


capricci and l'âge d'or present

BRUNO DUMONT

JOANA PREISS

SIBÉRIE

A FILM BY JOANA PREISS



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SIBÉRIE

A FILM BY JOANA PREISS
with Bruno Dumont and Joana Preiss

France - 2011 - 82 min - Digital Betacam, Blu Ray - English subtitles - colour

Press kit and stills available on www.capricci.fr

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SYNOPSIS

A travelling couple on the Trans-Siberian railway. Equipped with digital cameras, Joana and Bruno record their complicity and their rifts, track their weaknesses and their confessions against a cold and infinite territory. It is the occasion to put their love to the test of isolation, foreignness, cinema.



JOANA PREISS - INTERVIEW

How did SIBERIE come about?

Bruno and I wanted to do a movie together.

We were interested in the story of a cinema-couple, a couple of somewhat narcissistic artists: an actress and a film director. These professions necessarily draw out the sentiments at play in a love story. It has been the subject of numerous discussions between us, and we've discovered a great intellectual proximity.

I thought that he would be the director, but Bruno put the camera in my hands. For him, it was very clear from the outset that we had to both be in front of and behind the lens. I found it very generous that Bruno wanted to give me such a role, like a transmission.

But the project has a playful dimension. Since I am an actress and Bruno is a director, we'd obviously be using our own experience. The ambiguity between our experience and fiction was planned from the outset. The role reversal was one of the risks of the film: I would be the director and Bruno the actor. This was another way of putting our cooperation to the test.

Where did the idea of a trip to Siberia come from?

We'd met in Siberia a year and a half before. We considered coming back along the Trans-Siberian railway. The trip then emerged as the best way to tell this story. It turned out that this change of scene was one of the conditions of project.

I quickly thought about the cinematographic potential of the train. The cabins are like a camera: two people, spending days and nights in a train, without being able to get out, except to buy things to eat on the platform and from time to time being confronted with the other in all their privacy. This continuous parade of Siberia scrolling across the window was kind of ironic. Outside is constantly projected onto a kind of screen right before our eyes but the landscape still remained elusive.



We flew from Moscow and took the plane to go to Vladivostok. Vladivostok is the tip of the East. It is the furthest place from the Indo-European continent - not a benign place. We stayed a few days and then left on the Trans-Siberian to Ulan-Ude on the Mongolian border. The trip lasted three days and three nights. Then we went to Shumak which you can only reach on horseback or helicopter, and finally Irkutsk. Last time we had not visited all these places so the trip and the film allowed us to continue exploring Siberia.

How did digital enter into this project?

On the one hand, I think it's an idea that interested Bruno since he had never worked with digital and it was a way for him to experiment, to see what this technique could produce. I think that digital was an intrinsic part of the project. It gave us the opportunity to capture moments that would not have been possible to shoot with heavier equipment and sound engineers. We were able to shoot everywhere, without it being a problem for others or for us. I felt that we would see stronger more authentic things revealed in people. The intrusion of these cameras allowed us to capture a certain privacy, even if staged.

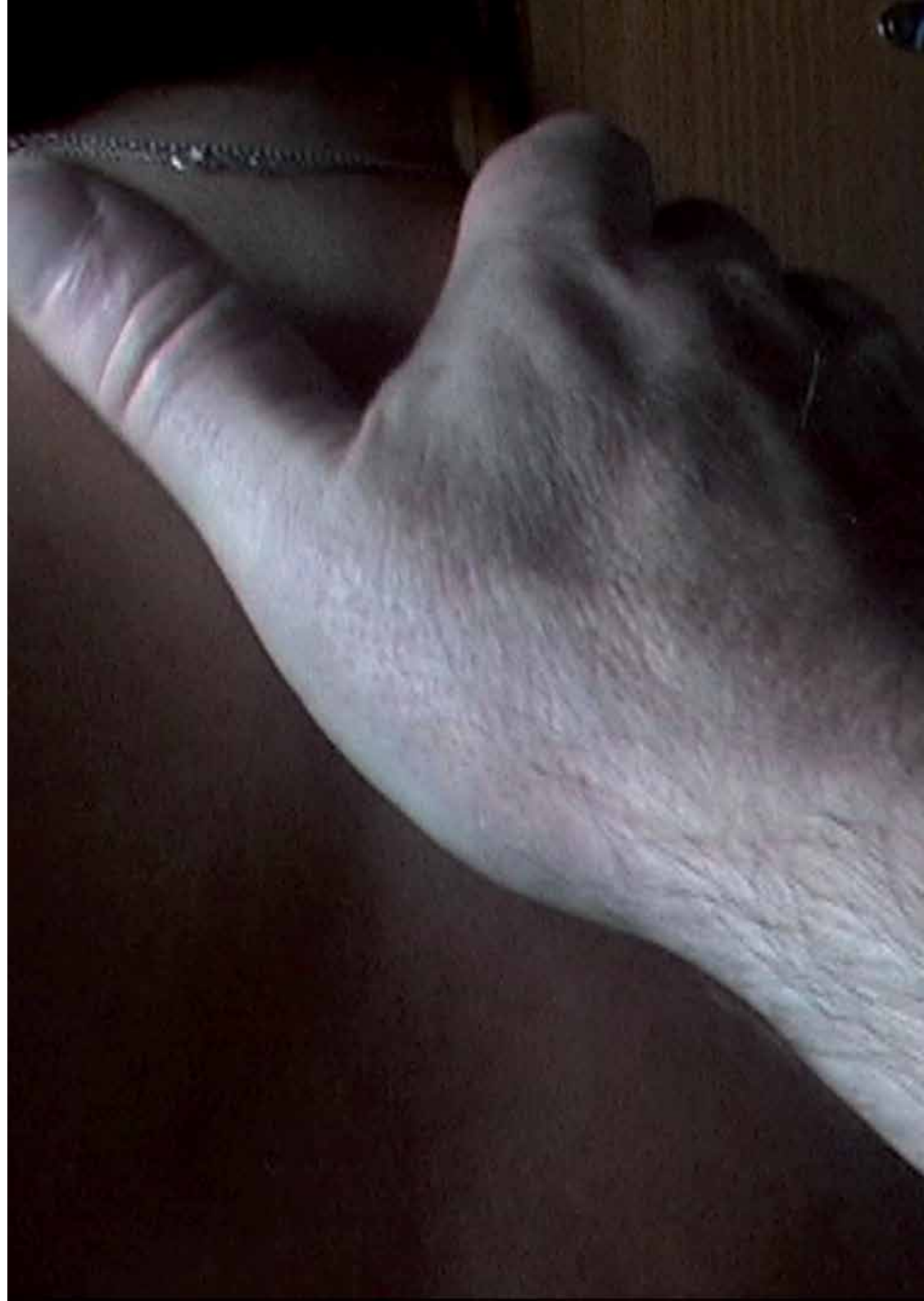
Digital also allowed total spontaneity. Sometimes, Bruno was filming me while asking me questions to stir up a debate, questions that I did not want to answer. So I took my turn with the camera. Filming was a form of direct response to his questions. The verbal exchange was replaced by a kind of ping-pong film shoot.

But the digital image was also surprising. None of us were familiar with these cameras before using them for the film. They are very low resolution cameras that we'd been loaned for the occasion. We only learned about their real qualities through filming. I deliberately kept and even accentuated some of their differences as a symbol of two points-of-view.

What have you decided to keep out of view?

The only things that we didn't film were sexually intimate moments. It was deliberate: I thought it was best to tell a love story without showing sex, even though there is desire. The tacit agreement was between me and Bruno. We did not censor ourselves.

But in fact, there was a scene in the film in which Bruno wanted me to play angry and I refused to do it. My objection was just related to when the scene would have been shot. If this would had come up three days later, maybe I would have loved getting angry for him.



The shoot was improvised. The film was built little by little. That was the idea: make a film with two cameras without planning anything in advance, record what happens to individual desires, and just what happens. In the end, there are three types of sequences: those in which we decided to act, those where we reflect on our relationship with the camera and those where we discuss the relationship between the director and the actress.

How do you divide up the subject matter for filming?

In fact, apart from images in which one of us appears, you don't know who is filming. We never made a distinction between Bruno's images and mine during shooting. The cameras were interchangeable: we were free to shoot with each other's tape or camera, combine images. Filming together was part of the project.

We finally had nearly 24 hours of footage. The editing was very complicated. There was also footage of our role reversal discussions that I mentioned, and our questions about the desire of the other. I did not privilege these theoretical discussions, because I didn't want to be complacent, relying on talks about cinema. There are a few scenes of this kind, but they are more discreet.

What interested me most was the love story of two people in the depths of Siberia. I wanted them to unfold in front of the camera. I really wonder how you can succeed in love now, when narcissism is so reinforced. I feel that the film couple is a beautiful allegory of the modern couple.

I also chose to show a lot of shots with food or drink, eating and drinking. For me, food and love are closely related, either in one direction or another. When in love, either we eat a lot or not at all. Similarly, alcohol is linked to Siberia, to destruction and oblivion of self. But it is also a way of getting together. We are always navigating between these two poles.

The editing pushes the film towards fiction ...

Yes, it is a fiction: I totally invented the story. Regardless, fiction is already part of the mechanism. I am touched by the films of Robert Frank, Jonas Mekas, Robert Kramer or Lech Kowalski, and the way they question the border between what is private or not. They are central but have a distanced view of what they are filming. My photos with Nan Goldin have the same logic: my life is transformed by the desire of another. Editing the film allowed me look back at the gaze I had on Bruno and appro-



priate his gaze on me. The finished film reconstructs these points-of-view: I imagined the gaze we had on each other during this trip.

Just like this ambiguity between fiction and reality, I also really wanted objective and subjective views to rub up against each other. There are two sets of subjective eyes - those of the two characters - and I found it interesting to imagine a third person shot them whose gaze is constructing a fiction. For one thing, it gave me more freedom editing. But it also allowed me to lighten it up: the camera is not omnipresent, but its place is fundamental. I love the up-front imaginary that the camera's absence brings to the back and forth shots. Such frontal points-of-view are seldom seen in cinema.

Their intimacy is very present, but I needed to open it visually. The shots of landscapes or of the faces also allow the film to air out. Facing the conflict between them, they shoot objects because they no longer can shoot each other.

The end of Siberia is very surprising, it totally out of place the rest of the film ...

I wanted there to be a sharp break, both formally and narratively that echoes the rupture of two characters. I was aiming for something more contemplative, more ascetic and mysterious.



JOANA PREISS

Joana Preiss is an actress for both theatre and cinema. She worked with directors Christophe Honoré, Olivier Assayas, Nobuhiro Suwa, Pia Marais, Claire Doyon and got involved in the works on video and sound of Nan Goldin, Ugo Rondinone, Dominique Gonzales Foerster and Céleste Boursier Mougnot.

She's been performing in Pascal Rambert and Eléonore Weber's shows for 10 years.

Also a singer and a musician, Joana Preiss also set up the White Tahina band with Vincent Epplay. Sibérie is her first film as a director.

SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

- 2010 Hips movements / by HPG
- 2010 Son of a gun / by Claire Doyon and Antoine Barraud
- 2010 Katai / by Claire Doyon
- 2010 Accomplices / by Frédéric Mermoud
- 2007 Boarding Gate / by Olivier Assayas
- 2007 Die Unerzogenen / by Pia Marais
- 2006 Noise / by Olivier Assayas
- 2006 In Paris / by Christophe Honoré
- 2006 Paris, je t'aime / by Olivier Assayas et Frédéric Auburtin
- 2005 A perfect couple / by Nobuhiro Suwa
- 2004 Ma mère / by Christophe Honoré
- 2004 Clean / by Olivier Assayas
- 2002 Roundelay / by Ugo Rondinone
- 2001 Close to Leo / by Christophe Honoré
- 1997 Late August, Early September / by Olivier Assayas

BRUNO DUMONT

DIRECTOR

- 2009 Hadewijch
Fipresci Prize, Toronto, 2009
Official selection, San Sebastian, 2009
Official Selection, New York, 2009

- 2006 Flandres
Grand Prix, Cannes, 2006
Golden Anchor Award, Haifa, 2006

- 2003 Twentynine palms
Official Selection, Venice, 2003

- 1999 L'Humanité
Grand Prix du Jury, Prix d'interprétation féminine,
Prix d'interprétation masculine, Cannes, 1999

- 1997 The Life of Jesus
Mention spéciale Caméra d'or, Cannes, 1997
Prix Jean Vigo, 1997
Fipresci Prize, Chicago, 1997
International Jury Award, Sao Paulo, 1997
Sutherland Trophy, British Film Institute Awards, 1997
Fassbinder Award, European Film Awards, 1997



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Length: 82 minutes

Production year: 2011

Shooting format: DV

Screening format: Digital Betcam, Blu Ray

Aspect ratio: 16/9

Languages: French, English, Russian

Subtitles: English

Director: Joana Preiss

With: Bruno Dumont, Joana Preiss

Photography: Bruno Dumont, Joana Preiss

Editing: Clémence Diard and Joana Preiss

Sound editing and mixing: Thomas Fourel

Colour grading: Julien Bisschop

Executive producer: Johanna Bourson

Producer: Thierry Lounas - Capricci Films

Coproducer: Elisabeth Pawlowski - L'âge d'or

International sales: Capricci Films