

Les Films **SÉVILLE** Pictures

Presents

WEST OF PLUTO

A FILM BY
HENRY BERNADET AND MYRIAM VERREAULT

OFFICIAL SELECTION - FESTIVAL DU NOUVEAU CINÉMA 2008

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

This ensemble piece blends humour and drama as it follows the stories of ten suburban teens over a 24-hour period. With a cast of 15- and 16-year-olds, *À l'ouest de Pluton*'s gripping realism cuts to the heart of adolescence, the bewildering and intense time of life when people struggle to learn to relate to others.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Pluto lost its status as a planet in 2006. It is no longer the solar system's ninth and last planet, a fact that Pierre-Olivier finds deeply upsetting. Jérôme wants to declare his feelings to the girl he loves, Nicolas and Steve are trying to come up with the perfect name for their punk band, Émilie throws a successful party in spite of herself... It's a more or less normal day in this little corner of the planet. With a cast of 15- and 16-year-olds, *À l'ouest de Pluton* follows the lives of ten suburban teens over a 24-hour period. This ensemble film, combining humour and drama, reveals their concerns and their ways of seeing the world. With gripping realism, the film cuts to the heart of adolescence – the intense, fascinating time of life when people struggle to relate with others and try to make sense of the absurdity of daily life.

DIRECTORS' NOTES

The concept

For a long time, we wanted to make a film about this tumultuous and fascinating time of life. Our aim was not to explain adolescence using adult professional actors, but to immerse ourselves in the world of teens with as much realism as possible, from treatment to content.

First love, the first real “drunk,” first sex, the first real argument with your mother, your first betrayal by a best friend... We wanted to capture that exhilarating yet cruel time through the eyes of today’s teens. Who are they? What do they think about this world where they live? We wanted both to create a portrait of this group of young people and reveal their reality, while also paying tribute to the strange, intense phase that is adolescence. Through a fictional story that takes advantage of all the freedoms of documentary filmmaking, the film brings together our gaze and their lives, our imagination and their world.

We also wanted the film to explore how every person has to relate to others and seek self-affirmation in others’ eyes. They want to assert their uniqueness but blend into the crowd; they feel invisible yet are thoroughly vulnerable: in our view adolescent characters are rich and complex beings because they are constantly searching for their identity and for a meaning they can call their own.

The approach

Having gone through our own adolescence in a suburb of Quebec City, we decided to recruit our cast and make the film in Loretteville, a thoroughly ordinary suburb. After holding auditions in a high school, we assembled a group of about 15 people aged 14 and 15. For over six months, we met with them weekly to prepare them to play the lead roles in our film. Using improv scenarios both closely and distantly related to their lives, and holding many discussions about their lives and worldviews, we got to know them and gradually fleshed out each of the characters on the foundation provided by the teens’ real personalities. Even though we wrote the film’s script, we drew inspiration from their improvisations and our discussions, which became means of including authentic elements of their reality in the various scenes.

We chose to work with these young people over a relatively long time partly because their humour and intelligence drew us in, and because we were blown away by the spontaneity of their acting and their talent for natural improvisation. Working with these teens was highly beneficial, because they immediately understood that they were actors with creative input, whose imagination and lively spirits were to be

integral to the film. The script for *À l'ouest de Pluton* was therefore built out of both scenes written beforehand and scenes in which the actors improvised during filming. Because we wanted to achieve the greatest possible realism, the actors, while directed consistently with our vision of the film, were also constantly encouraged to deliver their lines in their own words and in their own voices. Several times during filming, these “amateur” actors succeeded in delivering performances of stunning authenticity and sincerity.

Treatment

À l'ouest de Pluton is a marriage of hyperrealism and dreamscapes. Throughout the film, the two visual approaches alternate and intersect, respond to and complement each other. The raw world of teen life blurs with the strange poetry of the suburbs in the fall, tying together the disparate threads of the story and lifting the veil on the young protagonists' inner lives.

Hyperrealism

The film's hyper-realistic scenes employ a documentary-style treatment. The camera that follows the teens going about their daily lives, with their discussions and confrontations, is anchored in reality. Techniques borrowed from documentary filmmaking were used to reinforce the teens' natural acting. Realistic, minimal lighting was used in most cases, along with a wide-angle lens and a handheld camera very sensitive to motion. These choices allowed us to capture the young people's reality with the greatest possible authenticity. During filming, we followed a strict rule: the camera must follow the actor, not the other way around. The camera becomes a sort of sponge whose frame is sensitive to the actors' performance while following the action as closely and fluidly as possible.

On the subject of sound capture, we often hid microphones on the set to give the actors as much freedom of movement as possible while keeping the crew at the greatest distance possible. This approach helped prevent the young actors from being distracted by the mechanics of making the film. The actors' freedom and the importance of providing the room to improvise at any time were central to the technical approach to shooting the hyper-realistic scenes. We are particularly fond of films in which technique helps spark improvisation and the actor works with the fewest constraints possible.

Dreamscapes

The documentary-like approach is accompanied by an entirely different treatment. A very stable, often stationary camera is used for certain scenes that are infused with a dreamlike, poetic dimension. Slow travelling shots of the suburbs by day, shots of a young boy intent on smashing a sheet of styrofoam in the wind, deserted suburban streets at night, traffic lights changing in a mesmerizing ballet, the moon rising behind the trees, a dog violently attacking a tree and mangling its trunk with its teeth: all of these sequences give the film a contemplative character. Visually, these scenes are intensified with their

minimalism and transfixing slowness both within the frame and through the camera movements that constitute them. While they help spark viewers' imagination by forcing them to surrender to the stark, surreal qualities of the imagery, these scenes also serve to illustrate the depth hidden behind the static, unchanging face of the suburbs. The dreamscapes in *À l'ouest de Pluton* express part of the characters' unspoken inner life and suggest a poetic vision of their solitude and inner turmoil. Despite their desire to belong to a group and constant efforts to define themselves in relation to others, the main characters are, though they try not always show it, consumed with their own solitude and individual questioning. As the film progresses, the characters who find themselves alone, who must confront themselves, are one by one brought into the film's dreamscape mode. For example, this is the case when Paluche, who to all appearances is self-assured and invincible when in a group, is seen crying as he walks down a deserted street at night. In that sequence he is filmed in a slow travelling shot at a very wide angle, exposing his solitude and his vulnerability to the world around him.

The suburbs, the world...

The suburbs are an essential unifying element in the film. They are both a prison and a playground for teens, and often filmed in very wide shots that convey their overwhelming presence. The suburbs are presented as a mysterious – and living – setting. A little girl running with a doll at dusk, a series of street lights suddenly coming on, teens invading the clean, wide streets as though they own them... Our goal was not, as is so often the case, to capture the kitschy side of the suburbs but to reveal this environment as the witness to the lives and human dramas that unfold there. We wanted to convey the earthy side of the suburban landscape. All the characters in the film are therefore connected by the fact that their destinies collide and intertwine in the same small suburb, the same corner of the country, the same bit of planet... somewhere west of Pluto.

...and Pluto

For years after its discovery by Clyde Tombaugh in 1930, Pluto was considered the ninth planet in the solar system. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, increasing numbers of similar objects were discovered. The mounting body of evidence led the International Astronomical Union to revise the definition of a planet. In August 2006, much to the chagrin of Pierre-Olivier, who has a particular fascination with this celestial body, Pluto had its planetary status revoked. Since then, it has been considered a minor solar system object, numbered 134340.

No space probe has ever visited Pluto. The New Horizons probe, launched by NASA in January 2006, is scheduled to make a flyby in the summer of 2015, after travelling 6.4 billion kilometres to get there.

We found resonance in the idea of drawing a parallel between adolescence and this distant, mysterious body with an unstable identity.

Micro-budget

Because we had to begin production quickly, before our actors could age too much, we initially did not seek government assistance, instead investing about \$15,000 of our own funds to make the film. The filming was done in collaboration with Spirafilm, the Quebec City-based independent filmmakers' cooperative. After viewing sample footage, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, the Canada Council for the Arts, Telefilm Canada and SODEC all contributed support for post-production.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

HENRY BERNADET

Producer, writer and director

Henry Bernadet holds a DEC in television production from Cégep de Jonquière and a bachelor's degree in film production from Concordia University. After winning the *Vidéaste Recherché-e* competition for his first film, he made 20 shorts, mainly comedies, seen in festivals in Canada and around the world. Henry has also directed about 100 profiles and reports for television (Radio-Canada, RDI) and websites. His video work for the stage play *Téléroman*, by Larry Tremblay, earned him a nomination from the *Gala des Masques*. In 2007, he was nominated for a Géméaux for best youth series direction for his work on the magazine show *Prêt pas Prêt*, shown on TVA and TFO.

His first fictional feature film, a co-directed production entitled *À l'ouest de Pluton (West of Pluto)*, is slated for release in 2008. Henry is a member of Spirafilm and the Association des Réalisateur et Réalisatrices du Québec (ARRQ).

MYRIAM VERREAULT

Producer, writer, director and editor

Myriam Verreault holds a bachelor's degree from Université Laval, where she majored in film studies with a minor in history. After graduating from Cégep de Jonquière with a DEC in media arts and technology, she coordinated and directed a radio documentary series recorded in West Africa for *Ados-Radio* (Radio-Canada). Her first fictional film won an audience award and a special mention from the jury at the *Vidéaste Recherché-e* competition in 2003 and third prize in the young filmmakers' competition at the *Carroussel international du film de Rimouski*.

Myriam Verreault is a co-founder of the *Festival du film étudiant de Québec* and of the *Festival de films de Portneuf sur l'environnement*, where she is also the organizer of the Kabaret Kino event. She has been a member of the board of the Spirafilm independent filmmakers' cooperative since 2007. When in Quebec City, she works as a property master and as a freelance editor from her home studio, where she edited *À l'ouest de Pluton*, among other films. She founded and runs Vostok Films, an independent film production company.

VOSTOK FILMS

Vostok Films is an independent producer of fictional feature films. Founded in April 2007 by young

producers Henry Bernadet and Myriam Verreault, the company's initial mission was to complete the feature film *À l'ouest de Pluton*. After shooting dozens of hours of footage and realizing that their project had significant artistic and commercial potential, the producers decided to start their own production company. The desire to maintain their independence and artistic freedom, along with their confidence in their managerial abilities, prompted them to found Vostok Films. They had decided that only a company under their sole ownership and control could provide them the freedom they needed to make a bold, original film from inception to completion.

CAST

Jérôme	DAVID BOUCHARD
Pierre-Olivier	ANNE-SOPHIE TREMBLAY LAMONTAGNE
Kim	YOANN LINTEAU
Benoît “Paluche”	SANDRA JACQUES
Émilie Bégin	MICAËL MINGUY-BÉDARD
Nicolas	YANN BERNARD
Kevin	MARC-ALEXANDRE PARADIS
Steve Labbé	DENIS MARCHAND
Gaetan	THOMAS GIONET-LAVIGNE
Émilie Bégin’s brother	CAROLINE BEAUSÉJOUR
Isa	FRÉDÉRIQUE BOIVIN-LAFRANCE
Nath	CYNTHIA PAQUET
Véro	MARIE-PIER B. TOUZIN
Jenn	LISE CASTONGUAY
Benoît’s mother	SYLVAIN BROSSEAU
Mario the pusher	VIRGINIE LEBLANC
Magalie	MARIE FRÉDÉRIQUE AUGER
Chez Gilles Patate waitress	
Jérôme’s sister	MÉLANIE BOUCHARD-ROCHETTE
Émilie Bégin’s mother	ODETTE LAMPRON
Émilie Bégin’s father	MARIO GAGNON
Jérôme’s father	RÉAL ROCHETTE
Jérôme’s mother	LINA BOUCHARD
Paluche’s friend	ALEXANDRO RIZZO

ALEXIS DROLET

TECHNICAL DATA

QUEBEC - COLOUR - 2008 - 95 min. - 35mm - ASPECT 1.85:1
Dolby SRD – Original French version

Producers, writers and directors	HENRY BERNADET and MYRIAM VERREAULT
Associate producer	VIRGINIE BARRET
Executive producer	PIERRE BROUSSEAU
Director of photography	PATRICK FAUCHER
Editor	MYRIAM VERREAULT
Sound	MATHIEU CAMPAGNA PIERRE ROUSSEAU

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Crédit d'impôt cinéma et télévision – Gestion SODEC, SODEC - Société de développement des entreprises culturelles - Québec, Telefilm Canada, Canada Council for the Arts – Media Arts, Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec, Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit, Spirafilm and Locations Michel Trudel.

Production

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