

Director's statement
Sleeping Jade / Le Sommeil de Jade

Translating an inner emptiness

At the age of 28, I'm leaving youth to enter a new phase of my life, characterized by employment. All around me, I see these young urban people, mostly middle class, who, like me, seem to be living in a strange state that is difficult to describe, a state of the body but above all of the mind, a kind of breathlessness, resigned fatigue and contained suffering, produced by the first years of their 'working life'. Young people who work long hours and sink into a kind of torpor, having conformed to the ideal they have been told to achieve: a permanent job, married life, a comfortable apartment. Jade and Gabriel (my characters), this ordinary couple enjoying an unremarkable evening in a well-kept but impersonal apartment, are the faces of this youth I belong to, which seems to have aged prematurely, gradually abandoning its joy for the tranquillity of its material comfort, to which it clings desperately when the outside world comes knocking at its door.

On the other side, other young people reach adulthood without having achieved the ideal that was promoted and are still chasing the train. Also out of breath, but for very different reasons, these young people, this time from the working class, live in another kind of suffering, another kind of disillusionment: that of precariousness.

These youths never meet, even though they live on the same floor; one is afraid of the other, who envies her. The impetus for this film was the desire to see them on screen. I had an intuition that something was missing from the usual portrait of French youth, far from the image of "millennials" - committed and rebellious young people who stand up for the climate; or over-excited young people full of energy who explore their limits at parties.

For me, this state of youth is a cinematic challenge: the visual translation of an inner emptiness; an immersion in a state of mind and body that is specific to our time. The idea is to find the signs of this emptiness in bodies. Bodies that are young and yet tired, hollowed out, compressed by work, resistant to encounter. Shaped bodies that embrace the social role of worker-consumer assigned to them. I'm trying to capture this almost constant state of half-sleep into which I'm plunged, a loss of vitality that produces apathetic bodies, beings deaf to others and to the world.

Standardized dreams, failed aspirations and the bitterness that comes with them are illustrated by the choice of interior, in an attitude, in the weariness, aggression or despair of a voice captured by the camera. It's also Elie's body, his gestures and his silence that call out to me: a face that bears the weight of his hopes and failures, damaged by a failing social ladder on which he stumbles. The face, which is central to the meeting between Jade and Elie, will therefore be at the heart of the film: there's the melancholy of Jade's and Gabriel's faces, from which a bitter beauty emerges; but there's also the brutality of Elie's face, its fragility and sincerity, which compels Jade and opens up the possibility of a meeting. When Jade looks at Elie, something seems to happen, something of an awakening. An entire social order is destabilized by the arrival of Jade's neighbor. And this upheaval, whose force must be conveyed on the screen, requires a break in the formal treatment of the story: a narrative suspension that allows the inner upheaval that Jade experiences to unfold.

Plunging into a state of confusion

The formal treatment of this film will be a gradual and almost imperceptible transition from a familiar everyday life, marked by a saturated sonic and visual environment (the thunder of an underground railway, the almost religious silence of an open space, the omnipresence of work, signaled by the cascade of sound messages), to an intimate and disturbing nocturnal ambiance. It begins with a light-hearted sense of suspense, created by an atmosphere close to the thriller genre, as Elie bumps into the lift in the building. The viewer, who is also concerned, is drawn into the suspicious gaze of Jade and Gabriel. But soon the direction of the film changes: the viewer, as surprised as Jade, suspends his apprehension when Elie appears to her in a fragile position. This

second half of the short film is filled with images, sort of visions that impose themselves on Jade. It's the other side of the dream: going beyond the young couple's comfortable interior to discover the violence and suffering hidden behind the ideal. One of the markers of this transition is the encounter between Jade and Elie, but above all the puddle of blood that creeps under the door shortly afterwards. This horrific vision - treated in a hallucinatory mode - is the climax of a narrative and formal derangement. The derailment of reality is underlined by a floating mise-en-scène and increasingly cold colors.

The second half of the night is submerged in a hazy atmosphere, immersed in the mental world of Jade. The aim is to make the viewer feel the vertigo born of the confrontation with radical otherness, the emergence of doubts and unexpected fears. At this point in the film, everything is disturbed: the strange puddle that intrudes on everyday life and manages to penetrate in spite of the door (the last protection against the outside world); the ghostly Gabriel, whose movements seem to obey a poorly oiled mechanism, ready to do anything to stop the spread; a dissonant kiss in a blood-stained bathroom that seals a shared guilt.

Then there's the final section of the film, marked by the return of daylight and therefore a naturalistic treatment whose suddenness is almost dazzling and which even questions the reality of last night. In the subway, in the office, until Jade falls asleep on the sofa, the epilogue seems to merge with the prologue, thus reinforcing the cyclical dimension of this slice of life. But is Jade really as she was? The question of a possible return to normality - to everyday life, to the couple, to the system - is at stake. An image appears: that of another face, Jade's, carrying the violence of awareness, the horrific vision of restored order, the fear of the chaos lurking behind the tidy living room.

Jonathan Boissinot
director of *Sleeping Jade*