

SPECIAL TREATMENT

A FILM BY JEANNE LABRUNE

A film by
Jeanne Labrune

95 Minutes, 35mm & Digital, Color, French w/ English subtitles,
Dolby Digital, 2010



FIRST RUN FEATURES

The Film Center Building, 630 Ninth Ave. #1213
New York, NY 10036
(212) 243-0600 Fax (212) 989-7649
Website: www.firstrunfeatures.com
Email: info@firstrunfeatures.com

<http://firstrunfeatures.com/specialtreatment/>

"Smart, witty, entertaining!" - [San Francisco Examiner](#)

SYNOPSIS

In this darkly erotic drama from cult filmmaker Jeanne Labrune, Isabelle Huppert stars as a high-class prostitute named Alice who serves up sexual fantasies for her clientele, from schoolgirl innocence to S&M. Fed up with the seamy underbelly of French masculinity, Alice crosses paths with Xavier, a neurotic psychoanalyst facing a marriage crisis. The two quickly realize their professions share a thing or two in common as they navigate the overlapping worlds of psychotherapy and sex therapy.

Interview with Jeanne Labrune

“Special Treatment” is your eighth full-length feature film, why did it take six years since “Cause toujours!”?

In 2004-2005, I wrote, with Richard Debuisne, *Those We Love are Strangers*. The producer really liked the project but the film was stopped for financial reasons when I was just starting preparations. It was very difficult and painful. I then instantly began writing a novel: *L’obscur* (The Obscure). The novel has nothing to do with the movie; however, all the energy gathered earlier to make the film was thrown into writing the book. And then, one day, I happened to come across a book by Jacques Lacan evoking the “pass,” the moment when someone who is in psychoanalysis becomes the analyst in turn – a passage. Yet, in French the word “passe” is also the word used for a prostitute’s trick, and this struck me. I spoke about it to Richard Debuisne, with whom I co-wrote my latest films, and, together, we started thinking about making a cinematographic connection between psychoanalysis and prostitution; it was almost just a game at first. We realized that there were several points in common between the two professions.

The location is generally discreet and enclosed, there is a couch or a bed, a given session length giving rise to payment – in cash for prostitution (although there are psychoanalysts who want to be paid in cash as well) – and above all a limit set by money: in prostitution, money means that the prostitute rents her body and only her body, that there should be no question of feelings; in psychoanalysis, money means that the analyst rents his time, his “presence,” and possibly some of his mind, but that nothing else is to be expected either in terms of feelings or a physical relationship – strictly prohibited, as any other form of acting out in the analytical rite. Location, rite, duration, money, the prohibition of love;

on one side flesh, on the other a “listening” presence, both for sale; for us, it all became a realm for reflection, writing and moviemaking, and we also talked about the opposite of prostitution, that is love and gratuity. Starting from this, I wrote the initial draft of the screenplay, which we worked on together and rewrote afterwards.

Have you ever been in analysis?

Yes, for a few years, two then three sessions per week; that was in the ‘80s. In some ways psychoanalysis is to life what prostitution is to love, an interlude, a substitutive experience which works with frustration, need and can create a kind of addiction. In prostitution, the addiction is of a fairly simple nature. The idea is, I imagine, achieving pleasure and sometimes even just fulfilling a simple need; when the client leaves, he is “satisfied” and, if not, he can change partners each time. In psychoanalysis, things are obviously more complex, for there isn’t ever a sense of “satisfaction” at the end of a session. Indeed, it is dissatisfaction which brings the analys back to the analyst. This appointment with one’s self, via another person, can become an addiction and, as in any other addiction, there is as much pleasure as there is pain. Yet sometimes, through analysis, one is led to laugh - laugh at oneself, one’s own need for closure; one tires out and finds detachment from oneself.

Does the film deliberately take part in the current debate on psychoanalysis?

No, since we wrote it three years ago. In 1999, when I wrote and directed *Tomorrow’s Another Day*, I already had an ironic look at psychoanalysis and questioned the relation between body and mind that we have again here. *Special Treatment*, which was written in 2007 and shot in 2009, is coming to movie theaters with this polemical backdrop and I don’t mind, as long as the debate doesn’t lead people to watch my film through a reductive prism.

Still, the film does criticize analysts and their relationship with money rather severely. I don’t think that analysts are any greedier than most. And unless an analyst claims to be “curing,” there is no ambiguity. When I talk about addiction, yes, there is a risk, yet why wouldn’t we pay to talk about ourselves, to think.

The relationship with money is being questioned in the film because it is an obsession in today’s society. That which should only be a means of exchange has become something of value. And yet money has no value in itself and the accumulation of money, as well as the lack thereof, should in no way give those who have it a higher value than those who don’t. Today the rules of the game are those of the market, you have to be “marketable” at all costs, even if it means being a fraud. To sell oneself, learning to sell oneself, to sell one’s image, to become a brand and comply with what others supposedly wish for, these are the rules, the laws that govern. All this is exposed as an imperious necessity which one ought not disregard and which is often presented as fate. We are not far from prostitution.

This is what is being questioned in your film through the character of Alice...

Prostitution is a practice that shows in the most obvious manner the relationship between a person and money. She embodies the question: what do you sell of yourself in your work? You always sell something, even if only your time. And the more of yourself you put into your work, the more you sell “yourself.” Yet there is often a service, a skill or an object being produced which keeps this line of questioning at a “respectful” distance. The specificity of a prostitute’s work is that she has to do “what she is asked to do” docilely, she has to slip into the client’s desire and comply with it. She must not express any form of revolt; if she thinks something, she mustn’t show it; she isn’t paid to think. She sells herself as an object. Using someone and disposing of this person “after use” is not a practice limited to prostitution. It is an ever-expanding practice in the labor world in this period of liberalism in crisis where only what produces money is considered as having any “value” and where gratuity and generosity are “undervalued”; where a person has no value for him or herself and where “complexes or hang-ups” should be done away with, which can also mean to do away with anything complex, to no longer have any scruples to go simply and brutally to what counts: money.

An angel is not an insignificant object, it is an intermediary between God and men. Moreover, why are there so many objects in your films?

The word “angel” comes from the Greek word *angelos* which means “messenger,” and in the Christian tradition it is a messenger from God. Here, however, it is a messenger between men, it doesn’t represent anything religious and it doesn’t transmit any message from any god. The last person to receive it, from Cassagne’s hands, says: “Oh, what a beautiful doll!” This sentence wasn’t in the screenplay, it came spontaneously out of Marie-Christine’s mouth and we kept it because, deep down, it was full of sense, or nonsense, like the (French) title of the film. No one escapes the metaphysical question, we all wonder, at some point and sometimes often, about the meaning of life, although there is no answer to this question. Yet wondering about it is the only way not to live like an animal. It is a civilizing question, as philosophical hypotheses are, while religious answers are, as all beliefs, dubious, and like all certainties, they spawn dogmas and fanaticism.

To go back to objects, each of us sees something different in the same object, gives it a different meaning, an interpretation, reveals something of him or herself when talking about it, projects onto it his or her own imaginary world (as was already the case in my three previous fictions, one starting from a dresser, another from a bouquet of flowers and the third from a minuscule insect: a moth). The true value of an object is its imaginary value. This is a reflection we can also find at the heart of artistic creation.

How do you work with actors?

In a different manner with each of them; I try to feel out what each of them needs. I barely speak about the screenplay, almost never about the meaning. No explanations, no

psychology. We build the character together based on tangible things; the choice of an item of clothing, a pair of shoes, a lipstick or a belt can keep us busy for a very long time. Through these choices, we learn to know each other and we draw the characters in successive strokes. I don't have the impression I'm working, I am there. I can evoke a few specific moments with them:

To summarize, we could say that your film is a film more serious than it seems about money and human relations.

Several people who had read the screenplay thought this film would be along the lines of my previous fictions. It is, in the sense that my work has been consistent, from my first films, serious and sometimes dark, until the last few fictions I filmed, which are dark underneath but with a light and ironic tone. By choosing Isabelle and the other actors, with the sets and the light, what was taking shape was really the unveiling of the other side of the human comedy, the lifting of smiling masks. Since the beginning, my films have had in common the fact that they tell a story about overcoming something. How can one try to give life meaning, how can one overcome the bitter traits of human nature, how can one remain lucid, make it through despair and achieve a certain lightness? What should we do to defeat the stupidity and violence inside of us, which are lurking like a beast that we constantly need to tame, that we need to shake off, untangle within ourselves and out of ourselves? My films are all about this struggle.

Select Filmography of Jeanne Labrune

Feature films:

La Part de L'Autre, 1985

Of Sand and of Blood, 1987

Sans un Cri, 1991

Beware of my Love, 1998

Vatel (screenplay adapted into English by Tom Stoppard for Roland Joffé,) 1999

Tomorrow's Another Day, 2000

Special Delivery, 2002

Cause Toujours!, 2004

Special Treatment, 2010

Novel:

L'Obscur, Grasset, 2007

Richard Debuisne (co-screenwriter) Bio

An assistant director on fifty some-odd feature films (Jean Luc Godard, Jean Pierre Mocky, Maurice Pialat, Serge Gainsbourg, Catherine Breillat, Jeanne Labrune, Ritty Panh,) Richard Debuisne played a role for Godard in *Chantons en Choeur*, and continued acting in increasingly important roles for Jeanne Labrune in her films, including *Special Treatment* (2010,) *Cause Toujours!* (2004,) *Special Delivery* (2002,) *Tomorrow's Another Day* (2000.) Since 2002, he has been collaborating with Jeanne Labrune, co-writing her screenplays. He is currently adapting *La Voie Ardente* for the screen, based on the novel by Dominique Vieux. In 2005 he spent a year on stage with the Magasin theater theatrical troupe (Marc Adjadj.)

Credits

Director	Jeanne Labrune
Screenplay	Jeanne Labrune & Richard Debuisne
Produced by	Jani Thiltges
Coproducers	Patrick Quinet, Claude Waringo,
Executive Producer	Serge Zeitoun
Original music	André Mergenthaler
Cinematographer	Virginie Saint-Martin
Set decorator	Régine Constant
Costumes	Claire Fraïssé
Editor	Anja Lüdcke
Sound	Carlo Thoss
Sound Mixer	Luc Thomas
Sound Editor	Fred Demolder, Valène Leroy
First assistant director	Matthieu Blanchard
Unit production manager	Brigitte Kerger-Santos

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Cast list

Alice Bergerac	Isabelle Huppert
Xavier Demestre	Bouli Lanners
Pierre Cassagne	Richard Debuisne
Juliette	Sabila Moussadek
Hélène Demestre	Valérie Dréville
Robert Masse	Mathieu Carrière
The happy and sad man	Didier Bezace
The transvestite	Frédéric Longbois
The pipe collector	Christophe Odent
The pedophile client	Jean-François Wolff
The elegant athlete	Gilles Cohen
François Briand	Frédéric Pierrot

Select Press

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Special Treatment

FRIDAY, AUG 26, 2011 16:27 ET

A tasty fable about a hooker and a shrink

Isabelle Huppert plays a burned-out Parisian prostitute in the wry, intelligent comedy "Special Treatment"

BY ANDREW O'HEHIR



You start out watching "[Special Treatment](#)," a new film from the veteran French writer-director Jeanne Labrune, and at first it seems like a romantic comedy, one different in detail but not in species from the Hollywood rom-com. Admittedly, no American director -- unless he or she had a commercial death wish -- would ever try to make a romance involving a prostitute who's pushing 50 (played by the formidable and fearless Isabelle Huppert) and an overweight, married psychiatrist (played by Bouli Lanners, a comic actor well known in France). Then, if you stick with "Special

Treatment" a bit longer, you realize it isn't a lightweight erotic romp at all, but a complicated and delicate two-person odyssey that's much richer and subtler than that.

Labrune's original title, "Sans queue ni tête," is a French expression that could be translated as "nonsense," and echoes the English idiom about not making "head or tail" of something. That suggests the way this film resists ordinary storytelling logic, with a current of delightful absurdity beneath its *très propre* Parisian surface. On the other hand, "Special Treatment" is a pretty good title too, since Labrune and co-writer Richard Debuisne (who also plays a crucial supporting role)

draw a series of intriguing parallels between the services provided by Alice (Huppert) and Xavier (Lanners), burned-out professionals who view their jobs and clients through a lens of utter cynicism.

When Xavier meets Alice for their first date in a hotel bar -- they've previously met, by accident, in the drugstore -- there's a key moment when he looks at her and realizes that everything about her, from her clothes to her hair to her manner, is a calculated performance. The only sincerity that's possible between them is a kind of business logic or a sense of professional kinship, and if Xavier at first regards her the way he regards a patient, he then shifts to something that's a lot more like looking in a mirror. What's really pulled them together is a shared sense of desperation and a yearning for change, and maybe even reinvention. Xavier's marriage is crumbling, although he still loves his wife (Valérie Dréville), and Alice is eager to leave her sordid customer base behind and make a new start.

This really isn't a plot-centric movie, and in any case it isn't going in any of the directions you think it is. After two inconclusive meetings and a complex of mixed signals, Xavier and Alice still haven't consummated their relationship, and her attempts to get referrals to other shrinks from him end in quiet but hilarious failure. A late-medieval wooden angel bought at auction by another therapist, Pierre (co-writer Debuisne), travels in a peculiar circle from one character to another, and ends up at the mental hospital where Pierre works, and where Alice finally shows up in search of deliverance. This is a memorable journey, with exquisitely drawn characters and a tremendous cast, that blends satire, melancholy and romance in unlikely but delicious fashion.

"Special Treatment" is now playing at [Cinema Village](#) in New York, and opens Sept. 16 at the [Laemmle Sunset 5](#) in Los Angeles, with other cities and home-video release to follow.