

JOSH CHARLES ANAÏS DEMOUSTIER

BIRD PEOPLE

A FILM BY PASCALE FERRAN

OFFICIAL SELECTION
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BIRD PEOPLE

a film by Pascale FERRAN

with
Josh Charles, Anaïs Demoustier,
Roschdy Zem, Camélia Jordana,
Geoffrey Cantor, Clark Johnson,
Taklyt Vongdara and Radha Mitchell

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SYNOPSIS

In a Paris airport zone, two strangers try to make sense out of their lives: an American engineer under great professional and emotional pressure who decides to radically change the course of his existence, and a young hotel chambermaid who goes through a life-altering supernatural experience.





AN INTERVIEW WITH PASCALE FERRAN

Where did you get the idea for *Bird People*? Do you remember what made you first think of it?

After *Lady Chatterley*, I wanted to make a contemporary film, one that would attempt to capture something from today's world and the incredibly constant acceleration of time.
I believe it was the scenery that first came to me in daydreams: images such as the airport transit and industrial zones that you see by the side of the highway when you leave a big city and head for the airport. I wanted to film places that are rarely seen in movies. Those kinds of no-man's lands, which in fact are mostly places of transit but then become strangely fascinating and intriguing backdrops once you realize that there are people who work and live there.
Then, almost at the same time, another thought came to me, the question of *"l'appel du vide,"* the void's seductive call, something akin to: "I'm on the railing, what if I jumped?" I have always been haunted by the childish and original idea of leaping into the void. Both *Peter Pan* and the bodies falling from the Twin Towers on 9/11. An impulsive urge for liberty and an image of death. It also reminded me of a little-known short story by Theodore Sturgeon, the science-fiction writer, about a person whose body disappears somewhere between the place where they jumped and the place where they should have crashed into the ground.
That triggered the image of the bird. And the idea of a transformation.

You're mentioning ideas that correspond more with fantasy or genre films; that's quite far from the notion of "French art house" cinema…

I'm not sure we can talk about a genre film, or rather in the plural then, genres, because part of the fun of the film is mixing genres. But it's true that I have always loved science fiction and fantasy literature, Murakami in particular. Images of birds and flight had been swirling in my mind and suddenly I realized that what I wanted to do was to confront the real and the imaginary, relying on a fantasy that is deeply embedded in the collective unconscious - the profound wish to fly, to be freed from one's constraints. And this fantasy is also a way to speak about the world we live in. Indeed, we are now in the domain of the fantasy film genre, that of Bong Joon-ho's *The Host,* in particular, which has been an extremely important film for me these past years.

Why did you choose a title in English?

It became obvious during the writing stage that this had to be the title. Normally I don't care for English titles, for many reasons including the fact that it's a language I speak very poorly. But we were looking for a title that would combine the two stories and the two characters. And this title not only does that, but also infers that there could be more than two, a small crowd in fact. It turns out that in English the expression can equally be used for those who often travel in airplanes. Birds and airplanes, two characters who are part of a throng - the title was irresistible and French offers no equivalent.

Before focusing on Audrey and Gary, the movie in fact starts with an anonymous crowd, an ordinary swarm of people moving towards an airport, public transportation…

It's very interesting to observe a crowd: the random trajectories, intertwining shapes and movements. It's like choreography made from everyday life. A crowd seen from a distance looks like a swarm or a flock into which individuals dissolve. It's a place where you are literally *no one.* I always imagined beginning the film that way. Even before writing the screenplay with Guillaume Bréaud, I had already named the first chapter *Les flux et les foules [Flowing crowds].*
And then we start zooming in on people, looking at their postures and their faces and this changes their status: they become persons, then characters, with the possibility of a thousand different stories. It's funny because, I had this "funnel-like" beginning in mind, starting with the crowd and leading to Audrey's face and she's looking at a sparrow, but I didn't realize the film would end up doing something with it. It was more like an overture to an opera, something that starts with the rustling of the world and people. And then, the film finds itself haunted by the question – Am I someone, am I anyone? The relationship between the individual and the group. And afterwards, it's also from this thinking that the idea came for the group of birds at the end, these flocks into which Audrey seems to disappear again.

At one point Gary says: "Just tell them I can't do it anymore. I can't keep living my life like this. I feel like a lump of sugar dissolving at the bottom of a cup." Is this what you mean?

Yes, the question of disintegrating into a world that is increasingly less inhabitable for all of us is an issue that keeps creeping back into the story, in spite of the fact that it wasn't calculated on our part.
Gary's entourage never stops asking him to justify himself, to give the reasons for what he did, as if there had to be some secret, something he refuses to admit. Yet that's not the case, and he can only answer with banalities: *"I'm fed up, I can't go on this way."* And finally, driven into a corner by his wife, he says something that is absolutely sincere: *"Just tell them I can't do it anymore. I can't keep living my life like this. I feel like a lump of sugar dissolving at the bottom of a cup".* And when he says this, he's talking just as much about the whole wide world as he is about his own relationship with her. What he says is important because it attests to the fact, at least in Gary's case, that there are no barriers between public and private space,

or between our private spheres and the society we live in: the world is in us. It comprises, constrains and shapes us. Of course, taking into account the craziness of today's world, the confrontations, and our kowtowing towards the lowest common denominator, the idea that the world is in us is depressing at best. Except that the opposite is also true: if the world is in us, that means we are the world. And we can change it in part. To me, this is one of the moments in the film when the pendulum's movement swings the other way.

How did you come up with Gary's character?

At first, the story followed Audrey, a young girl whom we don't know very much about except that she is in a transitional period in her life, between her studies, which don't seem to really interest her, and a part-time job to get by that she has somehow allowed to turn into a full-time job. But she is also a curious and imaginative young girl who is very interested in people, even if she doesn't easily bond with them. And so, at the hotel, she cleans rooms, opens doors and behind each one there is a character and a story of which only the traces can be seen. Gary was one of those people. She noticed that he didn't leave when he was supposed to, and so his life interested her, for it echoed the questions she was asking herself. We were at that point in the writing when I asked Guillaume Bréaud to write "Gary's story." And what he came up with was so fascinating, every detail of his existence was so concrete, that Gary took over the film. We made room for him because these two stories seemed intimately connected and their comparison allowed us to add both romantic and thematic layers to the film.

We have the impression that you are only interested in the way in which Gary breaks all his ties, and not really in what he will do later…

Life is filled with so much pressure today that I have the impression, and I could be wrong, that everybody has thought about giving it all up at one point or another, like a fantasy or a safety valve. But what we found interesting in particular was to take a careful look at the reality involved in acting on this fantasy, that is to say the opposite of fantasy, the actual going from word to deed. When Gary decides to go through with it, it's practically a question of survival for him. He feels like he is on the verge of falling apart, and it's the only way he knows how to give himself a new lease on life. So his act is deeply liberating for him; but it is also a very violent deed, both for him and for those concerned, his wife and his children first and foremost. It's heart-wrenching.
However, the question of what happens afterwards is not what the film is about. Nor is it a decisive one for Gary. He'll figure it out later. What is a matter of utmost urgency for him, the goal towards which he channels all of his energy and abilities from his past life - a methodical and efficient life – is to find, once again, a state of complete availability. He wants to stop being subjected to his life.

What according to you connects these two characters - the American who lives his life jumping on and off planes and the student who cleans hotel rooms at Charles de Gaulle Airport?

It's easy to see that they are opposites in practically every way possible, everything sets them apart. On the one side an American man who earns a good living, and is married with children. He displays every sign of social success. On the other, a young French woman, a dreamer, who isn't really sure what to do with her life and ends up as a chambermaid because of money problems. Yet something connects them: most probably the simple fact that they live in the same world at the same moment and aspire to other things than what life has brought them.
But there is something else, I believe, that secretly links them. It's the question of a bond. What connects us to others? They are both at a moment in their lives when they don't really know how to answer that question. Gary no longer feels deeply connected to anyone, neither to his wife, nor to his business associates with whom he founded a rapidly expanding company. So he decides to cut all his ties, one after the other, until he is completely adrift, disconnected from everyone in society. Audrey, for her part, is a young girl who has already cut herself off from a number of those around her and continues to do so in a more frantic way, cutting herself off entirely from humanity thanks to a supernatural event. Breaking away or taking off seem to me to be today's two major fantasies, and at the same time they are completely destructive to our links and bonds. Yet we need this security valve in order not to break down and to keep on living our lives. It's a dizzying anthropological moment.

But Gary and Audrey are going to be transformed by what they experience. As if they have been entirely reconfigured…

That's exactly it! The experiences they both live through in one form and the other act as a type of reconfiguration or rebooting. And in the end when they meet, it's as though they recognize each other. And what they recognize in one another is the impression of having become full-fledged human beings. As if they had to go through everything they've gone through, even the impossible, to rise from the ashes anew and whole again. I thought it was funny for it to be through something as commonplace as possible: talking with a stranger in an elevator, then shaking hands.

The movie covers many antagonistic areas: communications technology and nature, a hotel room and the whole world, Google Earth and an owl, the weightiness of human movement and the lightness of a sparrow's flight. It's a wide spectrum of topics…

I wanted to try and show very big and very little things, minor and major things. But it was also a concern for realism. In my mind one of the most important aspects





of the contemporary world has to do with rapid changes in activity patterns. For instance, you are daydreaming, absorbed in a memory, and then a cell phone suddenly forces you to take part in a decisive conversation with someone at the other end of the world. All of this bumps and rubs together; it's what our days are made of. As the idea for the film was to successively enter into the heads of the two main characters, it seemed logical, and fun, not to just film their actions, but also their thoughts, their dreams. I wanted to accompany them in their different states of consciousness, while trying to restore as best possible the present of every moment. I know it's quite unreasonable, but it's a movie that tries to embrace the entire world, and hold together extremely heterogeneous things.

The movie also shows a character who sleeps in his car, long commutes, exhaustion and how repetitive unqualified work is. None of that is make-believe…

No, of course not. But mixing genres means putting together outlandish fiction with almost documentary-like observations. The film's truth is that even a supernatural hypothesis can serve a representation of reality. But it takes just a step aside in order to see a part of it, with a renewed freshness. Otherwise we don't see anymore. Especially when faced with the world's harshness. We are harassed by images all day long and sometimes it creates the feeling of seeing nothing at all. That is why I tried to imagine a way to modify our perception of the world around us.
At the center of the project is the way we see things, as well as the way Audrey and Gary do. She feels like no one sees her anymore and he thinks he is no longer capable of seeing things or people. The film tries to restore their ability to see during the course of the story; restore their vision, and the moviegoers' vision, in order to perceive things they have never seen before, or not in the same way. It should "reopen" their eyes also, through a childlike vision of the world, wondering at it.

When Audrey is followed by a cat, it's like *Sylvester and Tweety Bird!*

Yes it really is cartoonlike! *"Oh no, not the cat, not the goddamn cat!"* A chase in a hotel corridor has to be a bit cliché. But for the rest, I tried to avoid being cartoonlike as much as possible, because it is diametrically opposed to what is at stake there. That part of the film had to be fully from Audrey's point of view, so that we identify with her and can put ourselves in her place. And that brings our most primal and original fears into play.

All of this also implies it was extremely difficult to make?

Yes, the film was very complicated to make. Well, especially the bird part. The human part was difficult to make, the cinematography, the direction, the editing, because of the film's different patterns, which required us to be inventive in a different way every time. But that was a normal difficulty, on a human scale I'd say.
The bird part was really a flight of fancy. Julian Hirsh *(the director of photography)* and I spent much time researching the most appropriate techniques for each shot of the bird's subjective POV, all the while knowing that it had to remain doable and affordable, without a large crew or a lot of money. Sometimes we had to use very expensive options because there weren't any other solutions: helicopters, cranes, remote-controlled helicopters, and sometimes we really just made it up, with the help of Edwin Broyer's *(the key grip)* brilliant inventions.

And for the bird shots, were there many special effects used?

Could you tell?

No.

Well then I'm tempted to say there weren't any! The truth is, naturally, that all of it is filled with special effects, but we used very different types, according to the shot. Sometimes it required a great deal of effects, sometimes very little, so that in the end nobody realizes that any were used at all.

But aren't there CGI shots of a bird?

Some wide shots, yes. As soon as there was a shot with a close-up on a bird, it wasn't possible to use CGIs because you can't recreate something as organic as a ball of feathers. It's a question of substance. CGI does an airplane cabin very well, but not a sparrow. It can imitate hard materials, but no fragile materials, let alone living things that shiver in the breeze, flutter, quiver, and are alive. There are moments when a sparrow can be spectacularly beautiful…
It was Pierre Buffin, the founder of the visual effects company BUF, who came up with the main technique for this part. We decided to film real sparrows in real scenery, because they needed actual shots as a basis to work from to create the effects and keep them as invisible as possible. It was also the most artistically coherent thing to do, because I was obsessed with realism for this part. In the end, the film is as hybrid in its making as in its form.

Is that the reason why it took so long to make the film?
Yes. Eight weeks to shoot with human beings, which is pretty much normal, then eight weeks with real sparrows, which is extravagant. And then it took a year to edit, with two thirds of the time devoted to making bird sequences from bits and pieces of shots taken from hours and hours of rushes. Mathilde Muyard, the editor, had to recreate every shot. It was like making lace. At the same time we worked with Geoffrey Niquet and Romain Bavent on the visual effects. We were a very small team. Those were the very particular economics of the film.

But is there such a thing as sparrow trainers?
Well no. The fact is that no sparrow has ever been trained. Nobody is interested in them. Not a single study has been conducted, nor any research made on sparrow



behavior! But we found people who were able to work with them. People who took care of the sparrows from birth, cultivated profound bonds with them, and who then trained them. It was pure experimentation.

What about the actors? How did you get Josh Charles to play Gary?

I had noticed him in the first season of *In Treatment,* where I thought he was exceptional. And then I saw him again in *The Good Wife.* When Avy Kaufman, the American casting director and I started working together, we thought about all sorts of actors, some better-known, but none of them could make me stop thinking about Josh, as if I had recognized something in him. Finally, we gave him the screenplay to read. We then had a very long meeting and when I heard him talk about the story and the character, I knew that the role was for him. It was very moving for me to have found Gary on the other side of the world while I don't speak a word of English. There was something beyond my wildest dreams about it all. Then, during the film shoot, he was fantastic from beginning to end. He never tried to perform; he was just always present, in the moment of every shot, in a rare emotional truth and depth.

And Anaïs Demoustier ?

She is a gem… I immediately imagined her in the role for all sorts of reasons. Anaïs is a great actress with wonderful instincts for acting and direction(!) that are absolutely astounding. With her, it was strange because everything seemed so obvious to us both that we needed to push ourselves further, to a point of greater precision of thought and action. We put in a lot of work prior to filming. Then, she just blended into the shoot's collective energy – it was delightful.

One last question to wrap things up: How do you explain the fact that a film that gives such a dark perspective on the world leaves the audience with such a charmed feeling in the end.

It was my secret wish, but you never know if you are going to make it happen. I think it has to do with a feeling of freedom. It's a film that despite thousand of constraints tries to be as free as possible, and tells the story of two people whose sole ambition is the same thing. So, in the best of cases, at a given moment, we soar with them. And then, everything is possible.

Including asking for David Bowie's services…

Yes! Sometimes, for the audience's pleasure, you need to know when you shouldn't deny yourself anything.

PASCALE FERRAN

After graduating from IDHEC (former FEMIS) where she pursued cinema studies from 1980 to 1983, Pascale Ferran worked as an assistant in television and as a co-writer for Pierre Trividic, Arnaud Desplechin, Jean-Pierre Limosin and Philippe Venault.

She directed six short films from 1979 to 1990, notably LE BAISER [The Kiss], which received awards in several international festivals.

She directed her first feature film PETITS ARRANGEMENTS AVEC LES MORTS *(Coming to Terms with the Dead)* in 1993. The film, won the Caméra d'Or at Cannes Film Festival.

Her second feature, L'ÂGE DES POSSIBLES (1996, *The Age of Possibilities*) received the FIPRESCI award at Venice Film festival.

In 1999, she directed the French dubbing of Stanley Kubrick's EYES WIDE SHUT.

Then she directed her first documentary, filming every single recording session of a jazz record, performed and composed by Sam Rivers and Tony Hymas: QUATRE JOURS A OCOEE (Four Days in Ocoee).

Afterwards, she co-wrote a film with Pierre Trividic, PARATONNERRE, a project that had to be abandoned at the pre-production stage due to lack of financing.

She then adapted D.H. Lawrence's JOHN THOMAS AND LADY JANE (an earlier edition of the second LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER), which was developed into two versions, one for theatrical release, the other as a two part television mini-series broadcasted on ARTE. LADY CHATTERLEY, the theatrical version, selected at Berlinale Film Festival in 2007, won the Louis Delluc Prize and the main César awards (Best Film, Best Actress, Best Adaptation, Best Cinematography, Best Costume).

Following the César awards, she created and chaired *Le Club des 13*, a think tank of 13 French personalities in cinema, composed of screenwriters, directors, producers, national distributors, sales distribution firms and movie theater owners. The group's work resulted in a report titled LE MILIEU N'EST PLUS UN PONT MAIS UNE FAILLE *[Arthouse films are no longer a creative bridge, but a weak link]*, raising a red flag and taking stock of the challenges related to financing art house and avant-garde films.

Afterwards, she went on to write the screenplay for BIRD PEOPLE, with Guillaume Bréaud, and as of the summer of 2011, has dedicated her time to preparing and directing the film.

JOSH CHARLES – GARY

Josh Charles is an American film, television and stage actor.

Born and raised in Baltimore, Charles secured his first feature film role in John Waters' 1988 film HAIRSPRAY. The following year, he starred as student "Knox Overstreet" in Peter Weir's film DEAD POETS SOCIETY. Other notable film roles include THREESOME (1994) by Andrew Fleming, PIE IN THE SKY (1996) by Bryan Gordon, S.W.A.T. (2003) by Clark Johnson, and FOUR BROTHERS (2005) by John Singleton.

From 1998 to 2000, Charles co-starred in Aaron Sorkin's comedy-drama series SPORTS NIGHT. Then he co-starred in the first season of the acclaimed HBO series IN TREATMENT. In 2009, he joined the cast of the drama THE GOOD WIFE, alongside Julianna Margulies, for which he received an Emmy nomination in 2011, and a Golden Globe nomination in 2014 for Best Supporting Actor in a Series, Mini Series or TV Movie.

On the stage, Charles co-starred in THE GLASS MENAGERIE by Tennessee Williams in 2009, and THE DISTANCE FROM HERE by Neil LaBute, which received a Drama Desk Award for Best Ensemble Cast.

He recently completed his run on THE GOOD WIFE, in the 5th season, and also finished directing his third episode of the series.

Upcoming, Charles can be seen in Ross Katz's film BROTHER'S KEEPER with Bobby Cannavale, Rose Byrne, and Nick Kroll, as well as I SMILE BACK alongside Sarah Silverman.



ANAIS DEMOUSTIER – AUDREY

Spotted when she was only 12 years old, Anaïs Demoustier made her first screen appearance with a small role in Denis Bardiau's LE MONDE DE MARTY in 2000. She then obtained a place in her high school's audiovisual-cinema section and was given her first substantial role in Michael Haneke's LE TEMPS DU LOUP (*Time of the Wolf*), in which she played Isabelle Huppert and Daniel Duval's daughter.

In 2008 she was directed by Christophe Honoré in LA BELLE PERSONNE (*The Beautiful Person*) alongside Léa Seydoux, with whom she worked again in Rebecca Zlotowski's BELLE ÉPINE (*Dear Prudence*). Then she played Jean-Pierre Darroussin's daughter in Anna Novion's film LES GRANDES PERSONNES (*Grown Ups*), for which she was nominated in the category of Most Promising Actress at the 2009 César awards.

She was nominated for another César in the same category in 2011, for D'AMOUR ET D'EAU FRAICHE (*Living on Love Alone*) by Isabelle Czajka, who had already directed her five years earlier in L'ANNÉE SUIVANTE.

In the past few years she has appeared in LES NEIGES DU KILIMANDJARO (*SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO*) by Robert Guédiguian, ELLES, by Malgorzata Szumowska, THÉRÈSE DESQUEYROUX by Claude Miller and QUAI D'ORSAY (*The French Minister*) by Bertrand Tavernier. On stage, she has been directed by Christophe Honoré in NOUVEAU ROMAN, and by Arnaud Meunier in LE PROBLEME by François Bégaudau.

More recently, she appeared in SITUATION AMOUREUSE: C'EST COMPLIQUÉ by Manu Payet, and will feature in UNE NOUVELLE AMIE (*The New Girlfriend*) by François Ozon.



CAST

Gary	Josh Charles
Audrey	Anaïs Demoustier
Simon	Roschdy Zem
Leila	Camélia Jordana
Mme Baccar	Akela Sari
Melle Lhomond	Anne Azoulay
Boris	Manuel Vallade
Vengers	Hippolyte Girardot
Katlyn	Genevieve Adams
Allan	Geoffrey Cantor
Mc Cullan	Clark Johnson
Nuala	Catherine Ferran
Akira	Taklyt Vongdara
and **Elisabeth**	Radha Mitchell

With the voices of

The narrator	Mathieu Amalric
Audrey's father	Philippe Duclos
Gary's sister	Kate Moran

CREW

Screenplay	Pascale Ferran and Guillaume Bréaud
Storyboard (Bird scenes)	Thierry Ségur
Casting	Richard Rousseau and Sarah Teper (France)
	Avy Kaufman (USA)
	Claire Andrieu (Extras)
Director of Photography	Julien Hirsch
Sound Engineer	Jean-Jacques Ferran
Set Designer	Thierry François
Costume Designer	Anaïs Romand
Hair & Make-up Artist	Natali Tabareau Vieuille
1st Assistant Director	Simon Rooke / Guillaume Plumejeau
Script	Agathe Grau / Charles Sire
Bird Trainers	Céline Reding et Guillaume Collin
Production Manager	Aude Cathelin
Location Manager	Nicolas Borowski / Sarah Lérès
Film Editor	Mathilde Muyard
Sound Editor	Nicolas Moreau
Mixing	Jean-Pierre Laforce
Digital Effects	BUF Compagnie
Digital Effect Supervisor	Geoffrey Niquet
Original Score	Béatrice Thiriet
Performed by	Le Star Pop Orchestra
Producer	Denis Freyd

La Javanaise, lyrics and music by Serge Gainsbourg, performed by Julien Doré

A **Archipel 35** production, in association with **France 2 Cinéma** and **Titre et Structure Production.** With the participation of **Canal +, Ciné +** and **France Télévisions**. With the participation of the **Centre National du cinéma et de l'image animée**, **the CNC (new technologies and production)**. With the support of the **Région Île-de-France**. In association with **Cofinova 8**. Developed with the support of **Procirep, Angoa-Agicoa**, the **MEDIA Programme of the European Union**, **Cofinova 5** and **Cofinova 6**.

World Sales: **Films Distribution**.



Phœnix

Are you willing to be sponged out, erased, cancelled,
made nothing?
Are you willing to be made nothing?
dipped into oblivion?

If not, you will never really change.

The phoenix renews her youth
only when she is burnt, burnt alive, burnt down
to hot and flocculent ash.
Then the small stirring of a new small bulb in the nest
with strands of down like floating ash
shows that she is renewing her youth like the eagle,
immortal bird.

D.H. Lawrence, *Last Poems*, 1931.

Design by Taklyt Vongdara



LE CERCLE NOIR PRÉSENTE