



FOCUS ON: GASPAR NOÉ

I Stand Alone (*Seul contre tous*)

Seul contre tous is a feature-length follow-up to Gaspar Noé's acclaimed 1992 short *Carne*. In the earlier film the same unnamed central character, a dour butcher, brings up his possibly autistic daughter in a nightmarish world of blood, horsemeat, stunted relationships and frustrated sexual desire. With its disconcerting humming soundtrack, minimal dialogue and harshly drawn environment, *Carne* is directly indebted to David Lynch's *Eraserhead*, which Noé describes as 'the closest thing to a nightmare' he has seen on the screen.

Despite the success of *Carne*, which has been shown several times on French television and won Noé the support of a disparate group of luminaries after its screening at Cannes, the director had a hard time completing *Seul contre tous*, having been snubbed by France's official funding mechanisms and Canal Plus. This accounts for the five-year gap between the films. Noé lists his supporters in the end credits of *Seul contre tous*, who include the fashion designer Agnès B and Dario Argento. Agnès B lent Noé funds at the point when he had used his own money – from sales of *Carne* – to the point of bankruptcy. She is, says Noé, the saviour of his film.

Noé's experience of the insecurities surrounding *Seul contre tous* production history clearly added to his identification with his middle-aged hero: on one level the film is a feverish nightmare dreamed by and for precarious inhabitants of the flexible marketplace, in which the film industry is but one of many. But it is far more than this. The movie recaps, at the start, the butcher's journey into penury after going to prison and losing his shop. He lives despairingly with his pregnant ex-bar-owner girlfriend, for whom he has nothing but loathing, in her elderly mother's flat, which he finds disgusting and unhygienic. The butcher hates old people, but then he hates everybody and everything apart from the impossible memory of a father he never knew, a communist resistance hero who was murdered in the death camps. The butcher gets a job in a rest home for the elderly, impassively helps a young female nurse when a resident dies, and is seen by a nosy neighbour walking the distressed young woman home. He visits a porn cinema where his misanthropic disgust finds a corollary in the humanity reduced to bodily functions on the screen ('the people who do that know the meaning of our species,' his inner voice rails). When his mistress begins a grotesque argument, accusing him of infidelity, the butcher explodes, punching her repeatedly in the stomach to kill the baby. Taking the old woman's gun containing three bullets, and with a dwindling 300 francs between himself and destitution, he hitches a ride to Paris where his misanthropy reaches fever pitch.

Seul contre tous is a dark, uncompromising feelbad masterpiece, which could appropriately have been called *Hate* had not Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine* got there first. It is tempting to see in it the seething underbelly of the French heritage movie which largely defined that national cinema for foreign audiences before *La Haine*. But this would miss the point. Noé is both scathing and dismissive about what he described to me as, 'the huge family of soft bourgeois French cinema'. His film instead emerges from his enthusiasm for a body of powerful movies from the US and UK – including *Straw Dogs*, *Taxi Driver* and Alan Clarke's *Scum* – which uncomfortably implicate the spectator in hermetic

microcosms of misanthropy. Noé is devoted to these films as high points of the cinema of confrontation, and is of a generation that shares the current nostalgia for a time when transgression seemed to matter.

I would suggest that this is not because these films play with assumed cinematic norms of propriety but because they disregard audience comfort and can be appreciated as undiluted expressions of the creative delirium of their making. Unlike François Ozon, Noé is sceptical about cinema's power to shock. Reality is too shocking for that – movies, no matter what the Dogme movement claims, are just illusion. Noé says he has rarely been shocked by cinema – but was when a lightweight French television comedy show invited National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen on to crack jokes. But he does know the power of the feigned outrage the tabloids and institutions of censorship periodically invoke to represent the fears and anxieties of, largely, non-cinemagoers. Noé claims to have wanted his film banned at least somewhere to prove its confrontational power. Instead, as *Seul contre tous* awaits its 16 certificate in France, a film he had expected to alienate 90 per cent of its audience and draw flak from feminist groups, gay groups, anti-racist campaigners and conservatives has been lavishly praised by the press, communist and conservative alike. Maybe he takes some comfort from the fact that exhibitors in Paris have refused to show it because they are afraid, he says, of sharing his point of view.

The point of view at stake, though, is the butcher's, to whom France is a country of 'cheese- and Nazi-lovers' (Noé illustrates this with a photograph of Petain shaking hands with Hitler); of 'nigger faggots' (like a bar owner's son who is probably neither from an ethnic minority nor gay); and of 'faggots in suits' (like the abattoir owner who makes him fill out an application form knowing he is not going to give him work). Noé unsettles us with unexpected zooms accompanied by non-diegetic gunshots, with bold captions bearing the legends 'Morality', 'Justice' or 'Faggot'. But his central technique is continuously to expose us to the butcher's hate-filled interior monologue in voice-over. It is this verbal *tour de force* that reminds French reviewers of the rabidly deep pessimism, grotesque black humour and liberating linguistic intoxication of controversial novelist Céline. Some of this verbal feverishness is necessarily sacrificed in the subtitling, and Noé apparently spent much time with the translator trying to devise an English equivalent of the singular mix of homophobia and racism in the phrase '*encule de ta race*' (Noé's solution – 'you buttfuck race' – was deemed clumsy).

Noé's butcher is stripped down to his basic needs – food, shelter, sex – and looking as though he will be denied even these, he tries to embrace nihilism as an absolute truth that will guide him to a reason for living for another 20 years. The exaggeration of his truly miserable experience in a world of uncompromising harshness where 'each man makes his own morality' permeates Noé's movie. Noé claims it is a funny film – and indeed there is pitch-black comedy. It is embedded partly in discomfiting truths about men and violence which cinema has done more than any other medium to obscure. And there is humour – and not a little fear too – in the moment when a caption appears telling us we have '30 seconds to leave the cinema'. It counts down for us, knowing we will stay put, that in the darkness of the cinema, unlike in life, we are unshockable. It is, says Noé, a joke – but what follows is no fun at all. It tests any belief we may have in the possibility of redemption, the existence of love and our own humanity as well as our nostalgia for, and acceptance of, a cinema of transgression to some kind of limit. For now.

Richard Falcon, *Sight and Sound*, January 1999

I STAND ALONE (SEUL CONTRE TOUS)

Director: Gaspar Noé
Production Company: Les Cinémas de la Zone
With the participation of: Love Streams Productions, Canal+, CNC - Centre national de la cinématographie
And the financial support of: Procirep
Producer: Gaspar Noé
Unit Production Manager: Alain Lefebvre
Unit Production Managers (2nd Unit): Pascale Servoz-Gavin, Cécile Fournier, Jeremie Nicoli
Collaborators: Dominique Delany, Francis Doré, Nicolas Worms, Henri Moisan, Patrick Bideault, Philippe Bonometti, Gilles Sebbah
Collaboration: Laurent Tuel
Assistant Director: Stéphane Derderian
2nd Assistant Director: Dominique Delany *
CASTING: Francis Doré *
Screenplay: Gaspar Noé
Script Collaborator: Lucile Hadzihalilovic
Director of Photography: Dominique Colin
Camera Operator: Gaspar Noé
Assistant Camera: Antoine Rabaté
Stills Photography: Bertrand Etienne
Special Effects: Jean-Christophe Spadaccini, Julien Poncet De La Grave
Graphics: Denis Esnault, Ernest Evrard
Editors: Lucile Hadzihalilovic, Gaspar Noé
Property Master: Henri Moisan *
Titles Design: Olivier Brunet, Tanguy Lefevre
Titles/Opticals: Arane
Colour Timer: Pascal Massonneau
Sound Recording: Olivier Le Vacon
Sound Recording (2nd Unit): Jean-Luc Audy, Frédéric Pfohl
Re-recording: DCA
Mixage: Olivier Dô Húu
Sound Editor: Valérie Deloof
Sound Effects: Nicolas Becker, Jean-Noël Yven
Laboratory: Telcipro
Dedicated to...: Luis Felipe Noé
Dolby Sound Consultant: Francis Pérreard

Cast

Philippe Nahon (*Jean Chevalier, the butcher*)
Blandine Lenoir (*Cynthia, his daughter*)
Frankye Pain (*his mistress*)
Martine Audrain (*mother-in-law*)
Zaven (*moralistic man*)
Jean-François Rauger (*estate agent*)
Guillaume Nicloux (*supermarket manager*)
Olivier Doran (*voice of presenter*)
Aïssa Djabri (*Doctor Choukroun*)
Serge Faurie (*nursing home manager*)
Frédéric Pfohl (*male hospice nurse*)
Stéphanie Sec (*female hospice nurse*)
Arlette Balkis (*dying woman*)
Gil Bertharion Jr (*truck driver*)
Rado (*hotel caretaker*)
Nicolas Jouhet (*café owner*)
Ahmed Bounacir (*café customer*)
Roland Gueridon (*old friend*)
Hervé Gueridon (*2nd friend*)
Sophie Nicolle (*interim's daughter*)
Paule Abecassis (*drug addict*)
Marie-Madeleine Denecheau (*Roland's wife*)
Robert Roy (*4th friend*)
Joel Lecullée (*1st butcher*)
Denis Falgoux (*2nd butcher*)
Marc Faure (*abattoir director*)
Gérard Ortega (*bar owner*)
Stéphane Derderian (*bar owner's son*)
Alain Pierre (*bar owner's friend*)
Sylvie Raymond (*nurse*)
Robert Schlockoff, Thierry Tronchet, André Brochenin, Elisabeth Weissman, Paulette Charpentier, Manu, Tami, Laurent Aknin, Roger Daviot
Monsieur Billot (*3rd butcher*)
Tateos Derderian
Jean-Max Causse

France 1998©
93 mins

* Uncredited

35mm print courtesy of the Sundance Collection
at the UCLA Film & Television Archive

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I Stand Alone (Seul contre tous)

Sun 1 May 18:10; Fri 20 May 20:40

Irreversible: The Straight Cut (Irréversible)

Mon 2 May 18:30

Enter the Void

Sun 8 May 14:30; Sat 21 May 20:00

Love (3D)

Sun 8 May 18:15; Mon 23 May 20:20

Gaspar Noé in Conversation

Tue 10 May 21:00

Gaspar Noé's Mixtape + Q&A with Gaspar Noé

Thu 12 May 18:00

Lux Æterna

Fri 20 May 18:40; Mon 23 May 18:40

Climax

Fri 27 May 18:15; Mon 30 May 20:50 + extended intro by season programmer Anna Bogutskaya

NEW & RE-RELEASES

Croupier

From Wed 4 May

Vampyr

Thu 5 May Preview 18:15; Mon 23 May 14:00 Seniors' Matinee + discussion

From Fri 20 May

Cabaret

From Fri 6 May

Vortex

Tue 10 May 18:00 Preview + intro by Gaspar Noé

From Fri 13 May

Get Carter + The Frighteners: The Manipulators

Mon 30 May 18:00 + intro by Douglas Weir, BFI Technical Delivery Manager

From Fri 27 May

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