

A black and white close-up photograph of a man wearing a fedora hat. The man is looking slightly to the right with a subtle, enigmatic smile. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of his skin and the details of his facial features. The hat is a classic fedora with a dark band. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

arte
SALES

Dr. JACK and Mr. NICHOLSON 52'

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A 52' documentary directed by Emmanuelle Nobecourt
Produced by ARTE France and MORGANE PRODUCTION
Provisional Delivery: WINTER 2018

PITCH:

Everyone knows him, but no one knows the man behind the actor.

How did this common young man become the icon of counter-culture over night?

Who is hiding behind the most famous smile of Hollywood, beneath the womanizer and the indisputably beloved star? A tormented man, a man obsessed with women, who hates them as much as he loves them. A man plagued by a silent anger and driven by an irresistible thirst to get even. Where does his extraordinary passion for life come from?

Sexy, crazy, rebel, scary, and out of control, this documentary reveals the multiple faces and complex personality of Jack Nicholson through his films.

SYNOPSIS:

They call him “Mister Hollywood”. Over a career spanning fifty years with more than sixty films, three Oscars, a Best Actor award at the Cannes Film Festival and nearly forty nominations, Jack Nicholson has become an institution in Hollywood, while remaining fiercely rebellious. At 80, he has to face a new reality: although his soul is still that of an inveterate seducer, decency forbids him to parade at the arm of beautiful young women just old enough to be his daughters. Secluded in his Hollywood lair, Jack now lives as an old lone wolf.

But Jack Nicholson remains the leader of the pack. He still has this aura of mystery on which time has no effect and that only living legends possess. Oblivious to criticism, polemics and rules, he continues to be the most elusive of American actors. Everyone knows Jack Nicholson, but nobody really knows who he is. He remains an indecipherable enigma, which he cunningly keeps behind his sunglasses and cheeky grin.

Jack’s story starts with the absence of his father that he always sought to compensate, and with a blurry identity that he exploited rather than clarified.

His filmography is like a treasure hunt, his films are for him “a big book, his hidden work - an autobiography.” This confession sounds like an invitation to look for the man behind the characters and gather the pieces of the puzzle by ourselves.

TREATMENT

FROM JOHN DOE TO ICON (1950s-1960s)

In 1969, when Jack Nicholson became a star with *Easy Rider*, he was already 32 and had been desperately trying to make it in Hollywood for fifteen years. This late recognition was anything but easy for the “young” actor who had not been destined to be the star we all know. How did this average East-Coast American, this ordinary young man, become the hero of counter-culture in just one movie?

Jack was born on April 22, 1937 in Neptune, in a small town in New Jersey. He grew up in a family of strong women: his mother, Ethel May, or "Mud", who ran a hairdressing salon; his sister Lorraine, who married early to become a housewife; and June, the most eccentric, who left for California to be a dancer. His mother's business was flourishing, the family was close and Jack was spoiled with attention.

But behind what looked like a classic and rather happy childhood lied a more complex reality. Jack's father, John J. Nicholson, an exemplary citizen and devout Catholic, fell overnight into alcoholism and left the house before Jack really had time to know him. The love and care that his mother and sisters provided him were not enough to fill the void left by his absent father. To draw attention, the young boy threw spectacular temper tantrums that “shook the house like an earthquake.” The angry and solitary child became an ungrateful and difficult teenager.

On top of that, he was a nerd who skipped a class, something he was not proud of. During his school years, Jack began to act dumber than he was to get rid of his A-student image. Camouflaging his intellect, he bet everything on his extraordinary charisma. When at 16 he decided to leave everything behind to move to the West Coast and live with his sister June, he took everyone by surprise. Nobody could imagine him going anywhere. After all, he was just a class clown who never took anything seriously.

He arrived in California in the mid-1950s. At the time, Los Angeles was still a small town, somewhat provincial but glamorous. Jack immediately felt at home. There, nobody knew who he was, everyone had left their past behind to reinvent their life. For Jack, it was the beginning of some tough years, but also of the training years. He took acting classes, ran from one casting to the next without standing out in the crowd, and joined a group of young actors, directors and screenwriters, making their debut with Roger Corman. The King of B movies in Hollywood gave Jack his first role in a comedy, *The Little Shop of Horrors*, a small budget movie in which he played a masochistic patient who goes to the dentist just for the pleasure of feeling pain.



THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS (1960)

In real life as in his first movie roles, Jack turned out to be an outsider, slightly out of place, embracing the spirit of the time while not really being a part of it. If fame finally came with *Easy Rider*, it was because he was finally given a part to which he could identify, in which he was truly himself: an average American, transformed by his confrontation with the counterculture that upset this era.

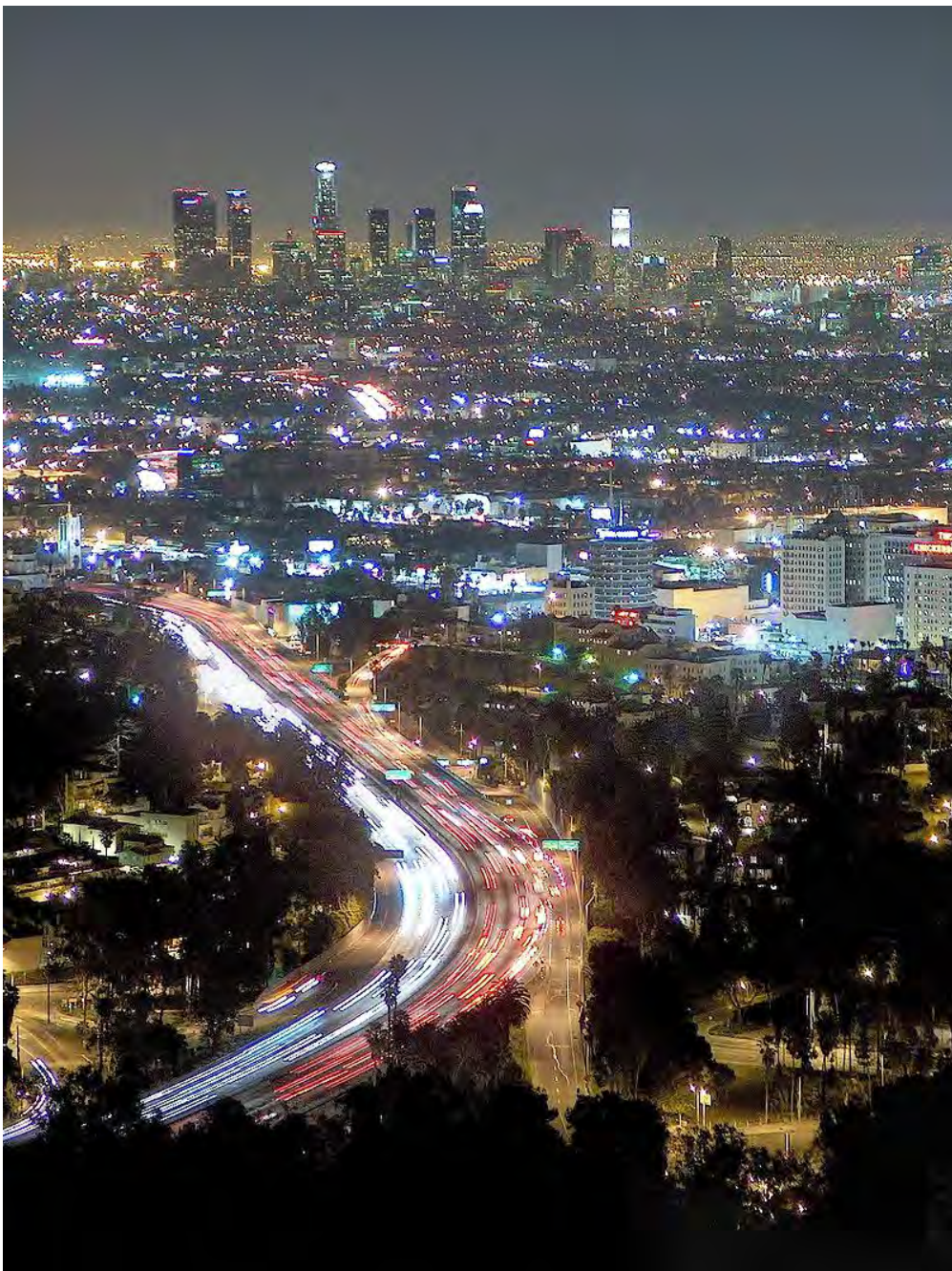


EASY RIDERS (1969)

Released in July 1969, the movie instantly acquired cult status. It earned \$ 20 million for a budget of \$ 500,000 and amounted to the birth certificate of the New Hollywood. From one day to the next Jack Nicholson turned into star.

FROM ILLEGITIMATE SON TO REBEL SON (1970s)

As he accessed to the status of movie icon overnight, Jack Nicholson became one of the great actors of his generation: Marlon Brando, Warren Beatty, Dennis Hopper... The biggest stars of the time were also the wildest. Jack moved to Beverly Hills, on the city heights, in a mansion that was soon dubbed "the wildest House in Hollywood", located between Brando's and Beatty's, on Mulholland Drive, otherwise known as the "Bad Boy Drive"...



View of Los Angeles from Mulholland Drive

Although Jack Nicholson was now under the spotlight, neither fame nor wealth could satisfy his insatiable need for recognition.

In 1974, during an interview with a journalist from Time Magazine, Jack learned a terrible family secret that he will never recover from. He was 37 when he found out that his sister June was actually his mother, and Ethel May, the woman who raised him as his son, was in fact his grandmother. This had the effect of a bombshell. At the time, the two women were already dead. Jack, who managed to dissuade the reporter to publish his article, was left alone with his questions. His entire life suddenly looked like a sham.

That same year, Jack starred in *Chinatown*, a thriller set on a background of incest, directed by Roman Polanski. How not to make a connection between the famous line of Faye Dunaway: “She's my daughter... She's my sister. She's my daughter and my sister!”, and the family secret recently revealed to Nicholson?



CHINATOWN (1974)

For the first time in his life, Jack understood where this unfathomable sense of lack, this feeling of always being out of place came from: “I came out with the feeling that I was not a wanted child. My mother and father split up just before I was born and I realized that it had to be very complicated for Ethel May to raise a child while her marriage was falling apart.” He could finally decipher the reasons for this anger that burned deep inside him for so long and that was now feeding his brutal and tortured anti-hero characters.

He displayed all the nuances of that anger in *Five Easy Pieces*, *The Last Detail* and *Carnal Knowledge*. His anger would gradually take over. For Jack nothing would ever be the same. On screen, he was getting darker, more cynical.

It is difficult not to see a metaphor for his grudge against the opposite sex in the scene in which he tries to strangle nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in 1975.



ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST (1975)

He had never understood women and they damaged his self-confidence. Women, who left him, betrayed him or prevented him from becoming what he really was.

Even before he knew the truth about his birth, Jack was never a feminist. When he directed his first film, *Drive, He Said* in 1971, Nicholson insisted that one of the actresses appear naked in all her scenes. At the time, he said, provocative: "I was tired of acting proper. I just wanted to show a naked woman, without any particular reason."

Movies allowed him to seduce women, manipulate them, bully them and abuse them, when in real life they made him suffer.

But the actor did not only draw from his psyche to create his performances. In 1970, when Charles Manson, was trialed for multiple murders, Nicholson went to the hearings almost every day. He may have been friends with Sharon Tate, the wife of Roman Polanski, one of the murder victims, but the actor could not resist his fascination for the personality of the guru and his bulging, demented eyes. It is hard not to see the link between the terrifying expression on Manson's face and the famous gaze that Jack Nicholson developed for his character of Jack Torrance in *The Shining*.

The revelation about his birth released something dark inside Jack Nicholson, an inner rage that he let run its course. From then on, he unleashed in his roles the violent impulse that consumed him.

FROM PSYCHODRAMA TO THE PSYCHOPATH (1980S)

The character of the writer who falls into madness in *The Shining* in 1980 was the first step of a long catharsis. In an interview, he declared that everything he was “doing in movies [was] autobiographical”, and that “having dubious origins [was] a great asset.” All the more dubious that he still didn’t know and didn’t want to know who his real father was. Suspicion fell on a man named Don Furcillo-Rose, a small businessman from New Jersey. When he found out that his son had become a movie star, he relentlessly tried to reconnect with him. In vain. The only answer he would get would take the form of an unwavering letter written by the lawyers of the actor: “Our client denies and dismisses your unfounded allegations claiming that you are the father of Mr. Nicholson. These statements are false and defamatory.”



SHINING (1980)

Jack seemed to have left his past behind. His only family was a gang of hard-core partiers, like him, and filmmakers, the only ones he agreed to work with, because they knew who he really was and gave him tailored roles inspired by his larger than life personality. This is why he refused to play in cult movies such as *The Sting*, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Godfather*, and rather worked with Roman Polanski or John Huston.

For Jack, John Huston was not only a great director whom he admired, but also a role model and a surrogate father. Which was not far from reality, as Jack and Anjelica Huston, John’s daughter, were the most glamorous couple in Hollywood for 17 years. It was Jack’s longest and most tumultuous love story.

After so many tough years riddled with guilt and bad luck, Jack finally got his revenge and turned into a sexual predator. In *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and in *The Witches of Eastwick*, he declared to be a “horny little devil”. And in real life, his affair with a 28 years old model was on the cover of *Playboy*. Anjelica Huston eventually left him for good in 1989, when she learned that another of Jack’s mistresses was pregnant.

After Anjelica and he broke up, he cut loose with everything that connected him to his former life. He was ready to let the madness of his characters completely overwhelm him. In his last 80's role, the Joker in *Batman*, he abandoned once and for all the boundaries between man and actor. This role represented the pinnacle of his madness and of his celebrity and established for good the ultimate signature of Jack Nicholson in the collective imagination: his smile. The time had come for Nicholson to show his true self: "Jack is dead. You can call me Joker."



BATMAN (1989)

FROM "MISTER HOLLYWOOD" TO JACK THE VETERAN (1990s-2000s)

In the early 1990s, Jack Nicholson was at the peak of his career. People called him "Mister Hollywood". After his whopping \$ 60 million fee for *Batman*, he became one of the richest actors in Hollywood, with a wealth estimated at more than \$ 300 million. Now in his late 50s, Jack was well respected but still had no respect for anything. He continued to blithely smoke, drink and use drugs of all kinds, and to show off with women who were young enough to be his daughters.

But once at the top, the fall was unavoidable. By continuously stating loud and clear his contempt for order and good morals he found himself increasingly marginalized.

Behind the great Nicholson, another Jack began to show. An ageing man, who had trouble accepting growing old. An increasingly nostalgic man who was haunted by his past demons.

When Rebecca Broussard, the mother of his daughter Lorraine and his son Raymond, left him for a younger man after a six years relationship, Nicholson was devastated.

Behind his mask of the indomitable predator lied a wounded animal, abandoned by all the women he ever loved, and who never really recovered from it. His beastly performance in *Wolf* in 1994 showed the first signs of weakness. For the director, the movie was about "ageing men and their sexuality. A movie that could not fit better with Jack's present life."

Loss of appetite, exhaustion, the crazy animal had turned little by little into an old and worn out wolf: "There are a lot of normal things I can't do anymore. I can no longer work on a film for twelve hours and then go out at night bar-hopping. My sex drive is not the same. It makes me sad." His provocative gaze had disappeared behind sunglasses that he always kept in public. Not only to shield himself from the cameras of reporters, but also to conceal his age: "With my glasses, I'm Jack Nicholson. Without them, I'm fat and I'm 60."

The isolated and neurotic writer who eventually found love in *As Good as It Gets* in 1996 constituted the transition into the final phase of his career, made of introspective roles. Jack let go and finally showed himself as he was: a tired beast, marked by the years, still wild but less agile, and terribly human.



AS GOOD AS IT GETS (1996)

In 1996, *The Crossing Guard* looked for the man behind the star. In an almost documentary-style, Sean Penn, the director, pictured Freddie, the bruised and revenge-obsessed father in a world of outcasts and girls. It marked the end of an era.



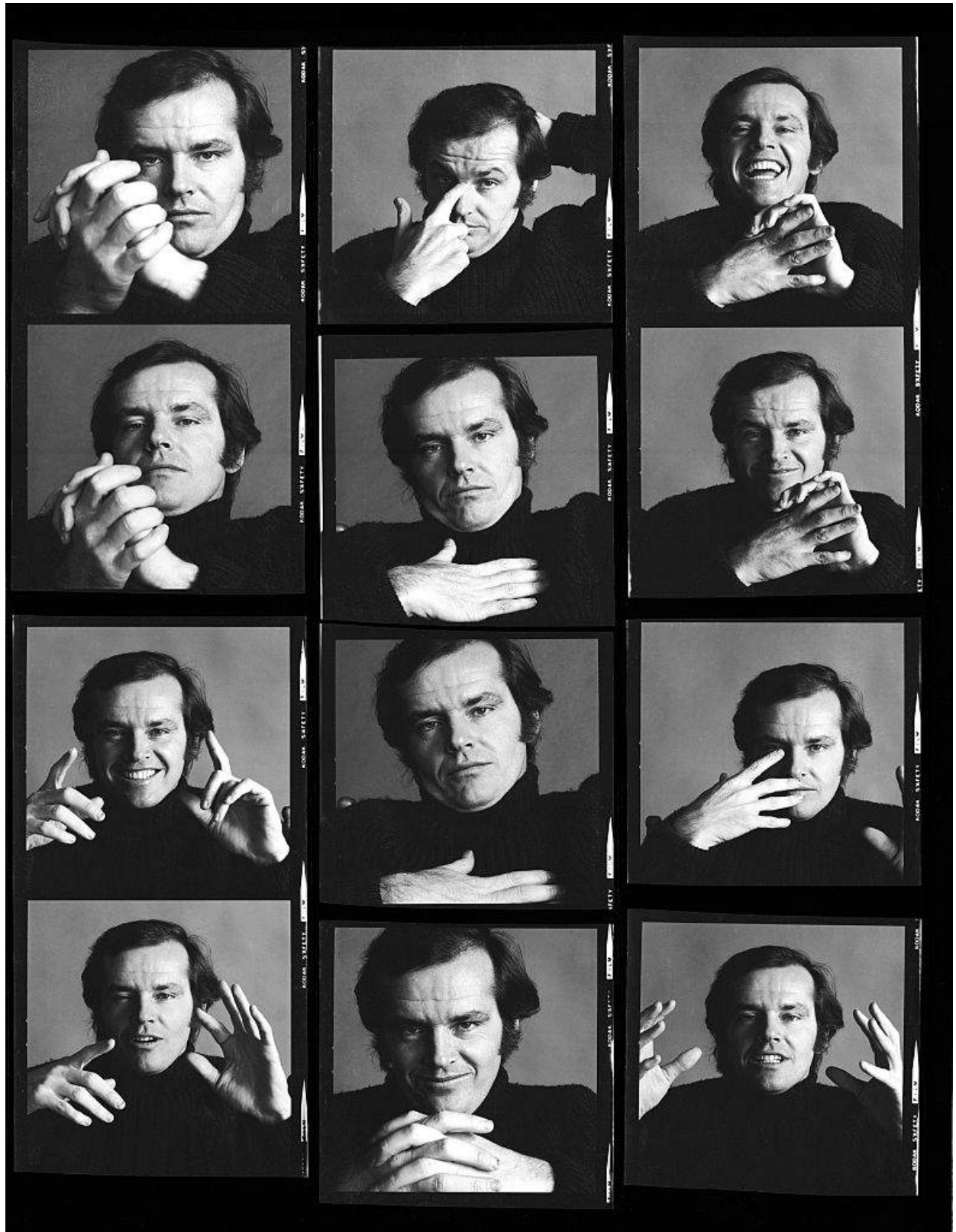
THE CROSSING GUARD (1996)

An era that ended for good with *Mr Schmidt* in 2002, Nicholson's last major role. He played an archetypal old and average American, like a distant and nostalgic echo of the one that made him famous in *Easy Rider*.

EPILOGUE

Jack Nicholson vanished from the screens in 2010. A filmography of 63 films that give us glimpses of the man behind the screen, but the mystery remains. Secluded in his Hollywood mansion, Jack Nicholson does not need to hide behind his equivocal smile anymore. By retreating from the spotlight, the last living Hollywood icon is creating his legend.

INTENTION



Through a career of fifty years and more than sixty films with some of the greatest directors of the time, Jack Nicholson has contributed to redefine the notion of actor and to reshape the landscape of American cinema. An iconic superstar, but also the subtle incarnation of his time through his roles and personal life, impervious to criticism, polemics and social norms, Jack remains the most elusive of Hollywood actors. Never quite himself, never quite another, he always aimed at creating confusion. Hidden behind his irresistible smile and his sunglasses, he exposed his qualms on screen, expressing his identity disorders through his roles. As he confessed, they are his “hidden biography”.

With the clues he gives us and through all the characters that he has incarnated, the film attempts to identify who is actually the man behind the pretence.

THE NARRATION

Everything begins and ends with Jack Nicholson smiling. Fascinating and magnetic, it is his signature, the ultimate weapon, as effective to seduce as it is to terrorize, the mask that conceals his mystery. From one smile to the next, from one role to the next, the film goes in search of the truth hidden beneath the surface.

The narrative is built around two axes tightly woven together: the chronological account of his life and of his career, with a description of the various periods in which he lived in the background.

FILM ARCHIVE

The filmography of Jack Nicholson offers all the necessary narrative milestones to tell his life, because his films disturbingly reflect his complex personality, his loves and torments. Film extracts are a determining factor in the structure of the film and are at the heart of the narrative.

Extracts will be used in the following way:

- To illustrate the life of Jack Nicholson. Because you can never really separate the man from all the characters he played on-screen, extracts are used to evoke the story of his life, shine a light on its dark corners and illustrate its highlights.
- From a strictly cinematic point of view: To showcase the highlights of the filmography of the actor, the evolution of his roles, the milestones in his career.

STILL IMAGES

The iconographic documents are also important: photos, contact sheets, movie posters, press articles, scenarios, complete the narrative elaborated by the filmed images. Mixing private and public elements, the diversity of this material contributes to reveal the man behind the legend. Inhabited by the inimitable voice of Jack Nicholson, they acquire an evocative power that transcends it.

THE SHOOTING

Finally, Hollywood today is one of the important elements of the film. Not only it is where most of the witnesses interviewed are living, but the city is also the main set for Jack Nicholson’s life, career, and where he was made king. He never left it since he got there in the 1950s. We are following his footsteps in places attached to his legend: Hollywood Hill, Sunset Boulevard, Mulholland Drive, Laurel Canyon, the great studios...

WITNESSES

The narration compiles several voices. First and foremost that of Jack Nicholson. He never fancied television, and did not participate in the programs that regularly invite actors: talk shows, master classes, etc. A little uncomfortable in public, he limits to a bare minimum his speeches in the various celebrations (Oscars, Golden Globes).

However, there are a few and very interesting interviews of him for TV, radio, and also press conferences.

In addition, he has given many and long interviews to the print media, including magazines like Playboy, Rolling Stone and Vanity Fair, excerpts of which will be read by the narrator of the film.

These interviews are the raw material from which we get to write a first level and intimate narrative. Other voices respond to him, those of witnesses chosen among co-workers or friends. Directors, actors and actresses, his biographer, a film critic... Their affectionate, distanced, amused, or critical testimonies are built into a "fictitious" dialogue that complements, supports, nuances or clarifies Nicholson's story.

MUSIC

Songs and music reminding the years with which they are associated will be used during editing as sound archives. But an original sound track seems essential. Like for fiction, it makes the character more expressive, points out the developments of the narrative, underlines the atmosphere, the adventures, the underlying movements. It gives consistency and colour to the film.

PARTICIPANTS

Bob Rafelson,

Director - Friend of Jack. They know each other since 1965, he directed him in 5 films.

He can testify to the tough years, the transition to celebrity, the actor at work, the intimate and multi-faceted person.

Anjelica Huston,

Actress and life companion of Jack Nicholson for 17 years... She can talk about their relationship, Jack and the women, his family secret, Jack and his father, his gang, at work, etc...

Danny DeVito,

Actor and director - Friend of Jack who played with him in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in 1975 and directed him in *Hoffa* in 1992. He knows him intimately and at work as an actor.

Warren Beatty,

Actor and director - Friend of Jack Nicholson, with whom he played in *The Fortune* in 1975 and that directed him in *Reds* in 1981. He can testify to the wild years of debauchery, the evolution of Hollywood and how Jack has changed.

Meryl Streep,

Actress - A feminine counterpart to Jack in terms of status in Hollywood. She played with him in 2 movies: *Heartburn* in 1986 and *Ironweed* in 1987. They are friends. She can tell us about Jack at work, his relationship with women, his stardom, the evolution of his roles.

(If not available, eventually Jane Fonda)

Sean Penn,

Director - He directed Jack in *The Crossing Guard* in 1995 and *The Pledge* in 2001. Introduced at a young age in the gang of Jack's friends, he experienced the wild years of debauchery. But he directed the actor in his late period and can testify to the evolution of the man and of his relation to old age.

Patrick McGilligan,

Author of the standard biography *Jack's Life*, 2015

He can talk about any point of the story.

Jean-Baptiste Thoret,

Film critic - Specialist of the "New Hollywood".



Jack Nicholson with Angelica Huston



... and with Meryl Streep.

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