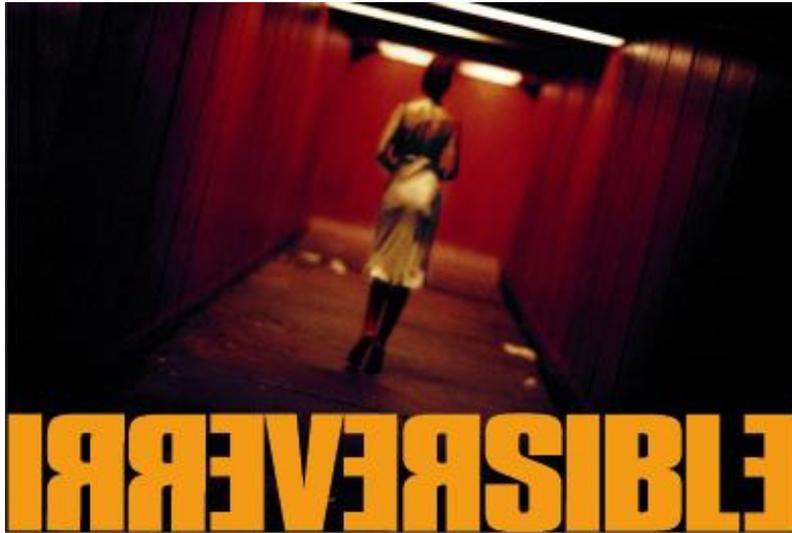


Press Kit



A film by Gaspar Noé

STARRING

Monica Bellucci
Vincent Cassel
Albert Dupontel

Awards/Festivals

WINNER: Stockholm Film Festival 2002
OFFICIAL SELECTION: Telluride Film festival 2002
OFFICIAL SELECTION: Sundance Film Festival 2002
OFFICIAL SELECTION: Toronto film Festival 2002
OFFICIAL SELECTION: International Critics' Week Cannes 2002

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IRREVERSIBLE

CAST

Alex	Monica Bellucci
Marcus	Vincent Cassel
Pierre	Albert Dupontel
Le Tenia	Jo Prestia
Philippe	Philippe Nahon
Stéphane	Stéphane Drouot
Fistman	Jean-Louis Costes
Mourad	Mourad Khima

CREW

Writer/Director	Gaspar Noé
Producer	Christophe Rossignon
Producer	Richard Grandpierre
Co-Producer	Vincent Cassel
Co-Producer	Brahim Chioua
Co-Producer	Gaspar Noé
Original music	Thomas Bangalter
Cinematographer	Benoit Debie
Cinematographer	Gaspar Noé
Editor	Gaspar Noé
Casting	Jacques Grant
Production Design	Alain Juteau
Costume Design	Laure Culkovic

Additional Music

Extract from Ludwig van Beethoven's 7th Symphony

IRREVERSIBLE

IRREVERSIBLE > BECAUSE **TIME** DESTROYS EVERYTHING > BECAUSE SOME ACTS ARE IRREPARABLE > BECAUSE MAN IS AN **ANIMAL** > BECAUSE THE **DESIRE FOR VENGEANCE** IS A NATURAL **IMPULSE** > BECAUSE MOST CRIMES REMAIN UNPUNISHED > BECAUSE THE LOSS OF A LOVED ONE DESTROYS LIKE LIGHTNING > BECAUSE **LOVE** IS THE SOURCE OF LIFE > BECAUSE ALL HISTORY IS WRITTEN IN **SPERM** AND **BLOOD** > BECAUSE IN A GOOD WORLD > BECAUSE **PREMONITIONS** DO NOT ALTER THE COURSE OF EVENTS > BECAUSE TIME REVEALS EVERYTHING > THE BEST AND THE WORST.

SYNOPSIS

Irreversible is a demanding and audacious but thoroughly rewarding cinematic experience that has been thrilling audiences since its world premiere in Cannes and its North American debut screenings at the Telluride and Toronto film festivals.

Even for a director that has been known to invite controversy in films such as *Sodomites* (1998), *Seul Contre Tous* (I Stand Alone) (1998), and *Carne* (1991), Noé's *Irreversible* can still be considered the ultimate in bravura filmmaking. An emotional odyssey that unspools in reverse from gut-wrenching violence to sweetly observed moments of sublime tenderness, the film stars Monica Bellucci and real-life husband Vincent Cassel as a couple whose story is told over the course of a fateful evening in a series of long takes. The film features two unsettling and graphic scenes of violence and sexuality that are difficult to watch. However, these grim sights are nestled within a carefully constructed -- although unconventional -- narrative which serves as a counterpoint to moments of striking tenderness. In some ways, *Irreversible* is a study of darkness and light.

GASPAR NOÉ (Writer/Director)

Born in Argentina on December 27, 1963, Gaspar Noé spent his childhood between Buenos Aires and New York.

At the age of 12 his family moved to France. After studying philosophy and cinema, Noé made his first short films of the eighties, *Tintarella di luna* and *Pulpe amere*.

In 1991, he created his own production company, Les Cinémas de la Zone, with his partner Lucile Hadzihalilovic and made the mid-length film, *Carne*, the story of a butcher struggling to raise his mentally handicapped daughter.

Carne received critical praise and was followed in 1995 by the short film *Une Expérience d'Hypnose Télévisuelle* and in 1998 by *Seul Contre Toul (I Stand Alone)*, the sequel to *Carne*.

MONICA BELLUCCI (Alex)

Monica Bellucci first attracted international attention with her performance as Malena, the beautiful young widow who turns a small Italian village upside down in the 2000 film *Malena* by Giuseppe Tornatore.

By that point, Bellucci had already been a major star in Europe for several years, a great beauty whose depth as a performer was well known. In fact she was celebrated as a female icon years before she began performing, launching a successful career as a model while still a pre-law student at the University of Perugia.

In 1990, director/producer Dino Risi offered Bellucci a leading role in the Italian television series *Vita coi Figli (Life with Sons)* opposite Giancarlo Giannini. She made her feature film debut in Francesco Laudaudio's *La Riffa* (1991). Her performance in the 1996 French thriller *The Apartment* (1996) established her as a fully-fledged film star and earned her a nomination for a Cesar award, the French equivalent of the Oscars.

Almost from the beginning Monica Bellucci has attracted the attention of international filmmakers. Francis Ford Coppola gave her a small role as one of the seductive Brides of Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1992) and she appeared with Gene Hackman and Morgan Freeman in Stephen Hopkin's *Under Suspicion* (2000) as well as the French martial arts/horror sensation *Le Pacte des Loups Brotherhood of the Wolf*, produced by Luc Besson. Bellucci has made a point of ignoring traditional distinctions between the art house and commercial career tracks for performers and in 2003 starred opposite Bruce Willis in Antoine Fuqua's action adventure film *Tears of the Sun*.

Monica Bellucci's iconic significance increased exponentially in 2003 with her back-to-back appearances as the cyber goddess Persephone in *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*. She will also be seen in the upcoming feature films *She Hate Me*, *The Brothers Grimm* and as Mary Magdalene in *The Passion of the Christ*.

VINCENT CASSEL (Marcus)

Alongside frequent collaborator Mathieu Kassovitz, Vincent Cassel emerged in the mid-1990s as one of France's most arresting and exciting new actors. He has worked in films ranging from grim urban dramas to light romantic comedies.

The son of celebrated actor Jean-Pierre Cassel, who made a career out of playing seductive bourgeois men, Cassel was born in Paris' Montmartre district in 1966. At the age of 17 he went to circus school and spent the next few years generally avoiding acting, due in part to the fact that both his parents (his mother is a journalist) didn't want him to go into the movie business. Cassel was eventually lured into films in 1991, when he landed a small role in Philippe de Broca's *Les Clés du Paradis*.

Two years later he appeared with Kassovitz in *Métisse*, an urban romantic comedy that cast Cassel as Kassovitz's older brother, a tough Jewish boxer. Cassel again stepped in front of the camera for Kassovitz in *La Haine (Hate)* in which he played a rough-hewn Jewish kid roaming the mean streets of Paris in the company of two friends and a gun. The film was a surprise international success, winning a Best Director Award for Kassovitz at Cannes and a number of French Césars. Cassel received César nominations for Best Actor and Most Promising Young Actor.

Cassel began popping up in such English language productions as Merchant-Ivory's *Jefferson in Paris* and as the leading man in a number of French films, including *L'Appartement*, a romantic comedy in which he starred alongside Romane Bohringer, Jean-Philippe Ecoffey and Monica Bellucci. He also appeared in *Elizabeth* as the mincing Duc d'Anjou and *Birthdays Girl*, a romantic drama opposite Ben Chaplin and Nicole Kidman. Additional film credits include *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc*, *The Crimson Rivers*, *Sur Mes Lèvres (Read My Lips)*, *Brotherhood of the Wolf* and the upcoming features *Burberry*, *The Reckoning*, *Agents Secrets* and *Ocean's Twelve*.

ALBERT DUPONTEL (Pierre)

Selected filmography

- Un long dimanche de fiançailles (2004) aka A Very Long Engagement
- Convoyeur, Le (2004)
- Clefs de bagnole, Les (2003)
- Correcteur, Le (2003) aka Passage du désir (2003) (France: subtitle)
- Monique (2002)
- Petites misères (2002) aka Dead Man's Hand
- Origine du monde, L' (2001)
- Acteurs, Les (2000)
- Du bleu jusqu'en Amérique (1999)
- Maladie de Sachs, La (1999) aka Sachs' Disease
- Créateur, Le (1999) aka Creator, The
- Serial Lover (1998)
- Bernie (1996)
- Un héros très discret (1996) aka Self-Made Hero, A
- Giorgino (1994)
- Chacun pour toi (1994) aka Every Man for Yourself

INTERVIEW WITH GASPAR NOÉ

By Gerald Peary (Boston Phoenix, April, 2003)
www.geraldpeary.com

French filmmaker Gaspar Noé was in a sweat in March at the Miami International Film Festival. He told me that someone anonymous had threatened to kill him because of his transgressive film, *Irreversible*. He'd been looking over his shoulder, anticipating an attack. Earlier, he and his leads - Monica Bellucci, Vincent Cassel - were greeted with jeers and boos (and also applause) when they appeared for the press conference following *Irreversible's* premiere at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival.

At Cannes Noé couldn't have been surprised that some journalists were jolted by *Irreversible's* **most incendiary scenes: a guy being pummelled to death by a fire** extinguisher in the bowels of a Paris gay bar, Rectum, and a seemingly endless, no-escape brutal rape in the corridors of a Paris metro station. He's asked: why trap an audience to watch?

"There are days you don't want to see such things," Noé conceded. "As for trapping people: when there are aggressions on the street, including rape, people come up to see. There's a visual fascination. On television, such things are on all the time. I saw something recently at 8:30 of people killing each other with machetes. In movies, you have killings without emotions. But rape? It's almost taboo in the cinema."

"I wanted to make a film I like. When I see Bunuel films, I like them. People talk about the scandal of *Irreversible!* A few people left the press screening, but there was no scandal. I can understand this movie can shock some American distributors, who are more and more politically correct, because of the multiplexes. This film will be R-rated, or NC-17. Maybe in the 1970s, it would have just passed by."

Actor Cassel: "Why does a filmmaker have to justify his film? If everyone liked *Irreversible*, it would be strange. People I really love, I told them not to go. That's the best advice I can give them."

Actress Bellucci, the rape victim: "I have friends who say they didn't like it, but we were on the phone talking for hours. I said, 'Are you sure you didn't like it?' A lot of people detest the film, but some love it. There's a reason to make it: it's an important, deep film."

Noé explained the rape scene: "My idea was to use Jo Prestia, who had been a rapist in an Eric Zonca movie. He was perfect. He used to be a boxer, a world champion of Thai kick boxing. He's very, very nice. I introduced him to Monica, and she was scared not of the rape but that he would hit her. That wouldn't happen. He knew how to box, to control himself."

"It's a totally artificial rape. Everything is simulated. Although it seems a continuous shot, actually sixty little bits were put together from 20-minute continuous shots. There were nine months of post-production, many sleepless nights, putting the scenes together. Now the rape scene is credible, it wasn't originally. The rapist's penis wasn't there originally, or blood on her face. Special effects technology allowed us to add all that."

Bellucci: "How did we prepare? I looked at various films concerning rape in the day, like *Deliverance* and *The Accused*. Gaspar only asked me to be strong and truthful. I did my best. The first day, we shot my love scene with Vincent. The rape scene in the metro, we shot four times, and then we chose the good version. It's true, when I see the rape scene now, it hurts. But as Gaspar said, 'The film is not a crime. It's a film about a crime.'"

Noe: "Compare it to real revenge movies like *Mad Max* and *Death Wish*. *Irreversible* isn't a revenge movie. The guy seeks revenge on the rapist-killer, but I don't believe in that. We need to see the beast within us, and then refuse it."

www.geraldpeary.com

INTERVIEW WITH GASPAR NOÉ

By Neil Smith
www.bbc.co.uk

After Carne and I Stand Alone, Franco-Argentine director Gaspar Noé is no stranger to controversy. But even he could not foresee the furore that greeted Irréversible, an unsparing revenge drama starring husband and wife Vincent Cassel and Monica Bellucci.

How did the film come about?

I told Vincent [Cassel] I wanted to do a film like *In the Realm of the Senses*. Monica was starting *The Matrix* sequel in September 2001, so there was very little time. Because of their celebrity we found the money. The only condition was we had to finish by the end of August. The budget was 20 times my last film, but I only had six weeks to shoot it.

Why did you tell the story in reverse chronological order?

Very few movies deal with non-linear narratives, and they are much more interesting to me. On the first day of shooting we did the love scene, which is at the end of the film. Strangely, it was this scene Monica and Vincent were most concerned about, not the rape.

The film has been attacked for its violence. How do you react to that?

Violence is in life; it's part of human experience. I had problems with the French critics, because they don't like seeing France portrayed in this way. Interestingly though, most of the people who are offended have not been women, but men.

So what was it like making such a visceral film?

Going to work was like going to a party; I never knew what to expect. You don't see the fun we had off screen. The only hard scene to shoot was the party scene. We had to shoot it 20 times!

Courtesy of: www.bbc.co.uk

INTERVIEW WITH GASPAR NOÉ

By Brian Pendreigh
www.iofilm.co.uk

***Irreversible* Director "Delighted" By Audience Response**

***Irreversible* has been called many things, including unwatchable, but director Gaspar Noé tells Brian Pendreigh that he has reason to be positive about audiences' response.**

It is a year since *Irreversible* hit the headlines, with suggestions it would prove one of the most shocking films in recent memory. It lived up to its promise - or threat - at the Cannes Film Festival, when many walked out in disgust at its rape scene, or simply because its swirling hand-held camera induced nausea.

The British Board of Film Classification passed it for cinema exhibition, whilst warning it may take a different view on a video release.

"It's good for the publicity of the movie, if you want to make it a commercial success" says Gaspar Noé, the film's Argentine-born, French-based director, who seems younger than his 39 years, citing *Jason and the Argonauts* among his favourite films, along with *2001* and Polanski's *Repulsion*, an eclectic mix suited for the post of cinema's latest enfant terrible.

"But sometimes the controversy makes you forget what the movie really is about," he adds. Attention can now focus on what is certainly a remarkable film, though it is no mean task to work

out what the film is about, for *Irreversible* begins at the end and works its way back to the beginning, presenting scenes in reverse chronological order.

One man is arrested at a gay club and another taken out on a stretcher. The film then back-tracks slightly, following what seems to be the same two men (Vincent Cassel and Albert Dupontel) through a succession of darkened rooms, past half-naked bodies in search of a third man, called La Tenia.

The camera spins like a drunk fighting to keep his balance, a discordant soundtrack assaults the ears, stroboscopic lights flash. It is difficult to follow what is happening, though there is an overwhelming air of violence. "My aim was to make you feel out of your minds," explains Noé. He succeeds.

A man's head is repeatedly smashed with a fire extinguisher, like a pumpkin. A subsequent scene reveals the men went to the club to avenge the rape of a girlfriend (Cassel's wife Monica Bellucci). The scene was apparently shot in one agonising, nine-minute take, with just grunts and muffled cries on the soundtrack.

It is not known who sat with their eyes on a stop-watch, not me, though I wish it had been. *Irreversible* continues to backtrack, to a bland love story, but rarely has blandness seemed so welcome.

The film has prompted a wide range of responses from sometimes bewildered critics. And while viewers will no doubt continue to walk out, Noé maintains there are others for whom the film becomes an "obsession", continually returning to it, looking for something new.

The reverse-chronology technique has been employed in *Memento* and by *Quentin Tarantino*. "Everybody copies everybody else now," says Noé. His starting point was "a rape and revenge movie, told backwards". "That was the concept that was sold to the people who financed the movie."

Dialogue was improvised and Noé insists (though I did not notice) that at one point Cassel says his name is Vincent, though his character is called Marcus.

The film benefits from the chemistry between Cassel and Bellucci. "When they are holding each other in their arms, it's natural," says Noé. "In most movies, when you see a couple having sex, they're very stiff." But he dismissed the idea that Cassel and Bellucci had sex for real, one of many bizarre rumours to attach themselves to *Irreversible*.

He has been delighted by the response of those who make the finishing line. "A lot of people cry at the end of the movie. Some people come out and smoke a cigarette. Some people go for a walk or a cigarette in the middle of the movie. Each person handles the movie as he wants..."

"But anybody who goes to the theatre knows exactly what he is going to get."

Courtesy of: www.iofilm.co.uk

INTERVIEW WITH GASPAR NOÉ & MONICA BELLUCCI

Time Destroys Everything

By Warren Curry

www.cinemaspeak.com

"I thought if the movie was to be useful (I) should portray (violence) as raw as it can be," comments French director Gaspar Noé about his controversial new film *Irreversible*. Having already been released in numerous countries, as well as being a film festival staple for well over a year, *Irreversible* will have its chance to stun a wider range of American moviegoers upon its

U.S. release on March 7 (in L.A. and New York). Regardless of what you may have read about the film up to this point, no amount of advance warning can provide a suitable defence for the sensory attack this film unleashes. Even the movie's most ardent proponents would have to concede that it's a film for very select tastes. The easily disturbed need not attend.

Irreversible, which stars real-life husband and wife Monica Bellucci and Vincent Cassel as two lovers whose lives will be tragically and irreparably altered, is gaining most of its notoriety for two horrific scenes of jarringly realistic violence. Using a backward narrative structure (ala *Memento*) we first see a harrowing act of revenge (of course we aren't yet aware that it's revenge) carried out by an enraged man named Marcus (Cassel) and his more sedate friend, Pierre (Albert Dupontel). Later, we witness the crime, which prompted the lethal response -- a savage rape of Marcus' girlfriend Alex (Bellucci) that Noé captures in one excruciatingly long take. "There are movies when rape is long and then it becomes as painful as it could be on the screen," says Noé. He adds, "Still, if you see (Abel Ferrara's film) *Ms. 45*, or other movies dealing with rape or crime or killing, it's like the information goes through the screen -- 'this guy has been killed; this woman has been raped' -- but you don't have the emotional sensation of having seen anything."

Bellucci, already a star in Europe and well on her way to becoming one in the U.S. with high-profile roles in the upcoming *Tears Of The Sun* and both *Matrix* sequels, was certainly familiar with the director's previous incendiary output. "I saw his first two movies, *Carne* and *I Stand Alone*, and thought, 'This guy is crazy, but he's so talented.' When he wanted to work with me I was very thrilled," comments Bellucci. However, the actress definitely doesn't see the director as an artist navigating extreme territory merely in an attempt to shock. She observes, "Gaspar has something to say. For me this film is like *A Clockwork Orange*, it's like *Pi*, it's like *Requiem For A Dream*, it's like Pasolini's movies. All those movies are so difficult to digest, but there is something, there is meaning." According to Bellucci, part of that meaning is, "that the monster is inside us and it can come out at any moment. One of the themes of this film is vengeance, and Gaspar says that vengeance is a natural instinct. But for vengeance we do stupid things. Vengeance makes people blind and for vengeance you do things that can't be taken back; they are irreversible."

While playing the victim in a rape scene that lasts over ten minutes must be difficult enough, Bellucci also mentions that she had to do six takes of the scene because of the physical complexity of capturing it in one shot. So how does an actor prepare for something like this? "The acting process is very difficult to explain; it's something very intimate, very private," explains Bellucci. "That day Vincent asked me, 'Do you want me to stay on set with you?' I said, 'No,' so he went surfing in the South of the France. I was by myself all day long in my house. I had rehearsed the scene one day before, so I knew very well all the positions. I didn't really think about it. I didn't know what I would've done five minutes before shooting. You have everything inside you, you just have to find it."

As the film regresses in time, the camera work transforms from the chaotic handheld that follows Marcus and Pierre as their search for the criminal leads them to a hellish, underground, gay S&M club with the dubious name of The Rectum, to a static frame that captures the earlier warmth and happiness of Marcus and Alex's relationship. "I wanted the movie to be like a mushroom trip -- it would start with a bad trip and then become a good trip," points out Noé. "In a mushroom trip, everything is fuzzy at the beginning; it's like a nightmare, you have glimpses of things you think you see but you can not remember them. I wanted the whole movie to be like that." The film's distinct visual imprint shouldn't come as a surprise, as Noé also served as his own D.P. Regarding the manic opening scenes, he reveals, "I would not frame it with my eyes; just do it with my hands and then I would show to the crane operator what I did with the camera to see if he could do the same things."

Although it's easy to ascertain an obvious method to Noé's madness, the film's untamed blast seems largely attributable to the fact that the filmmaker was working without a traditional screenplay. "The whole movie was very instinctive and organic; it was not a brainiac movie because we didn't have time to write the script," offers the director. "I had a lot of freedom and I wanted to enjoy that freedom, so I had no time to write the dialogue (and asked the actors) to just improvise the dialogue on the set. The whole treatment, the day we started shooting, was just three pages long and each scene would be portrayed in 10 or 12 lines. I didn't know if the scenes would last for 15 minutes or 3 minutes -- on paper they all look the same length."

An artist who clearly strives to use the medium as a confrontational tool, Noé is reluctant to establish a limit in his cinematic assaults. "Whatever can happen in life can happen on the screen. For me nothing is (pornographic)," he states. Bellucci, while displaying bravery clearly above and beyond realistic expectations, doesn't necessarily share the same views. "Gaspar is such a crazy guy. He's not like a normal human being, so you sometimes have to control him a bit." While shooting a scene of post-coital bliss between the actress and her husband, Bellucci laughingly reminisces about the couple adamantly distinguishing their boundaries. "(Gaspar) said, 'You guys, that scene can be real -- you can make love for real.' We said, 'Listen Gaspar, films are films and reality is reality. I'm going to do my best, I'm going to give the best performance I can, I'm trying to be so realistic, but I'm not a porno star.'"

Regardless of a minor difference of opinion, Noé is exuberant about expressing his admiration for Bellucci's courage. "I don't know any other actress at the level of Monica who would've accepted to do the scene the way she did it," he asserts. "Compared to what she had done before, where she was always like the reward for warriors fighting and the ultimate European bimbo, and sometimes she was in movies she didn't care for, maybe this was the first time that someone said, 'In this (movie) you play a woman who is close to yourself.'" Although indisputably on the brink of monumental international acclaim, Bellucci humbly plays down her meteoric career growth. "I don't feel I'm a movie star. I do my movies, but I don't go to parties. I'm surprised; I thought nobody would be interested about *Irreversible* in America. It's such a crazy European movie," she remarks. And while this may be old news to *Matrix* fanatics, Bellucci describes her new character in the franchise as, "very mysterious, very dangerous. She's not a victim -- she's in control."

Whereas reactions to *Irreversible* will differ wildly, the film's detractors (and there are already many) will be hard-pressed to repress a grudging respect for Noé's cinematic mastery. This is a director (like no other currently working), who acutely grasps the emotional and psychological impact of sound and image, and the devastation they can inflict upon the viewer when linked together so expertly and with such primal intentions. When Noé claims that, in contrast to the brutality of the film's first half, "the end of the movie is so melancholic that people come out puzzled and not with anger," he seems to conveniently dismiss the one-minute+ of harsh blinking strobe light (those prone to seizures please take note) which concludes the film. When asked about the inclusion of this visual blitz, Noé responds, "It gives you a sense of fear linked to time. You have this abstract fear that is not linked at all to the plot of the movie and it's very mechanical, so you're more afraid of yourself or your mind's structure than what's going on the screen."

If the message hasn't already been transmitted in clear enough language, I must repeat that those thinking about spending 90 minutes with this film are strongly warned to proceed with caution. Possibly it's because this writer had been exposed to all of the disclaimers prior to seeing *Irreversible*, inevitably leading to a maximum of heightened awareness as the film unspooled before my eyes, but never before during the opening credits of a movie have I experienced such unrest. Those who can take the relentless early punishment Noé dishes out will certainly be in for a movie-going experience unlike just about any other. Whether or not that's a good thing, arguably, has never before been as polarizing a cinematic subject.

www.cinemaspeak.com

INTERVIEW WITH GASPAR NOÉ, MONICA BELLUCCI & VINCENT CASSEL

Standing up to Censorship

By Rich Cline (writing as Jack Leger)

www.shadowsonthewall.net

Argentine-born filmmaker Gaspar Noé is no stranger to controversy. His 1998 film *I Stand Alone* was chopped by the British censors, and everyone thought his new film *Irreversible* would be even more severely cut, if not banned altogether.

The buzz began last May at the Cannes Film Festival, where people reportedly fled the ***Irreversible*** screening in horror. As the film's star Vincent Cassel says, "The film has a notorious reputation. At Cannes people ran away from the cinema, threw up, fainted. They're just a bunch of wimps!"

Bellucci adds that her mother wasn't in Cannes, but her dad was. After the news reports, "my mum called me and said, 'Monica. What have you done? People are saying you did this horrible movie, your career is finished!' And I said, 'Oh come on, it's only a movie!'" Meanwhile, her dad loved the film!

Irreversible opens in a gay S&M nightclub with a scene of astonishing brutality, as two men storm into the Paris club and beat a man to death with a fire extinguisher. It's shot in one take, with gritty cinematography and an energy that gets way under the skin. And this is nothing compared to a scene later in the film, in which Cassel's real-life and on-screen wife Monica Bellucci gets brutally raped, also in a single 10-minute take. The trick is that the film is moving backwards; the murder is revenge for the rape, and the film is actually examining how life can change in a split second.

JUST AN IDEA. After *I Stand Alone*, Noé decided he wanted to make an even more erotic drama: "I ran into Vincent in a bar and we started talking. He wanted to do a film together with Monica, but we didn't have very much time, because she had to go off to do *The Matrix Reloaded* in September."

Cassel continues: "Gaspar asked if Monica and I wanted to make the movie Tom and Nicole should have made when they did '*Eyes Wide Shut*' ... a porno movie! I knew I'd never make a porno movie with or without Monica. But we started talking and negotiating for body doubles in the explicit scenes. And it all got too complicated. Then we started talking about something different."

Noé continues, "My two previous films were very linear. Then I saw *Memento* and the non-linear structure was much more mental. I was trying to think of something using reverse chronology, and then I remembered a rape idea I'd had before. So we decided we'd do a reverse revenge script. I wrote down 12 scenes, no real script. And we all just said, 'OK let's do it!' Monica and Vincent had this incredible energy! We had to shoot very quickly. But we could do whatever we wanted to do. It took six weeks to prepare and write the outline, and then six weeks to shoot."

The reverse structure works brilliantly, examining the violence and revenge with a startling insight. "At the beginning of the film they're just redneck thugs," Noé says, "but you get to know them. It's about tragedy, about how people can't fight their fate. People try to fight for survival and they get into this revenge trip that's stronger than their personality."

NOT THE USUAL CRAP. Cassel was drawn to work with Noé after seeing his first two films. "They were shocking. They had the ability to provoke reactions as opposed to the usual crap," he says. "With this movie some people, such as my family, looked at me after the screening like they didn't know me. I saw it twice and I'll never watch it again. But I'm glad I did something important with an impact like this. It was actually fun to make; we had a good time making it. I know Monica had a great time!"

Noé agrees, adding that "every day was like a party. You don't see the fun we had shooting the film. We never knew what would happen. It was intuitive and very creative."

Although the rape scene required extra care. Cassel left the set while they were filming it. "I went to southwest France to surf. I suggested that I leave, and Monica asked me not to be there. I knew the actor who played the rapist; he's a boxer and he knows how to control the scene physically. I knew Gaspar and I trusted him. I knew what he was looking for. And the floor was made out of rubber."

Noé adds that the scene was not filmed to be either erotic or unerotic. "The rape is seen from the victim's point of view," he says "It's almost cartoonish, too bad to be real. The camera is stuck to the floor like she is; we are in her head. And the people who complain about that scene tend to be men, control freaks who don't like the angle. I think it plays on their fear of being raped. On the other hand, during the revenge scene in the gay club the camera was excited, like the guys in the

scene. But during the rape I put the camera on the floor. And at the end, the guy's dick coming out was computer-generated. I added it in later because it made it look more real. When Monica saw it she liked it. But I didn't expect men to be more offended by that scene than women!"

FULL OF LIFE. Filming each of the 12 scenes in one single take was a considerable technical feat. Besides being limited to 21-minute sequences (the length of a film reel), Noé didn't put any limitations on a scene. He just rolled the cameras and let the actors create their characters and dialog. "The shooting script was only three pages long with 12 scenes in it. I'd just be on the set with the actors and we'd see how it would be. We'd bring ideas and talk and say if it sounded fake. We never knew who'd do what, and that made it full of life. I orchestrated the movie more than directed it."

Cassel says, "It's the only movie I've made where I had stage fright every day because I never knew what would happen. I liked it, and I'd do it again."

Each sequence was shot between six and 20 times. Noé says the hardest part was trying to control hundreds of extras in the party scene. "But we didn't stop shooting if there was a problem. One time you could see all the crew reflected in the mirror, but we could just erase it and fix it afterwards, because of the advances in technology. There were a lot of accidents and we did digital work afterwards to clean it up."

He also points out that he used technology to highlight the film's moods and emotions. "Over the course of the film there's a progression from a very shaky camera to smooth steadycam, and the colours go from red and yellow to blue. And we actually added a low-frequency sound to the first half of the film just to make the audience feel uneasy."

CENSORSHIP IS INSULTING. Obviously, censorship wasn't in Noé's mind as he made the film. His basic principle is that you cannot clean out the violence of real life when you make a movie. Bellucci puts it this way: "If I had kids I'd let them watch this film. I don't think children have to sit in the house and eat sugar and chocolate all day and think that life is just pink. Life is pink, but life is also black."

Noé finds it insulting that a government censors films. "There's a violent rape in *Straw Dogs*, and the whole feeling with that scene is really twisted," he says. "But people are mature, so why should the British government think its people are more stupid than other countries? I don't know what could be stopped by censors today unless they want to get into a power game. This film isn't a speech on violence. It's about how people get into violent situations and just go further than expected."

Noé says his goal was to make a life-affirming film "about how people dream of finding a future but then there's an animal reality. This film is life-affirming in the sense that it's about the perpetuation of the species."

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Q & A TRANSCRIPT

With Gaspar Noé & Vincent Cassel
www.bfi.org.uk

Gaspar Noé and Vincent Cassel were interviewed at the National Film Theatre on the 11th October 2002 by Hannah Magill. The discussion is in four parts under the sub-headings:

- ***Courage***
- ***Telling it Backwards***
- ***The Violence in Life***
- ***The Kubrick Factor***

Part 1: COURAGE

Hannah Magill: I'd like to begin by asking you how you came to be working together. I know that you wanted to work together before this particular project came to fruition. Can you tell us about the process of coming together?

GN: One year ago I was getting to the pre-production stage of another movie I wanted to shoot in Tokyo, about a drug dealer. But the producer told me we couldn't get into pre-production before October. That was in May, before Cannes. I went to a nightclub for a few drinks and met Vincent. He asked what I was doing, and I told him I wasn't sure what I'd be doing that summer, but that I might be shooting an erotic movie that I'd produce myself, with a very low budget, and unknown people. He asked what was the movie about, and I said that it's the story of a couple, but it's very erotic, like *In The Realm of the Senses*.

"I'd love to work with you." "Me too, but I don't think this is the right movie." "Well, just let me read the script." "There is no script, just a ten-page outline". But I asked anyway whether he thought Monica could be excited by the project? So I brought the script to them, and they were yes/no, yes/no. I didn't think they'd do it, or that I'd do it with them, but finally we came round to discussing who could produce the movie, and we met these two producers that Vincent had worked with before. One was the producer of *La Haine*, and the other of *The Brotherhood of the Wolf*. And they said that if Monica and Vincent want to do this erotic project with you, go ahead, they'd find the financing. The problem was that Monica was starting *The Matrix Reloaded* in September. So there was a very short time to pre-produce the movie and shoot it. Finally, I gave them the script and it was really too explicit, and I knew they'd refuse it. Which they did. But while we were having lunch with the producers I said, "Why don't we just do another project: let's do a rape-revenge movie told backwards. With no explicit sex." They said, "You're joking". I said I wasn't. "Of course, we don't have enough time to write it down; but we could do a movie with a lot of master shots, and improvise. If I just write down the twelve scenes, then we can shoot the movie with twelve scenes that'll be told backwards." They said OK, but they didn't really believe me; the producers even less.... But they asked Vincent and Monica what they thought of it, and they said, "Yeah, we'll do it." And finally, because of their celebrity, much more than mine as I scare a lot of people, the producers went to the TV channels to find the finance, and because of the names of Monica and Vincent, the money was on the table. There was no title, no script. There was one condition, though: that the movie should be finished by the end of August. I said I wanted to do it violent. "I don't know if you've seen Pasolini's *Salò*, but I'd like to try something that will touch that kind of violence." But I think they hadn't seen that movie, the producers. The whole thing happened like that, but also because the energy of Vincent and Monica was heading in the same direction as the sort of movies that I wanted to do. So after a while it was "What can we do together?" "Whatever we want. The money's there." My previous movies had cost like \$200,000 each, and suddenly I had a budget 20 times that. With six weeks to prepare and six weeks to shoot.

Vincent Cassel: It was five in the morning, in this club in Paris, and I hadn't seen Gaspar for a little while, and he came to me, a little drunk, and says, "Would you like to make the movie that Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise missed? I'd really like to do a pornographic movie with you and Monica." "What? What are you talking about? There's no way we could make this kind of movie with you." Then I came back home, and talked with Monica, and said it was funny, I'd met Gaspar, and he wants to make this porno with us, and that I'd said no, of course. She says, "What? You can't say that. You never know." So we started to talk with Gaspar, and I knew there was no way I would make a pornographic movie with Monica (or without, by the way), but we started to talk about everything but those things, and Gaspar gave us tapes of *L'Histoire d'O* and *In the Realm of the Senses*, and we watched and, honestly, with a lot of will.... it just wasn't possible. So we came back to Gaspar, and I said, "OK, let's find a solution. Maybe we could consider all those explicit scenes as stunts so we would have to have stunt doubles." "OK, no problem, maybe we could do that with digital..." So we just dropped it, and he laughed, "It's OK, we can make another movie." And first we thought of doing something with betrayal.

GN: It's worth mentioning that the erotic movie was told backwards; not totally, but... Because my first two movies were very linear, and you get tired of that. And there are directors around who match non-linear narratives with real notions, so you think, "Why should I do linear movies?" Things like *Memento*, much more interesting because they're much more mental than linear narratives. When you're jumping from one project to another, in one night, you have to ask what

you can do there. "Let's take reverse chronological order on this project." I'd always thought that one day I'd do a rape movie, showing a rape as it could be in real life. Then the idea of the master shots was maybe coming from the project I'd wanted to do in Japan, which was supposed to be done with a lot of master shots. "Let's do the movie told backwards."

VC: It was like two months from the night we met in the club to the day we started to shoot the movie.

HM: And you went from wanting to do an erotic movie with no stars to doing an un-erotic movie with big stars...

GN: The good thing about all the talking we'd done about that erotic movie is that when we came to the love scene, which we shot on the first day of shooting, that was the scene Vincent and Monica were most concerned about. Not the rape scene, not the violence in the movie; it was showing their intimacy. I can understand why. But when you do a movie it's better to get rid of things that are problematic at the beginning. So we just rehearsed twice with a video camera. The set was ready, we had two run-throughs with a Mini DV machine, found it was 16 minutes, and I called for the steady-camera. And I had to wait in the kitchen, because I couldn't be behind the steady-camera. But it meant that at the end of the first day of shooting, we already had the 16 minutes shot that is at the end of the movie. If in one day we have 16 minutes, maybe in one week the movie will be finished...

VC: My first question that day was to ask, because there were no lines, of course, how long the scene should be. And he just said, "Anything between two and twenty minutes..."

GN: The movie was shot on Super 16 (and then transferred to high-definition video and then transferred back to 35mm 'scope). So the Super-16 camera has a 300 metres can on it, it gives you 21 minutes. So, beside that restriction, nothing.

Part 2: TELLING IT BACKWARDS

HM: In terms of telling the story backwards, do you think that makes a difference to the impact of the violent scenes? They come at the beginning rather than the end, so there isn't the usual big emotional build-up, build-up, build-up, then release. Was that deliberate, reversing a tradition of how rape-revenge movies work?

GN: I think you just get linked to the characters in the middle of the movie. At the beginning they're just two heavy rednecks. And in the middle of the movie when you come to see the rape scene then you see their more civilised aspect. You're getting into them, emotionally; then retrospectively you understand their whole behaviour.

Someone told me the movie's not a drama; it's a tragedy. I asked what's the difference. In tragedies, you know what's going to happen next. People cannot fight against their fate. Whatever's going to happen, it's been written by someone above. In this case, written by the director...

HM: Is that a very negative view of human nature? That in a sense the bestial instincts within people will eventually come out?

GN: I don't think there are good instincts or bad instincts; it's just people trying to fight for their survival. And at times they get into revenge trips that are stronger than their brain.

HM: How do you feel about the shooting of the rape scene and the very violent murder scene at the start? Is it troubling to shoot something like that? Do you feel a distance from it as an actor?

VC: Well, you'd better have a distance from it. But altogether, the movie was pretty fun to shoot.

HM: For Monica, too?

VC: Yes, she told me she'd had a lot of fun doing it. Of course, it was very tiring to do the rape scene, and she didn't want me on set for it, which I understood. (I just went to the southwest of France to surf meanwhile). But we were calling at night to see if everything was OK. I mean I knew the guy, the actor, who used to be a world champion Thai boxer, so there was nothing I could do anyway... Between the takes he would talk about his kids and so on, so there was no ambiguity really, and I knew that, so it was more about not hurting her. The floor was made out of rubber, and because he's a boxer, he knows how to control his movements and everything. I was never worried about Gaspar, I knew the movie wasn't about stealing something out of us; but more about working together. We knew what the result was supposed to be, and what we were looking for. And when we went to Cannes I realised we had just what we were looking for. [Ironically:] Scandal.

HM: It can be a problem with films that contain rape scenes that they can seem too much like sex scenes. We're used to seeing scenes portraying sex; but to shoot a rape scene in a way to make it un-erotic, is that difficult?

GN: It wasn't really about making it erotic or un-erotic. The rape is seen from the victim's point of view. The rapist, if you really consider it, is really quite cartoonish. He's almost too bad to be real. Anyway, because the camera is following her from the back, and is put on the floor, like she's stuck to the floor, you are in her head. The people who get pissed off with that scene, it's never women, it's mostly men. Mostly aggressive or control-freak men. Because they feel invaded by the movie. Men, in general, have always been afraid of being raped, from when they were kids, and as soon as they're put in a position where they have to consider a rape from a woman's point of view...

HM: But in terms of your use of a fixed camera, and not using any cuts in that scene, is that to break down the use of her body?

GN: I didn't do it rationally; I didn't think about it. The whole movie's about being in the brain of someone who wants to take revenge. They don't take revenge on the right guy; they kill the wrong guy; whatever. But you are with them when they are taking the revenge, and so the camera is as excited as Pierre or Vincent during that scene. In the case of Monica, I did the camera myself. I was preceding her, and then suddenly I put the camera on the ground, and I just couldn't move it again. I would have felt ashamed of shaking the camera above her. That would be like sharing the rapist's point of view. So you don't even think about it, you just do it, and say this is what it should be like.

VC: Three months later, Gaspar came up to our home and said he had something to show us, because he'd added something to the rape scene; and it's the dick. The dick is CGI, and he asked us if it was right.

GN: Because when the guy was coming up you would notice that his zip was closed, and I saw there was something that didn't work there. He's just raped her, and you don't see his penis. So I added it with the guy who was doing all the special effects in post-production, and I knew we should show it to Vincent and Monica, especially Monica, because she was the person concerned. And she said that it looks great, looks much more real. And you're not really expecting that detail, especially in a movie with an actress as well-known as Monica.

Part 3: THE VIOLENCE IN LIFE

Audience question: Why did Vincent take on the role?

VC: I did it because I saw the first two movies he did, and I thought he was very interesting even though he was very shocking. Anytime I see a movie that provokes a real reaction from the audience, I am very interested. We see so much crap, so many things that are formatted; we're so used to seeing violence where people explode all the time... It's only when somebody tells a story that could happen, to anybody, to any of us, that it will provoke these kinds of reaction. People get mad, people start to lose their minds and say incredible things like, "You're a fascist," "The government should forbid the making of these kind of movies."

With this movie, for example, some people very close, from my own family even, looked at me after the screening, and it was like they didn't know me. We get used to everything, but to a movie like this you can't get used. I don't actually want to see the movie again as I saw it twice, that's enough for ten years. But I have the feeling of having made something special, instead of just another movie from this huge industry. That's why I wanted to do the movie, and I think Monica wanted to do it for the same reason. As for why Gaspar does, I don't want to know.

Audience question: regarding the violence in the film.

GN: Violence is in life. I know so many people who've been raped; though I don't know any who've been killed. I know closely men and women who've been raped. It's part of the human experience to meet violence. If it's not when you're five, it's when you're ten, it's during work-time, whatever. But you cannot clean out the violence of reality when you do a movie. The difference is, it's a useful movie. *Salo* is a useful movie even if it's very symbolic. There are many movies that deal with the animality within human beings. People are just fighting for their survival. And sometimes they get into neuroses of power that bring them to be violent with other people.

VC: The other actor in the movie, Albert Dupontel, always says that the most violent book ever is the Bible.

Audience question: Was every shot was a single take?

GN: No, they were shot from, let's say, six times to twenty times. Maybe Vincent would have worried most about the love scene at the end of the movie that was shot at the very beginning, but for me the hardest scene, the nightmare, was the party scene. That one we shot 20 times, as I just couldn't control 100 extras, doing drugs, drinking... half of the crew doing drugs... everybody trying to seduce a girl on set. I felt like dying the weekend after shooting that scene.

Audience question: regarding the film's look.

GN: In the whole movie there was a progression from the shakiest camera ever to a very flat, liquid camera. And the colours go from dark red and black and brown to like greens and yellows and blues. I think the first time you see blue in the movie is at the end when you see the sky.

Audience question: regarding pre-planning

GN: You can consider a movie as music. I wanted to start chaotic and then get flat. I couldn't time the scenes beforehand; didn't know if a scene was going to be three minutes or fifteen. I just had to be with the actors on set with the camera, to see how long they'd be.

For example, the scene with Monica, or the subway scene, or the scene with them at the end on the bed, the actors' proposals were always going to be better than anything I could impose on them. Bring me ideas, I'll let you know whether they sound true or false. For example, when Monica did that thing with her hand, I wouldn't have thought of that; she came up with that. When on the subway the actor starts asking Vincent about how he makes Monica come, no-one expected him to say that, not even Vincent or Monica. So that makes the whole scene full of life. I used to say I was orchestrating the movie, not directing it.

VC: Depending on what take had been edited, the movie would have a different sense, because we never said the same thing twice.

Audience question: regarding digital post-production

GN: There were lots of accidents. Sometimes the mike would be in shot, but we knew we could erase it digitally later. I told everyone we should never stop a take unless we were really short of negative or there was a huge camera problem. There were many technical problems that we erased in post-production, some sound problems, like when there was a huge sound in the middle of a scene in the apartment when they're supposed to be alone. But we knew we could erase it later. And there was one scene where the crew, me, the camera assistant, the guy holding the mike, were reflected in the window of the apartment, but we erased it later. If the movie had been

shot as movies were shot ten years ago, you would have noticed all these problems. Hopefully this high-definition post-production permitted a lot of things that are good for the movie.

Audience question: regarding *Straw Dogs* and censorship

GN: I'm not provoking the British censors, it's not my problem. It's not a concern when you're doing a movie. I was thinking of *Straw Dogs* when I did this movie, and when I did my previous movie, because it's a movie that impressed me more than maybe even *Taxi Driver*, and maybe the only movie in my whole life that made me walk out because I couldn't handle it. (I almost walked out of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* but I stayed to the end.)

It took me a few years before I could watch the rest of *Straw Dogs* [after the rape sequence]; it didn't even happen to me with *Saló*. The whole feeling in that rape scene is really twisted and I don't understand why a movie like *Straw Dogs* could be banned [from video release] for so many years in England. It's just as if the British government had more contempt towards their citizens than the French government. People are mature in any country and why should the British think their citizens are more stupid than French citizens. Stupid. Especially [in relation to] *Straw Dogs* as it's not appealing, my movie's not appealing and there are some movies that can make revenge seem appealing, where the revenge is taken on the right guy, and they're much better than the police. That's not the case in these movies. So I don't understand the censor's role, except in perpetuating the rituals of power.

Audience question: regarding revenge

GN: The man who's trying to rationalise the whole thing of revenge, that could be almost a Dustin Hoffman figure. The kind of hero that you always have in these revenge movies like "Someone raped my wife", or "Someone killed my wife, I'm gonna kill the guy" and then the other kind who'd say "No, no; you've got to think with your brains, not with your guts" and at the end he comes on like Dustin Hoffman in *Straw Dogs* to commit a murder. But the thing here is that also he kills someone who's going to rape his best friend. So in a way he's just protecting his best friend. Maybe he doesn't kill the guy who raped their mutual girlfriend, but at the same time he's just saving the life of his best friend. And then he goes too far, because people who are not used to violence, when they get into it, sometimes they just lose their mind much more than people who are used to it. It's not really a speech on violence. I got into too many fights myself. I'm not proud of it. It just happens.

Part 4: THE KUBRICK FACTOR

Audience question: regarding the influence of Stanley Kubrick and *A Clockwork Orange*

GN: I heard someone say I'd made references to Kubrick and John Boorman. I said, "Why Boorman; because of the rape?" "No; that's the music at the end of *Zardoz*." But I really hadn't remembered it from when I'd seen it at about the age of twelve. There's also a story about pregnancy at the end of *Zardoz* so I had to go out and buy the DVD, and I sort of said, "Oh yeah..." Maybe it was an unconscious thing that I used that music, but I really liked it, there's something about it. Compared to all the other music in the movie, where there's a sense it's just coming from a radio, this piece is like a comment on the movie. I had this scene at the end and I went through so much music for a soundtrack, not all classical, but then I heard this symphony by Beethoven and just started crying. And everybody in the editing room said this was great. You can't explain why it works; unless, of course, it's that the music is better than the movie. Everybody liked it; I had trouble instead with the strobe lighting at the end. I had to fight to keep that.

HM: But you do have a Kubrick reference with the *2001*.....

GN: There are references to many, many directors and many movies. There is Kubrick; there is mainly Kalatazov [Mikhail Kalatazovichvili], a Russian director who did this movie called *I Am Cuba* [1964]. I don't know if it was released here, but you can get it on DVD. It's a movie made mainly with master shots. But of course there are many references in the movie. When people say it's a homage to Boorman, of course I was touched by the rape scene in *Deliverance*. And if

there's a homage to Sam Peckinpah it's because I read an interview with him saying that he always wanted to do a life-affirming movie after all these movies about animal human behaviour. I think he never really came to do a life-affirming movie; so I really wanted to cross *Straw Dogs* and something more life-affirming. I don't know entirely if the scene about having a baby counts as that; but at the end you have people dreaming of a better future, or just a future. There's an animal reality they can stop with these virtual projections into the future. I can't say it's really life-affirming, but it is about perpetuating the species.

Audience question: regarding Cannes selection and reception

GN: We always wanted to have the movie at Cannes. It's the kind of movie that, if it does well at Cannes, everybody sees. If you're in competition it could be better or worse. At a certain point, though, we proposed it to the main competition, who said they'd really like a Vincent and Monica movie, but this movie's too heavy to handle. So the producers asked if I wanted to make any changes; but I said we'd just take it to the Directors' Fortnight, to the Critics' Week but let's not change a frame of the movie. The movie's much more than just the Cannes Festival. But eventually, after, I think, seeing my other movies, they said they'd accept it for the main competition. It was mainly the new artistic director of the Festival who really wanted the film, and he said they'd come to an arrangement to put the film in competition, but at midnight, which had never happened before. We had these conditions. Gilles Jacob and the rest of the festival committee didn't want us to show the film to the daily journalists. They said if we really wanted to release the film on the same day as its Cannes screening, we could show it to the monthly magazines or the weekly magazines, but not to the daily journalists, because they had to discover it in Cannes. So a lot of people were really pissed off with our publicists, with the distributors and even with the movie, because they were not invited to the two press screenings, where we were obliged to admit only the magazines. So we ended up with 100% of the French press hating the movie, even if some of the same papers had, within a fortnight, changed their minds. There's too much energy in Cannes of "It's good" / "It's bad"; people were screaming in the audience. But that's quite good. That's part of the pleasure as where else can you go to scream? You have 4,000 people in the theatre and you start to scream, and everybody starts screaming; it's part of the game. And I knew my movie was the kind of film that would get everybody shouting; it's cool. I told my friends, please start whistling or screaming as it's funny, like going to the World Cup.

Audience question: regarding regular use of the actor Philippe Nahon

GN: Mainly, he had been working for free in my previous movies, and he would have felt betrayed if I had not taken him in. I really did want to put him into the movie, but because the whole movie was just twelve scenes, and I knew what they were, at first I couldn't find a place for him. Except maybe being the cop, who's asking Albert Dupontel which party they've come from. But I said I'd rather have a cop to play a cop so the guy who plays the cop is a cop, the transvestites are transvestites, the two big guys were the security guys from the production.

So I'd promised Philippe a great part, and he was ringing almost every day, asking what his part was. As we were shooting I was saying, "Don't worry; you'll have your scene." The first week he wasn't involved; the second he wasn't involved, and he's calling, "When am I shooting?" I mean, he's like a stepfather to me, I've been working so much with him, so I cannot betray his trust, and I say, "You'll have a great scene, I promise." So I decided I wanted him in the opening scene of the movie, which would come at the end of the shoot. He comes, and he asks if he's playing with Vincent, who he likes a lot, or with Albert. Or whether he has a scene with Monica? In fact, the guy he's with at the beginning of the movie is a very close friend of mine, who was perhaps the most excellent director of my generation, who did too much speed; and actually he's in a mental hospital because he did too many amphetamines, and has some other problems. But he can come out of the hospital to do this one scene. So when Philippe asks again who the actor is, I just tell him it's a friend from a mental hospital... At first he's like, errrrr?, and then, even though he doesn't usually drink, he went to a bar and started drinking. I convinced him not to get drunk, and he asked again what the scene was. I said maybe he could just be on a bed talking about how time destroys all things because that was originally going to be the title of the movie and he'll try to give you a blow-job... "Oh, no, I don't want him to..."

Finally, though, he was very amused, and he realised that the other guy, Stéphane, was really intelligent; he really liked the person and began to feel free, so we kept on shooting all night. It

was the last take that made it into the movie. The guy was changing his dialogue in every single take, so I knew what Philippe Nahon would say, but not what the other guy would say. And in this last take, Philippe says, "I've been in prison for having sex with my daughter", and the other guy just says, "The western syndrome." A lot of people have asked me why he says this and I don't know. A lot of things in the movie are improvised. For instance, I never asked Albert Dupontel to ask Monica if the character played by Vincent makes her come; I'd just said, "Surprise me." There was just a weird energy on that take that maybe was best for the movie. They did surprise me. That's why when I watch the movie it feels part of me and part of them.

HM: And your own bit part?

GN: The party scene is one continuous shot, but sometimes one master shot is made up of two shots that are digitally rearranged. In the nightclub scene it was easy to use many small takes, because it's so dark, and when the camera's moving through the dark you can match any take as long as the movement goes the same way and at the same speed. I was thinking some people might complain, as they did with *Cruising*, that I was being homophobic, so I decided to put myself into that scene. Once the whole movie had been shot, I decided to go back for just one shot of me getting an erection and masturbating while watching another guy. So we returned to the club, went up to the third level, just for this one additional shot, as I wanted to be in my own movie doing this cameo. Usually I operate the camera, but in this case I asked my camera assistant. And I'd start masturbating, but I could hear the guys screaming who were really fucking in the club. Also, there was the producer in front of me, and the assistant director, and everybody was going "mmmmmm"... I would have an erection for maybe a minute, and then we'd have to start again. There were several takes better than this one, but they wouldn't match the editing, so I had to use this one, which is not very good for my image. By then I was more concerned with what my father would think of the scene,

Audience question: regarding male/female reactions to the movie

GN: I just said that men were more offended by the movie, not that every one was, but proportionately more men than women. I'd expected it to be the other way around, but after many screenings I discovered that men have more weird, more aggressive reactions to that scene.

HM: I think maybe there's a distinction to be drawn between being upset and being offended. Do you mean upset in the sense of being saddened and affected, or do you mean angry with the film?

GN: You feel compassion... The movie is physical. I did everything I could to make it physical. You can have a physical reaction to the movie, too. Even on the soundtrack, we added these really low waves, infra-waves, so that during the first half of the movie you have a 27-hertz frequency that's usually used in riots to make people run away. So for the first half of the movie you feel weird ú you could show just a cat drinking milk, and it'd be scary, and you wouldn't know why ú but it's because of this infra-wave beneath it.

Audience question: regarding what have VC and GN learned from each other

VC: What I learned from him? Good question; I don't know really. Maybe I can tell you what I learned from the whole experience. Thanks to this huge freedom we had, it's the only movie where I'd go on set every day and have stage fright as if I was on a theatre stage. Because I'd never know what was going to happen. That's the memory I have; and what I learned from that was... well, that I liked it. And that I would do it again.

GN: I learned about trusting people, having fun with people. I was going to the shoot like going to a party every day. I'd wake up, go "Let's go" because I didn't know what to expect, and that was exciting. You don't see on the screen the fun we had during shooting, or really feel the energy. With only a very short time to prepare, and a very short time to shoot, that helps you to do it in a more instinctive way, and not to think too much. Sometimes you have to put your brain in the closet to do good things, to help things happen.

HM: Thanks

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