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present

DELETE HISTORY

A film by **Benoît Delépine & Gustave Kervern**

starring

Blanche Gardin

Denis Podalydès
(From la Comédie-Française)

Corinne Masiero

2019 - France - Color - 106 min

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SYNOPSIS

In a provincial suburb, three neighbours are overtaken by new technologies and social media.

There's Marie, who could be about to lose the respect of her son because of a sex tape; Bertrand's daughter, a victim of online bullying; and Christine, whose Uber ratings are refusing to take off. With the help of a genuine hacker, they resolve to fight the mighty windmills of contemporary life: the Big Tech companies. Maybe their battle is screwed from the beginning – but you never know...

Q&A WITH BENOIT DELÉPINE & GUSTAVE KERVERN

In keeping with your previous work, *DELETE HISTORY* is both a "Yellow Vests movement" movie and a funny, scathing critique of the digital age. What was the original idea? How do you come up with your films?

Benoit Delépine It's the 10th film I've done with Gustave, we're both friends and filmmakers working together, and our films are actually inspired by our lives. We began with *Aaltra* back home in Picardy, in the fields, and our purpose was to one day end up in Mauritius, in Gustave's birthplace. We'd been trying to do just that without achieving our goal over several films – and now here we are! As this film is about uncontrolled globalization, we thought here at long last was the opportunity to go all the way to Mauritius with this epiphany – man is A.I.'s dodo (Editor's Note: a scene in the film explains that the dodo is a giant Mauritius pigeon that became extinct because of human activity). Just like the dodo, man believes he is the king of the world and isn't threatened by any predator – but he came up with artificial intelligence, which is much more powerful than he is, and now we can see the signs of what's going to happen to us. We can sense it'll end badly.

Gustave Kervern Every day, even before we considered doing this film, Benoît and I would call each other and talk about how we were overwhelmed by the incredible twists and turns of today's daily life. For instance, I still don't understand why I should pay 60 Euros for my phone plan when I see ads for 20 Euro plans all over the place – and no matter how often I call the company helpline, I'm told I have a decent plan. You keep getting the uncomfortable impression of being taken for a ride.

BD You can't speak to a real person anymore, all you get is an automated system all day.

GK The thing about the bed slat ordered online actually happened to me. It was a bloody hassle to change that slat: the store referred me to the manufacturer based in Switzerland, and when I called them, they referred me back to the store and so on. Everyone keeps experiencing this kind of situation for insurance, banking, phone subscriptions – "press 1, press 2 – it's so time-

consuming! You need to take a whole afternoon off to get something done yet, you don't even know for a fact that you'll get it done! You wonder if you're not a misfit and then you start talking to people and realize that they've all more or less experienced the same thing. It almost led me to a burnout.

BD Daily life has become a constant hallucination. To do our films, we're often overwhelmed by reality.

The film aptly and accurately takes aim at the high-tech absurdities of the day, as in the scene where Marie (Blanche Gardin) stores her various usernames and passwords in her deep freeze!

BD Right – we keep changing our passwords.

GK You end up using the same password everywhere and so run the risk of getting everything hacked all at once! And then you have to deal with the new password safety requirements, so you need to pick a more complicated one that's harder to memorize...

BD We live in an open-air madhouse! You're left with no option and can't talk to real people anymore. And then people don't seem to understand why there are no jobs anymore. Well, yeah, you don't see anyone anywhere any longer, so no wonder unemployment keeps rising. And when there are no jobs, why should people retire at 64? It's all such nonsense. Responsible people thinking about our future are aware that there will be fewer and fewer jobs, that machines and computers will do all the work, that there won't be anyone left to pay for our pensions.

You show how difficult it is to direct your complaint to someone real in the high-tech world – power is intangible, faceless, globalized, unreal.

BD We did research and met hackers. The point of the Cloud is that the info about us is stored in several places in the world. But there still is a physical place where you can delete data – and it's generally located in California. That's why Marie goes to San Francisco.

GK Our three protagonists are confused when confronted with the digital monster.

BD They met thanks to the Yellow Vests movement and luckily they became friends and have been supporting each other. How could you take on such a fortress alone?

GK We'd already dealt with the France of small and medium-sized towns in *Le Grand Soir*. In *DELETE HISTORY*, you can see people in their housing projects, they don't drive to save on gas and mileage – a running gag that demonstrates pretty well that they're stranded in their own homes.

Do you feel like the Yellow Vests movement actually fed on that sense of loneliness – of isolation?

GK Originally, the film was focused on a single character, a Yellow Vest protester *avant la lettre* who fought against all that, isolation, social hardship, digitization of public services... Except that we wrote one draft just before the movement broke out.

BD So we got afraid people might suspect us of opportunistically following the herd.

GK We then decided to change the subject and write about three protagonists with different issues, although similar in various respects.

BD We also wanted to put across the idea of solidarity in a gradually more and more individualistic world, with electronic tools that make people more and more isolated.

GK Corinne (Masiero) actually cried during the scene on the roundabout. We were aware she was involved in the Yellow Vests movement but we didn't know how deeply. It was hugely important for her, it helped her regain her confidence in people's ability to come together and swing into action. She was tired of demonstrations leading nowhere and was on the brink of burnout herself. When you're Don Quixote and keep fighting windmills, you grow tired after a while. The Yellow Vests movement perked her up again.

BD Let me tell you a story. We were looking for a place to write, to get in the mood, not too far from Paris. We picked Arras [120 miles north of Paris]. One thing leading to another, we also decided to shoot there, and found our housing project in the outskirts of Arras. One month before we began shooting, Corinne asked us where we were going to shoot and we told her: "In the North, near Arras". "No kidding? You don't mean Saint-Laurent-Blangy?" – "We do!" – "What? Are you nuts?" That's actually where she grew up as a kid and raised hell and got bashed about. It was a total coincidence! 35,000 towns in France and we just happened to pick that one!

The film shows that social, economic, digital divides are all connected, doesn't it?

BD Everything's connected! A few days ago, I presented one of our films at La Clef, an activist theater. Watching a film all together in a theater is a totally different experience from watching it alone at home on a TV or computer screen. That's also why we do a lot of wide shots – it's not our job to focus on this or that detail with a closeup, it's up to the audience to explore the frame. In a theater, you experience that moment all together, whereas when you're at home, you're on your own and you pay for all those digital services that tend to isolate you.

GK Whatever you may think of the Yellow Vests, what you hear all the time is

that on the roundabouts, people began talking to each other again, making acquaintances, reconnecting with each other. That's so important. They'd been living in the same neighborhood but wouldn't talk to each other. The film is about three lonely people who lived next to each other but ignored each other.

BD When Christine (Corinne Masiero) gets to the vehicle-for-hire company she works for to find out why she isn't getting more stars, she's asked if she wants more likes, more friends. She says: "No, I have all the friends I need!" I love that scene – it means she has actual friends. In the virtual world, having 10,000 friends is like having no friends at all.

GK With digital technology, public services tend to close down and you feel the effects more in rural areas than in big cities. It's getting difficult to find a post office, a doctor, a hospital, all those services keep closing down one after the other.

Although many of the situations depicted aren't funny, you still make us laugh.

GK When Bertrand (Denis Podalydès) is referred to another post office 30 miles away, it's funny but the sad thing is that it's true.

BD I thought I'd come up with the phrase "Heart of Hauts de France [the region where the film is set] but it actually exists. "Heart of Hauts de France" is a perfect example of the Newspeak. It definitely sounds better than "Foie de bas de France" [literally, "Liver of Lower France"]!

Although your characters are financially strapped, they're not materially destitute. You put across that today's malaise doesn't only hit the country's poorest people. Or that some consumer goods flogged to consumers these days don't make people happy.

BD When I return to the back of beyond and visit the people I grew up with, I find them well-off by today's standards. I grew up on a farm that was hardly comfortable, but I was very happy there. These days, in suburban areas, people aren't in dire straits technically, but they live on credit.

GK The housing project we shot in isn't so bad, even quite cute, and the people who live there are kind of comfy. However, we noticed they hardly talk to each other. They go home in the evening, watch TV, but there's no sense of community.

BD They're not so much economically destitute but existentially so. We met a guy who was comfortably settled with his wife and kids, living in a detached house, who'd work in Paris and come back home late every night and who ended up losing it. He spent too much time on transport and had a stupid life with too much pressure. After a number of years, he couldn't take it anymore and killed himself.

GK Kids often had their own rooms but stayed there playing video games, not in the least interested in our presence. We shot the film among the residents and almost lived with them until the end of the shoot. They sometimes got to meet each other through the shoot.

So what you're saying in your film actually happened in real life thanks to the shoot?

BD Yes, that's also why we make films. Every time, we experience a new adventure. We've always shot on location and met the people living there. What's amazing is that they always bring us something.

GK We don't redecorate the houses or apartments where we shoot. It's sociologically interesting to look at people's interior decoration, tastes and lifestyles. For instance, on this film, there was a beer pump in every house.

BD We couldn't believe it! That's probably because there was no bar nearby. No screenwriter could possibly come up with something like that. And they all had a huge flat TV screen in front of their beds.

Are your films based only on what you witness and experience – or also on books? I'm thinking of the work of geographer Christophe Guilluy who highlighted suburban France, or of novels including Nicolas Mathieu's *Leurs enfants après eux*.

BD I live in the suburbs, 10 miles from Angoulême, and I'm always riding my bike (an electric bike, I must confess!) to get around. Anyway, I've been studying France's evolution for the past twenty years and it's no wonder it's found its way into films and books.

GK When *Le Grand Soir* came out, I remember that *Télérama* [a cultural weekly] dedicated a whole section to suburban France that included interviews with the two of us, Depardon and probably that geographer.

BD I don't mean to brag but as soon as I saw the diesel liter price jump over the €1.50 mark, I thought it'd be a bloody mess. That was for sure! People got fleeced – like dodos. They were encouraged to live away from city centers because it was cheaper, to get into debt and then to opt for diesel because it was cheaper – and then the price of diesel caught up with regular. They were totally FUCKED! The Yellow Vests movement expressed what we'd been anticipating. No wonder people took to the streets, they thought something was wrong with the system. On TV, there are more debates about soccer than about pensions – it's crazy!

There's a scene where Christine explains how she cracked up because of her addiction to TV shows, just like hard drugs. Do you believe that TV shows also represent the high-tech, free-market economy?

GK Originally, we thought the film would take place entirely over the phone. We were asked how we would film this and told it could be deadly boring. But the fact is everybody is hooked on their phones, including older people – I can't believe it! It's a new addiction. So you have video games for young children and teens and TV shows for adults. TV shows also create a new addiction, you're stranded at home on your couch and you're happy because you don't have to use your car to go out. Between your beer pump and your giant screen, you're home with your own bar and movie theater! Plus, it comes quite cheap... At least you're led to believe it's inexpensive even though in the end you have to get three or four different subscriptions.

BD If you do the math, you spend six hours per day on TV shows, which isn't expensive on an hourly rate basis. Except that it comes at a price mentally, because you're literally on a TV show binge. The boss of Netflix said recently that they actually compete with sleep. Isn't that unbelievable? The notion of "available brain time" is outdone by something even worse.

GK We used to talk about movies by the coffee machine, now we talk about TV shows. If you haven't seen *Money Heist* or *Game of Thrones*, you're out, you're history. The crazy thing about the internet is that everybody is constantly rated, just like Christine. Restaurants and taxis are rated, but you can also be rated by a cab driver if you're a bad customer. We all end up rated and watched, just like in school.

BD Rating everyone is another way of hunting flaws to erase them. Now, isn't man nothing but flaws? Isn't that what human beings are all about? We were so excited to leave school that we definitely don't intend to go back! For a start, you're made to conform through school – admittedly, you need to learn how to write, read and count – but there's no way you can accept being graded all your adult life! When you kick the bucket, will an angel tell you: "I'm giving you a one-star rating for your life"? What the fuck?!

Let's talk about the cast. You've mentioned Corinne Masiero before – why did you cast her?

GK Because of *Louise Wimmer*, an outstanding film in which she's awesome. After that, we kind of followed her career, as we liked her loudmouthed, cocky attitude. We thought of her as a female Depardieu. When we start casting a film and we know we're going to spend a whole month with actors, we need to have fun – we need to feel something unique is going on.

BD We compare her to Depardieu for the right reasons, for acting reasons. She has an instinctive, animal side, and yet she's very precise and accurate.

What about Denis Podalydès? At first glance, he doesn't necessarily fit in your world ...

GK He's always made us laugh. We love the Podalydès brothers' movies.

They're always very good.

BD Their fraternal adventures are really interesting and funny. Denis is a kind of French Woody Allen – vulnerable, true, moving... A guy like him is incredible. When we offered him the part, he said: "I'll do it, whatever." It was a true gift for us, it helped the movie get off the ground and it comforted financiers and producers.

GK He was exactly like the outlandish character we had imagined. He has a real knack for comedy.

BD He's never pretentious. He's unassuming and just quietly keeps at it. On the shoot, he tried to make us happy and serve the film as best he could. He is so generous and non-judgmental. He's awesome.

On the other hand, Blanche Gardin seems to match your world and sense of humor perfectly.

GK Blanche was an obvious choice.

BD She was more than that. When you get to know her, you believe there's life after death. When you see her on stage, she rocks! When we offered her the part, we weren't too hopeful – it was as scary as reaching out to Depardieu. Blanche is a pinnacle of humanity, accuracy, truth, courage, humor. At first, she turned us down because she was supposed to write her own film. So we told her our film starred Viggo Mortensen and she said: "Come to think of it, I can do my film later!"

GK She didn't buy the Viggo argument...

BD Come on, she played opposite Denis, that's not so bad!

GK Blanche sets herself such high standards, and we suspected as much from seeing her shows. She didn't grow up dreaming about becoming a film actress.

BD She could very well have said no.

GK If she had, we wouldn't have pushed her. But she said yes enthusiastically. That's how our three main actors came together and the interesting thing is that they're very different, physically and psychologically. The three of them said yes to our offer quite easily, based on our previous movies and *Groland*. We're connected by a similar way of thinking.

Although Blanche, Corinne and Denis are newcomers in your world, some of your regular actors make cameo appearances: Benoît Poelvoorde, Michel Houellebecq, Vincent Lacoste, Bouli Lanners...

GK We thought that as it was our 10th film, including our medium-length film with Brigitte Fontaine, it was the opportunity to gather together people we like. However, we'd forgotten that in *Near Death Experience*, Michel already portrayed a suicidal guy. Every time we do a film together, he wants to kill himself!

BD In one single scene, Poelvoorde tears my heart apart. He reminds me of Goya's *Old Women*. In the scene where he plays an Uber delivery guy, he's sort of funny but he's mostly staggeringly emotional. He came to Arras and gave us that! That's

so powerful. He put everything on the table.

It's your first feature produced by Sylvie Pialat. Did you know her? Is it a kind of indirect tribute to Maurice Pialat's work?

GK We knew Sylvie in real life, she's a real joker, and we always thought we'd love to do a film with her.

BD We knew her through Maurice. He liked us. He loved television.

GK Maurice Pialat's work is all about humanity, powerful emotions, truthful acting.

BD There's something rough about his films that requires silences. There's always something going on, at every turn. It's really awesome. Our work is pretty harmless compared to his. You can tell Pialat's work is serious stuff. That said, I saw our film again yesterday and I didn't find it so funny.

GK To go back to Sylvie, we like her as a producer but also outside work, like everyone we work with. We're happy about the job we did with her, she looks at things in the right way, she was always there at the right time to say the right things.

Did you shoot on the actual tech giants' premises?

BD We went to the Silicon Valley but we shot the scene where Marie gets evicted at the Louvre-Lens Museum.

GK We had a hard time with the companies' names. We're not allowed to mention Apple, for instance, it's unbelievable.

BD Major brands are better protected than people. We couldn't mention Cupertino, Apple's corporate headquarters. It's as if we weren't allowed to mention Clermont-Ferrand because it's Michelin's home base! Isn't that totally crazy?

GK We had to whiten the Anonymous masks with SFX because Warners owns the rights to those masks.

BD Even that symbol of anarchy has been privatized by a multinational corporation. We're done for.

Do you see *DELETE HISTORY* as comic, desperate or just clear-sighted?

GK Tragicomic. Our films are always a bit like that. Take *Le Grand Soir* for instance – I see it as a comedy whereas many people find it really tough. Several genres found their way into ***DELETE HISTORY*** and tragedy may win out over comedy but I'm happy about that – it means substance prevails over form.

BD There's something really wrong about this era. We're sitting in an old bar right now and you have to fight against Starbucks and similar chains. All the interesting places are run by old men or women who will soon retire. But once they're gone, the world Houellebecq has long been anticipating will be upon us.

Q&A WITH BLANCHE GARDIN

Were you familiar with Benoit Delépine's and Gustave Kervern's work?

Blanche Gardin – I've been a distant admirer of their work for a long time. I secretly hoped we'd actually meet one day. Meetings are weird: when you know ahead that it's going to work out, well, it does! Every time I saw their films, I thought I had a very strong connection to them, that we were brothers and sister. When I met them, I was very intimidated, I spent a lot of time studying them, like Jane Goodall with her gorillas. I had to find my way in to actually being with them. The magic eventually happened. I'm not sure whether I adapted to them, or they to me, but there was such a wonderful union between us. I'd never experienced anything like that artistically speaking.

Were you ready to work with them whatever the material or did you make your decision based on the script?

I related to the issues addressed in the script and I recognized their social, poetic touch that moves me deeply. And it was funny. I guess I relate to all of Kervern's and Delépine's characters! To Depardieu in *Mammuth*, to Yolande Moreau in *Mammuth* and *Louise-Michel*... I relate to what we all have in common and we can all agree on. It's not easy to like what you see every morning when you look at yourself in the mirror, but there's always a respectable place deep down, and that place is our humanity. There's always that place in Kervern's and Delépine's characters. They don't write entirely unpleasant characters – they always reconnect us to a decent version of ourselves. I embraced Marie 100%.

Marie appears to be more of a slacker than you, since your career involves much hard work and determination.

Well, I haven't always been a hard worker. I used to be a slacker, I was lost and

I believe we all are at some stages in our lives. None of us is a single person, we are many throughout our lives. Even today, I have moments when I feel like Marie, when I say to myself: "What's the point?". Especially when dealing with the new values the world came up with that are – let's face it – ugly. I'm thinking of the gross economic Darwinism where you can either adapt or die. You're forced to relate to that, even if you're part of the game's winners. You could just as well find yourself on the losers' side, or even wake up in the morning to go help people instead of making money... I guess we all entertain that relationship to a world that's gone very wrong, where you feel cut off from future and past generations.

The film deals with economic – and digital – Darwinism. Do you relate to the complex relationship with new technologies the film speaks about?

Like many people, I feel left behind and compelled to use them. It's a slavery of sorts. You don't feel so lonely when you have your cell phone handy but you know it's not true – you're just as lonely as ever. You call people less and less, you text them to keep a connection that's not really a connection. Those new tools bring about a kind of human laziness.

The film also addresses the digital surveillance that we are all subject to – behind our backs – and that Marie falls victim to with the sex tape blackmail.

Yes, it will end up making us "model" citizens so that we can't be confronted with stuff we did ten years ago. We're moving towards a kind of social control that will be more and more handled by people themselves – we won't leave any trace that may be held against us, we'll lie low. It's all well-organized.

In the virtual world, you don't know who to turn to when a problem comes along. That's exemplified by Marie's and Bertrand's failure to solve their problems – they either deal with security guards or robots.

Marie goes to visit Google as though Google was a person. But it's a losing battle. The tech giants' power is intangible and untraceable. We're all outraged at how powerful the digital corporations are but we know all the same that we can't do otherwise – that we need to adapt. There's also something playful about digital services – and yet it's extremely perverse. You can't possibly tell people: "Let's do away with cell phones" – we're way too addicted, including me, even if I'm not a big user. If I don't have my phone with me, I can't find

my bearings in all senses of the word. Phones have replaced our offices and the people we ask for directions. One day in Lille, I had drunk too much and I smashed my phone, saying to myself: "Down with consumer society!" The next day, I woke up and realized that my train tickets were on my phone! I was lost, I didn't know what time my train was leaving, or even where the station was. I stayed there, stranded like a beached whale. I didn't even feel like asking the people around me for directions. With cell phones, you lose touch with reality. So, from that perspective, I relate to the film.

The scene where you store your passwords in the fridge is very funny and telling about the absurdity of our times.

Sometimes computers generate a password. It's actually the computers that know your passwords. So you tend to feel safe as if your computer was a loyal friend, with a moral compass... but the truth is, it's not at all! Why should you trust a machine?

Do you believe new technologies and new forms of poverty or loneliness are connected?

I do. This film takes aim at progress, and that's fine by me. Whatever you may think, we need to criticize progress, which isn't necessarily a reactionary attitude. We could really act differently: we could progress in human terms instead of only technologically. We're so convinced we're the best because we're the most recent version of humankind, but truth be told, not necessarily – it doesn't have to work like this. The fact of the matter is, if you talk to geeks, they'll tell you the best iPhone isn't necessarily the latest version. Progress isn't always linear. I'm totally unapologetic about criticizing progress and this film epitomizes it perfectly – technological progress involves disrupting human connection. And then it leads to the most depressing standardization you can find. In bars, people only talk about the latest TV show – it's become the sole topic of conversation.

Christine is hooked on TV shows and she's played by Corinne Masiero, who's famous for her role in a TV show, Bertrand has issues with the internet but he owns a giant TV screen and has subscribed to several online services... The film highlights the contradiction you were talking about – we long for technology while fearing in it a new type of willing slavery.

It's more and more difficult to live according to your own ideas – you're facing unprecedented contradictions. People have never made so little sense. The greatest environmentalists switch on their cell phones in the morning although we all know that high tech pollution is a fact. We don't know where all this is taking us but for the time being, it's no fun at all.

You come from a stand-up comedy background. How different – even challenging – was it for you to play a role and speak lines you hadn't written?

What happened with Kervern and Delépine is quite unique. I don't think I'll experience it again. We were like soulmates, we understood each other to a degree that most humans never reach. There was a good deal of me in the part and I don't think it was a shoot like any other. I didn't feel like I was acting or portraying a role – I was both an audience member and immersed in the Kervern-Delépine cauldron where a kind of magic potion was simmering. I came out of the shoot feeling worn out, but for the right reasons. So, I can't really make an overall comparison between film and stand-up comedy. On stage, you get the impression you can control what you're doing, you can't see yourself, whereas on the shoot, I could see myself. And I could see both guys coming on set in the morning, looking at the scene we were supposed to do and saying: "That's no good, that's crap!" and then tearing up their own screenplay and racking their brains, with or without me... But all the while, they remained the sweetest guys, generous and kind to everyone. They film in long sequence shots and let the actors breathe and flesh out their characters. I came up with a lot of ideas because I have a hard time speaking dialogue I haven't written. It was awesome.

You're used to being alone on stage. How did you feel playing opposite other actors?

It's different, but then again not so much, as the audience at a show is also a character with whom you have a dialogue. You play with the audience, and it's no figure of speech, it's a fact. It's a different audience every night and you play to what they respond to. In film, there's also an audience – the crew. You want to please them, to make them laugh... But it's awesome to act with great actors and discover them, and on this film I was so lucky to act alongside incredible people... Corinne Masiero, Denis Podalydès, Houellebecq, Poelvoorde, Lacoste... greats only, I was on top of the world!

In the end, will you take from this film the comedy or the terrifying comment on our times?

Today, you often hear the term "dramedy" and I think that's the right word. A comedy involves too much relativism: "Come on, that's not such a big deal, why not laugh about it?" That's not this film's take at all, it's much more desperate than that. **DELETE HISTORY** says we've lost the battle to some degree, but it remains hopeful about people and their humanity, about what we keep carrying inside, despite everything. The film is tragic when it comes to the problems of the system, but cheerful about people. There's a part in everyone that keeps hoping other people mean them well.

Q&A WITH DENIS PODALYDÈS

Were you familiar with Kervern's and Delépine's work? How much did you relate to it?

Very much so. I was familiar with *Mammuth*, *Le Grand Soir*, *Saint-Amour*. Each of these films left an impression on me, particularly style-wise—the combination of visual precision and extreme freedom in terms of tone, storytelling and acting. Dadaist spirit and modest means to the benefit of political acuteness and irresistible comedic strength. Their films are like no others, free-spirited, radiant, demanding and yet profoundly human and unassuming. During the shoot I watched the films I hadn't seen, including *Aaltra*, *Avida*, *Louise-Michel* and *Near Death Experience*. Their filmmaking is wild, totally bold, visually rich and varied in a mysterious way (each film has its unique tone), with amazing actors – Bouli Lanners, Yolande Moreau, Albert Dupontel and themselves – and the weird sidekicks inhabiting their films, like Michel Houellebecq who captivated me in the scene we shared. The more I discovered their films, the happier I was to be part of them and to blend into their cinematic landscape.

How did you land the project? Did they approach you?

They reached out to me and offered me the part. I leapt for it, I was so happy and so proud that they'd thought of me.

How did you react to the script when you read it?

It was a rather short synopsis that was only about my character, based on the image of the dodo. It was very funny, very clear, with scenes already perfectly depicted, intense, funny, moving, that I instantly took a liking to and looked forward to playing. So after ten minutes of reading I was totally sold – I'd said yes, yes, yes to them anyway!

Do you know any Bertrands (your character in the film), or even recognize yourself in him?

Who doesn't? Yes, I totally relate to him. There's a pigeon in me that is staggeringly naïve and even, in some fields (including computers), worryingly stupid. Bertrand is oh-so vulnerable (more than me!). Gustave and Benoît wanted that he should never act strong or display skills and especially that I shouldn't play it comically. But I relate to all three main characters, both idle and strong-willed, overwhelmed and snowed under, but also so fanciful, carefree and hopeful despite everything.

Do you relate to the digitization of everything in the same way Bertrand does?

I've opened hundreds of accounts on hundreds of sites, entered my credit card details hundreds of times, got lost in the depths of the web because I was told to buy a software solution to get a sports channel, downloaded the same software up to five or six times, opened suspicious emails, ticked and unticked boxes, said hello, thanks, yes I'm satisfied, seen huge amounts of info disappear because I'd reached the session timeout, started all over again, infuriated, slammed my computer shut in a rage... I've fallen into every trap convinced that – both to comfort and outrage myself – there were probably thousands, or even millions, of us, disconnected from each other, lost, shouting bitterly and helplessly on our keyboards. Luckily I'm not broke like Bertrand, I have people around me, I'm protected.

Bertrand's daughter is a victim of cyber-bullying. Have you or anyone close to you experienced that kind of situation?

No, not at all.

Does Bertrand embody our most common contradictions – he's addicted to digital devices while sometimes falling victim to them.

He's an addict and believes his salvation can only be found in the digital world as he's been online for a long time – from Facebook, with whom he's in conflict, to the most alluring connection of all: Miranda's exotic voice, the final stage of his alienation. His fantasies, his sexuality, his romantic life are entirely digital.

More generally, do the internet, social media and new technologies attract or frighten you?

I keep off social media. I don't have Facebook anymore, even though I could

never totally delete it because it's almost impossible, and I gave up, so there's still my picture but I never open it. I don't have Twitter or Instagram or anything. When I'm on my computer, most of the time I'm not browsing images and sites but writing and doing emails – that's it. I feel neither dislike, nor dread, nor attraction, nor addiction. Because I'm not alone and I don't feel alone.

Do you embrace the film's stance that new technologies intensify, or even create, loneliness and isolation?

Yes, I do. I have the feeling they create fake communities – a large number of shams, of imaginary connections, meetings, debates etc. I never read blogs or visit chat rooms – all those dialogues expressing hate or conventional passions, poorly written and so on, are both deafening and deathly silent. That's what I believe, but because I'm not tech-savvy, I'm probably missing out on a teeming, exciting world that, despite appearances, has an almost real life of its own, now that it's branched out and diversified so much. So I'm probably the one deluding myself, and much more isolated than I care to believe. The evidence being that I'm very often the last one to find out about events and news. And I'm aware that relevant ideas – maybe great ones – are obviously posted online everyday – and that I'll only be privy to them much later, in a book or a printed newspaper...

How did you find your collaboration with Kervern and Delépine?

They created the most enjoyable, exciting environment... a combination of cheerfulness - even mucking around - absolute dedication and high expectations. Gustave and Benoît never ever stop working on the film, thinking it through, rewriting it, perfecting each and every scene through the rehearsals and from take to take. And all the while, you keep hearing jokes on the set, the crew are smiling and generous, Benoît has an amazing laugh, radiant and heartwarming, Gustave gently cracks little jokes as if quite unconsciously, while pulling you back into line, asking you to do something else, something different, challenging you, pushing you out of your comfort zone and away from comedic conventions. Sometimes a particular scene can take its time finding its style. They only came up with the scene where I snatch a phone from one of my daughter's classmates after a number of decisions, cuts, shifts – until they reached the essence. They're more than happy to give up on a line that sounds tasty during a read-through but that proves contrived on the shoot.

How about Blanche and Corinne?

I loved working with them: rehearsing, acting, waiting, starting things over,

talking – or not talking – dreaming, laughing: the whole set of relationships you build on a shoot on a day-to-day basis. Thanks to the general atmosphere, we could only trust each other. We hadn't met before and we got to know each other gradually, without exaggerating the camaraderie – which you sometimes must do when you do a comedy, where everybody must be in high spirits, falling into each other's arms, etc. I loved their gentleness, their mystery, their attitudes, and their characters – the vulnerability and the wild imagination. I'm already dreaming of a sequel, of doing more films with them, of getting back together again and again.

I must say that I shared those wonderful relationships with the crew and cast, including those who only came to do a scene for a day or two – not to mention the neighbors from Saint-Laurent Blangy where we shot the interior scenes. We created an actual, living community during the three weeks we spent in the Arras area.

What's your take on the film? Is it a comedy? A tragedy? Is it desperate? Hopeful?

It's definitely a comedy, desperate and hopeful, which may not be a contradiction. I like comedies that make you laugh about things that aren't funny. Any good comedy feeds on desperate situations and the laughter it provokes gives it its optimism, its *raison d'être*, its subversive power.

Q&A WITH CORINNE MASIERO

Before you did the film, how did you feel about Kervern's and Delépine's work?

I was a fan of what they stood for: freedom, humor, boldness. I thought their first film, *Aaltra*, was crazy. When they want something, they go all the way, whether it has to do with form or substance, whether people like it or not. Also, they don't take themselves seriously, they have a fabulous self-deprecating humor, which is a quality I love. They also have a great sense of cinematography – I love the look of all their films. And they're the guys behind Groland, which is awesome. They go to small festivals, alternative movie theaters... When you see them there, you know that they're unpretentious, that you can trust them. I've always wanted to meet them, to work with them – I'd even have worked as a location manager if they'd asked me. So it was great when they offered me a role.

When you read the script, did you want to work with them even more?

I never read scripts! The only thing I'd have said no to was an anti-blue-collar bias, or a homophobic bias – anything hateful. Benoît told me it was nothing like that and he summed up the film, mentioned the tech giants, and obviously, I said: "Let's do it!" As I haven't read the script, I can't wait to discover the film. But that's the cool part... I like to do things when I don't have everything mapped out. It's more fun.

Still, you know more or less what the film's about?

Of course. Globalization, dehumanization, the whole mess that's fucking everything up, in particular whatever little we still had socially.

Without knowing it, they chose to shoot in your hometown. It's a crazy coincidence, isn't it?

Benoît said to me: "I'm doing location scouting near Arras." I said: "Well, that's fine, I used to live there, in a dump called Saint-Laurent-Blangy." – "Are you fucking with me? That's where we're gonna shoot!" It's very weird – we shot in a housing project that wasn't there back in the day, but I'd hang out in places that haven't left me only good memories. I couldn't find the building I used to live in – it was torn down – and it felt funny. Some places stirred me up, I ran into people from junior high... Two distinct periods of my life were collided.

Gustave and Benoît say that the roundabout scene stirred you up, too, as you were a Yellow Vest protester.

Yes, even if I wasn't part of the Arras Yellow Vest movement. But the truth is, something powerful came out that wasn't planned, and it took me a few hours to get over it. When film meets reality, things sometimes get a bit weird.

Christine, the character you play, confesses at some point that she OD'd on TV shows. It's both funny and serious and even more ironic considering you're famous for the show *Capitaine Marleau*.

I'm a true binge-watcher. I like BBC and Scandinavian series, and some HBO shows. French shows aren't bold enough, they're too unadventurous. But I haven't OD'd on shows like Christine. I know what addiction is, I've been there, so I can quit when it's getting dangerous. Binge watching won't destroy your body but may damage your brain – well, it depends on the show's quality. There aren't that many shows that expand your horizons and urge you to think outside the box.

The film pinpoints our contradictions regarding the Internet and the digital world – Christine relies on the Internet for her vehicle-for-hire business but she's upset she's getting only one star ratings. Aren't we all more or less caught up in these contradictions?

Of course we are. I've known two people who managed to live without a cell phone, without an internet connection – and somehow they're right. They favor human relations over digital. That's what the film is all about: you can connect directly without using all the new devices. We'll have to go back to that because otherwise, I think we'll be looking at mass suicide. At the moment, there's a sudden awareness – everybody's waking up, everybody's realizing there's something wrong, and it's global. It will take a few years but

I think we're heading for re-humanization: we'll find a way to use the new digital tools in a fairer social fashion. I want to believe it.

The big paradox about the internet is that it's in the hands of ultra-wealthy multinational corporations, more powerful than governments, that evade taxes to a great extent, collect lots of info from watching people – it's a combination of hard capitalism and soft fascism. But at the same time, the internet fuels collective uprisings, as was exemplified by the Yellow Vests movement, the Arab Spring uprisings, Iran, Hong Kong, flash mobs gathering for this or that cause...

It's always been this way – two sides of the same coin. For the time being, those big motherfuckers are reaping the benefits but at some point, things will turn around, they have to, we'll find a way to screw those who are screwing us. The people always end up winning – there's more of us than them. I personally think in the long run, when you look at history, you can see that, in spite of everything, there has been political and social progress over the centuries. That's also why the motherfuckers will lose, because theirs is a short-term view, they screw up everything to get richer now. Ours is a long-term view, that's where we have the edge.

Tell me about your work with the "two guys".

It was great! They're extremely meticulous, they have high expectations, they can change everything at any time. So everybody was going flat out, which allows you to come up with suggestions. Gustave and Benoît are constantly thinking about the film, 24 hours a day. They'd say: "Last night, we thought about something" – "Hey, don't you have anything else to do at night? Like sleeping?" You have to think on your feet, listen to what they have to say carefully – you may only have to change one word... They're really like conductors, paying attention to each and every note. But they're always very respectful, they won't push you when an idea feels awkward – they're great listeners. And they're very respectful of each other, they never bicker, you can feel true love between them – it's really amazing. When you're with people like this, it's bound to be catching and I think it comes across on-screen. Making a film with them is a total experience. Even if it's a serious job, it does you a world of good, it's a rest, a real joy.

How was it working opposite Blanche and Denis?

It was an absolute gift. Denis is incredibly humble. With his track record, he could brag, but he doesn't! He's always even-tempered, always on time,

knows his lines perfectly... It's great watching him work. Denis is a Stradivarius! I really admire Blanche as a writer, but she made sure not to be overbearing and allowed Gustave and Benoît to make their film. She has a real talent for everything, performing, improvising, coming up with ideas... She's incredibly kind, curious about everything and everyone. Having the two of them around me, and the two guys watching it all, was so uplifting.

Did you have time to talk with the guest stars: Houellebecq, Poelvoorde, Lanners, Lacoste?

Not all of them, it depended on their schedules. I love Bouli, he's a real gentleman, a great actor, a great director. I can't wait to see his scene, it was impressive to watch him work on portraying the fake demigod of the internet. Poelvoorde had dinner one night with everyone and was glorious. He's always asking himself the right questions. And then as an actor, wow, he's one of the greats. I didn't know him personally, but I admire him tremendously.

Is *DELETE HISTORY* optimistic or pessimistic?

Only time will tell! That's what I like about it, the film remains open to interpretation. It's not saying: "This or that will happen." It's up to us to stir ourselves to make sure things get better.

BENOIT DELÉPINE

After studying journalism, Benoît Delépine joined Canal+ in the late 80s. For the newly launched pay-TV channel, he was one of the writers-creators of the satirical puppet show *Les Guignols de l'info* for eight years. He then became one of the key figures of the satirical news show *Groland*, where he created the character of reporter Michael Kael. After writing several comics albums, Delépine turned to film in 1998, writing and playing a part in the short *À l'arraché*, and then the feature *Michael Kael Vs. the World News Company*, in which he reprised his popular TV role.

2020 DELETE HISTORY co-directed with Gustave KERVERN
2018 I FEEL GOOD co-directed with Gustave KERVERN
2016 SAINT AMOUR co-directed with Gustave KERVERN
2014 NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE co-directed with Gustave KERVERN
2012 ENFIN LA FIN (short)
LE GRAND SOIR co-directed with Gustave KERVERN
2011 COMME UN CHIEN (short)
2010 MAMMUTH co-directed with Gustave KERVERN
2008 LOUISE-MICHEL co-directed with Gustave KERVERN
2006 AVIDA co-directed with Gustave KERVERN
2004 AALTRA co-directed with Gustave KERVERN
1998 MICHAEL Kael VS THE WORLD NEWS COMPANY (actor)
1996 À L'ARRACHÉ (short) by Christophe SMITH (as actor)
1992 - 2010 GROLAND (writer and actor)
1990 - 1996 LES GUIGNOLS DE L'INFO (writer)

GUSTAVE KERVERN

Gustave Kervern worked on several TV shows including *Avis de recherche* and *Surprise sur Prise* before he began collaborating with Bruno Solo and Yvan Le Bolloc'h on *Top 50* and *Le plein de Super*. He met Benoît Delépine in 1999 and started the *Groland* adventure on Canal+. In 2010, he co-directed *Ya Basta!* with Sébastien Rost. Besides writing and directing, Kervern acted in the films he co-directed with Delépine, including *Aaltra*, *Avida*, *Louise-Michel*, *Mammuth*, *Near Death Experience* and *Saint Amour*. He has also acted for other directors including Pierre Salvadori, Samuel Benchetrit, Pascal Chaumeil, Emmanuelle Bercot and more recently Yann Le Quellec and Marie Castille Mention Schaar.

2020 DELETE HISTORY co-directed with Benoît DELÉPINE
2018 I FEEL GOOD co-directed with Benoît DELÉPINE
2016 SAINT AMOUR co-directed with Benoît DELÉPINE
2015 ASPHALTE by Samuel BENCHETRIT (actor)
2014 IN THE COURTYARD by Pierre SALVADORI (actor)
NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCE co-directed with Benoît DELÉPINE
2012 LE GRAND SOIR co-directed with Benoît DELÉPINE
2010 MAMMUTH co co-directed with Benoît DELÉPINE
YA BASTA! co-directed with Sébastien ROST (writer, actor)
2008 LOUISE-MICHEL co-directed with Benoît DELÉPINE
2006 AVIDA co-directed with Benoît DELÉPINE
ENFERMÉS DEHORS by Albert DUPONTEL (actor)
2004 AALTRA co-directed with Benoît DELÉPINE
2000 - 2010 GROLAND (writer, actor)
1996 DELPHINE 1 - YVAN 0 by Dominique FARRUGIA (actor)
1994 - 1995 LE PLEIN DE SUPER (writer, actor)

CAST

MARIE Blanche Gardin

BERTRAND Denis Podalydès from la Comédie-Française

CHRISTINE Corinne Masiero

SEX TAPE GUY Vincent Lacoste

ALIMAZONE DELIVERY GUY Benoît Poelvoorde

GOD Bouli Lanners

ORGANIC FARMER Vincent Dedienne

SLACKER Philippe Rebbot

SUICIDAL CUSTOMER Michel Houellebecq

CATHYA Clémentine Peyricot

SYLVAIN Lucas Mondher

CREW

A film by Benoît Delépine and Gustave Kervern

Produced by

Sylvie Pialat, Benoît Quainon

Benoît Delépine, Gustave Kervern

DP Hugues Poulain

Production Manager Philippe Godefroy

Editor Stéphane Elmadjian

Costume Designer Agnès Noden

Production Designer Madphil

Set Prop Designer Pascal Lavoué

Sound Régis Boussin and Fabien Devillers

Gaffer Michel Foropon

Key Grip Stéphane Canda

1st Assistant Director Gérard Bonnet

Unit Production Manager Jean-Baptiste Fauchard

Continuity Cécile Rodolakis

Post-production Supervisor Bénédicte Pollet

Co-producer Belgium Geneviève Lemal

Executive Producer Mauritius Andreas Haberbeyer/Identical Pictures Ltd

A Les films du Worso/No Money Productions production

In Coproduction with

France 3 Cinéma

Pictanovo

Scope Pictures

With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions

In association with La Banque Postale Image 13

Cofinova 16, Cinécap 3, Cofimage 31, Cinémage 14

Cinéventure 5, Indéfilms 8, Sofitvcine 7, Palatine Etoile 17

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Film in Mauritius – Economic Development Board

French Distribution Ad Vitam

International Sales Wild Bunch International

Aspect Ratio 2.35 Scope/Sound 5.1