

**Mongrel Media**  
Presents

# Something in the Air



**A film by Olivier Assayas  
(122 min., France, 2012)  
Language: French**

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*High res stills may be downloaded from <http://www.mongrelmedia.com/press.html>*

## **SYNOPSIS**

At the beginning of the seventies, Gilles, a high school student in Paris, is swept up in the political fever of the time. Yet his real dream is to paint and make films, something that his friends and even his girlfriend cannot understand. For them, politics is everything, the political struggle all consuming. But Gilles gradually becomes more comfortable with his life choices, and learns to feel at ease in this new society.

## OLIVIER ASSAYAS ABOUT SOMETHING IN THE AIR

*Interview By Auréliano Tonet  
Spring 2012*

### ECHOES OF COLD WATER

I am often under the impression that my films happen by themselves, that they force themselves onto me. SOMETHING IN THE AIR in particular. For a long time, I had a nagging sense of wanting to make not a sequel, but an extension of *Cold Water*, a film which, in 1994, became my second debut film, gave me a chance to review the way I made films. And it did take me by surprise. Only now in hindsight have I come to understand that it opened up doors for me. The doors of film autobiographies. I remember the amazement I felt upon uncovering dailies from the nighttime party scene, the one that only takes up a couple of pages in the screenplay, but makes up a third of the finished film: the fire, the teenagers, the joints. I had a feeling that I had, in a moment of haste, caught a sense of the poetry of those days, of my teenage years - the early 1970's. And then that also gave birth to a sense that this could well be the setting of a bigger film about this unknown and fascinating time period. A period that film has been so terribly wary of, to the extent of only being capable of approaching it with irony. When you start believing that collective history is being falsely represented, after a while you get a creeping idea that it might well be up to you to right the wrong. That you might well, unawares, be holding one of your own generation's experience. What I thought *Cold Water* lacked was politics, the attraction of the East, the music I used to listen to (in *Cold Water* it bears reference to the collective, in SOMETHING IN THE AIR, it's more intimate), and in a wider sense, the whole underground community of the 1970's, which was the source of my aesthetic and intellectual education. Even before beginning work on *Carlos* (2010), I had started taking notes on what would become SOMETHING IN THE AIR. I instinctively returned to the names of the two main characters in *Cold Water*, Gilles and Christine. Incidentally a continuity remains between them, including a physical aspect. Once *Carlos* was completed, I wanted to venture in another direction, a road I will no doubt walk down again. But as I opened my notebooks, I stumbled onto the notes on SOMETHING IN THE AIR. At once, I had an urge to continue, without giving it a second thought. And it was the right time too, no doubt in part thanks to having completed *Carlos*, which is also set in the 1970's. I had found the means to recreate that period in a way that seemed true to me. That momentum had to be taken advantage of.

## **AFTER MAY '68**

It so happens that, in 2005, I wrote a little book called *Une adolescence dans l'après-mai*, a letter addressed to Guy Debord's widow, Alice Becker-Ho, who is also a writer. It echoes through SOMETHING IN THE AIR, in terms of it being the same person writing about the same period of his life. Beyond that they are separate stories. The title APRES MAI [original title, literal translation: After May] literally evokes the story I wanted to tell: the aftermath of May '68. A time when a revolutionary experience lingers, a unique time in 20th century French History. Of course, May '68 nostalgia didn't exist in those days. The events had just taken place. The only outlook was revolution, a better May '68, a successful May '68. My characters come to life in an environment where everyone shares a faith in the revolution, even a faith in the enemy, even in the government. It's a given. The question is rather: "In the name of what will the revolution take place?". In 1971, the extreme Left celebrated Paris Commune's 100th anniversary. They had become experts on the dissent between Trotsky and Lenin, between Trotsky and the liberals, they researched the schism between the USSR and the People's Republic of China, they interpreted the differences of opinion at the heart of the Eastern Bloc, knowledge that would be of precious use once the revolution came along. Youth in the 2010's live in a shapeless present. They exist outside History, cyclic and static. The thought that you can have a say in society, that you can even rethink its very nature, has become very vague and conventional. It can be summed up more or less in terms of exclusion or inclusion. Often, it is said that this is tied to the spread of youth unemployment. This explanation has always seemed too short and very unsatisfactory to me. No one makes plans for a brighter tomorrow, a future utopia, it is demanded of the government to fight against exclusion. The demands are fragmented, divided; we're moved by injustice, without global analysis. In the 1970's we were against the very thought of a Government. No one wanted to be included, the plan of action was to be among the excluded.

## **THE FEBRUARY 9, 1971 DEMONSTRATION**

The film opens on the February 9, 1971 demonstration, that would have a strong influence on the years to come. "Le Secours Rouge", an organization stemming from the maoist communist movement, call for a demonstration to support the imprisoned leaders of the proletarian Left, who are demanding a political status. The date is set to February 9, 1971 at Place de Clichy in Paris. Meanwhile, the latter eventually gain their demanded status following a hunger strike. The Police Headquarters bans the demonstration, but the Leftists maintain the date, seeking out a confrontation with the law. The law enforcement authority decides to take to violence in order to repress the demonstration, using the recently formed "brigades spéciales d'intervention". This police unit included "voltigeurs", i.e. motorcycle riot control forces armed with batons. The Leftists wear helmets

and are armed with iron bars and bolts. Eventually, the demonstration did not, properly speaking, take place as the riot control forces prevented any gathering from forming and violently hunted down any groups attempting to come together. One of these skirmishes is recreated in the film. During the clashes, Richard Deshayes, aged 24, is hit in the face by a smoke grenade (at a flat trajectory). He loses one eye while the second is damaged. He is one of the most rebellious among the VLR (Vive la révolution) activists. VLR is a secessionist anarchist-spontaneist group consisting mainly of former members of maoists from The Proletarian Left. Deshayes is particularly known as the author of the FLJ (Front de Libération des Jeunes) manifest, published as a supplement in Tout, the official VLR paper. In the outskirts of the demonstration, an apolitical high school student, Gilles Guiot, is arrested on his way home. The next day, he is, in an unabashed arbitrary style, sentenced to six months in prison with three months suspended, for the unlikely crime of "violence against an officer of the law". The fate of Richard Deshayes and Gilles Guiot ignites a fierce mobilization driven on by two different movements. Those who wished to revive the student movement, which at that moment was losing momentum, to reconstruct it according to the majority Trotskyists. There are also those who wish to go head-to-head with the police according to a strategy originally outlined by the Maoists and, as always, followed by the unorganized individuals ready to act on any confrontation. These questions make up the background to the first scenes in SOMETHING IN THE AIR.

## **LEFTISTS AND LIBERALS**

Today, we use the term "communist" vaguely, to evoke what they in Italy frequently call the "extra parliamentary" Left, an unnatural alliance between post communists and post Leftists. We have to remember that in 1968, communism was the enemy. PCF [the French Communist Party] was regarded by Leftists of all persuasions as a simple and disciplined soundboard, taking instructions from Moscow. Mainly serving as a means to support Soviet interests and at the same time to maintain a social status quo, in favor of the PCF and the perfectly aligned CGT [French Trade Union federation]. It had been a long time since youth, artists, students and rebels had broken away from the PCF, and May '68 had seriously shaken the authority of the Party among working class in general and young workers in particular. My protagonists identify with a liberal tendency, at its extreme and creative peak in May '68, before it burned out. Today the movement is completely marginalized. When looking into the history of anarchy, it becomes evident that it is a utopia, that it doesn't work. However, it also represents momentary of brilliance. The radical questioning of society's values is not destined to be applied literally, its intended use is to help question, to rethink, to never accept anything as inevitable. It has a history of fundamental mistrust in the Government and its structures, whoever may be its members. Anarchy is always behind life and the freedom to think and act. This is undoubtedly the reason it has always attracted artists. Several authors who have

embraced a liberal stance have played an important role to me, even if, at times, it has meant distancing myself from my generation and its icons, who in any case were rarely the same as mine. I've referred to a few of them between the lines in SOMETHING IN THE AIR. However one chooses to label him, George Orwell's essays - in particular *Homage to Catalonia* - have been very important to me. I read them in English because they weren't available in French, most of them had never been translated and the others had since long been out of print. And then there is Simon Leys' *Les Habits neufs du président Mao*, the first denunciation, coming from the ranks of the ultra Left, of the madness of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, edited at Champ Libre by the former Situationist René Viénet. Finally, and above all, Guy Debord. Unfortunately, I found the Situationist International at the very moment it was dissolved. The final words in SOMETHING IN THE AIR are, incidentally, extracts from the IS death certificate, *La Véritable Scission dans l'Internationale*.

## **THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Everyone has sought to appropriate this vague and contradictory movement that is May '68, standing at the junction between so many classes and ideas. A very difficult group to get a grip of, and even more so on the movie screen - unless, perhaps, by ways of an autobiographical form, and in that case a modest form of the autobiographical point of view, I would say. Fragmented and demanding an singular originality. That said, I only believe in the film autobiography to a certain extent. Everything is autobiographical and nothing is, in a sense. The instant you make a film, the autobiographical contract is torn in pieces. In literature, you can attempt to be as honest and precise as possible, and relive the time period by ways of memory, even though it will always remain partly romanticized. In film, this part is multiplied by its square root. I confide fictional situations - inspired by real life, for sure - to actors who are certainly not myself, who are young today. I relocate them to other places and to times belonging to fiction rather than to life itself. Actually, in SOMETHING IN THE AIR, I've sketched outlines to a collective portrait. I would consider that approach more truthful, than if I were to strictly confine myself to the reminiscences of my own youth.

## **YOUTH**

"Between us and heaven and hell there is only life, which is the frailest thing in the world." This quote from Blaise Pascal, read at the beginning of the film is one possible definition of a youth completely committed to the present. There is something precious about the naivety, the candour, the idealistic outlook on the world we have when we seek to be a part of it, to find our place and to confront it as well, without reflecting on the consequences. Youth is always being consumed - hence perhaps, the importance of flames in several scenes in SOMETHING IN THE AIR. I was barely aware of it while writing, it was on the set that I discovered the double meaning of the image of fire. Truth be said, my

generation's youth was particularly inflammable. Today's youth is more reasonable. Everyone is radical, but, alas, they stand for nothing. In the 1970's, we were constantly asked to justify ourselves: "What have you done for the working class?". We were not about to work for the popular press (the rotten press), we hated companies of all shapes and forms and only approached them in order to sabotage from inside. We lived in communities, we rejected studies, we rejected building a family, no retirement plan in sight. The May '68 generation has built their careers in journalism, advertising etc. all because they got their intellectual education before the events. The post-May generation is born to chaos, it grew up in chaos. They had no other symbolic values than the rejection of the world, the marginalization, the commitment sum total. A very destructive sum total, it turns out. This generation has taken a heavy toll.

## **VANISHING POINTS**

On the steps of a big suburb high school, the troubles ignite militant activity, obviously of an anecdotal kind, orchestrated by Gilles and his comrades. One of their actions turn bad when a security guard is seriously injured. This tragedy influences the destiny of each of the characters, from beneath - just like the robbery at the beginning of my debut film, *Disorder* (1986), which ends in murder. In *Disorder*, I handled this guilt in a dark, violent and serious way. Here, it is slightly more mundane as well as hazy. No one dies. And each and everyone accepts his or her share of responsibility depending on their character. Alain considers himself exonerated. Christine leaves it behind, while going through a change of life. They don't theorize, but they do live; their escape is a result of the incident that has transformed them. Paradoxically, the least responsible among them, Gilles, finds the greatest use for the questions sparked by his guilt.

## **FROM PERSONS TO CHARACTERS**

In *Summer Hours* (2008), where several generations live together, I found myself at a midway point, between the adults and the teenagers. I remember how I missed looking at the world through youthful eyes. That inspired SOMETHING IN THE AIR. Filming young people, barely out of their childhood, was a way to push back the stereotypes on teenagers, driven on by current films. I chose the actors by intuition, as always: I think above all, I was looking for someone unique, rebellious, with an understanding - or an experience - of art and creation. Laure was the most difficult character to get a grip on, being more of a muse than an actress. We were lucky to find Carole. She has this nonchalance, this indifference towards the world that gives her the same enigmatic charm as her character. While working with them, I noticed how much young people's relationship to the world has changed since my teenage years. Questions that used to be in focus, such as the history of the worker's movement, and the shades, although byzantine, of the different persuasions making up the texture of the left wing, seem perfectly bizarre to them.

Incidentally, they neither understand the interest nor what's at stake with regards to the very idea of cultural politics. The only real conductors are the clothes and the music. And then of course the main question: a sort of idealism.

## **GIRLS AND BOYS**

At the time and at that age, it felt natural to commit politically or artistically rather than emotionally. I was mainly an observer with regards to the 60's sexual liberation. The "I" in a love affair wasn't made very important. In today's films, teenagers appear to be obsessed with sex, driven by lust. These portrayals are grotesque. There was certainly a liberation in the 1970's, but rather in the sense that it allowed for an open practice of up until then marginalized sexuality. But beyond the militant conquest of rights, sex - for even stronger reasons among teenagers - or emotional commitment really wasn't the centre of the world. Gilles is very selfish, in that sense. He loves Laure and Christine, but he doesn't let himself get wrapped up, he is not about to give up his destiny, nor his studies, for either of them. The female characters follow a more determined and pragmatic path than the boys. Leslie is the most independent of them, probably because she's American. Alain gains in maturity with her. Christine isn't afraid of leaving on an adventure with the group of activists/filmmakers she meets in Florence. She quickly becomes a small grown-up and settles in as one half of a couple. Laure, on the other hand, has her liberty, her poetry and her detachment from the world and it fascinates Gilles.

## **NATURE**

For a long time, I liked filming faces up close, often using a long focal length. As of *Summer Hours*, I gradually distanced myself from that technique. In *Carlos*, there are very few close-ups. I liked close-ups because it was rarely used in French film nor in French auteur films, with the exception of Jacques Doillon's films. Nowadays it's the opposite, it has been put into system, including on television. So I needed to move away, go looking elsewhere. Before that, and as a consequence of this way of making films, my films' production design became abstract, in favor of details, in favor of accessories who, up close, became all the more important. Nowadays, it's the opposite, the locations where my characters find themselves has become essential. I need to give life to each place and even more so nature, the seasons. It's like a box - I've often thought of Altman's films from the 70's, *Thieves Like Us* or *John McCabe*. SOMETHING IN THE AIR is the film that has allowed me to go the furthest in that direction. The story needed open up towards the world. That's why we, for example, chose to shoot scenes that were originally meant to be shot at night, in daytime, such as the scene in the youth hostel park in Florence. In *Cold Water*, the nature - wintery and bare as opposed to, in this case, summertime - only revealed itself at the end of the long nighttime sequence, in the early morning. In SOMETHING IN THE AIR, it's the opposite: the places and the emotions coexist in full daylight.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

The geography in *SOMETHING IN THE AIR*, melds the intimate and the symbolic. Just like Gilles, I grew up in a Paris suburb, in Vallée de Chevreuse. Just like him, I often went to London, on language holidays of course, but I was left to my own devices much more so than in Paris where my family kept a close eye on me. What's more, it's a city that for me has always been connected to a certain liberty. Especially as London at the time was ahead of Paris by two or three years, particularly in terms of counter-culture, as it had much more direct influence from the United States, they were more in synch. With Italy, on the other hand, I felt closer in every sense. My father was Franco-Italian, and that whole side of my family is Milanese. What's more, especially when I was very young, I had the feeling that I had a better understanding of Italian than French art. Incidentally, the French left wing movement had current and historic connections to the Italian Left. Hence, it is not a coincidence that Gilles and Christine spend their summer on the other side of the Alps.

## **AN EDUCATION**

"Reality knocks on my door, and I don't open" says Gilles in the film. It's a truthful and concise image of what youth was to me. I was more of an audience than an actor at that age. I was neither factory assembled, nor a member of a select group, nor was I a Corrèze community member. I manifested a vague radical sense, which I had in common with my generation and my friends. I committed to art and theories, but that came from observing the world rather than from practice. As a teenager, you have the feeling that real life exists elsewhere and that the world escapes you. Only once you've found your path, can you finally say: "I am here because I chose to be". *SOMETHING IN THE AIR* depicts the treacherous path on which we learn to think for ourselves, while soaking in the atmosphere of the times, and without being duped or victimized. It's a road that winds its way as much as it can away from well frequented places hosting collective action and wearing conformity of one shape or another. This awakening also comes from a reaction to one's elder. Gilles isn't rebelling against his father, but rather against the rules and the outdated values they represent. We are also defined by our relationship with the past and by the inventory rights that we apply. Art history only makes sense in the present relative to youth's capacity to reclaim it and bring it back to life in their proper way. From this point of view, theory is as precious as practice. It is its reflection. There's this false idea going around today which would have it that art is practiced in an intuitive manner, spontaneously, naturally. Certainly not. When you seek out your path, affinities are determined according to a logic that might be poetic in a way, but is above all very articulate. It always comes by way of ideas. Pasolini, Debord, Malevitch, Godard, Tarkovsky: art's great theoreticians are all great artists and vice versa.

## COUNTER-CULTURE

One of the central themes in *SOMETHING IN THE AIR* is the underground. Counterculture is an unknown territory for filmmakers. The purpose of film is to be if not universal, then at least popular. By nature, it has a tendency to fear the margins. How can we find the marginal poetry and share it through the wide means that film can accomplish? That is a question that inspired me while writing *SOMETHING IN THE AIR*. As opposed to the poetic approach in *Cold Water*, this time I had an urge to be literal. To pay tribute to the works and the artists who played such an important part in shaping my sensibilities, my identity. If the revolution failed to shake up society, it at least succeeded in the newspapers. Look at the free press magazines, expressive freedom, freedom of graphic design, the explorations of avant garde poetry and paintings, reprinted in dummies and broadsheets, where all the bold people of the times were allowed to run free. In music, there was the same urge to experiment, to challenge all the rules, to reject anything that might resemble market laws or even common sense. They were the tangible footprints of the revolution in reality. During the shoot, I was very careful, even fanatically particular, when it came to the choice and use of objects, slogans, newspapers: only at the cost of a rigorous accuracy in this aspect can we access the opportunity to share the psychological universe of this time period.

## BRUSHSTROKES

Even though Gilles is a much better painter than I am, his work is carried out according to the same curb: from paintings to drawings, from abstract to figurative, then to graphic design, followed by film. That was my road. I reconstructed it literally, but summarized, because for me it all happened between the ages of 15 and 25, while the film's chronology has been condensed. Leslie's trip to Holland gave me the opportunity to pay tribute to one of my favourite painters, Frans Hals (even if it's the admiring pages that Paul Claudel devoted to these two paintings, Hals' two last paintings, both holding traits of judgment day, which inspired me and now echoes in Leslie). The virtuosity of his strokes, or rather the strike of his brush, have fascinated me since my teenage years. To me, they are the very image of freedom, the painting free from the finished, free from the laborious aspect of figurative representation, in favor of speed of execution, and of the intimacy revealed through this spontaneity. Hals is as much an admirable expert of the human soul, as a calligrapher. And as such his genius touches what fascinates me in Chinese art. Dutch paintings, to which I took a great interest during my years as a student, nourished my filmmaking. Peter de Hooch's interiors/exterior and his unique sense of space... it's hard not to think about that when composing frames. In hindsight, my discovery of classic Dutch paintings coinciding with my abandonment of painting in favor of filmmaking might not have been all that unexpected.

## FREE PRESS

I've always been at tune to the sensuality of the printed matter. I grew up on the countryside, cut off from where things happened, there were three state-owned television channels, that's all. The world was changing and to keep up with these changes, as much as I could, I depended on the press. Due to this distance, for me there was no difference between the radical Paris press, such as *Tout* and *Parapluie* and the London "free press", such as *It* and *Oz*. Whereas the Leftist magazines were sold outside the high school, the English language press was only available in two or three places in Paris, which made them all the more precious. A far stretch from the access offered by the internet these days. The free press was my link to the world. The use of colors, the layout, the double exposures. In terms of beauty and intellect, it was a revival.

## MUSIC

Music at the cinema should free itself of conventions, in a Debordian way of speaking. A song possesses a poetry that finds a renewed meaning when combined with images, with a story. It soaks into the narrative and is at the same time absorbed by it. Until now these quotes came to me according to transversal and mysterious logic. This is the first time that the songs I contemplated while writing actually have found their place in the film. Probably because it is literally what I listened to when I was the same age as the protagonists. In *Cold Water*, I placed the tunes you would hear at parties - well, everything is relative....My own personal tastes are in SOMETHING IN THE AIR: Syd Barrett, Dr. Strangely Strange, Incredible String Band, Captain Beefheart, Nick Drake, even Amazing Blondel... In the scene in the youth hostel park, I chose a piece by Phil Ochs, dating further back, to the early 60's, the stubborn persistence, ten years later, of a "protest song". At the beginning of the party at Laure's, I could have chosen something more "rock", but the dissonant blues of Captain Beefheart is, in my memory, the time period's perfect pitch. 1971, 1972 is a fascinating time for music, very rich. Albums appeared in the mystical sense of the term. But you had to earn them, look for them, find them. It was much more than music; it was a sect. I listened a lot to what was called the Canterbury school, formed around the first set-up of Soft Machine, Robert Wyatt, Kevin Ayers, Daevid Allen, Mike Ratledge, etc. They're at the heart of the amorphous group that was created; Gong, Matching Mole, Caravan, Hatfield and the North. And of course the solo careers of some of them. Endorsed by among others Collège de Pataphysique, Soft Machine toured extensively throughout France and has incidentally had great influence on the French musical scene, who was uncomfortable with rock and got hooked on their more jazzy influences. The real music of the Left was really free jazz and not at all rock. Truth said, it was an exceptional time for it, Albert Ayler, Sun Ra, Art Ensemble from Chicago. They all performed and recorded in Paris. In film, I can't stand those patchworks where

fragments of songs are assembled. In SOMETHING IN THE AIR, songs aren't there to illustrate or to underline, they have a sort of independence, a parallel narrative of their own: they are an integral part of the story and I give them space to spread out in full length.

## **HEADING TOWARDS FILM**

After having given up painting, Gilles chooses film, with plenty of faith and with no restraint. It's a difficult, risky and intuitive road. Particularly as his points of references are still uncertain. The TV adaptations of *Maigret* for ORTF, to which his screenwriter father contributes, upsets him as much as the fantastic English film, already terribly obsolete. Confronted with a militant filmmaking, Gilles is forced to ask more sensitive questions. It is self-managed filmmaking, away from the industry's circuits and it radically rejects storytelling and even style. The political directives - from above - excludes everything else. You can't really say that he's a product of the time, he's more of a reflection, alas: dogmatic, self-sustaining, suffocating. At the opposite side: experimental film. The films by Philippe Garrel, *The Inner Scar*, for example. Garrel incarnates what attracted me to film. In France, he was the great abstract filmmaker of the times - which didn't stand in his way of, later, finding his way back to a narrative style with *L'Enfant secret*. The French Left closed in on itself, Garrel on the other hand was open to the world, to the counter-culture currents. At the end of SOMETHING IN THE AIR, Gilles understands why he has chosen film: the screen is the place where a memory can be reborn, where what has been lost may be found, where the world can be saved. Paintings can't accomplish this magical transformation, this resurrection, which doesn't exist in any other art form.

## A CONVERSATION WITH THE CAST

### WHAT IS YOUR OCCUPATION?

**Clément Métayer:**

*I just graduated from high school with a literature major (Bac L).*

**Carole Combes:**

*I graduated from CNED (distance education).*

**Mathias Renou:**

*I am making the film's "behind-the-scenes" programme.*

**Léa Rougeron :**

*I want to be an actress, I go to auditions.*

**Hugo Conzelmann:**

*I'm a sophomore college law student in Créteil.*

**Félix Armand:**

*I've recently travelled abroad a lot and at the moment I'm going to auditions in Paris.*

**India Salvor Menuiez:**

*I am part of an artist collective called LUCK YOU COLLECTIVE, based in New York.*

### DID YOU IDENTIFY WITH THE FILM'S YOUNG HEROES?

**Hugo Conzelmann:**

*Yes, even though in general I don't blow up cars. I quickly identified with my character, and when I received the screenplay I immediately knew. Actually, no one played a character study.*

**Clément Métayer:**

*I didn't feel like I was playing a character because Gilles resembles me, I draw, I play music, I would like to become a filmmaker, just like him. Olivier really nailed us. Everyone completely incarnates their roles. He gave us very little information, we were free to interpret the text. Carte blanche.*

### DID THE FILM ENLIGHTEN ASPECTS OF YOUR CHARACTERS?

**Clément Métayer:**

*I was unaware that the character would take the shape it did as I delivered my lines, as we didn't film the scenes in chronological order, I thought they would just be scenes piled onto each other. And yet, the characters came to life in the editing room.*

**Mathias Renou:**

*I feel that the personalities come to life from the very beginning of the film, even before the characters have evolved, it's very well made.*

**Félix Armand:**

*Alain falls in love with a girl and he goes off to explore this experience. Although, to begin with, he is very political, he then increasingly turns to his paintings.*

## **WHO ARE YOUR CHARACTERS?**

### **Hugo Conzelmann:**

*I play Jean-Pierre, who is part of Gilles' crowd. He has his convictions chained to his body, he makes sure to act according to these and follows his ideals through to the finish line. This might lead him to confusing times when he's recruited by an older activist, Rackham le Rouge. It's interesting to follow his course, the strength of his commitment.*

### **Clément Métayer:**

*I play Gilles, a high school student attracted to the arts, he's the most artistic member of the group. In the beginning he is as committed as the others but in due course he adds distance, his path diverges.*

### **Léa Rougeron:**

*I play Maria, a girl who becomes politicized through the group.*

### **Lola Creton:**

*I play Christine, a rather Cartesian character, who holes up with politics and hides her emotions.*

### **Félix Armand:**

*I play Alain, Gilles' friend. The film follows his evolution: he enlists in political life, only to later step back. He doesn't care about making mistakes, he is the impulsive one, he is daring and doesn't ask questions, in that sense he's the opposite of Gilles who does things by taking a step back and analysing everything.*

### **India Salvor Menuez:**

*At the beginning of her journey, Leslie's eyes are wide open and displays a typically American optimism. It's this illuminating vision that attracts Alain. Their love is dreamy and lasts up until the point where they're confronted with mortality and the disillusionment that follows.*

### **Carole Combes:**

*I play the character of Laure, Gilles' ideal love, his all-inspiring muse, even beyond death.*

## **HAVE YOU SEEN "COLD WATER"?**

### **Mathias Renou:**

*Yes. Olivier says himself that *Something in the Air* is an extension of *Cold Water*.*

### **Hugo Conzelmann:**

*The party scene resembles it a lot.*

### **Félix Armand:**

*I've seen *Carlos*, *Cold Water*, *Clean...* Olivier told me that it didn't make any difference, I just needed to be interested in the period.*

## **WHAT HAPPENS TO LAURE, WHEN SHE DISAPPEARS?**

### **Carole Combes:**

*She dies, that's the idea in the screenplay, and actually we shot a scene of my back when I fall, but it was left out.*

### **Clément Métayer:**

*In the end, perhaps Gilles seeks out the memory of Laure, beyond death, she guides him through London towards a cinema theatre.*

### **HOW DID YOU ASSIMILATE THIS ACTIVIST LANGUAGE, WHICH MIGHT SEEM QUITE ABSTRUSE THESE DAYS?**

**Mathias Renou:**

*Whenever we didn't understand, for example with regards to the general assembly scene, we were given pamphlets to read at lunch, before shooting, documents helping us to understand what we were talking about.*

**Clément Métayer:**

*It's very difficult to memorize dialogues stuffed with political references by heart, I didn't understand a thing. Olivier wanted us to know what we were talking about.*

**Hugo Conzelmann:**

*In the end, all this seems more like history than politics.*

**Félix Armand:**

*In order to understand the political language of the times, I watched a lot of interviews and old reports and above all, I read a dictionary.*

### **DID OLIVIER ASSAYAS EXPLAIN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ASPECT OF THE SCREENPLAY?**

**Clément Métayer:**

*He told me from the start that it had an autobiographical aspect, but I don't know in what way. He really wanted us to be ourselves, not necessarily express the time period, but rather our youth.*

**Mathias Renou:**

*Everything happened naturally, without that much instruction.*

**Félix Armand:**

*Olivier is very open but doesn't instruct much, on the set he let us do what we wanted. What he was looking for was the spontaneity of our age, even if we're not very cultivated.*

### **WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE SEVENTIES COSTUMES?**

**Clément Métayer:**

*The sweaters itched! I designed the psychedelic t-shirt that I wore and suggested the idea to Olivier.*

### **DOES THE STUDENT ACTIVISM IN THE FILM CORRESPOND AT ALL TO TODAY'S MOVEMENT?**

**Clément Métayer:**

*I find it touching to see young people demonstrating. CPE [student demonstrations against youth labour laws] was, in my recollection, the most violent mobilization. Well, we were in 8th grade at the time, so...*

## **DID YOU IMMERSE YOURSELVES INTO THE MUSIC OF THE PERIOD?**

**Hugo Conzelmann:**

*Starting from the shooting, we had already taken the plunge. Apart from that, I listened to Alpha Blondy at the time.*

**Clément Métayer:**

*For my part, I got into dubstep...! I didn't need to get into that spirit as I've always listened to Pink Floyd and Syd Barrett.*

## **THE CHARACTERS' COMMITMENT IS QUITE FAR FROM TODAY'S CYNICISM.**

**Clément Métayer:**

*In May '68, those young people had real ideas, while today the blockades are often a way of getting out of class to smoke joints.*

**Lola Creton:**

*In the film, they have more hope.*

**Mathias Renou:**

*They could tell themselves that everything was possible.*

**Félix Armand:**

*I think that that what Olivier likes about this period is that the youth was more committed, more radical in their actions (e.g. the demonstration at the beginning of the film, the act of defacing the walls of their high school, throwing Molotov cocktails), it was an enraged generation. It is very dear to him, especially with regards to how we are today.*

## **HOWEVER, THE FILM PORTRAYS THE CHANGES OF IDEALS FOLLOWING MAY '68.**

**Clément Métayer:**

*Which is the very point of setting the film during 2-3 years at the beginning of the 70's as opposed to May '68.*

**Hugo Conzelmann:**

*I didn't put that much thought into May '68, but more to the consequences. To the radicalization of commitment, political as well as artistic. In '68, those guys seemed to be having a very good time, while here it gets serious.*

## **HOW DID YOU APPROACH THE "NEW AGE" SCENES?**

**Clément Métayer:**

*I loved it, it was very funny. Our best memories are in Italy, where the film crew was much more relaxed than in Paris. We were traveling, there was a holiday feeling.*

**Carole Combes:**

*We were completely headfirst into the 70's, the set, the clothes, the atmosphere. But it was above all the music, in the hippie party scene, that immersed us completely.*

**DID YOU FEEL THE SAME AWE DURING THE SHOOTING, AS GILLES WHEN HE STEPS ONTO THE SET FOR THE FIRST TIME?**

**Clément Métayer:**

*I had never played in a film, it was very rewarding. The London scenes were the most fun to shoot, with the Nazi soldiers, the submarine and the sexual bomb.*

**IS THERE ANY ONE SCENE THAT MADE A SPECIAL IMPRESSION ON YOU?**

**Mathias Renou:**

*The scene in Laure's house, where the music perfectly blends with the atmosphere. It's the most powerful scene in my opinion.*

**Clément Métayer:**

*The electronic music during the London shoot (Kevin Ayers). Olivier chose it perfectly, we knew that with him it would be accurate.*

**WHICH SCENES WERE THE MOST DIFFICULT TO PLAY?**

**Clément Métayer:**

*Surely the intimate scene with Carole: I had an anxiety attack, had to take an anxiolytic, it was very difficult.*

**DID YOU DRAW FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES?**

**Clément Métayer:**

*I have a half brother who's 55 years old and who told me about May '68 and Richard Deshayes. Also, my father was very committed. So I wasn't completely at a loss.*

**Mathias Renou:**

*Olivier chose us because each of us love this period and he picked up on that, we weren't there, but we all wished we could have lived back then.*

**Clément Métayer:**

*Then again, I'm under the impression that the reality of that time period was different. Idealizing May '68 almost makes it commercial.*

**India Salvor Menuez:**

*I grew up thinking I would become a hippie, barefoot with flowers in my hair.*

*The first Nouvelle Vague film I remember is Godard's Masculin*

*Féminin, I saw it at the age of 13. I was blown away: I got a haircut and started making striped t-shirts. That was another side of the 60's, but it had such style!*

**Félix Armand:**

*It's a little cliché but when it comes to politics, I don't understand much at all, I apply the ostrich defense. Of course I'm interested, but I often find myself divided, I can't choose. I feel overloaded: in the 70's there weren't as many newspapers, whereas we, with the internet, are drowned in information, it's much more difficult to sort out. I agree with what Stéphane Hessel writes in Time for Outrage: Indignez-vous!.*

## OLIVIER ASSAYAS

### FILMOGRAPHY

- 1986 **DISORDER** (original title: "Désordre")  
1989 **WINTER'S CHILD** (original title: "L'Enfant de l'hiver")  
1991 **PARIS S'EVEILLE**  
1993 **A NEW LIFE** (original title: "Une nouvelle vie")  
1994 **COLD WATER** (original title: "L'Eau froide")  
1996 **IRMA VEP**  
1997 **HHH - UN PORTRAIT DE HOU HSIAO-HSIEN** (documentary)  
1999 **LATE AUGUST, EARLY SEPTEMBER** (original title: "Fin août, début septembre")  
2000 **LES DESTINEES** (original title: "Les destinées sentimentales")  
2002 **DEMONLOVER**  
2004 **CLEAN**  
2005 **NOISE** (music documentary)  
2006 **PARIS JE T'AIME** (short)  
2007 **BOARDING GATE**  
2007 **CHACUN SON CINÉMA** (short)  
2008 **ELDORADO** (documentary)  
2008 **SUMMER HOURS** (original title: "L'Heure d'été")  
2010 **CARLOS** (tv mini-series)

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1984 **HONG-KONG CINÉMA** (*co-written with Charles Tesson*)  
1990 **CONVERSATION AVEC BERGMAN** (*co-written with Stig Björkman*)  
1999 **ÉLOGE DE KENNETH ANGER**  
2005 **UNE ADOLESCENCE DANS L'APRÈS-MAI**  
2009 **PRÉSENCES**

## CAST

### CLÉMENT MÉTAYER

#### *Gilles*

Born August 25, 1993 in Marseille. He rides a skateboard since the age of 11, draws since forever, has been filming his friends and directing short films for 7 years now and on top of all that, plays the keyboard. Passionately interested in film and fresh out of high school with a literary diploma to show for.

### LOLA CRÉTON

#### *Christine*

Born December 16, 1993 in Paris. Lola began her acting career at the age of 10 in the medium length feature *Imago*. She landed her first major role in *Trouble at Timpetill*. In 2011, she is cast in Valérie Mréjen and Bertrand Schefer's *Iris in Bloom* and plays the lead in Mia Hansen-Løve's *Goodbye First Love*.

### FÉLIX ARMAND

#### *Alain*

Born May 27, 1991 in Paris. He graduated from high school with a literary major in 2011 and has travelled a lot since then. He has been interested in music ever since he can remember and he directed a music video in Los Angeles. He wants to be in acting.

### CAROLE COMBES

#### *Laure*

Born November 1, 1992 in Paris. Passionate about film and fashion, dreams of being an actress. She studied at Cours Florent in 2010 and *SOMETHING IN THE AIR* was her first audition.

### INDIA SALVOR MENEZ

#### *Leslie*

Born May 8, 1993 in Brooklyn and graduated Valedictorian in 2011. She went on to study at Hunter College but has recently decided to take a break from her studies for a while. She co-founded the artist collective LUCK YOU COLLECTIVE, based in New York. She appears in art films in the US and elsewhere.

### HUGO

#### CONZELMANN

#### *Jean-Pierre*

Born On July 13, 1993 in the Paris suburb of Suresnes, he is currently a sophomore law student in Créteil. Passionate about politics since the age of 13. Committed. He would like to finish his studies and work in law or politics.

### MATHIAS RENO

#### *Vincent*

Born On May 1992 in Paris. Passionate about film. He has written and directed three short films. He would like to become a director.

**LÉA ROUGERON**

*Maria*

Born On March 21, 1993 in the Paris suburb of Le Chesnay. Dreams of becoming an actress. She writes screenplays and would like to direct films. She has already directed short films.

## CAST CREDITS

Gilles **Clément MÉTAYER**

Christine **Lola CRÉTON**

Alain **Félix ARMAND**

Laure **Carole COMBES**

Leslie **India SALVOR MENUEZ**

Jean-Pierre **Hugo CONZELMANN**

Vincent **Mathias RENO**

Maria **Léa ROUGERON**

Rackam le Rouge **Martin LOIZILLON**

With the participation of **André MARCON, Johnny FLYNN** and **Dolorès CHAPLIN**

Security guard / Coach **Laurent RAMACCIOTTI**

Principal **Philippe PAIMBLANC**

French teacher **Alain GLUCKSTEIN**

Philosophy teacher **Jean-François RAGOT**

Jean-René **Simon-Pierre BOIREAU**

Activist filmmakers **Lionel DRAY, Guillaume SAUREL**

Porc-Épic Collective **Jeanne CANDEL, Adrien LAMANDE**

Carl **Paul SPERA**

High School student activists **Félix de GIVRY, Jean GARREAU**

Activist **Louise CHENNEVIÈRE**

Supervisor **Louis DUNBAR**

PSU activist **Jean-Christophe QUENON**

Security guards **Yannick ABIVEN, Jonathan DANNY, Colin DELEAU**

Union activist in Ardèche **Noël NAHON**

Gérard **Manuel MAZAUDIER**

Gérard's brother **Maxime JULIA**

Community **Calypso VALOIS, Roman KOLINKA, Blanche CLUZET**

Enzo **Marco di GIORGO**

Amie d'Enzo **Anna Gaia MARCHIORO**

Spectator 1 **Frederico MANFREDI**

Spectator 2 **Francesco FORMICHETTI**

Jean-Serge **Sylvain JACQUES**

Art teacher **Denis PERUS**

ORTF employee **Elizabeth MAZEV**

Board of screenwriters **Louis DONVAL, Patrick BORDES**

Jean Richard's fan **Sylvain SAVARD**

Assistant on moped **Luc BRICAULT**

Andrew **Rodney RECOR**

## CREW

Written and directed by **Olivier ASSAYAS**  
Producers **Nathanaël KARMITZ** and **Charles GILLIBERT**  
Co-Producer **Sylvie BARTHET**  
Associate Producer **Marin KARMITZ**  
Director of Photography **Éric GAUTIER, AFC**  
Editors **Luc BARNIER** and **Mathilde VAN DE MOORTELE**  
Production Design **François-Renaud LABARTHE**  
Sound **Nicolas CANTIN**  
Sound Editors **Nicolas CANTIN** and **Nicolas MOREAU**  
Mix **Olivier GOINARD**  
Costume Design **Jurgen DOERING**  
Hair & Make-up **Stéphanie AZNAREZ** and **Aurélien RAMEAU**  
Drawings/ Paintings **Diane SORIN**  
Casting Director **Antoinette BOULAT**  
Assistant Directors **Delphine HEUDE** and **Valérie ROUCHER**  
Camera Assistants **Sarah DUBIEN, Ronan BOUDIER** and **Boris LEVY**  
Key Grip **Gérard BUFFARD**  
Gaffer **François BERROIR**  
Sound Assistant **Olivier GRANDJEAN**  
Production Manager **Benjamin HESS**  
Line producers **Sarah LERES** and **Anais SUBRA**  
Produced by **MK2**  
In co-production with **France 3 Cinéma** and **Vortex Sutra**

With the participation of **France Télévisions Canal + Ciné +** and **CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE** with the support of **La Région ÎLE-DE-FRANCE** in association with **LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 5**

Executive Producers / Italy **INDIGO Films**  
**Nicola GIULIANO**  
**Francesca CIMA**  
**Carlotta CALORI**  
Executive Producer **Viola PRESTIERI**  
Production Manager **Giuseppe DI GANGI**  
Executive Producers / UK **Poisson Rouge Pictures** and **Christophe GRANIER-DEFERRE**  
Executive Producers / Netherlands **Orange Film** and **Erwin GODSCHALK**

## MUSIC

### **TERRAPIN**

*(Syd Barrett)*

**SYD BARRETT**

### **GREEN ONIONS**

*(Booker T. Jones / Al Jackson / Steve Cropper)*

**BOOKERT & THE MG'S**

### **STRINGS IN THE EARTH AND**

### **AIR**

*(Ivan Pawle / James Joyce)*

**DR STRANGELY STRANGE**

### **BALLAD OF WILLIAM WORTHY**

*(Phil Ochs)*

**JOHNNY FLYNN**

### **FANTASIA LINDUM /**

### **CELESTIAL LIGHT**

*(John David Gladwin)*

**AMAZING BLONDEL**

### **BRANSLE FOR**

### **MY LADY'S DELIGHT**

### **QUEEN OF SCOTS**

*(Edward Baird)*

**AMAZING BLONDEL**

### **KNOW**

*(Nick Drake)*

**NICK DRAKE**

### **ABBA ZABA**

*(Don Van Vliet)*

**CAPTAIN BEEFHEART**

**& HIS MAGIC BAND**

### **AIR**

*(Mike Heron)*

**INCREDIBLE STRING BAND**

### **WHY ARE**

### **WE SLEEPING**

*(Kevin Ayers / Michael Ratledge / Robert Wyatt)*

**SOFT MACHINE**

### **SUNRISE OF**

### **THE THIRD SYSTEM**

*(Schulze / Froese / Franke / Schroeder)*

**TANGERINE DREAM**

### **FARE THEE WELL,**

### **SWEET MALLY**

*(Robin Williamson)*

**ROBIN WILLIAMSON**

### **DECADENCE**

*(Kevin Ayers)*

**KEVIN AYERS**

**JOHNNY FLYNN** is a British writer, singer, musician and actor. He has released two albums (*A Larum*, 2008 and *Been Listening*, 2010). In *SOMETHING IN THE AIR*, he performs one of Phil Ochs' songs written at the beginning of the 1960's.

CONCERT SCENE: The **AFTER ME** band was set up by Jean-Marc Montera, especially for *SOMETHING IN THE AIR*. Montera wrote the song *After Me*, which he performs live for the film.



## LITERARY QUOTES

### **LES HABITS NEUFS DU PRÉSIDENT MAO**

Simon Leys  
*(publisher Champ Libre 1971)*

### **I AM 25**

Gregory Corso  
excerpt from GASOLINE  
*(publisher City Lights Books, 1958)*

## **ÉCRITS**

Kasimir Malevitch  
*(publisher Champ Libre 1975)*  
**LA VÉRITABLE SCISSION  
DANS L'INTERNATIONALE**  
*official Internationale Situationniste  
flyer*  
*(publisher Champ Libre 1972)*

## FILM CLIPS

**JOE HILL** directed by Widerberg

**LAOS, IMAGES SAUVÉES** directed  
by Madeleine Riffaud

**LE COURAGE DU PEUPLE** directed  
by Jorge Sanjines

## DRAWINGS AND PAINTINGS

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