



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
2024 OFFICIAL SELECTION
SPECIAL SCREENING

FILMLOVERS!



A FILM BY
ARNAUD DESPLECHIN



INTERNATIONAL PRESS

GLORIA ZERBINATI gloria.zerbinati@gmail.com

US PRESS

RYAN WERNER ryan@cineticmedia.com

INTERNATIONAL SALES

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7/9 rue des Petites écuries - 75010 Paris
sales@filmsdulosange.fr • www.filmsdulosange.com

France • 2024 • 1h28 • Color/B&W • Scope • Sound 5.1

FILMLOVERS!

*What does it mean, to go to the movies?
Why have people been going for over one hundred years?
I set out to celebrate movie theaters and their manifold magic.*

*So I walked in the footsteps of young Paul Dédalus, as if in a
filmgoer's coming-of-age story. Memories, fiction, discoveries
come together in an irrepressible torrent of pictures.*



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IN CONVERSATION WITH ARNAUD DESPLECHIN

In your title, with its plural form and exclamation mark, there's a certain conviviality, a certain panache.

I used this exclamation mark in the subtitle *Roubaix!* of *A Christmas Tale*. For me, it has a heroic function. It means, 'we the filmlovers.' For sure, when I was very young I totally embraced "la politique des auteurs". And it's still my policy. But this film is not an apology for directors I loved, or actresses and actors. It's a depiction of what happens to common spectators. What does it do to us to watch films? How does it subconsciously affect us? The sequences of random spectators in this film tells the story of 'us.' We all have our own habits: some prefer to sit in the front, others in the back; some cry at the cinema, others prefer to stay dry-eyed. Nonetheless, we form a community. There is both a solitude and a plural mingled in the film's title, and the exclamation point praises those

who enjoy the humble task of being cinemagoers. I care very much about this plural. I have my own idiosyncrasies, but I wanted to welcome and allow any inclination of the viewer to be projected onto the image. I also wanted to include television in the way films were viewed.

Emotion is central to *Filmlovers!* In a very tender sequence, Paul's grandmother takes him and his sister to the cinema for the first time. The children have two ways of seeing and reacting to the film...

It's a personal memory: my parents didn't have television, but I watched films at my grandmothers' house. So, there was nothing exceptional for me about merely watching a film, but sitting in a cinema was something new! I'd been to the circus, where the seats weren't quite arranged like that. And it was live!

In the film, just before the lights go out Françoise Lebrun improvises around the mystery of this projection booth and the beam of light. The other worldliness of the projector makes it almost more interesting than the screen. Similarly, the sister, Delphine, is an innocent spectator. She reacts and is shocked by *Fantômas*. Then at the end of the film, we meet Paul Dedalus again, played by Salif Cissé; he confesses to his own filmmaking aspirations—but will he ever make films? Regardless, he is a spectator, and will never stop being a spectator, and that's enough for me!

The counterpart to the sequence with his grandmother is when Paul joins his parents and discovers *Day of Wrath* by Carl Theodore Dreyer.



His father calls Dreyer, 'the greatest filmmaker in the world.'

Oh, Jérémy Zylberberg, who plays the father, is marvelous in this scene! It begins like a Hammer production: that huge staircase in the half-light and the barefoot child, with the cries of Dreyer's tortured witch... I love it!

***Filmlovers!* is quite a lyrical film, halfway between an analysis of the essence of cinema and a sentimental ode to the form.**

I like to examine things through feelings and sensations. *Filmlovers!* is an elegy. It begins with the image of Paul, as a child, waiting for his grandmother outside the door before going to the cinema—a tender image. There is no opposition here between lyricism and intellectualism.

The sequence of anonymous testimonials tells the story of how films can deeply affect viewers and even change their trajectories. Something I feel we all can relate to.

Yes, each spectator recounts an experience that is so common and so singular. Irreplaceable stories emerge. For example, the Algerian child who discovers *The Battle of Algiers* in his village; the young girl who cries at *West Side Story*; the





man who sees his life changed by *To Our Loves*...

How did the project come about?

Charles Gillibert and Romain Blondeau, who both knew how much the philosopher Stanley Cavell meant to me, asked if I'd like to make a documentary about film projection. I told them I didn't know how to make a documentary, but that I might think about a hybrid form. I put a few ideas down on paper, and little by little the film began to take shape. It was easy to write because I kept coming back to my own thoughts about cinema that were in my head for over twenty years, so the writing poured out of me. The film is both a commission from Charles and Romain and an infinitely personal essay. What started out as a straightforward documentary project became a vast and multi-layered film.

How did you structure the maze-like narrative? It evokes such a treasure map for film buffs from all walks of life.

The film is an essay. You have to put formal timelines aside. So, how do you make sure that viewers don't get lost? I wanted to play with the audience, to weave a dialogue with everyone. I usually make narrative films. In this film, more than

usual, I had to juggle a wide variety of digressions and tangential ideas. I utilized what I call 'Wes Anderson shots.' The fictional scenes had to begin with the actors introducing themselves to the spectator with a perfectly assumed look to camera. Young Paul is waiting for his grandmother to go to the cinema and looks at us defiantly... Then, in the philosophers' café, the young actress Olga Milshtein also looks at the camera, has her tea, and suddenly we enter the scene. It's a way of guiding the viewer through our treasure map so that they can invent their own reference points and hang their own memories and daydreams on the fabric I'm offering.

What quickly became apparent in the writing was the cascade of film quotes, the flood of images. But I didn't want to mention the authors of these images, because the subject of the film is the viewer of the films, not their creators.

How did you choose the excerpts from these films that are referenced?

I've forgotten all about scholarly cinephilia. I'm not comfortable with the idea of major or minor art in cinema. For me, there is no such thing as 'handsome' or 'unhandsome', to use Stanley Cavell's words. John McTiernan rubs shoulders

with Orson Welles and Godard. A popular film has as much right to exist as an auteur film. Beauty is everywhere. What surprised me was that I never made a collection of my admirations. Of course, there are tombstones for people I've loved like Misty Upham or Claude Lanzmann. Many of my favorite films don't appear in *Filmlovers!* For example, there's only one Japanese film mentioned, even though I count so many in my personal cinephilia. I didn't want to impose my own taste, but rather disperse my choices with those from the other people we show. What belongs to us, to us together? It's a collective memory with no value scale.

From chapter to chapter, your narrative moves from intimate experiences to historical and



political issues, as if the film is drawing a spiral with an ever-widening scope...

As a child from the provinces, born in France in 1960, I owe an enormous debt to television. Many of the people at ORTF (French Radio-Television Office) were Companions of Liberation, linked to the Companions of the CNC. They wanted to show cinema in all its facets. There was cinema for children, popular games, Sunday night films, but cinema also looked at society and fueled debates. Cinema has become a classic art. It is also a modern art! French television showed us that cinema was, well, ours. I think I followed the same trend in my own way by broadening the spectrum towards the end of the film. I mention Claude Lanzmann, whom I loved so much, and *Shoah*. I wanted to share this unique experience with the audience, even if they didn't have the chance to see the nine-and-a-half-hour film. With Lanzmann, we are looking at the blind spot of the twentieth century and beyond; *Filmlovers!* is a world-film.

From *Fantômas* to *Shoah*... That's also what your film is about, expressing a kind of jubilation in the face of everything that cinema has been showing for over a century...

That's why I called it an elegy. It's as if, on a date



that is no anniversary, we were wondering what we'd been through with cinema, all these films. We suddenly realize: 'How lucky we've been!' A true elegy must recover what is past, gone, or fugitive, and recount it. How lucky I was that my grandmother took me to see *Fantômas*! How lucky I was to meet Claude Lanzmann! All these films make a spectacle of the past we have lived through.

This spectacle operates in a space that you compared to a house. This idea of the cinema as a place that is both reassuring and open to the

world runs through *Filmlovers!* as does the idea of real life versus cinema.

Serge Daney used to say that as a child, from the playground onwards, he was a bit wary of society. Society doesn't only wish you well! But he had a great appetite for the world. Some children, like Daney or Dédalus, find that life or society is a bit overrated. They are cautious. They will find themselves in the cinema, protected, in the dark. At the same time, the cinema is the place where you can discover the whole world. Kent Jones once told me that I had made quite

a few 'house films.' *Life of the Dead*, *A Christmas Tale*, *L'Aimée* are all films built like houses, and *Filmlovers!* is no exception.

The way you film the physical cinema as a house allows us to feel the touch of the seats, the sound of the ticket being torn open by the usherette, because going to the cinema is also a sensual experience. In fact, you refer to the cinema as an erotic place!

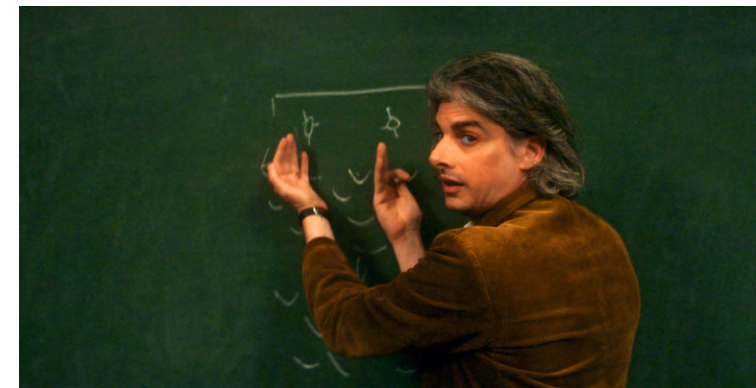
Yes, it's an erotic place. For example, a young Milo Machado-Graner lying about his age to see a Bergman! Or the love trio who meet up again, after years, for *Peggy Sue Got Married*. I thoroughly enjoyed revisiting the love triangle between Mathieu Amalric, Jeanne Balibar, and Marianne Denicourt in *My Sex Life...*, with these young actors, their lightness, and their complete seriousness.

Was it obvious to find Paul Dédalus at different stages of his life and to make autobiographical elements revolve around him?

What made it obvious was using myself as a tool. But I had terrible stage fright when I went to film Shoshana Felman and had to step into the shot. Same thing in New York with Kent Jones. It's not easy for me, I don't know how to act. But this



time, I had to take the plunge. I don't ask actors to be skilled, I ask them to be much more: to give me a part of themselves. Therefore, I also feel obliged to give a part of myself. The point is not to talk about myself. I don't think I am unique; identity is a fiction! But the shyness of the people filmed, their discomfort, their modesty, I find universal. For me,



it is the key to getting into films. So, I used a gallery of personal memories to bring those qualities out in myself. The scene with Pascal Kané really touched me. I used to take his classes, like those of Serge Daney. I really wanted this sequence to be shot at Censier university, where these classes took place.

My male characters are often called Dédalus or Vuillard. This time, it's Dédalus. Paul Dédalus, unlike Vuillard, is a spectator at heart: he is someone who loves to admire those around him. I realized this a long time ago when I filmed Mathieu Amalric in *My Sex Life*. I used the same surname again, which also evoked the maze of the narrative.

Admiration is the ability to come out of a film and feel enriched by it. When I was on the jury chaired by Quentin Tarantino at the Venice Film Festival in 2010, he would always ask us to start by praising the films we saw, even if it was only a brief detail. And we would all start with an exercise in admiration. If you know how to admire a film, you come out a winner. At the cinema, I love being affected by opinions. You have to consider them all, because everyone is equal, and that's what I like so much about it.

Paul Dédalus takes on many faces. The young actors who play him take the melancholy out of the story, as if recalling the spirited performances of the actors in *My Golden Days*.

All these faces are possibilities. Paul Dédalus is a delightfully common man. And each actor who comes to play him brings his own charm, mischief, singularity, seriousness, or lightness. In the café



sequence, Olga Milshtein is another possibility for Dédalus. In the sequence with the philosopher, Sandra Laugier, an appetite for life suddenly emerges. These young people want to show off to each other; they are alive! These young actors effused such joy while performing that it swept away anything that might have been nostalgic. Of course, I was thinking of the famous scene in *My Life to Live* when Godard films the philosopher Brice Parain in a café conversation with Anna Karina. As it happens, Godard decided to die just

as we were finishing the script for *Filmlover!* It was a very important moment in the history of cinema, and I don't think we've got the measure of it yet. But Godard's death left its mark on the whole project. Godard had made *Histoire(s) du Cinéma*, which meant a lot to me and from which I had to free myself. And yet he kept coming back at all the turning points in the film: *Baudelaire's journey*, *The Little Soldier*, and *First Name: Carmen*, where we hear Tom Waits' 'Ruby's Arms' at the end of *Filmlovers!*

That's what's so precious about films too: films are time, and we can hold on to that time that's slipping away and relive it. Yes, Godard and Lanzmann are dead, but how lucky I was to be their contemporary!

Mathieu Amalric makes an appearance as the 'filmmaker'.

Mathieu is a true filmmaker, more and more so. It was a way for me to invite him without offending his modesty, but I didn't know whether I was inviting the actor or the filmmaker. When Salif Cissé sees him, he doesn't know whether he's seeing the actor who starred in *James Bond* or the director of *Barbara*. I found this ambiguity exquisite, and as he is also Paul Dédalus, it formed a loop with the little boy at the beginning, especially as Louis Birman physically resembles Mathieu.

As in *My Golden Days*, you are reconstructing an era.

With set designer Toma Baquéni and costume designer Judith de Luze, we rediscovered the joy of making a period film together. It was very pleasant and romantic to set up the lobby of L'Arlequin cinema to bring back a crowd from the 1980s. It's a sensual, elegiac look at what we experienced.

It's a sign of the times, and perhaps also the fact that we survived the decline in audience numbers during Covid.

How did you work with cinematographer Noé Bach to create this iridescent image?

I wanted to work with a young cinematographer on this film. I'd found that, in Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet's *Anaïs in Love*, the lighting was as beautiful as the inventive camera movements. So, I suggested the film to Noé Bach. Noé came up with the idea of blowing a silver powder with glue at the bottom of the lenses, which created this iridescent effect.

The editing work on this film is substantial,





and the many extracts plunge the viewer into a state of intoxication at certain moments...

I first edited the film excerpts with Naïri Sarkis, an editor friend of Laurence Briaud's. Then, when Laurence was free, we continued the work, with cold sweats, because the question of the rights to these images was not an easy one. What was exhilarating to make were these cascades of images. The viewer had to be outpaced so as not to be able to catch every single quotation.

If cinema is a question, do you inhabit it better today?

Yes, I think so. With doubts. I still use lenses that are too long, and I'm always reproaching myself for it. In *Filmlovers!* I managed to shoot the sequences with the children with short lenses, to be closer to them, and I had the impression that I was learning how to make films.

In a physical cinema, I believe I can create thoughts and ideas, and engage in dialogue with directors, with actors and actresses on screen. I enjoy sharing films with spectators who have opposing views. So yes, as a spectator, I think I can inhabit the question of cinema. As a filmmaker, I'm not so sure! It is not for me to decide.

The film ends with you, from behind, filmed in a double doorway or window, uttering the words 'our enigma'. This film is the opposite of a testament: it opens up a perspective.

This film says just one thing: cinema is ours. That's why the word 'conversation,' which Stanley Cavell uses in several of his books, is so important: how do we share words? *A city of words* was Cavell's utopia. Today, it's so difficult to share words. Films—and this is the genius of cinema—are shared mechanically, because in the cinema we are all looking at a single point of view, the one recorded by the filmmaker. We share that point of view for the duration of the screening. And the marvel of it is that we can come out in total disagreement! But the conversation has begun. *Films matter*, Cavell also said. We talk about them, we discuss them, all as equals. The cinema is the most democratic place there is. It is an enigma that is given to us, that belongs to us, and that helps us to live better. ■

**Interview by Anne-Claire Cieutat,
Paris May 2024**

CREW

Screenplay **Arnaud DESPLECHIN** • Cinematography **Noé BACH** • Original score **Grégoire HETZEL** • Editing **Laurence BRIAUD** • Art direction and production design **Toma BAQUENI** • Costumes **Judith DE LUZE** • Casting **Lydie Le DOEUFF** • Sound **Antoine MERCIER, Sylvain MALBRANT, Emmanuel CROSET** • Assistant director **Guillaume BONNIER** • Line producer **Diane WEBER** • Post-production supervisor **Antonine GOSSELET MEURET** • A film produced by **Charles GILLIBERT** • Coproduced by **Eric NEBOT** • Associate producers **Romain BLONDEAU, Mélanie BIESSY** • A **CG Cinéma, Scala Films, Arte France Cinéma, Hill Valley** coproduction • With the participation of **Chanel, Arte France, Les Films du Losange** • In association with **Indéfilms 12** • With the support of **Ciné+, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Région Île-de-France, Pictanovo** • With the support of **Région Hauts-de-France** • In partnership with the **CNC** • French distribution and International sales **Les Films du Losange**

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CAST

In order of appearance

6-year-old Paul **Louis BIRMAN** • The painter **Dominique PAÏNI** • Barthes reader **Clément HERVIEU-LEGER** *de la Comédie Française* • The grandmother **Françoise LEBRUN** • The philosopher **Sandra LAUGIER** • Philosophy student **Olga MILSHTEIN** • 14-year-old **Paul Milo MACHADO-GRANER** • 22-year-old **Paul Sam CHEMOUL** Valérie **Marilou POUJARDIEU** • Sylvia **Salomé Rose STEIN** • Professor Censier **Micha LESCOT** • The philosopher **Shoshana FELMAN** • The American friend **Kent JONES** • 30-year-old **Salif CISSE** • The filmmaker **Mathieu AMALRIC**

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LIST OF MENTIONED FILMS

A Touch of Zen (1971)
King Hu

Aliens (1986)
James Cameron

Bathing in a Stream (1897)
Alice Guy

Bram Stoker's Dracula (1946)
Francis Ford Coppola

Broken Arrow (1996)
John Woo

Champs Elysées (1896)
Auguste & Louis Lumière

Cheyenne Autumn (1964)
John Ford

Chimes at Midnight (1965)
Orson Welles

Cliffhanger (1993)
de Renny Harlin

Come Drink With Me (1966)
King Hu

Coming Home (2014)
Zhang Yimou

Cries and Whispers (1972)
Ingmar Bergman

Daisies (1967)
Vera Chytilova

Day of Wrath (1943)
Carl Theodor Dreyer

Die Hard (1987)
John McTiernan

Europe '51 (1952)
Roberto Rossellini

Fantomas (1964)
André Hunebelle

**From the Branches Drops
the Withered Blossom** (1960)
Paul Meyer

Frozen River (2008)
de Courtney Hunt

Lola's Promise (1912)
D.W. Griffith

It Happened One Night (1934)
Frank Capra

Journey into Light (1951)
Stuart Heisler

Killer of Sheep (1977)
Charles Burnett

King Kong (1976)
John Guillermin

Man with a Movie Camera (1929)
Dziga Vertov

Minority Report (2002)
Steven Spielberg

Mouchette (1967)
Robert Bresson

Napoleon (1927)
Abel Gance

North by Northwest (1959)
Alfred Hitchcock

Notting Hill (1999)
Roger Michell

Only Angels Have Wings (1939)
Howard Hawks

Passage Through a Tunnel By Rail (1898)
Auguste & Louis Lumière

Peggy Sue Got Married (1986)
Francis Ford Coppola

Persona (1966)
Ingmar Bergman

Point Break (1991)
Kathryn Bigelow

Ran (1985)
Akira Kurosawa

Safety Last! (1923)
Fred C. Newmeyer

Samba Traore (1992)
Idrissa Ouedraogo

Shoah (1985)
Claude Lanzmann

Spellbound (1945)
Alfred Hitchcock

Sullivan's Travels (1941)
Preston Sturges

Terminator 2: Judgment Day (1991)
James Cameron

The 400 Blows (1959)
François Truffaut

The Age of Innocence (1993)
Martin Scorsese

The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (1896)
Auguste & Louis Lumière

The Battle of the Rail (1946)
René Clément

The Cotton Club (1984)
Francis Ford Coppola

The Deer Hunter (1978)
Michael Cimino

The Exiles (1961)
Kent MacKenzie

The Little Soldier (1963)
Jean-Luc Godard

The River (1951)
Jean Renoir

The Terrible Children (1950)
Jean-Pierre Melville

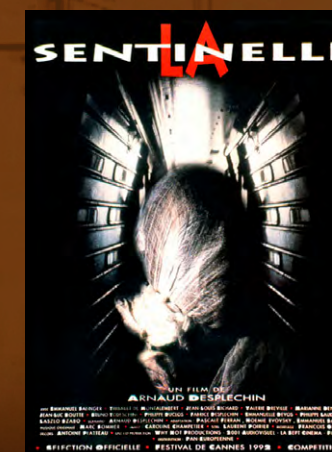
The Tiger of Eschnapur (1959)
Fritz Lang

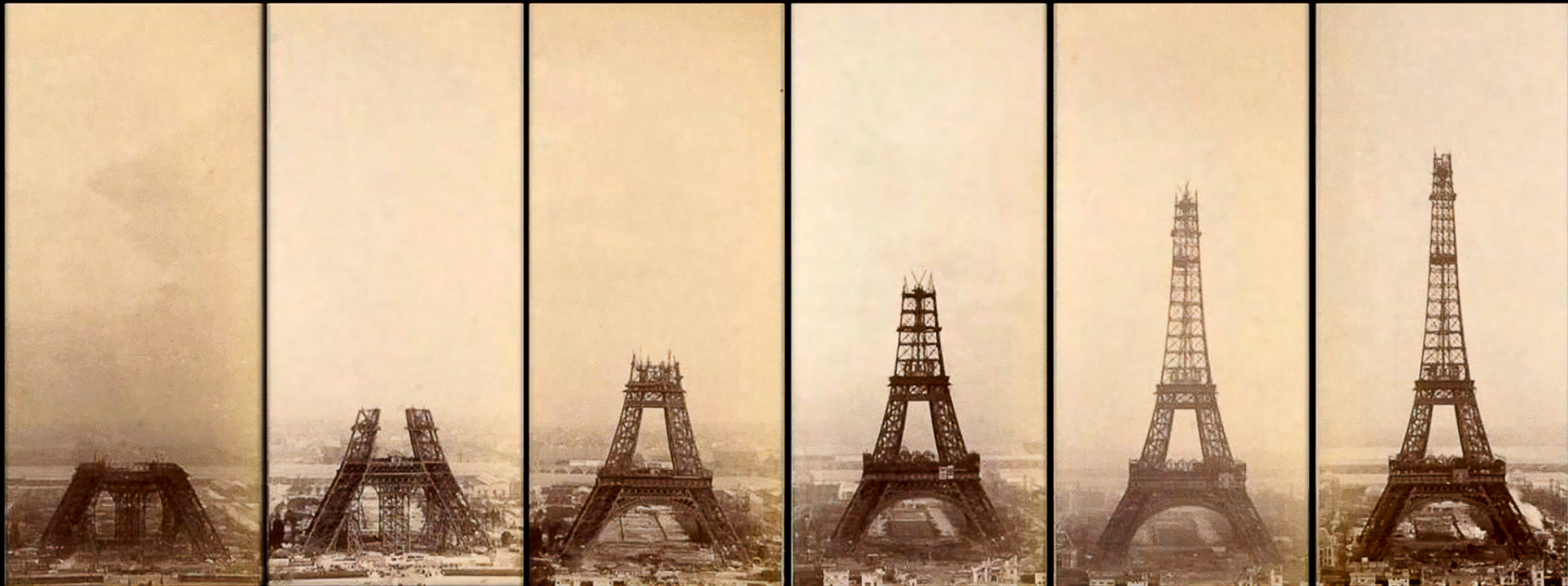
ARNAUD DESPLECHIN



2024 - **Filmlovers!** • 2022 - **Brother and Sister** • **In Therapy Season 2** (Arte) • 2021 - **Deception** • 2020 - **Angels in America** (Comédie française) • 2019 - **Oh Mercy!** • 2017 - **Ismael's Ghosts** • 2015 - **My Golden Days** Jacques Prévert Screenplay Prize / Lumière Prize for Best Director / Best Director Cesar Award • 2014 - **The Forest** (Arte TV Movie) • 2012 - **Jimmy P.** • 2008 - **A Christmas Tale** Best Supporting Actor Cesar Award for Jean-Paul Roussillon • 2007 - **The Beloved** (Documentary) Best Documentary Venice Film Festival 2007 • 2004 - **Kings & Queen** Best Actor Cesar Award for Mathieu Amalric / Louis Delluc Prize • 2003 - **Playing "In the Company of Men"** • 2000 - **Esther Kahn** • 1996 - **My Sex Life... or How I Got Into an Argument** Best Male Revelation Cesar Award for Mathieu Amalric • 1992 - **The Sentinel** Best Male Revelation Cesar Award for Emmanuel Salinger • 1991 - **Life of the Dead** (Short film) Grand Prix Angers Festival / Jean Vigo Prize

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www.filmsdulosange.com