

SYNOPSIS

Mathieu is a young and talented black box analyst on a mission to solve the reason behind the deadly crash of a brand new aircraft. Yet, when the case is closed by authorities, Mathieu cannot help but sense there is something wrong with the evidence. As he listens to the tracks again, he starts detecting some seriously disturbing details. Could the tape have been modified? Going against his boss' orders, Mathieu begins his own rogue investigation – an obsessional and dangerous quest for truth that will quickly threaten far more than his career...

Interview with Yann Gozlan

WHERE DID THE IDEA FOR THE FILM COME FROM?

With a double personal fascination. Fascination first of all for the very specialised world of aeronautics and civil aviation. This universe, which in my eyes is tremendously cinematic, with colossal financial stakes, where divergent interests (aircraft manufacturers, airlines, pilots, etc.) coexist, seemed to me to be an original and fascinating setting for a film. Then there is a fascination for the black box, the flight recorder itself - these famous black boxes that the newspapers constantly tell us about without us really knowing what they are. Often placed at the rear of the aircraft (the part generally best preserved on impact with the ground), there are two types: the FDR (Flight Data Recorder) which records the technical parameters of the flight and the CVR (Cockpit Voice Recorder) which records all the sounds and discussions between the pilots in the cockpit. The first flight recorders date back to the 1930s. Then, they contained photographic film onto which the flight instrument information was projected.

This photosensitive film was locked in a dark chamber, called a "black box" because it was lightproof. This name stuck as flight recorders today are orange with reflective white stripes, to make them easier to spot among the debris ... In my opinion, the black box holds a special place in the collective unconscious insofar as it holds the key that can explain the chain of events that led to the tragedy. Analysing the black boxes and, more particularly, the CVR (the recording of the last words of a crew before the crash) intrigued me as a dramatic issue.

Through my interest in it, I discovered the existence of the BEA (the French Bureau of Enquiry and Analysis for Civil Aviation Safety), an organisation responsible for investigating aircraft incidents and accidents. I wanted to enter this microcosm, to discover its codes and to share them with the public. For credibility and realism, I did a lot of research and met various people involved in this field: airline pilots, engineers, BEA investigators... Inspired by these meetings and discussions, I had the desire to write a story about a complex crash investigation. Although I was inspired by real cases, I didn't want to make a simple documentary or reenact an air disaster that had happened. My ambition was more to discuss the new issues that are about to revolutionise civil aviation: namely, generalised pilot assistance and the progressive automation of cockpits through artificial intelligence. Writing the screenplay took time: in addition to the necessary research, the tortuous plot was tricky. But diving into this universe has been fascinating!

YOU MAKE IT VERY EASY FOR US TO GET INTO THIS HIGHLY SPECIALISED FIELD... HOW DID YOU ACHIEVE THIS?

Perhaps, just by trying to be as precise as possible. Viewers need to believe the truth of what they are watching. It doesn't matter how much technical jargon is used in the dialogue, as long as the audience understands what is at stake in the scene. In addition, during the editing process, I realised that what might appear to be technical in writing took on a different 'colour' when filmed. It is the power of the embodiment of images.

THE FILM IS DIRECTLY CONNECTED TO REALITY. THE FILM DISCUSSES TERRORISM BUT ALSO THE CONTROVERSY CAUSED BY THE BOEING 737 MAX A YEAR AGO...

On the issue of pilot assistance, illustrated in the film by the MHD storyline, current events have caught up with us. In the spring of 2019, as the script was being finalised and I was beginning to prepare it, I learned that most countries had decided - a rare occurrence in aviation history - to ban all Boeing 737 Max aircraft from their airspace: the aircraft's pilot-assistance system, in this case the aircraft's anti-stall software, was said to have overridden the actions of the pilots and to have been the cause of two crashes in less than six months, the first in Indonesia and the second in Ethiopia.

This question of the dangers of the extreme sophistication of aeroplanes fascinates me because, in my opinion, it goes beyond the strict framework of aeronautics and refers to an issue which is universal and more topical than ever: the conflict between man and machine as well as the hold of technology has on our lives.

FROM THE BEGINNING, YOU LIKE TO CREATE A FEELING OF UNEASE BY TURNING TENSION ON THE VIEWER...

For this film, I wanted to make the public aware of the issues I have just mentioned, by treating them with the weapons of the type of cinema that has always fascinated me, Hitchcock or Pakula, cinema that involves the viewer by playing with their intelligence and their nerves. Hence my desire to make the most breath-taking and captivating story possible.

A real paranoid thriller set against the backdrop of a sensitive investigation that serves as a trigger for the conflict between Mathieu and his wife, Noémie. My ambition was to combine the intimate and the spectacular, the x-ray of a couple in crisis and the description of the world of aeronautics, romantic relationships and professional issues.

THE DEVICE FOR OPENING THE BLACK BOX RECOVERED FROM THE CRASHED PLANE IS A FASCINATING SCENE.

I don't think this had ever been shown in the cinema. There was a risk of reducing a scene like this to something purely technical and trivial. On the contrary, I wanted to bring a mystery and an unfamiliarity to the scene. My approach was to film it as if it were an open-

heart operation, trying to create a hypnotic atmosphere with the sounds in the lab, the looks of the various people behind the glass, the breathing of the technicians wearing their protective masks... In reality, when a black box is opened, there is a whole ceremony, a ritual that I found fascinating and that I tried to transcribe as faithfully as possible onto the screen.

Several people were present at the opening, including the manufacturer's representative, the airline's representative, the investigators, of course, as well as a CID police officer responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the operations, as well as a police officer. Opening a black box is an extremely delicate and meticulous operation: an impressive number of layers and sub-layers of protection of various kinds must be removed before the memory card is extracted, taking great care not to damage it.

MATHIEU IS LITERALLY OBSESSED BY THE QUEST FOR TRUTH ...

At the heart of the story, conspiracy theory and the quest for truth constantly clash. This obsession with the truth is, in my eyes, the central theme of the film. Through the character of Mathieu, I wanted to show how the path that leads to the truth can be complex, obsessive and, above all, destructive.

A TRUTH THE PROTAGONIST HUNTS WITH ULTRA SCIENTIFIC AUDITORY WEAPONS, BUT ALSO A LOT OF INTUITION. THIS MIXTURE OF OBJECTIVITY AND SUBJECTIVITY IS THE HALLMARK OF ALL SCIENTISTS, ISN'T IT?

Yes, and that's the whole problem when one of the two characteristics takes precedence over the other.

This is a bit like what happens to Mathieu in the film. Don't his intuition and his subjectivity blind him? Isn't his tenacity, his obstinacy leading him in the wrong direction? Mathieu is an excellent technician, meticulous and professional. But he is also a fragile, unsociable and withdrawn character. He has quirks, he suffers from tinnitus and hyperacusis. We feel that his relationship to the world is complicated, that he is perpetually on a hair trigger. He is someone who lives locked in his bubble, in his theories and his obsessions. But he would like to be listened to because he thinks he's the only one who can hear what others can't. This is the paradox.

THE SCENE IN THE SHED WHERE THE PLACES OF THE VICTIMS IN THE CABIN ARE DRAWN AND NUMBERED IS PARTICULARLY STRIKING: MATHIEU IS LITERALLY PROJECTED INTO THE PLANE...

Throughout the film, my aim was mainly to follow the protagonist's point of view. We follow Mathieu step by step throughout his investigation, sharing his fears and doubts. This

approach gives the feeling of identification but also of paranoia and danger that I wanted to create... My bias towards subjectivity is taken to its climax in the scene you mention, in the hangar when Mathieu, facing the rest of the cabin, imagines what could have happened a few minutes before the crash: he projects himself into the aircraft during the flight. What he imagines is then embodied on the screen ... This scene, which I consider essential, represented a staging challenge because it shifts the film into a mental dimension that flirts with a fantastic atmosphere that I hope will captivate the viewer. By plunging into the character's psyche, the film asks the viewer. Is Mathieu on the right track? Is what he discovers the result of scientific reasoning or of total subjectivity? Or even a type of madness? There is still a part of uncertainty that I like.

TELL US ABOUT THE FILM'S OPENING SCENE...

This shot was outlined in the very first version of the script. I wanted the camera to start from the cockpit dashboard and then move backwards in a long continuous movement, showing us the different cabins of the plane before sneaking into the tail of the aircraft and approaching the famous black box. I absolutely wanted the opening of the film to be shot in sequence for several reasons. Firstly, because the sequence shot, by its very nature, gives a feeling of "real time" that I wanted the viewer to feel. Secondly, because a shot like this offers total readability, making it possible to clearly situate the black box in the plane as well as the various a priori innocuous elements that take place in the cabin just before the accident. Finally, because the viewer will relive these few minutes before the crash several times during the film, each time in a fragmented way and from different angles.

IN BLACK BOX, WE SEE PIERRE NINEY WHOM YOU DIRECTED IN A PERFECT MAN...

I had very good memories of filming this with Pierre where I was impressed by his talent. I was very keen to work with him again on this new project which was very close to my heart and for which I had started to write the first drafts of the story long before.

A PERFECT MAN...

Pierre is a very technical and meticulous actor and is able to bring different colours and minute nuances to each take. I particularly like his rigor, precision, and sensitivity. Since I started writing BLACK BOX, Pierre was the only one I had in mind for the character. So, I was very happy when he accepted the role. With hindsight, I can see how much complexity, humanity he brought to the character of Mathieu. I find the way in which he manages to embody the internal conflicts and the torments which trouble the character astounding.

MATHIEU IS CREDIBLE UP TO THE POINT WHERE HE HIMSELF QUESTIONS HIS OWN CONCLUSIONS. AT THIS POINT, WE ARE CONSTANTLY TORN BETWEEN A FIRST MOVE WHICH IS TO FOLLOW HIM AND A SECOND WHICH TELLS US THAT, JUST MAYBE, HE IS WRONG...

It was important for the viewer to doubt the protagonist. What if Mathieu got it wrong? Has he tipped over to the side of conspiracy without realising it? Is he right to doubt his wife? Did Noémie really accelerate the certification of the ATRIAN 800 out of pure professional ambition, or is Mathieu losing all lucidity, consumed by paranoia? I thought it would be interesting to create a double action: forcing the viewer to identify with Mathieu while at the same time, as the film progresses, leading the viewer to doubt the protagonist's theory and even his mental health! Overall, I wanted the viewer to question and doubt all the main characters in the film.

NOEMIE AND MATHIEU MAKE A VERY MODERN COUPLE, UNITED BUT ALSO ALMOST COMPETITORS...

They come from the same school, ENAC (the national school of civil aviation) where they met, and they work in the same sector. While Mathieu and Noémie have different personalities, their partnership was built on a common ambition: professional success. I found it interesting to present this young couple through the prism of work - a couple who, as soon as they are alone, only talk about work! When the film starts, we feel a certain imbalance between them: Noémie, who is responsible for certifying planes, gets a promotion, while Mathieu is sidelined in his work. In addition to this imbalance, there is a feeling of inbreeding to their alliance that can easily lead to conflicts of interest. They have friends in the same circle who are likely to aggravate these tensions. I was interested in the paranoia and mistrust that gradually set in within the couple. From a directing point of view, this conflict makes it possible to create immediate tension with an economy of means: everything is based on the ambiguity of a look, a word, a smile or a gesture... They are a couple who do not understand each other. She hides things from him because she fears his reactions, he reacts because he feels that she is hiding something from him. This misunderstanding will be their downfall.

LOU DE LAAGE IS VERY SURPRISING IN THE ROLE OF NOEMIE.

Initially, the role was to be played by another actor who decided to leave the project a week before the shoot. The situation was not as easy, as you can imagine. But it was bad for good because in hindsight, I'm not sure the other actor would have suited the role. Lou replaced the actor at short notice and impressed me with her work and her talent. She immersed herself body and soul into the role and was literally transformed. Unlike Mathieu, his character is very comfortable in society. Noémie occupies a position of high

responsibility, she is in the process of rising through the ranks; she is a strong, bright, woman who is in control, and she has to navigate a competitive, predominantly male environment. To embody her character, Lou had to part with her youthful side and exude a natural authority. I got the idea for this strict and smooth bob haircut that makes it look cool and professional. I wanted a somewhat Hitchcockian image to emerge from her appearance. She had to appear mysterious, opaque so that she could be doubted. In addition, I asked her to speak quickly in certain scenes so that we get the feeling she was always one step ahead of her interlocutors when she spoke. Like Pierre, Lou comes from the theatre. All this pressure suited her. She had fun with it. I am very happy with her interpretation, which exceeded my expectations. Today, I can't imagine anyone other than her in the role.

THE APPEARANCE OF ANDRE DUSSOLIER IN THE ROLE OF RENIER, THE BOSS OF THE BEA, CONSIDERABLY STRENGTHENS THE CREDIBILITY AND POWER OF THIS AGENCY. HE IS BOTH OPEN TO THE PROPOSALS THAT MATHIEU PUTS TO HIM BUT REMAINS TOUGH. THE PASSAGE WHERE THE TWO OF THEM DISCUSS A SNIPPET OF RECORDED CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PILOTS IN THE COCKPIT, NITPICKING, ONE ON THE TERM EMERGENCY DELTA, THE OTHER ON THAT OF EMERGENCY DESCENT, SHOWS JUST HOW DELICATE THE EXERCISE IS...

There is something archaeological about this investigation. It is from the remains, in this case here of a degraded recording, that one must reconstitute a whole, an overview, a truth. But the CVR is incomplete and distorted, so it has to be interpreted to fill in the gaps in order to find the truth. The profession of acoustician is interesting in this respect. These technicians analyse sound recordings which are often of poor quality and where only snippets are audible; they often have to concentrate on micro-details at the risk of getting lost. And it was interesting that Mathieu ran that risk. André Dussolier, who plays the director of the BEA, naturally brings a figure of authority while at the same time bringing a paternal, almost affectionate side, a little bit of light, which did not exist in the script. He appreciates Mathieu but he sees him derail a little; he thinks he's headed in the wrong direction.

YOU SHOT PART OF THE FILM AT LE BOURGET. WAS IT IMPORTANT TO YOU?

It was essential for me to shoot at Le Bourget. On the one hand, for the sake of realism, insofar as the premises of the BEA are located there as well as the air show, which is the setting for the film's epilogue. And on the other hand, because this place, rarely filmed in cinema, with its various hangars, its vanishing lines, its tarmac and its large, monumental buildings, brings a specific visual identity to the film.

TELL US ABOUT THE EDITING...

Apart from one or two scenes that were moved, there were no changes to the chronology of the script. But the first cut was long, so we had to tighten and shorten several scenes while maintaining the plot twists that I wanted ...

During the listening sequences where Mathieu tries to analyse the content of the CVR in great detail, with the editor, we often went for a series of close-ups which fragment the space and the action where a wide shot would have immediately given a clear vision of the situation. We needed to visually translate the idea that Mathieu is trying to put together a puzzle. It is through the accumulation of details that the character will be able to reconstruct a whole, an overview. It is as if you have to look at a set of close-ups to imagine what the wide shot is, the out-of-frame of the opening sequence shot, the overall picture. At the same time, we wanted to increase the wide shots in the film. No simple establishing shots but graphic shots of undisturbed places that overwhelm the character, as for example in the hangar scene with the cabin... The closeness embraces the obsession, the wide the loneliness of the (anti) hero. The wide shot can also refer to an omniscient point of view, that of the film, which would collide with that of the main character, which is narrower, more obsessive, represented by close shots... as if to fuel the risk that Mathieu is wrong, that the wide and the close do not really belong together, are not united by the same point of view.

THE MUSIC, BY PHILIPPE ROMBI, IS VERY SYMPHONIC AND PERFECTLY ECHOES MATHIEU'S SOLITUDE...

I had wanted to work with Philippe for a long time. I have always been a big fan of his music, especially the scores he composed for Francois Ozon. So, I was very happy for Philippe to be working on BLACK BOX.

I have a passion for film scores and a penchant for orchestral music. And I like a theme to emerge and be developed. Philippe worked in this way by sometimes adding textures which were a little more electronic. The music is very modulated, sometimes discreet, sometimes lyrical like in the last scene at the Paris Air Show.

BOTH ENGAGED IN AN INFERNAL SPIRAL, THE MATHIEU IN A PERFECT MAN AND THE MATHIEU IN BLACK BOX EXUDE THE SAME DEAF MELANCHOLY. IS IT YOUR BRAND?

I don't know. In any case, both pay a high price. Looking back, I realise that I am attracted to the same type of characters: beings caught in a spiral, (anti) -heroes who struggle with themselves and who end up totally losing control by following their obsessions to the end.

Interview with Pierre Niney

SO, YOU GOT BACK TOGETHER WITH YANN GOZLAN FIVE YEARS AFTER A PERFECT MAN...

After this first experience, we knew we would want to work together again. Throughout this time, Yann and I stayed in touch, we spoke to each other regularly.

DID YOU FOLLOW THE WRITING OF BLACK BOX?

No. Yann only made me read his script once it was finished. The world of aeronautics and this character of the acoustician were very new to him. However, I found very personal themes there, in particular this tension that he infuses in each of his films.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THIS PROJECT?

I liked the precision of the mechanics that lead Mathieu, my character, to find the truth; the rigour of the treatment that never neglects entertainment; the paranoid and nervous side of the subject, the surprises in the script that keep us constantly on the edge of our seats; and I also liked the story of this couple that will implode because of this investigation. I liked this mixture of ambition, rigour, and generosity. You never fall into something a little too harsh. Yann is a great cinephile and I love it: he has the art of using what we all love in American cinema by putting it to use with a very French elegance.

IS AERONAUTICS A WORLD THAT WAS FAMILIAR TO YOU?

Plane crashes, the mystery of the famous black boxes, whether we find them or not, have always fascinated me - we all tend to develop a somewhat morbid voyeurism in the face of such events. But I had no idea about the power, manipulation and money games that go on in this field. As for the profession of acoustician, it was completely unknown to me.

YOU ARE AN ACTOR BUT ALSO BECOME AN AUTHOR AND DIRECTOR. ARE YOU TEMPTED TO INTERVENE IN THE WRITING OF A SCENE OFFERED TO YOU? WAS THIS THE CASE FOR THIS FILM?

I see this profession as a whole; I see us as storytellers whose mission is to tell stories as best they can - it's a craft - and this naturally led me to want to act but also to write for myself or for others. This more global vision of the profession interests me but never encroaches on the work I do with a director. They have their vision. I respect this vision and I just like to dive into the universe and the method of someone, body and soul. On the other hand, when Yann asks me for my opinion, I won't hesitate to imagine and propose one or two scenes that seem to me to accentuate the character's paranoia and the ambiguity in

which the viewer must find himself. He tells me yes or no; in this case, he liked proposals on BLACK BOX and we added some scenes and details that I submitted to him.

TELL US MORE...

Yann likes to dig into his characters and so do I. He is very open to discussion and always ready to improve a text. It's a moment we both love. The fact that I scratch Victor Pollock's car was an addition, for example. I also really liked the attraction between Noémie and Mathieu, who are very talented people, brilliant and formidable in their respective fields but who nevertheless struggle to understand each other, in part because of the slightly anti-social character of Mathieu.

IT IS QUICKLY UNDERSTOOD THAT THE CHARACTER HAS FAILURES: HIS PILOT FATHER DESERTED HIM, HE WAS NOT ABLE TO BECOME A PILOT HIMSELF DUE TO A VISUAL PROBLEM ...

It's great to work on human characters, with their intimate flaws and weaknesses. It's a delicate balance that Yann masters perfectly: we never dwell on it, we do not get an explanation of the script or in something maudlin, but we know enough to empathise with him. Mathieu doesn't really have a simple relationship with people: he is a perfectionist and above all is very obsessive. It is a very important qualifier to characterise him, and it is also an essential element in Yann's cinema. We talked a lot together about the character's obsession with the truth, about these people who stubbornly, who get bogged down and go further and further, whether they want to or not. Once they find this truth, and whatever it takes, they don't want to let go. They remind me of those whistle blowers who are becoming more and more vocal today on various issues. And who often find themselves even on the dock despite the truth of the scandal they are exposing! This is another aspect of the film that interested me.

MATHIEU IS ALMOST CONSTANTLY TANGLED BETWEEN THE SCIENTIFIC RIGOR OF HIS TRAINING AND THE INTUITION WHICH DRIVES HIM TO SEEK THE SOLUTION OFF THE BEATEN PATH.

He has a vision and lacks evidence, hence the doubt that he sows around him. I really like this juxtaposition of the rational with the irrational. Instinct is irrational and yet it is the basis of huge police and scientific discoveries.

I find that there is a certain correspondence in this duality with cinema and the acting profession: as in mathematics, the actor needs a certain technique, he must have a sense of rhythm, know how to place himself in front of the camera; however, without instinct, you never find the spark.

YOUR CHARACTER, MATHIEU VASSEUR, HAS THE SAME NAME AS IN A PERFECT MAN - WHY DID YOU MAKE THIS CHOICE?

Yann wanted it: maybe he wanted to keep with me from film to film something of the essence of this first Mathieu. I believe it is also an avatar of himself. An Antoine Doinel of the thriller. Yann never really explained this to me despite my questions. But I like it. It was both very inspiring and a bit of a mystery.

HOW DID YOU PREPARE THIS MATHIEU VASSEUR?

I come from the theatre, I like to work upstream. The script, the important choices on the scenes... It's good to have solved most of the questions you have with the director, including details like sitting or standing in a scene, before you get to the set. I also watched *THE CONVERSATION* by Francis Ford Coppola, at Yann's request. I did not know this great movie and I loved the character of Gene Hackman who obsessively listens to the same audio tapes with his headphones on. It was very inspiring. And then, of course, I spent a lot of time with the people at the BEA, asking hundreds and hundreds of questions. There, I ended up finding an investigator with a profile similar to Mathieu's. From there, as is often the case, I worked a bit like a journalist: I followed him, talked to him and asked him for permission to film him so that I could be inspired by his gestures, his way of working, his speed of execution. The profession of acoustician is very technical, it was important to be able to reproduce things fairly precisely.

FILMING PEOPLE WHO INSPIRE YOU FOR A ROLE, IS IT A HABIT?

Yes. When it comes to such special professions, I need to immerse myself, again, like a journalist. I needed to film his hands on the keyboard, to see how fast they moved, to study his concentration on this or that task ... It's a little embarrassing to ask someone if you can film them especially since acousticians are rather lonely people, I had to negotiate a bit but I explained that it was for my research and he understood.

DID YOU HAVE TO DO ANY SPECIAL PHYSICAL TRAINING?

I wanted Mathieu to have something quite dry, quite nervous, so I lost a little weight to look skinnier. But I also worked on his posture: Mathieu is someone who spends a lot of time in front of his computer, he doesn't necessarily stand very straight. He is not at ease socially and always apologises for being there, which makes him move in a particular way. These are elements that I love to imagine and create. In his case, the look, already fundamental in cinema, was even more so. In front of his screen, Mathieu's look had to be both particularly expressive, but without being too much either. There was a real challenge there. With Yann, we spent a lot of time on certain shots trying to find the right reaction to a new

sound he hears, looking in several directions to give a wide range of nuances in the editing. It was very meticulous work but crucial for the precise drama of the film.

TELL US ABOUT FILMING.

It was painstaking, very precise, sometimes even quite technical work which left me physically and mentally exhausted. I shot a film that took me to Antarctica and involved me diving with sharks (THE ODYSSEY by Jérôme Salle, 2016), another about firefighters (THROUGH THE FIRE by Frédéric Tellier, 2018), and none have made me as tired as BLACK BOX. The nervousness, the questioning and the paranoia in my character really affected me.

HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO FIND THIS TENSION ARRIVING EVERY DAY ON THE SET?

It is already present in the strength of the situations proposed: for Mathieu, it is a question of understanding why three hundred people died in the crash, and of projecting himself as far as possible into this questioning. It was all the easier with Yann because the script is well written, and he puts in the resources in terms of the set: the mere fact of stepping on the scene already helps with the immersion; you are in the story being told. There are also a lot of things that I steal from Yann directly (and discreetly). His characters and films are like him. Sometimes there's nothing better than observing the source.

DO YOU REPEAT ON THE SET?

No. We were already prepared beforehand. On the other hand, I did a lot of reading between takes with Lou so it was easier to believe in the couple's intimacy. It's hard to tell the story of intimacy in the cinema, so it was important to build something solid between our two characters from the start.

IT WAS THROUGH YOU THAT LOU CAME INTO THE FILM...

This is the magic of cinema! When I saw the script, I instinctively said to myself, "If the actress who was going to play her backs out, it would be great to get Lou." And that's what happened. Lou is wonderful in this role! She has a hardness, a femme fatale element but also a super seductive side that we have never seen in her before. The first time I saw her with this new haircut and this suit, I thought: "Yann made the right choice, she is going to be great, no one other than her could play such a convincing Noémie! ». I really wanted to work with Lou on a set. She and I shot our first movie roles together. It was our first pleasures of filming, our first emotions, a great memory.

YOU HAVE NEVER SHOT WITH ANDRE DUSSOLLIER BEFORE...

Beyond the density that his filmography gives to the character of Rénier, André succeeds both in being this entity that impresses Mathieu - a boss that you don't want to disappoint or betray -, and a benevolent, almost paternal presence. On a set, he is almost obsessively precise. We got on very well, Yann, him and me.

THERE ARE AMAZING SHOTS IN BLACK BOX ...

It's cinema with a capital C, with some very beautiful formal inventions: it's very hard to set up a sequence shot like the one at the beginning, in the plane, where we go from the cockpit to the black boxes in the tail of the plane; or to go, in the blink of an eye, from a plane's carcass in a hangar to a cabin full of passengers! I like Yann's cinema because it is complete, sensory - this shot in the pond where Mathieu is going to dive -, intellectual, paranoid ...

WE WILL SEE YOU SOON IN FOUR FILMS, BLACK BOX, LOVERS BY NICOLE GARCIA, OSS 117, RED ALERT IN BLACK AFRICA BY NICOLAS BEDOS AND GOLIATH BY FREDERIC TELLIER. FOR SOME TIME, WE GET THE SENSE THAT YOU ARE FILMING AT A MORE SUSTAINED PACE...

It's just the luck of the draw, even if 2020 has perhaps been a richer year than usual. I enjoy doing this job, telling stories.

Interview with Lou de Laâge

TELL US ABOUT HOW YOU CAME TO BE IN THE FILM...

Yann and I met a week before the start of filming. Pierre Niney, whom I know well, had called me the day before: "Lou," he told me, "we have a problem with the film. I'm sending you the script. Can you read it tonight and give me your answer... tonight?" That was fast.

WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION ON READING IT?

I knew, like everyone else, that black boxes existed but nothing about them. I thought, amused: "So, I am offered a role at the last moment on a subject that I know nothing about, with very technical lines... ».

But the script was beautifully written, extremely clear, I could see that Yann knew his subject inside out and the character of Noémie was new to me. I said yes. In the end, it's quite good that things happen this way: we don't have time to think, to ask the wrong questions, we have to move forward immediately.

YOU HAD NEVER PLAYED THIS TYPE OF WOMAN BEFORE.

That's what I liked of course. There was something to explore, if only physically, in Noémie. She is a working girl, quite cold in appearance, the opposite of roles I have played before or what I am like in real life. Besides, when Yann and I saw each other for the first time, I think he must have experienced a feeling of panic. But we spoke and he understood that I was going to enter his universe.

WAS THE HAIRCUT YOUR DECISION?

Yann thought that Noémie should have short hair. Having worn my hair very short before, I knew that instead of appearing more mature, harder and almost scathing like the character is, it would, on the contrary, make me look smaller, more youthful and more sympathetic. We agreed on this bob that I had never had before. It gives me a more angular, more symmetrical face, and it changes me drastically. So much so that I have trouble recognising myself on screen.

THIS TRANSFORMATION GOES IN PART WITH A VERY CONSTRAINED SIDE ...

Noémie seems so cold that you might think that she doesn't have any empathy for people, even if we gradually understand that this is not the case. I played on this little thread; on a very suppressed interpretation, and on her appearance. The costumes she wears - very straight and very fitted Chanel costumes - and her high heels contribute to her kind of

stiffness. It was important to structure her: she's not a character that you will see all the time, she needed to exist quickly and strongly.

YOU NEVER HESITATE TO PLAY A SUPPORTING ROLE.

No, because sometimes there's more exciting stuff to experience in a supporting role than in an important character that I'm not going to find interesting. Noémie is "a wife of" but she offers other challenges than just being Mathieu's wife.

HOW DO YOU ANALYSE THE RAPPORT BETWEEN THIS COUPLE?

It is a very modern couple, very representative of this generation of young executives often from the same schools and in whom the balance of power, and even of competition, are at least as important as the romantic relationship.

MATHIEU, THE HERO, IS PASSIONATE, FRAGILE; NOEMIE IS MUCH MORE AMBITIOUS ...

I would say she is more competitive. She represents the modern woman with all that is required of women today - listening to others, attention, but also performance, confidence, firmness ...

SHE HAS SO MUCH ASSURANCE THAT WE ARE TEMPTED, AS MATHIEU IS, TO THINK THAT SHE COULD BE LIABLE FOR THE CRASH ...

She herself is unaware of what is going on in Mathieu's brain - the viewer knows much more than she does. Noémie is only worried about seeing her partner unravelling. But that was one of the challenges of the film: for Mathieu as well as for the viewer, at a given moment, everyone could be a suspect.

SUSPENSE IS ONE OF THE HALLMARKS OF YANN GOZLAN'S FILMS. DID YOU KNOW HIS FILMS?

I had seen them when they came out, without imagining that one day he would offer me a role. By reading the script and then discovering the finished film, I was able to measure the path he has travelled and appreciate his progress. Everything is refined about him - his writing, his staging, his style. No detail is trivial and left to chance.

WHAT PREPARATION WORK DID YOU DO WITH HIM DESPITE THE RUSH YOU WERE BOTH IN?

I met people working at the BEA to familiarise myself with this environment and with the terms I had to use in my lines. Previously, Yann and I had read together so that he could tell me his intentions, tell me about this aeronautical environment that I did not know and give

me the vision he had of Noémie. It was so clear that I had no difficulty finding the energy and subtlety he was looking for in her. It's easy to work when you have someone in front of you who knows exactly what they want. Yann asked me for one thing in particular: he wanted me to speak much faster than I do in real life. Normally I have a much more leisurely flow.

YOU HAVE AN ALMOST HITCHCOCKIAN SIDE IN BLACK BOX. DID HE GIVE YOU FILM REFERENCES?

No. It was as if everything hinged on a pact of trust. We had no time to doubt. The proposal I made to him suited him, it was simple, obvious.

WHAT KIND OF DIRECTOR IS HE?

He knows what he wants and expresses it in a very concrete way. He is not someone who will get lost in long dialogues, he is both modest and in his world. To work with him, you should not try to be reassured or cocooned. No, we move forward together, we trust each other, and we are all responsible for what happens.

IN THE SCENES YOU HAVE WITH PIERRE NINEY, THERE ARE A LOT OF CLOSE-UPS IN WHICH YOU CONVEY VERY SUBTLE NUANCES.

This was one of the pleasures of the script - it is not at all explanatory and allowed us to tell the story in a way other than through words, through the nuances of looks, breaths, and tiny details. The close-up makes that easier, it's an interpretation that is also much more mathematical; a very Yann Gozlan game ...

HOW DOES IT FEEL TO BE BACK WITH PIERRE NINEY, WITH WHOM YOU MADE YOUR DEBUT?

We shot our first film together, 18 YEARS OLD AND RISING by Frédéric Louf. It was fun to be together on a set again ten years later. But we didn't have much time to work beforehand, Pierre was already shooting when I started the preparation. As far as I'm concerned, BLACK BOX was really made for me. This rarely happens, and it was really great.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CHOICES: UNLIKE MANY ACTORS, YOU ARE CAREFUL NOT TO MAKE ONE FILM AFTER ANOTHER...

I don't have this desire. I need to embark on adventures that I really enjoy, and to prepare for them slowly. When you are an actor, you know that there will be times when you're in a slump and times when you have too many offers to accept them all. You have to know

how to accept this strange temporality and know how to have fun. Why do a job with passion if you are not going to do it passionately?

YOUR FILMOGRAPHY IS EXTREMELY VARIED. HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO AVOID BEING LABELLED?

By making the decision. I realised very quickly that I could easily be put in the same jobs and that was not what interested me at all. To encourage other proposals, I had to refuse some of them. Before shooting RESPIRE, by Mélanie Laurent, I said to myself: "As long as there isn't a project or a casting that takes me elsewhere, I'll do theatre. And if nothing happens, I'll stay in the theatre. »

HOW DO YOU LEARN TO SAY NO?

It came instinctively but it's also a whole process, it's no small thing to say no, it means displeasing, hurting egos... But that's also how you end up working with people who suit you and on projects that suit you.

YOU JUST FINISHED MELANIE LAURENT'S THE MAD WOMAN'S BALL.

In a very different role again. It's great to work with Mélanie again. She allows me to approach characters that even she doesn't know beforehand what I'll do with them. She gives me this chance.

IS WORKING WITH DIRECTORS AGAIN SOMETHING YOU ENJOY?

Of course. I take that as a compliment.

Interview with André Dussollier

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE CHARACTER OF RENIER, THE BOSS OF THE BEA?

First of all, it was the originality of the subject that I liked. It was a new object that dealt with an area I did not know and which I found exciting. Yann Gozlan's high standards, his writing, did the rest: I always admire directors who take the time to write and consider every detail, and even more so when it comes to young filmmakers. They live in a time when the image invades everything, where everything moves quickly, and we can understand that it is easier for them to have gaps in narration. I was all the more pleasantly surprised to see the precision and rigor with which Yann Gozlan had built his story. I have watched his films since we met: although they are very different, I find there are themes that are revisited, this same attention to detail and tension ...

IS THE SCRIPT WHAT MOTIVATES YOU IN CHOOSING A ROLE?

The quality of a script is decisive for me. Along with the quality of the director. The public first of all wants to see a good film. I like to imagine what the script will become, to live all the characters, all the situations, their evolution. And I need to see if the role that I am offered brings something to the story that is being told. If it is interesting, if it has weight in the plot, even if it is short, as is the case in BLACK BOX, I go for it.

WERE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE WORLD OF AERONAUTICS?

Not at all. I was already worried about getting on a plane, I will be even more worried in the future after filming this... BLACK BOX is fictional, but having read a lot since then on the subject, I understood that we are now not too far from the world portrayed in the film.

RENIER, THE BOSS OF THE BEA, HAS THE FINAL SAY ON THE REPORT TO BE PROVIDED ON THE CAUSES OF THIS ACCIDENT WHICH LEFT THREE HUNDRED VICTIMS. HAVE YOU BEEN TEMPTED TO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THIS SERVICE?

Not so much. In addition to the very comprehensive script, I had spoken at length with Yann. Whatever questions I asked him, he had the answer. So, I felt, if not familiar, at least fairly comfortable in this world, and above all I understood that the people who were investigating, whose task is immense and whose responsibilities are overwhelming, are very ordinary people. Instead of the heroes I imagined, I saw specialists who were more akin to those rigorous and secret soldiers that we meet in the army than to stars. The place where they work in Le Bourget is banal, their appearance is banal, without any particular dress

code. Renier, like the others, is rather inclined to wear a modest ready-to-wear costume. There is nothing to distinguish him from any other manager.

HOW DID YOU PREPARE YOUR CHARACTER?

As soon as I read the script, I made the connection with *THE CONVERSATION* by Francis Coppola. I watched it again. And Yann and I did a lot of reading together. Rénier's role is not easy: he feels sympathy for Mathieu and, at the same time, he is aware of the mistakes that the young man may have made in the past. Mathieu was not always the ideal investigator - he was wrong about the causes of a previous accident, the crash of a Cessna ... Rénier must be cautious towards him.

THERE IS IN PARTICULAR A SCENE WHERE, AS THEY LISTEN FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME TO THE EXCHANGES BETWEEN THE TWO PILOTS IN THE COCKPIT, YOUR CHARACTER AND MATTHEW'S CHARACTER GET HUNG UP ON A DETAIL THAT COULD BE DECISIVE. ONE OF THEM, RENIER, HEARS "DELTA URGENCE", A CODE DESIGNATING THE INTRUSION OF A STRANGER IN THE COCKPIT; THE OTHER, MATHIEU, HEARS "EMERGENCY DESCENT", A CODE MEANING THERE IS A TECHNICAL PROBLEM FORCING THE PILOTS TO LAND...

You can't be complacent at times like this. However much the two men think of each other, the sympathy factor no longer holds, the stakes are too high... I like this tightrope walking which forces Mathieu and Rénier to focus on the investigation and forces them to put aside the trust and the habit that usually binds them.

IT'S INCREDIBLE, THIS SCENE: WE FEEL THAT THEIR INTERPRETATION CAN BE DECISIVE ...

It had to be just one syllable away from confusion. In writing, the ambiguity seemed less obvious and Yann and I had a lot of discussions to make it more so: it was absolutely necessary for doubt to settle in Mathieu's mind and, conversely, for Rénier to be able to question his diagnosis. This is the advantage of having a demanding director: it trains you to consider things and it increases tenfold the requirement that one has to create a character.

WE GET THE IMPRESSION THAT YOU ARE INVESTING IN A SUPPORTING ROLE AS IF IT WAS THE FIRST OF YOUR LIFE ...

That is exactly what it is. I always feel like I'm starting from scratch, as if I had arrived from my province only yesterday. Regardless of experience or age, it is always a new adventure. Even though I had little time on this shoot, I worked on the character of Rénier as if it were

the main character, with the same preparation time. It's difficult to arrive on a set in an episodic role: you have to be in unison with those who have already been there for some time and who have had time to break themselves in. It's a big investment.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST VIVID MEMORY OF THE SHOOT?

I remember one scene in particular where Pierre Niney wanted to switch a line and I found myself in the position of referee between him and Yann Gozlan. It wasn't the new kid on the block, nor the slightly older actor, it was Rénier, with his sympathy for Mathieu's character and the reserve he must have towards him.

WHAT IS YANN GOZLAN LIKE AS A DIRECTOR?

He's Mathieu's portrait: same high standards, same meticulousness... Me, who likes to do retakes, I found my master. He is always ready to retake, to seek, to find the important detail. We could have shot fifteen hours without stopping as Yann was ready to retake and search. He has taken the time to work on each scene and understands that, in the same way, the actor wants to work and work again. It's always a leap into the unknown to work with a director that you don't know. Curiously, and even if their productions and their worlds are very different, Yann reminded me a lot of Claude Sautet on the set of *A HEART IN WINTER*. It is impossible to make a proposal to them without feeling a deep need to do so. Both are open, ready to welcome an idea that would add something. We feel that they love their work and are willing to go as far as possible. It is fascinating.

YOU SHOT THREE FILMS IN 2020: TOUT S'EST BIEN PASSE, A DRAMA BY FRANÇOIS OZON, ALL ABOARD, A COMEDY BY BENJAMIN EUVRARD, AND BLACK BOX BY YANN GOZLAN. YOU HAVE BEEN SEEN IN A SERIES, "CELLULE DE CRISE", BY PHILIPPE SAFIR, FRANÇOIS LEGRAND AND JACOB BERGER. YOU JUST COMPLETED LE TORRENT BY ANNE LE NY. YOU DO A VOICE OVER IN BIG BUG BY JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET. YOU ARE EVERYWHERE ...

It's weird to hear all these titles listed, I don't feel like I've worked that much. Probably because a lot of these films don't have a release date. "You have to follow the slope as long as it's going up," says André Gide. Except that right now, it feels like you're pedalling and freewheeling. Going up is awkward.

Interview with Sébastien Barthe

Communication manager of the BEA (Bureau of Investigation and Analysis for Civil Aviation Safety)

WITH BLACK BOX, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT CINEMA AUDIENCES HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE HOW THE BEA WORKS. WHAT ARE THE REASONS THAT LED YOU TO OPEN YOUR DOORS TO YANN GOZLAN?

Quite simply because the film is fictional, it does not deal with real facts. As a state agency, it would have been impossible for us to endorse a project concerning an event which we had investigated, and which would inevitably have given rise to a simplified and therefore erroneous interpretation. Beyond the technical shortcuts that the BEA finds difficult to resolve, including when it comes to documentaries, this type of exercise could have serious human consequences, particularly for the families of the victims, and for our credibility. Our experience shows that, even in the context of documentaries, it is difficult to faithfully transcribe the complexity of what we do. Yann Gozlan came to us with a completely new project. From then on, we welcomed his request with open arms. The fact that BLACK BOX is fictional was really a 'passport' for us. That said, although the manufacturer and company in the film are fictional, the technology at the heart of the plot illustrates and anticipates the real safety concerns and challenges of tomorrow.

HOW DID YOU WORK TOGETHER?

It took place in three stages and started two years before the filming began. During the first stage, Yann Gozlan met with us many times to get input on the script: he familiarised himself with our professions, our working methods, our pace of life and our culture. He is a lover of detail and, personally, I am quite a film buff. This made communication between us all the better. Yann wanted to know everything: what was the standard of living of an investigator, his workload, his availability ... Once his script was finalised, he asked that it be re-edited to improve its technical credibility.

TELL US ABOUT THIS SECOND STEP.

We obviously had to simplify the dialogues as much as possible so that they could be widely understood while still keeping a sufficiently technical vocabulary to keep the serious and complex spirit of the work of engineers in our laboratories. From then on, our role involved saying to Yann: "That's it, we would rather say this sentence like this, or we think this scene is better this way; but if you don't agree, we won't get angry either. " Then came the third phase, which consisted of meeting Pierre Niney, Lou de Laâge and Mehdi Djadi, who plays the character of Samir, at the BEA and showing them around our facilities in

connection with the script and their respective roles, and then acting as consultants during filming.

WHAT EXACTLY WAS YOUR ROLE AS CONSULTANTS?

It was mostly answering very technical questions: "Is this sentence in the dialogue credible?" What do you say here? What clothing do you wear in this situation? Is the department name correct? Is the label on this desk correct?" A lot of details that make the atmosphere of the BEA in the framework of a major investigation almost painstaking.

I only let myself intervene in the staging of a scene once. It was during the press conference given by Rénier, the boss of the BEA, with Mathieu. In the theatre, the extras who played the journalists did not react, they were very passive, whereas when an event of this nature occurs in real life - Rénier announces the intrusion of a terrorist in the cockpit! -, there is a lot of commotion.

People will cut off those in charge, they will start making phone calls all over the place, taking pictures... Yann followed my advice and modified the scene accordingly. Overall, the idea was to best transcribe the working atmosphere within the BEA.

THERE ARE SOME VERY SURPRISING SCENES IN THE FILM, SUCH AS THE OPENING OF THE FAMOUS BLACK BOX, WHICH FEELS LIKE IT'S STRAIGHT OUT OF A RELIGIOUS CEREMONY SO MUCH SO THAT THE CONCENTRATION, THE RITE ITSELF, SEEMS SACRED

The process is very fast in the film: in reality, opening flight recorders can take up to half a day because the protocol is so complex, meticulous and secure. All those concerned (aviation companies, manufacturers, investigators, etc.) must be able to ensure the act is completely transparent. So, in order to avoid any dispute, the black boxes are brought under seal by a CID officer, then the seals are opened in front of witnesses and the entire procedure is filmed. It is important to understand that these recorders are often crucial elements in an investigation: they contain all the information recorded during the flight, i.e. thousands of parameters stored in the FDR (flight data recorder) indicating the speed of the aircraft, its pitch, engine speed, altitude, etc., and several hours of conversations recounting the exchanges between the pilot and co-pilot in the cockpit, recorded in the CVR (cockpit voice recorder). If the film emphasises the voice recorder, it is because, in the story, the flight data recorder is too damaged to deliver information.

ALL THE SAME, WHY DOES THIS OPERATION TAKE SO LONG?

First, because, in a major event like the one described in the film, the recorders may have been damaged requiring an exhaustive process, all of the stages of which are codified upstream. Performing the same operation on recorders in perfect condition is much faster.

Then, because it is very meticulous: the manipulation of electrical circuits is a matter of microscopy. To appreciate the tension between the participants, it is also important to know that they are all depending on the recorder being in good condition. Will the card be usable? Will we have to repair it? Is it badly damaged? There is a real suspense here. There are huge human, industrial and financial stakes involved.

IS IT NORMAL FOR THE BLACK BOX RECORDING (CVR) TO BE BARELY AUDIBLE?

It can happen that the quality of the audio to be processed is poor: the sound environment of an aircraft is in itself already noisy, so all it takes is for the flight conditions to be disturbed by turbulence to degrade the recording conditions even further. Hence the enormous amount of analysis carried out by the investigators who try to cut out everything possible from the audio tracks. There, so-and-so pushes a button; there, it a door opens; there is hail on the windshield ... The CVR contains four audio tracks - the pilot's microphone, the co-pilot's microphone, a background sound microphone and another microphone that connects the cockpit to the crew. The pilots have very technical dialogues that must be analysed and compared. Since we have no images, what they say is codified. If, for example, a pilot says that he is performing such an action, the acoustical engineer will immediately verify that this action has been carried out, by looking for the noise of the button or the joystick supposed to have relayed it. By putting all these sounds together, he ends up with a fairly accurate scenario of the event.

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR MISINTERPRETATION TO OCCUR WHEN A TAPE IS FOUND TO BE POORLY AUDIBLE?

We do everything to make sure that does not happen. The analyses are never done by a single person but by several people who will cross-reference their conclusions.

HOW LONG ON AVERAGE CAN THESE SPECIALISTS SPEND ON ANALYSING THE BLACK BOX?

If we take the example of the Germanwings A320, with the co-pilot committing suicide, the conclusions are very clear. This is also the case when an event lasts only a few seconds. It all depends on its length, on the importance of the dialogues, there aren't really any rules. But most of the time, a full scan takes several weeks. In general, we have a first level of analysis which consists in listening to the discussions between the pilot and the co-pilot, then we go into more and more details.

THE FIFTY-FIVE BEA INVESTIGATORS HAVE CIVIL SERVANT STATUS. IS IT TO GUARANTEE THEIR PROBITY?

It's just because the BEA is a state agency. Afterwards, this protected status effectively makes it possible to ensure maximum security for the work carried out on the black box data; data that is, moreover, it is ultra-secure and accessible to very few BEA agents.

HOW MANY CASES DOES THE BEA HANDLE EACH YEAR?

About one hundred and fifty investigations are open on French soil. And we attend an average of three hundred and fifty others overseas as accredited representatives.

GETTING BACK TO THE MOVIE. ARE ALL INVESTIGATORS AS OBSESSIONAL AS THE CHARACTER OF MATHIEU IN THE BLACK BOX?

Not that much. But Mathieu is still quite credible in terms of his personal investment: when they work on an investigation, our agents really invest themselves fully. And if they can't figure out something, they're really going to devote all of their time to it.

WHAT IS YOUR ASSESSMENT OF THIS EXPERIENCE?

Personally, it exceeded my expectations. As communication manager, I like the seriousness and the requirement with which Yann renders the reality of our work in the film. As a film lover, I think he has made a very good, inventive, original and masterful thriller. As a man, it was a great adventure.

BLACK BOX

A FILM BY YANN GOZLAN

MAIN CAST

Pierre Niney
Lou de Laâge
André Dussollier
Sébastien Pouderoux
Olivier Rabourdin
Guillaume Marquet
Mehdi Djaadi
Anne Azoulay
Octave Bossuet
Grégori Derangère
Aurélien Recoing
André Marcon

TECHNICAL INFO

Feature film, Genres : Thriller, Noir
Production country : France
Production year : 2020
French release : 08/09/2021

Runtime : 2 h 9 min
Color type : Color
Aspect ratio : 2.35
Audio format : 5.1