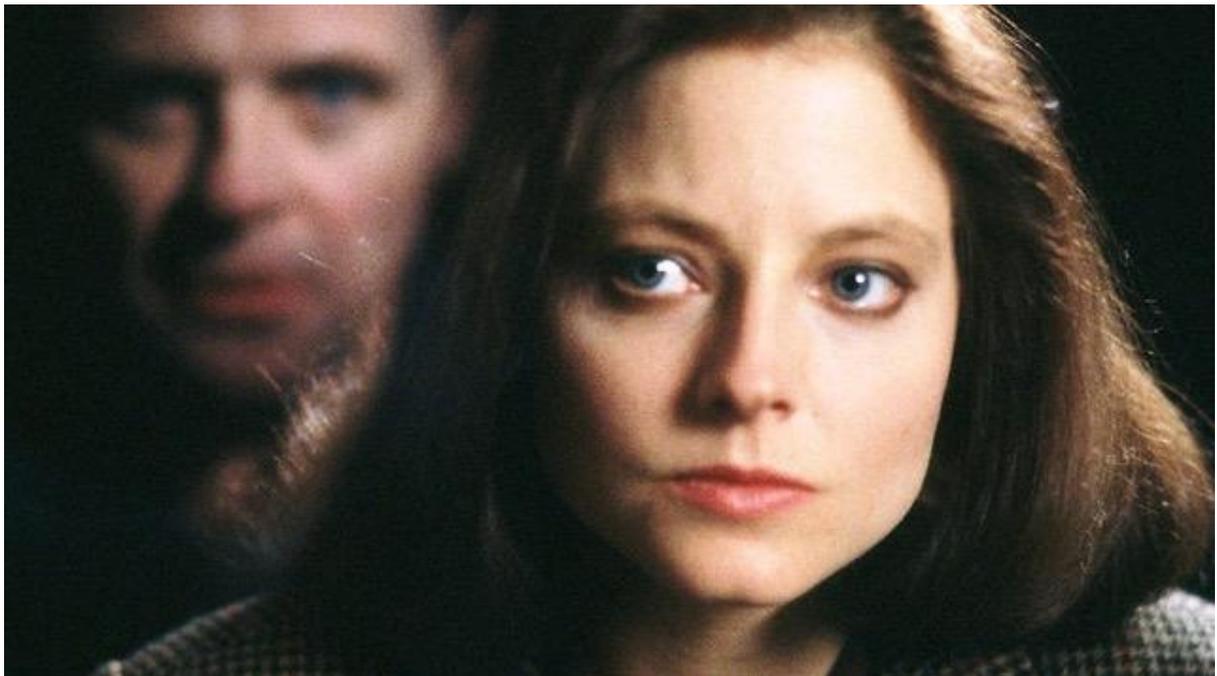


arte
DISTRIBUTION

Presents

JODIE FOSTER
A HOLLYWOOD PRODIGY



A 52' documentary
Written by Yal Sadat and directed by Camille Juza
Produced by HAUT ET COURT TV and PETIT DRAGON

PROVISIONAL DELIVERY: SEPTEMBER 2020

PITCH

It's hard to imagine a more "Hollywood" tale than that of Jodie Foster. She was practically born on a movie set. Pushed by a mother who wanted to make her a star, she comes from a world of stereotypes. And yet she is a very unusual figure in this industry. She is an intellectual who speaks French and is a confirmed Francophile. She plays complex characters that have nothing to do with the temptresses loved by American cinema. At first, she was that Lolita who fascinated the crowds and appealed to every gaze – even those of predators. But her status as this precocious young beauty almost cost her her career, before she decided to take matters into her own hands and become the most powerful actress and female director in Hollywood.



How did the former child star, discovered in Disney TV movies and reinvented as a 12-year-old prostitute in *Taxi Driver*, manage to conquer a powerful, patriarchal industry that probably never really understood her? Too radical for the Hollywood oligarchy but too mainstream for the militant groups that reproached her for hiding her homosexuality and maintaining ties with Mel Gibson and Roman Polanski, Jodie Foster is problematic. She lived out her feminism as a lonesome cowgirl, alone against the world, settling for films that got her voice heard. It's as if she was jealously guarding a secret. But what secret? Is this a strategy or the expression of discomfort with the world in which she is living? When she came out in 2013 – amused, blasé, and relatively late in life – fresh light was shed on a small part of the mystery. Disappointed at being asked for a public confession when she believed she had been “out of the closet for decades”, she seemed to be telling us that she wasn't late, rather, she was ahead of everyone: Her precociousness, her early roles as a Lolita, her move to directing, and her performances as action women had already marked out a liberating path, but only just the outlines. If you adopt the right perspective, since the start, her career has told an atypical story of empowerment, an underground combat led from within the industry by a feminist Trojan horse, destined to overturn Hollywood from within, and society with it.

1. The child prodigy: From Disney to the sidewalks of Taxi Driver (1962-1977)

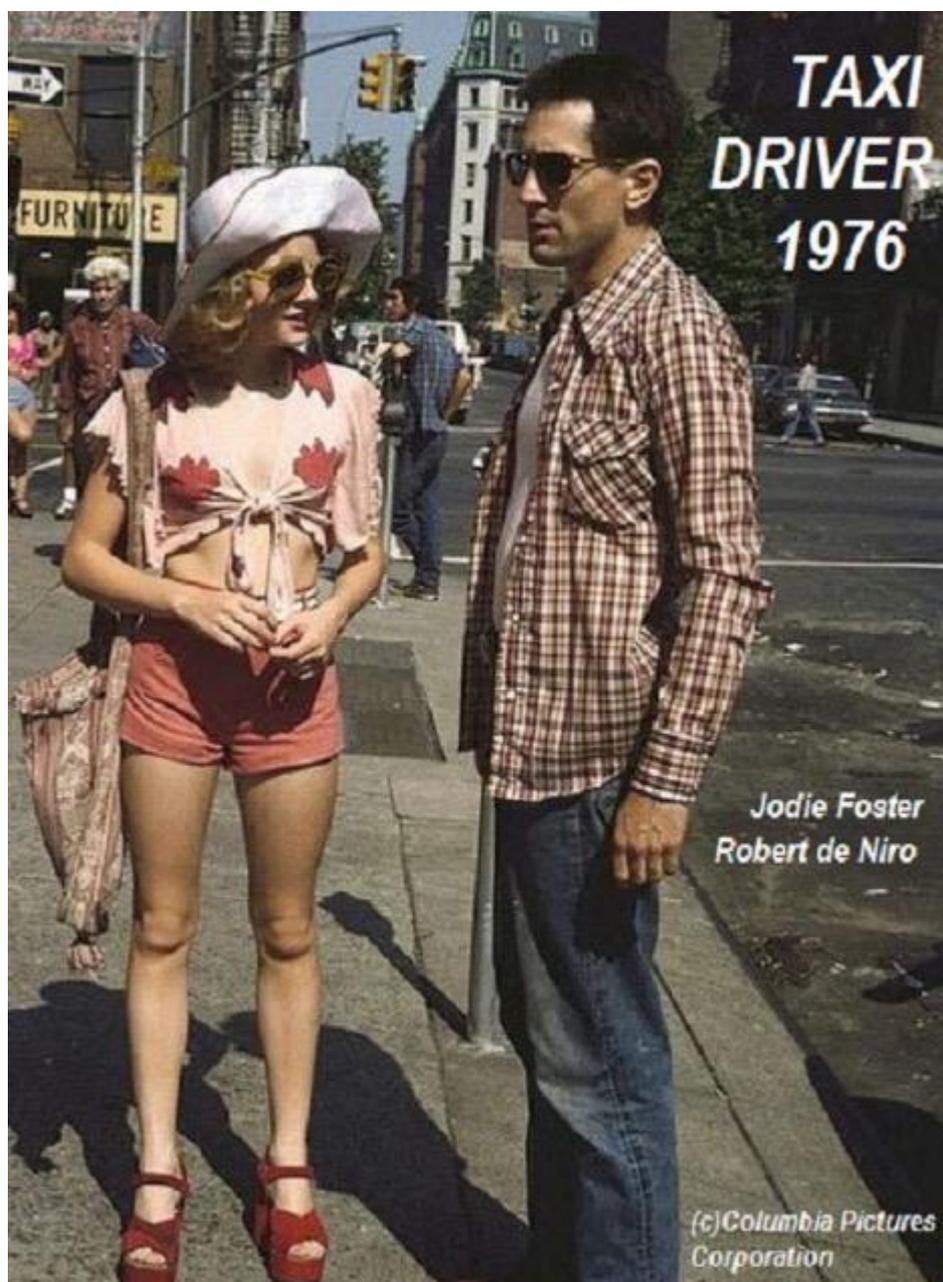
Alicia Christian Foster was born in the Hollywood foothills on 19 November 1962. Her mother, Evelyn Almond, known as Brandy, had just divorced Lucius Foster III, the cheating husband with whom she already had three children. This negligent father only shone by his absence, but Brandy was a tireless Pygmalion, obsessed with her own creation. The family lived in a modest house on Cahuenga Boulevard, a short walk from Hollywood's Walk of Fame. Brandy was an Illinois girl with progressive ideas, who worked as a press officer for a producer. But by night, she was an impresario for her son Buddy, an aspiring actor. One day, when he was being photographed for a Coppertone sunscreen ad, a publicist noticed the little blond tornado who had come along with her mom and big brother. Her knack for making adults laugh resulted in her being picked as the new Coppertone girl, who became the company's icon – the little girl with the cocker spaniel pulling down her swimsuit with his teeth. At the age of three, little Jodie became the star of a huge ad campaign, heralding Lolita's early career. She already knew how to read and learned her lines easily. At the age of five, she joined Buddy in the series *Mayberry R.F.D.*, while picking up supporting roles in Western series like *Gunsmoke* and *Bonanza*. Jodie soon eclipsed her brother, whose career was faltering, and she became the main source of income for the household.



Her success was such that in 1973, Martin Scorsese cast her in a small role as a delinquent girl in a world of drugs and prostitution in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. “From the moment she walked into the

studio, I was struck by her professionalism,” he remembers. “She was nothing like your usual child actor, who is less determined and more egocentric.”

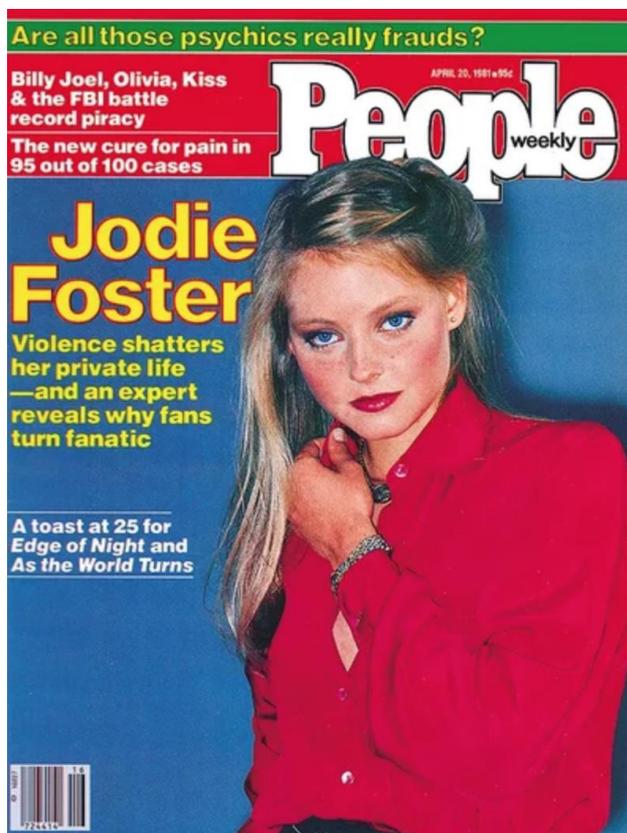
But her next film made Jodie Foster a household name. At the age of 12, she starred in *Taxi Driver*, tottering on high heels as Iris, a runaway whose dreams of a hippie community washed up with her on a New York sidewalk. She insisted on taking the role, against her mother’s wishes. And as Iris, Foster learned that “acting is not just about being yourself and achieving an objective, but it can also be a job to which one can bring meaning.” And she changed – to her own cost – into a media phenomenon with a whiff of scandal, chased by the press in Cannes where *Taxi Driver* scooped the Palme d’Or. At the age of 14, this aura of budding bimbo won her a next role as *The Little Girl Who Lives Down the Lane*, in which she played an orphan hunted down by a torturer. For Célia Sauvage, an expert on gender issues, “These films foreshadow the great theme running through her filmography: From the 1970s through to *Panic Room*, she was regularly surrounded by enemies who embodied a certain male gaze.



It was the same when she moved to Paris to star in *Stop Calling Me Baby!* in 1977. By now, the innocence of Disney movies was a distant memory. But she was ready to shock, declaring in her already strangely deep voice: "Who wants to see little girls playing with dolls, drinking tea, and saying: 'Daddy, I love you?'" One must examine the role Foster's mother played in this game of seduction. How did she manage the hyper-sexualization of her daughter? One cannot suspect her of being complacent with industry machos as she took her children to demonstrations campaigning for the rights of women, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals. Her brother Buddy says that their father's absence was made up for by the presence of a Mexican woman, Josephine Dominguez, whom the children called Aunt Jo, and whose name, "Jo D.," inspired little Alicia's nickname "Jodie". "Years later, our mother's homosexuality became clear to them. Brandy demonstrated some incredible bravery in accepting who she was in society, and Jodie inherited that courage," he says. Brandy certainly cultivated all the assets she ever dreamed of in her daughter: Artistic fulfillment, financial success, and French culture. But by thrusting her into the limelight where her body became an object, Brandy did not emancipate her from an underlying kind of domination, suggesting that Jodie would have to achieve this through her own efforts.

2. The genius's ransom: Harassment and slump (1978-1989)

Before continuing her career, Jodie Foster wanted to learn more about the world, so she left Los Angeles to study Afro-American literature at Yale. But unfortunately for her, she was not left to her own devices and was closely monitored. After harassing her by phone, John Hinckley, Jr., a 25-year-old Texan, moved to live close to campus and close to Foster. Expelled from the American Nazi party for his violent behavior, Hinckley was obsessed by *Taxi Driver*, having seen the movie 18 times. He was removed from campus many times but continued to post letters and poems under her dorm room door.



In a letter dated 25 March 1981, Hinkley revealed his plan to imitate the vigilante in *Taxi Driver* in the scene where he makes an assassination attempt on a presidential candidate, and kill Ronald Reagan for her pleasure. On 30 March, Reagan was shot six times by Hinckley outside the Hilton hotel in Washington DC, sending the country into turmoil. Foster decided to disappear from the limelight. The madness of Hinckley's actions opened her eyes and forced her to radically alter her life. From then on, she drastically reduced her public appearances, and never again appeared in real life or on screen as a simple victim.

Once recovered from his injuries, the Reagan shooting ushered in a new conservative mood in Hollywood production. In 1981, Kim Basinger and Melanie Griffith were playing damsels in distress or sexy vamps. There was little material for Foster, who remained a child of the counter-culture. In a sad echo of the Hinckley affair, the only roles she was offered placed her square across from brutal males. "Those producers who pretended to be defending her by offering her roles of weak women also kept her firmly in a position of victim," observes Célia Sauvage. So she had to go looking elsewhere. In 1984, New Wave veteran Claude Chabrol cast her in *The Blood of Others*, an adaptation of the novel by Simone de Beauvoir which was shot in Paris. The fact she was bilingual, combined with her subtle acting skills, made her one of the most cerebral of American actresses. Glamor was a thing of the past. Thoughtful, hard-working, and above all discreet, this former 1970s icon was now transformed into an anti-star. In 1987, one script among many dealing with the struggles of martyred women caught her eye: *The Accused*, which recounted the gang rape of Cheryl Arujo, who was discredited due to her class and above all, her sex – so much so that she was accused of encouraging her attackers, who were initially acquitted. By transforming the victim from punching bag to fighter, Foster turned *The Accused* into her greatest role. It restored her faith in the profession and made her aware of her power to channel her own life through performance. The film was a great success and her performance was crowned with an Oscar. She had become the embodiment of women abused and then ignored. The fallen ex-starlet was finally part of the resistance against the patriarchal norms of her country. It was 1989, and Ronald Reagan had just left office.



3. Seizing power: Consecration and controversy (1990-2000)

Since the triumph of *The Accused*, this reborn idol walked a new path. After playing the victim-turned-fighter, she wanted to appear as a savior for other women. And the dream opportunity then presented itself: Michelle Pfeiffer had just turned down the lead in *The Silence of the Lambs* because she found the script too brutal. Agent Clarice Starling was set to confront the kind of predatory behavior that had haunted both Foster's films and her life.



This tiny woman confronting a cannibalistic man intent on carving up young women, this FBI rookie who stood up to these bloodthirsty men and the misogynistic contempt of her superiors while never denying traditional heroism, both vulnerable and appetizing in the true sense of the word, but only to free herself from it, proving that a woman does not have to take on male posturing to beat her opponents.

With this multilayered film, she retained her faith, and her artistic and strategic integrity. *The Silence of the Lambs* was a triumph that won multiple Oscars, including a second consecutive one for Foster. Clearly, it wasn't only women who identified with her struggle.

People were wondering what kinds of relationships she had with men. She had always brushed the subject aside, so much so that the rumors finally started had to fly. Did this pretty blonde prefer women, perhaps? Once again, it was in her films where one had to look for the truth. She may have insisted on leaving her sexuality in the shadows, but she carefully chose roles so that hypothesis of homosexuality was not dismissed. Either her character is single throughout the film, or her lover dies very early on. During the 1990s, this taste for heroines living without men was perceived by lesbians as a subtle signal.

In becoming a fearsome poker player in *Maverick*, she forged a strong friendship with Mel Gibson. It seems impossible to imagine her in an intimate relationship with the virile monster of *Mad Max*, accused down the years of domestic violence and anti-Semitic, homophobic, and racist remarks. Could Foster be a woman of such paradox? One regularly saw this slender blonde hanging on the arm of this muscular macho man at receptions. By remaining a loyal ally of Gibson's – she exposed herself to fierce criticism directing him in *The Beaver* in 2010 – Jodie proved that becoming the equal of men doesn't necessarily involve going to war with them. But her support for Gibson is far from being the only thing for which she was criticized. LGBT activists took umbrage at her participation in *The Silence of the Lambs*, a film that some considered homophobic because of its transvestite killer. ACT-UP New York

and Queer Nation reproached her for staying in the closet and contributing to painting a deplorable portrait of their cause. The 1992 Oscars were the subject of protests by militants who, over the following months, undertook a campaign to out Foster. Posters of her were plastered over New York, daubed with the word "QUEER". Determined to preserve her privacy, she never responded. And she refused to apologize for *The Silence of the Lambs*. To her mind, there was no question she would become the coerced spokesperson for a minority, and too bad if that lost her some of her audience.

This did nothing to make her lose sight of the ambition born when she first met Scorsese of becoming a director. In 1991, she made *Little Man Tate* about a gifted child with an incredible mathematic ability. It was a commercial and critical success and a first for the actor-director: Hollywood had seen nothing like it since the 1950s pioneer Ida Lupino. In 1995, she went on to make *Home for the Holidays* through Egg Pictures, her own production company, and thus becoming one of the rare self-made women in the industry. This was enough to restore her reputation as a progressive, especially when she played an astronaut the following year in *Contact*, helping promote parity in astrophysics. More than ever, she came across as an intellectual whose ideas are translated less through public speeches than through artistic and indeed political acts.



4. A woman at war: Coming out and the Weinstein affair (2002 to the present day)

In 2002, Foster celebrated her 40th birthday whilst starring in David Fincher's *Panic Room*. This is the age when actresses often find themselves in a desert with regard to roles, but Foster had a strategy. If the glamorous roles were no longer incoming, she was going to focus on action. Powerful female roles such as that in *Panic Room* then followed, with *Inside Man* from Spike Lee and *The Brave One*, which saw her reinvented as an urban vigilante in 2007.

This did not prevent her being once again subjected to media pressure, and the speculation about her private life continued relentlessly. She eventually bypassed them by coming out, something that had been expected for years, but she did it in her own way. At the Golden Globes in 2013, she delivered her revelation in the form of a theatrical apotheosis. As moving as it was caustic, her speech lambasted an Orwellian epoque in which the urgency to know and reveal everything is destroying our privacy.

But her confession once again was the subject of much debate within the gay community, which accused her of lacking in transparency. But she showed her support in other ways, like by directing the episode entitled “Lesbian Request Denied” from Orange is the New Black. Her commitment was translated into work rather than in words, even though the Weinstein affair led her to take a stand: “It’s an amazing moment in time. Like after slavery, we need reconciliation. We need to move towards dialog with men. Justice by Twitter is not a solution.”

Jodie Foster’s desire for discretion and even silence is not just to protect her privacy. It is perhaps ultimately for an even simpler reason: She has already said it all. In truth, she saw it all coming, decades in advance. The archaism of the movie industry had been weighing on her since childhood, with harassment, threats, and the objectification of her body, so she has had all the time in the world to identify the mechanisms of male domination. Her experiences foretold what we are now living through with Instagram and overexposure, of which women – famous or otherwise – are the primary victims. The future might well be shaped by learning from her: Freed from the desire to be seen, she has been able to fall back on her desire to act and to become a fully-fledged actress, not just in cinema, but in a society in transition.



WRITERS' NOTE

Behind her reputation as a star who has broken with the game of celebrity, Jodie Foster has always seemed like an intruder, one who has mastered the codes and obligatory smiles. A look through the archives and her filmography confirm this notion. Even in her most popular films, like *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Panic Room*, she seems like strangeness itself with this cold beauty, like an icon who defies all the codes of Hollywood glamour. She is beautiful yet never passive, heroic but not masculine, sexual but not eroticized: A subtle, paradoxical androgyny is developing from film to film.

How could an actress have such a brilliant career without resorting to the guise of vamp or bimbo? That is the question that guided our research, obviously driving us to look back at her childhood as a premature Lolita. The way her entourage tried to invent a star, subjecting her to the predatory gaze, perhaps explains her rebellion against the diktats of the world of entertainment. Being one step ahead of the world, with her precocious understanding of the codes established by a paternalistic star system, allowed her upon reaching adulthood to turn the rules to her advantage. Such a reversal seems to us like the perfect example of a successful Hollywood takeover and the driving force behind a powerful narrative of feminist struggle.

But the heroine of this story is even more unique, in that she led her fight as a maverick. She didn't act like a woman with a cause like Jane Fonda in the 1960s, nor did she make any grand declarations, and she certainly didn't brandish her sexual orientation as a banner. Indeed, her coming out in 2013 was above all an occasion to denounce the media pressure that forced her to talk about her private life. In short, Foster's feminism is about acts, not words. By refusing a number of roles, by bending those that she accepted to her own philosophy, and then by becoming a director and producer herself, she has profoundly altered the status of women in American cinema and even Western popular culture in general. In spite of the recent awareness brought about by the #MeToo movement, actresses still remain tethered to a cliché of passivity: The image of women offered up as docile beauties continues in our collective imagination. Better than any other female Hollywood star, Jodie Foster has managed to break this cliché and integrate the notions of action and creativity into her profession. As such, this film will recount the story of a creature turned creator, conceding nothing to the great crusher that is Hollywood.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The story of Jodie Foster is the story of a woman who was dispossessed of her own image in her youth, but who slowly took it back through a long and hard-fought battle, to then shape it to better represent her true nature and her own vision of the world.

This film will recount this struggle for an image, drawing on all those which Foster has projected throughout her career. Because Jodie Foster's fight has been written in acts, powerful roles, and creative gestures, it seemed obvious to us that cinema should be the main pillar for the film. Foster's filmography offers some incredible insights to her psyche, like a corridor towards what she has experienced, suffered, and overcome. Extracts from her movies will provide access to the major turning points in how she has evolved as a woman, an actress, and a writer.

As far back as the auteur feature films she made in the 1970s, Foster's roles foreshadowed the recurring theme of her work: The resistance of a heroine confined in a closed space, who is gradually transformed, at the mercy of the toxic, often-male gaze – of Harvey Keitel in *Taxi Driver*, Martin Sheen in *The Little Girl Who Lives Down The Lane*, Anthony Hopkins as Hannibal Lecter once she was an adult, or even the attackers in *Panic Room*. Her films will provide the compass for this documentary, the driving force for all the reflections about her: How else could her story be told? She who is so determined to avoid discussion of her biography and who so fiercely defends the idea that cinema already reveals a lot. More than any other star, Jodie Foster is the child of a world of images, the first whose whole life has been followed, referenced, and documented by cinema, TV, and advertising.

From the little girl having fun on TV movie sets, to the turbulent high-schooler in Los Angeles, to the beautiful adolescent answering journalists on vintage French TV, to the confident adult revealing her intelligence on talk shows, we have access to these multiple incarnations, from her early childhood to the woman in her 50s. These rich archives offer the opportunity to retrace the metamorphosis of a character who grew up in front of the lens. But also to mark a shift that has become very clear to us: Post-1981 and Hinckley's obsession with her, Foster became an adult. These images, at the time they were created, tell the story of an era, of the feminine figure they produced, and the trap they ended up closing around the young Jodie Foster.

A narration in the present tense

In addition to a commentary we hope will be devoid of any didacticism, the testimony of the various interviewees (specialists on the Hollywood film industry, gender specialists, or those who have worked with Jodie Foster) will explain the constant dialog between a biographical journey and the construction of a body of work. The narration must be in the present tense to draw the viewer into the temporality of the archive footage ranging from the Hollywood of the 1970s to that of today, and restore the revolutionary scope of such a figure. Interviews will be shot in different places, depending on each witness, adapting to the context of each one, whether they are filmmakers, academics, journalists, or those close to Foster.

The soundtrack

We will entrust the soundtrack to a composer, who could work, for example, with the typical textures of the 80s and 90s, a critical turning point when Jodie Foster's popularity was at its peak.

Interviews

Jordan Mintzer, American journalist at the *Hollywood Reporter* / Célia Sauvage, French academic and expert on gender studies / Martin Scorsese, director of *Taxi Driver* and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* / Lynne Stahl, American academic and specialist on the work of Jodie Foster / Kirsten Stewart, actress and friend of Jodie Foster.

BIOGRAPHIES

Writer: Yal Sadat

Yal Sadat holds a doctorate in film history and a master's degree in comparative literature. For the past decade, he has contributed to numerous film magazines, including Inrocks, Sofilm, Première, Chronic'art, Jalouse, and Technikart. His work includes investigations, critiques, reports, portraits and interviews with some of the world's greatest filmmakers. He regularly hosts film presentations and conferences.

Co-writer and director: Camille Juza

A graduate of Sciences Po and holder of a DEA in political philosophy, Camille Juza has been directing documentaries for the past 15 years. She is interested in societal issues, particularly justice and architecture. In 2010, she joined the documentary unit of France Culture, where she produces feature-length programs on cultural and social history. She recently co-directed La Fabrique d'Arnold Schwarzenegger.

HAUT ET COURT TV and PETIT DRAGON: Emma Lepers

This film is a co-production from Haut et Court TV, the TV production arm of Haut et Court, founded in 1992 by Carole Scotta; and the documentary production company Petit Dragon, founded in 2005 by Emma Lepers. We produce atypical, contemporary projects that focus on themes of discovery, culture and society, in order to open up new perspectives and offer a way to decode the modern world. Our latest cinema documentary productions include Maria by Callas, Entre Les Murs, and Comment j'ai détesté les maths; and for TV, La Fabrique d'Arnold Schwarzenegger and Abderrahmane Sissako; and for the web, the series Tous Musclés, Sound System, and Le Futur est de retour.



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