



CHANTAL AKERMAN: ADVENTURES IN PERCEPTION

La Captive

La Captive (The Captive)

Director: Chantal Akerman

©/Production Companies: Gémini Films,
Arte France Cinéma

Production Company: Paradise Films

With the participation of: Canal+,

Centre national de la cinématographie, Gimages 3

Producer: Paulo Branco

In Charge of Production: Elisabeth Bocquet

Production Manager: Antoine Beau

Unit Production Manager: Guillaume Roitfeld

Unit Manager: Antoine Moussault

Production Unit Manager: Hacéne Belkhedra

Location Manager: Thierry Golitin

Pre/Post-production Supervisors:

Elisabeth Bocquet, Marielle Duigou, Marilyn Watelet

1st Assistant Director: Paolo Trotta

2nd Assistant Directors: Renaud Gonzalez,

Michèle Massé

Script Supervisor: Agathe Sallaberry

Casting Director: Richard Rousseau

Casting: Marion Touitou

Screenplay: Chantal Akerman, Eric de Kuyper

Inspired by 'La Prisonnière' by: Marcel Proust

Director of Photography: Sabine Lancelin

Editor: Claire Atherton

Art Director: Christian Marti

Set Decorator: Janou Shammass

Costume Designer: Nathalie du Roscoät

Costumer: Claire Gérard-Hirne

Wardrobe: Christian Castandert

Key Make-up: Annouchka

Hairdressers: Pierre Chavialle, Gérald Portenart

Titles/Opticals: Arane

Sound: Thierry de Halleux

Mixer: Stéphane Thiébaud

Studio Recordist: Éric Ferret

Supervising Sound Editor: Catherine de Loof

Sound Effects: Nicolas Becker

Stunts: Catherine Robert, Stéphane Boulay

Cast:

Stanislas Merhar (*Simon*)

Sylvie Testud (*Ariane*)

Olivia Bonamy (*Andrée*)

Liliane Rovère (*Françoise*)

Françoise Bertin (*grandmother*)

Aurore Clément (*Léa*)

Vanessa Larré (*Hélène*)

Samuel Tassinaje (*Levy*)

Jean Borodine (*chauffeur*)

Anna Mougllis (*Isabelle*)

Bérénice Béjo (*Sarah*)

Adeline Chaudron (*prostitute in the woods*)

Sophie Assante (*singing woman*)

Christopher Gendreau (*bellboy*)

Sébastien Haddouk, Xavier Morange (*painters*)

Stanislas Januskiewicz (*maître d'hotel*)

Laurence Guillet (*receptionist*)

Pascal Erizabal (*hotel porter*)

Claude Hermann (*voice on radio*)

Caroline Roucoule, Gersende Dufromontel,

Elodie Marteau-Laurent, Karine Demilo,

Pia Vuorinen, A-Sophie Morillon (*young girls*)

France-Belgium 2000©

118 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

A contemporary review

La Captive is a film like no other currently on London's screens, but if the director's name, Chantal Akerman, puts you in mind of an avant-garde, confrontationally feminist cinema from the past, you'd be wrong this time. Similarly, if the fact that *La Captive* is another Proust adaptation made in the wake of Raul Ruiz's magisterial *Le Temps retrouvé* with the same producer, Paulo Branco, prompts you to expect more Visconti-like opulence and moving scenery, such preconceptions should be banished. *La Captive* does explore territory that once nourished many auteurs – the very borders between sexual obsession, dream logic and madness where Hitchcock and Buñuel plied their trade but it now seems Akerman's alone.

All the autobiography and deconstruction we've come to expect of Akerman since her 1975 breakthrough feature *Jeanne Dielman 23, Quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* are here subsumed to the cause of creating a truly cinematic world of allure, distraction and unknowing. And it may match a new mood in the director herself: 'I forget how difficult I used to be. I see some people in the industry and I say hello and they ignore me because they still remember I was obnoxious 20 years ago.'

La Captive adapts the section of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* titled *La Prisonnière*, in which Proust's well-born narrator Marcel describes his tortuous relationship with his live-in mistress Albertine. To himself Marcel professes his indifference to his mistress, but outwardly he behaves with extreme jealous possessiveness. The obsessive lover in Akerman's film is Simon, a very rich young man of the present day. He not only uses a mutual female friend Andrée to spy on and chaperone his girlfriend Ariane, he himself follows Ariane like a stalker. His jealousy of Ariane's female friends (some of whom are almost certainly her lovers) is more pronounced than in Proust. Simon wants to know not just 'what goes on' between women, but what they're thinking, and the unattainability of his girlfriend's mind is compounded only by the unattainability of the lesbian worldview.

La Captive opens with amateur film footage of the Normandy-beach frolics of Ariane, Andrée and several other women on holiday together, who all display a communal air of closed-off intimacy, a collective Gioconda smile. At one moment Ariane, a wiry, freckled presence, looks directly at the camera as if challenging the audience to discover who she is. Then we find out that the silent amateur film is being projected by Simon, and that he's trying to lip-read what Ariane is saying as she stands next to Andrée. 'I like you very much,' is his conclusion. Cut to Ariane in a summer dress and high heels striding confidently through a near-deserted Place Vendôme in Paris. She's being watched as she gets into her open-top Mercedes by Simon, in the driving seat of his Rolls. As we see her move off from Simon's viewpoint and the Rolls follows behind, the shooting style reminds us irresistibly of police detective Scottie Ferguson (James Stewart) tailing Madeleine Elster (Kim Novak – whose character is undoubtedly named with Proust in mind) through the streets of San Francisco in *Vertigo*, especially as the orchestral music swells: a doom-laden, watery piece by Rachmaninov, *The Isle of the Dead*, that's highly reminiscent of Hitchcock composer Bernard Herrmann. Soon Simon is

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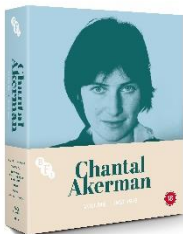
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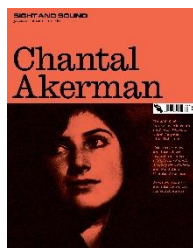
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Chantal Akerman**

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following Ariane at a distance as she climbs one of the steep stairways of Montmartre. The click-clack of her determined progress is in stark contrast with Simon's entranced silence – he seems to glide with his arms fixed at his sides, like a Magritte figure floating through a De Chirico Paris. But when he reaches the hotel he's seen Ariane enter and the receptionist tells him she's booked a room for her aunt, not for herself, we're thrown into another surrealist's arms – those of Buñuel and his discreetly charming but bewildered bourgeoisie.

It would be all too easy to over-emphasise the myriad influences here, which amount to nothing more than a drinking in of cinema on Akerman's part. What's completely unique is *La Captive's* extraordinary sense of time. As Ariane explores an art museum under Simon's gaze, the tension is excruciating. Ariane's heels clomp on the wooden floorboards as she strides through the exhibits, seemingly in real time, while Simon's slower steps only make the floor groan and creak. The elastic time frame of this ridiculous bout of hide-and-seek is typically dreamlike. It's clear Ariane must know what Simon gets up to and it may be part of the game they play in which sex can occur only after he's pretended to do something else and she's fallen asleep. You could widen that out and suggest that his suspicions of her lesbianism are equally part of their rituals and that without them the obsession would disappear.

You can read it either way, especially as Akerman makes sure her film always puts us in Simon's position. Though he's a shit who behaves as if he owns Ariane – in one scene he even drags her away from an opera-house reception without the slightest nod towards social niceties – the women do all seem as if they're lying to him. Andrée – his supposed confidante and Ariane's chaperone – is also number-one suspect as Ariane's lover (while Simon dry-humps her sleeping form, Ariane calls out Andrée's name). These dualities all contribute to the feeling of a work of pure cinema, one that doesn't give up its meanings in the first reel, or even at the first screening. In portraying the enigma of woman from a man's point of view, Akerman successfully reveals the real enigma of the unknowability of any human being to another. And of course Simon, with his obsession and his pollen allergies (which seem analogous to post-coital disgust), is as much of a captive of his own imagination as Ariane.

Nick James, *Sight and Sound*, May 2001

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