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THE BLU-RAY
RELEASE
OF THE FILM
CLIMAX**

ABOUT THE TRANSFER

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VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO GASPAR NOE FOR HIS GENEROUS ASSISTANCE WITH THIS RELEASE



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GASPAR NOE'S CLIMAX
BY ANTON BITEL (2018)**

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ORIGINAL PRESS KIT



LONG DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL: GASPAR NOÉ'S CLIMAX

BY ANTON BITEL

PARADISE LOST

Gaspar Noé's *Climax* opens with an image of snow white – a colour signifying innocence and, in Japanese culture, death – and of a distressed woman, clothed inadequately for the weather in a singlet whose black colour creates an extreme contrast with her environment. This is shot wide from directly above in a God's eye view, as the camera fluidly tracks her staggering movements across a field of virgin snow, her every step leaving a dark imprint that sullies the purity of the scene. Soon she collapses, writhing and howling on the ground, and forming the imprint of a snow angel – except that where the angel's wings should be there are, in another vivid contrast of colour, traces of blood. As she crawls desperately, the camera, still looking down, moves on past her position to float over a large, leafless tree.

Although we have no idea yet what is going on, this sequence will prove an apt introduction to Gaspar Noé's fifth feature as writer/director. For we discern in it the corruption and contamination of a paradisiac idyll (complete with tree), the bloody imagery of defloration and birth, and the indifference of the universe – all motifs that will come to pervade *Climax*. Most of all, though, the sequence introduces a doom-laden tone of mortality – and indeed the credits which immediately follow this prologue are prefaced by the words, "To our makers, who are no longer with us", as though we were reading a death toll rather than a



conventional list of contributing cast and crew. We do not know it yet, but *Climax* will be a film about artists – and here, in these opening credits, artistic expression is simultaneously celebrated and mourned for its vanity and its ephemerality. The point is hammered home in a text caption that appears immediately after the credits. “EXISTENCE IS A FLEETING ILLUSION”, it reads – and the words flash on the screen for only an instant, as though to underline their content.

ENDLESS CLIMAX

The word ‘climax’ typically refers to the culminating point of greatest intensity to which either a narrative, or indeed sex, has gradually built. Yet in partial imitation of a strategy with which Noé first famously experimented in *Irréversible* (2001), *Climax* begins at its end. For although the scenes of *Climax* were filmed in chronological order over 15 days, the prologue with the woman in the snow was in fact a sequence shot at the very end of the production, and indeed takes place after all the other events depicted in the film. In other words, the opening sequence is itself a climax of sorts, presented in advance of everything that has escalated towards it. Even the elegiac credits which follow the opening scene are in fact closing credits, formally introduced by the words, “You have seen (“vous avez vu”; note the *passé composé* tense signifying a completed action) a film based on real events...” – and, as in Noé’s *Enter the Void* (2009), there are no end credits at all accompanying the actual end of the film. Even more confusingly, it is not until the exact midpoint of *Climax* that its genuine opening credits appear – marked by a similar multi-font text and pulsing score to those used in the opening credits for *Enter the Void*.

So while the rest of *Climax*, following the prologue, unfolds in a conventionally linear manner and, after a brief audition sequence,

closely observes an Aristotelian unity of time and place, nonetheless everything here is framed as being back-to-front and topsy-turvy, with the beginning also the end, the centre also the start, and the climax a permanent present. The characters – all dancers, and all played by dancers – seem to be in a state of near-constant climax, whether performing energetically, or partying hard, or losing themselves involuntarily to the LSD with which their sangria has been spiked. Throughout all this, the dancing continues in one form or another, as an ongoing expression of these people’s endless yearning for ecstasy and escape. While the inadvertent drug-taking might drive some characters to orgiastic sex, others to brutal violence and others yet to just more dancing, these are mere exaggerations of previous behaviours in which they expressly describe themselves as having engaged. The climax that comes with abandoning oneself to instinct and pleasure is always the goal of these young dancers – and it often comes with consequences, be they venereal disease, pregnancy, missing teeth, permanent scars or worse. Acid just makes the conduct, and the consequences, that little bit worse. Not all will survive, but there has always been death and even murder on the dance floor of life.

DANCE PROGRAMME (UNDER THE INFLUENCE)

Most of *Climax* takes place in a single location over a single night. At an isolated boarding school whose pupils are away for the winter, a troupe of 22 urban dancers and their DJ Daddy (Kiddy Smile) perform a piece that is the joyous culmination (another climax) of three days’ concentrated rehearsal. They then unwind with a party, drinking, chatting and dancing, even as Emmanuelle (Claude-Emmanuelle Gajan-Maull), who mixed the punch, puts her young son Tito (Vince Galliot Cumant) to bed. And then the drugs kick in, and everything goes to hell.



Before all this, though, we are treated to a prolonged sequence of audition tapes, in which the dancers all talk to camera about their aspirations and anxieties, and their attitudes to dance and to life. With dancer/choreographer Selva (Sofia Boutella) and Daddy asking the questions from the other side of the camera, these excerpts from interviews with 20 of the dancers form a programme for *Climax*. For not only do they introduce us to its personnel, in a broad range of sexes and sexualities, faiths and ethnicities that encapsulate both the varieties and the tensions in modern multicultural France, but they also, in their discourse on dance and drugs, sex and violence, bliss and nightmares, foreshadow the film's key themes.

"Dance is everything," states the first interviewee Lou (Souheila Yacoub). "It's all I have." With these words she lays out the film's principal conceit: that all of life – from birth to death, and everything in between – can be envisaged, whether literally or metaphorically, as dance. For *Climax* is all at once jig of life and *danse macabre* – and Lou is the film's alpha and omega. For not only is she the first person seen auditioned for the troupe, but also the woman who traverses the snow to her likely doom in the film's first (but chronologically last) scene. In between, she announces that she is pregnant, she loses her unborn baby, and she is bullied into acts of irreversible self-harm, all, ironically enough, while being one of the few dancers who never actually drinks the sangria.

The interviews are shown on a TV set, framed on one side by a pile of VHS tapes, and on the other by books. These too are a programme of influence. For the videos intersect with *Climax* – some obviously (the enchanted dance of *Suspiria*; the writhing subway freak-out of *Possession* which Selva later imitates; the nightmarish hermeticism of *Eraserhead*, etc), some less so (*Fox And His Friends*, *Vibroboy*) – while the books serve as manifestoes

for the broad ideology behind the film: the pessimism of Emil Cioran; the eternal return and flirtation with nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche; the anarchism of Mikhail Bakunin and the death wish of Claude Guillon. Nestled among tomes on filmmakers Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau and Luis Buñuel, there can be spotted an edition of the pseudo-Nietzschean *My Sister and I*, hinting at a subplot to come involving the incestuous love of Taylor (Taylor Kastle) for his younger sister Gazelle (Giselle Palmer).

COLLECTIVE ANARCHY

Near the end of *Climax*, a text caption appears: "LIFE IS A COLLECTIVE IMPOSSIBILITY." That word 'collective' is important here. The first time we see the dancers actually dancing, as they perform their rehearsed number, they are a true ensemble, expertly executing a bravura set-piece presented in a single fluid take that lasts about ten unbroken minutes. Here the members of the troupe collaborate precisely as a collective, working both individually and together in the service of their art – and the disembodied camera, positioned as the ideal viewer, weaves in and over their elaborately orchestrated movements. In the film, this dance sequence alone was choreographed, and all those that follow were improvised, with each dancer given free rein to express him or herself at will. This reflects a shift over the course of the night from collectivism to egoism. Under the influence of the acid, the group will break down and fall apart, as their coordinated cohesion collapses into an infernal anarchy of individual ids bumping and grinding against one another.

Where Noé placed us in *Enter the Void* in the subjective centre of a drug-induced hallucination, presenting audiovisually the experiences of his tripping protagonist, here he watches over the shoulders of his characters from a more objective perspective, capturing their disorientation only via the increasingly reeling



movements of the camera that tracks them through the school's rooms and corridors (lit in stylised reds, yellows, blues and greens, like a *giallo*). Here horrific things happen often at the periphery of the film's frame, or even entirely off-screen, while a murky mix of pulsating 90s dance tracks, chatter, laughs, wails and screams forms the heady soundscape. In this hostile, hellish environment, characters like Selva (the principal focus for much of the duration, although this remains a true ensemble film) not only struggle to get a grip and to survive, but also to continue their lifelong quest for a person in whom, or an activity in which, they can find – or lose – themselves.

(LONG DARK NIGHT OF THE) PSYCHE

The working title of *Climax* was *Psyche*, which is both the Greek word for 'soul', and the name of one of the dancers (played by Thea Carla Schott). In her audition tape, Psyche claims that she needed to get out of Berlin because of its heavy drugs scene, and because of a roommate who started dropping acid directly into his eyes. "It's too much," she insists, "I don't want to end up like Christiane F.", alluding to the woman whose autobiography *Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo* (*We Children of Bahnhof Zoo*, 1978), a copy of which Psyche carries in her bag, documents the author's rapid descent into a world of drugs and prostitution. Psyche is one of the more intriguing characters in *Climax*, aloof from and seemingly bored by everyone, including her girlfriend Ivana (Sharleen Temple), and lacking any sense of social consideration that extends beyond her own hedonistic impulses.

At the point where the dancers start realising that, as David (Romain Guillemeric) puts it, "something's kicking in", Psyche stands tall in the middle of the dance floor, her legs astride, and urinates right there, her shameless exultation contrasting with the panic of others. As the psychotropic madness pervades

the building, we often catch sight of Psyche in the background, dancing alone, oblivious to the chaos all around her. Indeed, she will be the last one standing, and dancing. In short, in this supposedly safe space turned very unsafe, Psyche thrives, hoofing to her own tune – and for her, the party never stops, and "too much" is just a challenge to carry on, even to go further.

The poster campaign for *Climax* exploited the often-outraged reception of Noé's past filmography as an ironic come-on: "You despised *I Stand Alone*, you hated *Irréversible*, you loathed *Enter the Void*, you cursed *Love*, now try *Climax*." In her aggressive selfishness, Psyche may hardly cut a sympathetic figure, but she reflects the extremity-seeking, psychonautic spirit of precisely those viewers who are on board for Noé's cinematic excess, no matter where it takes us. Her journey is a round trip that matches the film's begin-with-the-end structure, charting a model of life that proves a hard-partying heaven for her, and a writhing hell for near everybody else.

Anton Bitel is a freelance film critic, writing regularly on genre cinema for Sight & Sound, Little White Lies, SciFiNow and VODzilla.co. He blogs at ProjectedFigures.com, and has no sense of rhythm.





YOU DESPISED
I STAND ALONE
YOU HATED
IRREVERSIBLE
YOU LOATHED
ENTER THE VOID
YOU CURSED
LOVE
NOW TRY

CLIMAX

MY NEW
FILM

GASPAR
NOE



WHY?

There are sometimes certain events that are symptomatic of an era. These events explode, spontaneously or otherwise, until they reach the law enforcement agencies; some then become information on a major scale. They take on a new dimension: they are magnified, reduced, misrepresented, digested or not by those who disseminate them and those who receive them. Lives, glorious or shameful alike, end up on paper, then quickly disappear into collective oblivion. Existence is nothing more than a fleeting illusion that each of us takes to the grave.

When we read biographies, everything and its contrary is stated. It's the same whenever any affair or a news story is revealed. And the new communications channels that have spread during the last 20 years have rendered all objectivity even more illusory.

Humans, like animals, are born, live and die leaving no more trace than the smallest daisy in the middle of a field. Joys and pain, achievements and blunders, occupy a virtual perception, a present that doesn't exist outside their memory.

In 1996, a million stories hit the headlines, stories that are forgotten today, and tomorrow even more. Some of those born or alive that year are still among us. But of the great majority of those whose hearts have stopped beating, nothing remains: a name in a cemetery, or in an old newspaper lost in the depths of a cellar.

At their most intense, the pleasures of the present allow us to forget this vast emptiness. Joy, ecstasies – whether constructive or destructive – act as an antidote to the void. Love, art, dance, war, sport seem to justify our brief time on earth. And of these distractions, the one that has always made me happiest is dance. So if I was to make a film, it seemed exciting to make one based on a real news story, with dancers whose talents mesmerized me. With this project, once again, I could represent some of my dreams and nightmares on screen.

1996, it was just last night. Only there were no cellphones or internet. But the best of this morning's music was already there. In France, Daft Punk released their first record, La Haine had just been released in cinemas, and the journal Hara-Kiri was definitively unable to revive itself. The Massacre of the adepts of the Solar Temple was suppressed by the occult forces of the state. And there were those who dreamed of building a powerful and peaceful Europe while a barbaric war infected its interior. Wars create movement, populations change, as do beliefs and ways of living... And that which is called God will always be there on the side of the most powerful gun. What was, will be. The comma may move, but the essence of the sentence will always remain the same.



HOW?

I've always been fascinated by situations where chaos and anarchy suddenly spread, whether street brawls, psychotropically enhanced shamanistic sessions, or parties at which the revellers lose control collectively under the influence of excessive alcohol. The same applies to my film shoots. My greatest pleasures lies in having written and prepared nothing in advance, and as much as possible allowing situations to happen in front of me, as in a documentary. And whenever chaos sets in, I'm even happier, knowing that it will generate images of real power, closer to reality than to theatre.

For this reason, instead of a real script, I chose as a base the simple telling of this sticky and haunting story. A troupe of dancers gathers in an isolated building to prepare a performance. After their last rehearsal, chaos erupts. Starting from a page-long outline allowed me to capture moments of truth and to convey in images this sequence of events collectively. If you want dancers, actors or non-professionals to express themselves physically and verbally in a chaotic fashion, improvisation is essential.

As for the dancing, except for the very first scene which was choreographed, the dancers were free to express themselves in their own language, often very close to the unconscious, revealing their individual interior turmoil. In dance styles like voguing, waacking or krump, the participants display their

physical prowess with a jaw-dropping spontaneity. With the very best dancers, this becomes particularly dazzling.

The scenes were shot chronologically to generate both a state of general trust and a spirit of competition that drove the dancers towards ever-more psychotic performances. Contrary to more usual depictions of dance, in which every step is predetermined, I tried to push my protagonists to simulate possessed states like those encountered in ritual trances.

Although drugs certainly figure in the story, this time the idea wasn't to depict altered states of perception subjectively through visual effects and sound, but on the contrary, to stick to an external point of view on the characters. Another rule was to film very quickly and in long takes, a choice made possible by shooting on a unique set. This allowed me to complete every shot in a fortnight during February 2018. We nonetheless rehearsed the first choreographed scene with our dancers. And, to ready them for the other dance sequences, we had them listen to the music already chosen for the film.

To talk about dance is to talk about music. In order to respect the era in which the film is set, the music – whether electrifying or melodious – dates from no later than the mid-90s. And to create a familiar emotional state, we tried to include tracks that would speak to the widest audience.



WHO?

From the start the concept was to make a film with the best dancers we could find in France or who could travel there. With the intention of making a film centered on corporal expression, Serge Catoire and I didn't search for actors but scoured krump battles and voguing balls in the Paris region, as well as dance videos on the internet. Very quickly, and instinctively, we understood with which dancers it would be wonderful to form a troupe and film. We convinced the daring Edouard Weil (Rectangle Productions) and Vincent Maraval (Wild Bunch), co-producers of my film LOVE, and the production of this low budget movie was underway. During our very first visit to a voguing ball, as guests of Léa Vlamos, I met Kiddy Smile, huge DJ and musician, who invited me to witness dance battles from the stage. Serge and I hadn't seen such a happening energy on show in Paris since certain violent street demonstrations during our adolescence.

We managed to contact the dancers who made us dream and talked to them about a film that already had a story but no predetermined dialogues. Unexpectedly, the channel ARTE took an interest in the project. Kiddy acted as our 'godfather', contacting - and above all convincing - on our behalf certain of his voguing friends. It seemed obvious that we should offer him the role of DJ Daddy. At the same time, I had the idea of contacting the legendary Sofia Boutella in Los Angeles, whom I had met once, to offer her the driving role of the choreographer. Her dance videos fascinated me as much as she did herself. For some time she'd committed herself to acting and had appeared in a number

of feature films. I knew she would have the strength and the madness necessary to play this extreme and multifaceted role. Before giving me her answer, she recommended the person she considered the best choice to handle the film's choreography, Nina McNeely, and I thank her again for this brilliant idea. The presence of particular dancers drew others to us, and small groups responded positively to our proposal. We were lucky enough to encounter waackers, krumpers and a group of electro dancers (including Romain Guillermic and Taylor Kastle) who right away sent us videos of themselves simulating trance states. Delight follows delight. In January, I contacted all my most treasured collaborators, who made themselves available (Benoît Debie, Lazare Pedron, Ken Yasumoto, Rodolphe Chabrier, Pascal Mayer, Fred Cambier, Denis Bedlow, Marc Boucrot, Tom Kan and Laurent Lufroy) and to whom were added the encouragements of Thomas Bangalter and two wonderful new associates: production designer Jean Rabasse and first assistant director Claire Corbetta-Doll.

In record time we found a disused school in Vitry and were able to clear the rights to music tracks I'd dreamed of using. Two days before the shoot we met acrobat and actress Souhelia Yacoub, and secured a work permit for the astonishing contortionist Strauss Serpent, so he could join us from Cameroon. Nourished by our multiple experiences of uncontrolled crashes, the shoot went ahead in an atmosphere of delight, and the improvisations of the dancers, on the floor or in their extemporized dialogues, dazzled us all.

Two months later, we are pleased to present this modest reproduction of the joyful and sad reality.

All my thanks to those who made us, and who are no longer...

Let the party begin!

GASPAR NOE



CLIMAX

CAST

SOFIA BOUTELLA SELVA
 ROMAIN GUILLERMIC DAVID
 SOUHEILA YACOUB LOU
 KIDDY SMILE DADDY
 CLAUDE GAJAN MAULL EMMANUELLE
 GISELLE PALMER GAZELLE
 TAYLOR KASTLE TAYLOR
 THEA CARLA SCHOTT PSYCHE
 SHARLEEN TEMPLE IVANA
 LEA VLAMOS EVA
 ALAIA ALSAÏR ALAIA
 KENDALL MÜLLER ROCKY
 LAKDHAR DRIDI RILEY
 ADRIEN SISSOKO OMAR
 MANADOU BATTELY BART
 ALDU SIDIBE KYRRA
 ASHLEY BISSETTE SHIRLEY
 MOUNIA NASSANGAR DOM
 TIPHANIE AU SILA
 SARAH BELALA JENNIFER
 ALEXANDRE MOREAU CYBORO
 NAAB ROCCO
 STRAUSS SERPENT SERPENT
 VINCE GALLIOT CUMANT TITO

MUSIC

TROIS GYMNOPÉDIES [ERIK SATIE] by GARY NUMAN
 SOLIDIT by CHRIS CARTER
 SUPERNATURE by CERRONE
 BORN TO BE ALIVE by PATRICK HERNANDEZ
 PUMP UP THE VOLUME by M/A/R/S
 FRENCH KISS by LIL LOUIS
 SUPERIOR RACE and TECHNIC 1200 by DOPPLEREFFECT
 DICKMARTIZED by KIDDY SMILE
 SANGRIA and WHAT TO DO by THOMAS BANGALTER
 VOICES by NEON
 THE WORLD'S by SUBURBAN KNIGHTS
 ROLLIN' & SCRATCHIN' by DAFT PUNK
 WINDOWlicker by APEX TWIN
 ELECTRON by WILD PLANET
 TAINTED LOVE / WHERE DID OUR LOVE GO by SOFT CELL
 UTOPIA ME GIORGIO by GIORGIO MORODER
 ANGIE (INSTRUMENTAL) by THIBAUT BARBILLON
 M4D by COSEY FANNI TUTTI and COH

CREW

DIRECTOR GASPARD NOE
 SCREENPLAY GASPARD NOE
 IMAGE BENOIT DEBIE
 EDITING DENIS BEDLOW
 GASPARD NOE
 SOUND KEN YASUMOTO
 PRODUCTION DESIGN JEAN RABASSE
 COSTUME FRED CAMBIER
 CHOREOGRAPHY NINA MC NEELY
 ASSISTANT DIRECTOR CLAIRE CORBETTA DOLL
 LINE PRODUCER SERGE CATORE
 VISUAL EFFECTS RODOLPHE CHARRIER
 MAC GUFF LINE
 MUSICAL SUPERVISOR PASCAL MAYER / NOODLES
 PRODUCED BY EDOUARD WEIL
 VINCENT MARAVAL
 BRAHIM CHIOUA
 GASPARD NOE
 RICHARD GRANDPIERRE
 MICHEL MERKT
 PATRICK QUINET
 EDDY MORETTI
 DANNY GABAI
 PRODUCTION RECTANGLE PRODUCTIONS
 WILD BUNCH
 IN COPRODUCTION WITH LES CINÉMAS DE LA ZONE
 ESKWAD
 KNM
 ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA
 ARTEMIS PRODUCTIONS
 VICE STUDIO
 CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET
 DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE
 (CREATION VISUELLE ET
 SONORE NUMÉRIQUE)
 LA SACHEM
 IN COPRODUCTION WITH VOO & BE TV
 SHELTER PROD
 IN ASSOCIATION WITH TAXSHELTER.BE & IN
 WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CINEVENTURE 3



FCD1845