



MAGGIE CHEUNG: FILMS OF ROMANCE, MELANCHOLY AND MAGIC

Clean

Clean

Director: Olivier Assayas

©/Presented by: Rectangle Productions, Leap Films, 1551264 Ontario Inc., Arte France Cinéma

Co-production: Haystack Productions, Rhombus Media

In association with: Canal+, CNC - Centre national de la cinématographie, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Téléfilm Canada, The Film Consortium, UK Film Council, The Works International, Matrix Film Finances

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In association with: TMN - The Movie Network, Astral Media

Executive Producer (The Works): Aline Perry

Executive Producer (Matrix Film Finance):

Rupert Preston

Produced by: Edouard Weil, Niv Fichman, Xavier Marchand

Co-producers: Nathalie Choukroun Lacoste, Jane Moore, Daniel Iron

Line Producers: Frédéric Sauvagnac, Sari Friedland

Line Producer (UK Crew): Jo Farr

Line Producer (San Francisco Crew): Ellen Lent

Associate Producers: Forensic Films, Elizabeth II

The Film Consortium: Chris Auty, Neil Peplow, Andy Ordenez

Production Co-ordinator (French Crew):

Clémentine Harland

Production Co-ordinator (Canadian Crew):

Nadia Day

Production Accountants (French Crew):

Philippe Levy, Johanne Bernard

Production Accountant (Canadian Crew):

Daniel Horvat

Location Scouting (French Crew):

Emmanuel Roussille, Manuel Pouet, Nathalie Bezon

Locations (Canadian Crew): Sherry Wolfson,

Elizabeth Parker, Gordon Brooks, Charles Wilkinson

Locations (San Francisco Crew): Dan Kemp

Locations (UK Crew): Chris Morgan

Post-production Co-ordinator (French Crew):

Mélanie Karlin

1st Assistant Director: Matthew Gledhill

Casting: Antoinette Boulat, Shaheen Baig,

John Buchan, Millie Tom

Written by: Olivier Assayas

English Script Adaptation: Andrew Litvak,

Don McKellar

Director of Photography: Éric Gautier

B Camera Operator (French Crew):

Jean-Charles Cameau

Special Effects: Arane, Mikros Image

Editor: Luc Barnier

Production Designers: François-Renaud Labarthe,

Bill Fleming

Property Master (French Crew): Yvon Moreno

Construction Manager (French Crew): Vincent Amiel

Costume Designer: Anaïs Romand

Key Make-up: Thi-Loan Nguyen

Key Hair: Franck-Pascal Alquinet, Debra Johnson

Credits: Arane, Mikros Image

Laboratory: Deluxe Laboratory Ltd

Sound Design: Daniel Sobrino, Roman Dymny,

Nicolas Moreau

Sound Recording: Guillaume Sciama,

Richard Flynn, Herwig Gayer

Stunt Co-ordinator (Canadian Crew):

John Stoneham Jr

Special Thanks to: Robin O'Hara, Scott Macauley,

Michèle Grignon, Kerry Barden, Marty Gross

Olivier Assayas on 'Clean'

Was it very different writing about a character for Maggie to play as opposed to writing about her 'as' herself in Irma Vep?

For *Irma Vep* I was using the obvious images I had of her – I'd only met her a couple of times. It was really Maggie as 'Maggie Cheung the Hong Kong cinema superstar'. So it was about the fantasies you build on the surface of movie stars. But after *Irma Vep* I felt I owed it to her to make a film about her real self. She told me she was getting all the credit for *Irma Vep*, when really it was her co-star Nathalie Richard who should have got the praise, because what she was doing was so much more lively and complex. In many ways I agreed, because the humanity of Nathalie's character is ultimately what makes the film.

Somehow I always felt I owed it to Maggie to give her a part that would use her deeper, more human side. But it's difficult, because she's a very complex character and can only be in very specific parts because of the strange mix of cultures she is. In *Clean* what I was interested in was the geographic and cultural fragmentation of this individual. Emily is like Maggie in that she's all over the place – part Chinese, part British, part French; she's part of a globalised culture, a story happening on two different continents, in four different cities. And I realised that if I wanted to put all these things together, I'd need something as simple as it gets in terms of a story arc.

You say in your press notes that you wanted a project where Maggie wasn't seen as a Chinese woman in a western film. But if it hadn't been for Maggie, would Emily still have been Chinese?

No, though the fact that Emily happened to be Chinese made her more interesting, less conventional. And the reason for the simplicity of the story is the complexity of Emily – if she's less complex, the simplicity of the storyline becomes a little thin.

The scenes where she descends from the fantasy world of rock aristocracy to work as a waitress for her uncle play poignantly on Chinese notions of status.

Like all modern Chinese, Emily becomes herself by cutting off her ties to traditional thinking and the values of the family, which can be extremely tough, especially for women. I always had the idea that the lowest Emily can go is to be reabsorbed by her community in the most limiting way.

Both Clean and Irma Vep are about deglamorising – about a character stepping down from the gods. In Irma Vep Maggie arrives in Paris and she's just sitting in an office somewhere in a different world. It's very much at odds with the glamour of the Hong Kong movie goddess.

To me in *Irma Vep* she never loses that glamour because even if you put her in an office or a back alley her character is always gracious – she has an aura. In *Clean* it's more about someone who has let herself become a rock 'n' roll stereotype and in the process has forgotten who she really is. The arc of the film is about what happens when the bubble bursts.

People ask me if I was inspired by someone like Courtney Love or Yoko Ono, and I say no – I'm not inspired by them, though the character herself is. She

Cast:

Maggie Cheung (*Emily Wang*)
Nick Nolte (*Albrecht Hauser*)
Jeanne Balibar (*Irène Paolini*)
Don McKellar (*Vernon*)
Martha Henry (*Rosemary Hauser*)
James Johnston (*Lee Hauser*)
James Dennis (*Jay*)
Rémi Martin (*Jean-Pierre*)
Lætitia Spigaerelli (*Sandrine*)
Béatrice Dalle (*Elena*)
Arnaud Churin (*store manager*)
Cheung Man Kit (*restaurant owner*)
Kurtys Kidd (*detective*)
Shaun Austin-Olsen (*record label owner*)
Jodi Crawford (*Gloria*)
Ross McKie (*Vancouver police 1*)
Calum Dehartog (*Vancouver police 2*)
Clare-Marie Grigg (*cafeteria nurse*)
Paul Brogren (*motel clerk*)
X-Ray (*X-ray*)
Joana Preiss (*Aline*)
David Salsedo (*Jeff*)
Mike Hoong (*waiter in restaurant*)
Régis Vidal (*Alexis*)
Jürgen Doering (*Irène Paolini's fan*)
Shaun Matheson (*police officer 1*)
John Stoneham Jr (*police officer 2*)
Michelle Palmateer (*Avis agent*)
Paraskevi Antonarakis (*manager of diner*)
Shannon Novak (*record label employee*)
Tricky, David Roback, Liz Densmore, Metric,
Emily Haines, James Shaw, Josh Winstead,
Joules Scott-Key (*themselves*)
France-UK-Canada 2004©
111 mins
35mm

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has at the back of her mind the stereotype of the woman who is a terrible influence on her artist/musician boyfriend and ends up trapped in that part.

But Emily's character gradually comes to light – not just to us but to herself. When she begins to reconstruct herself she starts from scratch; it's like someone trying to walk in the dark. For me it's not about getting her son back or getting off drugs, it's simply about understanding who she is again.

Clean strikes me as one of the few films about rock to deal convincingly with its deep-down mundanity – another example being Paul Schrader's Light of Day.

I like *Light of Day*. I thought Joan Jett was great in it. I was a little intimidated when I realised I'd have to deal with that sort of indie-rock background: it's very difficult, and no one gets it right. I thought the only way to do it was to use real musicians, have people play their characters – they're not stars, they're just people who are famous within their own world.

I kept on using them as consultants. I kept asking James Johnston, 'Would you do this, is this believable?', or I'd ask David Roback, 'Would you put the mike there, where would you be sitting?', or I'd ask Tricky, 'Who would you speak to, who would you not speak to, do you sit on your own in your car, what sort of people are around you?' I tried to put them in an ambience they would recognise and accept as totally believable. If you get one detail wrong, it's the one thing that will stand out and make you look like a fool. It's not cool.

What's surprising is how much you leave out – despite the title, you make very little of the painful process of Emily coming off smack.

I don't want to dramatise drugs and I don't want to dramatise getting off drugs. For me the painful part is not what you usually see in film, where people are raving mad and hitting their head on the wall because they're in pain from withdrawal. For me the issue of getting off drugs is more about dealing with the inner pain of being yourself. People don't take drugs for fun, but because they need them, because there's something within themselves they can't deal with. So when you get off drugs you have to face the same problems that made you a junkie in the first place. The physical issue of withdrawal has been shown a million times in films and I don't think it's interesting.

There's a wonderful incongruity in the cast list – seeing Maggie Cheung, Nick Nolte, Beatrice Dalle and Don McKellar credited together really makes you wonder what sort of film you're going to see.

I've always been excited by the short-circuit you create by putting together people who are not supposed to meet. Like when I was doing *Paris s'éveille* (1991) I was excited by the notion of having Jean-Pierre Léaud and John Cale on the same credits list – having John Cale score a Parisian film about kids. *Irma Vep* was my first shot at expanding that policy. The premise was, 'Maggie Cheung comes to Paris and meets Jean-Pierre Léaud, what do they have to say to each other?'

Interview by Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, July 2005