



OFFICIAL SELECTION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



THE CONQUEST

GAUMONT and MANDARIN CINEMA

present

THE CONQUEST

A film by
Xavier DURRINGER

Script and dialogues by
Patrick ROTMAN

With
**Denis PODALYDES Florence PERNEL Bernard LE COQ
Hippolyte GIRARDOT Samuel LABARTHE**

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SYNOPSIS



May 6, 2007. France's run-up to the presidential elections.

As the French people are getting ready to go to the polls to elect their new president, Nicolas Sarkozy has shut himself away in his home. Even though he knows he has won the battle, he is gloomy and looks despondent in his dressing gown. All day long, he has been trying to get in touch with Cécilia – to no avail.

The last five years unfurl before our eyes, recounting Sarkozy's unstoppable ascent, riddled with backstage underhand trickery, fits of anger and confrontations.

THE CONQUEST is the story of a man gaining power and losing his wife.

XAVIER DURRINGER

A FIRST

When Eric et Nicolas Altmayer came to me with a project written by Patrick Rotman that focused on Nicolas Sarkozy's conquest of power, I was a little worried because until then no film had ever been made about a president in office, not even in the United States. It was an uphill struggle, let alone the fact that I am pretty anxious and rather paranoid to begin with. Therefore, I thought that the best option was to have an honest approach and again raise the question of France's political life. For example, we did not change the names of the protagonists, which involved legal issues. And the more I was told not to deal with this matter, the more excited I felt. It was necessary to make this film and to conquer uncharted territory.

A SHAKESPEAREAN SCRIPT

What I found thrilling was the fact that it was about a fight inside the same camp - Chirac, Villepin and Sarkozy were fighting for power. It read like a Shakespearean script. And what appealed to me was the extraordinary metaphor of love embodied by Cécilia Sarkozy, who for twenty years had struggled to pull the man she loved from the shadow into the light and who walked out on him for another man on the day he conquered power. Pure fiction! The essence of drama!

It was crucial to make a film which would neither blame nor praise the protagonists but portray them as sensitive, human and sometimes complex and emotionally unbalanced creatures. Thus it is a film about politics but about the emotional and psychological stakes involving the conquest of power. Actually I hope that the audience who sees the film will leave the theatre wanting to go on discussing the theatrical dimension of the political arena. We made this film to spark a debate, to have viewers wonder why Sarkozy has moved them so much and how he managed to win over 80% of the far-right voters.

We wished to describe the infernal mechanism of the conquest: this film aims to be an eye opener.



When Eric et Nicolas Altmayer brothers came to me with a project written by Patrick Rotman that focused on Nicolas Sarkozy's conquest of power, I was a little worried because until then no film had ever been made about a president in office, not even in the United States. It was an uphill struggle, let alone the fact that I am pretty anxious and rather paranoid to begin with. Therefore, I thought that the best option was to have an honest approach and again raise the question of France's political life. For example, we did not change the names of the protagonists, which involved legal issues. And the more I was told not to deal with this matter, the more excited I felt. It was necessary to make this film and to conquer uncharted territory.

« ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE »

make-up artists their make-up, and tailors their clothes. They have speechwriters whose lines they rehearse before reciting them in front of an audience. When they are in the spotlight they are confronted with audiences who cheer them on. Like actors, they experience loneliness before the curtain rises. In fact they are constantly in the spotlight and under the scrutiny of journalists who criticise them, whether they are on their side or their opponents'. It reminded me of a theatrical metaphor. In my view this film is a representation of reality. Just like theatre actors, politicians are cut off from the world reality. It was consequently important to show Sarkozy rehearsing

in front of empty theatres before appearing in front of his audience. When he flaunted his sadness or his dismay before journalists, it was nothing less than a stage performance aimed at showing the French people that he was just an ordinary man. All of this is under strict control to strike a chord with voters.

Nicolas Sarkozy is the politician who dramatically changed the relationship between politicians and the media and the image conveyed by politicians as stars. He chose to play the card of transparency. For the first time in the history of French political life, a president wearing sunglasses appeared in glossy magazines that featured his holidays and his love affair with a model! He is the first president to have revealed his innermost feelings. That's why it was possible for us to make a movie. As he says in the film "in the name of that bloody transparency, now I am held accountable!"

There were also scenes that everybody has seen a million times, like the one in La Baule in which Villepin emerges from the sea. My choice was to shoot all the scenes from the other side of the looking glass. I mean instead of shooting journalists, trying to approach politicians, with their back to the camera, we shot them facing it. Peeking at private moments, how exciting!

FROM FILM NOIR TO WESTERN

What struck me was that the world of politicians includes the same codes as those you find in film noir movies. You also find hierarchy, with armed bodyguards equipped with earpieces, wearing dark glasses, and the boss at the top of the pyramid. It is a little like THE GODFATHER which was a metaphor of the film director. Politicians attack each other with vitriolic sound bites and make phone calls cupping their hand over their mouth to prevent lip-reading. It is a world in which the cult of secrecy prevails and in which subordinates and underlings are willing to give their life to protect the boss, in accordance with their code of honour.

And there is pungent dialogue – especially with Chirac and Villepin who don't mince their words. That's why I used close-ups of the protagonists, as in westerns, the difference being that in my movie it is the words that kill. I must say that being used to filming groups of men, I felt quite comfortable in this political world where Sarkozy is always surrounded by his advisers. In the history-laden halls decorated with gilded panelling, the dialogue – reminiscent of films written by Audiard – goes back and forth between the protagonists in sometimes highly dramatic situations and adds a humorous dimension to the film.

PLAYING REAL-LIFE FIGURES

When Denis Podalydès arrived for the screen tests, his bald skull covered with shoe cream, he suddenly fit into the character, spoke and moved like Sarkozy without mimicry or false posture. He had the right voice; therefore I knew he would have the right body. We didn't use any artificial devices except for make-up, as for any other actor. Denis told me right away: «I'll be straightforward» And he played the character with his qualities and weaknesses, so much so that we believe him when he says what he says. And this symbolises quite well the sort of man Sarkozy is. For instance he is very serious when he declares that he will make a retreat in a monastery, and ends up on multibillionaire Bolloré's yacht. But we do believe him. Denis is highly talented, both serious and pungent, a real comedian. You could almost look at Sarkozy and figure that he is a caricature of Podalydès, the actor.

Denis being the fantastic actor that he is, the rest of the cast had to be as stunning so as not to be outshined by him. Bernard Le Coq as Chirac, Samuel Labarthe as Villepin and Florence Pernel as Cécilia, all match up to Denis and they were in symbiosis with him. All of them did a great job altering their voices and their bodies, a rather risky business.

I also wanted the supporting cast, Hippolyte Girardot, Saïda Jawad, Mathias Mlekuz, Grégory Fitoussi and Dominique Besnehard, to have specific relationships with Nicolas Sarkozy, to serve him and address him in a



special way... We all worked hard together, constantly doing research, communicating and discussing.

Likewise, I had to work with the extras, to make their cheering and touching Sarkozy believable. And it was the very passion of the crowd that galvanised Denis.

CLASSICISM AT ITS BEST

We needed a classical mise-en-scene. I alternated between tracking shots and long sequence shots following Denis Podalydès who was able to act for about four minutes non-stop. We allowed the actors to be free and position themselves on the set. Even if you believe you are at the Elysée or at Beauvau, we didn't actually shoot the sets; what we shot were faces and bodies. That's why there are so many long shots, to give pre-eminence to the actors' bodies and to give priority to the pacing and the movement so that no two scenes were alike.

By examining the pictures, I realised that the advisors were always standing there, on the look-out, on the alert. Thus while Villepin and Sarkozy are sitting behind their desks, their men are constantly in motion.

The film was shot in Super 35mm Cinemascope, with only one camera.

LONELINESS

I wanted the opening scene of the film to be symbolical and metaphorical. A very slow tracking shot reveals a deeply lonely man, wearing a dressing gown, toying with his wife's wedding ring on the very day he becomes France's President.

This shot sums up the whole film: «he is the only one knowing what he's won compared to what he's lost and he is the only one knowing what he's lost compared to what he's won»

There are other shots revealing the loneliness of this man who, paradoxically enough, is always surrounded by people, in his office, in front of a cheering crowd, at a sidewalk café etc. He is definitely a Shakespearean character.

MUSIC AS COUNTERPOINT

My first and only choice for the composer was Nicola Piovani. I had in mind his pieces for Fellini's last two movies INTERVISTA and LA VOCE DELLA LUNA, and his film scores for the Taviani brothers or for Roberto Benigni's LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL. I wanted the music to create a feeling of distance from the action; I wanted a baroque counterpoint that would call to mind the circus or the opera and conjure up the dramatic quality of political life as well as its burlesque aspect. I do think that Sarkozy with his twitches and almost jumpy gait looks a bit like Charlie Chaplin.

**« I'll be everywhere at once. Keep them guessing.
Launch 8 projects. They'll be punch-drunk.
I'll be Headline Minister ! »**

Nicolas SARKOZY

PATRICK ROTMAN

GENESIS OF AN EXTRAORDINARY PROJECT

It was not a new project : Eric and Nicolas Altmayer had contacted me after seeing my film on Chirac, which had been broadcast in 2006 on France 2 television channel. They wished to talk to me about shooting a political thriller. It was to focus on the four weeks following the death of the French president. To be honest, I was not thrilled by the project, I thought that if we made a political movie, we should stick as close as possible to real facts, the way the Anglo-Saxons do, because viewers need a reference framework to relate to the story. Actually I have thought for years that it would be a good idea to make a fictional film based on real political figures. The idea came to me as I was shooting the documentaries on Mitterrand and Chirac. I believe that these two presidents make for good fictional characters in a feature film. In the political world tensions are extreme, passions violent and hatreds intensified.

With Sarkozy you get all the elements you can dream of to recount the conquest of power in the media age, as well as the kind of melodramatic dimension that no screenwriter would ever dare invent... Thus I proposed to the Altmayer brothers to write this story for the screen the way the Anglo-Saxon screenwriters do. They quickly gave me the green light to write the script, the first one ever written about a French president in office, with the real characters' names. We were very eager to work on uncharted territory and did our best to live up to the stakes. It did not take us long to decide that the story had to take place within a single day, the day of the run-up to the presidential election, which must be seen within the context of the five years that had led to Sarkozy's conquest of power.

DOCUMENTARY IMMERSION

To make my film on Chirac I had collected a large number of documents and interviewed dozens of people, Sarkozy being one of them.

For THE CONQUEST, I studied everything that had been printed in the press between 2002 and 2007 and read some sixty books which I had carefully annotated. This allowed me to authenticate the reliability of some stories and anecdotes which are inserted in my script. After that I met with informants, protagonists and witnesses.

I also watched hours of stock footage and this helped me to visualize some scenes.

I was also helped by Michaël Darmon, a France 2 journalist who had been hired as a "history consultant" by the producers because he had witnessed a lot of events mentioned in the movie and had covered Sarkozy for years. His notebooks, which cover several years, provided us with highly valuable information such as who is on friendly terms with whom, in whose office do they meet, what do they say about such and such a political leader? Etc.

GREATER THAN LIFE

I insist, THE CONQUEST is a fiction film, it is well documented but it is a fiction nonetheless, with essentially imagined scenes and invented dialogue. There are some twenty scenes which are close to reality, like the one-on-one encounters between Sarkozy and Chirac and the clashes between Sarkozy and Villepin. On the other hand lots of sequences are totally imaginary as when Villepin has Chirac repeat «I decide and he executes». The scene is imaginary but there is some truth in it. I know that Villepin actually had Chirac rehearse his speeches before some of his television appearances, and I am pretty sure (I learnt it from a reliable source) that Villepin is the one who came up with that choice of words. Just as he did say «I'm going to fuck him up». You have to realise that this is the way politicians most often talk. That's why I was very careful to use this extremely violent style, which may surprise many viewers. In this movie everything is mixed up, truth and untruth, real elements with imaginary ones. At the end of the day, fiction is a way of telling the truth with a pinch of untruth thrown in. What matters is not so much accuracy but credibility.

HUMAN, TERRIBLY HUMAN

From the very start I did not intend to write a satire or a political tract, viewers will not change their political



views after seeing the film! It is first and foremost a cinematic work. And by the way, the movie makes Sarkozy look more human, more like a very lonely guy, with his wounds and weaknesses. This is a man who puts his obsessive lust for power before anything else and who consequently loses his wife. It is all the more important as Sarkozy himself can be grotesque at times and if I had exaggerated he would have come across as a ridiculous puppet. He is a bit like a gang boss with very loyal advisors. He needs to be supported, cheered up, entertained etc. That's why I found it interesting to remain inside the clan of the "Sarko'boys" and watch their rivalries and internecine wars.

Sometimes, Sarkozy is so touching that you want to comfort him, then he becomes obnoxious and awe-inspiring or else he is a brilliant manipulator with plenty of intuitive skills etc. I used the same approach as in my documentaries: I never tried to arouse empathy or hatred. I merely wished to show that politicians are "exceptional creatures" with complexities and contradictions. That's why they are cinematic characters.

*« I'm alone. I forged myself and I'll fight to the end.
I know Chirac better than he knows me.
He won't catch me. He's history.
I'm free. I'm alone and I'm free.
And you, Dominique... you're a dead man. »*

Nicolas SARKOZY

ERIC and NICOLAS ALTMAYER

A WORN-OUT POLITICAL SYSTEM

We had the project in mind long before the 2007 French presidential election. We intended to produce a movie about politics, not only because the background and the characters are highly cinematic, even Shakespearean as regards the three main protagonists, but also because it was a great opportunity to make a movie about the

sident, Nicolas Sarkozy, as he is desperately driving to the Charles de Gaulle airport to get his wife back. What happens during the 45 days following his death? What mechanism is set in motion when new elections must be organised? To what extent is the electoral machine cut off from the ideological debate? But Patrick Rotman, who had first based the story on this premise, told us that it would not work. He was right, if we had put fictional characters together with real ones, we would have ended up with characters nobody would have believed in! Therefore, rather than depict a fictional campaign, Patrick told us we'd better describe what really happened. He then approached Michaël Darmon, the France 2 political correspondent who had been covering the candidate Sarkozy for five years. Michaël was our "history advisor" throughout the script writing phase and the shoot.

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

It felt as if we were entering territory that aroused everybody's suspicions. This feeling springs from the habit of self-censorship instilled in the French system: we make it a rule not to go beyond certain fixed limits, when on the face of it, there's no reason why we shouldn't. So much so that lots of my friends asked me how we had managed to deal with such a sensitive subject. I answered: why shouldn't we? As long as a movie was not intended to



world we are living in. It is a world in which as Tocqueville put it: "politics is no longer an ideological debate but a free-for-all in which players demand bread, games and scapegoats."

Given the lightning speed of modern media, the virulent electoral campaigns and the role played by personal rather than ideological rivalries, the political debate, in the noble sense of the word, has vanished. That is what we intended to put forward and Nicolas Sarkozy's access to power epitomizes it all. What's more, I think that there is a link between the current political vacuum and the way voters are turning away from the political system. Our aim was to make people aware of the dangers of this slippery slope.

Our first approach to the subject was to imagine a tragic scenario: the accidental death of the newly elected pre-

be a political tract or an indictment, but rather an Anglo-Saxon type of movie, based on real facts and realistic, there was no reason why we shouldn't be shooting it. And by the way we found partners willing to help us put the film together. Incidentally Gaumont's moral endorsement of the project encouraged our financial partners to make the film come true. We'd like to express our special thanks to them.

Paradoxically enough, the Elysée did not put any pressure on us. True, at the beginning we were quite inconspicuous but little by little the script started circulating... At a very early stage Le Canard Enchaîné, a weekly satirical newspaper, had mentioned an impending project about Sarkozy. But the Elysée must have thought that

direct political interference that jeopardised freedom of speech would have huge consequences. I also believe that Sarkozy is the first president whose relationship with the media is totally unconventional. He is part of a generation used to the media going over every aspect of the life of a president... Anyway, this project could be much more easily envisaged with Sarkozy than with his predecessors...

A TIGHT BUDGET

The film cost 5 million euros to shoot, which shows that a movie with ambitious goals like THE CONQUEST can be made on a budget within reasonable limits if all conditions are met. The entire cast knew that we were shooting an extraordinary film, and none of them had special demands. Together with Xavier Durringer, we had set up an accurate work schedule involving a lot of sequence shots. We were able to do this because the cast was outstanding, especially Denis Podalydès. The actors had no difficulty with long dialogue scenes. We did not have to shoot scenes too many times and pre-production planning was very accurate.

A REAL DELIGHT

I didn't expect the film to be so funny and enjoyable. I think it owes it to Xavier's vivacious personality and to his intuitive skills, which led him to think of the commedia dell'arte and consequently to hire Nicola Piovani for the score. It is also thanks to Denis Podalydès who knows how to create farcical situations onstage and to bring out the comic skills of the cast. In conclusion the contrast between the farcical situations and the realistic aspect of the film is quite enjoyable.



*« Seen the dwarf at the factory ?
What a demagogue ! What populism !
Like Poujade in the 60s ! »*

Dominique de VILLEPIN

DENIS PODALYDÈS

How did you first respond to the offer of playing Nicolas Sarkozy ?

I was thrilled. Why? Because I love political movies. I had been wanting to play an actual or fictional politician for years. Politics offers amazing opportunities for actors and a wide range of situations, which have hardly been tapped by French cinema. Foreign movies have paved the way with films like *THE QUEEN*, *IL DIVO*, or *W*. Playing Sarkozy, the current president, did not bother me, nor did it curb my enthusiasm. Quite the opposite actually. I was eager to play in the present-day world, to have an intimate relationship with Nicolas Sarkozy who is amazing whether you agree with the man's political ideas or not.

Are you interested in politics ?

Yes, very much so. Reading the "political" section in the newspapers is like reading a serialized novel written day after day. There are exciting times, and frightening ones, like nowadays

Did you empathize with Nicolas Sarkozy ?

You must avoid taking sides and passing judgment, you must hush the inner voice that whispers in your ear that this is not how you vote. Enhance his physical aspect, his political gift; show his daring, brisk, energetic, mysterious personality. And his sense of humour. He has a much greater sense of humour than most politicians.

How did you work on the voice ?

I slowly immersed myself in it. I relentlessly repeated some sentences over and over again. I admit I tried to mimic



Did you need to do a lot of research? Like view stock footage in order to study the "character", for instance ?

Yes, I did what you usually do when you play this sort of character – I listened to his voice, watched all available documentaries, studied reports and pictures, there are countless numbers of resources. Then little by little I let the character take over, almost surreptitiously. Eventually he got into me, unobtrusively. I didn't seek to be a carbon copy of Sarkozy, I didn't try to look exactly like him, talk like him or walk like him. I sought to create a likeness, a character that was totally me and totally – or almost totally – Sarkozy. I once read a beautiful response that Depardieu made when asked the same question, "Don't do anything, just let go". True, he was not talking of a character study, but I think that even when you want to play somebody like Sarkozy, you must "let go" so as to convey the feeling that the actor and the character are free.

it, but it was not mere imitation, it came from within, so to speak, I let the voice settle inside my head all the while seeking the right pace rather than the right tone.

How do you avoid caricature or pastiche ?

You need to take your time, be watchful and patient. You must listen and observe. I would watch certain TV shows endlessly, as if I were listening to music. For instance, I'd watch the French TV show by Arlette Chabot called "One hundred Minutes to Convince you".

And never look at or listen to impersonators. Sometimes it's a good idea to turn off the sound and focus on the body. At times, only listen to the voice. Ignore what's going on during the presidential election. Think up imaginary situations and let the character in. Forget real facts. After all he becomes a fictional character in the movie.

Did you need a modicum of empathy with him, which meant forgetting your political leaning ?

Yes but I find it easy to relate to politicians. Be they right-winged or left-winged, I take an interest in them. I have always been interested in Sarkozy even though I have always voted for left-wing candidates.

At times your Sarkozy reminds us of a Shakespearian character, some sort of King Lear grand and poignant, moving and abhorrent, by turns...

Shakespeare is the world's greatest playwright of political tragedies. His characters have influenced all the theatre plays that address these issues. And cinema has also been influenced by him. Sometimes I thought of RICHARD III, although I had just played RICHARD II.

connections between the theatre and politics, the theatre and film. It may be flattering but it also gives credit to the idea that politics is all about lying.

What was it like to work with Xavier Durringer ?

There was a great sense of freedom in our work. He favoured long shots. He was open to improvisation and ready to try several options. He had a good sense of pace and comedy. We really got along well in terms of our goals and methods. It was a collaborative effort, which helped us move forward and trust each other. And we had great fun all the while. Xavier has such a Sarkozy-like energy – but not a Sarkozyist one, don't get me wrong!



Did the clothes help you be the character ?

Costume designer Jurgen Doering was incredibly helpful. He took me to a tailor's shop in the 8th arrondissement in Paris where some politicians get their clothes and we found the clothes there. I can't speak highly enough of key make-up artist Dominique Colladant with whom we designed the make-up and wig, and of all the make-up artists.

How close is politics to the theatre ?

Very close indeed. Close but not identical. When the president goes to bed, he remains the president. Now the actor who goes to bed no longer has anything to do with his character. You should beware of

**« Forget it. It's pure hogwash.
I was targeted to stop me from chairing the UMP.
One day, the person behind
this will hang from a meat hook. »**

Nicolas SARKOZY

FLORENCE PERNEL

What was your first reaction when you were offered the role of Cécilia Sarkozy ?

When Xavier Durringer mentioned the role to me, I first wondered whether he was joking. True, I have the same hairdo as she used to have back then, but this is as far as the likeness goes. Needless to say, I never thought of myself playing Cécilia Sarkozy, who is quite different from me. Not only in physical terms - I don't look like her at all - but also in terms of personality. I perceived her as cold and tough, as a woman who tried to shield herself and was always anxious to build up her husband's career and win over the media. That said, I did not pass any moral or political judgment on her - I was supposed to play the character and not share her views. At the same time I was very excited at the idea of acting the part.

Can you tell us about your acting process ?

It was like plucking the petals of a flower. I first looked into all the available material about her. Luckily she was much exposed to the media and you can find plenty of articles as well as two biographies: LA FACE CACHÉE DE L'EX-PREMIÈRE DAME (THE HIDDEN FACE OF THE EX-FIRST LADY) co-written by Laurent Léger and Denis Démonpion, and CÉCILIA by Anna Biton. However there is not much footage about her. Luckily I found a 2002 copy of a TV show, ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL (SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT), which was a big help. Sarkozy was the Home Office Minister then and you see shots of her in her office while high ranking officers are waiting in the corridor for a meeting with her or shots of her playing with her son, etc... I also found TV footage of Mr and Mrs Sarkozy heading for Guadeloupe (in the French West Indies) in the hope of saving their marriage. It gave me the most information about her gestures and postures.

What about her voice ?

I first used a special language style but when Xavier Durringer heard me reading a few lines, he advised me to forget about it. As nobody knows what Cécilia's voice sounds like, contrary to Sarkozy's or Chirac's, nobody would remember how she talked. He advised me to use my own voice and not try to imitate hers. Therefore, I rather focused on her gestures, her gait and her bearing, which all reflect her character. My friend Juliette Coulon, who is an actress, served as a "resonance chamber" and helped me progress step by step.



« France belongs to no one because she belongs to herself. France is not nostalgia. Bowing down to the past mustn't infringe on the future. France is an idea, a future. I must embody that idea, that future. »

Nicolas SARKOZY

What do you think is her most striking feature ?

I must admit I was impressed when she decided to break up with Sarkozy! I must say I was a bit shocked because she was married to a man with huge responsibilities; but I also admired her courage. It was like a signal sent to all women. As I got to study her more closely, I found out that she was more complex than the media would have us believe. What struck me most was the discrepancy between a life which she seemed not to have chosen and to which she wouldn't surrender, and her eagerness to put her couple out in the open and under the media glare.

Tell me about your physical transformation.

As it happened, I was on another shoot until August 5 and the shoot of THE CONQUEST was due to start on August 2. Consequently I couldn't "turn into" Cécilia until August 6. And I realised, once again, that when you start looking like the character you become the character more easily. As I had my hair dyed brunette, as my eyes became blue and I grew 4 inches, all my previous work became relevant and I started to really become Cécilia.



The movie shows that she is the only woman in a male environment...

Yes and I think that she's paid for it. She fought hard to carve a place for herself; hence the rivalry with the «Sarkoboy», which is shown in the movie. Obviously she was close to "God" and she was the one who had the most intimate relationship with Him. He would ceaselessly ask her advice. But I think that the woman with an iron fist was also a woman struggling against her self-consciousness, her shyness and her need to shield herself, which accounts for her apparent coldness. Her husband's status imposed huge responsibilities on her and at the same time she dreaded the world of politicians. This contradiction was probably the reason why she was uneasy and sometimes even aggressive. As I was performing the part, I kept bearing in mind the discrepancy between the self-restrained person she was deep down, and the image she conveyed.

From time to time Sarkozy is blunt with her...

You're right; he snubs her even before his advisors. The two biographies of Cécilia show that the change occurred when Sarkozy became president of the UMP: she didn't like the idea because she sensed that he would lose his distinctive qualities and that their private life would be turned upside down, and history was to prove her right...



***« I've wanted this for 30 years.
Time to sharpen your blade. »***

Nicolas SARKOZY



BERNARD LE COQ

How did you get involved in this movie ?

A few years ago, Patrick Rotman, whom I had met before, asked me if I had ever been asked to play Jacques Chirac! I told him that yes indeed I had been told that I slightly looked like him but I never actually played the part. Patrick told me then that he may have a screenplay he wanted me to read. I didn't hear of the project again until about six weeks before the start of the shoot. Xavier Durringer called me saying he was convinced I was a perfect fit to play Chirac. Right from the start he had complete confidence in me.

Weren't you a bit concerned at the idea of playing a man engraved in the collective mind of the French people ?

I wasn't too worried at the beginning, which is odd because I am usually rather nervous. I believe it is first and foremost thanks to the amazing job done by Dominique Colladant, the key make-up artist. When I looked at myself in the mirror I saw the likeness with the character I was playing. I had also watched a lot of stock footage of Chirac, and paid special attention to Patrick Rotman's documentary about the former president. These documents helped me study Chirac's gait, gestures, facial expressions, and those peculiar eyes.

How did you manage to avoid a pastiche interpretation or a caricature of a politician who has been often mimicked ?

I am most grateful to impersonators. I am not very talented when it comes to impersonating someone and



*« No need to panic, Jean-Louis.
I really don't give a flying fuck.
Nicolas stopped growing a few inches short
to ever succeed.
But I will keep an eye on him.
Sarkozy will be my last scalp. »*

Jacques CHIRAC

What did you think of the screenplay ?

I loved the dramatic quality and the style of the narrative, I was fascinated by the story of this president who lays himself bare to the public eye with incredible immodesty and constantly seeks to be present everywhere, all the while rolling with punches. The French audience will certainly be interested in the screenplay with its high dramatic stakes and historic background. And above all I personally was delighted when reading the heated exchanges between the characters.

I regard impersonators who exaggerate as a very useful mine of information. They have allowed me to spot some of Chirac's peculiar voice inflections. My job was to break through those "idiosyncrasies" to reach something more real.

Did you find the accuracy of the sets helpful ?

The more credible the sets, the easier it is to become the character. From the start you are immersed in

another world, you enjoy letting yourself into it and you feel that the film director trusts you. The make-up, costumes and sets of the production were so convincing that I was sort of driven by the character.

Did you empathise with the character ?

The character is both complex and gracious. In the movie, Chirac is portrayed as a rather decent guy, and his actual reputation confirms this. I couldn't but grow fond of him. What's more, he has a great sense of humour, in real life as well as in the script. And the sparkling, witty lines contributed to making the character even more likeable.

How does Xavier Durringer work with the cast ?

He had a very sharp eye for details and knew exactly what he was doing and yet we felt incredibly free. I happened to be on the set at the very beginning of the shoot, which allowed me to establish a relationship of trust and confidence with Xavier. And I can tell you that there was an atmosphere of trust throughout the whole shoot.



*« Dominique, trust my years of experience.
Papers come and go.
Just to end up housebreaking puppies. »*

Jacques CHIRAC





PRODUCTION DESIGN

Xavier and his brother Eric Durringer laid emphasis on the minutest details: for instance they recreated the patina and the actual mantelpiece of the Elysée Palace. They also reconstructed the three large windows of the president's office and had the desk shipped from overseas because there were only two similar pieces in the whole world. Likewise, the Beauvau desk had to be reconstructed because of its peculiar design, with four front legs and special gilded brass fittings. They did a great job studying pictures and locating the furniture and props that can be seen on Chirac's and Villepin's desks. It looks as if the scenes were actually shot at the Elysée and at Beauvau.

All these details remind us of the power of the institution. But they must also be quickly dismissed so that viewers may focus on the story and the actors.



COSTUMES

Together with Jurgen Doering, who worked with fashion designer Yves Saint-Laurent for ten years, Xavier Durringer closely examined a large number of pictures to study what such and such a politician was wearing under such circumstances. They did not rent the costumes. They bought Sarkozy's and Cécilia's wardrobes as well as that of the "Sarko'boys" and changed the colours slightly.



WIGS

They were designed in Belgium by specialists who spent 1,200 hours recreating Sarkozy's hair style. They paid special attention to his scalp and to his curls.



CAST

Nicolas Sarkozy **Denis PODALYDÈS**
Cécilia Sarkozy **Florence PERNEL**
Jacques Chirac **Bernard LE COQ**
Claude Guéant **Hippolyte GIRARDOT**
Dominique de Villepin **Samuel LABARTHE**
Franck Louvrier **Mathias MLEKUZ**
Laurent Solly **Grégory FITOUSSI**
Frédéric Lefebvre **Pierre CASSIGNARD**
Rachida Dati **Saïda JAWAD**
Pierre Charon **Dominique BESNEHARD**
Bernadette Chirac **Michèle MORETTI**
Bruno Le Maire **Emmanuel NOBLET**
Henri Guaino **Michel BOMPOIL**
Jean-Louis Debré **Gérard CHAILLOU**
Pierre Giacometti **Nicolas MOREAU**
Richard Attias **Yann BABILEE KEOGH**
Michaël Darmon **Fabrice CALS**

CREW

Director **Xavier DURRINGER**
Script and dialogues **Patrick ROTMAN**
Adaptation and dialogues **Xavier DURRINGER**
Writing consultant **Michaël DARMON**
Producers **Eric et Nicolas ALTMAYER**
Coproduction **MANDARIN CINEMA GAUMONT**
With the participation of **CANAL +**
In association with **MULTITHEMATIQUES MANON, COFIMAGE 22, COFINOVA 7, UNI ETOILE 8**
Music Composer **Nicola PIOVANI**
Director of photography **Gilles PORTE (A.F.C)**
Art director **Eric DURRINGER**
Costume designer **Jürgen DOERING**
Casting director **François MENIDREY (A.R.D.A)**
1st Assistant director **Ambre VALADE**
Script supervisor **Carole FEVRE**
Sound **Guillaume SCIAMA**
François MUSY
Gabriel HAFNER (A.F.S.I)
Editor **Catherine SCHWARTZ**
Production manager **Marie-Jeanne PASCAL**
Postproduction manager **Patricia COLOMBAT**

Interviews and texts from Franck Garbarz
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« Don't forget it. I'm a Ferrari.
You open the hood with white gloves ! »

Nicolas SARKOZY

