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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2024



A MISSING PART

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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2024

A MISSING PART

(UNE PART MANQUANTE)

A film by **GUILLAUME SENEZ**

with **ROMAIN DURIS, JUDITH CHEMLA, MEI CIRNE-MASUKI**

98 min - France / Belgium



SYNOPSIS

Every day, Jay travels the length and breadth of Tokyo in his taxi, looking for his daughter Lily. In the 9 years since he has separated from his wife, he has never been able to get custody of his daughter. Having given up hope of ever seeing her again, he is about to move back to France when Lily hops in his cab. But she doesn't recognize him.

A CONVERSATION WITH **GUILLAUME SENEZ**

The film starts with a feeling of displacement as it opens on the streets of Tokyo. What initially crystallized this wish to make a film in Japan?

Strangely, and unlike many people, I have never been fascinated by Japan. It just so happens that I went there with Romain Duris as part of the activities surrounding the Japanese release of *Our Struggles* (2018), my previous film. We ended up confessing to one another that we wanted to work together and had begun to discuss various subjects that we found inspiring when one day a few expats told us about the stories of parents who have to fight to be able to keep seeing their children after separating from their Japanese spouse. Moved by these accounts, something imposed itself as obvious, a promising narrative thread, and the possibility of a new film

for us. I rapidly contacted my co-screenwriter, Jean Denizot, and right upon my return, we started working on a draft. So, I didn't fall in love with Japan first, but with a story that takes place in Japan.

Who are the people that you met over there?

At first, someone told Romain and I about this exclusive custody law without having experienced it themselves. Then we contacted a few people who were directly concerned: Vincent Fichot, who went on a hunger strike during the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2021, then Emmanuel de Fournas and Stéphane Lambert. Three French parents among numerous other cases, as there is talk of 150,000 children "kidnapped" by one parent every year in Japan. Their stories greatly moved us. Although the narrative for *A Missing Part* draws its inspiration from real life situations, it is above all a fiction film. When I went back to Japan in 2022, I participated

in a demonstration against such kidnappings with Vincent Fichot. This was where I heard other people's stories and realized the extent to which this concerned Japanese citizens just as much as foreigners, as well as men and women alike. According to a survey, approximately 60% of the Japanese population wishes things would change. The parliament recently passed a law aiming to establish shared custody, but culturally the Japanese police rarely interferes in family matters – not to mention that the government often holds a conservative stance, especially with respect to marriage.

There were six years between *Our Struggles* and *A Missing Part*. What happened over this period of time, since you started writing ?

It generally takes me four to five years to write, raise funds and shoot a film. It's true that in the

meantime, the Covid crisis held things back. While some people were extremely productive during that period, I wasn't at all. In addition, Japanese borders remained closed for a long time and it wouldn't have made much sense to write this story solely between Paris and Brussels. I went back to Japan as soon as I could. I had to confront our story with that of people who've actually experienced such a situation, as well as further root the narrative in the Japanese culture and flesh it out with the country's iconography. I was intent on avoiding any form of exoticism.

That is the whole point of the film, which also tackles the idea of blending cultures...

This is what I liked so much about this story as well: beyond the parental kidnapping, we also tell the story of a foreigner who is confronted with a wealthier country, a different culture, another language, another religion. We often see films

focusing on the stories of immigrants who arrive in France, coming from Africa or Eastern Europe. As far as I was concerned, I wanted to reverse things and speak about a French immigrant in another country. I wondered how to best “confront” today’s viewers with a number of subjects. I am in particular thinking of the book Dialogue sur l’art et la politique [Dialogue on Art and Politics] (2021), based on a conversation between the British filmmaker Ken Loach and the French author Edouard Louis, in which I read : “The era when literature – or films – depicted a reality that no one knew about is nearly over. Zola wrote to represent factory workers’ or miners’ lives; Sartre wrote to afford greater visibility to prostitution and homosexuality. Now, with the new technologies and media, everything or nearly everything can be seen. The question therefore no longer is to show but to confront – I believe it is a significant shift: indeed, what are the aesthetics of confrontation?” The idea, here, is not to hold the viewers’ hand or think for

them, but to convey an emotion. If they are touched on a deeper level, if they question their feelings, then the film is all the more impactful.

The taxi, as a setting, defines the film’s atmosphere and instantly conjures up imaginary realms. Why did you choose to make Jay a cab driver ?

My co-screenwriter and I were intent on our leading character never sleeping. We initially had him work in the daytime and roam through the night but it ended up being the other way around. Taxis conjure up a certain notion of wandering and lonesomeness, associated with a lifestyle bordering on monastic as far as Jay is concerned. Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Le Samourai* (1967) also greatly influenced us while we were writing – Jef Costello’s isolation, his sparsely furnished apartment, his unusual relationship with his pet bullfinch, his resignation, and his intriguing determination to head straight for disaster.

Using a taxi also comes from a desire to film the urban environment as if through a never-ending tracking shot. Nearly always in motion. The funny thing is that Akira Kurosawa’s work has taught me to visually enhance an image’s background as there always is wind, rain, fire, pedestrians in his... I’ve been paying attention to this for a long time, but I’ve never followed that rule as much as while filming in Japan!

You usually give your actors and actresses a lot of freedom. How did this work with a film shot in another country, with a Japanese crew, and using another language?

I adopted the same approach, meaning that the actors and actresses don’t have the written dialogue. I am the only one who has the dialogue at the beginning. The idea is to essentially work with improvisation at first and then gradually aim for the dialogue. Only the Japanese lines were available, as

it would have been an added difficulty to ask Romain to improvise in a language that he didn’t have a great command of. Very quickly, however, he managed to improvise a few sentences – he worked with a coach for months and truly impressed me. Thanks to his hard work, we were able to have room to maneuver in both languages. It was fundamental, as I feared that the contrast between the French and Japanese dialogue would be too blatant.

What is your work approach on set with your actors and actresses?

We never rehearse; rather we “seek to understand” the characters. We discuss who they are at length ahead of time. I aim to preserve as much as possible my actors’ and actresses’ instincts and spontaneity. I therefore limit the number of takes and I film everything from the get-go. With the first takes, we experiment with movement and interactions, we

fine tune things together as a group, and sometimes sheer brilliance strikes. I always strive to reassure the cast by telling them to consider the initial takes as rehearsals. But the fact is that for each of the films I've made, a part of the early takes has always made it into the final edit.

Let's talk about Romain Duris, with whom you already worked for *Our Struggles*. What makes him an ideal partner, as far as you're concerned?

I have followed and appreciated his work since the *Good Old Daze* (1994); it has been a true meeting of kindred spirits between us and I remember being awed by his professionalism. He is a seriously hard-working person, who never hesitates to voice his doubts and submit ideas on set. Also, we discovered this story together so it was out of the question to work with anybody else. He was the first to send me press clippings, read early versions of the screenplay.

There's also something partially subconscious in choosing an actor: while filming *Our Struggles*, the film crew often got our names mixed up! It happened again, strangely, as soon as we started prep work for *A Missing Part*. I am not saying that I look like him, but there is something of a mutual projection between us.

The Japanese cast is very eclectic. How did you pick your actors and actresses?

Once again, it's a matter of spontaneity. I worked with a Japanese casting director. As she didn't know me, she initially submitted possibilities that tended to lack distinctive traits. I could sense that she was leading me towards a rather conventional form of cinema, whereas I love singularity. Afterwards, she came back with more unexpected profiles: for instance a singer to play the bookseller, a manga author for the grandmother. In other words, people

whose primary profession wasn't acting, but who added this little extra, variant touch that I love so much.

The character of Jessica, played by Judith Chemla, brings in a madness that also stands out starkly. Why did you choose to make her that way?

If you were to say there is a common denominator between my films, it is definitely the wish to show characters who are fundamentally flawed as regular people! Maxime in *Keeper* (2015) and Olivier in *Our Struggles* are characters who can prove to be annoying or make ill-advised decisions. It's also the case for Jay, who has a darker side as well and is in some way partly responsible for what is happening to him.

Concerning Jessica, her energy is close to that of the characters played by Laetitia Dosch in my first two films. It so happens that I like contrasting

tones and anyone who functions that way, meaning people who lose their temper and then hug you or kiss you, laugh and then cry in the same scene. I am well aware of the fact that borderline characters can be annoying but I like their flaws. Jessica is a colorful character indeed, but she also spurs Jay onward. She is his mirror image in some way: what she is currently going through is what he had to endure years ago. As we were writing the script, this was a way of bringing up Jay's past all the while remaining in the present and avoiding flashbacks.

The filiation between Jay and Lily remains elusive, which is also reflected by the young actress who plays her. How did the idea of this particularly singular relationship come to you?

I love being taken by surprise during the casting process, stumbling upon personalities who are in complete contradiction with what I'd imagined and

then rewrite their part. My casting director Laure Cochener knows this and therefore always submits many different possibilities for one character. This was the case with Lily, who had to be able to embody a person who is “walking a tightrope” between two cultures. Mei Cirne-Masaki had no previous acting experience but you could instantly sense that there was a tension between her outer reserved appearance and her inner turmoil. Everything then fell into place. The greatest part is that we were able to shoot the sequences with Mei in the narrative’s chronological order, which means that the affinity between her and Romain blossomed alongside that of their characters, whose relationship evolves from chauffeur and customer to father and daughter. The staging also underlines this change, and as we move further into the story, Jay and Lily end up more frequently in the same frame. The last sequence in which we see Lily, in the parking lot, was also Mei’s last shooting day. It was greatly charged emotionally.

Then again, as we are in Japan, people’s relations with emotions are different – containing them becomes key...

It is indeed very French to express oneself without filters. While Jay appears more Japanese than the Japanese themselves at the beginning of the film, his disposition shifts later on, revealing his true nature. Lily also finds herself in a sort of in-between. I remember that in the script there was a problem with one of her lines, when she asks her father: “Is it true that in France kids my age tongue kiss?” I had been told that it was inappropriate; that she was too young and too Japanese to speak that way. Once we’d shot the sequence, it was no longer an issue, for we precisely touched upon a dichotomy: while Lily is Japanese, she does dare to ask the question. In addition, it’s a question about tongue, whose double meaning I also find amusing. It’s interesting to see the extent to which being on point when embodying a character

adds subtlety to the screenplay. This is also what my job as a director is about – making the film better than the screenplay.

The last scenes on the beach are a definite departure in the tone, with emotions suddenly being released. How did they come about?

Straightaway, I wanted them to be separated from the previous timeline. Like an enchanted interlude, which is more lyrical and in which music has a greater presence. Two or three days before the film shoot, my French producer David Thion called me to insist on how significant those scenes were. They were truly key, for they had to trigger something powerful emotionally while promoting an underlying unease: while Jay’s being reunited with Lily was something of an epiphany, the beach scenes had to make us realize that Jay is now in turn kidnapping his daughter. When we were writing the screenplay, we

insisted on the paradox of the moment when they’re reunited, when the father and daughter don’t really know what to say to one another. There’s a certain awkwardness between them, until they join the “Jibiki-ami” fishing, with the massive net. I wanted this moment to be set within Japanese traditions because Jay profoundly loves this culture, and is just as attached to it as a Japanese-born citizen.

Music is one of the only dramatic devices you use. Tell us about your collaboration with Olivier Marguerit, the composer?

I had never worked with a composer before, but I quickly realized that this specific film would need pauses. The music could not be too ostentatious or exotic. Olivier struck the right balance thanks to the use of an Ondes Martenot, one of the earliest electronic musical instruments. And then we also have additional music sequences based on a

personal playlist that I expanded as I was writing the screenplay. I had Jeanne Added's cover of Des'ree's I'm Kissing You in mind very early on. And the Japanese version of Johnny Hallyday's Que je t'aime was in that playlist as well.

Discreetly, the film gives the virtual world and technology an ambivalent role, at the end in particular...

The film ends with Jay's deportation by the police. It's extremely violent, yet the app that allows him to follow Lily brings some hope: we know the bond between them has been rebuilt and they will stay in contact. All this happens through virtual means, and in fact Vincent Fichot has created his own app called Find My Parent. It gives children the possibility to "throw a bottle in the ocean" by entering specific information about a missing parent, in case of an accident, war, or kidnapping.

There is also the notion of loss, as though connected to a form of anguish...

Loss, I'm not sure. However, there was a slightly silly form of anguish for me during the shoot: because of several soccer-related accidents, I've always had this fear of twisting my ankle. Not only does Lily's character suffer a sprain in the film, but in addition the stress related to the shoot triggered imaginary pain for me in the exact same spot. I remember asking for a brace similar to Lily's and the team had a good laugh! It was as though I was making my character's pain my own, which was a truly strange experience. I drew the conclusion that my anxiety and my work are interconnected.





SHORT FILMS

2005: Squaring The Circle

2009: In Our Blood

2012: U.H.T.

2020: Walk With Kings

FEATURE FILMS

2015: Keeper

2018: Our Struggles

2024: A Missing Part

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Guillaume Senez was born in Brussels in 1978. He wrote and directed several short films that were selected and received prizes in numerous film festivals: *Squaring The Circle* (2005), *In Our Blood* (2009), *U.H.T.* (2012), and *Walking With Kings* (2020). His first feature film, *Keeper*, released in 2016, was selected for over 70 festivals worldwide (including Toronto, Locarno, Rotterdam, Angers Premiers Plans, etc.) and received over 20 awards (including three Magritte Awards). His second feature film, *Our Struggles*, was selected for Critics' Week at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival. It also received two 2019 César nominations (including Best Actor) and Five Magritte Award in 2019 (including best film and best director). *A Missing Part* is his third feature film.

CREW

Director	GUILLAUME SENEZ
Screenplay	GUILLAUME SENEZ, JEAN DENIZOT
Producers	JACQUES-HENRI BRONCKART, DAVID THION
Associate Producers	PHILIPPE MARTIN, TATJANA KOZAR
Executive Producer (Japan)	HIROTO OGI
Music Composer	OLIVIER MARGUERIT
Casting Director	LAURE COCHENER, ARDA
Director of Photography	ELIN KIRSCHFINK, AFC, SBC
Editing	JULIE BRENTA
Set Designer	TAKESHI SHIMIZU
Sound	NICOLAS PATURLE, VIRGINIE MESSIAEN, SABRINA CALMELS, FRANCO PISCOPO
Costumes	JULIE LEBRUN
Make-Up	JILL WERTZ
First-Assistant	FRANCK MORAND
Artistic Advisor	YU SHIBUYA
Production Manager	JULIE FLAMENT, ADP
Post-production Manager	JULIEN SIGALAS

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Cinécap 7, Cinéaxe 5

Cinémage 15

Tokyo Metropolitan Government TCVB and by **Tokyo Film Commission**

O'Brother Distribution

Haut et court Distribution

Be For Films

CAST

Jérôme “Jay” Da Costa

Jessica

Lily

Michiko

Lily’s Grand-Mother

Lily’s Mother

Jay’s Father

Yu

ROMAIN DURIS

JUDITH CHEMLA

MEI CIRNE-MASUKI

TSUYU

SHUNGICU UCHIDA

YUMI NARITA

PATRICK DESCAMPS

SHINNOSUKE ABE

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Sound Format

5.1

Aspect Ratio

2.39

Running time

98’

Genre

Drama

Original version

French, Japanese, English

Subtitles

English

Year of production

2024

Countries

France, Belgium

JAPAN INTRODUCES JOINT PARENTAL CUSTODY, A PRINCIPLE FAR FROM UNANIMOUSLY ACCEPTED IN THE ARCHIPELAGO

A spouse who no longer has custody may never see his or her children again, as Japan recognizes neither visitation rights nor - until the legislative change - shared custody. Abduction of a child by one of the parents is not considered a crime. In the event of remarriage, the name of the biological parent who does not have custody of the child even disappears from the official records of the new home established by the former spouse. According to the latest government data, nearly 95,000 divorces were officially declared in 2022, affecting 161,902 minors, twice as many as in 1950. Under the current framework, which dates back to 1898, only one divorced parent can obtain custody over the children. This right almost always goes to the person with whom the

children are residing at the time of the divorce. In 86% of cases in 2022, this was the mother.

The fact of no longer being able to see one's children is at the root of movements in Japan by advocacy groups such as Oyakonet and Sakurakai which have organized «orange marches» to defend the cause of parents of «kidnapped» children. The increase in marriages - and therefore divorces - with foreigners has made the problem an international one. In 2010, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution criticizing Tokyo on this issue. Japanese women found themselves on file with Interpol for child abduction after complaints from their foreign husbands. Under pressure, Tokyo signed the Hague

Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction in 2014. But «abductions» occurring in Japan are not covered by this treaty.

An amendment to Japan's Civil Code, passed by Parliament on Friday, May 17 2024, established the possibility of joint parental custody over children in the event of divorce. Scheduled to go into effect in 2026, the amendment gives divorced parents the option of choosing between sole and joint custody. Parents opting for joint parental custody will have the right to see their children and decide together on important events such as surgery, schooling, passport applications or moving.

Source: Article Japan introduces joint parental custody after divorce by Philippe Mesmer in Le Monde May 23, 2024

https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/05/23/japan-introduces-joint-parental-custody-a-principle-far-from-unanimously-accepted-in-the-archipelago_6672388_4.html

また君に

A MISSING PART

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