

A promotional image for the movie 'Young Girls in Black'. It features two young women with long brown hair, both wearing black clothing. The woman on the left has a nose ring and is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The woman on the right is looking slightly to the right with a similar serious expression. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting an indoor setting like a hallway or a room. The title 'YOUNG GIRLS IN BLACK' is overlaid at the bottom in a white, sans-serif font.

YOUNG GIRLS IN BLACK

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QUINZAINE
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CANNES 2010

YOUNG GIRLS IN BLACK

A film by **Jean Paul Civeyrac**

France • 2010 • Running-time: 1h25 • Formats: 35mm – Scope / DOLBY SRD



Photo © Carole Beibud

Noémie and Priscilla, two teenage girls from working class backgrounds, cultivate the same violence, the same contempt of the world. They are a source of serious concern for family and friends, who sense them capable of going to extremes.



Photo © Camille Bebbud

Conversation

Yannick Haenel — *Young Girls in Black* tells the story of two teenage girls who decide to commit suicide. What strikes me is the political aspect of your film. For in fact, through the two girls desire to kill themselves, it evokes everything that's missing from life. Noemie and Priscilla are in search of an absolute, they constantly defy the figures of society who disappoint them or keep them down. The film isn't sociological, it can't be reduced to a portrayal of society, but it raises the question about the shortcomings of what life has to offer in a very radical, impassioned manner.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — Yes, the inner life of the two girls is largely unsatisfied: they can't find nourishment in the reality that surrounds them. They harbor a need for the infinite, the absolute, which can only be measured against the idea of death, of the extreme. At the same time, the two girls have a very critical political discourse on society. And it is plain to see today that the violent games teenagers indulge in are also a response to a social debacle, and that there's no

way to enter life. The film tries to attest to these two dimensions. It was not inspired by any specific news item, but is based in a number of real accounts: since 1997 I'd collected articles that dealt with two teenage girls killing themselves. That idea that they do it together is important: it is no longer merely an individual act, it brings the other into play by seeking a bond in death that no longer exists in life.

Yannick Haenel — The two main characters announce their suicide at school in front of the whole class during a presentation on Kleist where they explain how he killed himself with Henriette Vogel. The fact that they announce it publicly lends the film the tension of a program: the viewer is caught up in the preparations for the suicide. At the same time, what I like in that scene is that it shows the defiant aspect of their act. The announcement is the act by which they define themselves as not being part of this society: moreover, their classmates heatedly reject their attitude. We might describe the action as a rite of passage: Noemie and Priscilla will be confronted with institutional figures that they will stubbornly oppose.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — They don't respect educational, law enforcement or psychiatric institutions. In my first film, *Ni d'Ève ni d'Adam*, there was already this idea that these institutions were inadequate, that they no longer serve to show the way but instead raise barriers. Not because



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Not because school is like a prison, but rather because these institutions don't meet deepest aspirations of the individual. *It's pointless*, as the two girls would say. The theme of social misfits runs through my films; the characters are somewhat excluded, not integrated, including in the primary institution that is the family. In *Young Girls in Black*, the family seems caring, but it is also a possible locus of debacle, such as with Alain's unrestrained behavior toward Priscilla due to drink.

Yannick Haenel — What's more, it's in the family space, which seems warm enough, and which you film with that full light of reunion dinners, that the suicide takes place.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — I'm thinking back on what you said about the announcement of the suicide. In fact, the announcement isn't premeditated, they haven't told each other, "We're going to kill ourselves." It just comes out. Noemie announces it to the class in response to the violence of their reactions, then the idea starts to grow. The word leads to the act. If there is a plan, it's fortuitous. Then the film, so to speak, fulfills the plan, but not as expected. Things don't go according to plan, the viewer can even hope that it won't happen, that circumstances will foil the plan. In a way, *Young Girls in Black* can also be seen as an action movie! The act finally takes place, but in unusual alcoholic circumstances. Drunkenness is important here: if they hadn't been drunk, they probably wouldn't have done it.

Yannick Haenel — The other important thing is that they are two friends. But it's a peculiar friendship. The absolute they are unable to find in love, because boys have betrayed them both, they found in a symbiotic relationship. When Noemie suggests suicide to Priscilla, it's almost like an offer of romantic intimacy: "We'll do it," she says, or "If you do it, I'll do it." Later they each say, "I love you" on the phone,

Photo © Carole Béthuel





Photo © Carole Beihud

and despite the distance, there is the very intense carnal presence due to the words they exchange.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — Their friendship is so strong that it resembles love, even if their feelings for each other has nothing sexual about it. Their vocabulary is one of an inner absolute and as with mystic or romantic authors, it coincides with the vocabulary of love: it enables them to express a trace of the infinite they feel inside.

Yannick Haenel — The long scene of the suicide over the phone films them from the back, and we hear their voices. The two girls could be almost mistaken for one another, they merge into one another in the image. Their bodies are constantly on screen. Their despair, their malaise, their fervor, their stubbornness, their stupor, the cold cruelty that isolates them... All that is very carnal. In the film there is a genuine choreography of bodies. They are not specters!

Jean Paul Civeyrac — They have great inner vitality. They don't cultivate morbidity in any way. The attraction of death has nothing to do with a morbid character trait.

Yannick Haenel — The attraction of that intensity that is death gives them a true sense of living, it makes them brim over. It's very clear in

the scene where Priscilla is alone at home and eats like a pig: her body is too big for the room, she breaks everything, her vivacity overflows her living environment. And then there are all the scenes in the town where they run around, they tag the word "BURN" on everything, their gestures burn, the fire has to catch. Moreover, the film confounds the sociological clichés of young girls in black: they aren't gothic, even if they seem to be.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — Indeed, if they had been gothic, they would have in fact belonged to a defined group. I was determined for them not to belong anywhere. They are free electrons, remote from their family and therefore alone. And it may be that this freedom, too large for them, is what makes them suffer.

Yannick Haenel — I get the feeling that your films often deal with the borderline between the living and the dead. There are all the passages from one side to the other, the balconies, the dream scenes, the dawns. It is a questioning of entering another state.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — The suicide takes place at dawn. It's the appearance of a new life, so their death can begin. Noemie can't bring herself to do it, to make the leap into the void. At the end of the film, she is once more on the balcony, and she finally releases something of herself.

Her harshness, her inability to cry, which is mentioned in the last part of the film, and which her mother reproaches her for, is a sign of inflexibility. The thing she is filled with overflows at the end, because the memory of her friend is suddenly painful. This life that she will have at dawn, this life that will begin again, will happen with the friend she's found again inside her. If there's more than one way of interpreting the end of the film, we can still say that Noemie relinquishes nothing of what makes her up, and she will keep her friend inside forever. Hence this transfigured face, exhausted and at peace, too...

Yannick Haenel — I don't see any renunciation on her part at the end of the film either. Noemie is still on fire, she may in an orchestra, she's not one of them. You film her walking away from the musicians. She is apart; she now has the strength to be alone because deep down she's no longer alone.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — Yes, and it's the music from Gluck's *Orpheus*, which we hear at that moment, *The Dance of the Happy Shades*, which expresses the notion of going to search for someone in death. In the final dream, it's as if Noemie was in Priscilla's dream, she's looking for her friend, in a sense she brings her back with her. The cinema allows you to materialized the fact that the dead are present, with us, forever. In *Fantômes* and *À travers la forêt*, there was this notion of

being in a fantasy drama; here we're in a realistic film: we can recognize the quotidian, but there's still the same notion. And it's the imagination of these two girls that gives us some access to it.

Yannick Haenel — The two actresses in fact ground this life and this imagination in the film with considerable intensity... In your films there are often young people who raise doubts, who come up against the idea of belonging or not belonging, who stumble over the passage to adult life.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — Élise Lhomeau and Léa Tissier had never made a film before. I saw quite a few actors, but I chose them because they struck me as being the only ones capable of embodying this intensity we spoke of, and they had within them a world that could epitomize the unconditional nature of the characters... I give preference to young characters in my films because that's the moment in life when nothing is fixed yet; everything is in a state of flux. It creates the possibility of an intense rapport with life, and also a quest... And I also like to work with actors who have little or no film experience precisely because they don't yet have a full sense of their own image. They are open to whatever vision I might have of them. They don't give me the image that they think is their best. On the contrary, they are receptive to the image that I feel is best for the film.





Photo © Camille Beihud

Yannick Haenel — The two actresses are very different. They personify two manners of vulnerability, and power as well. The Kleist text they read in class speaks for them: They have “high-strung natures.” Their sensibility is so heightened that it gets in their way, it’s like a wound; and at the same time, it lends strength to their demanding nature. Noemie is very introspective, she lowers her eyes, and when she raises them, you’d think she is about to attack. Priscilla is something of an exuberant, gangling amazon, she explodes on the screen as soon as she walks into a shot. In fact, she’s the one who jumps.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — Probably because she’s more vulnerable, more neglected, more at the mercy of events. Maybe if someone had taken her in his arms, she wouldn’t have done it... Where as the other girl could do it at any moment. They don’t relate to the world in exactly the same way. Priscilla is more vegetal, Noemie more mineral.

Yannick Haenel — There’s a twilight atmosphere in your film, dark brown shades, an entire almost gentle, warm, enveloping nocturnal palette. And when the suicide happens the sprawled body of the young girl destroys these tones, and her cold corpse, along with the receding camera, then reminds us of the metallic colors of urban locations.

Jean Paul Civeyrac — Speaking of colors, it’s obviously black that’s



Photo © Camille Beihud

dominant. We had to fix these two dark silhouettes in the world, in a mostly dehumanized universe, like those prefab classrooms. The important thing is the feeling it creates: the black they wear seem to say they’re not in their place, that they have none, and that they are desperately, ardently looking for one, wherever it might be.



Cast list

Noémie	Elise LHOMEAU
Priscilla	Léa TISSIER
Martha	Elise CARON
Sonia	Isabelle SADOYAN
Toni	Roger JENDLY
Alain	Thierry PARET
Isabelle	Aurore SOUDIEUX
Music Teacher	Youlia ZIMINA
Mme Schaeffer	Christine VEZINET
The inspector	Jérôme DERRE
Clément	Robinson DELACROIX
Sam	Brice FAZEKAS

Crew list

Direction and Screenplay	Jean Paul CIVEYRAC
Cinematography	Hichame ALAOUIE
Sound	François MEREU, Sébastien SAVINE, Stéphane THIEBAUT
Editing	Louise NARBONI
Script supervisor	Mathilde PROFIT
Casting	Sarah TEPER, Leïla FOURNIER
Set design	Brigitte BRASSART
Costumes	Marie-Laure PINSARD
Production manager	Hélène BASTIDE
Contribution to direction and executive producer	Lola GANS
Produced by	Philippe MARTIN
Production	LES FILMS PELLEAS
In coproduction with	RHONE-ALPES CINEMA
With the participation of	CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINEMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMEE
	REGION RHONE-ALPES
With the support of	CENTRE IMAGES – REGION CENTRE
with the participation of	CINECINEMA
in association with	LA BANQUE POSTALE IMAGE 3
International Sales	LES FILMS DU LOSANGE

Jean Paul Civeyrac

Jean Paul Civeyrac was born on December 24th, 1964 in Firminy (Loire). After studying philosophy at Lyon III where he wrote a thesis on the opera film, he became a student in film direction at the Fémis. Later, from 1999 to 2010, he co-led with Claire Simon the department of film direction of this school.

- 1991 **La vie selon Luc** (*fiction, 15 mn - End of studies film*)
- 1997 **Neither Eve nor Adam** (*fiction, 90 mn*)
- 2000 **Les solitaires** (*fiction, 75mn*)
- 2001 **Fantômes** (*fiction, 95mn*)
- 2002 **Man's gentle love** (*fiction, 80mn*)
- 2003 **All the fine promises** (*TV fiction - ARTE, 85mn*)
- 2004 **Tristesse beau visage** (*fiction, for ARTE, collection of Portraits, 17mn*)
- 2005 **Throught the forest** (*fiction, 65mn*)
- 2006 **Ma belle rebelle** (*fiction ADAMI-Talents Cannes, 11mn*)
Mon prince charmant (*fiction ADAMI-Talents Cannes, 11mn*)
- 2008 **Malika s'est envolée** (*fiction, for the Théâtre de Gennevilliers, 35mn*)
- 2010 **Young girls in black** (*fiction, 85mn*)



