

the super 8 years

Les Films Pelléas present

A film by

Annie Ernaux & David Ernaux-Briot

QUINZAINÉ
DES RÉALISATEURS
Société des réalisateurs de films
CANNES

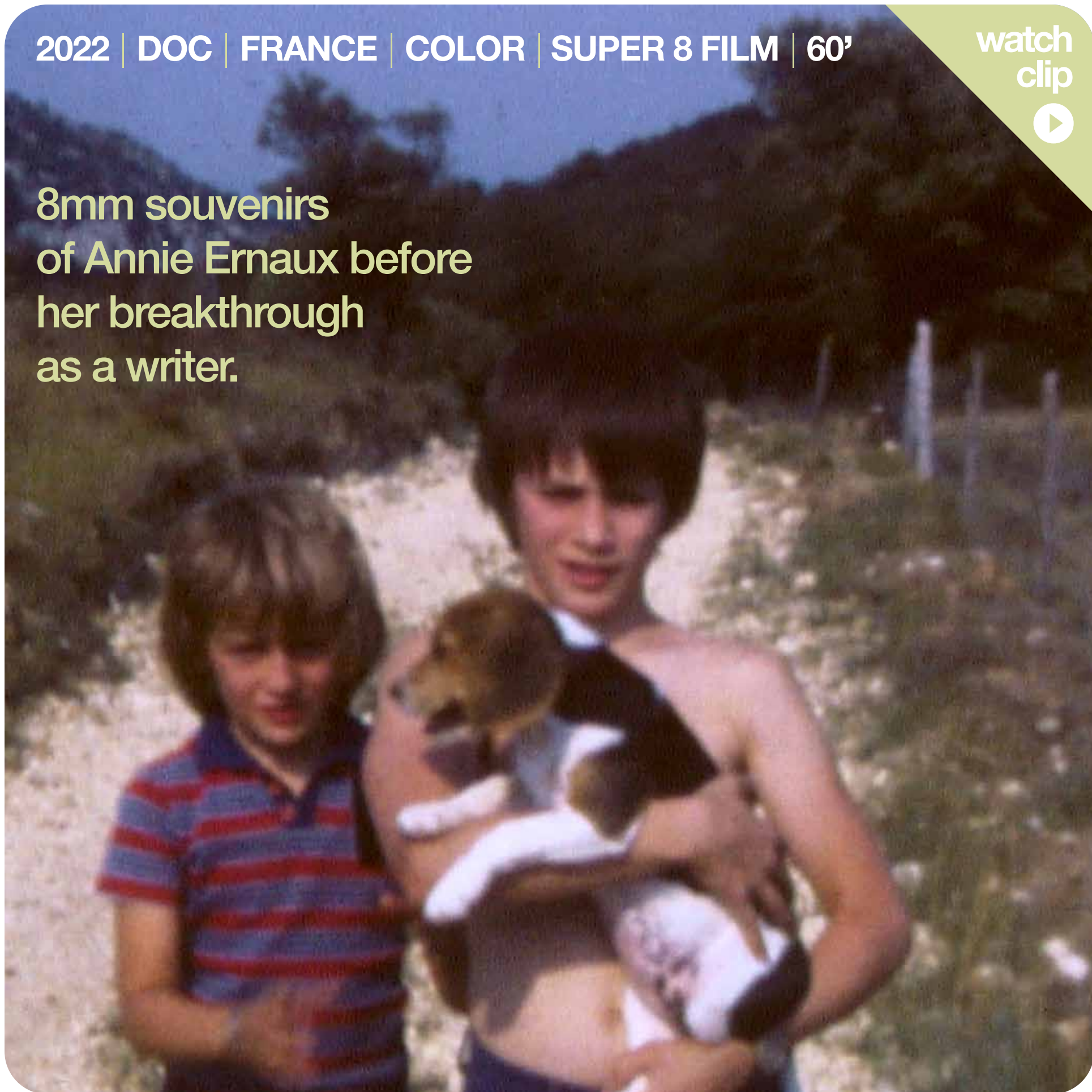


2022 | DOC | FRANCE | COLOR | SUPER 8 FILM | 60'

watch
clip



8mm souvenirs
of Annie Ernaux before
her breakthrough
as a writer.



synopsis

"In re-viewing our super eight films, shot between 1972 and 1981, it occurred to me that they comprised not only a family archive but a testimony to the pastimes, lifestyle and aspirations of a social class in the decade after 1968. I wanted to incorporate these silent images into a story which combined the intimate with the social and with history, to convey the taste and colour of those years."

Annie Ernaux



interview with

Annie Ernaux
& David Ernaux-Briot

The material in *The Super 8 Years* is extremely rich; why didn't you think of this film before, and what finally made you decide to make it?

Annie Ernaux

At first, we thought of this material as being just for family use. After my husband and I separated in the early 1980s, we left those home movies alone, which showed the part of our story where we all lived together - my husband, our two sons, and me.

David Ernaux

I became interested in seeing them again when my oldest son expressed a desire to see his grandfather, Philippe Ernaux.

Annie Ernaux

It also has to be said that with technological developments, getting everything set up to show super 8 films began to seem harder and harder to us; putting up the projector, the screen, etc. These images represented not just our past but also the past of technology.

David Ernaux

I showed them to my children sometime around 2016. At the same time, I filmed the projection screen with a digital camera and recorded the family's comments: those of my mother, my brother, the children. My goal was to create a family memory, a way of passing my children's grandmother's words on to them. It was only somewhat later, when I went back and watched those digital films, that I thought this could be of interest to everyone: you see the time period in the decor, the clothes, and also in the ideals, with the trips to Chile and Albania.

Annie Ernaux

I didn't think of it at all. On rare occasions, I have shown one or two reels of me with the children to close friends, but never the movies of our trips, which I thought were of no interest to anyone, as is often the case.

When the two of you decided to try and turn this material into a publishable film, did you carefully rewatch all the reels?**Annie Ernaux**

In 2000, having learned that it was possible to transfer super 8 films onto video cassette, I took some of the ones we had to the FNAC so that we could watch them easily. The result was disappointing, the colors were different. I didn't look at those bland images that had been put together end to end more than once or twice. But when David asked me to write a text for the film he was planning, I rewatched them attentively.

David Ernaux

Some of the reels hadn't been transferred onto video, so we had a few viewing sessions to watch everything.

What were your feelings when you saw them again recently?**Annie Ernaux**

The first feeling was an acute sense of time. I was that young woman who was not aware of her youth. The children in the movies are now grown men. Many relatives are gone: my mother, my parents-in-law, my sister-in-law Dominique. And my husband, the filmer. The other feeling was the certainty that those images capture a major period of my life: my entry into writing, the publication of my first book, and the inevitable process of the end of my marriage.

David Ernaux

I didn't have any particular feeling other than one of great familiarity. I have always known these images, they have been part of me and have borne me for a long time. Strangely enough, the emotions came during editing, when it was time to organize the shots, add music, seek out the feelings. It was in distancing myself from myself, in treating the films as external material, that I was moved.

One of the things the film does is overlay the images with a text written by you, Annie, which you read as a voice-over. For you, was this film a natural extension of your work, or was this a very different experience?

Annie Ernaux

The film is an extension of the inscription of the individual and the familial within the social and historical that is consubstantial with my writing. There is a kinship between the book *The Years* and *The Super 8 Years*. But the experience was very different. I did not start off from my pure memory and I did not have to invent a form, as I did in *The Years*. Rather, the filmed images served as a guide to memory, and brought back to life the personal as well as the political and historical context, giving rise to a sociological view of our social class belonging and the “Glorious Thirty”.

Your images are pictures, perhaps superficial or illusory, of family happiness. But your text creates a critical distance from those images. Was this tension, this dialectic between sound and image, at the heart of your project?

Annie Ernaux

For me, it was natural to proceed that way.

David Ernaux

My mother’s text didn’t surprise me at all! I know her, I’ve read her books, I am very familiar with how she understands the world and I share her way of seeing things. The question for me, rather, was how to coordinate the text and the images. The editor, Clément Pinteaux, and I spent a lot of time doing that work. It was a question of building a structure divided between moments when the text is in agreement with the images, when the text supports and explains what is shown, and moments when my mother’s reflections, revealing an invisible truth contained in the images, startle the viewer. I think that the contrast is very fruitful, between family images common to all and the violence that the text sometimes conveys.

Annie Ernaux

There was no question of writing a descriptive commentary. The images belong to the grammar of family movies, holidays, parties and anniversaries, travel films. I had to interrogate them, and inscribe them into the individual time of our own history, as well

as the collective time. And to express what we—like everyone else—were unconsciously trying to capture by filming. Eternity, no doubt.

Some of the images contain certain clichés about the ideal family. Your voice-over text dissects these clichés and interrogates family, marriage, social conventions, the place of women. And in fact it was your husband who filmed 95% of these images.

Annie Ernaux

Indeed, he was the one who had a monopoly on the use of the camera. In a very gendered division that characterized our relationship, I didn't dispute that. When I took the camera, it was to film him! I don't know if you noticed, but he poses horribly!

David Ernaux

I find the sequences with my father fascinating, perhaps because of how rare they are, but also because of the complete disconnect between the precision of his filming and the fantasy he plays out when he is being filmed. He knows there is no sound, and yet he keeps talking! It's totally pointless! He now appears to me as a man of the moment, just like the camera, which records the moment. He didn't rework the images, he didn't do any editing except to put the short three-minute reels one after another to make a 20-minute film. This is obviously very different from the work of writing.

Annie Ernaux

That said, and I didn't really realize it at the time, my husband was very good at filming.

David Ernaux

My father clearly paid attention to framing. In all the rushes, I didn't see a single composition that didn't have an intention behind it. Obviously, it was not cut, he didn't shoot several angles of the same scene for example, but all the shots are composed with great coherence.

The film bears on another one of your recurring themes, the uneasiness of class defectors.

Annie Ernaux

When the camera came into our house, my mother had been living with us for two years.

She represented the daily presence of the world of my working-class origins within the intellectual bourgeois home that I created with my husband. A trip to Chile during the era of Allende's Popular Unity precipitated my awareness of being what at the time we would not yet call a "class defector," and I was devoured by the need, the desire to shed light on this process of breaking with the world of my childhood. This is also what the images of the film secretly tell, the birth of my book *Cleaned Out*.

David Ernaux

I am not a class defector, but I have a sensitivity to issues of class. This working-class origin, it's within me. I inherited a way of being, a way of talking loudly, of making trivial jokes, and a thousand other things, and I know perfectly well that these don't fit into the so-called proper social codes. But it's me, it comes from my upbringing. I feel like I'm between two worlds, between the working classes and the intellectual bourgeoisie, which distinguishes between human beings based on good manners, which are not natural, and are not natural to me.

Another striking aspect of your film is travel, especially to countries that were hard to reach, such as the USSR or Albania, which was completely closed off.

Annie Ernaux

Chance played a role there. In 1975, because of our move from Annecy to Cergy, we were late in planning our vacation and there happened to be a few spots left on an organized trip to Albania, a destination that seemed exciting to us, since the country was so closed off and unknown, inaccessible to individual travelers. Enver Hoxha's regime was totally anti-Soviet and pro-Chinese. We were a small group of just 8 tourists, and we were constantly accompanied, supervised, by a guide from the regime. More than anything, he was afraid we would have contact with the population. We represented "Western rot". The oldest woman in our group had stones thrown at her by some kids because she had gone outside the prescribed perimeter on the beach. It was quite particular, it was like being in North Korea or Mao's China. At that time, which was the beginning of the *Guide du Routard* guidebooks and of charter tours, travel adventures had become more democratic.

There is a sequence from your trip to Morocco where there is also a lack of contact with the local population, but for different reasons than in Albania.

Annie Ernaux

We were in M'Diq with the kids in a kind of Club Med, a fake bubble. I also think that there was no desire to have contact, either on the part of the Moroccans or on our part, as we were trapped in a rigorously codified tourist system. In my voice-over, I express the boredom this stay in Morocco caused me.

David Ernaux

You write, “*three weeks of peaceful boredom, interrupted only by excursions to Chefchaouen and the royal palaces...*”

Annie Ernaux

In Morocco, I felt like I was a good mother! That kind of club where we stayed gave parents freedom and provided the children with friends and games. It was convenient for everyone, and it allowed us to take the children abroad.

Did the trip to the USSR leave a mark on you?

Annie Ernaux

We went for a long weekend with Intourist (*Editor's note: the Soviet tourism company of the time*). There too, it was very codified, we were shown the Red Square, Lenin's Mausoleum, etc. Like in *Nathalie*, the song by Bécaud.

David Ernaux

In the text, we kept everything related to the imaginary of Russia, which was very strong at the time and remains so today.

Annie Ernaux

Russia was always this great country behind the Iron Curtain. And also the country of Tolstoy, of Pushkin. Its presence in my imagination was enormous. And it was still the Cold War, with the USSR and the United States facing off. Every day, *Pravda* was quoted in press reviews. At the age of 31, I brought this imaginary face-to-face with reality for the first time. Moscow was sad, with broken sidewalks, rows of buildings on the outskirts where in the evenings you could see naked light bulbs hanging from the ceilings, empty shops...

The most amazing thing is that you were able to bring back these images of the USSR and Albania. Filming Albania at that time was almost a scoop!

Annie Ernaux

In Albania, there are extraordinary ancient treasures, and we were able to film them. I was fascinated by all the beauty of the ruins and the vestiges of Illyria co-existing with a violent and brutal regime whose signs were crudely displayed everywhere.

One might imagine that the trip to Allende's Chile was much more joyful and motivating for you?

Annie Ernaux

Oh yes, especially since the country was not closed at all!

David Ernaux

I remember having an Allende poster in my bedroom as a teenager.

Annie Ernaux

Allende, that was the non-communist left in power. We went on a trip organized by *Le Nouvel Observateur*, whose purpose was both political and touristic. Allende received our group for an hour in the Moneda Palace.

***The Super 8 Years* is political, intimate, but it is also a beautiful object of cinema, if for no other reason than the grain of the images.**

David Ernaux

It's super 8 film, it leaves more room for the imagination than the clear and detailed images of digital.

Annie Ernaux

For me, the advantage is that they are silent images, there is no one in them to contradict me (laughs)... There is nothing in these images that I cannot place very precisely: I remember the circumstances, my state of mind, the intra-family relations. I could even have added the soundtrack of the songs we were listening to, an option that we ruled out so as not to be too redundant.

David Ernaux

The mere enunciation of my mother's words and the images signal the era, there was no reason to add to that with songs.

This film crowns what could be called an “Annie Ernaux period in cinema,” after *Simple Passion* by Danielle Arbid, *Happening* by Audrey Diwan, and *I Have Loved Living There* by Régis Sauder. How is it for you to be experiencing this moment?

Annie Ernaux

(laughs)... It's pure chance! That period is ending, I think, with this film. It began in 2008 with *The Other One* by Pierre Trividic and Patrick Mario Bernard, adapted from my book *The Possession*. A very beautiful film, perhaps a little too experimental to have had the success it deserved.

And what was your relationship to cinema as a viewer?

Annie Ernaux

I'm not really a cinephile, simply because there were many periods when I couldn't go to the movies. It was when I was a student that I went most to the movies, a moment that coincided with the New Wave, Truffaut, Godard, Resnais... When I walked out of *Last Year at Marienbad*, I remember thinking that I needed to write like that, with an insistent voice, flashes of memory. Today, I still tend to favor films that surprise me in one way or another, whether in their subject or their form, and documentaries.

David Ernaux

If I had to choose the films that marked me and created the desire for cinema in me, first would be *Shadows* by John Cassavetes. I remember it as the revelation that a film can be an existential experience that transforms our understanding and sensory relationship to the world. The other film, perhaps more consistent with my scientific studies at the time and probably because I was a student on the Jussieu campus, near the National Museum of Natural History, is Nicolas Philibert's magnificent film, *Animals and More Animals*, about the renovation of the Gallery of Evolution there. _____



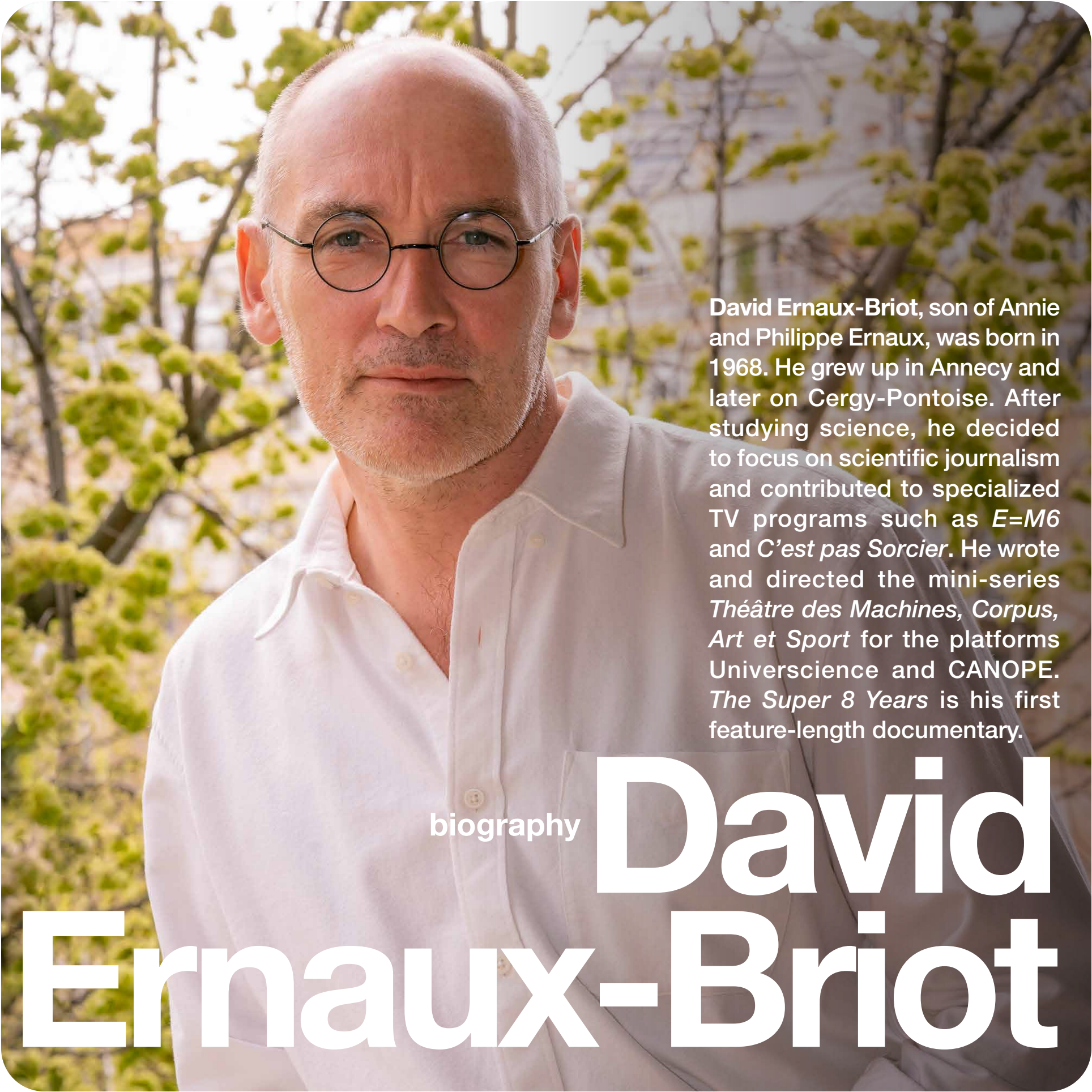
The author of some twenty works of fiction and memoir, Annie Ernaux is considered by many to be France's most important literary voice. She won the Prix Renaudot for *A Man's Place* and the Marguerite Yourcenar Prize for her body of work. More recently she received the International Strega Prize, the Prix Formentor, the French-American Translation Prize, and the Warwick Prize for Women in Translation for *The Years*, which was also shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize. Her other works include *Exteriors*, *A Girl's Story*, *A Woman's Story*, *The Possession*, *Simple Passion*, *Happening*, *I Remain in Darkness*, *Shame*, *A Frozen Woman*, and *A Man's Place*.

Recently, two of her books were adapted into award-winning films: *Simple Passion* by Danielle Abrid (Cannes Label 2020) ; *The Happening* by Audrey Diwan (Venice Golden Lion 2021).

Annie Ernaux

biography



A portrait of David Ernaux-Briot, a middle-aged man with a receding hairline, wearing round black-rimmed glasses and a white button-down shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage and a building in the distance.

David Ernaux-Briot, son of Annie and Philippe Ernaux, was born in 1968. He grew up in Annecy and later on Cergy-Pontoise. After studying science, he decided to focus on scientific journalism and contributed to specialized TV programs such as *E=M6* and *C'est pas Sorcier*. He wrote and directed the mini-series *Théâtre des Machines*, *Corpus*, *Art et Sport* for the platforms Universcience and CANOPE. *The Super 8 Years* is his first feature-length documentary.

biography

David Ernaux-Briot

the super 8 years

Les Films Pelléas present

A film by
Annie Ernaux & David Ernaux-Briot

Produced by
David Thion, Philippe Martin

Directed by
David Ernaux-Briot

Story written and told by
Annie Ernaux

Cinematographer
Philippe Ernaux

Editor
Clement Pinteaux

Music by
Florencia Di Concilio

Sound editor
Rym Debbarh Mounir

Sound mixing by
Melissa Petitjean

Post-production supervisor
Juliette Mallon

Color-grading
Alexandre Pocquet

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Arte France-La Lucarne

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The CNC

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