

A cat in Paris

Jean Loup Felicioli and Alain Gagnol

France, 2010, colors.



EDUCATIONAL WORKSHEET

CinéSchool

FRENCH CULTURE
IN THE UNITED STATES



HIGHER EDUCATION,
ARTS, FRENCH LANGUAGE



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This notebook for "A cat in Paris" was created by Bernard Génin.

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A Cat in Paris

Jean-Loup Felicioli and Alain Gagnol

France. 2010.

70 min.

Producer: Jacques-Rémy Girerd

Coproduction: Folimage, Lunanime, Lumière, Digit Anima, France 3 Cinema, Rhône-Alpes Cinéma, RTBF / **Script:** Alain Gagnol / **Dialogues:** Jacques-Rémy Girerd and Alain Gagnol / **Graphic design and key scenic:** Jean-Loup Felicioli / **Color schemes:** Maryse Tuzi / **Construction manager:** Patrick Tallaron / **Special and generic effects:** Izu Troin / **Editor:** Hervé Guichard / **Sound engineer :** Loïc Burkhardt / **Mixer:** Luc Thomas / **Misuc:** Serge Besset / **Conductor:** Stéphane Cortial / **Animation studio:** Folimage (La Cartoucherie), L'Enclume, Suivez mon regard, Lunanime.

Dubbing: Dominique Blanc (Jeanne) / Bernadette Lafont (Claudine) / Bruno Salomone (Nico) / Jean Benguigui (Victor Costa) / Oriane Zani : (Zoé) / Bernard Bouillon (Lucas) / Jacques Ramade (Monsieur Bébé) / Jean-Pierre Yvars (Monsieur Hulot) / Patrick Ridremont (Monsieur Grenouille) / Patrick Descamps (Monsieur Patate) / Yves Barbaut (a guard and a zookeeper) / Line Wiblé : (an old lady).

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Summary

Dino is a Parisian cat that lives its life in two homes. By day, it lives with Zoe, a mute little girl, the only child of Jeanne, who is a detective of the police force. By night, Dino climbs over the rooftops of Paris in the company of Nico, a lonely thief.

Jeanne, Zoe's mom, is under a lot of pressure. She must stop the suspect of a string of jewelry thefts (Jeanne is unaware that Nico lives only two steps away and her own cat serves as a scout for him) and be in charge of the surveillance of the Giant of Nairobi, a giant statue coveted by public enemy number one, Victor Costa. This man, a dangerous nut job, is also responsible for the death of Jeanne's husband, Zoe's father, who was a police agent too. It is since this trauma that the little girl withdrew into silence.

One night, Zoe, who was following Dino on his nocturnal adventure, surprises Costa, who was giving orders to his henchmen, a group of clumsy and bumbling gangsters. Zoe discovers that her nanny Claudine is in fact a spy paid by Costa. She entered Jeanne's house to better inform the gangsters. The whole group starts chasing Zoe, who takes refuge in Nico's house. But Claudine delivers her to Costa and he kidnaps her. Nico then sets her free. A crisscross chase ensues until the wee hours of the morning ending on the rooftops of Notre Dame in Paris where Jeanne and Nico confront Costa in the middle of the crisis.

Zoe ends up never doubting the love of her mother, who at that point was overwhelmed by her job. She also finds a father figure in Nico! Freed from her traumas at last, she can speak again.

Nico redeems himself: no more stealing now that he has found a partner and a little girl at the same time: Jeanne and Zoe.



About the author

First a drawing teacher, then a graphic artist in publicity, editorial cartoon, and animated films, Bernard Génin became a journalist in 1979 for the column "Weekly Cinema" in *Telerama*, which he quits in 2004. Today, he teaches History of Animated Films to the Supinfograph section of ESRA (Graduate School of Audiovisual Production).

He is the author of two books: "Animated Cinema" published by Editions des Cahiers du cinema (2004) and, in collaboration with Pierre Courtet-Cohl, "Emile Cohl, the inventor of animated cartoons" published by Editions Omniscience.



A Cat in Paris

It is a calm mix of genres – never before seen in animation – where film noir (robbery, aggressions, suspense, pursuits), a coming-of-age story (a mute little girl who speaks again), burlesque comedy (with gangsters who are more hilarious than dangerous), and even a touch of fantasy (Costa's strange apparitions as a red octopus and Nariobi's giant's apparition in Costa's deranged mind) can be found. The result never seems the product of a film recipe. The authors found the perfect mixture, and the originality of the movie not only makes it worthy of being recognized unanimously by the press, but also worthy of running for an Oscar.

ABOUT THE MOVIE

Do not tell the spectator everything

From the beginning, the environment (visual and musical) is mysterious and suspenseful. The first credits appear: bleak, white letters on a black background, accompanied by a haunting jazz. A city's rooftops appear, nightfall. Alley cats fight over the contents of a trash can. The shadow of a man followed by a passing cat; their silhouettes climb up a wall.... Then, the scene changes to two buffoon guards ridiculed by their job as night guards. Nico, the thief from the rooftops, is not at all scary. He moves lightly, nimbly, and elegantly like a dancer... It is the night guards who are funny when, for example, Nico has fun mimicking one of them, right behind him, without him noticing; or when they fall in the dark like the Dupont-Dupond from Tintin and Milou. The second credits begin and bring us back to the rooftops shown in shadows, announcer of adventures, with more rhythmical music. In the following scene, the day begins. We see little Zoe, her nanny Claudine, then her mom, Jeanne. Little by little, we come to understand that Claudine is hiding something from us. But, as Jean Renoir said, "You must tell the spectator everything or he will become bored." Thus, Claudine's duplicity is revealed to us little by little. In the beginning, there is nothing alarming about her, only that her perfume is annoying. She is jovial, serving, even comprehensive (she is the one who explains Zoe's sadness to Jeanne since Zoe was disappointed that no one took an interest in her dead lizards). And when Jeanne lets herself become overwhelmed by her emotions, she tells her, "Do not cry like that, Madam. If not, I'll cry too." Who could ever think she plays a double role?

The authors show a glance of her alerted face for only a second when she goes out and Dino sneezes while passing by. Later on, there will be a similar glance of her, barely for a second, when she hears Jeanne say that she is on Costa's trail. We begin to have our doubts about her when we see her attack the cat with her vacuum, but are sure when we hear her voice behind the fence where Zoe hid. From that moment on, she will always appear as "evil", preceded or followed by a purple cloud of her perfume.

Death and mourning

From the very first scenes, there is no doubt the movie touches on very difficult topics, for an animated film (murder, mourning, Zoe's silence). And the inevitability of the death of Zoe's father is further emphasized by Jeanne's comment, "I know nothing sadder than having lost one's dad. Unfortunately, nothing can ever bring him back." This absence, intolerable for Zoe, is visualized by a picture on her bedroom wall. The character's grief is well shown: Zoe's crying, Jeanne's crying, Jeanne disarmed, torn by sadness, after the gymnastics class where she sees Costa in the shape of a giggling octopus. Without knowing it, Nico pours salt into the wound when he tries to get to know Zoe, "Do you have a dad, a mom? ...What? Did I say something I wasn't supposed to?"



Cinematic references

A small, movie-lovers' reference is made to King Kong when Costa fantasizes and thinks he sees Nairobi's giant, enormous, on the streets of Paris. The last movie-lovers' reference: the title, which evokes a Charlie Chaplin classic, *Une vie de chien* (*A Dog's Life*. 1918).



The universe of children's stories

The references that children will not miss are those that evoke the universe of traditional stories. When Costa tracks Zoe, hidden in a closet at Nico's house, he says, "I'm going to count to three, little piggy, and I will blow your house down." This clearly refers to the big, bad wolf attacking the three little pigs in Walt Disney's short film.

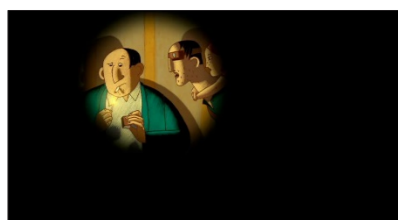
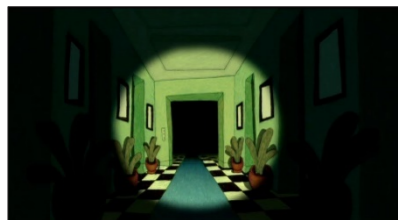
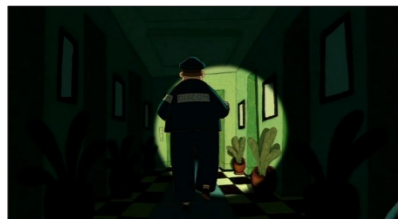
Color and graphics play

Jean Loup Felicioli said in regard to the series "Little Tragedies": it tends towards the light Olivier Gagnol's sometimes overly-gloomy stories. "A Cat in Paris" is the most colorful film noir ever seen. Everybody salutes its pictorial beauty. Certain colors play an important role in the action.

The color violet, for example, defines Claudine: it's the color of her dress (and of her partner Costa's vest). It is above all else the color of her perfume, which the authors chose to illustrate as a sort of luminous trail. In a terrific and mysterious clip, the color violet becomes unsettling stretching into the form of Claudine, then a serpent in the night and then Dino sitting on the rooftops by Nico's side. It is this trail that will allow the tomcat to guide Nico to Costa's hideout.



The color red, in cinema, has always been synonymous with danger, undoubtedly because it is the color of blood. Only a few drops can be seen in "A Cat in Paris", barely visible, when Dino scratches Claudine's legs; or when Costa, with a violent punch, knocks out one of Nico's teeth. But red is also the aggressive color of the octopus that, in various occasions, appears to mentally torture Jeanne.



Other than offering an infinite range of colors, new animation techniques allow for all possible lighting variations. "A Cat in Paris" unfolds mostly **at night** turning it into a festival of lights and shadow play: phantomlike and quasi expressionist glows on the gargoyles of Notre Dame, giant shadow of the dog yawning as Zoe passes by, soft moonlight streaks on Zoe's face sitting on a swing... The darkness also allows for beautiful, dreamlike moments, such as in the robbery scene with the African artifacts collector in the middle of his sleepwalking.

The authors also resorted to Chinese shadows (on Notre Dame during Nico's fall, or during the credits with the forest of chimneys at night and the moon magnificently transforming into a cat's eye). Another beautiful example of visual ideas: the ellipse that reveals the beginning of winter during Christmas: there are stars in the sky at first and then a slow progression transforms them into snowflakes falling over Paris.

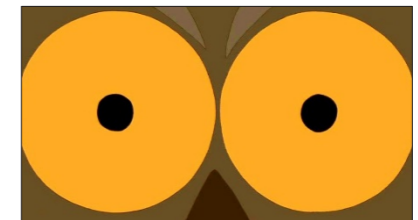
Good and evil

We know it: the script saw various versions before finding its funding. The authors held on. They gave themselves in to a very delicate gymnastic to avoid a too-obvious dualism like Disney's, where "good" and "evil" can be so clearly defined.

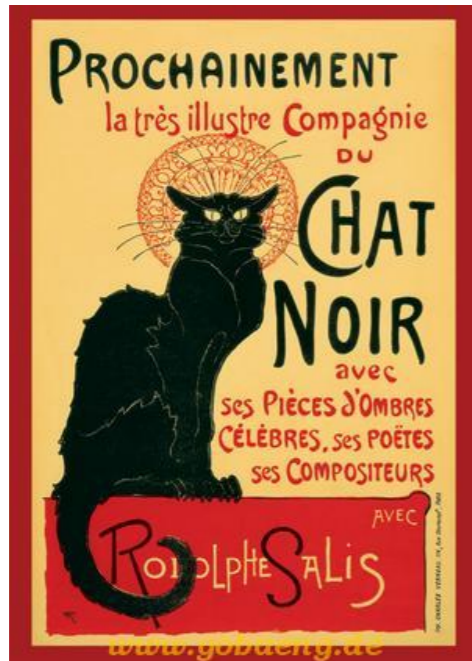
The most ambiguous character is Nico. He is a thief, but he redeems himself by saving Zoe from Costa's claws and he even ends up living with the female investigator of the police force in charge of stopping him! His character evolves throughout the movie and Jeanne changes her opinion about him, clearly shown by their exchange of words on Notre Dame when she saves him, in extremis, from falling into the void, "Well, well, well! Since when do the police save thieves?" "Since the thieves save children. No? Am I wrong?" (0.52'18). As for Claudine, we saw how our perception of her changes during the first fifteen minutes when we discover her duplicity. Costa, on the other hand, is a monster from the beginning completely cynical when, with a cruel grin, he tells Zoe, "I came to visit you in remembrance of your dad... whom I knew well!" He is hateful when he tells Jeanne, "I am going to finish the job I started with your husband. When you're up there, say 'Hello' to him for me." His monstrosity is hardly moderated by the

ridiculousness of his anger (when he gets stuck in the lake at the zoo) and of his last fantasy on Notre Dame.

Right before the epilogue, the crooks and Claudine are all arrested: we see them climbing into a police van. Even Costa cheats death despite his fall: he falls on top of a truck parked just below, almost as if the authors wanted to save him from the ultimate punishment.



“Chinese shadows”, in cabaret and then cinema:



The credits of “A Cat in Paris” are in “Chinese shadows”, a traditional technique thought to have been originated in India and then moved to China before reaching the Near East and Europe as a result of the great migrations. A famous Parisian cabaret, whose name, coincidentally, is the same as the title of the film “The Black Cat”, owes its renown to these Chinese shadows. It was founded in Montmartre by Rodolphe Salis in November 1881. Poets, painters, and humorists turned it very quickly into the hotspot for avant-garde Parisian art, symbol of the Bohème by the end of the 19th century.

It is during a literary session that “shadow play” is born. A cartoonist built a small castle in the corner of the room. One night, two of his fiends hung a towel over the opening and had fun making silhouettes of cardboard sergeants marching. Salis immediately saw how to make the best of it: the small castle was replaced by a real theater with a backstage and coat hangers; the silhouettes were cut out of zinc; and the technique was continually perfected with sound material. For more than ten years, the public rushed to The Black Cat, where more than forty different plays were presented.



Bibliography

Worksheet based on "A Cat in Paris" by Bernard Génin and edited as part of the program School and Cinema by the association Children of Cinema. With the support of the National Center of Cinema and Animated Images, ministry of Culture and Communication, and the Executive Management of School Education, the SCÉRÉN-CNDP, ministry of National Education.

Internet links

Site for the film's pedagogical support:
www.uneviedechat.crdp-lyon.fr

About the movie's music:
<http://dujazzpourlespetits.free.fr/pages/repertoire.htm>

Animated cinema for primary school:
<http://ww2.ac-poitiers.fr/ia17-pedagogie/spip.php?article1036>

Educational videos about animated cinema:
<http://www.onf.ca/selection/studiostopmo/>

News about the studio Folimage:
<http://www.folimage.fr/fr/>

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 thanks to the participation of the French Embassy in the United States, February 2015.

Activities before the movie

These educational activities have been created for a group of students 10/12 years of age in order to prepare them for a future viewing of the film in its entirety. The work may be done in their native language or in French according to the students' linguistic profiles.

Link for the movie's trailer with subtitles

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x29aqil_a-cat-in-paris-une-vie-de-chat-2010-trailer-english-subtitles_shortfilms

1. A cat's life

- How do you picture a cat's life?
- In another life, would you like to be reincarnated as a cat? Why?



Did you know? The title of the movie is a cinematographic reference to Charlie Chaplin's classic « A dog's life » (1918)



- And a dog's life? Is it different? Why?

Compare the poster for "A dog's life" with the picture above. What do you notice?

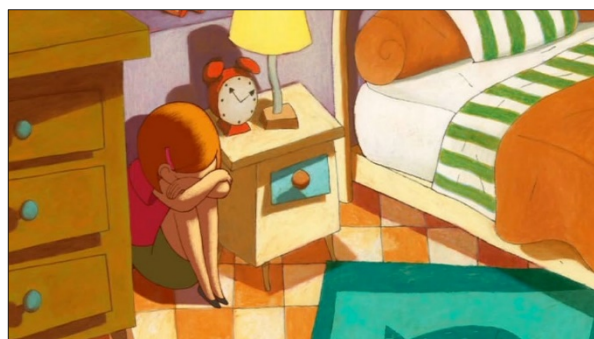
2. Silence

Zoe decided to no longer speak. Describe the image and imagine the reason for her muteness.

Did you know?

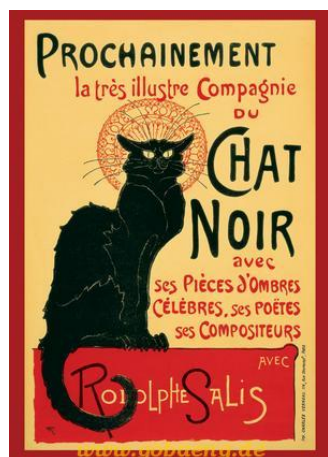
Zoe is mute; she refuses to speak.

"Mute" comes from the Latin "mutus" which means "mute".



3. Analysis of the image

Look at and describe the image by giving as many details as possible. What main elements of the film can be seen?



Did you know?

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A famous Parisian cabaret, whose name, coincidentally, is the same as the title of the film "The Black Cat", owes its reputation to these Chinese shadows. It was founded in Montmartre by Rodolphe Salis in November 1881. Poets, painters, and humorists turned it very quickly into the hotspot for avant-garde Parisian art, symbol of the Bohème by the end of the 19th century. It is during a literary session that "shadow play" is born.



4. Working with the trailer

- a) In small groups, match the images to their corresponding comments (Sheets 1 and 2). Watch the trailer to verify.
- b) From what you have seen, make deductions in small groups about the character assigned to you: his character, life, relationship with other characters, etc.



Zoé

Dino





Nico

Jeanne



Costa

1.



2.



3.



4.



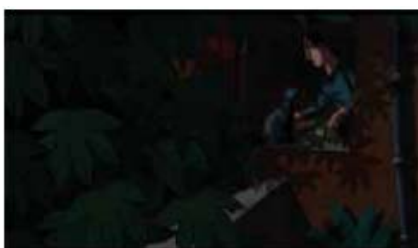
5.



6.



7.



8.



9.



10.



11.



12.



1. NICO – THAT’S IT. BE CLEVER.

2. THE WOMAN – I KNOW WHO YOU’RE THINKING OF. I DON’T KNOW ANYTHING SADDER THAN LOSING ONE’S DAD. WE MUST KEEP LIVING WITHOUT HIM.

3. MASCULIN VOICE – HELLO, CAPTAIN.

4. THE WOMAN – YOUR ATTENTION, PLEASE. VICTOR COSTA.

5. THE WOMAN – THAT’S WHO SHOT YOUR DAD. YOU KNOW, I WILL CATCH HIM SOON. I PROMISE YOU THAT.

6. MASCULIN VOICE – SHUT UP!

7. NICO – YOU’RE LATE TONIGHT. I WAS GOING TO LEAVE WITHOUT YOU, OLD MAN!

8. MASCULIN VOICE – WELL, GOT ANYTHING NEW FOR ME, MY PRETTY? WHAT’S ALL THIS MESS? GRAB HER, GUYS. CAN’T LET HER ESCAPE!

9. NICO – YOU TRUST ME? THEN, HANG ON TIGHT TO MY BACK.

10. THE WOMAN – THEY KIDNAPPED HER!

11. MASCULIN VOICE – YOU GONNA LET ME GO, FILTHY BEAST?! GO ON, BUZZ OFF, BON VOYAGE!

12. NICO – AH, YOU’RE HERE! WITH ALL THAT. WE DIDN’T EVEN HAVE TIME TO CHAT. MY NAME IS NICO. YOU DON’T WANT TO TALK TO ME? CAT GOT YOUR TONGUE?

Answers

Activity 1: a and b free expression / c : a dog's life seems a lot less pleasant than a cat's. The cat is in the sun in the arms of its master, it seems happy and loved. The dog has a sad look, he and his master are side by side on a sidewalk, they seem miserable.

You may also point out the cinematographic reference of the title to that of Charlie Chaplin's.

Activity 2: Free expression

Activity 3: You can see the Eiffel Tower, the moon, the rooftops of Paris and their chimneys (the alley cat's world), night.

Make the students notice the artistic process used in contrast with the black shadows over the blue background. Make the connection with the Chinese shadows technique.

Activity 4: The number of each strip corresponds to the number of the photogram.

For this activity, cut the comment strips and the corresponding photograms. Hand them out to the students so they can rearrange them accordingly. You may also encourage them to draw hypotheses on the story and the actions of each scene. Watch the trailer to confirm their hypotheses.