

THE LAST SUPPER

**ARNO BOUCHARD
INTERVIEW**



COULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR HISTORY/BACKGROUND AND HOW YOU BECAME A FILMMAKER?

I will, in a way, answer the Oedipus part of that question at the end of this interview, if you don't mind.

As for my background, I studied modern literature and cinema at the Sorbonne university. Did many little jobs for a living. Then, I started working on personal stuff as a director and photographer. I was fed up with words. I wanted to write with images. But to forget words, I was unable. It was an illusion. A lie. My images are written with words.



YOUR WORK HAS BEEN COMPARED TO DAVID LYNCH AND ALEJANDRO JODOROWSKY; WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS?

Come on! This is one of my first pieces, there is no way one can compare "my work" to one of these geniuses. One can definitely spot some influences on what it is that I do... that is I think a better way of putting it.

But, with a little less of humility, I think that it is always better your work to be compared to the one of artists you admire than to the one of men you do not like!

Lynch ..., the films he does are they the films we see?

I do feel close from him. His cinema always moved things in me. It's not made, for me, to be understood, but to feel, to look for, to find something lost in your unconsciousness or your memories.

I love movies that need the spectator to make sense. For me, a bad movie is a movie that doesn't needs me. We need two kinds of cinema. The one that helps us to escape, we don't have to face reality. And the one that makes us travel in ourselves and helps us to access to what Aristotle called the purgation of pity and fear. I need both, but I feel closer to the second kind of movies. I wish cinema shows us a path to the unexplainable. "I wish to feel a tension that minimizes the result of an external action than the soul's conflicts". That was Dreyer's wish. I wish I could have the same.

I think that for showing the path to unexplainable, you have to twist reality. Reality does not exist. I mean, it exists. But I do not see it. I do not want to see it. I see the things only once they are disturbed. That they are not real anymore. Reality bores me. Art multiplies the opportunities of making the reality my reality. Fiction more beautiful than life! If it is not disturbed, reality remains only a piece of reality. A tautological representation, a vacuum. Same thing for peoples. They are interesting if they are cracked, in danger. The cracks only are able to create desire. It's with our fragility that we seduce, our vulnerability, never with our strength. To make things happen, man has to manipulate them. It is Van Gogh who explained that very well in his letters to his brother Theo. He spoke about his need to change the reality, which ended up becoming lies, truer than the truth itself. All the work of an artist is, I believe, to recreate a reality. To tell the truth, it is necessary to lie. Cocteau by the way wrote somewhere "I am a lie that always speaks the truth". The only truth is in poetry, cinema and in novels. If one wants to express the truth without using fiction, man loses the poetic truth. We could say that the liars are the only sincere peoples. What they add, omits or transforms, ends up revealing their most intimate dreams and desires.

All the symbolic and mythological references helped me to twist the reality. Every single metaphors of humanity end up by becoming realities: Oedipus, Lilith, Tiresias, Abel and Caïn, Jonas, Prometheus, Sisyphus. All those myths silently running into the movie started like a parabola, fable, metaphor, end up by materializing themselves in our lives. As if the true goal of life was a validation of the metaphors and myths! James Gray uses them in such interesting way in each of his movies.

What fascinates me about cinema is its ability to know more things about us than ourselves. Like a few books or poetry sometimes do. The author puts it, clearly articulated, what exists only virtually in me; unformulated feelings, ideas, they did not find their words, but have always been familiar to us. Man should accept to hear these truths, accept to find in the singularity of others a way to question oneself, the possibility of an intimate revelation.

Concerning Jodorowsky's influence, it's different. When *The Last Supper* was made, I knew nothing about him but his name. Nor have I ever seen a film from him. Shame on me! I won't speak about him because I don't know his work well enough. But at the moment I'm answering this interview, *La Montaña Sagrada* and *Santa Sangre* are on my desk staring at me.

The other thing about your question is, do you mean "your work looks like Lynch's or Jodorowsky's one"?

Coppola once said "if you steal things, steal them from the best!", and Jean Eustache in *La Maman et la Putain* to add "To speak with the words of others, it's perhaps what we could call freedom". The persistent problem for an artist is to express a subject which is always the same and which cannot be changed, by finding a new form of expression each time. Influence in art, it's an endless chain.

So... did Lynch inspire that movie? His name has never been mentioned during the creating process. Anyway, I deeply think intentions and inspirations must not be visible in the work. In a way Lynch inspired it, maybe, but probably less than the brother I didn't had, the father I thought I had lost, my mother I hate for not having been strong enough to survive to my father's abandon, my mentor Pierre Strebel who gave birth to my soul or my son who softly kills me everyday. This movie is a lot less violent than I am. Perhaps if my childhood had been happier, I would have shot something less heavy. I am not someone dark. Deep maybe. You could laugh at me and tell me that the deeper you go, the less light you have; it's true, in a way, so yes, I'm dark, but I can't help thinking that it's in the darkest films that one finds the most beautiful sun rays. The dark aspect of life generates a narrative dramatization much more interesting than success or happiness. Tolstoï said that all the happy families looked each other the same way but that all the unhappy families are single in their misfortune. I am not a pessimist. My temperament is strangely optimistic. But I am lucid. I think an artist defines himself more with what he hates, with his fears and lacks than with things he likes.



YOUR WORK IN THE LAST SUPPER IS MIND-BOGGLING, DISTURBING, YET GLORIOUSLY RIVETING AND MESMERISING. HOW DID YOU ARRIVE AT YOUR SIGNATURE AESTHETIC? COULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CREATIVE PROCESS AND HOW DO YOU KEEP YOURSELF INSPIRED AND MOTIVATED? AND WHAT WERE THE STRONGEST CREATIVE INFLUENCES YOU'VE HAD TO PUSH YOU IN THIS DIRECTION?

You have to keep in mind that *The Last Supper* is the brain child of two twisted minds. David Gil's and mine. Everything started with discussions with him and Vincent Gagliostro, an other director and friend, who was very helpful, about a documentary speaking of praying mantis. What a fascinating animal! Not speaking about the female killing the male after being fertilized, no, everyone knows that. I'm speaking of the male who isn't killed by the female straight away. It waits, several days or weeks, at the same place, waiting for the female to come back and kill it. It is doomed and will not escape in order to fight for its living. Its life becoming useless once it has procreated. It is there only way to maintain the kind. And males would do anything to procreate. Even their own sacrifice. Giving its sperm takes its life away. We'll see later the link with the main actress in the movie who refuses to have a child because, for her, giving birth is giving death.

Then, my personal experience and obsessions brought me to a symbolic transposition in the human world. What if... What if a man's guilt of being a man conduces him to that kind of sacrifice: to become a woman?



We then created this no man's land, this female's world, full of creatures having their mutation and who will become women only once they are fertilized. A world that doesn't exist, with no space and no time references. The choice of the Super 8 mm film came from that idea. Let's erase every marks. And the Super 8 gave this aesthetic signature. What I'm trying to explain, is that even if people find this film very visual, only visual! the way the film looks comes from the words, from the cinematographic idea that is: when man wants to become another one than the one he is, when he's caught in the dream of being another one, he's fucked. The aesthetic signature comes more from what we were speaking about than the way we wanted it to look like. However, what is art if it's not the way images, ideas, words turn into style, and what is style if not Man. We then imagined a God, gracious God with a pig's head - that was a sculpture from an other twisted mind: Gilbert Peyre. A God to take care of our creatures. A God to whom they sacrifice their being, their sight, their understanding. A God who hates them and who will be scorned and killed in return. I do not believe in God. It interests me only in a poetical way. At the same time, there is something very sad in atheism and the negation of God which doesn't suit me neither. I did not yet manage to deal with anger and hatred.

This story can be read as a simple transposition of Eden, the forbidden fruit is the will to become Another, or, it can be read as a post-apocalyptic world about men desperately trying to save humanity...

With David we sat, spoke, collected images linked with what we wanted to tell that touched us. Sometimes words came first, sometime images did. Finally, the story was there, the story of a man and women making love. As she gets fertilized, she castrates him. She takes his virility. She takes away from him what makes him Man. He becomes she. He becomes Woman. She devours him metaphorically. She draws him at her image. Loving reflex? Thanks to that

mutation, he accesses to power. To the possibility to become fertile. To give birth. To create. He can now maintain the kind. Redemption and blossoming exist through being a woman. She is the only one who can save the real. To maintain the kind, the masculine has to set his feminine part. But this state of mind freedom through missincarnation is a lie. An utopia. He-She will pray at the Porks' God feet. He-She will give him its body and it's blood in a havoc. Sacrifices its eyes, its consciousness, its judgment. Belief and Devotion have to be taken as a renouncement not as a removal. A body dependence. A thoughts' advice. As a spiritual death. To be dazzled is letting being devoured and destroyed by the light. The religion rapture's power is before anything a dread's force.

The man who desires to experience the mutation in *The Last Supper* says something about the desire to give birth and the shame of being a man, but also the dead end of this will once he becomes a woman. He tries to liberate the life that Man has imprisoned. The life that Man killed. The father, the mother, the artist, are those who try to liberate life. Creation has definitely something to do with redemption. Atonement.

In *The Last Supper*, the last man entrance into the lair symbolizes the Eternal Return. Time stands still. Irreparably. Unfertile. It is doomed forever. The proud prisoner. The cursed journey chemist. Judged not for who he actually is, but for what he wants to become : God.

On an other hand, The Woman is a symbol of innocence. Her blood symbolizes the loss of the virginity and breeding. It is a symbol of emancipation as well. Birth. As she is impregnated, she becomes two. She becomes a Woman. She becomes a mother. She becomes mortal. As she becomes the slave of flesh, as she gets pregnant, she reduces her freedom. Salvation and procreation mutate into slavery and retreat. Yet she refuses to keep this child. She chooses nothingness rather than hell. She tears her ovaries out and throw them at the Pork's God. This Act isn't a humanist act trying to deny a child's life in a doomed world. On the contrary. This is the most selfish expression. An ultimate protection act. Having a child it is loosing our freedom. It is loosing your right to die. Her Salvation lies in a bright locked unknown. Abortion and the guilt that follows only brings to an alternate self, monstrous, ghost around the living, condemned to torture and roaming. To the lonely night with the blind eyes.

The Child God with the pork's head will cut the belly navel and throw his Father in nothingness. A way for him to deny the Father. To refuse authority. And to prevent him from becoming God by reaching Creation. The child is the Man's father, and prevents him from living. Being fatherless is not being.

As I said, The Last Supper tries to rebuild a past which never existed. Imagines a future that shall never be. The story is about a rotten world where the life continuity seems like a dead end. Abortion seems the answer to avoid the alienating repercussions of childbirth. As giving birth is normally the symbol of an ultimate and magical access to a Divine knowledge the story brings you to the paradox as the power to give birth and death. As a surreal condition giving birth is dying.

Our characters are similar to those tragic heroes. Despite their sacrifice, they can't get out this lair without dying. This limit is their privilege. Their distinction is their captivity. Images have spirit more than reasons. They are not bringing you into mental thoughts but will drive your senses. The audience's interpretation will be primary and intuitive. And for making the images more immediate, the making had to be more instinctive. Images make sense responding to each other into a poem form. A tragic poem. An « absence hymn ». To others. To oneself.

Images have the obviousness of hypnosis and the strength of the rumor. They contrast the temptations of mind to the limits of the body. Images dig a language that would reinvent the dark lightening of destiny. They would like to celebrate this struggle for life. Terrifying. Lyrical. This run towards emptiness.

The Last Supper is a paradoxical hymn to life and lost joy. To the dream that vanishes and the paradise which gets back. If Woman is the Man's future, Love is to be recreated. We are not meant to live alone but to love and face life.



I had written a voice over in order to guide the spectator. With words, life and emotions were hard to find because the images were already strong and powerful. I had to keep my mouth shut, to listen my instinct and to trust the composer. I wanted the movie to be at the same time literary, philosophical, mythological and visually, poetically, plastically adventurous. I wanted people to be haunted by themselves after having seen what haunts me. But maybe it will never happen. People won't see anything other than boobs and heels. I received a few months ago a nice and full of humor e-mail. I thought at first it was a mistake and that it was an e-mail for Peter Greenaway. But no, it was for me! It was written: "Could we say you have put Zorn's music to attenuate the noise the seats will make when the spectators will leave the projection room in the middle of the movie? By the way, nice tits and beautiful asses. I didn't completely lost my time!"

I was talking about the voice over I had to take off because it spoke to the intellect more than to the guts. It broke the hypnosis. But the other reason that pushed me not to put the voice over was the music. I can't speak about the creative process of this movie without speaking of the composer John Zorn. I passed him a DVD with the first edit version, storyboard and scenario during his residency in Paris at the Cité de la Musique. I wrote him a letter asking to license some music, specifically, his string quartet *Kol Nidre*. He answered me and flatly dismissed the idea arguing that putting a religious music on a sex scene wasn't the best idea I had! But as he very much loved the story and the images he saw, he offered to do an entirely original score.

The collaboration with Zorn has been an amazing input of energy, sensibility and fragility. Zorn's first response to the bizarre violence of the images was with very intense sounds, envisioning Bill Laswell, Marc Ribot, the Marc Ribot!, Ikue Mori and Willie Winant on industrial / noise percussion. But the more we spooked about the film, the more he sensed a deeper feeling of ritualistic calm and subtlety running through it all. He finally decided to go with the mystical sound of the world's first musical instruments: voices and percussion. I had wrote a long and poetic voice over I loved very much. I had to forget about it. Zorn turned the words into music (without even maybe reading them!), A magician... and a man with a word. The score has then been quickly recorded and mixed with Marc Urselli's help.

Deleuze explains that the artist's images are made to become percepts that create feelings able to survive to those who will feel them. For a composer, it's different. Zorn's music creates affects, evolutions that exceed the forces of the one who tests them. *The Last Supper* tries to bind a cinematographical idea, the visual percepts and the musical affects. By using this narrative fiction, the movie tries to give eternity to emotions. David and I tried to create the imperishable with perishable things: with words, acts, beauty, determinations, sounds, stones, colors, so that the emotions lasts beyond the ages.



WHY THAT MOVIE ?

Why that movie? You'd better ask "How that movie"?

Once the script was written, Éric Thazard proposed us to shoot in an ancien metal factory that will become the Door Studios. It was shot on Super 8mm Kodak color negative film with Dan Salzmänn as the director of photography. We were unable to finish the shooting on time and the building has been destroyed. Grégory Colbert accepted us to end the shooting a few months later in the beautiful Théâtre des Muses, located in the Marais rue Vieille du Temple, in Paris. Thanks to him and to Christian Bruck! *The Last Supper* was developed and graded at Todd-AO in London with HKDB, Vincent Gagliostro and Nesti Mendoza's help. The post-production started in 2009 at Première Heure, in Paris, with Patrice Haddad and Louis Arcelin's generosity. Ivan Winogradsky and Yann Masson helped to edit and grad it.

The Last Supper took almost three years to be made. This movie was made with sacrifices, from myself, from the crew, and actors and technicians who have given a lot of their time and skills. I will never thank them enough. *The Last Supper* was made more with feelings and passion than with money help of any French associations or production companies.

When Tarkovski said "Having ideas is not enough. You have to suffer for them", believe me, I was sitting right next to him. Flaubert and Celine use to tell something about dedication too. Put your guts on the table... Sacrifice everything for your art, otherwise your art won't go any way. Giving birth to *The Last Supper* was a nightmare. And a dream. I ignore if the child will live but cradling him gives me a lot of pleasure.

Maybe people will be sensitive to the aesthetic of the film, but, I hope, the message will touch them. *The Last Supper* speaks about a rotten world. About man's cowerdness. About women's and God's selfishness. It's the story of the lost of love, of oneself. A story with metaphysical and mythological meanings and keys. I needed this story to be drowning in something bigger, deeper than itself. Not trying to say anything. But to make feel something. The most important thing with this movie, I think, is to look the images, read the poetry fighting against violence, listen to the music. Not in order to understand or to know. But to feel.

The message I wanted to deliver wasn't meant to be delivered by words. The Last Supper is essentially a non-verbal experience. It attempts to communicate more to the subconscious and to the feelings than it does to the intellect.



DO YOU THINK SURREALISM IS ENJOYING A REVIVAL?

Do you mean it was dead!? No. Surrealism is not enjoying a revival, I don't think so. But, maybe, emotions are. Surrealism can die as an artistic period, as a literary kind of art, but it will never die for those who keep in them a taste for praying. I mean, not the Christian prayer, but one of these natural prayers which are made by imagination, a caring mind, a pleasure to get touched by the absurdity of our lives, necessary prayers to those for who life is a reason enough to survive. Cézanne wrote "We have to hurry if we want to see something, because things are disappearing." People realize how lazy they have become. How do you want to get emotionally rapped today. The Youtube culture, the free access to sex, violence everywhere? Curiosity might be satisfied, not feelings. The way people feed themselves turns them into lazy emotionless spectator. The imagery in the media, on TV, are responsible of that emotional decline. One looks at violence, one looks at death, and immediately afterwards, one continues to live. People have acquire an amazing ability to digest images without feeling anything. Maybe it comes from the images themselves. Omnipresent and omnipotent images. That see everything. Know everything. Can everything. Who earned all the rights. To listen to the doors. To excavate the cupboards. To open the beds and smell the clothes. Images badly lit, badly framed, badly directed, lazy made, and that ends up by "killing the shade, the unconscious, the dream, the mystery" says Serge Danay. The secrecy isn't safe any more... But, hopefully, storytellers like Béla Tarr, Alexandre Sokourov, Jean-Luc Godard, Bruno Dumont, Carlos Reygadas, Raphaël Nadjari, Andrei Zviaguintsev, Apichatpong Weerasethakul... keep on walking. Sorry for that litany, but you asked me about my creative influences.

Surrealism is a path to emotions. It stops you and makes you look backward. If you have time for that, of course! Surrealism is for me a short cut, a way to feel without thinking. I love surrealism because it makes emotions in an intuitive way. Nothing to do with intelligence or knowledge, even if, to understand and enjoy, you sometimes need reference points. With Surrealism, you feel or you don't feel. It has something to do with what you deeply are and something to do with the poetry that is in you. No surrealism without poetry. At least visual poetry. Magritte and Duchamp are my beautiful visual poets. As Dan Salzmänn, *The Last Supper's* director of photography used to say, "they should be an Avenue Marcel Duchamp better than an Avenue des Champs Élysées". Dan Salzmänn was also a beautiful poet and a great technician. I say "was" because he must be looking and laughing at us now, somewhere between Jupiter and Venus. He died two months ago. I miss him. Let me look at him and give him a "Magritte kiss". Just for him and those he loved.



Surrealism is closer from the guts than from the brain. That's why I feel close to it. It's Desnos, one of my favorite poets from the surrealist period who wrote: "What is asked to cinema is what love and life refuse to us: the mystery and the miracle."

WHAT DO YOU DO OUTSIDE OF FILM-MAKING? ANY INTRIGUING HOBBIES AND / OR OBSESSIONS?

Well, I won't try to be intriguing in an interview. I let this to James Ellroy. He does it so well! I rather be intriguing with my work.

People will easily imagine things and create their own image in order to turn their phantasms on. Whatever I could tell, our image never belongs to us. I love this quote from Cary Grant that says "Everyone dreams of being Cary Grant. Even me."

I'm trying not to get to personal about me. What you get about me is what you see in yourself through my eyes. That's me. That's how I want to speak to you about me. With my sensibility. That's the reason why I'm doing movies.

Outside film-making, I try to make a man of my 16 years old boy, try to make of his frightened shoulders brave ones. I also try to embrace the dark side and the light one in me. Photography. I steal emotions. Faces. The only things that interest me are people's emotions, their madness, their ways, their anguish, their wounds, their cracks.

Obsessions? Yes. Like everybody. Death. Love. Fear. A taste for auto-destruction. Memories. Shame. Manipulation. Solitude. My dying body.



WHAT'S YOUR EARLIEST CREATIVE MEMORY?

Something to do with your first question...

My birth maybe! My mother kept me ten months in her belly. Comfy bed, cozy breakfast. I wasn't feeling like coming out. And perhaps I had a bad presentiment about what awaited me outside. I finally wanted to go out in original way. Feet first. The doctor did not want. The Doctor Sabatini was maybe too superstitious, and thought that it would be an ill omen to leave his mother with the feet in front!

But I can feel it's is not the kind of "traumatism" you were looking for.

I was nine years old. My mother was watching François Truffaut's *La Femme d'à Côté* (*The Women from Next Door*). She didn't want me to watch the movie. The erotic mood made her feel uncomfortable, so she sent me to bed. I was pissed of, of course, not because I felt Truffaut was a great director, but because I wanted what was forbidden. And, of course, I didn't go to bed. There was a back door in the T.V room. I went there and watched the movie through the 2 or 3 centimeters of that back door but couldn't open it more because of the noise it could make. I turned that experience into a movie installation named *106'*: it is Truffaut's film seen through a hole. 106 minutes standing up without moving in a doorway. In silence. 106 minutes of childhood memories, cinema, frustration, women, battleground, love, eroticism, hate, violence, death: EMOTIONS. I remember a few other things too. I remember I've been electrocuted the night of Christmas 1985 with the Christmas tree. Since then, Christmas sucks. I remember the first time I succeeded in writing my name. I ran to show the absolute four letters to my mother. She obviously didn't shared my enthusiasm nor my pride. I remember the first time I saw her naked. I knew it was bad to look at her but I couldn't help. I remember Johnny Weissmuller being killed in *Tarzan* and falling of the tree. I thought he was really dead. I ran to my mother (again!) crying. And she explained to me what cinema was. I remember my first erotic film. It was *Deep Throat*. What a script: a nurse who wants to heal sick men because she feels guilty of loving pleasure. Having a clitoris in the throat is like a terrible sin for her. Each charitable action became immediately a sinful one full of guilt. Bergman, Dreyer or Bresson could have directed it. But Gérard Damiano did. I remember how boring were the history-geography class at school. I loved history-geography. I remember the feeling of all those chewing gums under the desk at school and my nails drawing and drowning deep in them. I remember my grandmother's smell and the painful shapes of her fingers. I remember getting inch by inch in hot baths telling to myself I was a Titan washing his ass in a volcano. I also remember Derain's *Big Ben*, Van Gogh's *Road* and Cézanne's *Abduction*. I remember James Stewart's eyes in the letter scene in *The Shop Around the Corner* by Ernst Lubitsch, James Stewart desperately seeking for the pleasure on Sullavan's face. I remember Ali Mc Graw coming out from the shower in Sam Peckinpah's *Getaway*. I remember Gloria Grahame declaring her feelings to Humphrey Bogart in Nicholas Ray's *In a Lonely Place*. I too remember the man destroying the garden of his wife who has been murdered in Kurosawa's *Stray Dog* because he can't stand the view of the life still alive sowed by the dead hands of his dead love. I remember the number of words uttered by Alain Delon in Melville's *Le Samourai*. "I don't remember yesterday. Today, it rained..." says Robert Redford to Faye Dunaway in *The Three Days of the Condor*...

Asking me about my memories is the best way for a never-ending interview. I am working these days on a very personal project based on a load of Super 8 mm footages from my childhood. I'm making a "love film" of it. Guess what? I speak of my mother! A man should be able to divorce from his mother! No?

