



ONLY THE ANIMALS



A FILM BY DOMINIK MOLL





Following the disappearance of a woman during a snowstorm, five strangers in a remote mountain town are caught up in a mystery that spans continents and which none of them expected.

S Y N O P S I S



**DIRECTOR
DOMINIK MOLL**

Biography

The French director and screenwriter was born in 1962 in Bühl, Germany. In 2005 and 2000 his feature films *LEMMING* and *HARRY, HE'S HERE TO HELP* were selected to compete for the Palme d'Or at Cannes. *Harry, He's Here To Help* won several César Awards including Best Actor, Best Director and Best Editing in 2001.



Filmography

2019: Only the Animals (Seules Les Bêtes)
2018: Eden (TV Series)
2016: News From Planet Mars
(des nouvelles de la planète Mars)
2013: Tunnel (The Tunnel) (TV Series)
2011: The Monk (Le Moine)
2005: Lemming
2000: Harry, He's Here To Help
(Harry, Un Ami Qui Vous Veut Du Bien)
1994: Intimité

When I read Colin Niel's novel «Seules les Bêtes» I was immediately caught up in its unique atmosphere and quickly wondered how it could be adapted for the screen. The plot revolves around the mysterious disappearance of a woman during a blizzard. Five stories ensue, in the course of which we follow the thoughts of five surprising and moving characters. The confrontation of the first stories, which intersect, complement but also contradict each other, arouses the reader's attention and leads us to imagine things concealed in the shadowy corners of the story, creating

an unsettling atmosphere. And then, two-thirds of the way through the book, we are taken by surprise with an unexpected shift from the rural and depopulated world of the countryside to the urban and tropical setting of Abidjan. The juxtaposition of these two contrasting worlds, rarely represented on screen, between the harsh, snow-covered landscapes of the Causse Méjean and the young scammers of Abidjan's working-class neighborhoods, arouses strong images. There is undeniably something very cinematic about the book. Gilles Marchand and I liked the idea of embracing through

this story the difficulties of the old French rural world, but also the astonishing situation of young people in an African megalopolis, and this global interconnection that now links us all. A way, through these singular characters and their secrets, of evoking the modern world. For us, the heart of the story does not lie in solving the mystery of the disappearance (the «whodunit»), but in the characters and what their journeys reveal about their respective dreams and worlds. These are five love stories, frustrated and asymmetrical ones, fuelled by misunderstandings, secrets, fantasies, disappointment and disillusionment. Each of the characters is driven by the need to love and be loved. By hoping for this love, by wanting to believe in it, by seeking to share it, by trying to live it, each of them will imagine things, and everything they imagine will cause them to act. Sometimes for the better, but also for the worse.

COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR



A man with a beard and short hair is shown in profile, looking out of a car window at night. The scene is dimly lit, with a blueish tint. The man's face is partially illuminated, showing his eyes and features. The background is dark, with some blurred lights visible through the window.

INTERVIEW
WITH DOMINIK MOLL

You have adapted *Only the Animals* by Colin Niel with Gilles Marchand. What appealed to you about the novel?

A number of things, actually. Starting with its uniqueness. Through a thrilling and mysterious plot, the novel explores two worlds abandoned by fiction and that everything seems to oppose. The harsh mountainous Causse plateau in Southern France, where farmers are sometimes so isolated that they have difficulty starting a family, and, five thousand kilometres away, an African metropolis of nearly five million inhabitants, Abidjan, where young people dream of making a fortune by becoming brouteurs, in other words cyber-scammers. Colin Niel makes his characters so vibrant and engaging that I wanted to bring them to life



on screen. And then there's the very unusual structure of the novel, this story where each chapter corresponds to the point of view of a different character. What might at first seem to be simply a stylistic idea says something profound about each character's relationship to love... And inspires a particular form of jubilation with the resolution of the plot.

What do you see as the virtues of this structure adopting successive points of view that is at the heart of the film?

This structure creates mystery and suspense. Each new chapter reveals an additional layer of the overall narrative,

INTERVIEW WITH DOMINIK MOLL

another point of view or new elements, which shed fresh light on what may have happened. This light also creates new areas of shadow. This unique structure makes the viewer particularly active. Changing points of view can be confusing for a second, but it soon becomes fun and exciting. And the unity of the plot is always preserved since we continually have the same anchoring point: the disappearance of Evelyne Ducat during a snowstorm, around which everything revolves.



The construction is based on what Tarantino has called «the Rashomon structure», also used in Jackie Brown?

That's true but, in Kurosawa's film, we have three different interpretations of the same story. In *Only the Animals*, the points of view are incomplete, intertwined, and do not necessarily cover the same period. For example, in the third part with Evelyne and Marion, we go back in time. This construction makes the story more playful and sophisticated than if we had been in precisely the same space-time continuum in each chapter.

The Causse Méjean has a specific cinematic dimension, at least in a French context. Was this element important in the decision to adapt the novel for the screen?

Yes, essential even. I had stayed there twice and each time I was struck by the cinematic potential of its landscapes. The Causse plateau has something very unusual about it. This vast, deserted area, surrounded by gorges, is a natural fortress, only accessible via small roads full of hairpin bends. Moreover, the story plays on this contrast. Some characters live on the Causse and others in the valley. These snow-covered landscapes look wonderful on screen of course, but they mainly reflect the characters' personalities.

The characters are all different, singular, but united by a common point: the overpowering desire to escape from their daily lives, along with their blindness concerning the object of their desire. Is *Only the Animals* a pessimistic film or simply lucid in its approach to romantic encounters?

There is a lot of idealism in each of the characters. They are driven by the desire to love and be loved. Their quest is an active one. It may sometimes seem strange or ridiculous, but they always want to believe in it. It's their ideal. There is a blatant cruelty about the fact that they are all wrong. This brings in an air of black comedy. An irony that makes this darkness both terrible and euphoric.



The character of Michel (Denis Ménochet) brings in another theme: Internet addiction and the power of social networks. Did you want to take a critical look at our modern world?

Actually, it was more the idea of showing the power of projection and imagination that the Internet can generate. When you are behind your computer or telephone screen, you feel protected, less exposed, inhibitions fall, you dare to go further than when you are really facing someone: the screen acts as a catalyst for your desires. And also as a way out.

Even so, for Michel, isn't the Internet a dangerous addiction that cuts him off from his wife, makes him lose money and virtually drives him insane?

When I did my research on Internet scams, I read reports about people who had been robbed of tens of thousands of euros. There was a woman who couldn't admit that the handsome man who had seduced her online didn't exist, she kept his picture on her nightstand despite all

the evidence proving the scam. The Internet increases the power to fantasize tenfold, for better or for worse... That said, Joseph doesn't have an Internet connection and he isn't doing very well either.

There is a strange dimension to the film, like an invisible thread that connects the characters, sometimes without their knowledge. There is also the African shaman, the old people of the Causse who seem to have premonitions... Was this metaphysical and non-rational aspect deliberate?

Yes. In Abidjan, all the brouteurs consult the fetishist. The magical dimension really exists for them. And I like the idea that the irrational is not very far off. Papa Sanou tells the young scammer, «Chance is stronger than you», and the film indeed plays with almost supernatural coincidences. That said, Papa Sanou is also there to ask for his percentage on scams, which is already much more... materialistic!

The financial dimension marks the whole story.

That's true. We know that money cannot make us happy, but it's hard not to wish

we had money so as to be happier. Young brouteurs have a very special relationship with money. They want to blow it. Right away, right now. They are not looking to improve their daily lives. They spend it all in one night, making it look like they have so much money they can throw it away. They do not envisage themselves in the future but only in the present moment. As young Armand says, «It is better to be rich one day than a slave all your life.»

Was the film's political dimension intentional?

Only the Animals is first and foremost a film noir, a mystery thriller. But shooting in Abidjan, showing these young people and their thirst for wealth, also showing the isolation of a specific rural world in France, bringing these two worlds face to face today... all this, of course, has a political dimension. Whether you are on the Causse or in Abidjan, beyond economic inequalities, everyone is looking for an ideal. But despite the Internet network that now potentially links all individuals on the planet, the paradox of «so far – so close» is growing. We may be closer and closer... but we're further and further apart.

Let's talk about the actors. Laure Calamy plays in a less fanciful register than usual.

Yes, she has less of that exuberant side in which she often excels, but it's always interesting to take actors out of their comfort zone. Laure plays a generous social worker, she wants to help everyone, even her husband whom she cheats on. She is like a Good Samaritan who tends to forget herself. Her character is the one who tries the most to understand what is happening, but she is also the one who has the fewest keys to help her understand.

Denis Ménochet makes a perfect Michel with his mixture of gullible childishness and a somewhat worrying opacity.

When we were casting the film, I had just seen CUSTODY where I found him incredible. I absolutely wanted him to play Michel. Fortunately, he fell in love with the script and the character that he made all his own. On paper, one might have feared that the «chat»

scenes would be daunting, but Denis took such delight in performing them that they became totally jubilant and are among the most successful in the film. He allows us to experience everything that goes on in his mind.

Isn't Michel too gullible?

Of course, as we sit watching the film, we may find him naive and think that we would be smarter than him. But I think it's more complicated than that: he gets something out of it. He says himself that he doesn't care about losing money. He is totally into his dream. He is in love.

Like Ménochet, Damien Bonnard is a much sought-after actor of the mid-forties generation discovered a few years ago.

During the writing stage, Gilles and I feared that Joseph and Michel were too similar: two farmers who fall into improbable love stories. We had tried to set them apart by making Joseph a lonely old farmer. And then, during the casting process, I thought about meeting Damien... and he imposed himself naturally. He exudes a darkness, a strange and contained madness that suit the character of Joseph perfectly. In his own way, he manages to embody the reality of isolated rural areas inhabited by single people who have not been lucky enough to know love. Joseph transcends this emotional despair in a rather unexpected way!







Valeria Bruni Tedeschi is also less quirky than usual, as if infected by the film noir genre.

She's an actress I really like. In her own films, she brilliantly performs characters who are quite close to her, often with a lot of humour. For *Only the Animals*, I wanted her to create a character more distant from her, and so probably tougher to perform. Evelyne is in control, she doesn't want to be overwhelmed by her feelings. She probably has a flaw but, as Valeria said during the readings, «I don't need to stress that flaw because I carry it inside me, it will show through no matter what.» That's precisely what happened. I find her devastating in the scene where she ends up slapping Marion.

Nadia Tereszkievicz is the newcomer here. How did you find her?

We did screen tests with a lot of young women and we narrowed down the choice to three actresses. We got them to perform with Valeria to see which couple worked best, and there was a particular chemistry between Valeria and Nadia. Nadia has incredibly positive energy, which was important to me. I didn't want Marion to be perceived in a negative manner: we had to understand how she falls in love at first

sight, what she tells herself, how she clings to this love... We have to feel that she believes it. This brings us back to the idea of belief that is essential in *Only the Animals*.

How did you find the brouteurs, especially Guy-Roger «Bibisse» N'Drin?

Very early in the film's preparation, we contacted Faissol Gnonlonfin and Joël Akafou, respectively producer and director of *Vivre Riche*, a documentary on Abidjan's scammers. They are the ones who opened doors for us to this world where we casted the roles. It was important to me that the young cyber-scammers be played by real brouteurs. I liked Bibisse from the very first tests. He has a smart and malicious side that allows you to feel empathy for him. And I felt that his potential as an actor was just begging to be released. He had never acted before, but he quickly understood what it meant, this mixture of trickery and straightforwardness. In his encounter with Denis Ménochet via computer, the childish pleasure he takes in plucking his pigeon is quite irresistible.



Visually Only the Animals is a quite stylish film. Had you worked with Patrick Ghiringhelli before?

Yes, on the series Eden where we already enjoyed working together. His lighting has a lot of character but he achieves it without us noticing. It's quite surprising. We both like to rely on pre-existing sets and light sources to compose the frame and lighting, so working with set designer Emmanuelle Duplay was also very important. To create the specific atmosphere of this film noir, we played on both the differences between the snow-covered Causse and the humid and dusty atmospheres of Abidjan, but also on

the contrasts between the wide-open spaces of the plateau and very confined and often nocturnal places like Joseph's hiding place or the small office that Michel has built in his cattle-shed.

Was it difficult shooting in the rather poor districts of Abidjan?

We shot in the Yopougon and Treichville neighbourhoods where you don't see any white people. In addition to the precious help provided by Faissol Gnonlonfin and Joël Akafou, we were able to rely on a local production company (Boucan Productions), which simplified the task

for us. The team was mixed, European and African, which also made it possible to be accepted by the inhabitants. At times, we worked in an almost documentary mode, especially for street scenes where we were able to use people going about their daily lives, which always brings in life and reality and strengthens and nourishes fiction all the more.

How should we interpret the title, Only the Animals?

I have always liked the title, with its mysterious beauty, but every time I see Colin, the author of the novel, I forget to ask him what the exact meaning is for him. There are of course animals in the film and perhaps they are the only ones who know what really happened on the night of the storm ... In the screenplay, Cedric, the gendarme, talked philosophically about cattle's looks, wondering what goes through their minds when they look at us: «We don't know if they are stupid or just sorry to see us ...» Perhaps we need to preserve the beauty of this mystery and let everyone form their own interpretation.

Interview by Serge Kaganski, film critic.





MAIN CAST
BIOGRAPHY

DENIS MÉNOCHET

Since *INGLORIOUS BASTERD'S* memorable opening scene in 2009, Denis Menochet has built a strong career which stands out by its diversity. From blockbusters such as Ridley Scott's *ROBIN HOOD*, Stephen Frear's *THE PROGRAM* or José Padilla's *7 DAYS IN ENTEBBE* to independent films like Julie Delpy's *THE SKYLAB*, Francois Ozon's *INTHE HOUSE* or Rebecca Zlotovski's *GRAND CENTRAL*, he has always been praised by critics as one of France's greatest character actors. Most recently he worked opposite Joaquin Phoenix in Garth Davis' *MARY MAGDALENE* and Vincent Cassel in Jean Francois Richet's *THE EMPEROR OF PARIS*. In 2019 he moved everyone in François Ozon's poignant *BY THE GRACE OF GOD* (Silver bear at the Berlin Film Festival). But it is his frightening performance in Xavier Legrand's *CUSTODY* that revealed the true nature of his unique talent, earning him a César's best actor nomination. In 2020, he will be appearing with Benicio Del Toro in Wes Anderson's *THE FRENCH DISPATCH* and in Xavier Beauvois's highly anticipated *UN PETIT FILS*.

VALERIA BRUNI TEDESCHI

Born in Turin, Valeria Bruni Tedeschi studied at the Amandiers Theater school in Nanterre and is trained in the Strasberg method. In 1983, she made her film debut directed by Patrice Chéreau, in her first true cinematic role in *HÔTEL DE FRANCE*. She won the Most Promising Actress César (1994) for her role in Laurence Ferreira Barbosa's *NORMAL PEOPLE ARE NOTHING EXCEPTIONAL* (Les gens normaux n'ont rien d'exceptionnel). In 1997 she wrote the dialogue for *NOTES OF LOVE* (La parola amore esiste) with Mimmo Calopresti and realized she had a taste for writing screenplays. Her first film, *IT'S EASIER FOR A CAMEL...* (Il est plus facile pour un chameau...), received several awards at the Tribeca film festival. In 2007, *Actresses* (Actrices) received the Special Jury Prize at Un Certain Regard and in 2013 *A CASTLE IN ITALY* (Un château en Italie) was selected in the Official Competition of the Cannes Film Festival. In 2018, she presented in Venice Film festival her last film as a filmmaker *A SUMMER HOUSE* (Les Estivants).



LAURE CALAMY

Laure Calamy trained at the Conservatoire Supérieur d'Art Dramatique de Paris. Her cinematic encounters range from Guillaume Brac and *A WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN*, for which she received several awards, to *Blandine Lenoir* and *ZOUZOU*. She has also worked with Justine Triet (*IN BED WITH VICTORIA*), Lola Mysius (*AVA*), and Guillaume Senez along side Romain Duris in *OUR STRUGGLES*; the three films were presented at La Semaine De La Critique. With Alain Guiraudie, she presented *STAYING VERTICAL* in the Cannes Film Festival official competition. In 2019, Laure Calamy has filmed with Julie Bertuccelli (*CLAIRE DARLING*) alongside Catherine Deneuve and also with Emmanuel Mouret (*LADY J*). She's currently preparing to resume shooting of the third season of *CALL MY AGENT!*

DAMIEN BONNARD

Damien Bonnard began his career at the National School of Fine Arts. His feature films were directed by Bertrand Blier, Virgil Vernier, Brigitte Sy, among others. In 2016, he won his first leading role and a nomination in the Cannes Film Festival official competition for the Alain Guiraudie feature *STAYING VERTICAL*. He is to feature in Anne Fontaine's next film alongside Charles Berling and Isabelle Huppert. He was nominated at the 2019 Cesar Awards in the best supporting actor category for *THE TROUBLE WITH YOU* by Pierre Salvadori. He was the main character in *LES MISÉRABLES* by Ladj Ly which won the Jury Prize in Cannes 2019. The same year he met Roman Polanski once again on the set of *THE DREYFUS AFFAIR* alongside Louis Garrel, Jean Dujardin, Vincent Grass and Emmanuelle Seigner. More recently, he joined the cast of *THE FRENCH DISPATCH*, Wes Anderson's forthcoming film.

NADIA TERESZKIEWICZ

Nadia Tereszkievicz began a career as a dancer at a very early age before turning to film under the direction of Dennis Berry, who offered her the lead in *WILD*. She recently played a disenchanted young heiress in *PERSONA NON GRATA* by and with Roschdy Zem, Raphaël Personnaz and Nicolas Duvauchelle. Nadia has just completed the shooting of *POSSESSIONS in Israel*, Canal Plus' forthcoming series directed by Thomas Vincent, in which she plays the female lead against Reda Kateb.

— MAIN CAST

Denis Menochet: Michel
Laure Calamy: Alice
Damien Bonnard: Joseph
Valeria Bruni Tedeschi: Evelyne
Nadia Tereszkiewicz: Marion
Guy Roger «Bibisse» N'drin: Armand
Bastien Bouillon: Cédric
Marie Amie: Monique

— MAIN CREW

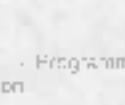
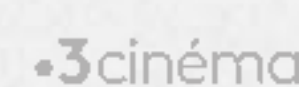
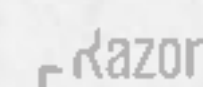
Director: Dominik Moll
Screenwriters: Dominik Moll, Gilles Marchand
Adapted from «Seules Les Bêtes» by Colin Niel
published by Éditions du Rouergue
Cinematographer: Patrick Ghiringhelli
Editor: Laurent Rouan
Original Score: Benedikt Schiefer
Sound: François Maurel, Noemi Hampel and Matthias Schwab
Production Designer: Emmanuelle Duplay
Costume Designer: Isabelle Pannetier
Casting Director: Agathe Hassenforder
Producers: Caroline Benjo, Carole Scotta,
Barbara Letellier, Simon Arnal
Production Company: Haut et Court
In coproduction with: Razor Film Produktion (Germany),
France 3 Cinéma (France)
Supported by: Région Occitanie, Eurimages, Cnc – Mini-traité
Franco-Allemand, FFA, MBB, France 3, Canal +, Ciné+, Media,
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— TECHNICAL DETAILS

Original title: Seules les Bêtes
International title: Only the Animals
Duration: 116 min
Aspect Ratio: 2.39:1
Format: 4K
Sound: 5.1
Year: 2019
Original Language: French, Nouchi
Countries of Production: France, Germany

DENIS MÉNOCHET LAURE CALAMY DAMIEN BONNARD NADIA TERESZKIEWICZ BASTIEN BOUILLON GUY ROGER « BIBISSE » N'DRIN AND VALERIA BRUNI TEDESCHI A FILM BY DOMINIK MOLL
SCREENPLAY DOMINIK MOLL AND GILLES MARCHAND BASED ON THE NOVEL « SEULES LES BÊTES » BY COLIN NIEL PUBLISHED BY ÉDITIONS DU ROUERQUE
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY PATRICK GHIRINGHELLI ORIGINAL SCORE BENEDIKT SCHIEFER SOUND FRANÇOIS MAUREL NOEMI HAMPEL AND MATTHIAS SCHWAB PRODUCTION DESIGNER EMMANUELLE DUPLAY COSTUME DESIGNER ISABELLE PANNETIER FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR THIERRY VERRIER
PRODUCTION MANAGER DIEGO URGOITI-MOINOT EDITOR LAURENT ROUAN PRODUCED BY CAROLE SCOTTA CAROLINE BENJO BARBARA LETELLIER SIMON ARNAL COPRODUCED BY ROMAN PAUL GERHARD MEIXNER A FILM PRODUCED BY HAUT ET COURT IN COPRODUCTION WITH RAZOR FILM PRODUKTION
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