

France-Japan 2008 / 92 min / color / 35 mm / Dolby SRD  
Nobuhiro Suwa & Hippolyte Girardot  
A film by

# yuki & nina

60<sup>e</sup> Internationale  
Filmfestspiele  
Berlin  
Roubine

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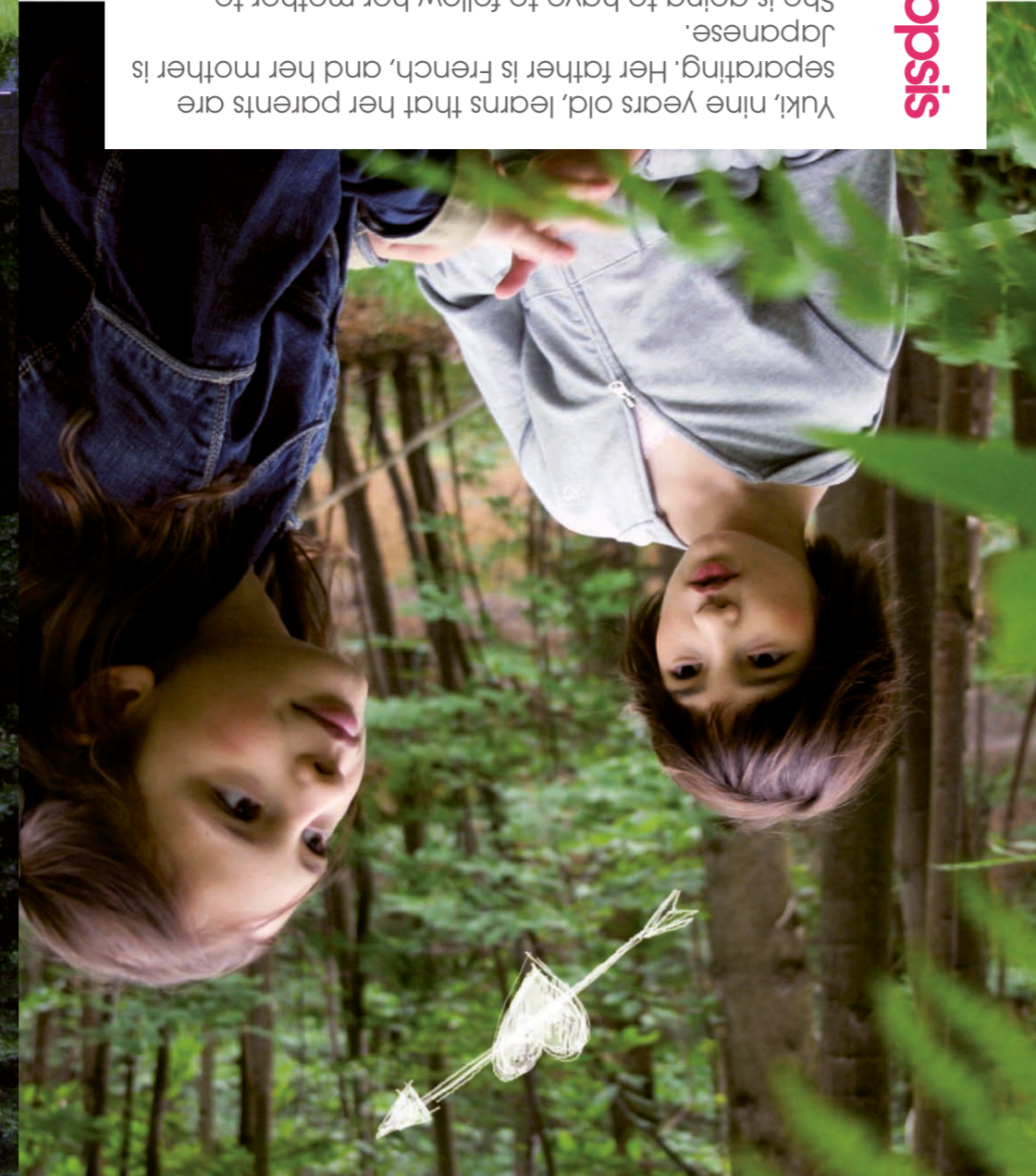
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**synopsis**  
Yuki, nine years old, learns that her parents are separating. Her father is French, and her mother is Japanese. She is going to have to follow her mother to Japan, leaving everything behind in Paris, starting with her best friend Nina. Together, Yuki and Nina devise schemes in order to get her parents back together. Running away seems like the only solution in the end - the forest will be their new destination.

## director's notes by hippolyte girardot & nobuhiro suwa

### an encounter

**HG** : I met Suwa in May 2004. He was preparing a film, A Perfect Couple, and wanted to see me about the male role. We met several times, speaking a great deal, and we enjoyed these conversations. One day I told him about a particular experience I had before even becoming an actor: from improvisational work done with young teenagers, I had made some super 8 films. That interested him a great deal. And then he telephoned me to say he would very much like for us to work together. He spoke to me about his desire to write a story together and co-direct it. It was such an unlikely and surprising proposition, that I accepted immediately. It was a new experience for me, and I liked that.

**NS** : I have always looked for a deeper involvement and collaboration with the actors in my films, striving to go further. But after all is said and done, I was the only one in control. Here, for the first time, I wanted something else.

### at a child's height

**HG** : Our idea was, from the outset, to be "at the height of the child" in reference to his or her understanding of the world. We didn't want to draw the film towards the story of a separating couple. One of the reasons was because it was something that Suwa had just done in A Perfect Couple; the other reason, I now believe, is that the one area where we had something in common was this little girl. This subject area, more than the parents, was common ground for us. Having been a child was what we had most in common.

**NS** : One of the first discussions that Hippolyte and I had, was that he as I, we are fathers. On that basis, we had many discussions in order to write the screenplay, but in the end, rather than speak about the father-child relationship, we just needed to relate the child's vision.

### the story of a little girl

**HG** : The fact that we were projecting ourselves onto something we had never been, that is to say a little girl, allowed both of us to see bits of ourselves in this character, yet with a certain distance. When someone makes a film, he or she speaks from his or her inner or private self; but as there were two of us, the only way our personal perceptions could come together was through another person - this is the way Yuki came to be. She was our Madame Bovary.



**NS** : Yuki's story could be the reverse angle of the story from my previous film, A Perfect Couple, which already tackled the theme of a couple's separation. But above all, what interested me was how to show children in a movie, and it was also a challenge for me to see what we could do with children in film. I believe that generally, children are shown according to an adults' point of view, the way in which adults interpret them: it's a vision of children internalized by adults. We cannot approach children's existence in a pure way, one that is entirely detached from adult influence. For me, it was the desire to approach them as a full-fledged outsider.

### the forest, a magic place between france and japan

**NS** : At the beginning, we neither intended to shoot in Japan, nor in a forest. It happened during the process, for there were many exchanges between France and Japan, and I realized that this story had a sense of dual belonging. I thought that the forest could be a point of passage, which by way of cinema, became real and expressed our common approach with Hippolyte. This forest also represents a place that would be outside of the family's social community, a world where children would go alone, without their family's influence.

**HG** : The forest, which became a point of passage from one world to the other, also became for us, in the process of making the film, a "magic" place. We too, Suwa and I, were alone, without points of reference, lost and searching for our film. And so, the moment when Yuki is alone on her rock, and suddenly makes the decision to go ahead in order to grow up, was improvised, found in the moment, ignoring a heap of reasons that had been written into the screenplay. When we arrived in Japan, we were also obliged to change the film because of the weather, to adapt, and to "survive". Exactly what happens to Yuki.

### children in cinema

**HG** : When you are a child, the power of the imagination is incredible. It is something we lose because of reality, because of our



lives as adults. Every child is an artist from the start, for he or she is someone who is good at changing reality. Suwa was much more confident than I concerning the justness of Yuki's character. I was nervous because I had acted with children before, and several times I saw some who despite their efforts, would imitate already made images they would see on television, through the characters of American children, dubbed in French. Children who watch a lot of television model themselves after what they see, much as some actors model themselves after an actor on Actors Studio. Freshness and innocence are things that are very difficult to find in a child when he or she is in front of a camera. Yuki was our lucky break. Pretending didn't make sense to her. She is very discreet and modest, but also frank, she is full of confident strength. She didn't get worked up, she would concentrate on her shot, then a moment later return to her activities. This gives the character a sort of mystery and inner depth that we are never able to break through. She told us that in reality, a child is extremely secretive. And I find that the film well recounts this mystery, this impenetrability, that place where we cannot go. And as a spectator, it creates a desire, we're attracted to it, we are really sucked into the enigma.

**NS** : It is true that, generally speaking, it is difficult to film children. With actors who are grown-ups, we exchange a few sentences and we understand one another. While with children, for example with Noé/Yuki, who moreover was acting for the first time, there wasn't a common language. But what was positive, is that the little girls really understood the film, and communication was established on another level than that of language. They well assimilated the film, thought about it, and then brought a lot to it. More than directing, I would say it was their understanding of the film that was essential.

### two making a film

**HG** : From the beginning we didn't want an overly written screenplay, with dialogues. We wanted to work the way Suwa had worked on his other films: have a canvas, and successfully create the conditions so that the characters could really improvise during the shooting. Miraculously, we got the money to make the film with a very thin screenplay, it must have been thirty pages. Then, directing the film became a new form of writing, thus a new adventure. As the film predominantly takes place in France, the greatest difficulty was the preparation while we weren't together. As I was here in France, my responsibility required me to delve into the film in a much more significant way than I had imagined. When Suwa would come, we could then confront our points of view on the film. It was a unique way of working. We never wanted to establish a shooting "method", in order to keep our options open. That proved to be very complicated, because you

can't work with children eight hours a day. We never had enough time, and we had to constantly improvise, shot after shot. Our choices were made in a rush and that ended up being plain luck. Like a sailboat when the wind picks up. The one who is nearest the sails takes charge. There wasn't an area reserved for one or the other. For editing, once again we couldn't be together. We worked out a kind of parallel editing. He edited in Japan, and I edited in France. Then we would exchange files. It was probably the most difficult part, because Suwa and I had very different visions of the film. Our personal vision of film was coming through. Finally what guided us, once again, was Yuki's character. What is this little girl's story? What happened to her? What is important to her?

**NS :** When we were shooting, we talked about how to divide up the work. We didn't want to unnecessarily duplicate things, and yet we didn't necessarily react the same way.

During the shooting phase, the simplest idea finally, was that Hippolyte direct the actors more closely in French, and that I supervise more the scenes as a whole. But he was closest to the actors.

For the editing, at the beginning the idea was that I would do a rough cut with my team in Japan, and then I would send the result to the French team. There was a lot of going back and forth, it was a very long and arduous process.

Co-directing was a great experience for me. When I see the film now, there are moments that I still can't understand, things that I would never have imagined in this way. But that is possibly also what I was looking for when I launched into this project. Thanks to this collaboration, I better understand my ego, my desire to make films.

I better understand my own cinema, what I know how to do, and what I want to do.

**HE :** Through this first experience behind the camera, I learned that there is a whole creative fabrication process in film that I never imagined when I was an actor, where everything is played out in the moment. It is more like painting where, little by little, something appears. It is not just a stroke, but the some thing started over again, rubbed out, shortened, drawn out, moved, it's quite a long and quite a complex working process, both physical and intellectual.

Doing this work four-handed (not to say many more) has given the film, to my eyes still today, a mysterious, occult, impenetrable dimension that I find in Nohé/Yuki's eyes.

The film is a place of encounter, a place where something is made by several people. You make a film, and the film makes you - it shapes you as well. You are not the same afterwards, because you have told a story, and this story told with others, has changed you. You have created a world, and this world has created you.



## biographies

**Nobuhito Suwa** was born in Hiroshima (Japan) in 1960. His second feature *M/OTHER* was presented in Cannes at *Directors' Fortnight* in 1999 (*RIFFESCI award*).

Currently, he's the superintendent of the University of Tokyo Zokei. Hippolyte Girardot was born in Boulogne- Billancourt in 1955. He started as an actor with *LE DESTIN DE JULIETTE* by Aline Issermann. Then, he played with Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Berri, Eric Rochant. In the last few years, he played in the films by Arnaud Desplechin.

Pascal Ferran and Amos Gitai. YUKI & NINA is his first feature as a director.



### Nobuhito Suwa, as a director:

2/Duo / 1997 - Rotterdam International Film Festival, NETRAC Prize  
M/Other / 1999 - Cannes Film Festival, Directors' Fortnight, RIFFESCI Prize  
H Story / 2001 - Cannes Film Festival, Un Certain Regard  
A Letter from Hiroshima / 2002 - Locarno Film Festival, Golden Leopard (Video)  
Un couple parfait / 2004 - Locarno Film Festival, Jury Special Prize and CICAE Prize  
Paris je t'aime I / 2005 - Cannes Film Festival, Un Certain Regard

### Hippolyte Girardot, as an actor:

Le destin de Juliette by Aline Issermann / 1983  
Prénom Carmen by Jean-Luc Godard / 1983  
Fort Saganne by Alain Corneau / 1984  
Maison des sources by Claude Berri / 1986  
Un monde sans pitié by Eric Rochant / 1989  
Hors la vie by Micaou Bagdadi / 1991  
Le parfum d'Yvonne by Patrice Leconte / 1994  
Dans la compagnie des hommes by Arnaud Desplechin / 2003  
Lady Chatterley by Pascale Ferran / 2006  
Un conte de Noël by Arnaud Desplechin / 2008  
Le voyage du ballon rouge by Hou Hsiao Hsien / 2007  
Plus tard tu comprendras by Amos Gitai / 2008

## filmographies

### credits

Directed and written by... Nobuhito Suwa & Hippolyte Girardot  
Camera ..... José Desnâches  
Sound ..... Dominique Lécourt, Raphaël Girardot,  
Olivier Dô Huu, Takeshi Ogawa,  
Emmanuel de Chauvigny,  
Veronique Borneoud, China Suzuki  
Editing ..... Hisako Suwa & Laurence Briaud  
Music ..... Foreign Office,  
composed par Lily Margot et Doc Mateo  
Production ..... Comme des Cinémas (France)  
Co-production ..... Les Films du Lendemain (France),  
ARTE France  
Bitters End (Japan)  
World Sales ..... Films Distribution



### cast

Yuki ..... Nohé Sampy  
Nina ..... Arelle Moutel  
Yuki's Mother ..... TSUYU  
Yuki's Father ..... Hippolyte Girardot  
Nina's Mother ..... Marilynne Canto

