



Stockbridge Community Cinema

Programme Notes 10 February 2023

AZOR

Switzerland, Argentina, France | 2021 |
94 min | Cert 15

Director: Andreas Fontana

Screenplay: Andreas Fontana

Starring: Fabrizio Rongione, Stéphanie Cléau,
Carmen Iriondo



"It's impossible to work out what's going on in this country". It's December 1980 and the streets of Buenos Aires are under surveillance by the military authorities. But given that luxury hotels, private clubs, villas with swimming pools, vast estates and private boxes at racetracks are all much of a muchness, and that, in this sense, the privileged folk of the world form one big family partaking in the same elitist culture and speaking one same language, Swiss banker Yvan De Wiel (Fabrizio Rongione) and his wife Inés (Stéphanie Cléau), who are visiting the Argentinian capital for the very first time, are far from disoriented. However, a highly delicate mission awaits our refined Yvan: he must win back the mega-wealthy and tax-evasion-inclined clientele of his predecessor who has fled without explanation.

Such is the intriguing point of departure opted for in *Azor* [+], the brilliant debut feature film by Swiss director Andreas Fontana, which was unveiled in the 71st Berlinale's Encounters competition. The film unfolds in hushed yet turbulent tones, sinking slowly but surely into the opaque atmosphere of a Borges-style cryptic crime story (strewn with symbolic clues), whilst also exuding an episodic air (Mariano Llinás – *La Flor* – helped the director write the screenplay)... Because corruption reigns supreme here, toxic and dangerous, with greedy predators lurking beneath the sparkling champagne and flawless manners.

Divided into five chapters which begin with "The tour of the camel" (a rite of passage in private banking), the twisted plot sees Yvan leading a cautious investigation to try to understand why Keys fled so hastily, leaving a huge, personal mark on the wealthy individuals whose money he helped move to Switzerland, not to mention a raft of allusive and sulphurous rumours following

in his wake. Unsurprisingly, untangling truth from lie and taking over from Keys is anything but easy for Yvan who, supported by his wife, manoeuvres to meet the most important clients so as to convince them to continue their business with him. From Mrs Lacrosteguy (Carmen Iriondo) to Augusto Padel Camon (Juan Trench) and his wife Magdalena (Elli Medeiros), not to mention the aggressive Farrell (Ignacio Vila) and the powerful bishop Tatoski (Pablo Torre Nilson), the movements of our (secretly ambitious) banker, who is tested by each and every one of these characters, lead him right to the heart of the powerful military junta (and its allies), whose worrying national purification policy reaches all the way to the most untouchable levels of society. How far into the dark and tortuous jungle that is the world of money will Yvan be willing to go on behalf of his bank?

Tackling a tricky and compelling subject with a talent for suggestion (looks, allusions, unfinished conversations, etc.), Andreas Fontana excels at incorporating manipulative clues and nods (there's a driver called Dante), and playing with visuals which purposefully resonate with the main character: "cream, bad taste, somewhat reassuring". We also learn that in Swiss patois, *Azor* means "Shut up! Watch what you're saying" and "playing the silver-tongued monkey" means "playing innocent". These many cryptic messages are hidden within other (social and banking) codes, with "*Azor*" in Spanish also referring to the name of a bird of prey, not to mention Franco's yacht. Thus, we welcome the viewer into a spiderweb of elaborate mysteries, which signal a very promising step into feature films for this director.

Berlinale 2021 Encounters
Review of *Azor* by Fabien Lemercier

