

Locating Heisei in Japanese Film

The Historical Imagination of the Lost Decades

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the films of the “lost decades” of Japan’s Heisei period (1989–2019)—three decades of economic stagnation, social malaise, and natural disaster. Through an examination of the work of major Heisei filmmakers—including Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Ichikawa Jun, Sono Shion, and others—it explores the dissonance between the dominant history of Japan’s recent past and the representation of this past in the popular imagination of the period. Along with posing a challenge to normative accounts of history, Heisei film, this paper will also suggest, explores social issues that Japan continues to contend with as it enters the Reiwa period (2019–). In particular, this paper will discuss the work of Kore’eda Hirokazu, situating his films within neoliberal transformations over the last twenty years that have shaped social and cultural conditions in Japan.

Keywords: Heisei, lost decades, Japanese film, Kore’eda Hirokazu, Kurosawa Kiyoshi

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Before the current pandemic, Japan was going through another paradigm shift, as it transitioned to the Reiwa period and looked back at Heisei—a period marked by three decades of economic uncertainty, natural disaster, and other trends. Arguably, Heisei was also a time of historical crisis that led to an abandoning of the framework that gave meaning to national identity up to that point and an imagining of new relationships to the past in film. In this article, I will also discuss the reaction of Heisei film to other trends during the period, including the socio-cultural impact of neoliberal policies in the late 1990s and 2000s.

Lost decades and cultural memory in film: *Tony Takitani*

In *The Illusion of the End* (1992), theorist Jean Baudrillard argues that history has become a giant dustbin, where old ideologies, regimes, and events accumulate. Instead of serving as stepping stones for history’s movement forward, they pile up in a swell-

ing lump of sediment (Baudrillard 1994, 4). *Tony Takitani* (2005) by Ichikawa Jun, a cinematic adaptation of a story by Murakami Haruki, demonstrates the way events from Japan’s recent past accumulate in the cultural imagination of the Heisei period rather than serving as steps in the linear unfolding of history.¹ The film tells the story of the title character, Tony Takitani, played by Ogata Issei, a baby boomer growing up in the decades after World War II. Tony’s father, Shōzaburō, also played by Ogata, was imprisoned in China during the war, and represents a past that Japan has sought to leave behind. Living at the turn of the century, Tony has a relationship with a strange woman, Eiko, played by Miyazawa Rie, who is obsessed with clothing. After Eiko unexpectedly passes away, Tony searches for a replacement for her. He hires as a young assistant, Hisako (also played by Miyazawa), with an uncanny resemblance to Eiko. At first, time in the film unfolds in strict linear fashion, reflecting a normative view

of history. The lateral movement of images across the screen has the effect of showing history unfold sequentially, from past to present, according to the major periods of Tony's life and Japanese history. As the camera tracks to the right, the moments of Tony's youth, college days, and adulthood unfold before the viewer in sequential fashion coinciding with the flow of history in postwar Japan.

In contrast to this linear arrangement of events, however, the doubling of images and sound reflects the layering of past and present. Having the same actor play both a character living in the present and one from the past has the effect of merging memory and matter in the viewer's mind. The blending of material and memory also happens through dialogue. The divide between the non-diegetic voice of the narrator and diegetic voices of the characters breaks as characters repeat the narrator's lines or even speak in place of the disembodied voice.

The conflation of past and present occurs through Tony's obsession with reviving Eiko's image after she dies. He requires Hisako to wear Eiko's clothing, which Eiko leaves behind in a large walk-in closet. Again, the layers of clothes reflecting the accumulation of historical baggage. Putting on Eiko's clothes is both a physical experience and a virtual one for Hisako: a brush with the "lingering shadow" of Eiko's memory. This lingering shadow, however, takes on material properties. The "weight" of the past physically overwhelms Hisako when she puts on Eiko's clothes. The memory of Tony's wife is so "heavy" that she cannot help but burst into tears.

Standing in for the dark wells, subterranean bars, and other liminal spaces in Murakami's fiction, Eiko's empty closet becomes a place where the virtual past is overlaid onto physical reality in a sequence after Tony sells all of Eiko's clothing. Match cuts and dissolves merge memory and material experience. At the beginning of the scene, Tony is captured in the middle of the frame in a deep focus shot of the empty closet. A dissolve segues to Tony lying on the closet floor in the forefront of the frame, shot

from the same position, suggesting the passing of time. This early representation of time contrasts with the repetition created through matching, as the shot of Tony lying on the floor is matched with a shot of Shōzaburō lying in the same position in his prison cell during the war. The form cut on Tony's body, matched with that of his father, merges these two moments, giving memory material presence in the film.

The scene then cuts to Tony's body, captured in the same deep focus shot that it was at the start of the sequence. Although we assume that this image indicates a return to the present in the timeline of the film, lighting makes it appear if the space is not real but part of the world of imagination, cut off from the temporal sequence that initially gave structure to the scene. The scene then dissolves again to reveal Hisako crying in the middle of the frame, while Tony lies in the forefront. Finally, the scene dissolves one more time to the original image of Tony lying on the floor of the closet, with the door closed. Editing in this way layers virtual and actual images, disrupting the linear temporality of the story to visualize the transformation of the opaque materiality of the present, Eiko's closet, into a prism of affect and memory.

This conflation of material and memory challenges the othering of the past. Just as Hisako represents an amalgamation of the virtual memory of Tony's wife and the real woman living in the present, Tony represents a fusion of the person living in the present and the memory of the past, as depicted through his father. By portraying its leading characters in this way, *Tony Takitani* reveals the problem of situating the "lost decades" of the Heisei period within a linear model of historical representation.

The very name "lost decades" suggests a fracture in the unfolding of time. Foremost among the things lost during this time was the linear model of progress that allowed Japan to chart its development and to imagine a cohesive identity across historical periods. The narrative of high growth that characterized Japanese experience leading up to Heisei subsumed events into a unified storyline that followed the rise of the nation

to the status of a global power. This narrative was given linear form by the Japanese notion of the *nengō* system, or the method by which historical eras are named with the ascension of a new emperor. The naming of each new era divides history into periods, as the trauma of the previous era gives way to the hope and promise of a new one. However, economic stagnation at the start of Heisei became a vortex in the flow of this metanarrative, exposing its limitations. Historian Carol Gluck argues that “when it appeared in the early 1990s that both the postwar and the modern might be reaching their ‘end’ at the same time, the doubled historical voltage generated a powerful sort of ‘history shock.’” (Gluck 2003, 303) The popular imagination of Heisei reflects this crisis of history through works literature, manga, anime, and especially film.

In an oft-quoted description of cinema, John Belton speaks to its power to bridge gaps between historical periods: “Movies carry [audiences] across difficult periods of cultural transition in such a way that a more or less coherent national identity remains in place, spanning the gaps and fissures that threaten to disrupt its movement and to expose its essential disjointedness.” (Belton 1996, 2) Belton proposes that film has the ability to program cultural memory in such a way that the political and social ruptures of history are resignified as sites of national identification. Far from creating cohesion, works of film analyzed in this study underscores the fractures existing in the historical imagination of Heisei. It does so by reorienting the understanding of events that have been used to structure the narrative of economic progress. References to two events in particular - the end of radicalism in the early 1970s, and the subway gas attacks in 1995 - emerge repeatedly in Heisei criticism and culture, serving as important markers of the high-growth era.

The so-called United Red Army incident in February 1972 marks the moment when the country turned its back on activism and embraced capitalist growth. In 1969, the Red Army Faction (*Sekigunha*) was formed by activists with the goal of overthrowing

the government and sparking revolution through bombings, hijackings, and other forms of aggression. Due to police repression, the faction went underground shortly after its formation in 1971 and morphed into the United Red Army (*Rengō Sekigun*, hereafter URA). In the winter of 1971–1972, the URA established training grounds in the mountains of the Gunma Prefecture to prepare members for revolution. Having attracted police attention by that time, members fled the training grounds and dispersed, moving from one hideout to another, eventually crossing into the Nagano Prefecture. There, five young radicals barricaded themselves in a lodge near Mount Asama with a hostage and held off a force of three thousand riot police in a siege that lasted ten days and was broadcast live on NHK to a captivated audience of sixty million viewers, many of whom initially sympathized with the radicals. A few weeks after the standoff ended in the death of two officers and the arrest of the radicals, several bodies of URA members were discovered buried at the army’s training grounds, revealing a deadly internal purge that occurred during the months prior to the siege. This shocking revelation led to a sharp decline in public support for the movements ushering in the era of unprecedented economic development. As one of the three great traumas of postwar Japan, the URA incident, and the larger landscape of radicalism of which it was a part, constitutes a traumatic residue in the Japanese historical imaginary. Along with Japan’s defeat in World War II and the bursting of the economic bubble in the 1990s, the aftereffect of radicalism remained in the cultural consciousness even after the extremist period ended.

Identified as a repetition of the radical violence of the URA, the Aum gas attacks in 1995 served as a harbinger of the end of the bubble economy, creating a fitting sense of historical symmetry as the other bookend to the period of continued economic growth. Indeed, the shadow of the attacks would loom over Heisei until July 2018, when Asahara Shōkō, the mastermind behind the attack, was put to death a

few weeks after the end of the Heisei period was announced. Asahara's death was part of the national plan to tie up loose ends, leaving the past behind, as the nation eagerly looked forward to a new era.

The referentiality established between these two events served to structure Japanese history in Heisei cultural criticism. Works of Heisei film, however, problematize the appropriation of these events in the telling of a cohesive story of the period. Situating historical moments within a master narrative, and identifying casual relationships between events within the logic of linear history, requires a "closed" past that has been fully assimilated in the historical consciousness. That Heisei culture often represents Aum through the image of the URA, and the URA through the image of Aum conflates these two traumas, complicating their placement as stable markers within a linear view of history.

Crystalline Moments in the Films of Kurosawa Kiyoshi

Artistic representations lend themselves better to non-linear connections to the past than historiography; particularly film, as a medium, can successfully capture the conflation of past and present by melding virtual and actual images. To this end, film utilizes "time crystals" instead of timelines to reimagine the relationship between the present and the past. The term "time crystal" was coined by Gilles Deleuze to describe forms of temporal representation other than those preoccupied with the identification of beginnings and ends, and causes and effects. Deleuze uses the idea of a "time crystal" as a metaphor for the way audiences experience the reciprocal exchange between the actual and virtual in cinematic images. Crystalline moments in film create relationships that are not based on causal links between the present and a closed past, but rather on the reflection of virtual images of the past through the actual present, and the actual through the virtual. For instance, Tony's closet in *Tony Takitani* becomes a time crystal through the process of editing, where images of contemporary Japan are layered with those of its past.

Representing history in this way upsets fixed identities that have given shape to normative history. Crystalline moments in the films of Kurosawa Kiyoshi reimagine the relationship to Japan's radicalism—a period that the country would like to forget. Kurosawa effaces artificial divisions between past and present, creating new perspectives on political polarization and the fringe voices marginalized in the process of creating the social consensus at the heart of the high growth period of the 1970s.

Director Aoyama Shinji argues that Kurosawa's films tell the history of Japan's extremist era by introducing visual signifiers of radicalism. His films demonstrate the lingering effects of the ideological polarization that characterized the extremist era. At the start of *Karisuma (Charisma, 1999)*, the detective hero of the film is called to an abandoned building in the woods, where a young radical holds a government official hostage at gunpoint. Forced into an either-or scenario, the detective gets the drop on the gunman but hesitates to shoot, justifying his actions by explaining that he wanted to save both the radical and the official rather than chose a side. As a result, however, the radical kills the hostage; in turn, the police shoots him.

Because the detective did not intervene in the hostage scenario, he is suspended from duty. To serve his suspension, he departs to the countryside where he immediately becomes caught up in a dispute involving an enigmatic tree that is a threat to the rest of the natural environment because it is releasing poison that is killing other plant life. The motif of poisoning the public is recreated in perhaps the most overt connection to the gas attacks in Kurosawa's films—the jellyfish in *Akarui mirai (Bright Future, 2003)* that releases poison into the Tokyo harbor.

A botanist living in the area wants to destroy the tree, while a young activist protects the tree's right to life. Thrown into the middle of this polarizing conflict, the detective is pressed to choose a side, just as he was in the incident that began the film. Reenacting the hostage standoff that began the story, the detective confronts a

militia member tasked with protecting the tree holding the botanist hostage at gunpoint under the tree. Whereas the inability to choose sides in the first standoff led to equivocation, resulting in the death of both the hostage and the gunman, this time the detective acts with the interest of both parties in mind. Armed with a pistol, he incapacitates the gunman with a shot to the ear allowing the botanist to escape, while preserving the gunman's life.

That the detective is able to save both parties in the dispute highlights the limitations of the either-or rhetoric used to characterize the hostage scenario that began the film, the conflict surrounding the tree, and the social order at the heart of Japan's economic miracle, created through the othering of the past. By conflating the conflicts of the extremist era with those of the Heisei period, then, Kurosawa's films challenge the self-evidence of the established order of Heisei as a product of the evolutionary process of overcoming the past, depicting the period, instead, as an effect of polarizing tensions that have not been resolved. By challenging the artificial divide between a completed past and a self-evident present, these films highlight the difference between the way the past is represented in the dominant history of Heisei and the way it is experienced in the cultural imagination of the period.

History reframed: *Hikari no ame*

However, to argue that film from the lost decades turns its back on history would be inaccurate. Along with underscoring the limitations of outdated models of national progress, references to the past suggest a continued attempt to contextualize these events, albeit in a way that recognizes their displacement from the historical imagination, but also the way they continue to impact contemporary experience. The treatment of the past in works of Heisei film resists positivistic attempts to recover the past in whole as well as nihilistic views of the un-narratability of history. Instead, Heisei film experiments with different ways to bring the past into the present, by transforming abstract events into physical experience.

They do this by processing the past through personal acts of memory. Discussing the differences between history and memory, Peter Novick suggests that history involves an ordering of the past as past and present as present, while memory seeks to bring the past into the present as part of the myth making needs of the group (Novick 2001, 4). Films that deal with the past seek alternatives to the dominant narratives of history by focusing on the meaning-making activities of commemoration in the here and now. At the same time, these films do not just ignore the larger narratives that give meaning to experience on a grand scale in favor of smaller stories. Merely switching the focus from objective to subjective experience reinforces a false binary between the two. Instead, the films examined here highlight the interdependence between these two modes of processing the past, challenging the epistemological primacy afforded a closed past by identifying a locus of meaning for past events in acts of commemoration in the present.

In *Hikari no ame* (*Rain of Light*, 2001) characters seek to remember an event they did not witness. The film tells of the making of a film about the URA 30 years after it occurred. Ultimately, the struggle to make a film about the URA itself reveals the reality that history struggles to capture. Like the URA, the filmmakers struggle to realize a common goal—for the URA, it was revolution, and for the filmmakers, making a film about revolution. The ritual of filmmaking bridges the divide between objective historical accounts and imaginative acts of commemoration because it situates the story within temporal boundaries to establish historical accuracy and then employs creativity and interpretation to depict the experience. The staff turns to the resources of cinema to imagine the experience of the URA without having to depict events exactly as they occurred. In contrast to the documentary style used at the start of the film, the scenes capturing the historical drama of the URA utilize the cinematography and genre conventions of Hollywood cinema. The representation of the event is constantly framed within the present experience of the actors. The cast gains an appre-

ciation of URA suffering through the rigors of movie making itself. Scenes cut between images of URA members dealing with the cold and images of the cast and crew struggling to deal with the frigid conditions of the shooting location. One cast member, whose character was killed and buried, must reenact this grisly death—an experience that leaves her with a visceral understanding of the lynching of URA members. In this way, the act of interpreting, reenacting, and even creating the incident in the present serves as a form of remembering.

Neoliberalism in public space: *Distance*

Kore-eda Hirokazu's *Distance* (2001) locates the meaning of trauma in rituals performed by survivors. The story tells of six individuals whose family members were involved in a terrorist attack perpetrated by the fictional sect called Arc of Truth. Arc of Truth members, we learn, released poison in the water supply of a Tokyo suburb and then committed mass suicide on the banks of a lake near their remote cabin hideout. *Distance* opens on the third anniversary of the incident and follows the lives of the main characters as they memorialize their family members at the lake where they died. Although the characters search for meaning by visiting the actual location it took place, their stay in the cabin becomes less about finding prepackaged meaning there, but about recreating the past—an act that becomes a form of remembering in and of itself. Spending the night in the cabin allows them to commemorate the event in a visceral way. Their memory of something they did not witness obtains material form through their physical engagement with the space: they walk on the same floors and sleep in the same rooms as those they mourn. Forced to spend the night in the cold cabin, they huddle together like Arc of Truth members on the eve of the attack. In this way, the cabin manifests the meaning of the event through the physical and visceral experience of the characters in the present. Indeed, Kore-eda's films demonstrate a general distrust towards the past, emphasizing physical interactions in the present as a way of remembering.

In a film career that has spanned much of the Heisei period, Kore-eda's representations of everyday life are shaped by the neoliberal policies of the Japanese government in the late 1990s and 2000s—policies that were designed to kick start the economy amidst the ongoing recession. According to film scholar Anna Cooper, neoliberal policies inject capitalist logic into every aspect of human interaction: “Neoliberalism has affected virtually every aspect of human life: not just traditionally-understood economic spheres like labor practices but also areas like urban geography, human mobilities . . . interpersonal relationships and family life, conceptions of selfhood, etc.” (Cooper 2019, 265) I am particularly interested in Kore-eda's resistance to the appropriation of urban space and family life by the logic of neoliberalism. Urban geography directs movement in Kore-eda's films. Train lines and city streets direct characters in a prescribed manner. Yet, the very movement of characters through these spaces, as captured in film, allows them to temporarily remake these spaces, leaving an atmosphere that lingers even after they pass.

Spaces in Kore-eda's films, like the cabin in *Distance*, are places that are only possible in film. Places that are both part of everyday life, given form through his attention to documentary stylistics, but also colored by the emotional interaction of those that move through them. Kore-eda's films are often set in high locations: hills overlooking an ocean in *Aruitemo aruitemo* (*Still Walking*, 2008), an apartment on the top floor of a massive *danchi* (public housing) in *Umi yori mo mada fukaku* (*After the Storm*, 2016), and in towns overlooking the ocean in *Umimachi Diary* (*Our Little Sister*, 2015). The visceral experience of moving through space is accentuated by the strain of climbing up stairs and hills, allowing affect to linger there, remaking the space in the viewer's mind. Characters in *Umimachi Diary* take short cuts to their favorite spots high up in the hills in their home of Kamakura.

In *Aruitemo aruitemo*, ritualistic climbing up and down a public staircase in the hills appropriates the space for bonding

for the Yokoyama family. The first time the stairs appear in the film, they are pictured as a public space. A runner descends the stairs along with the patriarch of the Yokoyama family out on his morning walk. Later, the second son of the family, Ryōta, climbs the same staircase with his wife and son on the way to visit his parents. As they struggle up the hill, they stop along the way to talk about personal matters. This time, they are all alone on the stairs. At the end of the film, Ryōta, his father, and son, descend the stairs in the same fashion. Ryōta stops to make a phone call. As before, there is no one else on the stairs. Yet the capturing of the movement of these characters up and down the stairs throughout the film transforms it from a public space structured by the logic of the city into a space of ritualistic bonding for the Yokoyamas. If public spaces guide the subject, in Kore-eda's films, the subject's movement through them also shapes them.

Indeed, characters are often introduced as they travel through city spaces. In *Umi yori mo mada fukaku*, the main character travels by train, bus, and foot to get to his mother's apartment complex in the Nerima district of Tokyo. Ryōta is directed through the space, but his very transitory movement through it allows Ryōta to borrow it momentarily. As he moves in a prescribed course through the train station, onto a bus, and down an alley that leads to the *danchi*, the film emphasizes the visceral experience of moving by including sensory experiences. Ryōta stops to eat noodles, standing and slurping with other customers. The woman in front of him on the bus cools herself with a fan on the hot day. He opens a drink as he walks to the apartment complex. Providing a sense of movement through the city by accentuating other sensations that are relatable to the audience temporarily colors the atmosphere of these spaces. The creation of spaces in which real and imaginary, public and private enfold into each other provide the basis of experience in Kore-eda's films.

This is also true of his view of the family unit. During the Heisei period, the family bore the burden of economic progress un-

der neoliberal policies. Japan's social safety net, which enabled the nation's economic development, was outsourced to these family units by the neoliberal policies of the state. Families were expected to *relieve* the nation of the economic weight of providing its citizens welfare by taking care of their own familial network.

Kore-eda's recent film *Manbiki kazoku* (*Shoplifters*, 2018) reimagines the family from the ground up rather than deconstructing top-down version created by state policies. Indeed the film takes Kore-eda's disruption of the family beyond what he has attempted in previous films. It does this by imagining a family that is not defined by any of the traditional markers of familial organizations as defined by neoliberal logic. According to Levi Strauss, the notion of family in contemporary capitalist societies implies the following three designations: "The family originates in marriage; it includes the husband, wife, and the children born of their union; and the members of the family are united among themselves by legal bonds." (Silverman 1992, 39) As we learn partway through the film, these individuals are not bound by the designations of family outlined by Strauss.

Unbound by conventional limitations, the fluidity of this non-traditional unit renews the symbolic order of the family. Members of families, Louis Althusser suggests, are appropriated into a symbolic order before they are actually born, pre-inscribed as a child or sibling while still in the womb (Althusser 2014, 74). That the family members are not related by blood allows them to avoid appropriation into a pre-existing symbolic order defined around an official meaning of family. Instead, they are free to formulate their own sign system based on familial affection rather than legal prescriptions, referring to each other by familial designations, like father or sister. Though these are the same identifiers used to define legal relationships, they have nevertheless been stripped of this bureaucratic function, becoming a term of affection. In this way, *Manbiki kazoku* and other films by Kore-eda, transform the family from a social institution into an

affectual experience. By depicting family relationships outside of the normative system, Kore-eda's films identify the end of Heisei as an opportunity for Japan de-regulate the meaning of the family in an effort to revitalize this most basic unit of society.

Moving beyond the lost decades

If Heisei film renegotiates its relationship to the past, it also imagines a future beyond the post-bubble period. Because they track the development of youth from adolescence to adulthood in a teleological trajectory, coming-of-age films are a fitting way to depict the anticipation of moving into the future. In this final section, I want to compare two coming-of-age films from the Heisei period and how they envision a post-bubble world: *Ai no mukidashi* (*Love Exposure*, 2008) and *Eureka* (2000). On one hand, *Ai no mukidashi* seeks to remediate the pre-bubble order by normalizing youthful angst in the 2000s as part of a process of realizing the future. *Eureka*, on the other hand, reveals the cultural fissures that prevent the post-bubble generation from inheriting this order, creating fractures in the logic of the coming-of-age genre and historical continuity.

On the surface, *Ai no mukidashi* seems incapable of transporting audiences across the social ills of Heisei: juvenile delinquency, prostitution, religious cults, sexual aberrations, and other problems abound in the film. However, throughout the film, these problems are normalized as part of the maturation process for both the main characters and the larger period in which they reside.

More than other narrative forms, coming-of-age stories unfold in linear fashion. However, the development of the hero, is also determined by circular forces. The linear narrative flow that guides the story to its resolution, and the protagonist's maturation, is delayed by the protagonist's compulsion to return to his roots, spurred by his Oedipal desire for his mother. The linear and circular trajectories of the coming-of-age story contradict each other, Michael Minden suggests, with the linear manifesting in the continuation of the patriarchal

order and the circular manifesting in "incest" and the collapse of this order (Minden 1997, 1). These contradictions, however, are resolved by the marriage convention that comes at the end of the story. By wedding a proxy mother, the hero is able to sublimate his incestual desires through a socially acceptable outlet, while inheriting the patriarchal order as the head of a new household.

The coming-of-age genre depicts the remediation of the conflicts and contradictions of youth into a teleological story. Images of excess in *Ai no mukidashi* seemingly disrupt the synthesizing impulse of the coming-of-age formula. A boy-meets-girl drama, the film tells the experiences of two youths, Yū and Yōko, who each endure a tumultuous adolescence until they unite as a couple at the end of the film. Throughout the 237-minute runtime, the film parades a carnival of juvenile delinquency and sexual deviation that seemingly threatens the continuity of the patriarchal order, stanching the process of Yū's coming-of-age story and accentuating the divide between the "lost generation" (members of society in their mid-30s to mid-40s) and the baby boomers who came before.

However, the normalization of youth excess in the film as part of maturation process underscores the continuity of the larger historical imagination of the Heisei period. The linear logic of the coming-of-age story relates to the larger context in which the protagonist develops. Although *Ai no mukidashi* was criticized for representing the apocalyptic nature of youth culture in the 2000s, in actuality, the excess and antisocial behavior of post-bubble Japan are represented in the film as necessary components of the teleos of the story and the renewal of a linear view of history. This is accomplished at the end of the story, as the reunion of Yū and Yōko intimates at the creation of a new family unit.

In this way, the carnivalesque depictions of social ills in Heisei merely reflect the tension between incest and inheritance in the coming-of-age genre itself—tension that ultimately facilitates the growth of the protagonist and the assimilation of

their story into the larger historical trends of which they are a part. In this way, *Ai no mukidashi* visualizes continuity between Japan's past and its future, depicting the function of film to bridge these gaps, as described in the Jon Belton quote above.

In contrast, Aoyama Shinji's *Eureka* disrupts the synthesizing impulse of linear history, highlighting a failed inheritance between the past and present in the coming-of-age story. The film opens with a violent event that leads to the dissolution of two family units. A shooting on a public bus results in the death of six passengers, leaving only the middle-aged bus driver, Makoto, and two children—a brother and sister, Naoki and Kozue—alive after the gunman is shot and killed by authorities. The three hours of film time that follow this traumatic event track the experiences of the survivors in the wake of the incident as they are abandoned by their families and come together to form a new family with Makoto serving as a proxy father to Naoki and Kozue.

Ultimately a cynical film, however, *Eureka* does not depict the renewal of the patriarchal order and the grand narratives of high growth through the dynamics of inheritance. Rather, past dysfunctions create a cycle of violence that remains unresolved at the end of the film. Despite the reestablishment of the family in proxy form, the psychological damage incurred by Makoto limits his ability to pass on a legacy that can guide Naoki and Kozue's development. Due to Makoto's ineffectuality as a patriarch, Naoki's inheritance comes from another father figure in the film—the gunman on the bus. As the film progresses, we learn that several young women are murdered in Makoto's hometown. At first, the assumption is that Makoto is the killer and that he is acting out the trauma he experienced as the victim of the bus standoff. However, it eventually turns out that Naoki is actually responsible for the killing spree. His violent outburst demonstrates the ineffectuality of the coming-of-age narrative, in which youthful rebellion is parlayed into an eventual place in the patriarchal order. Through a coming-of-age protagonist who does not

develop in a positive trajectory through the inheritance process, *Eureka* demonstrates the degree to which the traumas of the past have fractured the historical imagination and confounded the symbolic function of the coming-of-age story to subsume past experience within a larger narrative of development.

Films like *Eureka* disrupt the synthesizing impulse of linear history, forging a view of the future not based on past models of national growth and historical development. While *Ai no mukidashi* demonstrates how the contradictions of inheritance are eventually resolved in the maturation process, *Eureka* highlights the inability of this process to cover up fissures that open between generations. In this way, the film accentuates the need for a new framework to guide a vision of the future other than the renewed narratives of the lost decades.

This paper is not an attempt to provide a comprehensive examination of Heisei popular film—a task that is too large for any one study. There are certainly several other ways to approach the meaning and significance of the Heisei period. Rather, I seek to illustrate the Japanese cultural imaginary as it transitions to a new period and searches for new ways of understanding the past other than the linear foundations of the metanarratives of high growth that guided experience throughout much of postwar Japan. As the individual chapters suggest, Heisei was a time of historical crisis that led to an abandoning of the framework that gave meaning to the national identity to that point and an imagining of a new relationship to the past. It was also, as the current impulse to move beyond Heisei suggests, a time of imagining a new vision of the future.

As part of this vision of the future, Kore-eda's *Manbiki kazoku* suggests a turn toward more pressing social issues that impact everyday people. Issues relating to unemployment, poverty, and the dissolution of the family unit in Japan take precedence in recent films over the historical inquiries presented in films from first decade of the 2000s. These issues gain greater

significance in light of the global pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests that are spreading around the world, drawing attention to the problems of inequality and

racism. Developments of Japanese film in the wake of these crises will certainly need to address the injustices that persist in its own cultural context.

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Endnotes

- 1 This section on *Tony Takitani* is based on a paper I published in the *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* (see Yamada 2020).