



Acropolis Cinema and MUBI present
the exclusive Los Angeles theatrical release of

NOCTURAMA



preceded by a special screening of

SARAH WINCHESTER, PHANTOM OPERA



films by Bertrand Bonello

August 15, 2017 – 8pm
Downtown Independent



NOCTURAMA

130 min // France // 2017

Official Selection: TIFF, Vienna, AFI, Rotterdam, San Sebastian, Zurich, London



SARAH WINCHESTER, PHANTOM OPERA

24 min // France // 2016

Official Selection: New York Film Festival, San Sebastian, FID Marseille, Torino

Ultra-Realist Abstraction: Discussing “Nocturama” with Bertrand Bonello

By Daniel Kasman and Blake Williams

NOTEBOOK: Now that *Nocturama* been theatrically released in France, what’s your perception of the conversation surrounding the film back at home? Is there a problem that you don’t specify the motivation or ideology of the attackers?

BONELLO: Yeah, there are many subjects [being debated] and this is one of them. Another is: “Are you allowed to do that?” The moral responsibility of an artist—stuff like that. These are big debates over the film.

NOTEBOOK: I wanted to ask a bit about the structure of time in the film. One of the most marvelous things about *Nocturama* is that it seems to take place in real time, and not only in real time but also almost in contiguous space. You’re following everyone in long steadicam shots through the Metro, through offices, through the store—we have a great spatial sense of continuity. And yet, you’re constantly stepping in and breaking that continuity in time, stepping back, going forward, stepping back, changing the viewpoint. Was this always part of the original conception of the story?

BONELLO: Yes, everything was written. Very precisely. It’s what took me the most time in the writing. Basically, you have three relationships with time. The first part is a work on simultaneity and precision, trying to find some tension there.

When you think you understand it, you stop the film, you go to a flashback, you go back—always to create some tension and attention. The second part, time stops, in a way—after the explosions. Because they have to wait. Trying to find some tension with the time that stops. In the third part, time explodes. Because it’s late at night and I wanted to be very precise in terms of geography and to show that it reflects the tiredness that happens in the heads of the kids. But all this is very, very written.

NOTEBOOK: Many if not all of these children are non-professional actors?

BONELLO: Yeah. And even the professionals are so young that they had, like, one experience.

NOTEBOOK: How did you work with them on the set, working on their characters? They are characters about which you give us a little bit, but not so much. It’s such a process oriented film, a film about what they do, and about waiting and being. Did you talk to them about who their characters were supposed to be, or more about what the action was in the moment?

BONELLO: The action. I don’t want to put in your head too many clues. But to be quite precise: take two seconds, do this, do that, do that. And for the characters, I wrote some stuff—I agree without a lot of background—but some precise stuff, and for

me this is 50% of the character. The other 50% is who you choose, you know? If you choose him rather than him. These kids they arrive with a lot. They arrive with themselves. Their way of talking, their face, the way they walk. For me, this brings 50% of the character, this incarnation, the embodiment. I wanted to respect who they were, also. Not to twist them too much.

NOTEBOOK: I was very moved by the group dynamic, because it was never quite clear to me why they were together, but I sensed a real camaraderie or a unity, even if not everyone was close. They all seemed to come together in a moment. What do you see as the thing that holds these kids together—kids of different backgrounds, different races, different classes?

BONELLO: Yeah—and probably different reasons to do this. But a kind of common anger. For different reasons. Maybe this sounds like something more relevant to a statement, but that's something that was really dear to me.

NOTEBOOK: In the first half of the movie, when they are engaging with this action, this plan of setting out the bombs and sending messages on their cell phones to one another, what sort of research did you do in order to be faithful to how this would actually play out?

BONELLO: I've done some research on very practical stuff. How to enter a tower. For example, when the guy says "this semtex has been stolen four years ago"—this is true. A lot of very, very ultra-realistic details. From this, I make the rest up. I wanted the film to be a mix of ultra-realism and abstraction. All my work is to find a good equilibrium at every moment, in fact. When I start to write a script I do a kind of file—a mood board. I start to write a scene and every image that I can find, I put it inside. All my work is to put order to these images. Sometimes, when you start noting the records of certain items, and it starts giving an artistic glow to the picture that I will give it.

NOTEBOOK: Speaking of writing, you write a lot of your own music for your films, including for *Nocturama*. Are you thinking about music as you're writing, do you have music you've already written in your head that you write to?

BONELLO: No, it's when I write. I am really thinking through the texture of what I need in a sequence for the film. The sound of the film. I have a little studio at home, and I go from my

desk to the studio and try to see if they work harmoniously together.

NOTEBOOK: So it's sort of inseparable, your script writing and your music composition?

BONELLO: Yes, it's side-by-side work. Because I like the idea that music says something. Like a dialog, for example. So it's part of the writing.

NOTEBOOK: How did you decide on the targets the kids were attacking? I imagine it was tricky to want to choose actions that have meaning in the film and in the real world, but ones that wouldn't necessarily be charged with too much meaning to specify what they're doing and peg them to a certain motivation.

BONELLO: It was obvious there should be something political, so I chose the Ministry of the Interior. Because for young people it's something very oppressive, because it's the police and the army and stuff like that. I really wanted something related to the financial powers. And then I really wanted a strong image. And for us, it's Joan of Arc, because it's become a symbol of the extreme right wing in France.

NOTEBOOK: Was it difficult to actually use that statue in the film? I imagine you didn't actually set it on fire.

BONELLO: We said to the city, "can we do a shot here? She's going pretend to clean it." We put some stuff on her cloth, and then we had the statue re-built and put a fire on a greenscreen and [slaps his hands] put the two images together.

NOTEBOOK: When you move to the second half of the film, to the luxury department store, the tone shifts to something more eerie, maybe something closer to a horror or genre film. What was your engagement with genre cinema while making this movie?

BONELLO: It's cinema that I was really watching a lot of when I was 12 or 13, the beginning of the 1980s. All the Cronenberg, Romero and Carpenter films. It's part of my relationship with cinema—strongly. I really wanted the film to go sometimes in this direction. Not totally, but to use it. I also wanted this to be a terror picture, a terrifying picture. We use terror in many ways.

NOTEBOOK: I was surprised at the specter of...I'm not sure what you'd call them, in the U.S.

we call them the S.W.A.T. team—those special police who raid the store at the end. Those figures to me were a total abstract terror: the silence, the methodicalness. It wasn't an action picture ending. It was spectral.

BONELLO: That was probably the most realistic part of the film. When you see the structure of the building, it's an eight-story building, so it's the most realistic way for them to enter, and the strategy is actually called the "hammer and the anvil." They come from the top and from the bottom, very, very, very slowly. Because they don't know what they're going to find. I worked with an ex-guy from these special forces, a specialist of terrorism.

NOTEBOOK: In the second half, when they're stuck inside, the kids play around quite a bit: trying on costumes, they try new personas, they sing, they dance. Do you see the first half of the film, the free half, as a kind of "play" as well? That they see their action as a kind of play?

BONELLO: There's a journalist who wrote something in France that I really liked. He said that this movie treats its subject as something that is really important but at the same time treats it as a children's game. And I like this approach of the film; I didn't think this way, but...

NOTEBOOK: Indeed, for in the first part, before certain hints come in, the kids could be just having fun in the Metro, jumping the stiles—playing a game.

BONELLO: Yeah, they are very serious, in a way, but they are really lost, also. I like the idea that the second part comes to counteract this first part. It brings an ambiguity to the film, which I think is necessary.

NOTEBOOK: Let's end on the cat. Can you tell me about the film's cat?

BONELLO: Elvis! It's not pregnant, it's just fat [laughs]. I wanted the idea that there is an opening in the ceiling...and first you see the cat... and then you see the police.



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