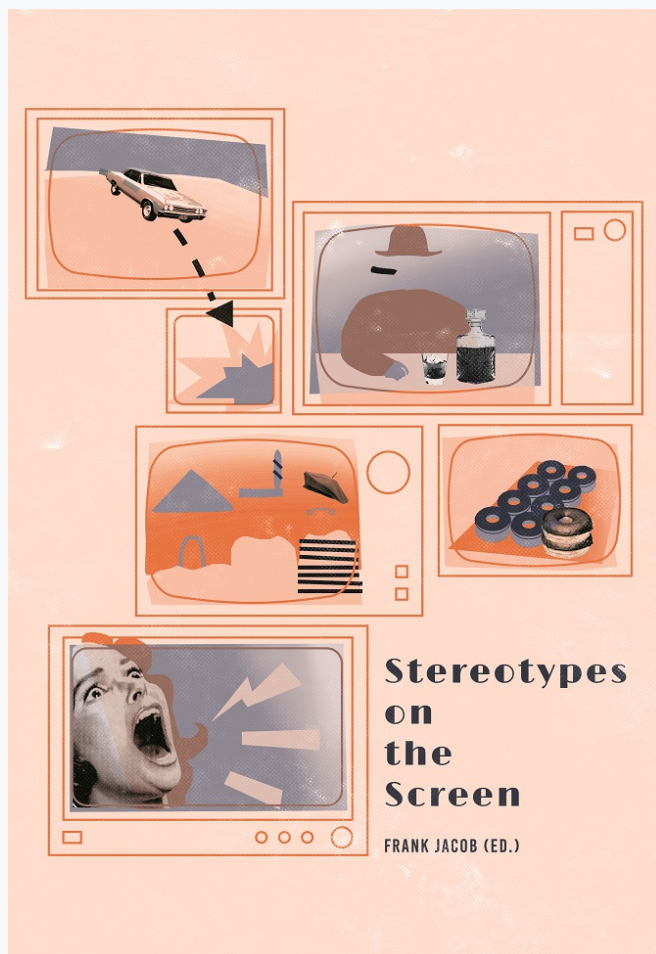


## Entertainment - Journal of Media and Movie Studies

Vol 1 (2016)

Stereotypes on the Screen



### Transference of Trauma in Body Genres: Wronged Women and Damaged Childhoods in *Ringu* (1998) and *Audition* (1999)

*Eunah Lee*

Copyright © 2018, Eunah Lee



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

#### To cite this article:

Lee, E. (2016). Transference of Trauma in Body Genres: Wronged Women and Damaged Childhoods in *Ringu* (1998) and *Audition* (1999). *Entertainment - Journal of Media and Movie Studies*, 1, 81-113. Retrieved from <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/entertainment/article/view/15960>

#### 4.

### Transference of Trauma in Body Genres: Wronged Women and Damaged Childhoods in *Ringu* (1998) and *Audition* (1999)

Eunah LEE

Despite its history of upheaval and reformation Japan has created and abides by a national myth that posits an essential continuity between its modern national development and its pre-modern era. According to Marilyn Ivy in *Discourses of the Vanishing*, Japan's claiming its coevalness, that is to say, "the coincident modernity" corresponding to that of Euro-American nations,<sup>1</sup> has nevertheless created a collective national anxiety and trauma. Since first opening itself up to the imperial West in the Meiji era, Japan has made persistent efforts to form itself as a modern nation-state commensurate with Western powers, which accompanied social and cultural turbulence such as imperial expansion, totalitarianism, violent global wars, military defeat in World War II, and the U.S. Occupation. Fran Lloyd points out that Japan's expansion—invading and colonizing other Asian nations—resulted from an adaptation of Western modernity.<sup>2</sup> As the West had constructed itself as the dominant world power in the nineteenth century, Japan attempted to have "a Japan-dominated international order in East Asia" as a replacement for Western power over Asia.<sup>3</sup> By attacking Pearl Harbor in 1941 and thus acting as an aggressor on American soil, Japan caused the U.S. to join the War, initially in the Pacific theater

---

<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Ivy, "National-Cultural Phantasms and Modernity's Losses" in *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Fran Lloyd, "Introduction: Critical Reflections" in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2002), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Elise K. Tipton. "Contesting the Modern in the 1930s" in *Modern Japan: A Social and Political History* (London: Routledge, 2008), 130.

only but eventually in Europe as well. The mobilization of U.S. forces ultimately led to the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that resulted in Japan's surrender and occupation by American forces.<sup>4</sup>

Post-war Japan's rapid growth is often called an "economic miracle"; the nation achieved astonishing changes in the course of transforming itself "from the ashes of defeat" into "an economic power second only to the United States."<sup>5</sup> The ways in which such miraculous achievements were possible, Tipton asserts, is due to the unique Japanese combination of continuing to value its traditionally hierarchical social structure and communal sense of loyalty while also privileging the modern ideologies of enlightenment and progress. The dual emphasis on the pre-modern ideology of Confucianism, which values "hard work, frugality, loyalty and learning,"<sup>6</sup> and on the aforementioned modern ideologies, which promote fast economic development, enabled the fostering of productive and "cooperative relations between labor and management" as well as "the commitment of workers to their companies" that enhanced productivity.<sup>7</sup>

David R. Leheny suggests, quoting William W. Kelly and Merry I. White, that Japan is a "family nation" that has "an idealized relationship between a benevolent and competent state, enterprising and seemingly infallible Japanese firms, and an ethnically homogenous nation structured around

---

<sup>4</sup> William W. Kelly and Merry I. White, "Students, Slackers, Singles, Seniors, and Strangers: Transforming a Family-Nation," in *Beyond Japan: The Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2006) quoted in Lloyd, *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Tipton, *Modern Japan*, 187.

<sup>6</sup> In *Modern Japan* (2008), Tipton notes that although Japanese citizens have been skeptical since the early seventies about the sacrifices they have made for the nation's rapid growth, the secure employment conditions and material abundance characterizing the lives of salary men in big enterprises, and their families, by extension, may have silenced the doubts of such individuals (214).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 204

traditional nuclear families.”<sup>8</sup> Nuclear families, in Japanese society, have functioned within a social structure that is constructed to maximize the efficiency of the labor force, which has resulted in the repression of women.<sup>9</sup> The idealized family is required to uphold a clear distinction between the roles of husband and wife, who sacrifice themselves for each other, their family, “the greater good” of society, and the nation.<sup>10</sup> In this structure, Japanese society has emphasized the role of mothers in cultivating and educating their children to be modern citizens.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it is the sacrifices of women that was inevitable for Japan’s rapid growth in finance, as well as its industrial and technological advancement that again brought back material abundance to family members, and, in turn, reaffirmed the validity of the national image as a homogeneous middle-class nation with hegemonic ideologies.<sup>12</sup>

The Japanese economic bubble in the 1980s, characterized by a rapid increase in the price of stocks and real

---

<sup>8</sup> David R. Leheny, “A ‘Vague Anxiety’ in 1990s Japan,” in *Think Global, Fear Local:*

*Sex, Violence, and Anxiety in Contemporary Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ichiyo Muto, “The Birth of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1970s,” In *The*

*Other Japan: Conflict, Compromise, and Resistance Since 1945*, ed. Joe Moore (Armonk, NY: East Gate Books, 1997), 154.

<sup>10</sup> Tipton, *Modern Japan*, 214.

<sup>11</sup> In the Meiji period, according to Marilyn Ivy (1995), the establishment of modern nation-building occurred alongside the restoration of the emperor as well as the building of a modern citizenry that was educated, conscripted, and disciplined into becoming imperial subjects. The scheme of building educated and disciplined modern subjects, which resulted from the ideologies of modernity—a developmental sense of time, notions of change, development, and civility—has a parallel with the development and conceptualization of modern notions of the child and childhood (6).

<sup>12</sup> Susan Napier, “Woman Lost: the Dead, Damaged, or Absent Female in Postwar Fantasy,” in *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 56.

estate, burst in the early 1990s. As a result, the number of bankruptcies increased greatly, and banks were forced to deal with massive non-performing loans. In addition, many alarming socio-economic and technological crises during the time added more reason to doubt modern national ideologies regarding the continuation of national development. Two of the critical social issues that accompanied the recession in Japan during the nineties were the increasing rate of juvenile crime and “the sexual precociousness of girls and young women.”<sup>13</sup> A significant number of girls and young women were involved in “compensated dating,”<sup>14</sup> which came to epitomize, and was tied to, the large scale of social anxiety. The aforementioned events, along with the collapse of the stock market and banking system, were “attended by growing evidence of distrust in large institutions,”<sup>15</sup> and this led to the creation of a prevalent sense of crisis in Japanese society. The long economic recession that started in the early nineties compelled many observers to recognize the possible failure and ruptures in both the modern ideologies of development and progress, and the predominant image of Japan as a primarily middle-class nation with homogeneous and harmonious familial relations at various social levels.<sup>16</sup>

In this paper, I will delineate the ways in which the trauma of modern nation-building in Japan, which has been repressed under Japan’s official narrative of linear progress, is revealed through an aesthetics of rupture—in terms of narrative and visuality—in J-horror and extreme films. Analyzing Nakata Hideo’s *Ringu* (1998) and Miike Takashi’s *Audition* (1999) as representative examples, I will elucidate how the dysfunctional nuclear families and single female

---

<sup>13</sup> Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Akiko Hashimoto and John W. Traphagan, “Changing Japanese Families,” in *Imagined Families, Lived Families: Culture and Kinship in Contemporary Japan* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 9.

characters, their realities shaped by the social conditions of the nineties, are shown as transposed repetitions of those who were marginalized in the past for the sake of Japan's rapidly achieved capitalist and technological modernity and supremacy in the global arena.<sup>17</sup> Cathy Caruth points out that particular stories of trauma are “[narratives] of a belated experience, far from telling of [escapes] from reality—rather [attesting to their] endless impact on a life.”<sup>18</sup> Trauma is generated in the catastrophic events that leave wounds in the mind that will not be healed, but repeatedly come back to the survivor. The nature of trauma can neither be known nor be explicable in language, and thus trauma returns “to haunt the survivor later on.”<sup>19</sup> According to Caruth, a story of trauma is structured “not simply [to] represent the violence of a collision but [it] also conveys the impact of its incomprehensibility.”<sup>20</sup>

In horror and extreme films from Japan, violence is reenacted for unknown reasons in the present, obliquely taking into account tragic and traumatic past events of the marginalized and oppressed with linguistically inexpressible traumatic moments often inserted as fragmented and disturbing scenes. For example, in *Ringu*, the shocking face of a female ghost is revealed in a disturbing moment where Reiko, the protagonist, finds the rotten body of Sadako in a well. From the muddy water in the well, a hand comes out and

---

<sup>17</sup> A prevalent element of the J-horror and extreme films of the late 1990s and 2000s is the dysfunctional nuclear family, including the depiction of the anxiety and stress of single women and mothers regarding childbearing. In *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema* (2005), Jay McRoy argues the meaning of dysfunctional nuclear family units, constituted of a single mother and child, as shown in Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (1998) and *Dark Water* (2002), and Takashi Shimizu's *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002), in relation to contemporary Japanese culture and its traumatic experience of modernization.

<sup>18</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

grabs Reiko's arm, as the head hidden behind a tangle of long black hair emerges. Eerie and unrecognizable moaning and rumbling sounds enhance the scene's sense of unease as Reiko unveils the face from behind the hair, which falls out as soon as it is touched. In *Audition*, Asami, who looks to all outward appearances like a submissive Asian woman with her slender figure, long, straight hair, and a black apron over a white fleet skirt and top—although her black gloves may hint at something slightly less innocent—tortures a middle-aged man by poking numerous needles into his stomach and eyes, and then slices off one of his feet with a razor wire. Paralyzed, all her victim can do is groan. These films feature shocking horror, and intensely visualized depictions of pain, which are the hallmarks of what has come to be recognized as J-horror or extreme cinema.

When global audiences encounter characters' psychological shocks and physical pain through the dramatized visualizations and plots of these films, they often respond bodily through their own skin by imagining and empathizing with characters. From feminist film theories to cultural studies, discourses on the spectatorship of body genres, a term referring to genres of horror, melodrama, and pornography that create bodily reactions from spectators, have focused on their subversive characteristics, as films belonging to a genre that challenges the binary distinction between object and subject, and high and low art. Linda Williams notes that body genre films have been regarded as a degraded cultural form, as it "[privileges] sensation" and "directly [addresses] the spectator's body" (5).<sup>21</sup> "Viewers feel too directly, too viscerally, manipulated by text," she asserts, and this causes "the lack of aesthetic distance, a sense of overinvolvement in sensation and emotion."<sup>22</sup> Steven Shaviro theorizes the ways in which "an excessive capacity" through

---

<sup>21</sup> Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4: (1991): 5.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

cinematic images affects the body of spectators “unwarrantedly.”<sup>23</sup> He argues that spectators respond “viscerally to visual forms, before having the leisure to read or interpret them as symbols”.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Patricia MacCormack argues that the spectatorship of minoritarians—referring to women, racial others, and perverts—is created through cinemasochism, or the spectator’s “submission to the image beyond comprehension.”<sup>25</sup> This submission leads to a “loss of the self that involves an encounter of the infinite outside within the self” of spectators.<sup>26</sup>

J-horror and extreme cinemas from Japan contain numerous narrative gaps, with no reasonable explanation provided for why certain horrifying images appear or how such gruesome events in the past are related to the characters living in the filmic present. In such narrative structures, the filmic horror is created through a psychological shock that is generated by abrupt insertions into the films’ narratives of graphic images of unrecognizable, dismembered, or distorted bodies or faces, or of sequences of extremely violent past events. Within this structure, untold and unhealed wounds return as an additional source of trauma, forcing audience members to witness traumatic events of the past as well as absorb the shock of violence and feel the sensation of pain in the present. Along this line of discourses about the bodily effects and meanings generated through cinematic visuality, this paper reveals, through analysis of *Ringu*, the ways in which inexplicable past traumas are visualized or materialized and then affect diegetic spectators (characters) in the film, whose fear and shock in turn are delivered to extradiegetic spectators (global audiences of *Ringu*) through terrifying images of the characters’ horrified faces. In addition, *Ringu* presents

---

<sup>23</sup> Steven Shaviro, “Film Theory and Visual Fascination,” in *Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1993), 30.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Patricia MacCormack, “Cinemasochism,” in *Cinesexuality* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 41.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.



characters who can sense and recognize traumatic incidents by touching people or things, and those traumatic incidents in the film are visualized in the form of flashback scenes. The film visualizes the ways in which the sense of touch evokes past memories of trauma that are repressed in the official history and ideologies as well as being inexplicable in language. Laura Marks, in her analysis of films by diasporic or ethnic directors in the West, advances the notion that certain visual impacts create bodily responses called tactile visuality, or a “new image from the memory of the sense of touch.”<sup>27</sup> She suggests that haptic visuality leads spectators to embody or sense, even if they are unable to understand, the traumatic cultural memories of others who are undergoing “the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge.”<sup>28</sup>

By focusing on disjunctive editing (flashback) scenes in *Audition*, this paper additionally discloses the ways in which the shock of traumatic incidents is visualized through cinematic effects. In terms of visual art forms that are associated with traumatic events or memories in the past and that recreate shocking sensations, Jill Bennett suggests that the past experience of trauma—which cannot be explained in the order of language—is revived as art that conveys the shock of trauma (the flashback that one involuntarily revisits) to spectators such that the past experience becomes “an experience of the present, an encounter with an ‘outside’”<sup>29</sup> Art forms that create a different language of “affect” can transmit shock to spectators by its visuality.<sup>30</sup> The pain of trauma is not registered in the process of memorizing daily experience, “common memory,” but it is inscribed in the

---

<sup>27</sup> Laura U. Marks, *The skin of the film: intercultural cinema, embodiment, and the senses* (Durham: Duke University Press:2000), xi.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*,1.

<sup>29</sup> Jill Bennett, “On the Subject of Trauma,” in *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford U Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

body through the skin, or “the sense memory.”<sup>31</sup> The visually striking scenes and disjunctive narratives in these films function as aesthetic tools for spectators to re-experience the traumatic shock of characters victimized by the patriarchal capitalist modern nation-building process of Japan. Along with delineating the traumatic modernization history of Japan, analysis of these two films—*Ringu* and *Audition*—will articulate the ways in which the collective memories of past trauma are interwoven with the altered socio-economic conditions of Japanese society in the 1990s.

Nakata Hideo’s *Ringu* presents the collective memories of past trauma in the stories of women and children who were victimized within the patriarchal and nationalist ideologies. In the film, a female ghost who was murdered as a child by her father in the 1950s, during Japan’s post-war modernization process,<sup>32</sup> returns via modern technological devices such as a videotape, televisions and telephones. The fear and horror experienced by the murdered child before her death in the 1950s return as unrecognized horror in the late 1990s, when the nation suffered during its economic recession from a loss of hope for the idealized nuclear family. Her curse, embedded in a video, is brought to bear on late-twentieth-century Tokyoites who happen to watch the video—its viewers die on the seventh day after watching the video—in the narrative present. In the expectation of finding out what caused the death of previous spectators of the video, the main characters of the film (and extradiegetic spectators as well) finish watching the video by choice. The video, however, refuses to

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 31-32.

<sup>32</sup> My analysis of trauma narratives in this paper are based on Jacques Lacan’s theory of psychoanalysis for trauma, the encounter of the Real. Lacan, in “Tuche and Automation” in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1988), suggests that the Real is the unspeakable, inexpressible, ineffable, unrepresentable truth, an undifferentiated space outside language that exists outside the Symbolic order. Lacan writes, “The real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it—in the form of trauma” (55).

reveal the cause of the viewers' deaths. Although hinting that "something horrible happened," the video insists through its successive presentation of cryptic scenes that it cannot be explained verbally or logically. Desperately looking for ways to resolve the curse, the main characters delve into the contextual and historical meanings of each scene of the video in the hope of tracing the curse back to its origin. Following the main characters' investigation in the film, the audience members of *Ringu* turn into witnesses of a hidden truth from the past. The cursed video in the film, and the film *Ringu* itself, are media for diegetic as well as extra-diegetic audiences to experience the unrepresentable trauma.

Eric White argues that the narrative of *Ringu* does not reiterate the traditional motifs of the return of the repressed, in which "the vengeful ghost losing its eternal rest" comes back and haunts the living, while its grudge is resolved by being "exorcized by means of a therapeutic catharsis."<sup>33</sup> Instead White hypothesizes that the endless transmission of the curse through the videotape and other technological devices highlights the fear and anxiety caused by the "simulacral proliferation of information in media-saturated culture."<sup>34</sup> He also asserts that the hidden faces of ghosts and the blurred images of the killed people's faces in photographs represent "the intrusion of 'posthuman' otherness," which means the imposition of "a new cultural logic of the simulacrum" onto "contemporary cultural life."<sup>35</sup> White suggests reading the narrative of *Ringu* as a postmodern text, that is to say, not as another uncanny horror story following the formula of "the return of the repressed," but as a narrative of the symptoms of postmodern and post-industrialized society. I claim, however, that the urban fear from which the films were born, and which the films in turn convey to

---

<sup>33</sup> Eric White, "Case Study: Nakata Hideo's *Ringu* and *Ringu 2*," in *Japanese Horror Cinema*, ed. Jay McRoy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U Press, 2005), 40.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

audiences, is not only the social anxiety caused in the nineties by recession. The films underscore the trauma of citizens who perceive the rupture in modern nation-building, on which the aforementioned social anxiety might shed light. I propose that the deviation in *Ringu*'s narrative arc from conventional horror films—the repressed returning without cathartic exorcism, only expanding the grudge through technology—is a post-traumatic text that reveals the traumatic past in Japan's modern nation-building project.

This anxiety about encountering the rupture is initially presented in *Ringu* in terms of exposing and relating the cursed video to the lives of teenagers on the loose in the nineties. The first victim in *Ringu* is a teenage girl named Tomoko (Takeuchi Yuko) who watched the video when she spent a night with her boyfriend and other friends on the Izu peninsula. In Tomoko's room, two teenage girls—Tomoko and Masami (Sato Hitomi)—are talking about Tomoko's secret: whether or not Tomoko has a sexual relationship with her boyfriend. This topic is overlapped with Masami's topic, which revolves around a rumor about the cursed video. At a certain point, Tomoko's parents call to inform the girls that they will be returning late. Tomoko and Masami respond with relief to the news, and they decide to celebrate their night of freedom. Tomoko, however, encounters the horror embedded in the video and dies of shock. Her shocking death scene then segues into a scene in which a camera screen records an interview of a teenage girl regarding the rumor of the cursed video. The main character Reiko (Matsushima Nanako) interviews several girls and learns from one of the interviewees that two high school students who watched the video were found dead in their parked car. Later, watching the news, Reiko finds out that these teenagers were mysteriously killed in a parked and locked car while engaged in sexual activity. These libertine teenagers' deaths draw Reiko's attention to the investigation of the cursed video, with the result that the circulation of the cursed video expands from the teenagers to Reiko's family. The fear of perceiving this

rupture stems from the phenomenon of middle-class teenage girls in the nineties who lived in comfortably well-off residential neighborhoods but overstepped the expected roles of girls that undergird the ideologies of the harmonious nuclear family.

*Ringu* depicts trauma that has lost a chance to be properly recognized, but having been buried, comes back in the form of a revenging ghost whose life is linked with that of a divorced woman who is a single mother. The link between two dysfunctional families—Shizuko's in the 1950s and Reiko's in the 1990s—represents the anxiety of post-industrial Japan with respect to its national ideologies about nuclear families and the role of mothers. During the recession in the 1990s, married women whose husbands might be laid off returned to the workforce in order to maintain the lifestyle to which their families were accustomed, as well as to support educational expenses for their children, although most of these women could only acquire part-time jobs. Despite their changed social conditions, these women were still responsible for housework and even wanted to prove that their working outside the home did not cause any inconvenience for their family members.<sup>36</sup> As a symptom of this altered cultural and economic state of Japanese society, the horror and extreme films released in the late 1990s present social anxiety caused by the loss of the idealized nuclear family and the undermining of the hegemonic view of women's expected role as dedicated mothers and auxiliary workers.

In *Ringu*, the main character Reiko is a busy career woman and a single mother with a seven-year-old son, Yoichi (Otaka Rikiya). From the first scene in which Yoichi appears, to the end of the film, Reiko is presented as a hard-working single mother who does not spend enough time with her son, and is therefore anxious for, and apologetic toward, him. Although Reiko and Yoichi are seen to be a close and loving mother and son, the film depicts tension between the

---

<sup>36</sup> Tipton, *Modern Japan*, 226.

demands placed on Reiko as a reporter and as a mother; throughout the film, Reiko repeatedly apologizes to Yoichi about getting home late from work and being unable to spend time with him. In the first scene in which Reiko and Yoichi are shown together, Reiko is late from work. She apologizes to her son, as they are scheduled to attend a pre-funeral ceremony at Tomoko's house (Tomoko is Reiko's niece and Yoichi's cousin). Yoichi clearly is used to such situations, and has not only changed into suitable clothes but even prepared Reiko's as well. Most of the time during the film, Reiko is away from Yoichi pursuing her investigation, and she frequently calls her son to tell him she is sorry for that. One night she stays with him, only to leave him at his grandfather's house so that she can travel the next day to further her investigation. That very night, however, Yoichi leaves his bed and watches the cursed tape while Reiko is asleep in the next room. After Reiko's realization that the only way to save her son is to have another person watch the video, she chooses to transmit the curse by showing it to her own father, even knowing it will cause his death. The film thus depicts the guilt of a single mother, who feels she is failing her son by being unable to provide him with a functioning nuclear family in which she provides a constant and nurturing presence. At the same time, it reveals how her guilt motivates her to transmit fear, in the form of the cursed video, to others.

The anxiety of characters who are situated in, and deal with, dysfunctional family issues in the narrative present of these film is interwoven with the mystery of a revengeful ghost whose origin can be traced back to the 1950s. Reiko's ex-husband Ryuji (Sanada Hiroyuki) is a professor with psychic powers but also an irresponsible father who is completely absent from his son's life (not even recognizing him when he passes Yoichi in the street). Despite his apathy as a father, Ryuji ends up helping Reiko investigate the curse. The divorced couple's investigation uncovers the buried story of a child who encountered a tragic death in the process of Japan's modernization. The curse of the video turns out to be

rooted in the murder of a young girl named Sadako, in the fifties, who is assumed to be the illegitimate child of an affair between Yamamura Shizuko and Dr. Ikuma Heihachiro. Shizuko was known for her psychic powers, while Dr. Ikuma was a famous professor of modern psychology who was convinced of Shizuko's psychic powers and attempted to demonstrate them in public. Following the failed demonstration, Shizuko committed suicide and Dr. Ikuma had to resign from his job. Ultimately, he throws his daughter Sadako down a well, and it is she who returns to the narrative present as a ghost. The illegitimate union of psychic Shizuko and Dr. Ikuma is echoed in Reiko and Ryuji's relationship; in the past the psychic was a woman (Shizuko), whereas now it is the husband (Ryuji) who has psychic powers. In a sense, the two couples are similarly marginal—one couple is having a secret affair and produces a child who cannot be acknowledged, while the other couple had a state-sanctioned relationship but broke it off after producing a publicly acknowledged child. The present couple's such characteristics seem diverted from the earlier couple's, taking a modernized and legalized form, but Reiko and Ryuji unwittingly spread the curse to their child rather than end it; Sadako's curse survives through being watched by Yoichi. This once-dysfunctional but reunited family—Reiko, Ryuji, and Yoichi—repeats mistakes similar to those from the past, and, by becoming mediums of the curse, reproduce tragedies in the present.

The combination of the pre-modern element and western modernity is, in *Ringu*, repeated through particular features of the characters, while the residue of trauma from the union of the pre-modern and the modern results in the unstoppable curse spreading. The aforementioned events of Sadako and Dr. Ikuma are set in 1950s Japan—especially, the post-war era when Japan struggled to reestablish itself as a modern nation after having undergone the traumas of war, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and several years of American occupation. In the nation's attempt to recover from trauma and redeem itself in the eyes of the

Allied powers by employing capitalist ideologies and technology from the West, there was a belief that Japan must remove pre-modern elements that still resided in its culture in the fifties.<sup>37</sup> Midori Matsui contends that Japan's acceptance and domestication of modern Western ideas and culture represented an "incomplete digestion," as Japan preserved its hierarchical pre-modern system in the fields of politics, economics, and education.<sup>38</sup>

In the film, the symptoms of that repression are shown as the story of a returned Sadako. Shizuko's psychic powers, which may symbolize the pre-modern elements, is denied and repressed by the modern western ideologies of mainstream society in post-war Japan. A western-educated psychologist, Dr. Ikuma attempts, through the public demonstration of Shizuko's psychic powers, to integrate pre-modern elements into the modernization process. But the only results are the tragic deaths of Shizuko and himself, as well as the trauma or grudge produced by their illegitimate union—Sadako. The symbolically loaded story of Sadako portrays that which has been repressed returning as a hybrid being of spirituality and technology that has taken form as an "incomplete digestion" of modernity; Sadako's psychic power allows her to have control over, and empower itself through, atomization, that is to say, telephone wires and television sets. She inherited her mother's psychic powers but they seem to be supplemented by her father's rationality and scientific capability. However powerful she may have been, Sadako was

---

<sup>37</sup> Japan's development as a late-modernizing nation-state is paralleled with its becoming a "colonialist, imperialist, and (some would say) fascist-Japan" that was able to challenge the dominant Western nations during World War II. In such efforts to emulate the West and/or become the West, Japan has been self-fashioning its being coeval or possessing an identical modernity with Western nations, a state that negates its forceful and intrusive encounter with Western modernity but emphasizes the continuity of Japan's progressive history (Ivy 1995, 6).

<sup>38</sup>. Midori Matsui, "The Place of Marginal Positionality: Legacies of Japanese Anti-Modernity," in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, ed. Lloyd Fran (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), 142.



thrown into a well by her father, remaining there until her grudge had deepened to the point that her tragic story, untold and unmourned, has become the source of yet another trauma. In *Ringu*, then, anxiety about failing the modern ideologies of continuity and linear progress as well as a harmonious society built upon the nuclear family is shown to be a path for the repressed past to affect the narrative present.

As if the ghost of Sadako from the past has emerged from the television screen via the video, the film *Ringu*, itself, rematerializes the past in a visual form via the touch of characters, which represents a spiritual/traditional way of assessing the horror. When Ryuji touches material that is related to the grudge of Sadako, he can see the past. The traumatic past event is reestablished via contact from the present. When traumatic events or memories are visualized as images, the shock turns not into representation but a bodily process, a process, according to Bennett, that is “experienced not as a remembering of the past but as a continuous negotiation of a present with indeterminable links to the past.”<sup>39</sup> Ryuji’s psychic power enables him to see past events, and the film *Ringu* allows the extradiegetic audience members, in turn, to become witness to traumatic events in the diegetic past. The scenes uncover details of the untold past, such as the public demonstration held to display Shizuko’s psychic power, in which she is accused of fraudulence, and her daughter Sadako’s killing of a reporter who accused her mother of faking her psychic powers. Another scene in the final part of the film visualizes Dr. Ikuma’s killing of Sadako by throwing her into a well. In such scenes, these untold histories are conveyed through Ryuji’s hallucinations, but they are also presented in black-and-white scenes resembling historical documentary footage, as if they are records of truth (Fig. 1). Ryuji’s hallucinations are being materialized in the visual form of documentary footage, as if Sadako’s ghost has

---

<sup>39</sup> Bennet, *Empathic Vision*, 38.



Fig.1. Still from *Ringu*

from an image on the television screen into a material being. The repressed memory that official history refuses to contain is preserved as sense memory, and it can only be revealed by someone who truly wants to learn the truth. The characters' touching of items related to a past memory allows the characters as well as the extradiegetic spectators of *Ringu* to recognize the other's trauma. The boundaries between images and materiality, imagination and reality, and spirituality and technology are thus blurred in the film's narrative. Through the ruptures of the temporally complex alternation of the narrative present and past, and from the aforementioned blurred dualities, the untold history of the past crawls out and demands the attention of the living in the contemporary world.

Director Nakata uses the film itself, and the cursed video within the film, to convey the shock of trauma from the past to the present by visualizing the face of fear and terror. Although the horror—the ghost from the video—does not show its face to the extradiagetic spectators until the end, the reactions of characters within the diegesis suggest that the *diegetic* spectators see the ghost, which returns to the narrative present via television screens. That horror kills the diegetic spectators of the video in the film, and in turn, shocks the

extradiegetic spectators, the audience members of *Ringu*, by showing the horrified look of the diegetic spectators. Tomoko is on the first floor by herself, her friend Masami having left briefly, when a television comes on of its own accord. Tomoko turns the television off and walks away, but feeling something she turns back. Apparently she sees something extremely horrifying, but the camera only shows a close-up of Tomoko's shocked face (Fig. 2), which stays static a few seconds and then changes into an overexposed negative of the scene in black-and-white (Fig. 3), intensifying the shock on her face.



Figs. 2 and 3. Stills from *Ringu*

With respect to the act of seeing others experience sensational pain, Bennett writes that “seeing sensation for an audience surely entails feeling or, at the very least, experiencing a tension between an affective encounter with a real body in pain and an encounter with the body as image or ground of

representation.”<sup>40</sup> In *Ringu*, the horror is imitated by the characters’ faces in the film, and the horror is revealed through the sensational pain inscribed in their faces. Seeing the expressions of inexplicable shock and fear, which are not “the graphic spectacle of the violence” but “the physical imprint of the ordeal of violence,” leads audience members to make contact with the truth, the pain of the traumatized.<sup>41</sup> At the end of the film, it is finally revealed that the distorted face of the female ghost Sadako, full of pain and anger, is the horror. When Sadako, hiding her face behind her long dark hair, comes out of the screen and reveals her facial expression of utter shock and fear (Fig. 4), characters watching her face within the film themselves end up dying of fear and shock (Fig 5).



Figs. 4. and 5. Stills from *Ringu*

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 39.

The trauma that Sadako experiences is conveyed to extradiagetic audiences' bodies by "the physical imprint of the ordeal of violence." Within the narratives of the horror and fear experienced by a young girl in the past, the distorted faces of the ghost and the spectators in the film are shocking and terrifying, and the concept that a monstrous ghost might emerge from a daily object—a television—may well intensify the horror of extradiagetic spectators who watch the screen playing *Ringu* in the extradiagetic present.

The traditional motif of the wronged woman who comes back as a ghost is transformed, in Miike's *Audition*, into a dramatically distorted "modern day heroine." The catch phrase, "modern day heroine," is used within the film to advertise a (sham) audition whose ostensible purpose is to cast a main actress for a movie, when in actuality the audition is being held for Aoyama to find his "ideal" woman so he can court her to be his future wife. *Audition* starts with a scene in which Aoyama Ryoko (Matsuda Miyuki) passes away in a hospital room while her husband Aoyama Shigeharu (Ishibashi Ryo) watches.<sup>42</sup> Their young son Shigehiko (Sawaki Tetsu) arrives carrying an art project from school for his mother and witnesses her death, broken-hearted. The film, starting from the end of a harmonious nuclear family, moves forward seven years after the mother's death. It is during Japan's recession, and Aoyama has decided to look for a new wife. Through the sham audition, Aoyama meets attractive 26-year-old Yamazaki Asami (Shiina Eihi) and later has a sexual relationship with her. Asami, while seeming to satisfy all of Aoyama's expectations for his ideal wife, is revealed over the course of the film to be a monstrous murderer, abuser, and revenger motivated by traumatic childhood memories from being raised in a horrifyingly dysfunctional family. *Audition* presents the repressed anger of the marginalized female who returns as a monstrous modern-day heroine who tortures,

---

<sup>42</sup> An adaptation of Murakami Ryu's novel of the same title.

dismembers, and abuses men's bodies using physiological knowledge and tools.

Stephen Hantke reads this film in the context of a web of feminist discourses—that is to say, he uncovers the meanings of the female character's revenge, both in the socio-political context of patriarchal Japanese society and in reference to the film's allusions to previous Japanese films in which female characters are depicted as sexual and social victims.<sup>43</sup> Positing Asami as a figure in the line of “the Japanese tradition of the female avenger,” Hantke argues that her violence is a challenge toward the “ideology of family” that undergirds the patriarchal and capitalist modern Japanese family.<sup>44</sup> Alongside this contestation of hegemonic values, Hantke views Asami's torture of men as a female rejection of the commercialized but romanticized form of modern love idealized in modern Japanese culture, where in fact family is “already dysfunctional” and “male authority” is “already often undermined.”<sup>45</sup> Reading in Asami “a reincarnation” of “the traditional female avenger” as well as “a reaction” toward the patriarchal capitalist family structure of modern Japan, Hantke suggests that “cultural anxieties about the success or failure of modernization” are expressed through the horror and shock conveyed by *Audition*.<sup>46</sup>

In accordance with Hantke, but more specifically, I view the film as concerning itself with the social anxiety of the nineties. I contend that the film presents the ways in which Japanese (corporate) men's anxiety is in conflict with modernized women's desires during the recession. The long-held Japanese dream of being a so-called “family nation” is undermined ideologically by the recession, while, in society,

---

<sup>43</sup> Steffen Hantke, “Japanese Horror Under Western Eyes: Social Class and Global Culture in Miike Takashi's *Audition*,” in *Japanese Horror Cinema*, ed. Jay McRoy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 54-65.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

the female labor force is again victimized due to corporate restructuring. This new socio-economic circumstance led to substantial layoffs of employees at corporations in every sector, which in turn generated numerous social problems and cultural anxiety relating not only to the concept of the “family nation” but to the structure of Japan’s nuclear families themselves.<sup>47</sup> In addition, female workers, long considered as supplementary labor in Japanese society, and often employed in part-time or temporary positions, became the first target of cost-cutting by having their work hours reduced or even losing their jobs. When it came to new hires, companies prioritized male over female applicants to fulfill their limited need.<sup>48</sup> For example, the film depicts Aoyama as having a stable job at a company where he has a position of power and is well paid, and living in a wealthy district of Tokyo. In contrast, all of the female characters with whom Aoyama has secret sexual relationships are socially and economically marginalized, taking jobs in which they are submissive to men, and seemingly accepting of their economically lower position in a patriarchal society: a female employee who was sexually used by Aoyama but still pursues him at his company, Asami having worked in a bar as a part-timer and applying for the fake audition, and Aoyama’s housekeeper in his home. The film depicts repressed female characters who are less privileged—they are under-educated, have lower-status jobs or no job, and are trapped and traumatized from being left behind by the economic abundance of modern capitalist society. It reflects the social reality that the recession led to even greater inequality between Japanese men and women, both in terms of their working conditions and their household situations.

The very tone of *Audition* is unmistakably shaped by the anxiety caused by the recession in the 1990s. The film’s male characters—middle-aged businessmen—are imbued with

---

<sup>47</sup> Hashimoto and Traphagan, “Changing Japanese Families,” 8.

<sup>48</sup> Tipton, *Modern Japan*, 226.

a defeatism that results from the recession, while they try to reclaim their power and masculinity by reestablishing traditional nuclear families of their own. In one scene, Aoyama meets a friend in the film industry, Yoshikawa Yasuhisa (Kunimura Jun), at a bar to inform him of his decision to pursue remarriage. Before he has a chance to bring up the topic, Yoshikawa mentions the dire condition of Japan's economy as "a survival game or a test of endurance," and adds, "It seems a bright future is ahead but I don't know how long we should wait." In that moment, however, his pessimistic outlook on business changes into annoyance toward some young women laughing and talking aloud in the bar. Yoshikawa complains that all the attractive women have disappeared, while the new ones are "no class, stuck up, and stupid as well." Finally, he ominously declares, "Japan is finished." Put differently, his failing belief in "the family nation" is paralleled by his perception regarding the disappearance of attractive women. Aoyama, however, is unconvinced by Yoshikawa's pessimism about Japanese women. Revealing his decision to get remarried, Aoyama notes that he himself plans to meet as many women as he can in search of someone, like his deceased wife, who has a job as well as a hobby or activity at which she is reasonably skilled such as playing the piano, singing, or classical Japanese dance, and which thus reinforces her self-confidence and independence without turning her into a popular success or a professional. The two men's dialogue alludes to their assumption that Japan's supposedly impending demise is related to and reflected in women's being "no class, stuck up, and stupid." At the same time, it reveals these middle-aged corporate men's fantasy that if they find a woman with qualities that meet their standard for an ideal wife in the traditional nuclear family, they will regain happiness. Aoyama wants as his spouse a woman who is talented enough to be confident but not so successful that he is unable to control her. Aoyama's expectation for his wife-to-be's talent is evoked



by his belief that women's confidence would bring happiness at "home."

The plot unfolds in the first half of the film with linear realism and at a relatively slow pace, mainly depicting Aoyama's family life and work through Aoyama's perspective. Stable, routine, and highly regimented Japanese men's lives—compartmentalized into family and work—are deployed, and in such a mode, even an unethical and provocative event—a sham audition—held by Aoyama and Yoshikawa is shown as matter-of-factly as if it was a normal scene in the daily routine of corporate men. In the sham audition, the women who respond to the casting call are willing to fulfill any request for the chance to be "the modern day heroine," and they answer even the rude, sometimes sexual and irrelevant questions that Aoyama and Yoshikawa ask, doing their best to satisfy the two men's demands. The mock-casting audition shows, on one hand, the ways in which these two middle-aged men, or, more specifically, two dominant figures who wield a powerful resource, abuse the film production company's support, and at the same time mislead and deceive female participants at the audition for their personal gain. It is a single middle-aged man's desperate but vile attempt to use his social position to find his "perfect wife" by targeting young women who are educated but have been underprivileged within the patriarchal capitalist system in Japan. On the other hand, it reveals how the young women's desire to be successful professional women in modern Japan makes them vulnerable to exploitation by corporate power. The naturalized depiction of the sham audition insinuates that Japanese society is embedded in capitalist corruption as well as patriarchal exploitation.

The film later discloses that there is a disjunction between the society's idealized vision for a wife-to-be, and what the patriarchal capitalist society has generated through its long-standing repression of women. Among all the audition applicants, Aoyama is attracted to 26-year-old Asami, as he is compelled by her reflections in her application essay about her

traumatic childhood; because of an injury she had to give up ballet, in which she had been engaged since childhood. Asami, in her application letter and the audition, seems an agreeably submissive, decent, well-mannered woman, accepting of her position and her painful past in positive ways. During their subsequent date, Asami reveals to Aoyama that in her childhood, she was left in the care of her maternal uncle and his wife when her parents got divorced, but after being severely abused by her aunt, she was sent back to her mother, who by then was remarried to an older disabled man. Understanding her past sympathetically yet deceiving Asami about the original purpose of the audition throughout, Aoyama chooses her as his future wife and invites her on a (supposedly romantic) trip, which for Aoyama apparently represents the fulfillment of a middle-aged man's sexual fantasy. It turns out that this trip is his first encounter with the reality of what he has fantasized.

During the trip, Asami brings Aoyama to her bed, revealing to him the post-burn scars on her thigh. The scars are a result of having been tortured as a child by her stepfather, but she lies that the scars are from self-inflicted wounds. Asami's confessions to Aoyama are distorted with lies through which she is able to hide the ways in which she has been sexually abused and psychologically scarred. What Asami does not reveal is that, although she was indeed a trained ballet dancer, it was by and for her stepfather, who was disabled from having no feet, but who nevertheless owned a very outdated, shabby, small, private ballet school. While her mother was away at work all day, Asami's stepfather not only forced young Asami to dance for him but he tortured her for his sadistic pleasure. His exploitation of her results in her psychopathic violence toward men's bodies whenever socially dominant male figures—her employers or her lover—deceive her. Although Aoyama sees in her the beauty, submissiveness, and decent manners he expects in his ideal wife, the film slowly reveals, in scenes of extreme violence, Asami's repressed anger from her traumatized childhood.

Once Asami exposes her scars, during their ostensibly romantic trip, and consents to a sexual relationship with him the style and content of the film are transformed from those of a melodrama to those befitting a psychological thriller. The editing pace and style of *Audition* starts to be non-linear, fast-paced, and artificially unrealistic after the scene of Asami and Aoyama's trip. The boundaries between imaginary and realistic scenes, and the past and the present, are blurred within the disjunctive editing style. Asami has vanished after their intimate relationship on the trip, leading Aoyama to trace her past. In the film, her past and present are shown as interweaved with Aoyama's imagination, which is shown as filmic reality. In the course of looking for her, Aoyama witnesses—in scenes that could be interpreted as his fantasy or imagination—how Asami is abusing a male victim who is amputated and trapped in her house, his life sustained by eating Asami's vomit. Overlapping with these scenes are moments from her childhood, in which Asami's stepfather asks the young Asami if she would dance for him to avoid being tortured as usual. Rather than dancing for him, Asami hesitantly stretches out her legs and takes her father's torture, which is to burn her legs with heated tongs (Fig. 6).

Hideously grotesque scenes of torture, abuse, and violence—they are either acted upon the child Asami's body or the adult Asami is acting out her rage on the bodies of men—explode across the screen within the disjunctive narrative structure. The abrupt change to sadomasochistic violence, in turn, compels spectators to experience visceral traumas of their own in this particular film-viewing experience. Bennett points out that those who were sexually abused at an early age are “more than being a passive victim,” as they “live and continually negotiate the effects of the abuse.”<sup>49</sup> The affect of such trauma cannot be conveyed in “moral or medical classification [as it] precedes representation,” but it can be expressed by artistic forms that

---

<sup>49</sup> Bennet, *Empathic Vision*, 27.

deliver its sensation and create “a discursive framework” that “develop[s] cultural awareness of the issue of sexual abuse.”<sup>50</sup> The artistic forms deliver “a condition of confusion” that provides “only fragments of memories, written onto the body.”<sup>51</sup> The visual representation of such shocks generates physical imprints on audience members’ bodies, and the bodily sensations of those spectators compel them to sense confusing memories of trauma. Underprepared audiences—whose standard expectations have led them to assume *Audition* will follow the relatively conventional format of melodrama—are disoriented by the turn of the film into an extremely violent and cruel horror.

The recurring scenes of Asami’s torturing of male bodies in the film manifest the endless repetition of trauma continued in the diegetic and extradiegetic presents. The most gruesome and shocking torture scenes and traumatic memories of Asami come at the end of the film, set in Aoyama’s house. From this point, Aoyama, who has pursued Asami throughout the film, turns into an object of her sadistic and meticulous torture—Asami is shown as an invader of Aoyama’s home and aggressor toward his body. With this conversion, the film opens up with rapidly-paced scenes of torture, abuse, and sexual perversion that put audience members in unavoidable shock and awe. Aoyama passes out after being drugged, and the following scenes flash across the screen: Aoyama dining with Asami while she recounts her traumatic childhood, then listening to his late wife’s warnings about Asami, then being fellated by Asami, who changes into other women successively—his female employee at work and a high-school-aged girl who is a friend of his son’s. These lead to scenes in which the child Asami is tortured by her stepfather and the adult Asami slits the throat of that self-same stepfather. All of these scenes are ambiguously framed

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 29.

as Aoyama's guilt-driven hallucinations regarding exploited women and/or the film's omnipresent narration of the past.



Fig. 6. Still from *Audition*

When Aoyama opens his eyes after having been drugged, Asami—wearing a white pleated skirt that suggests that its wearer is a well-mannered and submissive woman, contrasted with ominously black gloves and apron, not to mention a belt for a set of tools—pulls out her other medical supplies and tools from a big handbag. Explaining to Aoyama that the drug will paralyze him but make him sense pain more acutely, she inserts a needle on his tongue. She then tortures him by poking numerous needles into his stomach and eyes, and then slices off one of his feet with a wire. The visceral quality of the scenes depicting her acts of torture compels spectators, in essence, to experience Aoyama's pain and wounds in the narrative present through their own bodies in the viewing present.

The realistic depiction of physical violence enacted on Aoyama's body and the fragmented dream-like scenes of Asami's past are mixed and compressed in a short period of

screening time. The result does not so much help spectators understand the situation as traumatize them in their viewing experience, yet the parallel scenes suggest that Asami is, in the filmic present, reenacting on male subjects the tortures that had previously been performed on her own body and mind. The psychological pain and wound endured by the young Asami cannot be represented visually or explained verbally, but it is transformed into the visualization of Aoyama's bodily pain caused by his torture at Asami's hands. Scenes from her childhood are again inserted into the sequences of Asami's torture of Aoyama;



Fig. 7. Still from *Audition*



Fig. 8. Still from *Audition*



Fig. 9. Still from *Audition*



Fig. 10. Still from *Audition*

Asami, in the present, is in the process of cutting off Aoyama's foot (Figs. 7&10), while her stepfather, in the past, arouses himself (Fig. 9) while watching his stepdaughter dance beautifully in her pale pink leotard and shoes (Fig. 9). These sequences seem to convey the confused affects of fear, shock, and humiliation, as well as the pleasure of child victims in general—Asami, in this specific instance of the film—who are “sexualized at an early age” by a person to whom they have a close attachment. Asami, in turn, repeats and recreates the pain and abuse by inflicting it on Aoyoma while simultaneously turning him—another supposedly loving and

close man—into her father figure who did not have feet.<sup>52</sup> Asami's torture of others does not bring forth any resolving cathartic moments in relation to her past pain, but rather functions to reveal her traumatic past while conveying the pain of her victim, Aoyama, to spectators. At the same time, the moral ambiguity that Asami might have experienced when she was abused sexually and physically by her stepfather is re-created in spectators through the parallel editing scenes of Asami's violent acts and her traumatic childhood.

Surprisingly, the ending scene of *Audition* comes back to its prior melodramatic tone, adding a bizarre sentimentality through narrative excess that serves as a diversion from the avenging ghost narrative that Hantke suggests in his reading of *Audition*. Asami wants to have Aoyama's "absolute and only love" that is exclusively applied to any others, even to his son Shigehiko. The given reason, in the film, for Asami's torture of Aoyama is that his son's existence makes Aoyama incapable of offering her this exclusive type of love. Ironically, it is this very son who unexpectedly comes home and interrupts Asami's torture of his father and injures her. Pushed down the stairs by Shigehiko, Asami falls from the second floor to the first. The final scenes of the film, after all the horror, are composed of oddly juxtaposed sentimental dialogues between Asami and Aoyama, who both lie on the floor, injured, while calm, smooth instrumental music changes the mood to melancholic and melodramatic. Their lines are repetitions of various dialogues from previous scenes when they were dating.

---

<sup>52</sup> Ballet, in general, requires performers to embody and internalize a distinctly western aesthetic and performance technique characterized by an understanding of western classical music. As such, ballet arguably epitomizes the highly sophisticated beauty of Western culture. I posit that Asami's learning of ballet from her footless father thus allegorizes the rootlessness of Japan in its insistent pursuit of modern nation-building that has created a pathology of repressed nostalgia and anxiety.



Asami: I thought you were a very busy man. I don't know what you do very well. You might think I am desperate. I was longing for your call.

Aoyama: (Looking at her in the distance, he sheds tears, trembling.)

Asami: I didn't think I would see you again. Sorry. I am pretty excited. Living alone was a hassle. I have nobody to talk to. You are the first one who is truly warmhearted and tries to accept me and tries to understand who I really am.

Aoyama: It's hard to overcome that experience but someday you will feel life is wonderful. That's life isn't it?

Following this melodramatic scene, the closing scene of the film shows a blank young Asami sitting alone in an apartment, wearing ballet shoes. After the shocking torture scenes, this insertion of melodramatic dialogue could be read as a scene that reifies the film's critical perspective toward patriarchal capitalist formulations of love and marriage by turning the story into a black comedy. However, considering the last scene of Asami as a child, these snatches of dialogue may, rather, sentimentalize the whole story by changing Asami's violent actions into a reaction by an unloved and unprotected child. In other words, Asami desires back parental love in her relationship with Aoyama. By presenting this sentimental moment, the film once again delivers an ambivalent perspective toward the wronged one's damaging of others.

The nuclear family model, in which women devote themselves to their children's education, and children are subject to disciplining mechanisms that turn them into ideal modern citizens, once characterized the hope of national progress and modernity in post-industrial Japanese society. However, in *Ringu* and *Audition*, women and children are shown as figures entrapped in the past and thus representing discontinuity, but haunting the present and luring other characters to encounter the real, the truth or the past, and traumatic events untold. As I have demonstrated in this paper, the recurring theme of the problematic relations between mother and child in the dysfunctional family of the nineties are a reflection of the repressed problems in the unique cultural and social system of modern Japan. The buried stories

of the forgotten, unmourned women and children are retold in both films through a recursive narrative structure that juxtaposes past events with those in the narrative present. Inaccessible and unknown traumas of the past are not represented in these films, but instead are evoked through grotesque and graphic images. I assert that such traumatic events belong to the past but return to the present, in these films, as allegories of Japan's past attempts to transplant pre-modern elements into the imported, modern western cultural milieu, processes that have been accompanied by psychological scars. This sensibility is created in the long and ongoing traumatic modernization process, which has been shaped out of, and oriented in, the logic for survival—which has meant technological and patriarchal capitalism.