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Encounters



— COMA

A Film by Bertrand Bonello

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FRANCE

2022

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— COMA

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A FILM BY BERTRAND BONELLO

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— SYNOPSIS

A teenager has a special power: she can bring us into her dreams – but also her nightmares.

Locked in her room, her only relationship to the outside world is virtual. She begins to go back and forth between dreams and reality, guided by a disturbing and mysterious youtuber, Patricia Coma.

— DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

STARTING POINT

The origin of this film is a short film that became the prologue to *Coma*. It's basically a letter I wrote to my 18-year-old daughter as she entered into adulthood. It was intended both to be comforting and to communicate my concern for her. I wanted to show her how confident I was in her as a person, as well as in her future and her decisions, even though this period, one that we all go through, often makes us lose confidence in just about everything.

"The fact that other people dream is very dangerous. Dreams are a terrifying will to power. Each of us is more or less a victim of other people's dreams. Even the most graceful young woman is a horrific ravager, not because of her soul, but because of her dreams. Beware of the dreams of others, because if you are caught in their dream, you are done for."

Coming across this passage from a lecture by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze made me want to take the letter and the prologue one step further and to imagine and observe a girl's psyche. Deleuze's extraordinary passage inspired me to do exactly the opposite of what he says: *Let us be caught in the dream of the other* and see what happens.

From that point on, the film is fairly straightforward. It's about a young girl lying on her bed -- like on a raft in the middle of the ocean -- who journeys to the deepest depths of her inner self. The film is her journey to lands that are sometimes idyllic and sometimes dark and disquieting.

The film is about her obsessions with serial killers and ecology, her fear of a romantic breakup, and her reflections on liberty. All of this slowly, gradually, leads her to distort reality -- and, in a certain way, to see it more clearly.





THE VARIOUS WORLDS

The girl projects herself into a series of different worlds, like a series of doors opening onto her imagination. The world of dolls, of limbo, of Patricia Coma, of cartoons – all of which makes *Coma* a hybrid film with a whole host of narrative elements that, over the course of the movie, begin to connect with and contaminate one another. For example, the dolls start acting out scenes from a sitcom before referencing Donald Trump's tweets or the words of serial killers.

These slippages eventually lead the girl to lose sight of whether it's her or the dolls doing the thinking and speaking. She can't figure out whether the disappearance of one of her girlfriends is normal, or whether a psycho killed her. She begins to find it normal to encounter dead people, and starts asking herself deep questions about freedom and how she might someday be able to enjoy and make use of that freedom.

Each of these worlds generates its own fears and monsters, but also makes space for creation and wonderful possibilities. Beyond the fact that limbo is the realm of free will, it's also the only place where the characters meet.

The hybrid nature of the film called for a juxtaposition of textures throughout. It mixes classical, live-action techniques with subjective-POV camcorder shots, surveillance cameras, cartoon styles, 3D animation, archival footage, and online video, whether real or imagined (e.g. Patricia Coma's channel).

I wanted to approach each world like its own mini-story and commentary on the present age.

THE ERA

How does one talk to an 18-year-old in this day and age? The film doesn't answer this question, of course, but it does offer up some narratives to this effect.

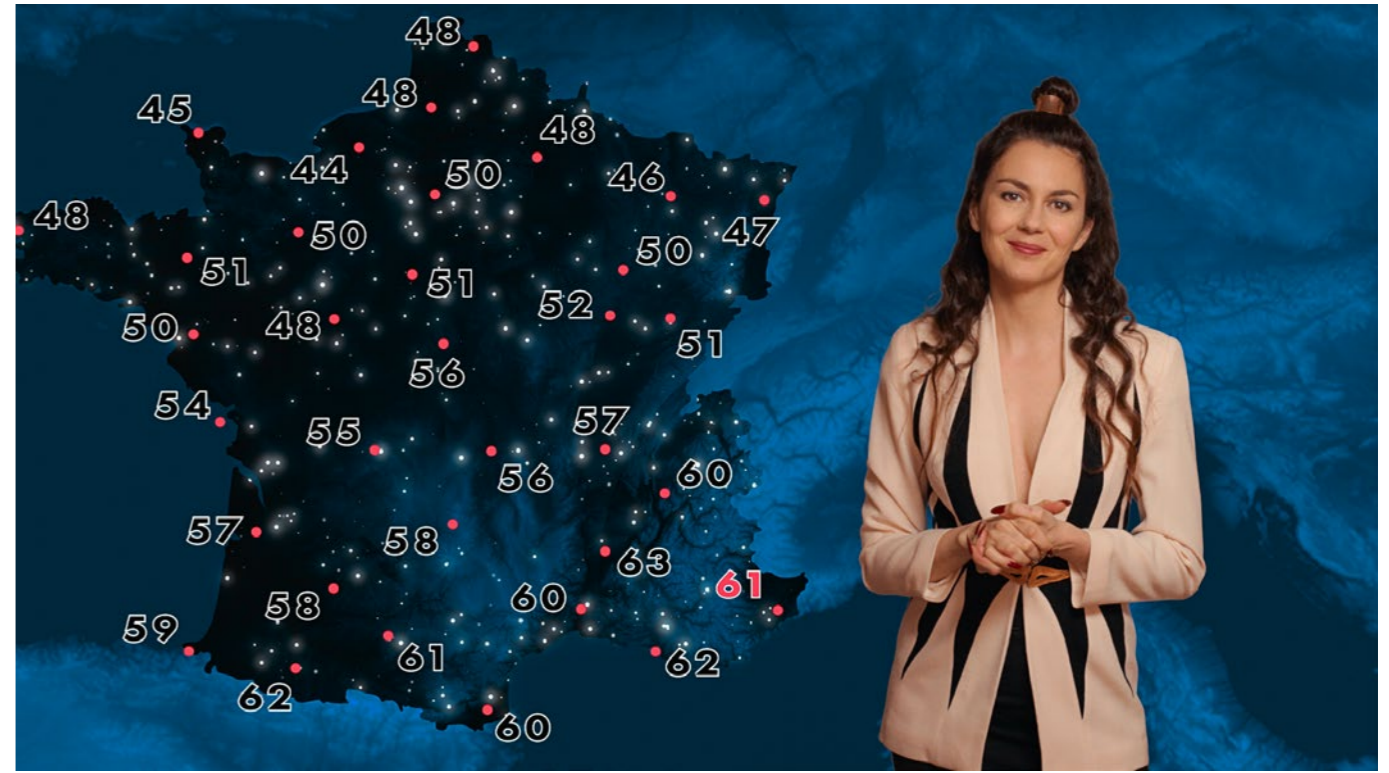
I wanted to address serious, important things, but do so in an often-playful way, sometimes even humorously and lightheartedly, even though the film is permeated with the somberness of our current time period.

Certain devices in the film, such as the animation or Patricia Coma's channel, allowed me to address things head-on, alternating between comedy, irony, and much more frightening things.

The Patricia Coma character ends up being a guide for the girl and for the film as a whole. She leads us to the film's most profound subject: the fact that today more than ever, being free means confronting one's deepest fears.

THE DREAMS

Although the premise is about entering dreams, the film is less about a realistic representation of the girl's dreams than it is about her emotional slippages and displacements generated by her perception of today's world. And in the end, it leaves us with, perhaps, one final question: Do we still have the right to dream in today's world?



— BIOGRAPHY

BERTRAND BONELLO

Director

Bertrand Bonello was born in Nice, in 1968. He began his career in music, participating in numerous artists' albums, before turning to cinema and directing.

In 1996, he directed *Who I Am – Based on Pier Paolo Pasolini [Qui je suis – d'après Pier Paolo Pasolini]*, a documentary short adapted from Pasolini's autobiographical prose poem. His first feature film, *Something Organic*, was presented at the 1998 Berlin Film Festival.

His feature film *The Pornographer* (2001), with Jean-Pierre Léaud, was presented at the Cannes Film Festival's International Critics' Week and was awarded the FIPRESCI prize.

In 2003, *Tiresia* was selected for the Cannes Film Festival's official competition. Then he directed *On War*, selected at the directors' fortnight in 2008.

In 2011, his feature film *House of Tolerance* was presented in Cannes' official competition. Praised by the critics, it received eight nominations for the French César awards.

In 2014, he directed *Saint Laurent*, which also was selected in official competition at the Cannes Film Festival. The movie represented France at the Academy Awards and received ten César nominations.

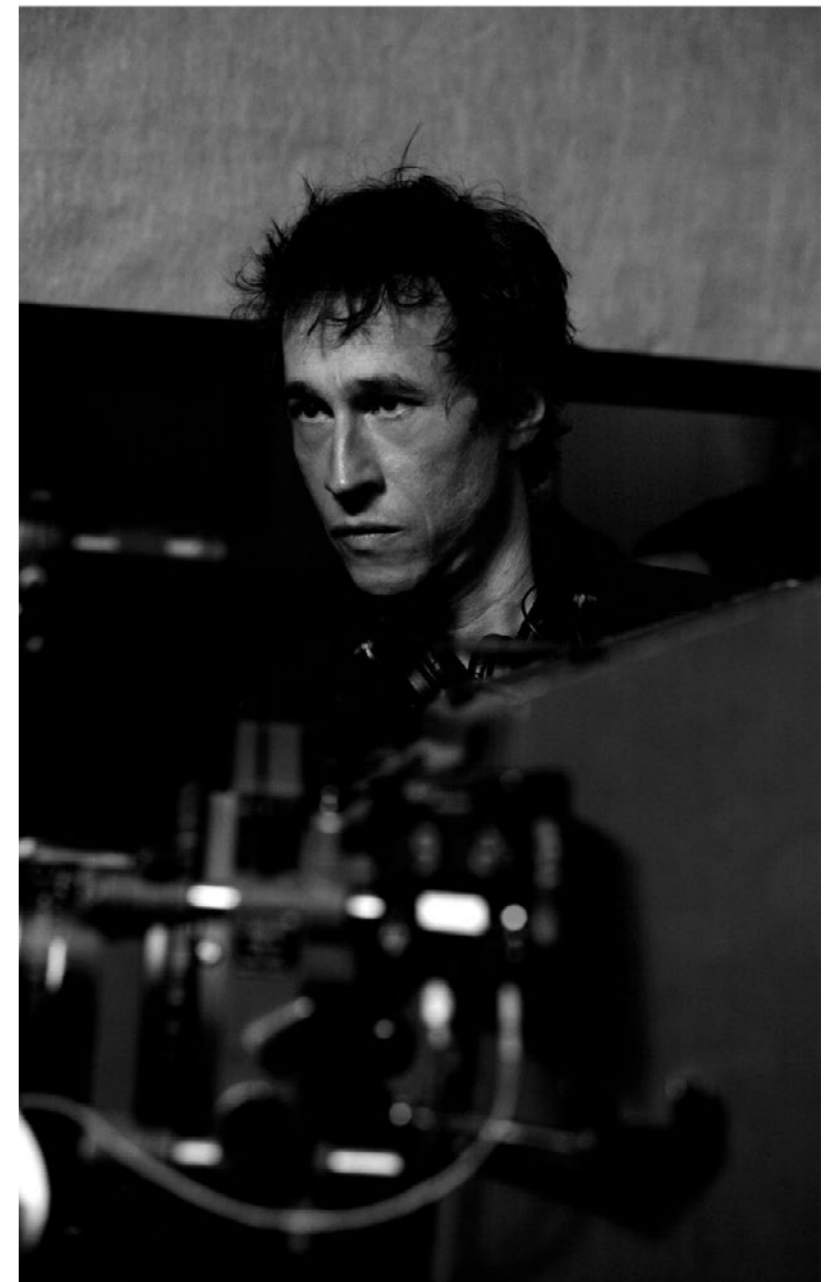
The same year, he exhibited at the Pompidou Center, which dedicated a film retrospective to his work, and released a music album: *Accidents*. In addition, he took on the leading role in Antoine Barraud's *Portrait of the Artist [Le Dos rouge]*.

At the same time, he went on directing musical and short films: *Cindy*, *The Doll is Mine* (2005) with Asia Argento, which made Cannes' official selection, *My New Picture* (2007), *Where The Boys Are* (2010), *Ingrid Caven: Music and Voice* (2012) presented at Locarno, and *Sarah Winchester, Phantom Opera [Sarah Winchester, Opéra Fantôme]* (2016) for the 3rd Stage, the Paris Opera's digital platform.

In 2016, *Nocturama* premiered at TIFF and San Sebastian.

His last feature, *Zombie Child*, was selected at Cannes Film Festival / Directors Fortnight in 2019.

COMA will premiere at the Berlinale in February 2022.



FILMOGRAPHY

BERTRAND BONELLO

2022	COMA
2019	ZOMBI CHILD
2016	NOCTURAMA
2016	SARAH WINCHESTER, PHANTOM OPERA
2014	SAINT LAURENT
2012	INGRID CAVEN : MUSIC AND VOICE
2011	HOUSE OF TOLERANCE (<i>L'Apollonide – Souvenirs de la maison close</i>)
2010	WHERE THE BOYS ARE
2008	ON WAR (<i>De la guerre</i>)
2007	MY NEW PICTURE (short)
2005	CINDY: THE DOLL IS MINE (short)
2003	TIRESIA
2001	THE PORNOGRAPHER
1998	SOMETHING ORGANIC (<i>Quelque chose d'organique</i>)

CAST

Louise LABEQUE	the teenager
Julia FAURE	Patricia Coma
Louis GARREL	Voice doll Dr BALLARD
Laetitia CASTA	Voice doll Sharon
Gaspard ULLIEL	Voice doll Scott
Anaïs DEMOUSTIER	Voice doll Ashley
Vincent LACOSTE	Voice doll Nicholas



CREW



With the support of	Centre national du Cinéma et de l'image animée Image/Mouvement du Centre national des arts plastiques
Cinematography	Antoine PAROUTY
Animation	Remembers - Ugo BIENVENU, Félix DE GIVRY, Simon CADILHAC, Josselin FACON
Editing	Gabrielle STEMMER
Sound	Romain CADILHAC, Clément LAFORCE, Jean-Pierre LAFORCE
Set design	Gaston PORTEJOIE, Daphné YVON, Anna BONELLO
Costume	Pauline JACQUARD
Make-up	Raphaëlle THIERCELIN
Assistant director	Alexis DIOP
Post production	Christina CRASSARIS
Country of production	France
French Distributor	New Story
International Sales	Best Friend Forever

Director	Bertrand BONELLO
Screenplay	Bertrand BONELLO
Producers	Justin TAURAND, Bertrand BONELLO
Production	Les films du Bélier, My New picture
Coproduction	Remembers



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