



Vincent Lindon and Emmanuelle Devos in *La Moustache*

## FRENCH LEAVE OF HIS SENSES

### *La Moustache*

review by George Sax

By the ten-or-twelve minute mark in Emmanuel Carrère's film you may feel you're experiencing another riff borrowed from the old Twilight Zone formula. In fact, for more than half of its less-than-hour-and-a-half length, it could pass for a sleek but serious-minded French rendering of one of those bizarro-world fantasy outings.

Then, it makes a sharp turn, taking leave of both its Parisian setting and its storyline, and becomes a movie animal of a rather different stripe. It deliberately leaves its protagonist, Marc, and probably a lot of the audience, in the lurch.

Marc (Vincent Lindon) is an apparently successful architect, married to an attractive wife who's employed in the professional/administrator class in some fashion or another—it's never revealed just how, which is the least of the movie's mysteries.

As the film begins, Marc and Agnès (Emmanuelle Devos) are preparing for a party in honor of their goddaughter's birthday. As he sits in his bath, Marc has an unexpected thought and shares it with his spouse: What would she think if he got rid of his mustache? She doesn't seem to take the matter seriously, and, on an impulse, he does just that, and awaits her reaction.

But there is none. None at all. Nor do either the man and woman they visit that evening register any recognition of a difference in his appearance. Not even their little girl seems to notice.

Marc assumes that everyone's engaged in a conspiratorial joke at his expense, but when he confronts his wife on the way home, she responds with confusion, then irritation, and denies any such thing. Even worse, she denies he ever had a mustache.

And the next morning, the people at his boutique design firm seem to be operating on the same unconscious assumption. And the proprietor of the little café across the street doesn't seem to notice anything new.

This is quickly becoming maddening—in the more consequential meaning of that word. Marc has prior photographic evidence of his changed appearance, although, curiously, he doesn't show it to anyone but a complete stranger.

Distressed, unable to go to his office, or do much else, and wondering whether it's he or Emmanuelle who's losing a grip on life, he agrees to consult a psychiatrist with her. Before that can happen, Carrère briefly infuses his film with an evocation of Patrick Hamilton's ancient menacing melodrama, *Gaslight*, in which a husband tries to dispose of an inconvenient spouse by convincing her and everyone else that she's mad. In one suspenseful, adeptly constructed sequence, Carrère seems to be signaling a similar resolution, but it's only a very temporary digression. The film returns even more seriously to puzzlemaking and then Marc abruptly flees to Hong Kong. This destination may have some obscure metaphorical import for Carrère, but it mainly seems to offer striking skyline and water vistas as backdrops to Marc's obsessively indecisive all-day and overnight ferry rides back and forth across the harbor before he finally musters the mental wherewithal to disembark. (This watery setting seems rather obviously to link up with the shots of dark waters that accompany the opening credits. There's some real wet signification here.)

There are likely to be two general kinds of reaction to *La Moustache* (which Carrère adapted from his own twenty-year-old novel): Engagement with the film's existential puzzles and tantalizing inconsistencies, or annoyance at what will seem to some to be hollow portents and whimsical mystification. I'm afraid I have to make common cause with the second group.

*La Moustache* comes off as a cross between Kafka and Sartre, with a bit (excuse me, I mean morceau) of Henry James' *Turn of the Screw*, but it only coheres in a superficial stylistic way—and then just barely.

Carrère may well have been trying to suggest something about the insubstantiality of identity, the fragility of reality and consciousness, but the film is too arbitrarily self-contradictory and glib to make much of an enigmatically thoughtful impact. It does benefit from Lindon and Devos' fluidly subtle performances, and Carrère's adept scene setting. But, in the end, it plays out as a frivolous exercise loosely held together by callow Left-Bank attitudinizing.

av



This Summer Rediscover...

A Taste of History with Modern Flair  
Just Seconds From Artpark!  
Patio Dining

OPEN FOR LUNCH

Tuesday - Friday from 11:30AM

www.theclarksonhouse.com

810 Center Street-Historic Lewiston

716.754.4544

**Jalafel Bar**  
A MEDITERRANEAN EATERY  
NOW SERVING  
wine & beer  
1009 ELMWOOD AVE. | BUFFALO 14222  
MON-SAT 11-10PM | SUN 12-8PM 884-0444

## HIGH END SUMMER STOCK LOW END PRICES!

### 1989 PORSCHE CARRERA CAB



Beautiful  
Condition!

STOCK #: FP13913 PRICE: \$23,995  
COLOR: SL MILEAGE: 72,125  
5 speed. Leather, power seats, power top, serviced and taken care of.

### 1997 INFINITY Q45



Beautiful!

STOCK #: FP13876 PRICE: \$10,995  
COLOR: BK MILEAGE: 74,403  
Every option. Heated seats, moon roof, ABS, traction control. Well maintained!

### 2005 FORD MUSTANG



Almost  
New!

STOCK #: FP13868 PRICE: \$26,995  
COLOR: SL MILEAGE: 2,489  
Leather seats, ABS, A/C, cruise, dual air bags. Power everything, tinted glass.

### 2001 VOLVO V70 CROSS COUNTRY



Excellent  
Shape!

STOCK #: FP13816 PRICE: \$18,500  
COLOR: BK MILEAGE: 36,949  
Leather, moon roof, non smoker, keyless entry, trip computer, power seats, heated seats, ABS.

### 2004 MINI COOPER



Super  
Clean!

STOCK #: ET14808B PRICE: \$18,995  
COLOR: WH MILEAGE: 19,192  
Like brand new with warranty. Own one of the highest resale value cars anywhere!

### 2004 NISSAN 350 Z



Loaded!

STOCK #: FP13892 PRICE: \$26,995  
COLOR: WH MILEAGE: 31,895  
Leather, loaded and in perfect condition!

**TOWNE AUTO CHOICE**

TOWNE...HOME OF THE REAL DEAL! 662-7400

3525 Southwestern Boulevard • Orchard Park, New York 14127

Corner of Southwestern Boulevard and Milestrip. One minute off the Milestrip East Exit of the 219 Expressway.

Hours: Mon, Tue, Th 9AM - 9PM, Wed & Fri 9AM - 6PM, Sat 9AM-5PM

Visit us at [WWW.TOWNEAUTO.COM](http://WWW.TOWNEAUTO.COM)