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VINCENT LINDON

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

A film by Stéphane Brizé

2016 Cesar Awards, Winner Best Actor
2015 Cannes Film Festival, Winner Best Actor
2015 New York Film Festival, Official Selection

France | 93 minutes | 2015

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Synopsis

At the age of 51 and after 20 months of unemployment, Thierry starts a new job that soon brings him face to face with a moral dilemma. How much is he willing to accept to keep his job?

Interview with Stéphane Brizé

Tell us about how this project began.

My films have always dealt with the intimate, without highlighting human beings in their social environment. The next step was to observe the brutality of the mechanisms and exchanges ruling our world by juxtaposing one man's humanity – a vulnerable man with no job security – with the violence of our society. I wrote the script with Olivier Gorce, someone I've known for a long time but whom I've never worked with. His analysis and perspective on social and political themes are very lucid. He was the ideal travel partner for this project.

At what point did the form of the film become clear?

Quite quickly, in fact. Right from the beginning of the writing process, I knew the film would be shot with a tiny crew, and non-professional actors would work with Vincent. I went even further and told Christophe Rossignon (producer) and Vincent Lindon that I wanted us to co-produce the project by imposing a limited budget and investing the better part of our salaries in the film, while paying the crew the normal rate. Not every film can be made this way, but this one allowed it. Content, style and financing echoed one another, and I liked this coherence. There was also the affirmation that films could be made differently at a time when the industry is seriously questioning how it finances production. I also had to rethink my set design and staging, as well as my themes. This film is the fruit of necessity.

One might see your intuition to have Vincent Lindon work alongside non-professional actors as odd.

I've had the idea for this sort of clash for a long time now. I had already filmed non-professional actors in tiny roles, and every time I had the feeling that I was getting closer to a truth – which is what interests me the most in my work. I had to push this system even further by throwing an experienced actor into a cast of



non-professionals. The idea was to bring Vincent Lindon to uncharted waters in terms of his acting.

How did you find them?

Many of the roles corresponded to specific jobs: the security guards, the banker, the staff at the unemployment office, the cashiers, *etc.* Coralie Amédéo, the casting director, first looked for people who worked at the same jobs as their characters. I was blown away by the people I met. I doubt they can do what actors do – but I don't think any actor is capable of doing what they can. It is fascinating to see people walk up to a filmmaker and casting director, in an office they're completely unfamiliar with, and impose their crude and powerful truth with mind-blowing authority. Where does their ability to completely be themselves in front of a camera come from? It's a mystery that continues to fascinate me.

Did it change Vincent Lindon's acting style?

Yes, no doubt. I know him rather well now, since this is the third film we've done together. I found him incredible in *Mademoiselle Chambon* and *A Few Hours of Spring*, but here, he reaches new heights. Here, he learned to let go – as did I, as a director. He did it almost without a safety net.

Why do you say almost?

Because I know where I'm taking everyone. I don't throw them together in some random spot and wait for a miracle to happen. I have a road map with all the destinations and detours.

How do technical aspects – and the image, more precisely – fit into your setup?

First, I chose to take on a cinematographer who had only made documentaries. I wanted someone who was used to being completely autonomous with framing, focusing and aperture. I worked with Éric Dumont, a young director of photography, who was barely 30 years old and had never shot a fiction film. I would very precisely tell him about the point of view of the scene and let him translate that into a composition. At that point, he became a full-on actor in the scene because, based on what he was framing, he gave it one meaning, or another. What interested me was Thierry/Vincent's point of view. He's at the center of the story. Whatever he sees and hears is what interests me. That's why I sometimes film him for a long time, even when he isn't necessarily the motivating agent in the scene. I film him like a boxer getting punched without necessarily filming the person punching him. That was, incidentally, what fuelled the choice of cinemascope, since I sometimes needed to show what was



happening across from or next to Thierry.

Would you call this a political film?

Yes. "Political" in the sense of "organization of the polis," or city. I looked at the life of a man who gave his body, his time, and his energy, to a company for 25 years before being left on the sidelines because his bosses decide to make the same product in another country with cheaper labor. This man is not kicked out because he didn't do his job well. He's kicked out because some people want to make more money. Thierry is the mechanical consequence of a few invisible shareholders whose bank accounts needed a boost. He is the face of the unemployment statistics we hear about everyday in the news. They might take up two lines in the paper, but behind them are human tragedies. On the other hand, there was never any question of using tear-jerking clichés either. Thierry is a normal man – even though the idea of a normal man has taken a beating these past years – in a brutal situation: he has been unemployed for 20 months since his factory shut down, and is now obliged to accept just about any job he can get. And when this job places the individual in a morally unacceptable situation, what can he do? Stay and be an accomplice of an unfair system, or leave and return to a precarious and unstable life? That is the heart of the film. A man's place in a system.

You follow Thierry for a long time before finding him a job.

Yes, it was important to take the time to show Thierry in the context of the social humiliation resulting from his unemployment. His appointments at the unemployment office, his work placements that lead nowhere, the bank lecturing him, the job interview via Skype, *etc.* No one is really mean, but in their own way, everyone – without really wanting to (or wanting to see it) – is participating in the violence of this world. This is our world. And the time we spend observing it allows us to understand that Thierry has absolutely no choice but accept this new job.

You also refuse to paint a caustic portrait of this profession, which is often caricatured.

But that's because the people I met were not at all caricatures. I didn't meet any cowboys who abuse their tiny bit of power. I met very pleasant men and women whose job it was to stop people from stealing things in their shop. I also added something that doesn't exist in the big-box superstore where I filmed, which is that the manager fires employees at the drop of a hat, and then refuses to replace them in order to inflate his revenue.

Did you invent that or had you heard about it somewhere?

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I'd heard about it a long time ago in a documentary, then filed it away for later use. It's one thing for a business to make money. It's another if it physically or morally abuses its employees to do so. Work has become a rare commodity. Like water. And companies ultimately have an enormous amount of power. If a company is healthy, the exchange between it and the employee is harmonious. But if this company acts like a dictatorship brandishing a nuclear weapon, then the employee becomes little more than canon fodder. At that point, what is left of his/her dignity? This is what I wanted to explore.

Stéphane Brizé Filmography

2015 THE MEASURE OF A MAN
2012 A FEW HOURS OF SPRING
2009 MADEMOISELLE CHAMBON
2007 AMONG ADULTS
2005 NOT HERE TO BE LOVED
1999 HOMETOWN BLUE



Cast

Thierry Taugourdeau.....Vincent Lindon
Employment Agency Counselor.....Yves Ory
Thierry's Wife.....Karine de Mirbeck
Thierry's Son.....Matthieu Schaller
Union Colleague.....Xavier Mathieu
Dance Teacher.....Noel Mairot
Bank Manager.....Catherine Saint-Bonnet
Mobile Home Buyer.....Roland Thomin
Mobile Home Buyer's Wife.....Hakima Makoudi
Employment Agency Tutor.....Tevi Lawson
Security Agent #1.....Stephanie Hurel
Young Shoplifter.....Soufiane Guerrab
Retired Woman.....Gisele Gerwig
Supermarket Manager.....Said Aissaoui
Security Agent #2.....Rami Kabteni
High School Headmaster.....Eric Krop
Interrogated Cashier #1.....Francoise Anselmi
Security Agent #3.....Jean-Eddy Paul
Security Agent #4.....Samuel Mutlen
Old Shoplifter.....Christian Watrin
Human Resources Director.....Guillaume Draux
Interrogated Cashier #2.....Akina Toilibou



Crew

Directed by.....Stéphane Brizé
Written by..... Stéphane Brizé, Olivier Gorce
Produced by.....Christophe Rossignon, Philip Boeffard
Associate Producers.....Vincent Lindon, Stéphane Brizé
Line Producer.....Eve Francois Machuel
Director of Photography.....Eric Dumont
Editing.....Anne Klotz
Assistant Director.....Emile Louis
Sound.....Emmanuelle Villard
Sound Editing and Mixing.....Herve Guyader
Production Designer.....Valerie Saradjian A.D.C.
Costume Designers.....Anne Dunsford, Diane Dussaud
Casting.....Coralie Amedeo A.R.D.A.
Production Manager.....Kim Nguyen
Post Production Manager.....Julien Azoulay