

**STRAND
RELEASING**

presents

THE WORKSHOP

A FILM BY LAURENT CANTET

WRITTEN BY ROBIN CAMPILLO & LAURENT CANTET

Starring Marina Fois and Matthieu Lucci

PRESS NOTES

*Official Selection:
Cannes Film Festival, Un Certain Regard
AFI Fest
Rendezvous with French Cinema*

Country of Origin: France
Format: DCP/2.35/Color
Sound Format: 5.1 Dolby Digital
Running Time: 113 minutes
Genre: Drama
Not Rated
In French with English Subtitles

National Press Contact:

Jenna Martin / Marcus Hu
Strand Releasing
Phone: 310.836.7500
jenna@strandreleasing.com
marcus@strandreleasing.com

Please download photos from our website:
<https://strandreleasing.com/films/the-workshop/>

SYNOPSIS

La Ciotat, the South of France. Antoine attends a summer writing workshop in which a few young people have been selected to write a crime thriller with the help of Olivia, a famous novelist. The creative process will recall the town's industrial past, a form of nostalgia to which Antoine feels indifferent. More concerned with the fears of the modern world, the young man soon clashes with the group and Olivia, who seems at the same time alarmed and captivated by Antoine's violence.

THE GENESIS OF THE PROJECT

Everything began in 1999 with a France 3 news report that my co-screenwriter, Robin Campillo, had worked on – at the time he was a video editor for television. The report was about an English novelist who conducted a writing workshop in La Ciotat, in the south of France. The workshop, offered by the local mission, was meant to provide the opportunity for a dozen or so youths to collaborate on a novel, with the only constraint being that the story take place within the town.

We then started thinking about a film. La Ciotat at the time was still recovering from its shipyard closing: though it officially dated back to 1987-88, the workers had occupied the yard for several years in order to delay the scheduled shutdown. Young people in the news report spoke nostalgically about their town's connection with working class culture, which still seemed vibrant to them. Indeed they felt as if they were the guardians of this heritage, which was precisely the subject of the novel they were writing.

We ended up dropping this project. I came back to it, seventeen years later, with the intuition that this working-class heritage would now seem antediluvian to young people today. They had of course heard about this period. They live near what remains of the shipyard, today converted into a yacht-repair site. But since the town has decided to become a sea resort, the shipyard has been forgotten. At best, it's an impressive backdrop that is mostly ignored.

The film bears witness to this radical transformation of society and culture which, probably because of the effect of political and economic crises, no longer has any relation to the world the way it was – the way the older generation would like it to remain. What the young people from *The Workshop* are saying, is that they refuse to be burdened by a past that is not even remotely their own. Today they are confronted with an entirely different array of problems: finding their place in a world that has little consideration for them, and the feeling that they don't have any control over how things pan out in general, not to mention the lack of control over their own lives. What's more, they have to face a violent society torn between distressing social and political issues, such as financial insecurity, terrorism and the rise of the far right.

WORKING WITH YOUNG ACTORS

When the first version of the screenplay was completed, we conducted a sort of “open casting,” where we went to sports clubs, theaters, bars, and waited outside high schools... It was a way to meet a few hundred young people from the area among whom I chose the actors. I led my own two-week intensive “workshop” with them, the idea being that I would tap into their personal experiences and characters to shape the film. Progressively, individual scenes were fleshed out. From that standpoint, it could be said that they never learned their roles; rather they assimilated their roles into their

personalities. And the exchanges that came out of this pre-production work influenced the writing.

In my films, I always strive to give enough time and space for the characters to develop beyond their allocated roles. As a filmmaker, but also as a moviegoer, I can only become attached to a character if he or she is independent enough to sometimes go beyond the simple needs of the screenplay's narrative. This is the reason why it is important for me to shoot each and every scene from start to finish with several cameras. It provides a space for something entirely unexpected to occur.

For instance the scuffle between Boubacar and Antoine wasn't in the script. But Matthieu Lucci (Antoine), entirely immersed in the situation, felt that his character needed to explode. We were all taken by surprise when he suddenly leapt up and jumped on Boubacar. In fact the camera didn't really catch it all...and so we restaged the scene.

Another happy accident triggered by this method: Matthieu, after having read his good-bye text, said: "There, I'll leave you. Good-bye." And he walked off camera. That wasn't written. He had just felt, at that precise moment, that a theatrical exit was needed. It brought tears to my eyes. This type of situation cannot occur if a shot-countershot approach has been put into place and if a specific line of dialogue and predefined actions are allotted to each person in the scene. This filming method gives the actors enough autonomy to truly be in the logic of both the scene and character, instead of just being in the film's logic.

MARINA FOÏS / OLIVIA: THE OTHER WORLD

At first I thought I would work with a foreign actress, like the novelist who ran the workshop and was the inspiration for the film. I thought it would be interesting to delve into the space between two worlds that observe each other. I had to abandon this idea because the person playing the novelist had to master the French language well enough to keep up with these young people's verve.

I sought out Marina Foïs for the part because I knew she would know how to fully shoulder this role, and that she had the necessary verve and vigor to assert herself within the group while remaining light-handed, which seemed absolutely essential to me. Among the leading characters, she is the only professional actress. During the shoot, she got entirely caught up in our approach: when we took breaks, she liked to ask the young men and women about their experiences, their perspective on different subjects. And she also freely answered the tons of questions they bombarded her with.

The young men and women had mixed feelings when it came to Marina: the closeness that inevitably develops on a film shoot, but also a certain distance because they knew her as an actress, and she represents a cinema they're fond of. Her status as a well-

known actress was an important element for the onscreen dynamic, because it mirrored Olivia's personality. Olivia, the novelist, is also famous and during the course of the workshop she arouses as much attraction as feelings of reserve among the young people who surround her.

MATTHIEU LUCCI IS ANTOINE

He is incredible. One day, he told me how truly he hated the character Antoine – all the while loving him – and how much it pained him to like this character so much. He was willing and open to carrying out the most difficult things I asked him, starting with Antoine's racist attacks on Malika. Matthieu has the ability to face five or six people with a bad faith that could pass for conviction and to such an extent that every time it occurred, he felt the need to apologize to those who didn't know him: "but that was my character talking!"

A WRITING WORKSHOP

What I wanted to show in this writing workshop was less the way that the writing process works than the difficult, tentative effort it is for a group to think together and reach an agreement. It was the dynamics of working with the group's tensions, dead-ends and compromises.

I am thoroughly interested in the way that learning in a training environment is always a sort of formatting, a way of steering, which leads those who are being trained to dedicate themselves to something that doesn't necessarily apply to them. It is undoubtedly inevitable and effective, but it seems important to me to be conscious of this when one is in the trainer's shoes. In any case, this is exactly what the film's main character, Antoine, accuses Olivia of doing: she has come from Paris with a preconceived notion of what they should be writing.

FILMING SPEECH

The only reason we believe that the younger generation doesn't know how to speak, is because we no longer give them the opportunity to do so. This indeed for me was the entire point in making a movie with them.

In our rehearsals, I was stunned by the depth of our exchanges, the way they found the words to defend their ideas, but also their pleasure in playing with different language registers.

I tried to show in the film how they knew, when speaking to adults, how to resort to the appropriate vocabulary, which isn't the vocabulary they use with one another. As a result, when Olivia takes the liberty of transgressing codes that they enforce amongst themselves, such as when she says: "that gives you a *hard-on*," from Antoine's perspective, it's intolerable – to the point it makes him fly off the handle, while in fact

he had been ready to openly listen to anything she had to say.

The Workshop isn't a drama about linguistic fragility. If there's a flaw, it's ideological. When Antoine tries to explain something, he contradicts himself, he's vague. Olivia contradicts herself too, but she does it with panache, because she is better armed, ideologically, than he is. There is a violence there that triggers the urge to fight things out. And this is most likely one of the questions that is urgent for society to face: what common ground can be found for all of us?

THE FAR RIGHT PREACHER

He is obviously inspired by all the “fascist-sphere” websites and blogs, which are frequently consulted by young people. The speech on “immunity” could be perfectly integrated there. It is in fact a collage of everything that can be heard in the mouths of far right representatives, mixing xenophobia and populism in an anti-politically correct, anti-global, anti-system dialectic... A discourse that is so predictable we tend to qualify it as caricature, but isn't any less effective for being so – as we know.

I was interested in exploring confusion and indecision through Antoine's character. Antoine has no ideal or ideology to guide him. He just wants something to happen that will give his life some meaning or even some depth. It's what he says at the end of his goodbye speech: “A man could kill out of boredom, just to see. He could have shot someone, just for something to happen.”

ANTOINE'S CONTRADICTIONS

Antoine doesn't feel at home anywhere. His fascination with his cousin and the gang is superficial. Although he follows them in their nightly outings, he's more amused than convinced. Moreover, even if he is surely the one who has been the most engaged in the workshop, he is nevertheless not totally integrated into the group, because the others constantly needle him about his contradictions. He needs to be part of a group, but he never fully belongs, either because he isn't good enough, or because he feels the limitations of the group in question.

This is a theme that runs throughout all my films: the contradiction between the desire to find one's place in a group and the impossibility to fully belong. Between the desire to be part of something and the need for independence. Maybe it's a contradiction within myself that I put to the test from film to film. There's probably nothing very original about this observation: we're all like Antoine – very social sociopaths.

Besides, if Antoine is difficult to follow, it's indeed because there's no ideological angle from which he can be analyzed. Olivia realizes this: “you're not an easy one to help.” And that's what underlies her interest in him. She is constantly faced with her own powerlessness: that of a “left-wing militant” who no longer knows how to behave with

those who feel like they are ignored by society because they are young, poor, unemployed... and who, with a heavy heart, watches powerlessly as those left behind turn to the miracle cures dangled before them by the far right.

Like many others, Antoine sees himself as a poster child for the anti-system, with whom all discussion seems doomed for failure. Thus everything that Olivia says confines her to her status as a member of the system – “people like you.” The film tries to acknowledge this social rift without pronouncing in favor of either of these people hindered by their powerlessness.

The most troubling thing about Antoine in my eyes is the difficulty he has in grasping the difference between literary violence, that which can be given full expression to in a thriller, and real violence, whose legitimacy, indeed possibility he doesn't hesitate to ponder: “You write murder mysteries all day long...you expect me to believe that you've never wished to kill someone?” he asks of Olivia, without any emotional distance, which obviously leaves her speechless.

THE SENSUAL TENSION BETWEEN OLIVIA AND ANTOINE

I didn't want this aspect to be in the forefront, but at least a hovering prospect. It's an underlying possibility when Antoine follows Olivia and her editor, or when, bare-chested, he looks at her on his computer. The possibility is there again when Olivia skims through Antoine's online identity or when she comes into his room and he is half naked.

What most interested me is that for each of them, the other is an embodiment of another world. Olivia is a refined woman who knows how to talk, who appears on TV. Antoine is a young man who built himself a body, like many young men today, within a narcissism that seems to represent some form of an ideal for him and allows him to stand tall and strong.

A LOOK AT TODAY'S YOUTH

I know it's cliché, but I think that boredom is the source of many problems for this generation. Especially when it is associated with the lack of prospects that prevail today. I get the feeling that an increasing number of young people feel like their future is following a preset path, and the place that has been left for them doesn't match with their hopes. And then, how does one remain enthusiastic, or find the necessary energy to take their life in hand, why should you even try when you are constantly being told that no matter what, all your efforts are pointless.

During the writing stage, we often heard the statistics of the growing enrollment in the army. The video clip that Antoine watches (an actual clip from the French army!) uses the same codes as video games: they know how to address this generation, promising

them an adventure, perhaps the only truly accessible one for many of them. Among the youngsters from *The Class*, many had this project in mind and did end up joining the army or the police. It's at once the only option available to them and a way of swearing allegiance, of becoming what is expected of them – “good young French citizens.

FROM NOVEL TO FILM – A THRILLER

Just as for *Time Out* and *Foxfire*, I wanted to give the film a “thriller” atmosphere. It's a way of clouding the issues and avoiding predictability. And the thriller's codes allow for the exploration of important sub-textual questions: the desire for another world, frustration, suppressed violence. But it also gives rise to violent emotional outbursts: I wanted the audience to be afraid, both for him and for her...

THE USE OF DIFFERENT IMAGE TREATMENTS: VIDEO GAMES ON COMPUTER SCREENS TO THE CINEMASCOPE FORMAT

I felt it was important to have this mixture and cross-fertilization between the amateur films of boats being sent off during the glory days of the shipyard and Skype and Facebook screens; between old documentaries about the working-class town of La Ciotat and the recent video-clip from the French army...but I also wanted to have shots of video games, which occupy such a central place in these characters' lives. The wandering knight that opens the film is the hero of *The Witcher*, for which we obtained the authorization to use a few minutes: this allowed me to outline Antoine's character, his desire for escape. For Antoine, video games fulfill a profound need for liberty and exploration.

And then video games also entail being part of a group. When he fights against the dragon, he's online and in the company of numerous players with whom he has to interact. These images are associated with the text read by Etienne, which also tackles the notion of being in a group, fighting for a common cause, and solidarity. This juxtaposition obviously isn't a coincidence, but I hope it won't be interpreted as an expression of reactionary nostalgia on my part, nor should it be taken as being sanctimonious or expressing something akin to “we end up with the group we deserve.” I hope that his pure enjoyment when playing will be felt by the audience. For Antoine, video games are an outlet and a means for self-construction.

Cinemascope allows me to film both a face and the world to which it belongs at that moment. It is also a way to break with the purely naturalistic approach, because culturally, it implies the idea of something theatrical, of big spaces. That was important for this film, because Antoine circulates between two extremes: the workshop, and the rocky inlets and coves along the coastline. I wanted to show him in nature, in this rocky, barren place, overcome by the pounding light and heat, with only the noise of the sea. Cinemascope is particularly well-adapted to this scenery.

I should mention that I'm very familiar with these places. I lived in Marseilles during the time of the social conflicts that took place following the La Ciotat shipyard shutdown. Every Friday morning, strikers would march on the harbor. I'd wanted to film this backdrop for a very long time: not only what is left of the shipyard, but also the sea and its coastline. And with this in mind I am grateful to the engineers at Sony, who invented a camera that allows you to film at 16,000 ASA. In the night scene at the end of the film, the light is truly moonlight. If its realism seems strange, it's indeed because this kind of light has never been depicted this way before, and it doesn't correspond to the standard codes of how night is represented in cinema. These scenes originated in memories of my youth, of going to wander the rocky coves on full moon nights; there's this white stone, this light, the impression of walking on the moon, that the camera can at long last capture.

THE FILM IS MARKEDLY CONTEMPORARY

We started writing shortly after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack. We then picked up the screenplay again a few days after the November 13th 2015 terrorism attack in Paris. And we were rehearsing when the Nice attack happened. That very day, Matthieu Lucci and I spent the morning in conversation, and that's what generated the dialogue about the need to speak about it, because it is something that touches them deeply. In short, everything occurred with a sense of urgency to explore perspectives that are different than those which we are regularly offered and promised, namely, nationalism and the desire to go to war.

A HAPPY ENDING

And yet I have rarely experienced a more widespread feeling of social inertia as I have today. Maybe it's the paradoxical reason why this time I wanted my film to suggest a more uplifting ending. Antoine gets the job done, mostly because he has found in the workshop a place where he can think things through. He is undoubtedly the one whom the workshop has made the biggest impression on and who will change the most as a result. In fact, that's the purpose of the film's epilogue. By embarking on a cargo ship, he takes his life in hand; he casts off, literally and metaphorically.

LAURENT CANTET

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Filmography

- 2017 THE WORKSHOP
Cannes IFF - Un Certain Regard
- 2014 RETURN TO ITHACA (RETOUR A ITHAQUE)
Venice IFF, Venice Days Venezia Classici Award
- 2012 FOXFIRE
Toronto Film Festival
- LA FUENTE, in 7 DAYS IN HAVANA - Cannes Un Certain Regard
- 2008 THE CLASS (ENTRE LES MURS)

Cannes IFF Palme d'Or Winner, 2008
Academy Award Nominated Film – Foreign Language Film, 2009
Independent Spirit Award Winner – Best Foreign Film, 2009
Cesar Award Winner – Best Adapted Screenplay, 2009
Cesar Award Nominated Film – incl. Best Film, Best Director, 2009
Lumiere Award Winner – Best Film and the Audience Award, 2009
European Film Award Nominated Film – Best Film, Best Director, 2008
- 2005 HEADING SOUTH (VERS LE SUD)
Venice IFF CinemAvvenire, Cinema for Peace Award, 2005
- 2001 TIME OUT (L'EMPLOI DU TEMPS)
Venice IFF Don Quixote Award, 2001
Viennale FIPRESCI Prize, 2001
Independent Spirit Award Nominated Film - Best Foreign Film, 2003
- 1999 HUMAN RESOURCES (RESSOURCES HUMAINES)
San Sebastian IFF – Best New Director, 1999
European Film Award Winner – European Discovery, 2000
Cesar Award Winner - Best First Work, 2001
Cesar Award Nominated Film – Best Screenplay, 2001
Louis Delluc Prize – Best First Film, 2001
- 1997 LES SANGUINAIRES
Arte 2000 Seen by...

CAST

Olivia
Antoine
Malika
Fadi
Étienne
Boubacar
Benjamin
Lola
Teddy
Boris

Marina Foïs
Matthieu Lucci
Warda Rammach
Issam Talbi
Florian Beaujean
Mamadou Doumbia
Julien Souve
Mélissa Guilbert
Olivier Thouret
Lény Sellam

CREW

Director
Screenwriters
Director of Photography
Editor
Sound Engineer
Sound Editor
Sound Mixing
1st Assistant Director
Production Design
Location Managers
Costume Designer
Make-up Artist
Music
Production Manager
Post-production Managers
Producer

Laurent Cantet
Robin Campillo & Laurent Cantet
Pierre Milon
Mathilde Muiyard
Olivier Mauvezin
Agnès Ravez, Antoine Baudouin
Mélissa Petitjean
Delphine Daull
Serge Borgel
Yannick Soscia, Yann Bottin
Agnès Giudicelli
Valérie Tranier
Bedis Tir & Edouard Pons
Michel Dubois
Cédric Ettouati, Luc Augereau
Denis Freyd

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