Acropolis Cinema and MUBI present
the North American premiere of

LE PARC

A film by Damien Manivel
February 10, 2017 – 8pm
Echo Park Film Center

LE PARC is the inaugural title of MUBI Discoveries, an ongoing series featuring new hand-picked festival gems you can’t see anywhere else.
LE PARC
71 min // France // 2016
Cannes ACID

Lush and mysterious, Damien Manivel’s beguiling second feature, a deceptively modest work influenced equally by Linklater as Straub-Hulliet, is a shapeshifter in the truest sense. What begins as an idyllic romance between two innocent teens gradually morphs into a metaphysical reckoning as identities blur and innocence is lost under the spell of a crescent moon.

FREEDOM OF DISCOVERY: DAMIEN MANIVEL DISCUSS “LE PARC”

By Jaime Grijalba Gómez
The following article is an excerpt from an article originally published in the Notebook.

NOTEBOOK: What struck me about Le parc is that it has a story, its central idea, and its structure, which can be divided in two parts or four parts, depending how one sees it. What came first to you?

DAMIEN MANIVEL: I really wanted to make a film in such a place as a park. Only one location. I really love films that work on a very small scale, like one day and one night—or a few hours. I really love that feeling of present time so that was the basic idea. After that, I came up with the idea of portraying a complete teenage relationship from the first shy approaches to the separation and the mourning. So it all starts with a young couple meeting in a park. I also knew I wanted to have this third character coming into this story who would be the guy who was taking care of the park. That’s basically what I started with.

NOTEBOOK: And then you started adding to this idea of just one location and a story covering just a few hours?

MANIVEL: Yeah exactly, because these choices are artistic but it’s economic at the same time. I’m the producer of the film, so I know I can’t use many locations, I can’t do complicated stuff.

NOTEBOOK: So the ideas you work with must fit your own production capacities?

MANIVEL: Exactly. And it’s not a problem for me, it creates freedom. I have these limits and I will try to make the film within that limits.

NOTEBOOK: Those limits allow you to go wherever you want, within those limits—and that’s the freedom.

MANIVEL: As for the storytelling, the story is so simple that it gives a sense of a strong narrative structure. So, I can start the shooting with almost no script, just a few ideas, and on the shoot every day the story evolves within that structure.

NOTEBOOK: You say “structure” as if you are potentially making a new film every day. Are you constructing the film around the moment you shoot?

MANIVEL: Listening to what happened before is the most important. What is it telling us? Where to go from this moment? I would like to go that way but maybe these shots are telling us to go another way. It’s an organic process. Every day we try to follow that feelings and sometimes we have to go back two days of shooting and start again because we took the wrong path.

NOTEBOOK: …it’s like a stroll in the park. Like a walk in the park, there’s a dead end sometimes.

MANIVEL: Exactly.

NOTEBOOK: In the second half of Le parc I felt that there were small clues here and there about where the film could go, but you didn’t take those roads most of the time. You went your own way, and I commend that. For example, when Naomie started to walk backwards, I thought she was literally traveling in time. But then, no, she wasn’t; and then it turned into a horror film—but it doesn’t go there either. How hard was it for you to resist all these possible routes? Or do you have no interest in those kind of stories?

MANIVEL: The second part of the film is ambiguous. There is a subtle sense of humor but it’s quite scary at the same time. Usually we don’t mix these things together. I mean if you laugh you are not scared and if you are scared you don’t want to laugh. So I was trying to make you know like something...

NOTEBOOK: Like a fairy tale forest?

MANIVEL: Yes like a fairy tale forest, in fact I tried to find my own way to film a night in the forest.

NOTEBOOK: Your own forest?

MANIVEL: Many directors have their forests. It’s really like a cliché. And you have many different ways to do it, so I tried my own. I don’t know if I succeeded in that...

NOTEBOOK: With such freedom, I imagine it may have been tempting to do something out of the blue. And I was kind of hoping that maybe the film would go this way, but at the same time I wasn’t.

MANIVEL: The film is like that, it’s a simple story but there are surprises. The second part is connected to the first part in a strange way.

NOTEBOOK: It’s like a mirror of sorts.

MANIVEL: You can say that, yes.

NOTEBOOK: How did you work with your main actress, Naomie Vogt-Roby, for her role as Naomie? How old was she?

MANIVEL: She was fifteen.

NOTEBOOK: Her performance is tremendously emotionally charged. How did you direct her so it wasn’t as harsh on her as it looked?

MANIVEL: She was really happy to make the film and it was a fantastic collaboration. She was really easy to work with and she trusted me even though she didn’t know what would happen every day, she didn’t read any script. She discovered the story each day and what her character is going through.

NOTEBOOK: Your film uses text messages quite vividly. There’s been some criticism about the abuse of showing texting communication in films. But I think that it’s different in yours. How did you make the choice to show the text messages on the screen and how important is that for you people to know what’s being said on the couple’s phones?

MANIVEL: It’s a suspenseful and emotional scene. We need to see what words they exchange. Their only link is still those words. So it’s necessary to show it. We took a lot of time to work on how it would be shown.
NOTEBOOK: How did you come up with the final choice?

MANIVEL: There are many ways to show texts on a screen. What I tried to do is an elegant and simple way of doing it. Basically, we came up with the idea of the words and just a little line on the side. And it works.

NOTEBOOK: The break up scene: the sun goes down, it's just one shot.

MANIVEL: Yeah, it's one shot, it's ten minutes.

NOTEBOOK: Did you do it in one take?

MANIVEL: Yeah. First take and we kept it.

NOTEBOOK: How do you prepare for that scene? Because you knew that you only had one chance, and if it didn’t work, you’d have to wait for another day.

MANIVEL: I didn’t prepare so much. I said “let’s do some kind of rehearsal.” It was very light. No pressure. Let’s try something. Okay, and we did it. I was really thinking it was a rehearsal but when we start shooting I got involved in the shot and felt it had the perfect timing. It’s really the moment when the sunlight goes down and Naomie is truly amazing.

NOTEBOOK: The couple’s scenes together in the first half are very natural. What did you draw from to write them?

MANIVEL: The scenes are natural because the actors are not stressed. They are shy but I don’t put them in stressful situation. We are in the park and we are making a film together so let’s try our best. I use improvisation, ideas that come from them, and also ideas that come up to me when I shoot. I mix all those ideas and propositions and little by little, I start to understand where the story goes. I don’t have one method, I can do one very long take or I can do 15 takes to find precision. It depends on what I’m feeling, how the crew is feeling, the atmosphere of the day. It’s a scary way to make films, you have many doubts when you are shooting but at the same time there is something beautiful about it. The process teaches you something.