



LATEST NEWS FROM THE COSMOS

A film by Julie Bertucelli
An Icarus Films Release

Best Documentary Nominee, 2017 César Awards

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LOGLINE

At the age of twenty, an autistic woman begins writing words, then phrases, and finally books, arranging one letter at a time.

SYNOPSIS

For most of her life, Hélène, who lives with her parents in rural France, did not communicate. And then, at the age of 21-despite having had no formal schooling or ever having been taught to read or write-she did. By arranging laminated alphabet letters, Hélène created words, then phrases and finally a book, one letter at a time.

And then another book. Under the pen-name Babouillec Sp (the letters stand for *sans parole* or "non-verbal"), this severely autistic woman writes poetry that can be soaring and childlike, surreal and funny, dense with allusions and filled with insight. H  l  ne's most recent volume is *Eponymous Algorithm*, which her parents helped to adapt for the stage. *Latest News from the Cosmos* draws us into H  l  ne's world as the play is developed. In a film unlike any other portrait of a writer, director Julie Bertuccelli (*School of Babel*) prompts us to contemplate the nature of creativity and communication, and the hidden potential in humans of all abilities.



IN THE PRESS

"Nearly 30 years old, an autistic woman can barely utter a few words. We assume she's behind but discover she's way ahead. When H       Nicolas takes hold of the letters placed on a table, she becomes a poet who, under the pseudonym Babouillec, delivers astonishing thoughts and visions."

—Telerama

"Placed before this explosive personality, in constant conflict with a very strong interiority that H       cannot express in speech, the viewer simultaneously becomes a voyeur and witness to a continuous miracle. Unsettling and captivating."

—Premiere

"Having never learned to read, at age 20 H       began to compose striking and inspired texts, which describe her vision of the world and society. The film empathetically questions the mysteries of art and intuition."

—L'Humanit  

"An absorbing portrait of human creativity. Inspirational and informative... If ever there was a movie warning us not to judge a book by its cover, this is the one."

—The Hollywood Reporter

Review: "Latest News from the Cosmos"

The Hollywood Reporter

11/9/2016 by Jordan Mintzer

The Bottom Line: An absorbing portrait of human creativity.

Director Julie Bertuccelli (*The Tree*, *School of Babel*) chronicles a highly autistic French woman who can compose short texts filled with poetry and wit.

Can a person incapable of speaking or writing somehow produce beautiful literature?

In *Latest News from the Cosmos*, director Julie Bertuccelli answers that question in the affirmative, documenting the remarkable story of Helene Nicolas, aka Babouillec, a severely autistic 30-year-old French woman who manages to convey her deepest inner thoughts through a unique form of poetic wordplay. Both inspirational and informative, this touching creative portrait received a small theatrical release in France and should find additional bookings on the fest circuit, with possibilities for screenings at educational and institutional outfits.

Born in 1985, Helene lives in a quiet country homestead surrounded by rivers, trees and horses grazing in the fields. Unable to say anything but a few basic words, she seems on

appearance to be young tween stuck in the body of someone much more mature, and is obviously in need of constant care. But around 10 years ago, Helene's mother, Veronique, discovered that her daughter was in fact capable of learning how to read, and subsequently taught her how to spell out words using laminated plastic letters, in a sort of ongoing game of *Scrabble* through which Helene was soon able to communicate her desires, dreams and astute daily observations.

The result, collected in several books, the last of which was titled *Eponymous Algorithm*, reveals a highly intelligent mind capable of reducing complex ideas to cleverly executed phrases that read like philosophical haikus or prose-poetry aphorisms. ("We survive by instinct to survive. Only love separates us from nothingness." "The taste for adventure mysteriously censors itself.") Some sentences come across as joyfully mystical, as if Helene were privy to secrets of the world we can barely grasp. ("In fact I'm telepathic and iconoclastic, ideally you will know the founding principles enumerating the back-and-forth of cosmic energy.")

Bertuccelli has directed a handful of features and documentaries — her last film, *School of Babel*, focused on an immigrant youth class in Paris — and in *Cosmos* she skillfully cuts between scenes of Helene "writing," which can recall the automatic writing sessions of the Surrealists, and a series of performances where her texts are adapted into theater pieces that she often takes part in. (The film's opening slyly brings these storylines together when we see Helene unable to sit still during a literary reading, only to realize that the reader is actually reciting one of her texts.)

Filming in close-up or even extreme close-up, as if trying to better penetrate the mystery residing behind Helene's bewildering facial expressions, Bertuccelli (who operated camera and sound herself) underlines the enormous chasm separating her subject's outward appearance from the insightful artistic mind that is reflected in her writing, leaving us to contemplate the difference between words, deeds and images. If ever there was a movie warning us not to judge a book by its cover, this is the one.

FILM FESTIVALS

Best Documentary Nominee, 2017 César Awards
Audience Award, 2016 Montreal Documentary Film Festival (RIDM)
2017 Tournées Film Festival
2016 La Rochelle International Film Festival
2016 Auch Festival Indépendances et Créations
2016 Gardanne Festival of Autumn
2016 Lussas Documentary Festival

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I first met H       and her mother V         three years ago, after a Pierre Meunier show they'd just seen. H       was having a discussion with Pierre, aided by her little laminated letters, and he asked her to work on *Algorithme Eponyme*, her latest text...I was dumbfounded discovering her there (not to mention imagining their upcoming work to stage this incredible text,) and I suddenly had the intense desire to make a film about her.

I'm still stunned to have been able to come across Babouillec and her world on my own little path in life. She does not speak, but she hears and perceives everything with an intensity that staggers those who meet her or read her work. She has not a trace of pity about her, but instead a razor-sharp sense of humor. The strength, intelligence, poetry and mystery of her texts continue to enthrall me. Her responses when I began filming her, her gaze which pierces through your soul, her infectious laughs, her intuition, and her sensitivity challenge our certainties and bring us towards a greater humanity. H       questions us about the power of the mind and the limits of social beings. She speaks to us about exchanges between her internal world, which is vast and free, and our world, which is too concerned with putting everything into boxes.

I know that she still has much to offer us. Spending time with her, talking with her, reading her work, watching her understand the world in her own very personal way, but still enjoy life and its perceptions, was a privileged and deeply moving experience for me.

—Julie Bertuccelli

A NOTE FROM BABOUILLEC SP WRITTEN DURING FILMING

WHAT A DAZZLING ADVENTURE
THE UTOPIAN BET OF BELONGING
TO A LIVING SYSTEM.
THE WORN-OUT FILM OF OUR SOCIAL SCENARIOS
FILLS MYSTERIOUS DESIRES.
THE MOCKING EYE OF YOUR CAMERA
FILMS RIGHT DOWN TO THE TOP OF OUR BEINGS.
I LOVE IT.

—Babouillec Sp

A NOTE FROM BABOUILLEC SP AFTER VIEWING THE FILM

WITH DISTANCE MY EYE FOUND ITS CRITICAL MEANING AGAIN.
THE BEAUTY THE IMAGE PROVIDES OFFERS US
THE POSSIBILITY OF QUESTIONING EMOTION.
LAUGHING OR CRYING IN THE FACE OF THIS WORLD FROM ELSEWHERE.
TRUE SUBJECT OF SOCIETY, TALKING ABOUT AUTISM CAN BE DISTURBING.
THROUGH YOUR FILM, JULIE, I CAME ACROSS AS A PERSON
OFF THE CIRCUIT WHO, WITH HER BOX OF LETTERS, COMPOSES
A LANGUAGE THAT BELONGS TO SOMETHING ELSE
AND THE WORLDS ARE JOINED.
I OBSERVE MYSELF WITH PLEASURE THROUGH YOUR SLY EYE
INHABITED BY LOVE OF DIRECT, FLUID LIGHT
EMBELLISHING THE POETIC CONTOURS OF WHAT'S REAL.
ABRACADABRA AND SAPERLIPOPETTE, I ADORE THIS MAGIC
MOMENT OF ETERNITY IN WHICH THE GAZE,
EMOTION, THE WHOLE BODY ARE IMMOBILIZED.
I BELIEVE THAT THIS STRANGE ALCHEMY OF THE INSTANT
FOR ETERNITY TEACHES ME TO HAVE TRUST IN
THE EXISTENCE OF BEING SOMEONE SOMEWHERE
IN A SHARED SPACE.
SO THANK YOU JULIE FOR HAVING EMBARKED WITH ME
IN THIS OTHER WORLD THAT YOU CALL
"NEWS FROM THE COSMOS".

WITH ALL MY LIVING LOVE [TVA – TOUT VIVRE AMOUR]
—Babouillec Sp



BABOUILLEC SP'S PHRASES FROM THE FILM

A neither whole nor standardized machine
Will not liBerate our reBellious verticality

Flashy oddball my life on the Blink

my words are free to exist
Are only improvised in the devil's rhythm
From the iNcaNDeScenT back and forth Of my laNterN

The sLY eye of the camera smiles at me,
mY love of the fantastic aDore

BaBouillec orator withOut boRder
ForBidDen A passport

Playing with each Of the secret spaces
of mY niTwiT mind

iN fact I'm telepathic and icoNoclastic
iDeally you'D know the fouNdationNs
eNumeraTing the back and foRth of cosmic eNergy

iN a book telling stories
the cosmos Nourishes my travels

EXTRACTS FROM THE TEXT
ALGORITHME EPONYME
TAKEN FROM THE SHOW
FORBIDDEN DI SPORGERSI

AND US THE DOERS OF THE WORLD IN THIS ARBITRARY MAZE,
ARE WE FREE, AMICABLY CONNECTED, IGNORANT
OF OTHERS OR ON LINE WAITING
WITH DISCONNECTED MINDS?

WE SURVIVE BY SURVIVAL INSTINCT
ONLY THE ACT OF LOVING SEPARATES US FROM THE VOID.

HALT THE RISE OF POWER OF SLEEPING HEADS.

TO WHOM SHOULD WE BELONG, RESEMBLE?
THE MODEL USED ENTERS THROUGH WHAT FORM OF THOUGHT?
ARE WE DEPENDENT ON THE LAW OF LIMITS?

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE, DINOSAURS TOO,

HOMOSAPIENS BLAZE THE TRAIL LITERALLY SUBJECT
TO THE ETERNAL QUESTION: WHO AM I?

TO BE OR NOT TO BE, THAT IS THE QUESTION.
SAYING SHIT TO THOSE WHO WANT TO KNOW
THAT'S THE ANSWER

MYSTERIOUSLY THE DESIRES FOR ADVENTURES ARE SELF-CENSORED

BABOUILLEC SP ON HERSELF EXCERPTED FROM HER WRITINGS

*I WAS BORN ON A SNOWY DAY,
TO A MOTHER WHO GIGGLES, ALL THE TIME
I SAID TO MYSELF, IT'S FREEZING,
BUT LIFE SEEMS COOL.
AND HARD TIMES ENSUED.
I FAILED NURSERY SCHOOL AND ALL MY CHANCES
OF BEING A CHAMPION AT SCHOOL DESKS.
NO LEARNING, JUST BEING YOURSELF
A TERROR FOR SOCIAL GRACES...*

*IS THINKING IN SILENCE A REASONABLE ACT?
I SPENT LONG YEARS
CUT OFF FROM THE WORLD OF SPEECH.
IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO ENGAGE IN
THE ESTABLISHED CODES. MUTISM TOOK HOLD OF MY BODY,
MY MENTAL INTELLIGENCE IS ENCLOSED
IN THIS SILENT BODY.
I ADORE WORDS, THE POTENTIAL EXTENSION
OF THOUGHT WITHOUT LIMITS.
SO I WROTE; AN ACT OF BELIEVING.
GIVING TO YOUR REASONS A MEANING TO MY SILENCE.
EACH OF MY MENTAL IMAGES INVITES ME TO VISIT
THE ORDER OF THOUGHT MATERIALIZING OUR WORLD OF
ESTABLISHED KNOWLEDGE. WHAT AN UNCERTAIN, EXALTING, PUZZLING
ADVENTURE.*

AN INTERVIEW WITH JULIE BERTUCCELLI

By Estelle Gapp

As the director of some fifteen documentaries, you are particularly sensitive to life's trajectories. How did you meet this young autistic author, H  l  ne Nicolas (pseudonym Babouillec,) whose portrait you have now created?

My films are always the result of great meetings, such as the one with young magistrates in *La Fabrique des juges* in 1997, or the one with adolescents of all kinds of nationalities in *School of Babel* [*La Cour de Babel*] in 2014. From film to film I'm often drawn to the same themes; the same questions arise again, notably concerning life's difference and difficulties, which make us stronger and shape us. I was not looking to make a film about the handicap of autism. Yet the difficulty of communicating is a topic that has interested me for a long time. I met Hélène thanks to director Pierre Meunier, who was working on a play about the construction of speech. Pierre had heard about an autistic person who did not speak, but who wrote. When he read her texts, he was blown away. I met Hélène and her mother Véronique at a performance of that show, *Du fond des gorges*. I was captivated by the young woman, by her mystery, her unique way of communicating, by the extraordinary dichotomy between her body, which is what we first notice about her, and all of the passion and brilliance she holds, which is so disturbing to our little human sensibilities. I immediately wanted to film her; she was like proof.

You say that shoots are like moments in life. How do you experience the long-term commitment that a documentary demands? Does your personal experience provide this sensitivity to the film?

I filmed H       over a two-year period, choosing to be the only one behind the camera, with no technical assistance from a cameraman or sound engineer. Intuitively, I wanted to establish a direct relationship, a strong intimacy with H      . The first shot of the film is the first shot I took of her. I didn't want to do a portrait of the daily life of an autistic person, but of an artist, a poet with blinding talent, who relates her vision of the world and her very unique, very deep vision of our human relationships. These two years of shared emotion and discovery have been a constant source of wonderment. H       doesn't speak, but so many things are conveyed through laughter, looks, silences, gestures, in addition to her writing. It was very moving and powerful to experience all of that, and at the same time I asked myself many questions. How can you successfully render the strength of her writing onscreen? How do you find the right way to create a vision of the existential enigma that embodies H      ?

The portrait exercise raises numerous technical and ethical issues. How does the camera find its proper place? How do you approach intimacy without voyeurism? Is the issue of modesty important to you?

In documentaries, it is always a bit tricky to film people in their private space, because nothing is objective; they need to accept the image that will be taken of them.

Incidentally, I often film people in their professional environment, that is, in a place where they are part of a social representation, so as to not be too intrusive. I chose to approach H       through her written work. Of course I filmed her in her daily life, but without trying to steal away a private moment. It was a matter of mutually accepting one another, step by step, of trying to establish contact with her, of building a relationship of trust, and ultimately becoming complicit. *"Starting from nothing to come together,"* as she magnificently puts it. I had to find my place as director, even though H       had agreed to be filmed. She was very conscious of the presence of the camera, which was an invaluable filter between us. She felt drawn in and amused by the camera, and immediately won it over. She looked at it with her impish look, and called herself *"filmo-magnetic"*.

Unlike a fictional storyline, a documentary is constructed gradually through filming. How did you work on the text of the film, its dramaturgy, its pacing?

While the events are not always foreseeable, I work off of an outline. I had a list of sequences I hoped to find, and many ideas on how to evoke the different facets of H      's personality. Then it was in filming that the film ended up being written, all the way to the long, crucial and fascinating task of editing. The creation of Pierre Meunier and Marguerite Bordat's play *Forbidden di Sporgersi* was clearly a rich canvas in terms of stages and events. But I also imagined other moments with H       alone, and with her mother. For example, I really wanted to see her in nature, horseback riding. In the end I thought it was one of the most poetic sequences of the film. H       does numerous activities: over the period I filmed her, she participated in a writing workshop with struggling youth, she wrote a libretto for an opera, organized meetings with other young autistic people...there were numerous temptations for filming, but I tried to stick to my initial principle in order to not spread myself too thin. From the narrative, which consisted of following H       along her artistic path creating the play, a general framework emerged, like the general search for a movement, and I knew that the culmination of the film had to be at the Festival of Avignon, at the first performances. I did not want to miss H      's reactions to the show or her presence onstage amidst the audience's enthusiastic applause. It was like an escape route for the film, a guideline but also an openness to everything that could happen.

Like H      , you introduce yourself, behind the camera, as a "voiceless" person. How do you tell the story of a person who cannot tell it herself? Does the visual allow her to invent another language?

While she does not speak, H       tells her story through writing. Thanks to her mother V        , and her long and hard work, you could say that writing has been like a second birth for H      . Very quickly, I asked myself how to read, how to play with H      's writing. In the beginning, I recopied her sentences, wanting to retain them, to savor them. How do you transmit her dazzlingly intelligent texts, their firepower? The sense of time in cinema is not the same as in reading. I tried to figure out how to give the viewer the chance to become steeped in these aphorisms. Hence the idea of showing some of her texts onscreen. They are made of laminated cardboard letters which H       manipulates using an alphabet book, arranged in a precious wood box which she brings everywhere with her. It was a matter of putting the writing into images,

of opening up the imagination, inviting people to move towards Héléne. I wanted to avoid interviews with specialists, and instead favor situations, capture relationships through looks, crises too, all those other moments of life that do not lie only in the efficacy of a response. Without having the pretension of being in her head, I hoped to evoke Héléne's inner world, to approach and make viewers curious and sensitive to what she was living, to absorb and capture the sensations she could experience. To make them feel how she is in a state of perpetual questioning, of intense reflection about the world. For me, the outside scenes in the forest or seaside have this density, this unique depth of field, like mental images that would be reflected within Héléne's mind. I did not intend to make a poetic film with formal effects; I merely wanted to open a door into her world, into her ever-brimming personality.

You could say that *Forbidden di Sporgersi* explores the mystery of H  l  ne's writing, while my film explores the mystery she herself embodies as a person and an artist. My only ambition was to be an intermediary between H  l  ne and the audience, to rouse their curiosity, their senses, to pave the way to getting to know an out of the ordinary artist.

We perceive Hélène as having a sparkling, audacious personality. Her life is a conquest every moment, a struggle to go out and meet the world. Beyond a portrait, can we say that your film is a life lesson, a quest for freedom?

Hélène is evidence of freethinking of exceptional power, beyond our limits, our social barriers. She constantly moves the borders between her body, others' bodies and the outside world. Like Pierre Meunier and all those who meet her, I was deeply moved by her out of the ordinary personality. Highly intelligent, intensely perceptive and with a strong presence in the world, she has been able to overcome her own difficulties with an enormous amount of humor. What particularly touched me was the path mother and daughter had taken to get to know one another. Then yes, that path is a major life lesson. We feel a lot of happiness, a true self-realization for Hélène and also a great blossoming and self-growth for Véronique. Hélène's exemplary path towards writing, her tenacity to acquire the freedom to express herself, calls us to question our relationship to difference, our way of judging others. In France, we are way behind in our knowledge and aid of autistics. Autism is not a handicap, but another way of being in the world, a special and unique human intelligence and perception which can enrich us and shake us up, qualities which are so invaluable for meeting and sharing. We filter what we experience quite a bit, while Hélène nourishes herself with all of her senses; she is conscious of all levels of existence. This extraordinary power to be open to things is found in what she creates. Hélène is a concentrated form of life, and she brings us further, with poetry and philosophy. With her, the answer is always stronger than the question...

You admirably film Hélène's silences. Sometimes she looks like she could be a Madonna, listening to the world. Have you felt a spiritual dimension in Hélène?

As she herself says, Hélène has a spiritual relationship with things; her gift is almost like that of a medium. She says she experiences an interplanetary travel, a “back-and-forth with the cosmos.” Her relationships with nature, space and time are always symbolic, metaphoric. She immediately makes us reach for the sky. She shakes up our relationship

ABOUT JULIE BERTUCELLI



Born in 1968, director Julie Bertuccelli studied philosophy and then worked for ten years as a director's assistant on numerous feature films, TV films and shorts, with Otar Iosseliani, Rithy Panh, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Emmanuel Finkiel, Bertrand Tavernier, Jean-Louis Bertuccelli, Christian de Chalonge, René Féret, Pierre Etaix and more.

Following her introduction to documentary filmmaking in 1993 at the Ateliers Varan, she made ten documentaries for Arte, France 3 and France 5, including *Un métier comme un autre*, *Une liberté!*, *La Fabrique des juges*, *Bienvenue au grand magasin*, *Un monde en fusion*, *Otar Iosseliani le merle siffleur*, *Le Mystère Glasberg* and *Antoinette Fouque – qu'est-ce qu'une femme?...*

Her first fictional feature film, *Depuis qu'Otar est parti* (*Since Otar Left*)...received some twenty prizes in France and abroad, including the Grand Prix de la Semaine de la Critique at the 2003 Cannes Festival, the César for best first work in 2004, the 2003 Prix Marguerite Duras and the 2003 Prix Michel d'Ornano in Deauville.

L'arbre, her second fictional feature film, shot in Australia, was an official selection in the 2010 Cannes Festival.

Her documentary *School of Babel* (*La cour de Babel*) which came to French theaters in 2014, received a César nomination and was crowned Best documentary from Trophées francophones du cinéma.

She was president of SCAM, Société civile des auteurs multimédia, between June 2013 and June 2015, the first woman to hold that position. She has been co-president of the ARP, Société civile des Auteurs-Réalisateurs-Producteurs since June 2016.

Julie Bertuccelli is currently working on her third fictional feature film, *Le dernier vidéogrenier de Claire Darling*.

ABOUT HÉLÈNE NICOLAS, BABOUILLEC SP

Hélène Nicolas, who has chosen the pseudonym "Babouillec Sp" (Sp standing for *sans parole*, or *wordless*), was born in 1985. Diagnosed with very severe autism, Hélène entered a medical-social institution around age 8, which she then left at age 14, in 1999. As of that date, she followed a sensorial stimulation program at her family home, along with artistic and movement activities, daily work that was shared between Hélène and her mother, Véronique Truffert, who stopped her career as a horsewoman to do so.

Hélène does not have access to speech and her motor ability is insufficient to write. She is thus enclosed in silence. In 2006, after six years of research on the place of thought in the existence of being, Babouillec Sp is opening up her universe to us. With the help of an alphabet in laminated cardboard letters, she writes words, sentences; she communicates at last.

In 2009 she wrote, with her little letters, *Raison et acte dans la douleur du silence*. In 2010, she started a creative literary work with Arnaud Stéphan for the stage and theater. At the same time, starting in 2008, Hélène also practiced various activities including horseback riding, fine arts, dance and music at Espace Kiêthon, an association which specializes in working with autistic people. She is now pursuing her path in writing, composing atypical pieces for the theater and more unclassifiable works.



FILM CREDITS

Direction, Image and Sound	Julie Bertuccelli
Featuring	Hélène Nicholas
Language	In French with English subtitles
Original title	<i>Derniere nouvelles du cosmos</i>
Country of production	France
Year of production	2016
Year of release	2017
Aspect ratio	1.85
Sound	5.1
Running time	85 minutes
Editing	Josiane Zardoya
Sound Editing	Olivier Goinard Olivier Guillaume
Sound mixing	Olivier Goinard
Calibration	Isabelle Laclau
Production	Les Films du Poisson, Yaël Fogiel and Laetitia Gonzalez
Coproduction	Uccelli Production and Arte France Cinéma With the participation of the Centre national du cinema et de l'image animée
International sales	Pyramide Distribution

An Icarus Films Release

The director's note, writings by Babouillec Sp, and director interview in this press kit were all translated from the original French by Liza Tripp for Icarus Films.

Movie Trailer:

<https://vimeo.com/195022566>

Downloadable Publicity Images:

<http://icarusfilms.com/pressroom.html>

User: icarus Password: press

More information about *Latest News from the Cosmos*:

<http://www.dernieresnouvellesducosmos.com>

<http://www.icarusfilms.com/new2017/cosmo.html>

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