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JBA PRODUCTION AND TARANTULA

PRESENT

# A PIECE OF SKY

**A FILM BY BÉNÉDICTE LIÉNARD**

WITH SÉVERINE CANEELE, SOFIA LEBOUTTE AND JOSIANE STOLÉRU, NAYMA HIRÈCHE, ANNICK KEUSTERMANN, YOLANDE MOREAU, GAËLLE MULLER, BÉATRICE SPIGA, OLIVIER GOURMET, ANDRÉ WILMS

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# SYNOPSIS

A PIECE OF SKY TELLS THE STORY OF THE RESISTANCE OF A GROUP OF WOMEN PRISONERS AND FEMALE FACTORY WORKERS.

IN PRISON, JOANNA QUESTIONS THE AUTHORITY OF THOSE DETAINING HER. MEANWHILE, THE PAST CATCHES UP WITH CLAUDINE, WORKING ON THE PRODUCTION LINE AT THE FACTORY, A PAST WHICH CLOSELY BINDS HER TO JOANNA.

JOANNA'S LAWYER ASKS HER TO REVEAL WHAT DROVE HER FRIEND TO VIOLENCE: ACCEPTING TO TESTIFY WOULD MEAN DENOUNCING THE UNION STRUCTURE THAT STILL SEEMS TO BE PROTECTING HER.

THE DRAMA SHIFTS BETWEEN THE FACTORY AND THE PRISON, BETWEEN THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL. JOANNA AT FIRST RELENTS, CRACKS AND THEN FINALLY FINDS WITHIN HER THE STRENGTH TO FOREVERMORE PROCLAIM HER RIGHT TO DIGNITY AND THE DIGNITY OF THE WOMEN AROUND HER.

CLAUDINE STANDS UP FOR HERSELF. SHE ACCEPTS TO TESTIFY, LEADING THE STRUGGLE IN THE FACTORY, AND REJOINS JOANNA IN HER RADICAL STANCE. SHE REFUSES THE COMPROMISE OFFERED BY THE UNION STRUCTURE AND ACCEPTS THE FACT OF HER EXCLUSION.

TWO WOMEN REVEAL THEIR TRUE SELVES IN THEIR REFUSAL TO COMPROMISE AND ARE OFFERED AN OPPORTUNITY TO RENEW THEIR FRIENDSHIP.

## BÉNÉDICTE LIÉNARD FILMOGRAPHY

BORN IN BELGIUM IN 1965, BÉNÉDICTE LIÉNARD STUDIED AT THE INSTITUT DES ARTS DE DIFFUSION ("INSTITUTE OF BROADCASTING ARTS"), CINEMA DIRECTION SECTION, IN LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE. AT THE AGE OF 24, SHE DIRECTED HER FIRST SHORT FILMS AND THEN WORKED AS PRODUCTION ASSISTANT ON THE FILMS OF JACO VAN DORMAEL, MANU BONMARIAGE, RAYMOND DEPARDON AND THE DARDENNE BROTHERS.

DURING 1997 AND 1998 SHE DEVOTED HER TIME TO CREATING A WORKSHOP ON EXPRESSION THROUGH SOUNDS AND IMAGES IN THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT. THE EXHIBITION "LES IMAGES LIBÈRENT LA TÊTE" ("IMAGES FREE YOUR MIND"), SHOWN AT THE MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN CHARLEROI, FEATURES THE PHOTOGRAPHS AND VIDEOS OF THE DETAINEES AT LANTIN PRISON.

SHE THEN TOOK ON THE VICE-PRESIDENCY OF THE BELGIAN CHAPTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATORY OF PRISONS.

During her studies, she directed *Let's play* and *Le bruit de la ville est si proche* produced by the French Community, and selected for inclusion in the Brussels, Oberhausen, Hamburg and Media 10/10 Festivals.

In 1990, she directed *En attendant Mireille* a documentary short film, produced by the Centre Vidéo de Bruxelles . This film was awarded the jury prize at the Festival Vidéo Psy de Clichy.

In 1992, she directed *Les petites choses qui font la vie*, a medium-length documentary produced by CBA, la Communauté Française de Belgique and Tele 21 (RTBF, Belgium television). The film was awarded the "Singe d'Or" at the Mons International Festival of Short Films, a special jury award at the Montreal Festival of Short Films, the prize for best documentary video at the Women's Film Festival in Quebec, the special jury prize for best documentary testimony at the "World Video" Festival in Brussels as well as the Province de Liege prize at the Liege video Festival.

*L'adoption, une autre vie* was originally a film made on commission about candidates hoping to adopt a child. It was broadcast on France 2, the French television channel, as part of their "25ieme heure" series and was selected at Donostia, San Sebastian.

1995-1997: Filming of *Têtes aux murs*, portraying the path of delinquent adolescents at the Centre Fermés – detention centres – of the French Community. The film was produced by Films du Tournesol, the Centre Bruxellois de l'Audiovisuel, RTBF(Belgium television), la Communauté Française de Belgique as well as La Sept Arte.

1998-1999, films commissioned by a trade-union organisation:

*Le droit des jeunes à la sortie de l'école*

*On n'engage plus, engageons-nous !*

*Rencontres atypiques et les pièges du temps partiel*

1998 : wrote *Une part du ciel (A piece of sky)*

2002: *Une part du ciel*, produced by JBA Production (France) and Tarantula (Belgium and Luxembourg) and co-produced by Arte France Cinéma, France 2 Cinéma and RTBF.

2002: Writing of a feature-length film *Faux pas*.

# REMARKS BY BÉNÉDICTE LIÉNARD

## BACKGROUND 1

The aim of the film would be to tell a story blending the personal and the political, it would quite simply explain something of the reason I make films. Let us speak about the author: the author exists only in relation to those around him or her. Never alone. Everyone's life is made up of realities. For me, the concept of art is the result of being present in a particular world.

My family comes from a small village in the Borinage region. Mining country. The town has been profoundly marked by 102 years of socialism, a long line of socialist mayors. A socialism which "provided" everything: the entire village's social and cultural life revolved around the "Maison du Peuple", the people's town hall, a dominating force which ruled out any other "different" way of doing things or thoughts. During my childhood, after 1965, the power of the coal-mining base collapsed. Everything needed to be reinvented, reformulated. But it seemed as though nothing new could exist beyond that offered historically by the traditional institutions.

I watched as my family began to speak on behalf of others, trying to find common ground. This view of the world, cemented in my childhood, is of course a political one. I felt the need for film-making in particular because I recognised in it a collective form, a collective phenomenon. A way of being able to say "us", and the pleasure it gave, a way of speaking and of speaking for others without being a despot, without being a dominating force.

## BACKGROUND 2

I am not a film-maker who tells stories. Fiction is the beginning of a "utopia of possibilities". A door that opens, takes a step, moves forward in a space where one will be made vulnerable.

The documentary film functions as a kind of report on the world, it records the state of things. I wanted to try a fictional approach to attempt to reformulate this notion of reality as presented by the documentary, which at the same time runs the risk of losing its momentum. I followed the "Clabecq Thirteen" \* affair from beginning to end, and I am still doing so to this day.

I am convinced that the situation of the Thirteen is an appeal to reconsider politics.

The criminalisation of their struggle proves to what extent any form of expression or thought is today rejected by our administrative and political structures, which exclude these battling men and women. The fictional background of *A piece of sky* was inspired by their story.

It is true that I chose not to say or show what caused Joanna to land in prison.

Since the very beginning of the project I was committed to not giving the audience an explanation of what she had "done". I wanted to force the audience to see her as she is, as her own person.

We (all of us, the prisoners, the workers, me...) cannot escape the stereotyped forms of reality. Deeply integrated forms of representation are part of our existence, we are also made up of images... Film-makers have an obligation to go beyond these stereotyped forms and it is in their intimate knowledge of the territory that they must place their trust. But they have an obligation to go beyond these forms.

The story related in a *A piece of sky* is that of an encounter and a moment of recognition, on the inside and the outside.

## **MIXTURE 1**

I do not see how to respond to questions about the making of the film without evoking the present. A moment happens and we know, all of us, that it is good and right, that we agree... When I meet somebody, what interests me is that they understand what we are doing: where the camera is, why it's being filmed like that, what we are going to say. If we do not agree on what we're doing, we just stop filming, simple as that. I am not them, I am someone else: the whole trick, during a sequence or even a particular shot, is to discover at what point our visions will meet.

Annick or Bella, who are actual prisoners, or Naïma, a factory worker, knew very well where the camera was, that they were being filmed from a distance or in close-up, that what we wanted to express at that moment was the result of my will, but it was a will that they had accepted and acknowledged. This then allowed them to adhere to it, while respecting their own truths.

## **MIXTURE 2**

There are no actors... but there are, and it is a very rich concept. This mixing of concepts is a dimension which I hold dear to me and always will. It is a question of bringing to the table the ingredients that another person, steeped in their own popular culture, is not familiar with. Ingredients that they will then taste, enjoy, and which will boost their confidence. We can then eat at the same table. I do not believe in "sharing", my background does not allow it: I am not in prison, nor have I ever been, I have never worked in a factory. My ingredients are not the same as other people's -- what interests me is that the other person brings their grain of salt to the table and I bring mine.

My world is also that of the cinema and therefore also that of the actor.

## **BETWEEN WORLDS**

Being "between things" gives me energy and freedom. Belgium, let us not forget, is an undefined state. Culture does not belong to us. There is no dominating cultural phenomenon to identify with, no political formula by which we can really define ourselves. How to slip "between"... This background subtlety is almost an art in itself.

Ideologically, I am indefinable: politically of the left but without adhering to it, fuelled by Judeo-Christian values but without adhering to them... this constant navigation allows me to avoid society's structures, it enabled "A piece of sky" to exist.

## **A BARRIER**

The presence of Séverine was an obvious choice from the start. She is socially involved with the world of factories, but at the same time her presence provided a fictional barrier against the real world of the prisoners. And Sofia (Claudine) fulfilled this same role.

It was Bella who showed Séverine the position to adopt when being stripped searched. Séverine-as-barrier made it possible for Bella to say, for example, that it is necessary, in this situation, to fold one's knees more or to lean forwards more. It was the prisoners that guided Séverine during the scene where she is in solitary confinement. The actual prison cell in question contained odours, tactile feelings, all things that cinema cannot reproduce... While Hélène Louvart (director of photography) and I prepared the lighting so that it would go on and off, the prisoners remained in the cell with Séverine, with the door closed. They left about ten minutes later, telling me that Séverine was ready to shoot. Séverine was extremely troubled, something of the real experience had been transmitted to her. So I started filming.

## **SOLITUDE**

How do you film solitude? The very act of filming produces a false and artificial representation, since the person being filmed is no longer alone. It is therefore of the utmost importance to show the truth of this falseness, in other words to not hide the presence of the camera. I refused all "aesthetics of solitude", any figurative representation. I refused to put the camera on a stand and to film the person like an object. And I wanted to watch, not as the guard peeks through the spy hole, but fully recognising the intrusion of my very presence.

I thus sought to take part: filming solitude could only mean looking at solitude itself. This participation implied a physical commitment: I can be heard on film and one "sees" me breathing, at pains to hold the camera for the length and intensity of the moment, to suffer from it physically. This solitude does not have anything "pure", or beautiful about it, it is not aesthetic.

This principle of refusing to portray the situation figuratively is applied to the actual locations, be it the factory or the prison: there is never a "description" of the place without the people.

## **FORWARDS MARCH**

The "travellings" in the corridors of the prison or the factory workspace are not "decorative". They are the result of my opinion of the characters: people walking towards confrontation. A world that is constantly on the move, alive, but not a lost movement. A moving forwards which systematically carries each character towards another, towards a situation, an affront, a confrontation. This constant moving is not permitted in two of the characters, that of the boss and that of the institutional trade unionist. And as for the choice of filming the prison director and the chief warden by underlining their faults, it was a deliberate one.

## **ACCURACY**

I am neither factory worker, nor prisoner. I am not of that world and yet it is so much in my life, that I am part of it. Not a minute goes by without my thinking about it. The telephone rings because a woman is about to be released from prison or someone in a factory has a problem, these are all events that are part of my day-to-day life. How to define me otherwise, than by this existence which consists in spending part of my time with a factory worker, a prisoner, and another part with someone from the world of cinema, of painting...

It is of this voyage that I am made.

## **THE SCREENING**

One speaks a great deal today about the "death of cinema", undoubtedly because being a member of the audience has become a mere mode of consumption. What would be an ideal screening of my film? That the audience would say: "I want to cry", or "I am leaving", or "I want to talk"..

*Remarks recorded in Paris by Marie-Pierre Duhamel, April 2002.*

\* Extract from Le Soir newspaper, 16-17 March 2002:

For almost four years now, the public prosecutor's office of Nivelles, followed by the Court of Appeal in Brussels, has been pursuing the "Clabecq Thirteen", and principally the democratically elected union heads, for incitement to violence. They are being held responsible for all the events and occasional incidents that exacerbated the country's worst social conflict, before Sabena.

## ENCOUNTER BETWEEN SÉVERINE CANEELE AND BÉNÉDICTE LIÉNARD

ORIGINALLY FROM BAILLEUL, SÉVERINE CANEELE CURRENTLY LIVES IN HAZEBROUCK, IN THE NORTH OF FRANCE. TRAINED AS A TEXTILE WORKER, SHE WAS EMPLOYED IN A NUMBER OF TRADES BEFORE ANSWERING A SMALL ADVERTISEMENT PASSED BY BRUNO DUMONT, WHO THEN ENTRUSTED HER WITH THE ROLE OF DOMINO IN "L'HUMANITÉ".

THE ROLE WAS THAT OF A HARD WOMAN, BUT A FULLY ROUNDED ONE, AND WAS PERFECTLY PORTRAYED BY THE YOUNG ACTRESS WHO RECEIVED LE PRIX D'INTERPRÉTATION FÉMININ AT THE CANNES FILM FESTIVAL IN 1999 FOR HER EFFORTS.

### BÉNÉDICTE

When I decided to make this film with you, for me the encounter was obvious from the start, and yet for you, to make another film after Bruno Dumont's *L'Humanité*, after the award in Cannes, was not an obvious choice at all.

### SÉVERINE

*I didn't believe it, making films to me didn't seem possible anymore. After all that had been said about me in the papers, I didn't feel able to make a second film. What was said about me after I received the prize was very difficult to understand and live with. We weren't actors and for the media, we were never going to be. When I accepted *A piece of sky* I wanted to prove what I was capable of.*

### BÉNÉDICTE

What happened when you first read the screenplay and you met me for the first time?

### SÉVERINE

*When I met you, it's true that I still didn't believe in it too much. I read the screenplay with my husband and he said, this film is made for you. It's a strong story, a role worth defending. Joanna is a strong woman who knows how to fight and I felt close to the character. It's true that in real life I tell it like it is and don't always know when to shut up.*

### BÉNÉDICTE

And yet, you often told me that Joanna was a part of you but that she was very different from you too. It's not Séverine, it's Joanna...

### SÉVERINE

*Joanna is a woman in prison and prison was a place I didn't know anything about. I recognised Joanna's state of mind, not her life. In *L'Humanité*, I played a woman from the north whose day-to-day existence was familiar to me. In *A piece of sky*, I really did the job of an actress in creating the character.*

### BÉNÉDICTE

I took you to prison, I took you to meet the women there. How did you experience the actual filming, which simply made Séverine become one woman among many others?

### SÉVERINE

*I didn't tell you at the time but when you explained your method of preparation and filming, I was scared. It was a world I didn't know. But when I realised that the women expected to make the film with me and that I just had to represent what they were, it really became a wonderful exchange.*

*We made the film together. I learned to listen to them, I didn't see them any more as prisoners, but as friends who were sharing the same voyage as me. They really helped me, they drove me towards Joanna who they knew better than I did.*

*At the same time, I often felt as if I were in prison myself. I felt watched...sometimes I had to be careful with my gestures and movements. In the evenings I was happy to be able to leave and it made me realise just how happy I am to have my freedom.*

**BÉNÉDICTE**

Some of the supervisors thought you were a real prisoner....

**SÉVERINE**

*It was strange...I hadn't done anything...I was not a prisoner and I felt a certain rejection towards these women who had done something ...at the same time I learned how to associate with them and go beyond what one normally thinks of people in prison. Today, I know that in some way we resemble each other and that you or me or any of us could find ourselves behind bars from one day to the next. My opinion of prisoners and prison in general has completely changed. It gave me a great deal to think about.*

**BÉNÉDICTE**

What was hardest for you?

**SÉVERINE**

*The solitary confinement scene. The atmosphere was charged with the experience of the women present who had really been through it and their suffering. And that day, I really did feel locked up. While filming, I had the impression that I would never be able to leave. Nothing, just blackness... I believe I really started to crack.*

**BÉNÉDICTE**

When you saw the film, what happened?

**SÉVERINE**

*I saw the women who were magnificent. I didn't see myself, I saw Joanna. It's a film that people can react to, it's a hard and just film. It makes you think.*

**BÉNÉDICTE**

How will you approach the next stage?

**SÉVERINE**

*I want to increase my experience in films. I want to explore other characters, to give myself other challenges and I know today that I can. Meanwhile, my life is much the same, I look after my little boy and I am back working at the factory, since I enjoy it. I'm happy I made your film and I'm happy about the independence I can have as a result of making films. Today I know that I am not the product of just one film, I can go further.*

## ARTISTIC AND TECHNICAL DATA

SÉVERINE CANEEL JOANNA SOFIA LEBOUTTE CLAUDINE JOSIANE STOLÉRU  
MRS PICRI NAYMA HIRÈCHE NAYMA ANNICK KEUSTERMANN ANNICK YOLANDE  
MOREAU MRS PASQUIER GAËLLE MULLER LAURETTE BÉATRICE SPIGA BELLA  
OLIVIER GOURMET LAWYER ANDRÉ WILMS PRISON DIRECTOR

AND CHRISTIAN CRAHAY, RENÉE FRÉART, MIREILLE GASPARRINI, CARMEN GOBBIN, MARIE-  
JEANNE HERNANDEZ, PHILIPPE JEUNETTE, VÉRONIQUE PEETERS, DIRK ROOSTHOFT, JESSICA  
SCHOEPEN, DOMINIQUE TREUTTENS, MARIANNE THOMAS

SCREENPLAY AND DIRECTION BÉNÉDICTE LIÉNARD DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY HÉLÈNE LOUVART AFC  
EDITING MARIE-HÉLÈNE DOZO CHIEF MIXING OPERATOR JEAN-PIERRE LAFORCE SOUND JEAN-JACQUES  
FERRAN FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR XAVIER CHRISTIAENS COSTUME MONIC PARELLE SCENERY PATRICK  
DECHESNE AND ALAIN-PASCAL HOUSIAUX PRODUCTION DIRECTOR ANTOINE BEAU PRODUCED BY  
JACQUES BIDOU, MARIANNE DUMOULIN, JOSEPH ROUSCHOP, DONATO ROTUNNO AND EDDY  
GÉRARDON-LUYCKX

## PRODUCTION DATA

PRODUCED BY JBA PRODUCTION (FRANCE), TARANTULA (BELGIUM & LUXEMBOURG)  
CO-PRODUCED BY ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA, FRANCE 2 CINÉMA, RTBF (BELGIAN  
TELEVISION CHANNEL), WITH THE CONTRIBUTION OF "EURIMAGES" FUNDS OF THE COUNCIL  
OF EUROPE, THE NATIONAL CENTRE OF CINEMATOGRAPHY, THE CINEMA AND  
AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA CENTRE OF THE BELGIAN FRENCH COMMUNITY AND  
WALLOON TELEVISION BROADCASTERS, NATIONAL FUNDS SUPPORTING  
AUDIOVISUAL PRODUCTION FROM THE GRAND DUCHY OF LUXEMBOURG, CANAL +