

URSULA MEIER



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Born in Besançon (France) in 1971, part Swiss part French, from 1990 to 1994 Ursula Meier studied film-making at the Institut des Arts de Diffusion (IAD) in Belgium, graduating with "Great Distinction". The success of **Le songe d'Isaac**, her end-of-course project, then of **Des heures sans sommeil**, enabled her to pursue an independent career, while at the same time working as assistant director on two films by Alain Tanner (*Fourbi* and *Jonas et Lila, à demain*).

Ursula Meier's films, awarded in many international festivals, alternate between genre-blurring works of fiction (**Tous à table** or **Des épaules solides**, a television film shot in video for the Arte series *Masculin Féminin*) and as strange and different documentaries as **Autour de Pinget**, **Pas les flics, pas les noirs, pas les blancs**).

In 2008, Ursula Meier presented her first fiction film for the cinema, **Home**, at the Cannes Film Festival Critics' Week. The film was nominated for three César Awards in 2009. It garnered numerous prizes worldwide, including the Swiss Film Prize «Quartz 2009», for Best Fiction Film, Best Screenplay and Best Emerging Actor. The latter distinction went to Kacey Mottet Klein for his first appearance onscreen. He later played the young Simon in Meier's film **Sister**. In 2009, together with filmmakers Lionel Baier, Jean-Stéphane Bron and Frédéric Mermoud, Ursula Meier set up *Bande à part films* (www.bandeapartfilms.com) in Lausanne (Switzerland). Completed in 2012 **Sister** received a Silver Bear – Special Award at the 62nd Berlin International Film Festival as well as three Swiss Film Awards in 2013.

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Pushing back the boundaries

Ursula Meier already has six widely-acclaimed films to her name: three short and three full-length features, fiction and documentary, each of which packs a powerful punch and shows an amazing determination to break new ground. With their sharply defined style and intuitive camera work, Meier's films are both sensuous and cerebral. Her work has a built-in tension, between rigour and fantasy, intuition and control, mind and body.

What is so distinctive about her? Boldness, a kind of stubbornness, a consuming desire to experiment, curiosity in exploring human behaviour, a constant search for new angles. The ability to capture atmosphere, dialogue which is true to life, extreme precision in directing her actors, together with a contemporary edginess, a sharpness of perception. Her films, which she adds one to another at regular intervals like knots in a cord, are tense, sharp, honest.

Ursula Meier divides her time between Brussels, Paris and Geneva. She lives as she speaks, at breakneck speed. She was born in Besançon, of a German-Swiss father and French mother ("We were Catholics on my mother's side, but the dominant factor in our upbringing was Protestant, from my father"). She spent her early years in Normandy, until the family settled in the Pays de Gex, a bit of Switzerland ceded to the French in days gone by: "It was a kind of no man's land, not really France, not really Switzerland. We crossed the border several times a day, which created a very strange relationship with the space we inhabited."

At school, she proved to be gifted in both maths and sport. "When I was young, I always had my head in the clouds. I could never understand what was expected of me academically. My relationship with words was very complicated. Maths was fun." She would speak little, preferring to listen. Spotted at the age of eight by a sports club, she took up athletics. "I gave it up when I discovered cinema."

The first film to make an impact on her was Robert Bresson's *L'argent*, when she was fifteen. "I had no idea what it was about, but I thought: so that's what cinema can be! A language without limits." In Paris, where she went at weekends to see her sister who was studying Fine Art, she spent her time at the Cinémathèque and Saint-André-des-Arts, discovering in no particular order Bergman, Dreyer, Truffaut, Rohmer, Godard, Renoir, Pialat, Ozu... Her sister, who had bought a 16mm camera, set about making a film in which Ursula played the leading role. It took two years to shoot. "Often there were just three of us and we did everything, from décor to lighting, using stage spotlights. Real do-it-yourself. That's how I got started."

FILMOGRAPHY

| | |
|------|---|
| 2012 | Sister |
| 2008 | Home |
| 2004 | Monique Jacot et Alain de Kalbermatten , portraits de photographes |
| 2002 | Des épaules solides |
| 2001 | Pas les flics, pas les noirs, pas les blancs |
| | Tous à table |
| 2000 | Autour de Pinget |
| 1998 | Des heures sans sommeil |
| 1994 | Le songe d'Isaac |

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While she was still at high school, a summer job as cashier in a supermarket enabled her to buy her own camera and make her first film (with an actress friend), though she did not edit it because of problems with the sound track. "It was a fictional feature film, at times almost a documentary. My father and brother played minor roles in it. The film told the story of a cashier who kicks over the traces following a theft from her till, which she did not see. A character rather like the heroine of Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* (*Vagabond*, 1985). The same violent anger, which comes up again in the character of the young athlete in **Des épaules solides**. Ursula Meier was already showing her love of experimentation: she wrote each scene the evening before from a pre-established outline and directed the actors intuitively during the shooting, holding the camera herself. She was determined to master the practical business of film-making, the actors, the camera work, the narration, but she was also hungry to learn the theory. She devoured *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Etudes Cinématographiques*, never missed FR3's *Cinéma de Minuit* series. Her meeting with Alain Tanner, the Swiss director of *Light Years Away* and *La Salamandre*, whom she admired and eventually plucked up the courage to telephone, was a turning point. "He confirmed me in my decision to attend a cinema school and to come back and see him again, which helped demystify film-making for me."

She set off for Belgium to attend the Institut des Arts de Diffusion (IDA), which gave her exactly what she was looking for from a school: a place which provided the resources without imposing a particular view of the art. **Le songe d'Isaac** (1994), her end-of-course project, was her first real achievement: a short fiction film demonstrating her skill in approaching the human body – that of an old man in the final moments of life. A subject that lent itself to dream and fantasy, without words, and at the same time highly controlled: "I didn't want to omit anything; everything was sketched out, story-boarded. The chief cameraman had composed some water-colours, I had written the sound track like a concrete musical score: each sound, each noise was thought out in advance with the picture." **Le songe d'Isaac** was awarded a number of prizes, which Meier used, without any safety net, to launch into another film-making venture: **Tous à table**, a short film which enabled her to explore screenplay issues, form and the process of working with actors. "I needed to make a film that was the opposite of the previous one. A film I could not control in every detail, shot quickly, with a good deal of improvisation, and nothing but words, a superfluity of them!" **Tous à table** was made over two nights. It is the story of an anniversary dinner which degenerates because of a riddle about three ants. The film-maker adopts the position of impartial observer, conducting a sort of behavioural study while creating confusion as to the nature of the production. Documentary? Fiction? Fiction disrupted by reality? The riddle is coupled with a cliff-hanger – like

AWARDS (SELECTION)

SISTER

Swiss Film Award 2013 for Best Fiction Film, Best Screenplay, Best Actor (Kacey Mottet Klein); Nomination César 2013, Meilleur espoir masculin (Kacey Mottet Klein); Silver Bear – Special Award 2012 (62nd Berlin International Film Festival); Critics Award (Trento Film Festival 2012); Swann d'or for Best Actress Léa Seydoux (Film Festival Cabourg 2012)

HOME

Swiss Film Prize «Quartz 2009»: Best Fiction Film, Best Screenplay (Ursula Meier, Antoine Jaccoud), Best Emerging Actor (Kacey Mottet Klein); César du cinéma français 2009, nominations: Best First Feature, Best Photograph (Agnès Godard), Best Art Direction (Ivan Niclass); Award for Best Cinematography (Agnès Godard) and Best Sound (Luc Yersin) (Monterrey International Film Festival, Mexico, 2009); Grand Prix – Golden Angel, Best Actress (Isabelle Huppert) (Tofifest International Film Festival, Torun, Poland, 2009); City of Athen Grand Prix (Festival du Film Francophone, Athen, Greece, 2009); Public Award for Best Fiction (17th Barcelona International Women's Film Festival, Spain, 2009); Award for Best Screenplay (Rabat's Auteur Film Festival, Morocco, 2009); Nouveau Talent Cinéma Award, SACD (Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques, 2009), France; FIPRESCI Award, New Vision category (Reykjavik International Film Festival, 2008); "Bayard d'Or" for Best Camera (Agnès Godard) (Namur International Festival of French-Speaking Film, 2008); "Valois" for Best Direction and Jury Special Distinction for actor Kacey Mottet Klein (Angoulême Festival of French-Speaking Film, 2008) "Silver Astor" for Best Actress (Isabelle Huppert), ADF Award for Best Photographer of International Competition (Festival International de Cine de Mar del Plata, 2008); German-French Prize of the Junior Jury, Press Prize, "Tübinger Filmtage-Preis" (25th International French Film Festival, Tübingen-Stuttgart)

DES ÉPAULES SOLIDES

Prix Titra-Film, Prix TV5 for the Best French-language Film, Prix Richemond d'Interprétation Féminine for Louise Szpindel (Festival Cinéma Tout Ecran, Geneva, 2002); Prix du Jeune Puplic, Prix d'Interprétation Féminine, Special Mention by the jury (Festival Ciné Junior, 2004); Prix de la Première Œuvre aux Lauriers by the jury of French radio and television under the aegis of the Senate; Nomination Swiss Film Prize 2004 for Best Fiction Film; supported by l'Acid (Cannes 2004)

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two films in one. This experimental short film – which Meier did not believe she would finish, it was so much more important for her simply to shoot footage, to experiment – is fascinating on account of its (slightly cerebral) intelligence; but the perfection of the acting, combined with highly alert camera work, gives the subject a rare intensity (the couple, the relations between people, the exercise of power...).

Ursula Meier can talk for hours about directing. She loves actors, their bodily presence, their mass in front of the camera. **Des heures sans sommeil**, a short fiction film, which focuses on the reunion of a brother and sister after the death of their father, emphasises what is left unsaid. All is left to body language! Built on flashbacks, each introducing its burden of sounds and images from childhood, this awkward little film retains its secrets, giving nothing away.

Childhood as a place of secrets is an obsession with this film-maker. Whether a place of happiness (lost paradise) or of tragedy (skeletons in the cupboard), childhood is not to be narrated. In any case, Ursula Meier rarely acts as narrator; she projects images as one would flash signals, blinding, as opaque as the beings on whom she turns her searching and sensitive camera. Maybe by zeroing in on bodies, returning to the shadowlands of her characters, she hopes to capture something of truth on the wing, as she has done in **Autour de Pinget**, a remarkable documentary on the writer Robert Pinget, a man who has spent his life with words (the words she so fears) – a quest in the form of an inquest (and one of her finest films).

She does the same in **Des épaules solides** (Strong Shoulders), a rebellious piece of fiction, shot in video format for Arte's *Masculin Féminin* series. In this portrait of a young, top-flight athlete, Ursula Meier examines the relentless determination of an adolescent to master her body, to the point where she denies her sufferings and desires. Here again, Meier shows that she is not prepared to adopt stereotypes. The DV camera operates as a probe, a rigorous instrument investigating areas of shadow. The director captures the obsessive desire of a young sportswoman to push back her boundaries, at the same time describing in almost documentary fashion her environment and its codes of behaviour.

The body, power, madness... From one film to the next, documentary or fiction, Ursula Meier confirms her ability to engage with the most different worlds, because what interests her essentially, what she is looking for – for herself and others – is the boundary. And in this research of hers, constantly put to new tests, Meier demonstrates honesty and courage. She does not judge, but shows impressive mental freedom in observing people's behaviour. **Pas les flics, pas les noirs, pas les blancs**, her documentary about a deputy sergeant in the Geneva police force, a far-right militant converted to the cause of intercultural dialogue, again shows her capacity to film with detachment and precision. Catherine Humblot, 2006

PAS LES FLICS, PAS LES NOIRS,
PAS LES BLANCS

Prix de la TSR – Best Swiss film
across all sections (Festival
International de Cinéma Visions
du Réel 2002)

TOUS À TABLE

Nomination Swiss Film Prize
2002 for Best Short Film; Prix
de la Recherche, Prix de la
Presse, Prix du Public (Inter-
national Short Film Festival
Clermont-Ferrand); Grand Prix
de la Communauté Française de
Belgique (Média 10/10 Festival,
Namur); Prix de la Fondation
Beaumarchais for the Best
French-Language Short Film
(International Women's Film
Festival, Créteil); Grand Prix
International, Prix du Public
(Brussels International Short
Film Festival); Silver Leopard,
Prix de la Jeunesse (Locarno
International Film Festival);
Grand Prix International (Villeu-
rbanne Short Film Festival); Jury
Prize (Winterthur International
Short Film Festival); Grand Prix
du Jury, Prix des Mines (Alès
International Itinérance Festival);
Prix de la Presse (Belhorizonte
International Festival); Prix des
Lycéens (European Cines-sonne
Festival); Prix du Public (Nuit du
Court Festival, Paris)

AUTOUR DE PINGET

Grand Prix du Scénario (Biennale
du Film d'Art, Paris); acquired by
the French Ministry of Culture;
Selected for the 2000 Visions du
Réel International Film Festival

DES HEURES SANS SOMMEIL

Special Jury Prize (International
Short Film Festival Clermont-
Ferrand); Best International
Director Award (Worldwide
Short Film Festival, Toronto);
Grand Prix de la province de
Namur (Média 10/10 Festival,
Namur, Belgium); Grand Prix
International (International
Actors' Film Festival, Tours);
selected for the "Lycéens au
cinéma" programme in the
Centre and Franche-Comté
regions

LE SONGE D'ISAAC

Prix André Bosman, best end-
of-course project for cinema
schools in Belgium (Studio
L'Équipe, Brussels); Silver Leo-
pard (Locarno International
Film Festival); Grand Prix de
la Communauté Française de
Belgique (Namur International
Francophone Film Festival);
Palme d'argent and André César
Prize (World Short Film Festival,
Huy, Belgium); Prix coup de
cœur (Montpellier International
Festival); Special Jury Award
(Karlovy Vary International
Festival); Quality Award of the
Office Fédéral de la Culture;
Quality Award of the Commu-
nauté Française de Belgique

Ursula Meier

INTERVIEW

Short films, documentaries, fiction, you have experimented with all genres, to the point of making fiction films which seem like documentaries and documentaries that are akin to fiction. Is this a way of trying your hand at everything, of testing the limits of cinema? Genres

are irrelevant as far as I am concerned. I like breaking into unknown territory. Each film has to involve a risk. But what does possess me, film after film, is an inexhaustible desire to understand human beings, to grasp what is hidden beneath the skin, the dark areas, the blemishes, but also the grace.

As in film-making, the characters who interest me are those who live on the edge. On the edge of madness, as filmed by Jane Campion in *Sweetie* or *An Angel at My Table*. I like it when you are getting near the edge without falling off. In **Pas les flics, pas les noirs, pas les blancs**, the difficulty was to maintain this fragile balance. I could have treated this deputy police sergeant and his far-right past with irony. But this chap is highly intelligent, and he does not tell any lies. He has a past. Son and brother of crooks, he grew up in a chaotic family. Didn't he become a policeman to learn to bring order into the chaos? Whatever the route someone has taken, it interests me. Then I need to be able to love the people I film. I was constantly needing to film him putting on and taking off his uniform, taking off his clothes. Seeing him with bare skin, a bit of flab, that was reassuring.

All your films give the impression of being extremely carefully crafted, even within individual shots. At the same time they display ultra-sensitive camera work, which captures intimacy, the body's "thoughts", the opacity of feelings. In making these films, which are both sensual and cerebral, which phase – script-writing, shooting, editing – gives you the greatest pleasure? Editing is the moment when I control things best, when my intuitions are sometimes revealed and become clear. When writing, I have a problem relating to the words, even though I keep some kind of control. When I shoot, I let go. If there are bodies to be filmed, the raw material for a take, desire, then a film is possible. I do not intellectualise about the place of the camera. I realised that with **Le songe d'Isaac**, my end-of-study project. There is a shot in which the body of the old man is seen from above. I remember that I kept saying: higher, higher! I was driven. I couldn't explain why. When we were editing, someone said to me: already it looks as if he is no longer there, it's as if it were filmed from heaven. When editing, faced with all the material you cut up and examine, you may discover why you did things in a particular way. When writing and shooting, you are in a very fragile state of balance, between intuition and control, but when you edit it is all very precise. Right down to the individual image.

Let's talk about your directing of actors, an activity in which you are also very precise: in TOUS A TABLE, for example, where you deliberately play with boundaries, it is difficult to know what is fiction and what is documentary, the production is so imbued with the realism of a psychological drama... What room for improvisation did you leave to the

A journalist with *Le Monde*, Catherine Humblot worked in the cultural department, then in the communications department, before helping to create the radio and television supplement, for which she acts as reporter and critic. Meanwhile, she has written a work entitled *La Peau des murs* (with Marie-Odile Briot), about the painter Ernest Pignon-Ernest, and made a documentary, **Paris Black Night** (with Yves Billon), on black music in Paris.

Ursula Meier

INTERVIEW

actors? How do you see your relationship with them? I am relating to other human beings.

I do not believe in “directing” actors, as the term is usually understood, using a technique... For me, it is a question of finding the truth that emanates from the human body; that is why I ascribe great importance to an actor’s body, because everything depends on it. There is something physical, organic, in “directing”, and in producing a film generally. But it is also a question of energy. In the case of **Tous à table**, the shooting was very highly organised: we had to get the actors in the right frame of mind, then manage the energy generated so that we could begin shooting at the right moment. The same with **Des épaules solides**, where the filming arrangements were vital, forming an integral part of the production. With **Tous à table**, I wanted to shoot the footage very quickly, on the hoof as it were, but I did an enormous amount of work with the actors (and technicians) beforehand. We worked on the characters above all, their backgrounds, their problems as couples. Some dialogues were written out in full, others not. Each actor knew his or her own part, but not necessarily those of the others. Twelve actors around a table – there is something both terrible and magnificent about it. At one particular moment, I wanted to try improvisation pure and simple; it was a disaster. I knew it would be, but I needed to experience it while shooting to enable me to get a grip on the film again. So I had my violins, my cymbals... All I had to do was direct the orchestra. I shot it over two nights, in chronological sequence, whispering directions to the actors as we went along. Only two of the actors knew the answer to the riddle. **Tous à table** was an exciting human experiment on the question: what is an actor? How far can he go? With Louise Szpindel, in **Des épaules solides**, it was extremely tense, even violent at times, though we got on very well off the set. It is true that she put a lot of herself into it. But it was not for nothing that she agreed to take on the role. Especially since the human body is the subject of the film. When she played the scene in which the character undresses and sees herself naked from head to foot, she broke down. We cleared the set, leaving only the cameraman; I directed her by watching the video feed. We are bound by a moral contract. If an actor is unwilling to go somewhere, we do not go there or we find another solution together.

Do you have a sense of solidarity with the new generation of French-Swiss film-makers?

Even though I spend a lot of my time in Brussels – and Belgium, with its humour, its gentle madness and its idiosyncrasy, has strongly influenced my outlook –, my two “brothers-in-cinema” are in fact Swiss: Lionel Baier and Jean-Stéphane Bron. The things we do are very different and I would place my films at the point of intersection between their respective approaches. They are into research, sincerity, humanity, without compromise. We support one another. We have an exceptional and priceless friendship.

Ursula Meier was interviewed by Catherine Humblot in 2006

LE SONGE D'ISAAC

1994 | 35 mm | colour | 13'

Isaac is dying in a nursing home. Jean is the carer looking after him. His respectful tenderness brings back to Isaac sounds and images from childhood: from another world in which dream and memory mingle... The child's eye view of the suffering of his sick mother, her outstretched hand as she lies on her deathbed. Gestures and glances take the place of words.

"This was the last film of actor/director Michel Vitold, even though he had decided to retire from acting many years before; he died a week before the film's first showing. He may not have seen **Le songe d'Isaac**, but it was enough for him to have acted it, to have lived it. It is disturbing when reality is inspired by fiction." Ursula Meier

In her first amazing film, *Le songe d'Isaac*, Ursula Meier records the last moments of Isaac, who, on his deathbed, has a vision of himself as a child with his sick mother. It represents a return to the foetal state, a bonding dream, maternal warmth set against the coldness of death. Not a word: just the music of look and gesture; this is a waking dream. An exceptional film.

Jean-Michel Vlaeminckx, *Cinergie*



Script: Ursula Meier
Cinematographer: Virginie Vermeersch, Thomas Couplet
Sound: Dimitri Haullet, Etienne Dombret
Editing: Julie Brenta
Cast: Michel Vitold, Basile Gendron, Joëlle Waterkeyn, Franck Vercruyssen, Nathalie Laroche

Music: Marie-Eve Ronveaux
Production: Institut des Arts de Diffusion, Limelette, Belgium
World Rights: Mediadiffusion, Limelette
Original Version: without dialogue

DES HEURES SANS SOMMEIL

1998 | 35 mm | colour | 34'

Compassionate leave. A brother is reunited with his sister in their family home. They have not met for years. Sounds and images from the past emerge in the silence of the night: of a childhood with an often austere, sometimes complicit father.

"When one leaves a mark, one leaves a wound," wrote Henri Michaux. This is one of the themes of this film, in which past and present clash and merge, and the past, whether whispered or shouted out loud, crushes and controls the present. *Lycéens au cinéma*

[...] *Des heures sans sommeil*, which richly deserved its Special Jury Prize (at Clermont-Ferrand), is the densest and most substantial: Ursula Meier has successfully juggled time periods and concepts of beauty to narrate, with a minimum of dialogue, the reunion of a brother and sister. Her editing and directing are reminiscent of certain women film-makers from the Antipodes.

Christophe Chauville, *Repérages*, March–April, 1999



Script: Ursula Meier, in collaboration with Nicole Borgeat and Laurence Vielle
Cinematographer: Patrice Cologne
Sound: Philippe Vandendriessche, Gaëlle Gauthier, Frédéric Fontaine
Editing: Julie Brenta, Karine Pourtaud
Cast: Frédéric Gorny, Laurence Vielle, Benjamin Decol, Erline O'Donovan, Charles Callier

Music: Michel Wintsch
Production: PCT cinéma-télévision sa, Martigny; L'Atelier des Jeunes Cinéastes, Brussels
Co-production: TSR (Télévision Suisse Romande), Aïe Productions, Geneva
World Rights: PCT cinéma-télévision sa, Martigny; L'Atelier des Jeunes Cinéastes, Brussels
Original Version: French (subtitles: English, German)

Script: Ursula Meier
Cinematographer: Tommaso Fiorilli,
Samuel Dravet, Sacha Wiernick
Sound: Philippe Vandendriessche,
Gaëlle Gauthier, Hervé Blicek
Editing: Julie Brent

Cast: Stéphane Auberghen, Bernard
Breuse, Philip Busby, Anne Carpiau,
Circée Lethem, Sabrina Leurquin,
Magali Pinglaut, Georges Saint-Yves,
Bernard Sens, Jean Vercheval,
Laurence Vielle, Joëlle Waterkeyn

Animation: Vincent Patar, Stéphane
Aubier
Production: Need Productions,
Brussels; PCT cinéma-télévision sa,
Martigny
Co-production: Au large de l'Eden,
Paris; TSR (SRG SSR idée suisse).

World Rights: PCT cinéma-télévision
sa, Martigny; Need Productions,
Brussels
Original Version: French (subtitles:
English, German)

An exceptionally talented personality, Ursula Meier, aged thirty, plunges us into a jarring comedy, shot in black and white. [...] All the best, then, to the ants and to Ursula, who, along with Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Cédric Klapisch and Eric Zonca, was discovered at Clermont.

Emmanuèle Frois, *Le Figaro*, February 5, 2001

[...] In this very human and highly amusing comedy, she zeroes in on the faces of people possessed by all sorts of feelings and impulses. [...] The film-maker has recorded something strangely animal and deep-seated.

Nathalie Mary, *Revue Bref*, Paris, June 2001

[...] In her latest film, *Tous à table*, Ursula Meier has pulled off a master stroke of the unexpected, creating a little jewel of cinematographic humour, intelligence and pleasure.

[...] Viewing and reviewing *Tous à table* does you a power of good; Ursula Meier is a film-maker to watch closely.

Philippe Simon, *Cinergle*, March 2001



| 2001

| 35 mm

| b/w & colour

| 30'

A group of friends get together for a birthday dinner. The meal is nearly over. The atmosphere is very lively, with people singing, drinking, smoking, kissing, hugging and telling jokes... Then someone asks a riddle. There is no question of leaving the table until it has been solved.

"With *Tous à table* I wanted to make a film in which twelve people reveal their true selves as they attempt to solve a riddle. I also wanted to shoot a film at speed, on the hoof, to generate energy and make a film in a single burst of creativity. By simplifying the circumstances (a single evening, people round a table) and plot (solving a riddle), I was able to concentrate on the characters. This arrangement enabled me to zero in on their faces and capture all the tensions that were gradually expressed. It involved a long period of preparation with the actors and technicians. There were a good ten of us operating around the table while the footage was being shot. For some sequences, the technicians used a shot list to enable them to match the actors' performances with the movements of the camera. Each minor event, conflict or climax was written down on paper and discussed before the scene was shot. I was able to rely on the actors to perform entire scenes without any need for retakes. During the shooting, I fed each actor by whispering exactly what action he or she should perform or suggesting a wrong answer to the riddle. The film was shot in this permanent state of tension between painstaking preparation and spontaneity, to create a strange atmosphere of fiction shot through with reality. The shooting took place over two nights." Ursula Meier

Script: Ursula Meier
Cinematographer: Patrice Cologne,
Hans Meier, Pascale Rebetez,
Ursula Meier
Sound: Etienne Curchod
Editing: Julie Brenta

Music: Philippe Cam
With the voice of: Claude Rich
Participants: Nadia Barentin, Michel
Butor, Olivier De Magny, Marie-
Christine D'Welles, Joël Jouanneau,
Anne-Brigitte Kern, Jean-Claude

Liéber, Gilles Poissonnet, Madeleine
Renouard, Alain Robbe-Grillet,
Jean Roudaut, Jacques Seiler
Production: PCT cinéma-télévision sa,
Martigny

Co-production: Need Productions,
Brussels; Au large de l'Eden, Paris;
TSR (SRG SSR idée suisse); RTBF (Radio
Télévision Belge Francophone); CNL
(Centre National du Livre), Paris
World Rights: PCT cinéma-télévision
Original Version: French

This is one of the finest documentaries ever made about literature. Because it is creative, scrupulous and faithful to the spirit of its model. Marie-Claude Martin, *Le Temps*

Ursula Meier gives a faithful account of Pinget. Brilliant. An hour of real cinema devoted to a writer reputed to be unfilmable. A film-maker under thirty years of age has succeeded, in a genre known to be difficult, in painting a portrait of a writer – a magnificent creative documentary. [...] The title says it all: rather than approach her subject directly: this young woman prefers oblique angles and homage at one remove. She decides to usher us into the novelist's world through a hidden door, the only one in fact which enables us to take the poetic measure of an author averse to revealing biographical details. [...]

Thierry Mertenat, *La Tribune de Genève*,
December 4–5, 1999

[...] Ursula Meier's film is a success because it manages to tell its story without betraying the thought of the writer it seeks to explain. [...] This fragmented portrait of a film seeks to approach an author via what is most bizarre about him: his way of being and his style. A fine example of how to adapt to one's subject matter. Jacques De Decker, *Le Soir*, January 22–23, 2000

AUTOUR DE PINGET



| 2000

| Digital Beta

| colour

| 58'

An indirect investigation of the writer Robert Pinget (1919–1997), author of thirty or so novels, stage plays and radio plays, the film manages to combine a style, a literary world and a cinematographic language. It explores the work of this author, conveys his fragmented vision of the world and strips off successive layers to reveal the man behind the words, ungraspable, contradictory, eternally absent. The film tries to express what Robert Pinget constructed, work by work, his way of looking at people and things, using image and sound to capture the sensations that emerge from reading his works, fashioning the cinematographic raw material into the likeness of his writing. Finally, the film asks what the writer was striving for beyond the words, describing a development which starts with daily reality and leads to poetry, a return to the working drawing, to childhood, to memory, to silence.

"I have been writing the same thing for the last thirty-five years: the difficulty of saying something, the impossibility of arriving at any truth because it can be said in several different ways, everything I have done is concerned only with style, writing, language, not a banal story you tell in order to please the reader." Robert Pinget

Script: Claude Muret, Ursula Meier
Cinematographer: Eric Stitzel,
Tommaso Fiorilli

Sound: Fred Meert, Luc Yersin,
Ursula Meier
Editing: Julie Brenta
Music: Michel Wintsch

Production: Ciné Manufacture CMS
S.A, Lausanne
Co-production: TSR (SRG SSR idée
suisse), Arte

World Rights: Bande à Part Films Sàrl,
Lausanne
Original Version: French (subtitles:
English, German, Italian)

[...] This documentary will inspire tender souls in search of a better world: through their authenticity and ability to question their basic assumptions, Sarah, Alain and Yves seem to hold some of the keys to the art of living in community. Marine

Faure, *Le Nouvel Observateur* n° 1959, May 23-29, 2002

[...] This documentary presents a fascinating experience and an exceptional character. Alain, with his outspokenness and determination to move mountains, is a pleasure to watch. He tells his story without dressing things up or prevarication. You also feel he is aware of the limitations and fragility of what he has undertaken. The director has done more than paint a portrait of him. By questioning those involved in this project and attending awareness-raising sessions for police officers, she has conducted a well-researched and intelligently written enquiry. Laurent

Thévenin, *Télérama*, May 25, 2002

[...] Ursula Meier is completely successful in constructing an account in which the lives of several people are bound up together, without ever seeming to preach. Definitely a fine film, which changes the way you look at the world. Michel Imhof,

La Tribune de Genève, April 29, 2002

PAS LES FLICS, PAS LES NOIRS, PAS LES BLANCS



| 2002

| Digital Beta

| colour

| 73'

This film tells the amazing story of Alain Devegney, a deputy sergeant in the Geneva gendarmerie. After suffering an act of violence in an African country, this former militant of the extreme-right Vigilance party becomes aware of the need for dialogue and intercultural exchange. With the help of a young female volunteer worker of Franco-Tunisian origin and the support of a police officer with a degree in education, he lays the foundations for an unprecedented project based on integration and mediation, which aims to transform relations between the police and the various migrant communities in Geneva.

Diligently pursuing this line of enquiry, the film tells the story of these men and women, observing without prejudice or starry-eyed naivety the difficulties and complexity of the project. Nor does it hesitate to show the limitations and contradictions that arise from tensions and misunderstanding. By encountering the different communities, each time reporting from the front line on attempts to achieve dialogue, negotiation and reflection, **Pas les flics, pas les noirs, pas les blancs** goes right to the heart of the intercultural issue.

Script: Frédéric Videau, Ursula Meier
Cinematographer: Nicolas Guicheteau
Sound: Luc Yersin, Philippe Combe,
Fred Meert
Editing: Suzanna Rossberg

Cast: Louise Szpindel, Jean-François
Stévenin, Nina Meurisse, Dora Jemaa,
Guillaume Gouix, Anne Coesens,
Jean-Pierre Gos, Max Ruedlinger

Production: Arte France, Paris; TSR
(SRG SSR idée suisse); PCT
cinéma-télévision sa, Martigny;
Need Productions, Brussels; GMT
Productions, Paris

World Rights: Roissy Films, Paris
Original Version: French (subtitles:
English, German)

This Arte series brings a double revelation: a female director and an actress. Their film make you want to shout with joy. You feel like telling everyone to go and see it. You want to follow their progress, to see what they will do next. Olivier

Nicklaus, *Les Inrockuptibles*, March 29 –
April 4, 2003

Strong Shoulders is such an unpretentious and sturdy piece of filmmaking that its artfulness only surfaces after we go over it in our heads, the unmistakable sign of talent. *The New York Times*

A great achievement. *Le Monde*

A big, affectionate hug.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

"For me, this is one of the best films I have made, and I am usually disappointed in what I do, by the gap between intention and final result.[...] I offer it to the cinema-chain bosses as a demonstration of what can be achieved in just 25 days' shooting and on a shoe-string budget [...] It really is an extraordinary film, quite unique, and I was greatly disturbed by it. I have a feeling that John Cassavates could have shot a film of this kind."

Jean-François Stévenin, actor, director



| 2002

| Digital Beta/35 mm

| colour

| 96'

A body is not a machine. It has its mysteries, its limitations, its weaknesses, and may break down at any time... Sabine, a promising young athlete undergoing training at a boarding institution for gifted sportsmen and women, has just one idea in mind: to improve her performance, no matter what the cost. Pushing her body as far as it will go, wanting to overcome her limitations, going so far as to tackle male opposition, Sabine – bold as brass, fiercely competitive, stubborn – ends up in state of denial of herself and others, battling with the elusive.

Des épaules solides (*Strong Shoulders*) is Meier's contribution to the *Masculin Féminin* series commissioned by Arte and shot in video format. The nine other films were made by Mathieu Amalric, Nabil Ayouche, Bruno Bontzolakis, Catherine Breillat, Jean-Michel Carré, Laurence Ferreira Barbosa, Nadia Fares, Bernard Stora and Virginie Wagon. Meier's film has been selected for many international film festivals worldwide.

Script: Ursula Meier, Antoine Jaccoud, Raphaëlle Valbrune, Gilles Taurand, Olivier Lorelle
Cinematographer: Agnès Godard
Sound: Etienne Curchod, Franco Piscopo, Luc Yersin

Editing: Susana Rossberg
With: Isabelle Huppert, Olivier Gourmet, Adelaide Leroux, Madeleine Budd, Kacey Mottet Klein

Production: Box Productions sàrl, Renens/Lausanne; Archipel 35, Paris; Need Productions, Bruxelles
Co-production: Télévision Suisse Romande (TSR), SRG SSR; France 3 Cinéma; R.T.B.F. (Télévision belge)

World Sales: Memento Films International, Paris
Original Version: French

Ursula Meier has pulled off a masterpiece. (...) One of the most beautiful films in the history of Swiss cinema. Thierry Jobin, *Le Temps*, October 15, 2008

A hard-hitting first try by a Franco-Swiss citizen. (...) *Home* is an incredibly well mastered and mature achievement, as obsessed with holding on to control as driven to let go of it. Didier Péron, *Libération*, October 29, 2008

A dead-end road movie, *Shining of the third kind*, a seventh-continent Traffic. (...) Ursula Meier revels in the gaps afforded by a script that takes pride in all it dares leave out. Thierry Méranger, *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, Nov. 2008

***Home's* greatest quality is its total originality. Ursula Meier has created a fable resplendent with bright colors and mysterious intricacies, with myriad paths viewers are left free to follow or not... She takes obvious pleasure in inventing, experimenting, surprising. In provoking, even. And, in any case, in inciting us to ponder, be it only in passing, a society more prone to asphyxiation than survival.** Pierre Murat, *Télérama*, October 2008

***Home* bears impressive testimony to Ursula Meier's maturity as a filmmaker.** Florian Keller, *Tages-Anzeiger*, May 20, 2008

A great filmmaker is born. Nicolas Crousse, *Le Soir*, November 12, 2008

Intriguing without affectation, clever without intellectualizing, *Home* is a revelation. Isabelle Danel, *Première*, November 2008

A magnificent contemporary fable full of poetry and mystery. Steven De Foer, *De Standaard*, November 12, 2008



| 2008 | 35 mm | colour | 98'

An empty four-lane highway stretches out as far as the eye can see across the peaceful and deserted countryside. Built several years ago, it has since then been left in disuse. On the very edge of the weed-ridden asphalt, a mere few feet away from the guard rails, sits a totally isolated house with its small garden. The house harbors a family.

Summer has come, and the construction project is back on its feet. The highway gets opened to traffic. Literally "planted" alongside the highway — several yards from the exhaust pipe fumes and increasingly deafening traffic noise — the family loses its points of reference and is thrown off its balance. Shutting themselves in more and more, its members cut themselves off from the world and are on the verge of going mad.

A road movie in reverse

To the rhythm of the constant coming and going of the cars and trucks along the highway, **Home** is no road movie but its reversed image, its negative so to speak. There's a lot of "moving about" in **Home**, but hardly any travel. Travel is for others, for those seen endlessly streaming past. For this family, it's not life on the road but life alongside the road, turning *Home* into a sort of on-site expedition: an inner trip, a mental journey.

Script: Antoine Jaccoud, Ursula Meier, with the collaboration of Gilles Taurand
Cinematographer: Agnès Godard
Sound: Henri Maikoff, Etienne Curchod, Franco Piscopo

Editing: Nelly Quettier
Music: John Parish
With: Léa Seydoux, Kacey Mottet Klein, Martin Compston, Gillian Anderson, Jean-François Stévenin, Yann Trégouët

Production: Archipel 35, Paris; Vega Film, Zürich
Co-production: RTS Radio Télévision Suisse; Bande à part Films, Lausanne

World Sales: Memento Films International, Paris
Original Version: French

The impressive new pic from Ursula Meier far from a sociorealist morality tale. Meier is still as physical a filmmaker as always and with ace d.p. Agnès Godard here pays particular attention to the movements between the spotless snow paradise up high, and the plains down below, where the siblings' reality literally looks more sludgy. Boyd Van Hoeij, *Variety*, February 13, 2012

The whole thing has been filmed without pathos, close to the bone, attentive to every gesture and capturing the film characters to the closest while giving wide berth to the sort of touristic imagery used by the entertainment industry to promote winter sports. The hidden challenge here is that of settling accounts on the basis of a certain claim to pureness and withdrawal, as if shunting aside the impurity, injustice and suffering of the world. Jacques Mandelbaum, *Le Monde*, April 18, 2012

It is the emotional loopholes that Ursula Meier highlights and that, as a visual artist, she gives us to see. The invisible is rendered visible – that is, human essence, the emotional core of every civilization. Daniel Kothenschulte, *Berliner Zeitung*, February 13, 2012

A fierce and dark tale played in heart-wrenching manner by the exceptionally talented Léa Seydoux and Kacey Mottet Klein. Emmanuèle Frois, *Le Figaro*, April 18, 2012

Excellent. A definite crowd pleaser in Berlin. Tim Robey, *Telegraph*, February 16, 2012.

A masterful anti-"Heimatfilm" (homeland film) for which Ursula Meier has found memorable images of alienation. A remarkable art-house film! Christian Jungen, *NZZ am Sonntag*, April 22, 2012



| 2012 | 35 mm | colour | 97' | L'enfant d'en haut

12-year-old Simon lives in an industrial valley below a luxury ski resort, together with his jobless sister, Louise. Every day, he takes the ski-lift to the opulent ski world above, stealing equipment from the rich tourists to resell to the local kids below. As he partners with a crooked British seasonal worker, Simon loses his boundaries, which affects the relationship with his sister. Confronted with a truth they had both been escaping, Simon seeks refuge up above.

"**Sister** is a warm, dramatic and poetic study of a moving beautifully observed relationship set unusually and with great imagination in a ski resort. An intelligent study of wealth and poverty brilliantly written and directed by Ursula Meier. It contains wonderful performances by Léa Seydoux and Kacey Mottet Klein." Mike Leigh (President of the International Jury) at the award ceremony of the 62nd Berlin International

Film Festival