



Presents

A PRIVATE LIFE


A film by Rebecca Zlotowski

103 mins, France, 2025

Language: French

Distribution

Mongrel Media Inc
1213C Bathurst Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M5R 3H3
Tel: 416-516-9775 Fax: 416-516-0651
E-mail: info@mongrelmedia.com
www.mongrelmedia.com

 @MongrelMedia

Publicity

Bonne Smith
Star PR
Tel: 416-488-4436
Twitter: @starpr2
E-mail: starpr@sympatico.ca

 /MongrelMedia

Synopsis

Renowned psychiatrist Lilian Steiner is deeply troubled by the sudden death of one of her patients. Convinced that it was murder, she decides to investigate...



Director's statement

It is the title of a film that haunted me first: *Vie Privée* [*A Private Life*] – borrowed from Louis Malle's beautiful, unrelated movie. Like those paper dolls you can dress in different outfits, I had been projecting various films onto that title for years, convinced it held a truth I needed to uncover: the intimate realm, the tension between what we know of ourselves and what others think they see. And, obviously, its counterpart – the public, professional life – where so many of our contradictions come to light.

That was when Anne Berest, whom I've known all my life, handed me a screenplay she had written long ago. The film was called *Liliane Steiner*, and it was about a psychiatrist of the same name, a patient who had taken her own life, and the idea that past lives connected them – accounting for the doctor's unusually deep empathy for the one who was gone. The premise thrilled me like the setup to a Jewish joke: what happens when your shrink starts crying, deeply moved, as you tell her your life story?

It quickly became clear to me that this psychiatrist must feel so burdened by guilt over her patient's death that she begins to question whether it was actually a suicide. She would start investigating

– ideally alongside a former lover, thought to be long gone – into the possibility of a crime. A personal crisis unfolding like a detective story; a re-marriage comedy disguised as a gamble.

But what is she really investigating? Herself – a bourgeois woman once so steady, now shaken by her own failure? Her patient, whose voice once echoed in the office and has now fallen silent forever? Her own responsibility? Or simply a crime – but which one, and why? The entire film becomes the staging and unraveling of that doubt.

I identified with Liliane Steiner, who is forced to confront the limits of her work and make amends. She is overwhelmed – not, as women are so often portrayed when labeled “complex,” by the turmoil of someone unhinged or irrational, or by addiction (though rest assured, she never says no to a good vodka) – but quite the opposite: by her excessive rationality, her unshakable composure, which, as everyone knows, is often nothing more than a façade.

She begins to question herself – on every level of her life, including her professional identity – and, strangely enough, this kind of story, one that dis-

mantles the myth of the “strong woman,” is still rarely told. There is always, in any film, an element of incantation – as if to say *please, let this never happen to me!* – but just as often, a secret wish to experience what we don't dare allow ourselves in real life – *please, let this happen to me!*... That ambivalence informed the tone of the film, oscillating between unapologetically comedic situations and darker dives into the depths of a character with hidden secrets.

It was this desire that inspired me to develop part of the imagery using scripted sequences and AI-generated visuals. They produce a strange, artificial texture – like something drawn from our dreams, or from what we've repressed. This work acts as a hidden door within the film, quietly opening for those who wish to step through.

To portray her, casting Jodie Foster felt like a long-awaited, exhilarating encounter. Our first meeting had never materialized – back on my debut film, when I had hoped she would play Léa Seydoux's mother in *Dear Prudence*. With *A Private Life*, I sensed that her flawless command of French, combined with her American sensibility, would enrich the subtle shifts in speech and perception throughout the film – what was heard, what slipped past us...

I know of no other actress who makes the arc of a thought, of a sudden realization, so visibly legible on her face. The camera captures her intelligence in motion – rapid, vertiginous.

The “Vie Privée” of the title is meant to evoke not only intimacy, but also a life that has been deprived. Private life, deprived of life. A way of suggesting that what touches us most closely is also what places us most at risk. It’s a talkative film, built around confrontations through dialogue – about a woman who fell silent, and another whose very profession was to listen to her. These questions of dialogue, of musicality, are at the heart of the film’s direction: in the analyst’s office, in the concert hall – places where everyone agrees to play a role: the one who speaks, and the one who listens.

The whole casting process was shaped by the same clear desire for musicality, with the pleasure of setting two families face to face – like opposing constellations. One revolves around Virginie Efira, a darkly luminous star, under the quiet threat of

Luana Bajrami, whose precocious power upends everything, and the seemingly inevitable presence of Mathieu Amalric. The other orbits around Jo- die, with Vincent Lacoste as a wounded, unloved son in whom humor always surfaces like a form of courtesy. And finally, Daniel Auteuil – forming, alongside Jodie, a cinematic couple that brings together two continents one wouldn’t expect to meet, yet who seem to have been intertwined forever in our shared imagination. This couple moved me instantly – with their gentleness, their intuitive acting, and an obvious chemistry that seemed to let their iconic filmographies speak to one another. Because I’m beginning to understand that any film that truly moves me is always, in some way, a film that deals with cinema itself – through us.

Rebecca Zlotowski

Q&A with Jodie Foster

Rebecca Zlotowski has never hidden her admiration for you, nor her desire to work with you. Were you familiar with her work beforehand?

No, I knew absolutely nothing about her. I read the script first, before doing any research or meeting her. That's always how I work – whether the director is well-known or not doesn't matter to me. The first thing I look at is the script. That's what matters most. And in this case, I could see right away how powerful it was – there was a real story there. And for me, the story is everything. Probably because my first great love was books. You know, I became an actress very young, almost by accident. But deep down, I've always been more interested in writing, in storytelling, in ideas. That's why this script felt like such a gift – it was so beautifully written. I also have to admit that the character of Lilian Steiner, the heroine of *Vie Privée*, intrigued me. So, I began watching Rebecca's films, starting with *An Easy Girl*, and then she came to meet me in Los Angeles...

Would you say you were already won over before even meeting her?

Yes, you could say I already knew I wanted to do the film before I even met Rebecca. But the real turning point – the life-changing moment between

us – was when she came to L.A. Because instead of just chatting about the character, making small talk, or grabbing a sandwich like people usually do when meeting a filmmaker for the first time, we went through the entire film, word for word, for six or seven hours straight. I had so many questions for her, and each one of her answers gave me this incredible surge of energy. It really moved me. Yes, that conversation changed everything. I saw then – knew – that Rebecca was someone deeply serious about her work, that she had a precise vision for every moment in the film, that she had thought everything through. In short, she had complete command of her script.

No concerns at all?

I'd say it was more a sense of anticipation. And I actually told her that – I was simply hoping she would push a little further into the purely cinematic aspects of her script. I mean those moments that truly engage the audience in the cinematic experience. Take the hypnosis sequence at the beginning of the film, which opens into a dream and creates such a sense of mystery that it requires the audience's full attention. That's a perfect example of a scene that draws on the unique power of film. But that wasn't a criticism, not even a doubt. It's just that, when you've never worked

with a director before, there are things you can't know for sure in advance...

You speak French perfectly, but you hadn't shot a film in France since *A Very Long Engagement*, back in 2004. Did the opportunity to work in French again, on the other side of the Atlantic, also play a role in your decision to embark on *A Private Life*?

Let's say it came second – right after the quality of the script. But yes, it's true, I'd been wanting to do a French film for a long time – with a French director, shot entirely in French, and not something that felt like an imitation of an American movie, or worse, a U.S. co-production. I was looking for a film with a more modest tone, one that engaged with ideas, the life of the mind. Now, I don't mean to suggest I was chasing some obscure little art-house project! (laughs) *A Private Life* is ambitious. Yes, it's a major film for Rebecca... and for me.

How did the shoot go? Did it feel disorienting in any way? Were you able to find your footing easily, despite the change of environment?

First of all, I have to say that Rebecca is one of the most devoted directors I've ever worked with. And also – well, let's just say I know how to handle

myself as an actress (*smiles*). For me, all the deep conversations need to happen *before* the shoot. Once you're on set, it's time to play. And in that sense, I really enjoyed working with Rebecca. Everyone loves her on set. First, because she's funny, smart, driven, and deeply human. She pays great attention to others. Then there's the fact that she works with the same crew she's had for years – there's a real sense of loyalty on both sides. And finally – and this matters a lot to her – she's involved in absolutely everything. She's part of every decision, big or small. Even choosing a scarf, for instance. Did you know that half of the clothes Lilian wears – my character – actually came from Rebecca's own wardrobe? I love that!

That must have been quite a change from some of the big American productions you've worked on!

It's true that the way films are made in the U.S. is a little different. Over there, everyone stays in their lane, and no one really crosses into someone else's lane. But that's probably because there are so many more people on set. In France, everything is smaller, more concentrated. Everyone wears three hats, and the director is the one who oversees it all. Whereas in the U.S., when you're on a big film, we're talking 170 people on set, months and months of shooting, three units running at once... it's a different scale! But my approach doesn't change. As long as I'm on the same page as the director – and I absolutely was with Rebecca – my job as an actress is to serve the director, to help them achieve their vision. That's what brings me joy. You know, I've made plenty of films where I didn't see eye to eye with the director, and it was painful. It took me years, but now I only do projects where I feel in sync with the filmmaker. Like this one!

Let's talk a bit about Lilian Steiner, your character. Like many of the women you've played, she seems to be in constant tension between intellect and emotion. Is that a coincidence?

To me, that tension you're talking about is really the fundamental struggle of being human – and maybe even more so when you're an actress! Because when you get on set, you come in with intentions, with ideas about the character, and then someone says "Action!" and suddenly, you have no idea what's going to come out... Actually, I wouldn't call it a struggle between the emotional and the intellectual – more of a dance, a kind of interplay. And I think that works particularly well here because Lilian is a psychoanalyst. A psychoanalyst is always walking a fine line between those two poles. Her work relies on both objective knowledge and subjective understanding...

Lilian is a psychiatrist, which means she speaks very little and listens a lot – at least at the beginning. Is that a difficult experience for an actor? In those moments, it feels like the camera is trying to capture the flow of your thoughts...

But that's part of the craft – mapping out a thought process! And actually, I really enjoy playing characters whose inner intellectual activity is almost visible. In fact, I'll tell you something: for me, it comes more naturally to portray thought than emotion. I remember my character in *The Accused*, Jonathan Kaplan's film – she was all raw emotion, she wore everything on her skin. And that was much harder for me to play than Dr. Lilian Steiner, who, in many ways, is closer to who I am. That said, I also love portraying contemporary women who move through the world – especially when that world puts their emotions at risk.

As the film progresses, the certainties of this middle-class woman – who's presented as calm, methodical, and impeccable – start to unravel. How do you interpret this gradual disorder?

I find it very beautiful, very authentic. It perfectly mirrors the journey of psychoanalysis. At least, Freud's version of it. But Rebecca's script is filled with Freudian references in any case! It's true that Freud is much more respected in Europe, while in the U.S., he's pretty much «out,» seen as outdated – mainly because of his misogyny. But honestly, there's nothing more beautiful than a Freudian interpretation. It's incredibly cinematic. In fact, if it hadn't been for Freud, there wouldn't have been Hitchcock!

Humor, especially wordplay, as well as dreams – two cornerstones of Freud's theory on the unconscious – are both explored in Rebecca's film. Just like in Hitchcock's work...

Yes, it's a very playful film, intellectually rich yet funny. In fact, it doesn't take itself too seriously. Just like Rebecca, who is intellectually very strong – she's done a lot of studying, read many books – but who can also easily laugh at herself. She loves that self-deprecating humor! And then there's her very strong Jewish identity, which allows her to embrace, with humor, a kind of primal, raw despair.

That sense of despair also comes through in the hypnosis dream sequence, with its reference to the Holocaust, since it transports Lilian – and the audience, along with her – back to World War II. Did you discuss this as well?

Yes, we talked a lot about this dream because it offered so many creative possibilities... In fact,

you can put anything into a dream. For example, Lilian's missing patient. We talk about her in the film, but we never actually see her... Except in this dream sequence, where she appears at a concert, which also features Lilian and Paula... who are, by the way, in the orchestra pit. But after all, why wouldn't the Holocaust be part of Rebecca's film? It already plays a large part in her life, due to her family history. And the Holocaust is a part of France's and Paris' history as well. So, it's almost inevitable that when you decide, like Rebecca, to speak about the unconscious in a more Lacanian way, all these people, all these surviving women, should be there. They shape your lives and your stories in a way that is... unconscious, inevitably!

In that same dream, Lilian also reunites with her son. A son who, by the way, appears dressed as a militiaman!

For me, that's part of maternal ambivalence. It's that feeling of loving your child so much, of him being such a part of you that he overwhelms you. Essentially, I adore him, but I know he's going to kill me! Yes, this fascinates me both as a mother and as an actress. And you know what? There are plenty of films that deal with this, like *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (by Lynne Ramsay) or *The Babadook* (by Jennifer Kent). I have a whole list! So- metimes I even think I could organize a Mother's Day film festival and only program films about maternal ambivalence! (laughs)

Another defining feature of *A Private Life*, beyond its humor and its exploration of dreams, is its ability to navigate multiple genres, ranging from psycho- logical thriller to remarriage comedy to mystery film. It's hard not to see it as a nod to Hollywood's Golden Age, isn't it?

I never studied cinema, so I'm not an expert on that era. The only period in film history I know well is the 1970s (laughs)! But I learn a lot from Rebecca; she's my teacher. That being said, you're right: there is indeed a nod in the film to what you call the remarriage comedy, a nod introduced by Daniel Auteuil and his character...



This is the perfect moment to talk about your co-stars, starting with Daniel Auteuil, who plays your ex-husband, delighted to reconnect with his ex-wife through his investigation into Paula's death...

I absolutely adore Daniel! It felt like a sibling relationship between us. I find him so sensitive, so calming. At the same time, as soon as he steps into the film, he brings levity. Thanks to him, the story becomes increasingly funny, without a doubt. In fact, I just love the little moments that unfold between his character and mine. For example, in the scene at the café, where he improvises a fake

fight with the waiter just to make Lilian laugh, I find it fascinating.

What about Virginie Efira? We see less of her, mainly through flashbacks, but her character still plays a decisive role in the development of yours...

Yes, the dynamic between Paula, Virginie's character, and Lilian Steiner is really interesting. My character projects herself onto this patient. It's her death that leads her to the hypnosis session, which then brings her to the door she decides to open, behind which lies that mysterious dream,

that Freudian vision... So, this death makes her ask herself questions she had never dared to ask before. For instance, why did her husband leave her? When I mention projection, it's also because Lilian slowly realizes that Paula lied to her throughout their analysis, throughout their shared journey. And that, in turn, fascinates her. It makes her question herself. In a way, Paula's death leads her to some kind of self-discovery. You can see how rich this film is! Unfortunately, we didn't have many scenes to play together with Virginie. I say «unfortunately» because she's so good, so stunning as an actress. But it was a gift to be seated behind her and listen to her during our therapy sessions.

Was it just as enjoyable to face the character played by Mathieu Amalric, who portrays Paula's very unsettling husband?

You know, Mathieu is a big hero in the U.S. thanks to his roles and films. So, I was very curious to meet him and work with him, even though I wasn't entirely sure what to expect! And actually, he turned out to be incredibly funny. He made me laugh so much! He was constantly cracking little jokes on and off set, like a child, full of energy. Very interesting and very engaged. As for his character, I find him unsettling, a little shady, and a bit quirky too. Disturbing. But the same goes for his daughter's character, played by Luana Bajrami, a young actress I discovered and found to be remarkable in navigating this complexity.



Isn't the fact that you play in a film called *A Private Life* a final nod when you, as a Hollywood star, have always been careful to separate your private life from your career?

That's one of the reasons why this script interested me. This subject is very important and also quite rich. As Rebecca reminded me, when you hear the phrase «vie privée,» it can have multiple meanings. «Vie privée» could mean «deprived of life.» In fact, there is a woman, Paula, who is dead in this story. A woman whose death is ambiguous – did she commit suicide or was she murdered? This is actually the central question of Lilian's investigation at the start. Beyond the play on words, I must

admit that I sometimes use films as a meditation on my own life. Obviously, I've always made sure to separate my private life from my professional life throughout my career, and that's only natural. But at the same time, I have to admit that the most important, most significant, most true aspects of myself, I find them on screen. And how could it be any other way? I have given everything to cinema. Of course, it's an artform, so this offering has been done with a certain amount of control. But still, all these years, I have shared very deep, very personal things with everyone, and I've been doing that since I was three years old. In a way, my career is my entire life.

Would you say that cinema has been a kind of... therapy for you?

In a way, yes. It could be linked to my character. In psychoanalysis, you have the therapist on one side, the patient on the other, and then there's the space where they meet. A space that's completely separate from their real lives, but where they share the most profound things they have to give. And it's precisely at that intersection where healing can happen... And not just for the patient! So, in that sense, one could say it's quite creative (*smiles*)...



Rebecca Zlotowski



Biography

Rebecca Zlotowski is a French director and screenwriter born in 1980 in Paris. A graduate of the Ecole Normale Supérieure and the Femis, and a former academic in French literature, her films as director are *Dear Prudence* (Critics' Week Grand Prize Nominee, Cannes, Winner Prix Louis Delluc for First Film, Critics' Award for Best First Film), *Grand Central* (Official Selection, Cannes), *Planetarium*, starring Natalie Portman, presented at the Venice Film Festival, *An Easy Girl* (SACD Award, Directors' Fortnight, Cannes), and *Other People's Children* (In Competition, Venice). Her mini-series for Canal Plus, *Savages*, adapted from a novel by Sabri Louatah, won the award for Best Series at the French Syndicate of Cinema Critics. She lives and works in Paris.

Cast

Lilian Steiner	Jodie FOSTER
Gabriel Haddad	Daniel AUTEUIL
Paula Cohen-Solal	Virginie EFIRA
Simon Cohen-Solal	Mathieu AMALRIC
Julien Haddad-Park	Vincent LACOSTE
Valérie Cohen-Sola	Luàna BAJRAMI
Pierre Hallan, smoking patient	Noam MORGENSZTERN from la Comédie Française
Jessica Grangé, hypnotist	Sophie GUILLEMIN
Dr. Goldstein	Frederick WISEMAN
Perle Friedman	Aurore CLÉMENT
Vera	Irène JACOB
Vanessa Haddad-Park	Ji-Min PARK
Cameron	Jean CHEVALIER from la Comédie Française
Paula 20 yo	Emma RAVIER
The neighbor	Scott AGNESI DELAPIERRE
Jacky Tiffou, man at the vigil	Lucas BLEGER
Man on the bus	Jérôme LENÔTRE

Crew

A film by

Screenplay by

In collaboration with

Director of Photography

Editor

Original Music

Production Designer

Costume Designer

Casting Director

Script Supervisor

Sound Editor

Sound Mixer

Re-recording Mixer

Color Grading

Artistic Collaboration

1st Assistant Director

Unit Production Manager

Key Grip

Gaffer

Head Make-Up Artist

Head Hair Stylist

Costume Assistants

Set Photographer

Personal Make-Up & Hair Stylist to Ms. Foster

Post-Production Supervisor

Executive Producer

Production Company

Producer

Associate Legal and Financial Director

Prep and Post-Production Administrator

Production Assistants

Assistant Accountant

Image & Sound Formats

Visa Number

International Sales

Rebecca ZLOTOWSKI

Anne BEREST and Rebecca ZLOTOWSKI

Gaëlle MACÉ

George LECHAPTOIS - AFC

Géraldine MANGENOT

Rob

Katia WYSZKOP

Bénédicte MOURET

Julie ALLIONE

Cécile RODOLAKIS

Thomas DESJONQUÈRES

Nicolas CANTIN

Jean-Paul HURIER

Yov MOOR

Jean-Baptiste POUILLOUX

Léonard VINDRY

Fanny GAUCHERY

Eric FODERA

Olivier REGENT

Anais LAVERGNE

Laurent BOZZI

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