asia argento
mathieu amalric
ON WAR
a film by
bertrand bonello
Les Films du Lendemain & My New Picture present
Mathieu Amalric
Asia Argento
Guillaume Depardieu
Clotilde Hesme

ON WAR
a film by Bertrand Bonello

France - 2008 - Color - 130 mn - 35 mm - Dolby SRD

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SYNOPSIS
Bertrand, a film-maker approaching forty, slightly disconnected from the world, finds himself shut in a coffin for the night following a certain set of circumstances. In the morning, he is no longer the same. He rethinks his life, and decides to follow a man to an isolated part of the world, The Kingdom, which is ruled by a mysterious and charismatic woman called Uma. There, people of all ages reside in a warrior-type hierarchy and seem to be living in a happy autarchy.

If I wasn’t Bob Dylan, I’d probably think that Bob Dylan has a lot of answers myself.

BOB DYLAN
Bertrand Bonello: To be honest, ON WAR, is the result of two failures, two abandoned films. (LA MORT DE LAURIE MARKOVITCH et MADELEINE D’ENTRE LES MORTS – a variation on VERTIGO). The feeling that came over me, above and beyond the film that wasn’t made, was the notion of being held back. Of being really stopped from achieving desired goals. So I started off from this idea, with the desire to turn it into something that was enjoyable. That is, to try and find cinematographic and jubilant answers to questions that I find contemporary and essential. That was the first thing.

Mathieu Amalric: It’s true that you presented this project to me as a reaction to films that hadn’t been made. And then you said to me, here I’ve written something with you and Asia in mind. It was so moving.

Bertrand Bonello: That was the second thing. Asia and you. People close to me. I wanted all of the roles to be played by people close to me, even the extras are friends.

A conversation between
Bertrand Bonello and Mathieu Amalric

**genesis / duality**

**BERTRAND**

Joy, yes, I’m all for that. I may not look it, but I am. For instance, I would like to film joy but I don’t think I’m capable of it. At one point, I wanted to make a film about a guy madly in love with a woman.
No casting agent, getting fully involved in the production, experiencing something with a circle of friends, and filming it, these were the basic elements. And also, I liked the idea of getting the two of you together, something that hadn't happened yet. With Asia, we did a short movie in two days (CINDY, THE DOLL IS MINE), there was this frustration of not being able to work together for a longer period of time. As for you, Mathieu, apart from the fact that we've known each other for a very longtime, it's possibly also because you asked me to play you in an autobiographical film.

**Mathieu Amalric**: In LA CHOSE PUBLIQUE (Public Affairs)... You refused. I really ended up playing quite a few alter egos. It's rather strange actually. By the way, that's how I was able to accept someone filming me. I would say to myself: here, with Arnaud Desplechin, I'm really playing Arnaud a bit. With Jean-Claude Biette, I was Biette... Even with Techiné... What liberated us, I believe, was the idea that it was totally asserted, even if you don’t know whether or not it’s the truth. I'm doing ON WAR with Laurent Lucas, and Laurent Lucas is playing Laurent Lucas... and on top of it I'm wearing your clothes....

**Bertrand Bonello**: Often the principle of autofiction is that you are really telling your life story, but you change the name. Here, it's the contrary. We start with a real name in order to at a certain point, dive with it into the unreal. That freed me. In the end, it's also a game, almost like a video game. We sign in with our names, and we find ourselves flung into adventures.
Bertrand Bonello: The third basic element, after the idea of desire and people close to me, was the unique place, which would become a place of fiction, thus cinema, and I set up this place which is called the Kingdom.

BERTRAND
I was in a place... where you feel good. It's peaceful. The people are nice. There are trees, you eat, you talk, you sleep, you dance. You have everything you need.

BERTRAND' MOTHER
An asylum was it?

Bertrand Bonello: The Kingdom is cut off from the world. It's a place of freedom, in any case of free thought, a place where everything is possible. Afterwards, it becomes completely personal, form eroticism to horror, you can put anything that goes through your head there.

Mathieu Amalric: The architecture of the place is very particular; the Anglo-Norman style is quite far from the French chateau style, which means that you really don't know where you are. Sometimes it makes you think of a fairytale house, or other times of a horror film. It favours the imagination. You had told me about the idea of this community. But when I read the script, I was immediately taken by something completely different. Something that speaks about this feeling that we aren't able to “live life to the fullest.” That we're here, and we're not here...

The character played by Asia seems to be the opposite of the idea we have of pleasure, with a certain form of austerity. She's cast against her type. She usually plays on her sensuality or sexuality. Here she quickly asserts an idea of pleasure that requires something else, something much more demanding.
Bertrand Bonello: It’s my most modest film sexually, while it had every possibility to be the most sexual. But I didn’t want to reduce the idea of pleasure to that. I didn’t want to associate the Kingdom with a sexual place. So the sex is off screen. Present, but off screen. The most sexual part of the film being the reading of a text, and a bestiary. The idea of pleasure is thus more intellectual, and I hope in the end, greater and stronger.

Mathieu Amalric: It’s a utopian community created by a generation. And Louise’s (Clotilde Hesme) perspective on it is very beautiful because it isn’t judgmental. In the end she is the one who understands things best.

Charles: Either we take pleasure or we rest.

Mathieu Amalric: The return to reality doesn’t work the way he wants. The transition from one world to the other is more complicated. And when he returns, in the second part of the film, he no longer wants to be a spectator, but an actor. He’s completely in it.

Bertrand: I just want some peace. I want society off my back. No more forms. No more visits to the bank or the post office. I can’t take it anymore. Everything’s repeating itself over and over again and I can’t keep up. This continual routine, turning over and over is making me fade way. It’s erasing who I really am. I’m disappearing!
Bertrand Bonello: If we could recreate an area that concentrated within it all of life’s propositions that most attracted us, would we be tempted by it? Would we be ready to leave everything for it? To finally be able to get rid of, temporarily, the very principle of reality and live a dream. I don’t know...

1968 - 2008

Bertrand Bonello: The role of Charles was initially for someone much older – to be brief, someone who would have lived through the 60’s. And then I thought of Guillaume, and the fact that these words coming out of his mouth, despite his young age, wouldn’t sound ridiculous. He said to me: “Don’t worry, I’m not 35, I’m 1035.” It is true that Guillaume has lived through a 1000 wars. Interior and exterior.

CHARLES
I’m not older than you but I’ve had a good time. I mean, a really good time. I’ve met people who were funny, intelligent, deep and carefree. And now? Where are they? These days, there’s no more grace. Everything’s forced. If you see it all through, you have to stand aside, put up with loneliness, sluggishness, defeatism, give up. And I don’t want to give up. I’m not dead yet.

It’s just that our times no longer permit joy. Are there still things that can bring us pleasure? In this society of ours, there are hardly any. Yet the world is full of them.
Bertrand Bonello: I think we can't be disconnected from May '68. I was born in 1968. Thus for me, the question of pleasure and the time period was bound to be fundamental. I have the impression I was born into a generation that speaks seriously about things that are not very interesting, while I dreamt of intelligent things being said lightly. The film also comes a great deal from that.

Bertrand Bonello: In LE PORNOGRAPHE (The Pornographer), a son was speaking to his father about the difficulty of existing after an era when pleasure and desire seemed to be so present; it wasn't being critical of '68, it was a legitimate question. Because we can neither live, nor replicate the same things. We can't live as if 40 years haven't gone by. So what do we do? The cards we're dealt are different, and I think the film speaks about that as well. So yes, on that level, ON WAR is a film made of fantasies. Hence the intervention of the war, and of Clausewitz's book.

UMA
Today, pleasure is something you have to win, like a war. So you have to fight like a warrior. But I'll help you. You don't bother about anything here. You're going to think, make love, drink, play... You're going to win wars. You want to be dazed by life? You will be.

CHARLES
It's a military order, but not a belligerent one. Carrying that sword is a fine thing. When you manage it, it's beautiful. You'll see.
Bertrand Bonello: It’s been lying on my desk for years. It’s more a book of strategies and philosophy, than a glorification of war. In fact, it’s the continuation of politics by other means. Here, it’s not war as a warlike act, but the idea that pleasure is not a given. It is earned. There must be expectations. One speaks to you of pleasure, and you end up in a place that can seem austere. One slowly discovers, at the same time you do, that it is not going to be simple.

Mathieu Amalric: Today, we’re supposed to make it alone, all of us. But then how does one do it? Of course there’s the myth of the economy… I don’t know how traders live amongst themselves as a group, but I imagine it must be a certain type of community – one where they stick together, and at the same time, each one of them has to make it on their own.

Mathieu Amalric: This feeling that haunts the character Bertrand, of being invisible, it’s a recurrent nightmare for me. That’s what shook me up. I have no idea if the beginning is funny - the part in the funeral home. I remember having laughed a great deal while reading it.

Bertrand Bonello: I wanted to have scenes, well, tragic-comic, let’s call them that. This proximity with death, this morbidness – because not to feel alive, is morbid – could be light. The couple that you make with Guillaume for one thing, already has something quite burlesque about it.

BERTRAND
I spent a whole night in there. I don’t want to live through that again. However, I’d like to experience the state I was in again. Return to that state but... in the open.

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the journey

Mathieu Amalric : When you were writing it, did you already have in mind all of the purely sensorial aspect of the film?

Bertrand Bonello : The physical aspect yes; I was telling myself that [the movie] would be physically sensorial.

With the cinematographer (Josée Deshaies) we had started off [with the idea] of a film that was very, very sunny. In the end, it rained for two months, right in the middle of the summer, so that changed many things, notably on the sensorial level.

In any case, we wanted to adopt two different filming logics for Paris and the Kingdom. Paris was practically a team for a film short, very small, we only used a single lens, the 50, that closest to the eye, which is the most "naturalistic". While in the Kingdom, everything was more extensive, richer. Likewise, the lenses used weren’t the same, they were softer. These are things that are not very visible, but perceptible all the same, I believe.

And the relation to the physical is solely used in the Kingdom. Physical sensations can end up transporting you… In the film, there is a kind of triangle that absolutely had to be respected: it was the intellectual, the mystical, and the physical.

Mathieu Amalric : We had a beautiful encounter with the choreographer (Bernando Montet). During the filming of the military training scenes, or the trance, the actors in the film – not just the leading roles, but all of the extras – were saying: yes, I understand one or two
things about what it is to train for six hours and then afterwards go into the forest to dance. You put them in the sand for an evening, and then the next day you leave them there and you have them listen to an erotic text. It had an effect. Those who were there everyday questioned all the same this idea of ‘community’ which allows you to find your inner self....

Bertrand Bonello : Yes, the preparation, that was fundamental.
Some of us, you, Asia, Guillaume, and some extras were sleeping at the chateau. We didn’t leave. Asia pushed it to the point where, in order to feel Uma’s isolation, she didn’t even leave her room. There were moments where I really couldn’t tell the difference between the scenes and what we were living. We ourselves were a bit filled by the experience.
During the dance sequence in the forest, we even brought a sound system, one as powerful as in a nightclub, and you completely let go of yourselves. These are quasi-documentary like passages. And there it becomes sensual because the notion of being filmed practically disappears.
On another level, the very end, when Bertrand’s character is alone facing Kurtz, the sensorial is mental, off screen. The sound was more thoroughly written than the image.

Mathieu Amalric : In such scenes, you really have to make only the off screen come to life. So yes, I imagined shots in my head. The beast, you imagine it in your head. I was very, very concentrated at that moment. The pleasure of being alone, an extreme and selfish pleasure of being filmed and then you understand why you wanted to be an actor.
Bertrand Bonello: When you find yourself alone in the forest, with the mission to kill Marlon Brando, it’s because we’ve all dreamed of American films. You have to admit it.

Mathieu Amalric: Making a film is also about doing everything that you don’t have the right to do. That which you don’t dare do. That which you are stopped from doing.

Bertrand Bonello: It’s really what Guillaume says: you abandon all when you enter here.

Mathieu Amalric: Disappearance. It’s probably the reason why we like making films. The time of the filming is a time of absolute irresponsibility. And if we have this drug, for a moment, we are so irresponsible that we really are a little bit ourselves.

Bertrand Bonello: Hence Dylan.

CHARLES
I don’t mean abandon it all, just forget. For two weeks. You’ll see.

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Bertrand Bonello: That’s what it is. The idea of getting together in a community isn’t to hammer in an ideology, but to stay unique. It’s very, very idealistic.

Mathieu Amalric: Hence Dylan…

Bertrand Bonello: Hence Dylan.
Bertrand Bonello was born in 1968. Educated as a musician before becoming a filmmaker, he made his first feature film in 1998, *Quelque chose d’organique* (Organic) for which he also wrote the screenplay and the music. The film was selected for the Berlin film festival in the “Panorama” section.

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Asia Argento

began her acting career when she was 9 years old. In particular, she has worked for Lamberto Bava (Demons 2) and Nanni Moretti (Palombella rossa/Red Wood Pigeon). She then regularly appeared in films directed by her father, Dario Argento, such as Trauma (1992) and Le Syndrome de Stendhal/The Stendhal Syndrome (1996). In 1999, Abel Ferrara chose her to play in New Rose Hotel. In 2000 she directed her first feature film, Scarlet Diva, the biography of a psychologically suffering star. Four years later she directed another film, the adaptation of a J.T. Leroy novel, The Heart is Deceitful Above All Things.


Mathieu Amalric

began his acting career with Otar Iosseliani in Les favoris de la lune/Favourites of the Moon. He then played in Arnaud Desplechin’s Comment je me suis dispute...ma vie sexuelle/My sex life...or how I got into an argument (1996), which launched his career and for which he received the César for most promising male performer. At the end of the 1990’s he became a prominent screen presence in “cinema d’auteur” with directors such as André Téchiné, Olivier Assayas, Jean-Claude Biette, Benoît Jacqutt, the Larrieu brothers, Serge Le Pérès, Jeanne Labrun, Eugène Green and Bruno Podalydès. In 2005, he received the César for best actor for his role in the film Rois et Reine/Kings and Queen, a film by his favorite director, Arnaud Desplechin. Film director, Mathieu Amalric is also the author of an autobiographical film, Mange ta Soupe (literally “Eat your soup”), he then wrote Le Stade de Wimbledon/Wimbledon Stage with Jeanne Balibar (2001) selected for the Locarno festival. In 2003, he presented La Chose publique/Public Affairs at the Directors’ fortnight in Cannes. After his latest highly remarked roles in films by Steven Spielberg, Munich, Xavier Giannoli, Quand j’étais chanteur/The Singer, Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, Actrices/Actresses, Nicolas Klotz, La question humaine/Heartbeat Detector, Mathieu Amalric received a second César for best actor in 2008, for his role as the journalist Jean-Dominique Bauby, in Julian Schnabel’s Le Scaphandre et le Papillon/The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (2007). Mathieu Amalric is attending the Cannes festival this year with Bertrand Bonello’s film On War, and Arnaud Desplechin’s film Un conte de Noël (A Christmas tale) - in official competition. He is presently filming a role in the next James Bond film - Quantum of Solace by Marc Forster - and will soon work with the director Alain Resnais.
**cast**

BERTRAND Mathieu Amalric
UMA Asia Argento
CHARLES Guillaume Depardieu
LOUISE Clotilde Hesme
PIERRE Laurent Delbecque
RACHEL Elina Löwensohn
MARIE Léa Seydoux
BERTRAND'S MOTHER Aurore Clément
HIMSELF Laurent Lucas

**crew**

screenplay, music, direction Bertrand Bonello
production Kristina Larsen
cinematographer Josée Deshaies
editing Fabrice Rouaud
sound Olivier Le Vacon
production designer Antoine Plattee
choreography Bernardo Montet
executive producer Bertrand Bonello
production director & assistant director Christophe Jauffroy
post-production Les Films du Lendemain & My New Picture
with the participation of Centre national de la Cinématographie, Canal+, TPS Star.
international sales Films Distribution

**Film clips**

"**eXistenZ**" by David Cronenberg  "**Tiresia**" by Bertrand Bonello

**Music**

Umia - la cérémonie - Seven pianos - Tiresia - Apocalypse then (Bertrand Bonello)
A Fuzz in my head (Bertrand Bonello) performed by JP Nataf

**Additional music**

Piano Concerto n° 21 en C majeur
Ill-Andante
Mozart

Untitled#1  English Chamber Orchestra directed by Daniel Barenboim
Memories Panda Bear
She Belongs to Me Robert Wyatt
Bob Dylan

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design .soazig petit.