



UGC présente

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Blanc
Emmanuelle
Beart
Sami
Bouajila
Julie
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les témoins

un film de
André Téchiné

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Produit par SAÏD BEN SAÏD Avec CONSTANCE DOLLÉ LORENZO BALDUCCI Scénario Adaptation Dialogues ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ LAURENT GUYOT VIVIANE ZINGG Directeur de la photographie JULIEN HIRSCH Montage MARTINE GIORDANO Musique PHILIPPE SARDE
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mongrel
MEDIA

Presents

Michel Blanc
Emmanuelle Beart
Sami Bouajila
Julie Depardieu
Johan Libéreau

the witnesses

(Les Témoins)

A film by
André Téchiné

(112 mins, France, 2007)

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SYNOPSIS

Paris, summer 1984.

Manu arrives in Paris, where he shares a cheap hotel room with his sister Julie. He strikes up a joyous, chaste friendship with Adrien, a wealthy doctor in his early fifties who opens Manu's eyes to a different way of life.

On a trip out on a speedboat, Adrien introduces Manu to Sarah and Mehdi, a young couple who have just had their first child.

An unplanned love affair and the onset of the AIDS epidemic - seen by the media and in the collective imagination as a shameful, modern-day plague - upset the ordered tranquility of their individual destinies. Each of them becomes a protagonist in - and witness to - a contemporary tragedy, where those who don't die may emerge stronger, but not undamaged.



AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDRÉ TECHINÉ

Did you start out with the idea of making a film about AIDS or was it a particular person or event in your life that inspired you?

Obviously, it's a mix of both, but I wanted to make a historical film.

Why another film about the history of AIDS?

Firstly, because there haven't been very many, in France at least. And even in the U.S., it's not exactly become a separate genre like the "Vietnam movie". And then because there are times in history when an event shines a light on a society's collective imagination. By paying very careful attention to what people say, we're able to hear what affects not only the individual, but also the whole culture.

So, you return to the 1980s with people dying of AIDS?

Yes, because I have a sense of having escaped my destiny and that's what gave me the urge to make this movie. Otherwise, it would have been a slightly abstract historical ambition.

It's a movie defined by its period, but not a documentary...

I deliberately turned my back on the documentary esthetic. I made it like an action movie. But it's an action movie based on considerable research and documentation.

Like some of your other films, such as "J'embrasse pas", we once more have a young man from south-west France coming up to Paris, a bit like you did...

I find it strange, this constant preoccupation with linking a filmmaker to a character. Finding a connection between somebody's private life and fiction is a vision of the process that is tainted by the current obsession with celebrities. When I create characters, I actually want to become someone else or picture myself in someone else's shoes.

Your male protagonists offer three different takes on homosexuality...

That interpretation strikes me as very arbitrary because I wouldn't describe the characters at all like that. I can never accept that a character be reduced to his or her sexual orientation. Withdrawing behind an identity is very dangerous in this particular instance. Everyone is a person in their own right and is no more a variant of homosexuality than heterosexuality. What interests me is that a character stands up and casts a shadow, and also that he should be in motion... elusive, just like life.

But you realize that you subvert a number of taboos that have returned with a vengeance in present-day France? For example, Mehdi is a police officer of North African origin, the father of a small child, a wage-earner who lives with a wealthy novelist...

The aberrant situations and unlikely characters sketched by Fassbinder or Pasolini are infinitely more subversive.

But less relevant to French audiences in 2007. In this case, Mehdi is Arab and bisexual...

In a dialogue about the baby, there is a brief allusion to circumcision. That's all. Other than that, for me, the character is that of a police lieutenant. I chose Sami Bouajilah for the part because he's a great actor. There's no reason to confine actors of North African origin to characters that reflect those origins, and I don't think the film plays the card of the sociological survey. Especially as North African police officers back then were not at all representative. There were not very many of them. As for his bisexuality, I have no idea... Above all, I think it's important to consider these issues beyond the framework of the heterosexual vs. homosexual dynamic. I don't know if, for Mehdi, his affair with Manu is the first time or the last time. I don't know if he's been with other guys or might do so in the future. Even I don't know that. I don't believe in the transparency of human relationships, nor do I believe in the transparency of the filmmaker in relation to the characters he portrays. I show them at a certain moment in their lives and that reveals certain aspects but it's the tip of the iceberg. The rest, even if we get glimpses of it, is left to the imagination of each person in the audience.

Your vision of the couple formed by Mehdi and Sarah is disturbing in an age when the couple is the cocoon, the gold standard... And here we have a woman whose response, when her partner suggests that they should try fidelity, is to say, "I love you too much for that. I'd feel imprisoned, especially with a womanizer like you."

I had a model for them. I thought of a couple who gave each other a lot of space, who had a kind of non-possessive, non-exclusive pact. But things aren't always so rational within a couple. After what happens between Mehdi and Manu, the lines

are blurred. They shift. The way in which Sarah imagines and recreates Mehdi's affair, which excluded her, could be interpreted as way of appropriating it and taking revenge. Mehdi thinks so and says as much, but I refuse to get psychological. In the later part of the film, I feel that the affair with Manu makes the bond between them unshakeable. I think it goes beyond whether they are driven apart or brought closer together. It's both at different moments. It would be wrong to think that the pact of infidelity that the couple agrees upon at the beginning of the film is impregnable. Their pact is only human and, therefore, relative. It could be a way of protecting themselves.

In that sense, would you say the film examines a kind of freedom that was there historically from the 70s to the early 80s, before AIDS?

Yes, those are what I call the "happy days", which is the title of the first part of the film. Sexual freedom enabled people to experiment with relationships in a harmonious way without shame and without constant discussion. Sex and friendships could be experimented with, free of feelings of guilt. We're light years from Puritanism and pornography, which are two sides of the same coin.

Doesn't the film highlight the fact that modern society has lost its nerve and fallen back on traditional values?

I don't know. I'm not a theoretician. I make movies about what I feel is important. What is true of this film, and every film, is that it questions right and wrong. And who decides what's right and what's wrong today? Doctors and lawyers. I think that from the onset of the AIDS crisis, the medical establishment capitulated on questions of morality, so that leaves only the law courts, and their executive arm is the police. That's perhaps why it seemed so obvious to have a doctor and a police officer in this story.

Let's talk about the female characters. They are both artists...

It's true that both women are involved in creative pursuits, but they have a radically different approach. Emmanuelle Béart's character, Sarah, writes children's books and has started work on her first novel, but she has writer's block and isn't sure she'll ever finish it. She is at odds with her artistic discipline and that confrontation takes up a lot of room in her life. Unlike her husband, she is deeply perturbed by the arrival of their first child. She doesn't know how to handle the baby and that impacts on her sexuality and literary ambitions. When she sees how attentive Mehdi is with the child, she draws him to her and invites him to make love. Julie Depardieu's character is an opera singer who doesn't see her profession as an art form. For her, the voice is a muscle and she has a sportswoman's approach to her work. She also clearly states that she isn't cut out for relationships and starting a family. At the end, Julie says that there is nothing to keep her in Paris. Her approach after Manu's death is to try to live life for two.

Maybe, when she arrives in Munich, she'll get lucky and meet someone. But I don't know that. Being able to be alone is a great adventure these days, a form of resistance to social pressure. It's just as audacious and important as forming a couple and I regret the negative connotations of the word "solitude". In this story, I think that characters like Julie and Adrien know how to be alone and that it's a strength, an opening, and not sad at all.

Is it fair to say that you are wary of too much pathos?

For me, I never make a conscious effort to reject the emotional dimension of a film, if that's your question. At the same time, I have no problem with shifting the emotion. For example, I prefer people to be moved by Manu when he runs, climbs a tree or bursts out laughing, than when he's sick. In my eyes, that wouldn't be emotion, it would be akin to taking the audience hostage and I reject that. It's an ethical position that's fundamental to my work. But I don't reject emotion. On the contrary. I simply content myself with moving it around rather than placing it where it almost becomes predictable. On the other hand, I hope that audiences find Manu moving in the upbeat scenes in the opening half of the film. "It's good times shared, not compassion in bad times, that makes good friends." I also think that, after Manu's death, the aria his sister sings at the opera is a moment of grieving. But singing has an innate vitality even if it is overshadowed by Manu's ghost.

The following summer, Adrien takes a new friend on vacation with him. Why didn't you end the film with Manu's death?

To quote Fritz Lang, "Death is not an ending." As Sarah's mother says, "It's a miracle being alive." It's this sense of a miracle that I wanted to conclude, and open, the film, and broaden the horizon by revisiting spaces that Manu had inhabited and rediscovering them without him, with another character traveling through. Perhaps loving Manu and bearing witness to his life makes the other protagonists stronger.

FILMOGRAPHY / ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ

2004	LES TEMPS QUI CHANGENT <i>Changing Times</i>
2003	LES ÉGARÉS <i>Strayed</i>
2001	LOIN <i>Far Away</i>
1998	ALICE ET MARTIN <i>Alice and Martin</i>
1996	LES VOLEURS <i>Thieves</i>
1994	LES ROSEAUX SAUVAGES <i>The Wild Reeds</i>
1993	MA SAISON PRÉFÉRÉE <i>My Favorite Season</i>
1991	J'EMBRASSE PAS <i>I don't kiss</i>
1987	LES INNOCENTS <i>The Innocents</i>
1986	LE LIEU DU CRIME <i>Scene of the Crime</i>
1985	RENDEZ-VOUS <i>André Téchiné's Rendez-vous</i>
1983	LA MATIOUETTE
1981	HOTEL DES AMÉRIQUES <i>Hotel of the Americas</i>
1979	LES SCEURS BRONTË <i>The Bronte Sisters</i>
1976	BAROCCO
1975	SOUVENIRS D'EN France <i>French Provincial</i>

CAST LIST

MICHEL BLANC
EMMANUELLE BEART
SAMI BOUAJILA
JULIE DEPARDIEU
JOHAN LIBÉREAU
CONSTANCE DOLLÉ
LORENZO BALDUCCI
ALAIN CAUCHI
RAPHAËLINE GOUPILLEAU
JACQUES NOLOT
XAVIER BEAUVOIS
MAÏA SIMON

Adrien
Sarah
Mehdi
Julie
Manu
Sandra
Steve
Sheriff
Julie and Manu's mother
The Hotel Manager
The Publisher
Sarah's mother



CREW LIST

Director
Screenplay

ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ
ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ, LAURENT GUYOT,
VIVIANE ZINGG

Producer

SAÏD BEN SAÏD

Music

PHILIPPE SARDE

Image

JULIEN HIRSCH

Editing

MARTINE GIORDANO

Production Design

MICHÈLE ABBE

Costumes

KHADIJA ZEGGAÏ

Sound

JEAN-PAUL MUGEL, FRANCIS

WARGNIER,

First Assistant

CYRIL HOLTZ

Script

MICHEL NASRI

Production Manager

CLAUDINE TAULÈRE

Post-production

YVON CRENN

ABRAHAM GOLDBLAT

