

FIN AODT PRODUCTIONS
PRESENTS

LÉA
DRUCKER

DENIS
PODALYDÈS

ALBAN
LENOIR

BENJAMIN
BIOLAY

*3 DAYS TO CHANGE
THE COURSE OF HISTORY*

THE WORLD
OF YESTERDAY

A FILM BY DIASTÈME

Synopsis

Elisabeth de Raincy, the French President, has decided to withdraw from political life. Three days before the first round of the presidential election, she learns from her Secretary-General, Franck L'Herbier, that a scandal coming from abroad will splash her designated successor and give victory to the far-right candidate. They have three days to change the course of History.

Interview with Diastème

Like French Blood in 2015, *The World of Yesterday* is about the rise of the far right in France, but in terms of politics and institutions. How did the film come about?

Unfortunately, the problem has only gotten worse since 2015, not only in France but all around the world. Obviously, it worries me. We've had Trump, Bolsonaro, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Salvini in Italy, all at the same time. I didn't see the point of writing about anything else, really...

How did the writing go?

I didn't want the story to be totally realistic, I guess I was influenced by my taste for tragedy and Elizabethan drama. I went for a novel-like atmosphere, I wanted the film to be at once a political thriller and a cautionary tale. I knew that the mood had to be crepuscular, removed from French-style political games.

Yet, even though the tone itself isn't realistic, I really wanted everything about the hierarchy, the work relationships between characters, as well as the language used at the presidential residence, to be genuine. And for that I needed experts. Gérard Davet and Fabrice Lhomme are political reporters at Le Monde newspaper [editor's note], and they agreed to be my consultants. They gave me their input about dialogues, about the personal, hidden rapport between these collaborators... They encouraged me to rely on language registers I might not have used. The characters have been working together for a very long time, there is definitely a certain level of deference, but also an intimacy involved. It is important to understand when they say "Mrs President" or "Elisabeth", when they say "tu" or "vous" ...

Once I was done, I called Christophe Honoré to finalise the script with him, always focusing on political thriller mechanisms, as well as on the emotional power of the story.

At the beginning of the film, we feel like this is the end of an era...

Yes, things have already taken a tragic turn, and soon we realise that the situation is even worse than we thought. Elisabeth is a centre or left-of-centre republican president whose term is coming to an end. She is not running for re-election. She is in bad health, and her term has been a failure. What went wrong? We don't know. In terms of the narrative structure, the story had to unfold over three days, so we don't get a glimpse of what happened before. But I think that somehow, we get it, we are used to presidents having big goals when they take office, only to end up deflated; they don't necessarily disavow their convictions, they just fail to deliver. They may be hampered by some crisis, like Covid, a terrorist attack, a social movement like the "gilets jaunes", etc. But sometimes they fall victim to their own cowardness, powerlessness, or contempt... We start off with ideals and end up with regrets. This kind of failure fuels social protest, hatred, unrest and fascism. It has been so since the dawn of time.

When faced with a scheme that will probably allow the far-right candidate to come to power, the President is urged to act by her chief administrative officer...

I don't know what Elisabeth will choose to do; the film has an open ending. I give no hints about what I think she should do (I honestly don't know), the characters have their own voices... The issue of state crime is complex;

as Franck says: "when France has a Daesh soldier executed, is it a state crime?" A while ago, the President rejoiced in a tweet at the news that the French army had "neutralised" an Emir of Al-Qaeda. Neutralising means killing. When can we decide that a human being deserves to be judged but not another? Can we do an evil thing for the sake of what we think is right? When does one become a murderer? It is the beauty of the cautionary tale: it questions morality without providing a clear answer. When I was a student, with only a vague notion of what the far-right was, we were sometimes asked: if you had been able to kill Hitler in 1933, would you have done it? The film is called *The World of Yesterday*, it ends with the last words in the eponymous book by Stefan Zweig, and we know what he did next...

What were your direction choices?

I went for a classic *mise-en-scène*, with some codes of the thriller genre, yet not necessarily modern thrillers: almost no hand-held filming, but tracking shots, shots/reverse shots, techniques I don't use that often. I tried not to accumulate shots and camera angles, not to bore viewers. And to focus on faces. I am not afraid of classicism. Besides, the more I watch today's films, the more I realise classicism is dead. And since it is outmoded, let's go for it!

And what about the music, which is ever-present in the film?

Music plays a major part in the film, it follows the whole story. Composer and cellist Valentine Duteil's soundtrack guides the film towards feelings. I asked her to write a little concerto for a string quartet, with a sad waltz movement and pizzicati, to enhance the suspense and the dreamlike atmosphere.



How did you recreate the Elysée palace?

We never call it the Elysée. The idea was to create a credible presidential palace, but one which, in fact, isn't the Elysée. It was fun to do, we shot half of the film at the castle of Rambouillet, and the other half at the city hall in Rennes. The palace is a lonely place. Elisabeth has no partner. It is also a haunted castle... We mention *Beauty and the Beast* in the film, and I thought a lot about Cocteau or Man Ray's work. The palace is also a theatre. A set that crushes the characters, a place where spontaneity is banned, where your every move is being scrutinised, and you can feel the weight of History.

Franck is obsessed with the idea of leaving a mark on history...

I think that we all wonder which mark we are to leave behind, even more so in such high-responsibility jobs. At some point in the film, Franck says to Elisabeth: "Your name will be like a stain in history books". Are you Churchill or are you Chamberlain? Posterity is not relevant for ordinary characters, but it is for people of this calibre. Franck insists, after his crazy gesture: "Some things are more important than us, we are nothing". It slowly pervades Elisabeth's mind. She knows that she will have to pay the price, one way or another. Far right is death. It always has been, whatever the time or the place. Whether political, religious or economical – we can see the results on the environment – fascism is death. The film is infused with death.

Diastème's filmography

Filmmaker / Scriptwriter Scriptwriter

THE WORLD OF YESTERDAY
LE MONDE D'HIER (2022)

THE SUMMER OF ALL MY PARENTS
JUILLET AOÛT (2016)

FRENCH BLOOD
UN FRANÇAIS (2015)

LE BRUIT DES GENS AUTOUR
(2008)

CLAIRE ANDRIEUX by Olivier Jahan (2019) (ARTE)

BACK HOME by Jessica Palud (2019)

ANGEL FACE by Vanessa Filho (2018)

SAND CASTLES by Olivier Jahan (2014)

COLUCHE, L'HISTOIRE D'UN MEC
by Antoine de Caunes (2008)

CLOSE TO LEO by Christophe Honoré (2003)



Cast

LÉA DRUCKER Elisabeth de Raincy
DENIS PODALYDÈS Franck L'Herbier
ALBAN LENOIR Patrick Hérouais
BENJAMIN BIOLAY Didier Jansen
JACQUES WEBER Luc Gaucher
THIERRY GODARD Willem
EMMA DE CAUNES Lucie
JEANNE ROSA Clémence
LUNA LOU Mila



Crew

Direction..... Diastème
Script..... Diastème
in collaboration with
Gérard Davet,
Fabrice Lhomme and
Christophe Honoré
Original Music..... Valentine Duteil
Image..... Philippe Guilbert
Editing..... Chantal Hymans
Sound..... Nicolas
Waschkowski,
Thomas Lefevre
Mixing..... Thierry Delor
Movie Set..... Valérie Valéro
Costumes..... Frédéric Cambier
Assistant director..... Jérôme Brière
Production Manager. Abdelhadi El Fakir
Producers..... Marielle Duigou
and **Philippe Lioret**
(Fin Août Productions)

In association with **Pyramide**
With the participation of **Canal +, Ciné +**
With the support of **Région Bretagne**
in partnership with
Centre National de la Cinématographie
In association with **Cinécap 4**
French Distribution and World Sales
Pyramide

France | 2021 | 1h29 | DCP | 5.1 | 1.85 | Color