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At the Movies

Chris Chase

SOMETIMES, during the course of a press conference following a movie at the New York Film Festival, a person can develop a cold. Or at least a headache. Listening, for instance, to the woman who attacked François Truffaut for "The Woman Next Door" on the ground that it wasn't relevant to the 1980's. She said maybe the picture would have been relevant in the 60's.

Since "The Woman Next Door," which is at the Paris Theater, is about such elemental phenomena as love and lovers and temptation and waste, Mr. Truffaut looked a bit baffled, but remained polite. He said he'd dealt with a similar theme of obsession in "The Story of Adele H.," and "I wanted to do the same kind of story again, but bring it closer to us."

More long-winded speeches passing themselves off as questions followed. By the time some savant raised his hand to ask if Mr. Truffaut didn't think "The Woman Next Door" would be "too depressing for American audiences," Mr. Truffaut had given up. He just burst out laughing.

The next day, Fanny Ardant, who stars in "The Woman Next Door" and who was making her first visit to New York — "It excites me, the taxi drivers, the sirens, the police cars" — conceded that she, too, had been puzzled by press inquiries about the picture's pertinence. "Love is the only thing that is universal," she observed.

Miss Ardant, slender and tall — "One meter, 74. I don't know what in inches" (it works out to 5 feet 8½ inches) — speaks a lovely, shy English, punctuated by many exclamations of "ah, oui," and intelligence and merriment shine from her eyes.

Although a television series called "Ladies of the Coast" brought her to the attention of French audiences (including Mr. Truffaut), Miss Ardant began her career on stage. She says she will never entirely abandon the theater. Most of all, she loves the classics. "Because I love the word, I love the music of the word. In the theater, I want to sing, I want to fly, I don't want to say, 'Pass me the salt.' To act well in Racine, you can spend your whole life — there is always something you have to work on, you never get to the end of it."



Fanny Ardant

Certain critics have mentioned that Mr. Truffaut's camera views Miss Ardant lovingly; Miss Ardant says Mr. Truffaut's camera views all women that way. "In his movies, the woman is glorious."

Mathilde, her character in "The Woman Next Door," is monstrous, as well as glorious, Miss Ardant says, because of the blindness of her passion. "Love is social, love can live in society; passion cannot, passion is selfish, moi, moi, moi. But Mathilde was not hard for me to understand. I recognize when love come in your life, all your visions change. When I play that part, I just remember all in my life that was not successful, all the things that gave me pain."

A single parent, Miss Ardant makes her home in Paris with her 6-year-old daughter, Lumière, yet she cherishes fantasies "of a family with a father, a mother, a lot of children, in a beautiful house in the country."

"Just because my life is not like that," she adds, "I don't say such a dream is rubbish."

Is her relationship with Mr. Truffaut a love affair? She says not.

"It is a very big affection."