Spring 2020

# Japan's 2D Trauma Culture: Defining Crisis Cinema in Post-3/11 Japan

Matthew C. Hill

JAPAN'S 2D TRAUMA CULTURE: DEFINING CRISIS CINEMA IN POST-3/11 JAPAN

by

Matthew C Hill

Bachelor of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2018

---

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

Media Arts

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2020

Accepted by:

Lauren Steimer, Director of Thesis

Kelly Wolf, Reader

Northrop Davis, Reader

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

# DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad. Your selfless sacrifices have paved the way for my academic journey.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# ABSTRACT

This paper labors to expound the link between the socially mediated "trauma process," or the creation of collective trauma through social discourse, and the proposed moniker of "crisis cinema" that has often been deployed by media scholars with no clear parameters. This paper, then, endeavors to evince the trauma process' relevance to crises and disasters, explicitly define a paradigm by which crisis cinema can be understood, and subsequently utilized by a larger patronage, and showcase the pair's reliance on one another. This is approached through the locus of the March 11, 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster and a selection of Japanese films that followed therein.

# PREFACE

This project, an attempted cross disciplinary pursuit between film and media studies and trauma studies, is not meant to be an endpoint; the desire is for further scholarship to follow, by myself and others, whereby the enclosed arguments can be challenged, improved, and ultimately put to use as a cog in the discourses approached within. To substantiate this process of embetterment, further industry analysis and production study are required, especially given my role as non-Japanese looking in, and, therefore, offer a discernible path for the future of this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In March 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing tsunami shook

Japan to its core, exposing the ill-preparedness of the country's energy operators, notably

at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, where a procession of grievous events

engendered one of the greatest nuclear disasters of all time. The combined ruination of

the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster directly claimed the lives of over 15,000

people, with more than 2,600 disappearances reported across 6 prefectures (Abe, 9). The

initial response to the disasters, recognized together as 3/11, was hampered by

communication ineptitude and indecisiveness of the parties involved, namely Prime

Minister Naoto Kan's government and leading Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO)

officials (Kushida, 14). The nature of the disaster, along with the bungled recovery

efforts, led to a diminution of public trust in nuclear safety, which was compounded by

the government's eventual insistence on resettling previously evacuated areas, despite the

persisting danger to inhabitants (Suzuki, 13). TEPCO's failure to effectively inform

victims of the hazards presented, or not, by the disaster zones left many in "a complete

state of anxiety about the future" (Onda, 71). As such, 3/11 is noted by scholars as being

six-fold, extending beyond the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdowns, to also

include a communications disaster, a breakdown of trust in authorities, and a widespread

sense of social precarity (Fischer, 346).

The social precarity that followed 3/11, described in recent academia as a "condition of [having been] harmed in a specific way," illustrates a state of enduring or surviving the damages of a crisis or disaster (Allbritton, 103). This state, enhanced by the perceived vulnerability to future disasters, represents "cultural trauma," defined by scholars as "when people live in fear of imminent disaster and fears of future threat dominate consciousness" (Kaplan, 24). The cultural trauma of 3/11 is constituted by many forms of damage, such as damage to life and the decline in standard of living, all of which have changed over time (Yotsumoto, 266). These damages, being an "endless impact on life," became pervasive elements of Japanese society, constantly reappearing in the lives of Japanese people across levels of affectedness (Caruth, 7). This proliferation aided in the construction of a national or collective trauma narrative and extended the pains of the disaster to all Japanese people by creating a "we" (Dinitto, 343). "We" represents the exhortation of solidarity in the face of mediated collective suffering, for example the phrase "Ganbarou Nippon," (Let's hang in there together, Japan) which could be found "on posters, social media, advertisements, bumper stickers, and handwritten missives of every kind" (Samuels, 40). Thus, Japan as a nation became a trauma culture, or "a culture in which discourses, and especially images, about catastrophic events proliferate," as the entire nation was portrayed as the victim to 3/11 (Kaplan, 24).

Changes in audiences' inclination and predilection require a measured reaction in film, a recurrent pattern throughout the continuance of Japanese cinema (Richie, 213). Thus, film's capacity to deliver salvation from cultural trauma is due in part to its ability to "seek alternative narratives that might resonate with audiences," especially when old

narratives no longer fit the bill. In 3/11's case, Japan experienced national calls for change immediately following the disaster, which juxtaposed "the fallen present" with an idealized past, represented as "nostalgic Golden Ages," or a utopian future free of the pains of modernity (Combs, 20). The answer to these calls, I will argue, came in the form of animated films that offered mediated recovery to 3/11's trauma victims, whereby they could constructively engage with the demons that torment them, while simultaneously taking symbolic steps to overcoming them (Stahl, 164). Furthermore, I will provide evidence that this direct filmic engagement with trauma is representative of crisis cinema discourse, which will be defined definitively in relation to its international deployment. Thus, a cohesive paradigm of crisis cinema will be formed, which will be subsequently applied to the animated films in question. By doing so, the specific elements that have allowed these films to mediate cultural recovery in response to 3/11 will be revealed, establishing a new, undocumented pattern of crisis cinema.

CHAPTER 2

MARCH 11, 2011: AN OVERVIEW

Japan, an island nation resting near the meeting point of 4 tectonic plates, has had

a seemingly interminable history with earthquakes, as 22 percent of the world's

magnitude (M) 6 or higher earthquakes transpire "in or near [it]" (Smits, 8). On March

11, 2011, Japan was struck by an M9 megathrust – occurring in a subduction zone –

earthquake that would later be accredited as the largest "known to have ever hit Japan"

(Chock, 4). This earthquake, initially named the Tohoku Area Pacific Offshore

Earthquake, was centered roughly 30 kilometers deep in an area just offshore the Sanriku

coast in Northeastern Japan (Abe, 9). The event occurred "in an area often described as

an 'earthquake nest,'" which is known to have experienced a multitude of major

earthquakes since at least 869 AD (Smits, 4). In 2007, it was estimated that the likelihood

of an approximate M7.5 earthquake striking the area before 2037 was 99 percent, with

the 2011 earthquake now being propounded as "represent[ing] a 1,000-year return period

megathrust subduction earthquake" in reference to the 869 AD Jogan Sanriku Earthquake

(Chock, 4). Despite the high frequency of earthquakes in the region, there remains no

definitive method of predicting or forecasting their occurrence "in any socially useful

way," due to the lack of a "singular characteristic pattern of disaster" (Smits, 5). That

notwithstanding, there were concerns from the scientific community regarding the

possibility of a near-future, Jogan Sanriku-level seismic event, however, politicians and

power company officials disregarded, and in some cases suppressed, these voices of disquietude. These same politicians and officials would come to label the Tohoku Area Pacific Offshore Earthquake, and its aftermath, as "unimaginable," in an attempt to palliate their incompetence (Smits, 22).

Megathrust earthquakes, also referred to as ocean trench earthquakes, make up 85 percent of all earthquakes that "shake Japan," and account for every seismic event higher than M8.0. These earthquakes "often generate trains of seismic sea waves," which we call tsunami, an event that, before 2011, had occurred 5 times along the Sanriku coast since the year 1611 (Smits, 10). Just 3 minutes after the Tohoku Area Pacific Offshore Earthquake ruptured, the Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) issued a "severe tsunami warning" in response to the characteristics of the earthquake. The tsunami was detected by GPS buoys 10 to 20 kilometers offshore, where it was 100 to 400 meters deep, with wave amplitudes reaching 6.7 meters in some cases. Because of this, the anticipated near-shore amplitude heights were expected to be "three times [higher]" (Chock, 4). In certain areas, such as the cities of Ofunato and Ishinomaki, the initial signs of the tsunami could be seen almost immediately after the earthquake due to subsidence, or the sudden, sometimes drastic sinking of the ground's surface in response to an earthquake (Chock, 6). After reaching its maximum propagation, the tsunami had ravaged the majority of the Sanriku coast, "in some cases wiping out areas thought to have been protected by seawalls" (Smits, 18). Together, along with all of the damage they caused, the earthquake and tsunami were named the "Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami," and were directly responsible for 15,887 deaths and 2,656 disappearances as of July 2014. The large amount of disappearances is "an indication of the large number of tsunami victims,"

which is supported by the tsunami's eventual 561 km² land coverage (Abe, 9). Beyond

the loss of life, the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami is believed to have caused

an estimated 16.9 trillion yen – over $217 billion – in damages, due in part to the collapse

of over 264,000 buildings (Chock, 4).

Among the devastation caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami,

the assault on the Fukushima Daiichi (Fukushima-1) nuclear power plant (NPP) offered

the most complexities (Smits, 2). Fukushima-1 is the oldest NPP owned and operated by

the Tokyo Electric Power Company, (TEPCO) Japan's foremost energy supplier,

accounting for roughly one-third of national energy production. The plant was one of

over 50 Japanese NPPs in operation on March 11, 2011 and was the most critically

damaged out of the 5 NPPs struck by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami that

day (Abe, 5). At the time of the disasters, 3 of the plant's six reactors were in operation,

with over 2,000 employees – 1,100 employed by TEPCO – present at the site (Abe, 8).

When the M9.0 earthquake struck Fukushima-1, the operations center buildings "were

catastrophically damaged, to the point of becoming unusable," and the external power

lines to the plant were severed, leaving only on-site channels of power (Kushida, 12).

Much of the damage can be attributed to the plant's design standards, which only

required preparedness for an M6.5 earthquake. Thus, Fukushima-1 was subjected to

acceleration from seismic land waves that "exceeded its maximum design basis…by 20

percent" (Smits, 21). Approximately 40 minutes after the earthquake's onset, the first

tsunami wave struck the power plant's 10-meter-high seawall. This seawall, built to stop

tsunami waves of up to 5.7 meters, was obliterated by the second, much higher wave,

which dealt its blow 8 minutes after the first. This second wave, measuring over 12

meters high, critically damaged the on-site power sources and cooling systems, hindering

the plant's ability to cool the reactors (Kushida, 12). With no means of cooling the

reactors, the plant suffered 3 fuel core meltdowns, and subsequent hydrogen explosions,

which released 168 times more radioactive cesium 137 than the atomic bomb dropped on

Hiroshima (Kushida, 11). This process, the simultaneous critical damaging of 3 reactors,

was a world first phenomenon that transformed the Fukushima-1 disaster into a "level 7

major accident on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale, (INES)" the

same level as the 1986 Chernobyl accident (Abe, 2). Together, the Great East Japan

Earthquake and Tsunami and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster became known as

3/11, a disastrous date that was made worse by the misconduct of and mishandling by key

figures, and which continues to cause complications to this day (Smits, 2).

Following the events of 3/11, specifically the nuclear disaster at Fukushima-1,

politicians and TEPCO officials hastily dubbed the happenings as "unimaginable,"

despite clear evidence that more could have been done to prevent such a catastrophe

(Smits, 10). For example, Fukushima-1's regulatory policy "dates from 1978," and the

countermeasures implemented for earthquakes and tsunamis only prepared the NPP for

an event similar to the "previous largest earthquake that has occurred since the Meiji

period," (1868-1912) which is considered a "terribly short time geologically" by experts

(Smits, 20). Along with these severe gaps in preparedness, the initial response to the

disaster by Prime Minister Naoto Kan's government and TEPCO officials reeked of

inefficiency that stymied the supposition of swift containment and recovery (Kushida,

13). At the time of an emergency, just as with normal operation, the Fukushima-1 plant is

the responsibility of its operator, TEPCO (Abe, 8). Despite this, TEPCO's chairman and

president were absent for 17 hours following the earthquake and tsunami, engendering a leadership vacuum at the energy company's headquarters that plagued communication attempts with the government and on-site operators. Additionally, the prime minister's office was in a veritable state of chaos, with emergency headquarters being set up in a room that "had only one phone line, and initially no computer, fax, or information such as schematics of the Fukushima nuclear plant" (Kushida, 14). Without sufficient communication between the parties involved, steps towards recovery were greatly impeded, with the plant manager at Fukushima-1, Masao Yoshida, needing to disregard orders, or lack thereof, in order to deal with the threat (Kushida, 14). This manifested when the need to inject seawater into the reactors emerged, as plant manager Yoshida began injecting seawater to stave off meltdown an hour before the political leadership gave the go ahead. Upon finding this out, a TEPCO liaison to the government ordered Yoshida to "halt the seawater injections until formal government order was issued," as seawater could render the reactors inoperable (Kushida, 18). TEPCO's self-serving behavior did not end there, with Kan's government receiving numerous contact attempts from TEPCO officials that inquired into the possibility of abandoning Fukushima-1 mid-disaster. Prime Minister Kan, who believed this to be an attempt to shift all culpability onto his government, ignored the requests and met with plant manager Yoshida directly. Unlike his superiors, Yoshida reassured the prime minister that key operators "would die with him defending the plant" (Kushida, 20).

The devastation of 3/11 has persisted in many ways, with one of the most substantial sources of remembrance being the land it claimed. While most earthquake and tsunami impacted lands have been restored, there is a sizable area of land that remains

tainted by the evocation of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, which forced over

100,000 people from their homes (Abe, 2). Following evacuation, the land surrounding

the NPP was categorized into 3 types based on the ability for inhabitance; non-return,

preparation for return, and possible to return, with each demarcation shifting – seemingly

haphazardly – over time (Suzuki, 12). As for the Fukushima-1 plant itself,  the process of

decommissioning is expected to take upwards of 40 years and will pose "significant risk

to workers and the public" (Suzuki, 10). To achieve this end, TEPCO founded the

Fukushima Daiichi Decontamination and Decommissioning Engineering Company,

which is following a specific process for decommissioning and decontaminating the

plant. First, the spent fuel is being removed from all 4 units. Next, the melted core debris

will be removed from units 1-3. Finally, overall decontamination of the plant will occur

(Suzuki, 11). There is a fair amount of skepticism regarding TEPCO's plans, with critics

citing both the lack of research in fields required to complete this process and TEPCO's

first major endeavor, a subterranean "frozen wall" meant to "stop water flowing in and

out of the site." The wall has, thus far, proven to be effectively limited (Suzuki, 11).

Distrust in TEPCO has stemmed from other events as well, such as their attempted

dumping of likely-contaminated water into the ocean, public inaccessibility to debates

surrounding future nuclear energy goals, and exponential changes to the cost of

decommissioning and decontaminating the Fukushima-1 NPP (Suzuki, 15).

CHAPTER 3

NARRATIVES AND NATIONALISM: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY

PURSUIT

Catastrophic events, such as war and natural disasters, possess the innate ability to impel expansive social, political, and economic change, thereby upsetting the status quo and completely redefining "normal." This is an effect that can unconditionally reshape a generation, such as Japan's "greatest generation" of rebuilders following WWII, who were bound together by the shared experience of wartime devastation (Samuels, 25).When a large collective is, as a whole, subjected to the brutality of a monstrous calamity, the event itself becomes a tool by which "groups battle to define the situation and so to control it." Thus, crises become socially constructed and manipulated battlefields, upon which warring narratives compete to deliver lessons to those that must carry on (Samuels, 27). This was indeed the case for Japan's 3/11, where contesting narratives invaded the public sphere and dominated discourses surrounding 4 specific motifs. For the first 3 themes, leadership, risk, and community, the winning narratives became readily apparent early on, forcing their way into acceptance through "right by majority." On leadership, the majority – roughly 70 percent – deemed the leadership during 3/11 to be "the single greatest impediment to an effective response." Prime Minister Naoto Kan was the maximal target of this public ire, with his premiership ending just 6 months after the disaster, following a downturn in public approval that was

united by a compelling consensus: "he has no leadership capability" (Samuels, 34). As for risk, TEPCO's aforementioned exploits rendered it as the "consensus villain with regard to risk and vulnerability." Japan's fragility became a keystone of the ensuing narrative, especially in regard to nuclear safety, and TEPCO's role as malefactor was cemented by its inability to read the room. Indeed, less than a month after the disaster, TEPCO submitted plans to add two more reactors to the Fukushima-1 NPP (Samuels, 38). Finally, with respect to community, the winning narrative defined the people of Tohoku as the embodiment of Japan, extending the suffering that resulted from 3/11 to the entire nation, represented by "a community connected by bonds and human contact that sustains solidarity through common struggle." (Samuels, 40). These narratives, surrounding leadership, risk, and community, are direct responses to the damages caused by 3/11, many of which have been categorized and analyzed using models developed following previous crises in Japan (Yotsumoto, 255).

The damages experienced by Japanese citizens following 3/11 constitute the collective despondency that became an indispensable element of the most pervasive and widely accepted narratives in response to the disaster. Recent scholarship has defined – and subsequently investigated – the damages with respect to Fukushima Prefecture, which is argued as having suffered the most damage due to the Fukushima-1 nuclear accident (Onda, 80). Herein, these damages will be analyzed through the purview of national ubiquity – specifically the damage to life, psychological damage, and damage to community – which will capacitate more profound discussion on Japan's crisis narratives as prepotent. Perhaps the most severe damage to result from 3/11, the damage to life denotes the deaths that derived from any degree of the disaster – earthquake, tsunami, or

11

the ensuing chaos in evacuation zones (Yotsumoto, 256). As such, the damage to life

became a keystone of all resulting narratives, with "disaster-related" deaths explicitly

exemplifying the role that humans played in 3/11's devastation – disaster-related deaths

refer to deaths "[not] caused directly by an earthquake or tsunami but by a later indirect

event," of which there were over 3000 (Abe, 4). A principal cause of these disaster-

related deaths was the inefficiency of evacuation plans, which, among other outcomes,

saw hundreds of people go without the medical treatment they needed, something that

was not lost on the national collective following the disaster. It, therefore, took form as a

segment of the leadership motif ultimately forged by the inability to effectively respond

to the disasters (Yotsumoto, 256). Furthermore, the "inherent vulnerability of modern

civilization" played a pivotal role in the risk motif, engendering a sense of precarity in all

Japanese citizens that envisioned a yet-to-happen sequel to the disaster (Samuels, 35).

This manifested in areas such as the large increase in suicides following 3/11, spurred on

by the anticipation of future calamities, and is symbolic of the psychological burdens that

result from "all dimensions of damage" (Yotsumoto, 262). Moreover, these damages –

damage to life and psychological damage – strengthened the perceived damage to

community, which – as its name suggests – was paramount to the community motif

(Samuels, 39). Compounded by the shallowness of local identities, the damage to

community naturally resulted in greater emphasis on national recovery efforts (Samuels,

40). Those "most" damaged by the disasters played a role in this, as the reliance on

outside help created a scission in local communities and created bonds that transcended

local municipalities (Onda, 80). The culmination of these damages – and the constructed,

widely accepted narratives that followed – gave rise to the fourth and "principal" motif of

3/11, a final series of narratives that, supported by their own discourses, offer the solution to the suffering of Japan; change (Samuels, 32).

In the immediate aftermath of 3/11, calls for "wholesale change" began to dominate discourses all around Japan, with the disaster being coined a "hinge of history" that would revive the declining nation (Samuels, 31). Three master narratives developed from this change motif, each offering their own vision for the future of the nation. The first change narrative, dubbed "staying the course," expresses concerns with the dangers posed by expedient, blanketed changes, and expostulates the degree of the disaster, contending that has been overblown (Samuels, 26). Proponents of this narrative, mainly stakeholders in the energy sector and national security, claim that sweeping change could "increase energy costs, destroy jobs, slow growth, result in power shortages, pollute the environment, and result in higher taxes" (Samuels, 32). In this way, "staying the course" represents the resistance to change, promising a brighter future if nuclear energy is pursued unremittingly (Samuels, 26). The second narrative centered on change following 3/11, slated as "reversing the course," focuses on the "failure of modernity," and advocates for a "return to coexistence with nature" that rejects materialism and wasteful consumption. Arguments in favor of this narrative come from those with roots in historic nationalist movements in Japan, religious sects, environmental activists, and more (Samuels, 32). "Reversing the course," then, represents the need to "undo the structures and assumptions about progress that led to the catastrophe," fundamentally altering modern Japanese society in pursuit of simplification and, therefore, a future forged by infallible practices (Samuels, 26). The final change narrative, labeled "putting it in gear," refers to the need to accelerate away from 3/11 – and the things that caused it – in an

attempt to look for "a newer, better, safer place" (Samuels, 26). Support for this narrative

comes from many directions but is united by the hope that 3/11 will be the spark needed

to "generate a new nation" that would reach utopia through innovation (Samuels, 31).

Notwithstanding the major ideological differences that constituted the disaster discourse,

one thing became abundantly clear; the "deep yearning for change" that was vocalized all

over Japan proved that the nation was – once again – experiencing a national identity

crisis (Samuels, 30).

      The pains of modernity have often provoked the nationalist voices of Japan,

specifically those that articulate the need to reevaluate Japanese identity following critical

milestones (Iida, 4). Japanese nationalism is seen as a non-ending process, or at least not

having ended yet, by which a "variety of projects, policies, and actions" are linked

together under competing discourses of "national interest," which do battle in the public

domain and involve "a wide range of agents" (Wilson, 3). Three times in its past, Japan

has experienced "openings" to the outside world, each resulting in a national identity

crisis that impacted the trajectory of nationalist discourse. The first, during the Meiji

restoration, saw the newly reestablished imperial rule scramble to adopt "advanced

Western technologies" that would aid their imperialistic pursuit (Tezuka, 9). This first

opening became the spark that would ignite nationalism in Japan – a concept that, for

"ordinary people," was "unfamiliar and perhaps unattractive" – with the first iteration

being a "top-down creation" featuring a "passive populace manipulated from above"

(Wilson, 4). "By the end of the Meiji period," though, nationalism had become an

"established fact" whereby the Japanese lived, resolving the identity crisis engendered by

the pressure of Western imperialism (Wilson, 8). Japan's second opening, defeat in

World War II, is often blamed on the militaristic pursuits that followed the first opening, and as such a blanketed problematization of national – or imperialistic – imagery was practiced, relegating the signs of Japan's first wave of nationalism to "tainted symbols of dubious credibility" (Befu, 100). Japan was consequently left with a "symbolic vacuum," or "absence of any alternative worldview, cultural model, or ideology," which, as a national identity crisis, enabled the rise of Japanese essentialism through discourses such as *Nihonjinron* (Befu, 102). *Nihonjinron* – a cultural discourse comprised of the search for the "essence of being Japanese" – is representative of secondary cultural nationalism, or the interest in "distinctive Japanese patterns of behavior and thought compared to those of non-Japanese," which became the foremost source of nationalism after the war (Yoshino, 50).

Japan's third opening, neo-liberal economic globalization in the 1980s, is heralded as "a period of transition from the unique to the universal," a direct slight to the essentialist school of thought that dominated previous decades. This led to the prevalence of cosmopolitanism, whereby different types of people "habitually cross national and cultural borders physically or virtually, developing a sense of multiple belongings to accommodate contradictions and rival ways of living within their own lifestyles," and challenged cultural nationalism from its foundation up (Tezuka, 12). The resulting identity crisis, however, found its roots in the "acute quest for meaning in response to the seemingly endless flood of commercial signs that [had] permeated and suffused the realms of subjectivity and social imaginary with notions of fragmentation, disembodiment, and ambiguity" (Iida, 8). Thus, Japan's openings – and, importantly, their ensuing national identity crises – can be delineated as a process that has

15

superintended the birth of nationalism to benefit the state, precipitated the early development and growing pains of cultural nationalism through the problematization of national history, and legitimized a rebellious flirt with cosmopolitanization, fueled by postmodern angst. By applying the features of an effective narrative to the aforementioned change motif that followed 3/11, I argue that the disaster was Japan's "fourth opening," which resulted in a new national identity crisis that amended to this "never ending" process of Japanese nationalism by offering maturation of the discourse and salvation through the redefining of cultural national identity.

An effective narrative is "marked by several features" that allow it to become a crucial element of "the process of interpretation" by "pick[ing] and pack[ing] the facts to achieve a desired end" (Samuels, 28). This is true for the popular narratives in favor of change following 3/11, both "reversing the course" and "putting it in gear," which I will argue constitute a larger, less exclusive narrative, labeled here as "changing the course," whose "desired end" is to redefine Japan's national identity. "Changing the course," then, is in direct contention with "staying the course," or the voices against change following 3/11, which, along with the unsurety of what change to enact, created a national identity crisis that problematizes Japan's current course of reliance on nuclear energy. Thus, change, at the national level, was posited as the solution to the collective suffering caused by 3/11, as only widespread change would cure the "stagnant nation" and deliver salvation from the precarious pursuit of perceptible self-destruction (Samuels, 30). This relied heavily upon the effective narrative features mentioned above, which, as a whole, allowed nationalist ideology to invade the popular domain at the behest of convalescence by solidarity.

The first feature of an effective narrative that "changing the course" exhibits, regardless of the proposed direction of change, is its moral appeal. As discussed previously, blame was assigned by the mobilized majority following the disaster, enabling the contriving of a "good" – those that suffered the damages of 3/11 and those who helped – as well as a bad – those responsible for the anthropogenic escalation of ruination. TEPCO and the government, particularly Prime Minister Naoto Kan, were the whipping boys of this narrative, as they were seen to have caused the most harm, ensuring that, when it came, change would begin with them (Samuels, 27). The second effective narrative feature that "changing the course" evinces is the existence of ideas and language that "resonates with larger cultural themes," by which change could be extended to save all of Japan (Samuels, 27). This transpires by way of the "trauma process," or the "socially mediated construction of trauma," that "constructs a 'we,'" thereby elevating 3/11 to the level of "national trauma" when victimization is expounded as a national tragedy (Dinitto, 342).  As a national trauma narrative, then, the return of arguments such as Japanese people's innate ability to "endure hardship, as they have in the past, and survive the vicissitudes of life on their volcanic islands" is made possible, and the reliance on national solidarity becomes requisite (Dinitto, 343). The third feature showcased by "changing the course" is its ability to "stick," thus ensuring that its ideas disseminate through Japanese culture, overcoming competing narratives and finding support at a national level (Samuels, 27). This relies on the repetitive nature of trauma, defined here as "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" that "addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, 4). Trauma's address – as a result of having survived an "encounter with death" – "repeats

17

itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will," propagating the nationalist ideas that indict the present course for Japan's suffering and framing change as a necessity hereafter (Caruth, 7).

The final effective narrative feature that "changing the course" exhibits is the credibility of the deliverer, which has relied extensively upon mediation to "organize reality" (Samuels, 29). According to Anne Friedberg's *The Virtual Window*, interaction with a screen – a framing of reality – enables the subject to represent reality back to themselves (Friedberg, 342). The mediated framing of reality following 3/11 adheres to this, as it "portray[ed] something as problematic, [found] causes for that problem, introduce[d] a moral element, and suggest[ed] solutions," all of which depends on the "core values and priorities of the public" (Samuels, 29). The construction of a national trauma narrative – a moral element –framed the disaster as problematic and defined the causes as the "bad" that perpetrated the accident, allowing the suggestion of a solution in the form of change, which would carry the nation away from the problematic present. This solution engages with cultural – and therefore national – themes that would resonate with trauma victims – expanded to all of Japan as discussed previously– and thereby revitalizes nationalist discourse. In order to accomplish this, semiotically potent artwork is needed to fulfill the "ethical imperative to create witnesses to disaster" that would breathe life into discourses derived from nationalist ideology (Kaplan, 23). The subsequent witnessing involves "taking responsibility for injustices in the past and preventing future human-based catastrophe," which is required by "not just the individual but the social collectivity as well," and would act as a call to action that demands change (Kaplan, 24). As with Japan's previous three openings, and resulting national identity

crises, the events of 3/11 have been extensively engaged in cinematic productions, which

have worked to deliver the "desired ends" of their respective nationalist discourses,

"changing the course" included (Richie, 217). In fact, there exists an entire, albeit loosely

defined and understood, subset of cinema dedicated to the mediation of crises and their

cultural impact, or so media scholars have declared.

CHAPTER 4

AN EXPLORATION OF CRISIS CINEMA DISCOURSE

Cinema, that ever-dying, most crisis-stricken medium, has quite ironically – or not – been a favored means of mediating those wrinkles in the human condition that we label crises. Whether it has been to create a collective that shares the load of social and political burdens, fantasize a battle with the hegemonic institutions of malaise, or call to action the guards of tradition, many film industries around the world have produced films that engage with the historical, political, or geographic crises that shake them. Media scholars have continuously deployed the term "crisis cinema" to categorize these films regardless of differences, which has allowed a veil of ambiguity to envelop the moniker, obfuscating the scope of its applicability. Because of this, it is important to define "crisis cinema" in respect to the dissimilitude allotted when approaching new scholarship on the subject, especially given the number of cinemas that have contributed to this phenomenon. From Spanish crisis cinema's focus on physical vulnerability resulting from financial instability to Hong Kong crisis cinema's heroics that are defined by the blending of Chinese tradition and Western values, each subset of crisis cinema offers distinct attributes and characteristics that must be perceived in their national or cultural contexts, and therefore the milieu of the crises that spawned them.

The differences present in the various incarnations of crisis cinema notwithstanding, there are significant elements that have maintained their consistency across geographic and political boundaries. Most seminally, the conception of a suffering protagonist is seen across the board in crisis cinema discourse, with a specific focus on past and/or yet to happen damages that are an apodictic analog to the pains associated with the crisis in reality. This component is key to developing a pattern of crisis cinema, as the other defining elements are derived from the trauma of main characters. For example, the creation of a group or collective that surrounds the anguishing protagonist, the next most common element in crisis cinema discourse, enables the apportion of pain, constituting a collective of suffering that struggles in solidarity. This cooperative of dolor's parallel to the real-world victims of crisis is axiomatic and represents the establishment of a single unifying identity that allows association and identification across levels of affectedness. Next, crisis cinema's films commonly formulate a fracas with an oppressive force that is deemed responsible for the ailment of society – represented through the aforementioned collective of suffering and the hegemonic disdain of authoritative figures. This clash is paradigmatic of the indignation of those that suffer from real-world crises, and is aimed at the powers that be, who are perceived as either having failed to protect the victims or are directly responsible for their detriment. Finally, films in crisis cinema discourse often posit tradition as the salvation sought by those who suffer, which sets the stage for conflict with the draconian bloc of dominion that repudiates the bygone. This betokens crisis victims' desire to create a future that echoes the characteristics of a time before their torment and indicates a mistrust in the future forged by perceived vulnerability. I argue that, together, these four elements – the

21

suffering protagonist, a constructed collective that shares the burdens of crises, necessary conflict with antagonistic or incompetent authorities, and the salvific capacity of tradition required to build a safer future – are the defining parameters of crisis cinema discourse as employed internationally by media scholars. Herein, select films will be analyzed from commonly studied crisis cinema campaigns – resulting from both political, economic, or social plights, as well as from natural or anthropogenic disasters – to develop a paradigm by which current and future crisis cinema discourses may be more clearly defined.

Spain has become a prominent locus for crisis cinema discourse, in both production and research, as a multitude of films have engaged with the economic crisis that afflicted the country less than a decade ago. Recent scholarship covering these films, such as Dean Allbritton's *Prime Risks: The Politics of Pain and Suffering in Spanish Crisis Cinema*, has focused on the ways in which the very political structures and measures in place for the safeguarding of Spain's populace have begun to cause the most harm. Allbritton argues that "the democratic processes that govern many modern states" expose citizens to themselves and the law alike, and that this exposure can cause harm to their physical bodies (Allbritton, 101). This physical vulnerability, he continues, has linked with the deteriorating socioeconomic condition to present a "spiraling system of increasing physical peril," fueled by the mediation of the crisis through film (Allbritton, 102). In this way, physical vulnerability stemming from pecuniary plights is argued as being the driving force for this wave of crisis cinema, and results in a sense of precarity that, as a way of being, acts upon the citizens involved, calling them to action. The relationship between vulnerability and precarity is further defined, "vulnerability is the

ability to be harmed, and precarity is the condition of being harmed," and represents a central element in Spain's crisis cinema discourse (Allbritton, 103).

The scope of films that constitute Spanish crisis cinema defined in Allbritton's research, and therefore this paper, is demarcated as "Spanish films that engage or confront what it means to live in a crisis," which he argues as allowing for the applicability to any crisis that Spain encounters (Allbritton, 103). Notwithstanding the variation that can be expected in films that fall into this loose category, the aforementioned parameters of our crisis cinema paradigm are present in each film, which helps to substantiate the pattern. In Spanish crisis cinema's case, as argued by Allbritton, the relationship between physical vulnerability and ensuing precarity is the essence from which the other elements are derived, making it key to start at the source of distress. This, he claims, is the vulnerable protagonist – often represented through occupational or political plights that impact financial security – whose vulnerability leads to physical damage, and therefore a state of precarity, that engenders suffering (Allbritton, 105). Thus, we have the suffering protagonist prescribed for our explicated pattern of crisis cinema, expounded by both economic vulnerability and physical precarity. Next, Allbritton states that the films in Spain's crisis cinema "attempt to organize the individual experience of precarity and vulnerability into a communal one," enabling their interplay to invent a collective of suffering (Allbritton, 103). This fulfills the necessitation that our crisis cinema paradigm depends on the concoction of a collective around those that suffer. Furthermore, Allbritton argues that this collective condemns the – oft-antagonistic – hegemonic institutions they serve, deeming them responsible for their original state of vulnerability, further confirming our criteria as the inevitable dissension occurs

(Allbritton, 105). Finally, those that suffer in Allbritton's analysis are said to look to the halcyon past to quell the anguish caused by the uncertain future, which, once again, adheres to our crisis cinema paradigm (Allbritton, 105).

Alex de la Iglesia's *La chipsa de la vida (As Luck Would Have It)*, 2011, exhibits all 4 components of our proposed paradigm of crisis cinema, while staying true to key elements of Spanish crisis cinema following the "Great Spanish Depression." Set in contemporary Spain, the story focuses on Roberto Gomez as he deals with prolonged unemployment, which causes him to struggle with the thought of having failed his family. After being turned down at a job interview with former colleagues, Roberto decides to visit the hotel where he and his wife spent their honeymoon, which he discovers no longer exists, having been replaced by a museum. Roberto begins to wander around the place, resulting in his being chased by Claudio, a security guard patrolling the grounds. This ends as Roberto enters a restricted area, an archeological dig site, and falls a great height, impaling his skull on a metal rod. Thus, Roberto's financial instability – vulnerability – has led to his being physically harmed – precarity – through a series of events that is emblematic of Spain's crisis cinema following the 2008 financial crisis. This, therefore, creates our requisite suffering protagonist, as the post-unemployment depression and subsequent mortal wound weigh down on Roberto's very existence.

While waiting for paramedics to arrive, Roberto calls his wife to deliver the news, however, she is unable to understand everything being said and rushes to his side. At around the same time, a tour group, led by the mayor and museum director, enter the area where the accident has occurred. Both of these events, his wife coming to join him and the tour group erupting onto the scene, represent the creation of a collective surrounding

the suffering protagonist that we necessitate. Nevertheless, as the events continue and more people are involved – the paramedics cannot move him for fear of killing him, so they wait on doctors to arrive, journalists are contacted to get the "scoop," museum employees try various ways to end the spectacle – underlying intentions and motives are revealed. The mayor is portrayed as one of the greatest malefactors, as he just wants the situation resolved quickly and quietly, regardless of whether or not Roberto survives. Along with this, journalists and reporters begin to invade the scene, further impeding the medical professionals' work, in an attempt to get exclusive footage to sell for a profit. These actions are symbolic of the malaise caused by authoritative figures that is key to our crisis cinema paradigm, and directly interfere with the struggling collective, thereby causing conflict. Finally, envisioning his family's return to a time before their financial struggle, Roberto plots with a journalist to sell an exclusive interview that damns the institutions that led to his plight, and in doing so, uses them to free his family from the fallen present – a clear parallel to the reverence of the past when looking to the future that helps to constitute our crisis cinema paradigm. In this way, Roberto's actions cast "optimism, hope, and sympathy as stand-ins for any action that might effect a real change upon the world" (Allbritton, 112).

Hong Kong's film industry is another that has birthed a Brobdingnagian body of films in reaction to a contemporary crisis, and similarly to Spain, media scholars have sought to apply the moniker of crisis cinema to them. The crisis that Hong Kong faced, however, offered disparate challenges, as described in Tony Williams' *Space, Place, and Spectacle: The Crisis Cinema of John Woo*. Scholarship such as this has focused on the identity crisis that ailed Hong Kong regarding the 1997 handover to mainland China, with

this article specifically focusing on the work of John Woo as director. Williams claims most Hong Kong residents "view[ed] 1997 as an apocalyptic 'end of the world,'" an element that crops up repeatedly in Woo's work (Williams, 70). It is also averred that Woo explicitly approaches the handover by focusing on "'things' [he] feels are in danger of 'being lost,'" and "contesting identifications, rooted within past and contemporary Chinese traditions, as well as current Western values," which he uses to problematize the present and elevate the past (Williams, 71). A "better tomorrow" is rendered through the miasma of a "gloomily envisaged historical and cultural apocalypse" with the pursuit of the bygone, thereby relieving society of the agony caused by the immediate (Williams, 79).

Crisis is explicated in Williams' paper as "a contemporary situation that expresses a lack of confidence, despair, artistic uncertainty, a lack of faith in progress, and a deficiency of old 'master narratives' securities," and is applied to John Woo's works from 1986 to 1992 (Williams, 69). Despite the dissimilitude that may exist within this gamut, just as with Spain, the constants of our crisis cinema paradigm remain veracious. The previously accounted for "things in danger of being lost" is a salient foundation, as Woo's work "involves parallels between vanishing traditions confronting pressing realities of the modern world and a colony in danger of losing its very identity," which provide the means whereby our requisite elements materialize (Williams, 73). First, the protagonists of Woo's films habitually face "violent embodiments of different forms of twentieth-century societies of spectacle," which engender extensive anguish and misery (Williams, 79). This exemplifies the suffering protagonist criterion that our crisis cinema model mandates. Compounding this, Woo uses space in his films as an allegory for Hong

Kong's identity, allowing disruptions in filmic space to represent disruptions in Hong Kong society (Williams, 75). Thus, any friction faced by lead characters becomes a hurdle for Hong Kong as a whole, which extends the affliction to those surrounding the protagonists and creates a collective that shares Hong Kong's suffering. Furthermore, Woo's work commonly employs legitimization crises to substantiate the "pressing realities of the modern world," which cause the collective of suffering to erupt into a brouhaha trained at their experienced unfair treatment by the officialdom (Williams, 73). This is symbolic of the proposed conflict with inimical institutions of power that is obligatory to our crisis cinema paradigm. Lastly, the films described in Williams' paper mediate the overcoming of obstacles through "visions of China's heroic past," positing tradition as the solution to the fallen present, offering a prosperous future through adherence to cultural history, as our argument goes (Williams, 79).

John Woo's *Hard Boiled*, 1992, is a prime exemplar of not only Hong Kong crisis cinema – containing elements such as doubling and the blending of Eastern motifs and Western values – but also of our proposed pattern that defines crisis cinema. Set in Hong Kong during the lead up to the handover, the film follows "Tequila," a gun-slinging police inspector bent on revenge, and Alan, an undercover cop that has infiltrated a triad syndicate. Both characters are symbolic of a suffering protagonist, as Tequila's partner is killed in a shootout that subsequently leads to Tequila being taken off the case, and Alan's role as undercover agent sees him committing atrocities that pain him to his core. The actions of the two constantly converge throughout the course of the film, which manifests the element of doubling common to Hong Kong crisis cinema from this period, acting as an allegory for the split nature of Hong Kong's existence – British colony and

Chinese special administrative region. Eventually, Tequila and Alan team up to stop the nefarious plans of a triad boss, Johnny, which leads them to a calamitous showdown at a populated hospital. Both the bonding of Tequila and Alan and the endangerment of the hospital's staff and patients represent the creation of collectives to share the suffering of the individual. Tequila and Alan, who were laboriously chasing the same eventual outcome, are able to rely on each other to reach that desired end. Their fight extends to the innocent people in the hospital, who must hope for the protagonists' deed to be completed for fear of personal harm – thus, our suffering protagonists are the embodiment of heroics meant to deliver Hong Kong from ruination.

The antagonistic authority criterion that our paradigm promises is represented through different characters or groups in the film. First, police superintendent Pang – in charge of both Tequila and Alan – blocks Tequila's pursuit of vengeance for his slain partner and commands Alan to continue his undercover role even when he is uncomfortable doing so. This, however, is overcame and overshadowed by the greater hegemonic threat, which takes form in Johnny and his goons gaining control of the hospital, and, therefore, control of the lives of the collective – allegorically threatening Hong Kong. Thus, the clash that ensues is representative of the collective's confrontation with the domineering powers that be, which supports our model. Finally, the communal salvation comes in the form of the knight-errant-esque heroics of Tequila, who "unconsciously performs an action ascribed to an earlier hero, Chao Yun," thereby saving the day – and the future – with Chinese tradition and confirming our crisis cinema paradigm (Williams, 79).

Japan is no stranger to crises or the subsequent mediation that responds to them, having experienced its fair share of both over the lifetime of the Japanese film industry. Just as with the other instances discussed previously, media scholars have habitually applied the crisis cinema label to Japanese films that are argued as being unequivocal reactions to the crises that have rocked the nation. This is exemplified in Yoshiko Ikeda's article, *Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II: From a Scapegoat of the Americans to a savior of the Japanese*, where the Godzilla franchise is analyzed through the scope of crisis cinema discourse. Ikeda's work posits the series' foundation as a cinematic response to the devastation caused by World War II, claiming "[Godzilla's] destruction is closely related to Japan's experiences in World War II" and "symbolically re-enact[s] a problematic United States-Japan relationship that includes atomic war, occupation, and thermo-nuclear tests" (Ikeda, 44). Her argument continues, "Godzilla formulas have proved to be very adaptable in confronting underlying themes and anxieties in the Japanese cultural psyche," which manifested as "a horrible monster and destroyed big cities in Japan" (Ikeda, 61).

Similar to what we have seen with Spain and Hong Kong, Japan's crisis cinema – represented here as the Godzilla franchise – helps to explicate our proposed crisis cinema paradigm. The elements that do this are a result of the film series' ability to "project the fears and struggles of the Japanese against the Americans, the Japanese themselves, science and technology, civilization, and later politics and economy" (Ikeda, 61). The suffering protagonist pattern is usually found in the individual or group of individuals that are trying to stop Godzilla's destruction, but that also "understand him as a warning of the danger of nuclear weapons and war" (Ikeda, 56). The suffering, then, is created by

29

not only Godzilla's wrath, but by the knowledge that humanity is ultimately responsible for the devastation. Additionally, the films showcase "Godzilla's destruction of the city from the viewpoint of the attacked crowds," extending the pain to any unfortunate soul found in the monster's wake (Ikeda, 47). This creates a collective of suffering that represents the "human cost of Godzilla, the H-bombs that have produced him, and ultimately World War II itself," and which affirms out crisis cinema paradigm (Ikeda, 48). Because of this, conflict in the films is generated with both Godzilla and those that would perpetrate further nuclear disaster, or "the statesmen who misuse" nuclear bombs, alike (Ikeda, 48). The solution to the ruination, therefore, is recognizing that "society cannot save itself only with the power of science and technology," with the need to have "a strong sense of morality and responsibility" to alleviate the "danger of nuclear weapons and the devastating consequences of war" being paramount (Ikeda, 50). Thus, the "fear and distrust of science," along with the destruction they have caused, manifests the desire to create a future free from their eidolon, often symbolically linked to the experiences prior their conception (Ikeda, 50).

Ishiro Honda's 1954 film, *Gojira*, formulated many of the components and patterns that would remain consistent across the Godzilla franchise to this day. Set in post-war Japan, the film follows Emiko Yamane, daughter of paleontologist Kyohei Yamane, and those that she interacts with through the course of Godzilla's rampage, including her father's colleague, Dr. Daisuke Serizawa, and the man she loves, salvage ship captain Hideto Ogata. Each of these characters exemplify a suffering protagonist, with their individual pains corresponding with key moments of the film. For example, Emiko is arranged to marry Dr. Serizawa, however, before she can inform him of her

decision to cancel the marriage to pursue her love for Ogata, she witnesses Serizawa's

creation, the oxygen destroyer. The device, which eliminates oxygen from a fish tank,

thereby killing the fish, terrifies Emiko, causing her to run away after promising to keep

it a secret. Later in the film, she must depend on Serizawa's device and help him

overcome his unwillingness to use it – representative of Serizawa's suffering – resulting

in her breaking the promise and divulging his secret to Ogata.

Emiko and Ogata confront Serizawa, arguing – a literal brawl happens when

Ogata tries to get to Serizawa's research – that the device is needed to put an end to

Godzilla's desolation. A collective, then, forms when they convince Serizawa to – along

with Dr. Yamane, who did not want Godzilla killed – deploy the oxygen destroyer to

save Japan. All the while, Japanese citizens constitute another collective that is suffering,

delineated by the monster's ruination, and further representative of our crisis cinema

model. The titular character of the film, Godzilla, represents the antagonistic power that

recklessly asserts supremacy over the collective of suffering, and adheres to our proposed

paradigm. In this case, however, the institution responsible for the misery extends beyond

Godzilla himself, to include those responsible for his creation and those likely to ignite

another calamity. Serizawa's reluctance to use – or even unveil – the oxygen destroyer is

indicative of this, as he believes it would be weaponized and used in the same manner as

the H-bombs that created Godzilla. It is Serizawa's belief that this should be the only

time the oxygen destroyer is ever used, causing him to burn his research and commit

suicide after confirming Godzilla's death. In this way, he ensures that, after the current

catastrophe is dealt with, Japan would return to a time without the oxygen destroyer,

giving the future a better chance without this destructive technology. This is echoed by

Dr. Yamane's exhortation; "Godzilla is not necessarily the last one. If H-bombs should continue to be used, similar monsters might appear," and completes our requisite criteria (Ikeda, 48).

Although we are attempting to apply the same label to multiple cinemas in reaction to crisis, it is important to labor under the consensus that they will never be entirely congruent. The crises that spurred these cinematic discourses arose in different contexts and were approached by viewers in different manners; this is what makes them unique enough to warrant juxtaposition. For example, while Allbritton's arguments – and our subsequent analysis of a film that emblemizes them – state that financial instability constitutes the vulnerability that crises feed on, not all suffering protagonists owe their plights to socioeconomic downturn. In Hong Kong – and specifically John Woo's – case, the suffering protagonist is created by the humanized threat to cultural stability and longevity. For Japan, as defined by the Godzilla series, the suffering protagonist is a result of the dire circumstances thrust upon society by humanity's obstinance. As for the necessity of a collective to share this suffering, each iteration of crisis cinema has offered unique takes. While Spanish crisis cinema – as with the example of the reporters and medical team in *La chipsa de la vida* – has the collective rally around the suffering protagonist to damn the powers that be, *Hard Boiled* exemplifies Hong Kong crisis cinema's reliance on heroics of a select few to save the collective from ruination. Moreover, the Godzilla franchise evinces the significance of multilayered collectives – the smaller collective that struggles with the would-be catastrophic oxygen destroyer while remaining a part of the collective that continues to suffer at the hands of a monster. The antagonistic forces that exert destructive power over these collectives are also unique

to each brand of crisis cinema, ranging from nefarious narcissism to apocalyptic

decimation. And while each subset analyzed here has relied on some degree of adherence

to tradition and the past, the magnitude to which the future should be defined by them is

protean. Heterogeneous dissimilitude notwithstanding, these are all indispensable

elements that are found across the board, which give form to our defined phenomenon, in

the exact way that we have defined. This form, then, this "crisis cinema" is an explicated

paradigm that we – as film scholars – may use to heighten our apprehension of cinema's

pivotal role in crisis, disaster, and trauma discourses.

CHAPTER 5

THE CRISIS CINEMA OF 3/11

Crisis cinema, as we have defined it, relies heavily on the efficacy of mediation, or, more specifically, fictional narrative films and their ability to "seep into the public consciousness" through "widely circulating blogs, internet sites, television entertainment channels, journals, and newspapers" (Kaplan, 27). These films, then, create a "'group mind'" not through "pronouncements by prominent officials," but through "various media and minority discourses produced by small collectives" that fabricate a "national public discourse" (Kaplan, 26). In the case of the trauma process that follows disasters, which we've defined as socially constructed, the "transmission of affect takes place as readily between viewer and cinematic emotions as between individuals in life," "stimulat[ing] the brain [and] chang[ing] how we act" (Kaplan, 27). Crisis cinema, therefore, enables victims to "work over and through [their] traumatic past by recalling, re-enacting, bearing witness to and critiquing" their experience, and permits those that "have not been directly affected by the extreme events in question" to "fathom 'the trauma of others'" (Stahl, 163). Indeed, the aforementioned propagation through media – and explicitly through "fictions" – enables "a group that has suffered a traumatic event" to "recognize the event's meanings" when "it learns about another catastrophe" (Kaplan, 27). Thus, the traumatized – being those that experience the repetitious revenant of their "brush with death" – are able to take "constructive symbolic steps toward working over

34

and working through [their] burdened past," by means of a mediated homolog of their lived experience (Stahl, 177). This moment of "*Jetztzeit*," or the "instant in which an image of the past sparks a flash of unexpected recognition in the present," is a moment of pure allegory (Lowenstein, 149). Crisis cinema, consequently, relies on fictions, as "direct archival footage" cannot maintain or convey "historical specificity," and, moreover, it cannot contribute to the process of healing (Caruth, 27).

As fictitious cinematic reactions to Japan's 3/11 go, none is more overt than Hideaki Anno's *Shin Gojira*, 2016. I argue, however, that this film is not representative of the crisis cinema that followed the disaster, instead existing "in a kind of limbo," "possess[ing] no logical progression from past to future, or from social problem to sanctioned solution" (Combs, 21). The film, having become parodic and filled with the "organizational [and] political bullshit" that removes the "possibility of knowing how things truly are," is a manifestation of the fatalistic defeatism that accompanies a "dystopian consciousness," thereby undermining the redemptive vocation emblematic of crisis cinema discourse (Combs, 26). Because of this, it is necessary to define the elements considered "core" to the crisis cinema spawned by 3/11, scrupulously examining their inception into Japanese cinema, as well as the relationship they share with our crisis cinema paradigm.

Hayao Miyazaki, often considered "Japan's greatest animation director," is credited with producing works that deliver "cultural recovery" in the form of "quest[s] to rediscover and reincorporate elements of purity, self-sacrifice, endurance, and team spirit," which are argued as being the "quintessentially Japanese" traits threatened by the "toxicity of contemporary Japanese society" (Napier, 289). This "discontinuous change"

35

– manifested in the disconnection from the past and its values – engenders the loss of identity – formed by memories of the past and the feeling of belonging to a place – faced by the characters in Miyazaki's films (Satoshi, 24). Moreover, the director injects motifs that appeal to children and adults alike, coupling the "melding of two worlds: the real and the imaginary" – analogous of magic realism – with the complex elements of postmodernism that "address issues deeply ingrained in the social fabric of contemporary Japan" (McDonald, 178). This marriage of modes, "a legitimately new phenomenon" in Japanese filmmaking, "narrativize[s] a series of structural antimonies" that confront the contemporary condition (Bingham, 124). For example, the dichotomy between rural and urban is explored through "a lovely human harmony engrained in rural communities now rapidly disappearing" (McDonald, 180). This is, of course, indicative of those oldest Japanese filmic paradigms – being themselves an extension of nationalist ideology – such as "the individual and his problems [being] continually sacrificed to the well-being of society," "justice and the well-being of society depend[ing] on the maintenance of established ways," and the ability to "escape the pressures of their own society by retreat[ing] into nature" (Anderson, 322). In Miyazaki's case, "a painstakingly evocative naturalistic setting with free play of fantasy" is made "possible with *anime,*" "whose readily accessible entertainment value made the message more accessible to general audiences" (McDonald, 179).

Much like the works of Miyazaki, the crisis cinema that followed 3/11 – which we are laboring to expound – relies on fiction's seminal role in the previously described trauma process, as well as anime's salient nature, whereby it "represents Japanese filmmaking as a whole," and "accounts for half of all Japanese movie tickets sold"

(Richie, 257). The adulation of animation, then, comes from its "stylistic unity, or a controlled stylization missing from representational styles," which results in its being "unified in vision, singular in style, and subject to none of the vagaries of actuality" (Richie, 252). It is through this intricate malleability that narratives have been – and will continue to be – disseminated in response to 3/11, relying on the re-intensification of the elements that Miyazaki championed to reignite nationalist discourse in the face of impending doom. Thus, the use of elements of postmodernism – the dichotomy between rural and urban, the catastrophic, and the misfit savior – and magic realism – the mysticality of nature, magical or fantastical powers, and the blurring of space and time – in animated films following 3/11 has constituted a new wave of crisis cinema that problematizes the continued pursuit of nuclear energy, thereby buttressing the national calls for change.

According to our – now established – paradigm for crisis cinema, the films that we hope to group under the moniker must exhibit a suffering protagonist, the creation of a collective around said protagonist, an authoritative force of ill-reckoning that must be confronted by the collective, and the building of a prosperous future upon a foundation of the idealized past. I argue that the aforementioned elements of postmodernism and magic realism help with this, and are, therefore, the key elements to the wave. First, the inception of a suffering protagonist manifests in several ways, with the most common being postmodern angst in the form of an identity crisis. This utilizes the dichotomy between rural and urban, usually depicted as characters in a rural setting wishing for city life and characters from urban settings being thrust into a rural environment – or vice versa. The sense of not belonging, as with Miyazaki's films, engenders suffering by

threatening the character's ontological worth. Furthermore, the suffering of characters

can be either created or compounded by another element of postmodernism, the dejection

caused by the catastrophic. Apocalyptic despondence also commonly leads to the creation

of collectives – our second requirement for crisis cinema – as those that suffer look for

aid. Interestingly, collectives could form prior to or after a calamity, usually as a result of

communities that further exacerbate the chasm between rural and urban, which affects the

overall response to the disaster.

The catastrophes that shake established communities often reveal, heighten, or

abate elements of magic realism – such as magical or fantastical powers and the blurring

of space and time – which then weigh on the validity of the perceived collectives. This,

consequently, has the power to shatter previously infallible bonds, as well as forge

stauncher ones. In the former, antagonism and hostility can ensue, cast by the insecurities

of the stagnant, which often takes the form of inimical authorities that feel their dominion

waver. Thus, dissension springs forth, worsening the already desperate situation, as our

crisis cinema model suggests. Alternatively, the forging of new bonds can lead to

redemption, as it enables characters to transcend previously established barriers to save

the afflicted. This plays out commonly with the salvific outsider, who, originally

distressed by their lack of belonging, puts the well-being of society above their own

aspiration. The deliverance offered by these misfit paragons promises a return to the non-

cataclysmic, allowing the future to be built on faithful motifs. Moreover, the elements of

postmodernism and magical realism present in these films – chiefly the outsider turned

hero, disparity between rural and urban, and the mysticality of nature – serve to re-instill

"quintessentially Japanese" motifs to disaster discourse, thereby breathing life into

nationalist ideology. To prove this model, it will be applied to several original – written and produced after 3/11 – animated films, each of which, I argue, holds a place in crisis cinema discourse.

Yasuhiro Yoshiura's *Sakasama no Patema* (*Patema Inverted*) debuted in Japan on November 9, 2013, making it the film most adjacent to 3/11 in this study. Perhaps causally, it centers on post-disaster society and the "carrying on" that occurs therein, with opening shots of the film featuring the cataclysmic destruction of humanity in the year 2067. Scientists, hoping to generate energy through gravity, executed an experiment that inadvertently reversed Earth's gravity, sentencing millions to their deaths and destroying much of humanity's infrastructure. We are then – some years later – introduced to Patema, a prominent member of an underground society, who, being bored with the confined tunnels and shafts of this refuge, habitually disregards the rules and explores the "Danger Zone." Already, Patema's discontent symbolizes a suffering protagonist, as her freewill is restricted by the sins of her forefathers. Along with this, it is revealed that a man called Lagos, the closest thing Patema had to family, left the colony years before, with no contact between the two taking place in the years since. Thus, Patema is afflicted by an identity crisis, feeling as though she is not where she belongs, which manifests in her desire to explore.

Shortly after we are introduced to Patema, along with some members of her society, we accompany her on another excursion into the Danger Zone. This time, however, things take a turn for the worse when she is confronted by an otherworldly figure with red, glowing eyes and garbed in a black cloak, who is seemingly hanging from the ceiling of a tunnel. Patema, who refers to the figure as a "bat person," tries to

defend herself, before ultimately falling down the large shaft underneath her catwalk. Upon regaining consciousness, Patema attempts to climb – seemingly – down from the tree that she is stuck in, but realizes that, below her, an apparently endless chasm awaits. Nonetheless, as her bag slips from her grasp and gets caught on a chain-link fence below her, she resolves to climb down to it. This leads to the introduction of our second – later elucidated as suffering – protagonist, Age, who, upon seeing the bag on the fence, moves towards it. As both characters reach the prize, it is revealed that, somehow, their gravities are inverted, with Age standing flat on the ground and Patema in danger of falling into the sky. Their inverted gravity, then, is representative of magical or fantastical powers, which acts as the reason they are able to meet and, later, bond. The two discover that, by holding on to each other, they can nullify the threat posed by Patema's plight. Subsequently, they travel to a nearby abandoned structure, where, once inside, Patema is able to stand on the ceiling without fear of "falling." The pair spend time introducing themselves and interrogating each other over their worlds, but when an alarm sounds, Age runs off after promising to come back for Patema. This, already, constitutes the forming of new bonds – and therefore collectives – that, by way of magic realism, transcends boundaries between disparate communities.

The focus of the film shifts to Age, along with the civilization within which he exists, as we are given further information on the calamity that reshaped humanity, labeled "The Great Change," along with a look into Age's life in this "surface society." Depicted as an aging, monotonous totalitarianism, the society – Aiga – drills into its populace the difference between themselves – "the true humanity" – and the "sinners" that "fell into the sky," while constantly reiterating the need to "follow the laws, maintain

order, and watch the ground." Age, whose actions and inclination cause him to stand out from Aiga's dull, grey uniformity, is a clear misfit in the society, establishing his role as suffering protagonist through, much the same as Patema, an identity crisis. This is compounded as, after returning to Patema and spending time with her, the two are hunted by the "security police" – Patema's "bat people" – sent by Izamura – Aiga's domineering leader – who despises "inverts" like Patema. These events, juxtaposed with scenes of Patema's friends – notably a boy named Porta – planning to rescue her, establish the two major communities in the film. Aiga, representing an "urban" setting and community, and Patema's underground society, which symbolizes a more "rural" coterie – with their differences allegorically displayed by their seeing the world inverted from one another. Furthermore, it substantiates the antagonistic institution responsible – at least in part – for the suffering of our protagonists, which betokens a further divide between the communities. Eventually, Patema and Age are caught by the security police, both becoming subject to the powers that be – Age is physically, and psychologically, assaulted, while Patema is held captive by Izamura – setting the stage for an inevitable clash with this hegemony of hostility. While under the control of Izamura, Patema is told the "truth" of The Great Change, which includes Izamura's insistence that Patema, along with all other "inverts," are scum and sinners. It is then revealed that Lagos, who was also being held prisoner by Izamura, has died, adding to Patema's suffering. Additionally, this moment in the film stands to reiterate the disparity between the communities – through Izamura's prejudice – as well as the mysticality of nature that facilitates the groups' inverted gravity enigma.

The ensuing events represent the breaking of boundaries and forming of collectives, as Age travels with Porta back to the underground society to plot Patema's rescue, with the final plan requiring commitment from both Age – a member of the surface "urban" community – and Porta – a member of the underground "rural" community. The two work together to sneak through Aiga's defenses, and, before long, Age is able to come to Patema's rescue – Porta is held back by his inverted gravity, which makes it too risky for him to follow. While Patema and Age are sharing a moment, Izamura springs his trap, surrounding the two with his security police, and consequently stoking the flames of dissension. The standoff eventually proceeds to the roof, where, at gunpoint, Patema and Age are able to escape by ascending into the sky – Patema's gravity is now stronger than Age's, because she has a device strapped to her leg that experiences gravitational pull in the same direction as her – which represents the utilization of their magical or fantastical powers. The pair, after losing and subsequently regaining consciousness, fly ever closer to the stars, before ultimately realizing that the stars – and the sky itself – are a mechanical construction suspended over Aiga, blurring the previously defined space of the film. To their amazement, they discover Patema's bag that had "fallen" into the sky, which leads them to discover the flying machine that Age's father had built – a topic they discussed earlier in the film – and, as a result, the journal inside. The journal, belonging to Age's father, recounts his friendship with Lagos – another example of collective-building across boundaries – with whom he built the flying machine. Patema and Age, whose bond has been strengthened by this ordeal, use the machine to travel back to Aiga, where the final confrontation with Izamura – and Aiga itself – occurs. A chase ensues that leads everyone to the underground society, where

42

Izamura's plans are foiled and the truth is revealed. Aiga, along with the underground society, exist below Earth's real surface, with the citizens of Aiga being the real "inverts," that hid underground to survive Earth's inverted gravity. The underground society, then, – Patema's people – were the people whose gravity was not affected by The Great Change, and who decided to live underground to help the afflicted. Upon discovering this, Patema, Age, and the others resolve to start anew on Earth's surface, living harmoniously and washing away the pains caused by the disaster and, importantly, Izamura and Aiga. Thus, humanity is redeemed by the unlikely collective of two disparate groups, led by suffering outsiders – and made possible by fantastical powers granted by nature's mysticality – that, together, overthrew the great oppressor.

In 2016, Makoto Shinkai's *Kimi no Na wa* exploded onto the scene, becoming the highest grossing Japanese film of all time with a record gross of $359 million. Shinkai's work masterfully blends elements of postmodernism and magic realism into a coming of age story that tackles motifs related to 3/11, with a large emphasis being put on the inevitability of disaster and humanity's need to cooperate in times of crisis. The film opens on Mitsuha Miyamizu, a high school student living in a rural Japanese town, Itomori, with her grandmother and younger sister. As Mitsuha goes about her morning routine, people comment on her "unusual behavior" from the day before, which she has no recollection of. While walking to school with her friends, Sayaka and Katsuhiko – nicknamed "Tessie" – they come across Mitsuha's father, the incumbent mayor of Itomori, campaigning for reelection. The mayor reprimands Mitsuha in front of her classmates – yelling at her to "stand up straight" – causing her to be embarrassed. Sayaka and Tessie's warmth towards Mitsuha when she is distressed, along with her relationship

with her sister and grandmother, begin to delineate the collectives surrounding her, which become key later in the film. After discovering someone else's writing in her notebook, Mitsuha confronts Sayaka and Tessie, who continue to describe her odd doings of the day prior. Mistuha admits that she feels as though she's been living in a dream about someone else's life, however, she attributes this to her gloom felt by living in such a small, rural town, stating that she wants to graduate and move to Tokyo. This helps to evince Mitsuha's identity crisis, which results from her feeling as though she is not where she belongs. Thus, Mitsuha is a suffering protagonist being acted upon by the structural antimony constructed through the contention between rural and urban. Compounding this, Mitsuha's family is in charge of the Miyamizu Shrine, which sees her taking part in traditional rituals in front of everyone – something that she finds embarrassing and adds to her list of reasons for wanting to leave.

The story shifts to focus on high school Tokyoite, Taki Tachibana, whose life we follow for two consecutive days. On the first day, Taki seems at odds with his own life, getting confused over mundane rituals and being captivated by daily scenery. His friends notice – and comment on – his strange behavior, which seems to affect everything he does, culminating in his need to ask where his own job is. At work, he struggles to keep up, makes numerous mistakes, and even causes a scene with a rude customer. He is bailed out by his coworker, Ms. Okudera, whose skirt is slashed intentionally by the customer. Taki, still seemingly out of character, mends Okudera's skirt out of gratitude, to which she states her approval of his "feminine side." At home that night, Taki, referring to his own belongings in third person, leaves a note in his journal describing the days activities. For a brief second, we see Mitsuha's notebook with the stranger's note;

"Who are you?" which prompts Taki to write "Mitsuha" on his hand before falling asleep. This entire first day, then, was – through the use of magic realism – Mitsuha's dream of living in Tokyo come true, as she spent the day "body-swapped" with a boy from Tokyo. The second day – taking much less time on screen – sees Taki react to everything that signifies the odd occurrences of the previous day, such as the writing on his hand, the journal entry, and his friends' snarky comments. Focus then shifts rapidly between Mitsuha, Taki, Mitsuha in Taki's body, and Taki in Mitsuha's body, before the two realize, simultaneously, that they have been switching places randomly while sleeping. Mitsuha and Taki begin to communicate through notes on their phones, paper, and even bodies, whereby they develop rules for when the switching happens. These rules, meant to make the process more bearable, consist of "do's and don'ts," as well as things to watch out for. They also decide to leave reports for the days that they switch, which will allow further clarity. As the switching continues, however, they both do things that irritate the other, and they both complain about each other's lives. This whole series of events is emblematic of the aforementioned dichotomy between rural and urban – the lives of two teenagers from each side overlapping – along with magical or fantastical powers that blur our – and the characters' – understanding of space and time.

As the rush surrounding the discovery of the body-swapping phenomenon dies down, we are placed with Taki – in Mitsuha's body – for a day. Significant coverage is being given in the news to the comet, Tiamat, which is described as having an orbital period of 1,200 years, and that can now be seen with the naked eye. Mitsuha – but really Taki – accompanies her grandmother and sister to the sacred vessel of the local deity, where they will deliver an offering of kuchikamizake – sake made by Mitsuha in a ritual

previously, where rice is chewed into a mash that is spit into a container and left to ferment – which Mitsuha's grandmother denotes as "half of Mitsuha." On the journey home, Mitsuha's grandmother confronts her, claiming "you're dreaming already, aren't you?" Taki immediately wakes up – in his own body – before realizing that Mitsuha has set up a date between himself and Ms. Okudera. After he becomes distracted by photographs on the wall – which are of Itomori – Okudera infers that Taki is "like a different person, today," and the date eventually ends when she confronts him about his feelings. Now on his own, Taki looks through Mitsuha's notes on his phone, finding one that references the comet. Not knowing what she means, he decides to call her phone. This is interjected with Tessie calling to check on Mitsuha, who, feeling dejected because of Taki's date with Okudera, decided not to go to the festival and see the comet with her friends. Following this phone call, however, Mitsuha decides to join Sayaka and Tessie after all, showing up with a much shorter hair cut – one of Mitsuha's defining physical traits in the film has been her hair, which she always wears in a specific style with a red braided cord. The audience was made aware of Taki's presence in Mitsuha's body, as he wore her hair down or in a ponytail. This represents a further complication with Mitsuha's identity crisis, as she does not understand the feelings that she is having in reaction to Taki's date. The three go to see the comet together, and, after taking in its beauty for a brief moment, it splits in two pieces, one of which heads towards Earth.

Taki's call to Mitsuha is unsuccessful, as he is met with a recorded message indicating that the phone is either out of range or turned off. He resolves to tell her about the date the next time the switch, however, the switching ceases. Taki becomes obsessed with Itomori – though he does not know its name – and begins to draw it from memory,

search for it in reference books, as well as study the mountains he assumes surround it. This progression, which also includes his daydreaming through daily activities, represents Taki's suffering. Unlike Mitsuha, who was suffering due to dissatisfaction with her own life, Taki is now suffering because of the loss of their connection, which culminates in his leaving Tokyo to attempt to find Itomori himself. To his surprise, Tsukasa – one of his friends from school who he told to cover for him – and Ms. Okudera are waiting for him as he arrives at the train station, who both believe that he is going to meet an online friend. This establishes a supportive collective around Taki during his time of despondency and helps to encourage his journey for answers that might offer salvation.

While the trio is eating at a restaurant during the trip, the restaurant's chef – who is originally from Itomori – notices Taki's drawings, confirming the town's name and reinvigorating Taki, however, the others immediately recognize it as a town that was obliterated by a comet 3 years prior. The chef takes them to the site of the disaster, and, as he takes in the ruination, Taki discovers that the messages left on his phone by Mitsuha are beginning to fade. The blurring of space and time is intensified, increasing Taki's dismay. Together at a library, Tsukasa and Okudera try to explain the events of Itomori's demise to Taki, who subsequently finds Mitsuha's name amongst the dead. Later on, while the three renting a room, Taki struggles to understand what has happened, even coming to realize that he has forgotten Mitsuha's name. Okudera, while looking at a book about Itomori's braided cords, notices the one that Taki wears on his wrist. When she asks him about it, he says that someone gave it to him a long time ago, but he cannot recall who. He then explains how someone – Mitsuha's grandmother, who, along with Mitsuha and her sister, made the braided cords at their shrine – explained to him – while

47

he was in Mitsuha's body – that the threads represent time itself, twisting, tangling, unraveling, and connecting again. Remembering this causes Taki to recall the sacred vessel that he visited with Mitsuha's family, and, while Tsukasa and Okudera are sleeping, he hears Mitsuha's voice and resolves to visit the vessel alone.

The chef from Itomori, feeling sentimental about the drawing, gives Taki a ride to the area surrounding the disaster zone along with food for his journey. Taki then sets off, retracing his steps in search of the vessel, remembering everything Mitsuha's grandmother taught him about their traditions, until he eventually finds its location. Upon entering the vessel, he finds Mitsuha's kuchikamizake, which he consumes in the hopes that it would reconnect them. Taki, after drinking the sake, slips, revealing a drawing of the comet on the cave's wall, which prompts a series of visions, or flashbacks, of Mitsuha's life, from birth to the comet's arrival. He then wakes with a start, realizing that he is back in Mitsuha's body on the day that she dies. Mistuha's grandmother, who instantly discerns that it is Taki, explains how she also experienced body-swapping when she was young, a phenomenon experienced by generations of the Miyamizu family. Taki informs her of the impending disaster and, after resolving to save everyone, runs off to find Sayaka and Tessie. While trying to convince them of the danger, they discover that the lake near Itomori was created by a meteor that broke off of the comet during its last orbit, 1,200 years prior. Next, Taki attempts to convince the mayor – Mitsuha's father – to evacuate the town, however, he does not believe the story about the meteor, and, after hearing the mayor insult his own daughter, Taki lashes out. The mayor in this instance represents an oppressive force that, by use of its power over others, causes harm to others – by not taking the threat serious, he is endangering the lives of everyone in Itomori.

Since the mayor is unwilling to help, Taki decides to go to the vessel, in Mitsuha's body, but instructs Sayaka, Tessie, and Mitsuha's sister to continue the plan they had constructed previously.

Mitsuha wakes up in Taki's body where he was last, inside the vessel before the swap, and discovers the ruins of Itomori. A flashback ensues – from Taki's perspective as he rushes to the vessel in Mitsuha's body – showing Mitsuha's trip to Tokyo a day before the disaster, expressing her desire to meet Taki before his date with Okudera, however, being three years into Taki's past, he has no memory of her. Before they are separated by the bustling crowd at a train station, Mitsuha tells him her name and gives him the braided cord that she always wears. Back at the vessel, the two are both present and can hear each other, but are unable to see each other, being separated by three years. They eventually cross paths and, at twilight – considered "magic hour" in the local tradition – switch back into their own bodies. The two, able to see each other in person for the first time, discuss the plans for saving Itomori, agreeing to write their names on each other's hands, which will act as a reminder when they wake up. Taki is able to write his, but before Mitsuha is able to, their timelines split. Taki, now in his own time again, forgets Mitsuha's name, once again causing his suffering. Mitsuha, running back to Itomori, meets up with Tessie, who, along with Sayaka, begin the plan to save the citizens. They set off an explosion and, using the high school intercom, broadcast a warning to the citizens, mandating their immediate evacuation to the high school – which lies outside of the meteor's zone of destruction – to avoid the forest fire started by their explosives. Tessie, realizing that their evacuation plans will not be able to save everyone, tells Mitsuha that she must confront her father, thereby gaining his help to evacuate the entire

town. As she is running, exhausted, to the Town Hall, Mitsuha struggles with forgetting Taki's name and, upon falling, opens her hand to find that he wrote "I love you." This empowers her, strengthening her resolve to reach town hall.

Taki wakes up near the vessel again, this time with absolutely no memory of why he is there. Five years later, Taki, now a college graduate seeking employment, feels as though he is missing something, which consumes his every thought – indeed, he is even searching for a job that allows him to help plan landscapes, so as to better prepare for impending disasters. It is revealed that the evacuation efforts were successful, with no deaths occurring from the meteor, and, out at a café, Taki overhears Tessie and Sayaka discussing their wedding. Hearing their names stirs something within him, combined by his constantly seeing a woman wearing a braided cord, and he begins to become focused on the disaster again. Later, Mitsuha and Taki come face to face in the windows of passing trains, causing them both to feel like they are close to discovering what they've been missing. As such, they begin running around the city until, eventually, they find each other, reestablishing their connection and ending their suffering.

Masaaki Yuasa's *Yoaketsugeru Ru no Uta* (Lu over the Wall) was originally released in May 2017, a full 6 years after the events of 3/11. The film, which the director admits as being accessible to children, focuses on the overcoming of prejudices, the dichotomy between human greed and nature, and the prevention of disaster through cooperation. Set in Hinashi Town, a small, rural fishing village, the film centers on Kai Ashimoto, a middle school student that left Tokyo to live with his father and grandfather. Kai, feeling dejected because of his boring life in the small village, uses music as a form of escapism, and does not socialize with the other students. Being an outsider, Kai's

despondency is indicative of an identity crisis, as he feels out of place in the rural village that is constantly contrasted with Tokyo. Thus, we have a suffering protagonist made real by the structural antimony of rural vs urban, which removes the sense of belonging required to form one's identity.

On his way to school, after a rushed breakfast with his father and grandfather, Kai is approached by Yuho and Kunio, two classmates that formed a band, SEIREN, together. Yuho and Kunio both treat Kai as a friend, and, after seeing his music posted online, want him to join their band. Their supportive nature and insistence on being Kai's friend – despite him giving them the cold shoulder – is representative of a collective assembling around the suffering protagonist, which is completed when, after learning that they practice on Merfolk Island – an area steeped in myths surrounding mermaids – Kai agrees to practice with them. This ensues after Kai, alone in his grandfather's boathouse, sees something mysterious in the water and becomes captivated by mermaid lore. As the three begin to play music together, a strange voice is heard singing along, which Kai goes to investigate alone. Upon finding the source, Kai, who is unable to stop dancing, discovers that it is a mermaid causing the sounds, which then disappears when the music stops. Deciding not to tell the others, Kai rejoins Yuho and Kunio as they depart to go home, however, they witness poachers illegally fishing near Merfolk Island, who, upon noticing the band's presence, rush over to confront them. The poachers, wanting to intimidate the group, threaten them with physical violence – going as far as throwing Kai's phone into the water – before being thrown into the water themselves – a mysterious pillar of water erupts from the ocean, overturning the poachers' vessel. The incident, which further solidifies the bond between the three, is denotive of the

mysticality of nature and magical or fantastical powers that will come to define much of the narrative.

When he returns home, Kai begins to ask his grandfather – who has lived in the village his entire life and harbors a great mistrust of mermaids – questions about the mythical creatures, before his father reveals that he knows Kai traveled to Merfolk Island. Kai's grandfather, who has repeatedly warned Kai to stay away from there, becomes angry, causing Kai to leave dinner early and seek refuge in the empty boathouse. Throughout the majority of the film, Kai does not see eye to eye with authority figures – even his family – which often leads to dissension. While listening to music alone in the boathouse, Kai, once again, notices the mysterious figure in the water, which turns out to be a mermaid. The creature, able to control water, floods the boathouse in pursuit of Kai, who, by accident, discovers that music causes the mermaid to begin dancing as legs replace its tail. The mermaid, who introduces herself as Lu, ensures Kai that she does not wish to eat him, returning his phone instead and disappearing back into the water. Lu is emblematic of many crisis cinema attributes; her existence as a mermaid, while representing the mysticality of nature and granting her fantastical powers, casts her as an outsider and leads to her suffering later in the film. Along with this, the close friendship that she develops with Kai symbolizes the forming of a collective across boundaries, specifically those evocative of "rural" and "urban," as, even though Hinashi Town is a rural village, Lu represents nature itself.

Lu and Kai begin to spend time together, which, along with making the two grow closer, seemingly cures Kai of his melancholy, leading to him interacting more with friends and family. This culminates when Kai introduces Yuho and Kunio to Lu, thereby

52

amalgamating their collectives and creating a larger one. The band, now including Lu, is offered – and accepts – to play at the local Lantern Festival, organized by Yuho's father and grandfather – both prominent members of Hinashi Town's governance. In order to keep Lu a secret and keep her out of the sun – which is harmful to mermaids – but still allow her to sing, they hide her in an icebox cooler with a microphone. This plan, however, falls through when Lu, whose singing causes everyone to dance uncontrollably, joins in, thereby revealing herself to the people of Hinashi Town. Kai and Kunio take advantage of the crowd's dumfounded-ness, rushing Lu to the water, which allows her to escape. When news of mermaids' existence spreads – helped by internet videos showing Lu dancing – the members of Hinashi Town's officialdom – including Yuho's father and grandfather – try to pressure information out of the trio, hoping to "put Hinashi Town back on the map." We learn that several of the older citizens of the village – including Kai's grandfather – hold grudges against mermaids, who they believe killed their loved ones in the past. That notwithstanding, the overwhelming consensus is to reopen the theme park on Merfolk Island, using the band – and Lu – as the main attraction. This decision consists of many different motives, with Yuho and Kunio wanting the exposure for the band, Lu's desire to befriend more humans, and Yuho's grandfather's wishes to reopen his previously failed theme park. Kai, who believes Lu would be endangered by this plan, does not wish to go along with it and, therefore, returns to his original state of despondency – even ignoring Lu after she agrees to go ahead with the plan.

As the event at Merfolk Land – the newly re-opened theme park – begins, Yuho and Kunio, who discover that they've been replaced by professional musicians made to look like them, run into Kai, who being upset by the reckless treatment of Lu, starts a

53

quarrel with the two, causing Yuho to run away. Once Lu begins to panic at the discovery of her friends' replacement, compounded by her being treated as a spectacle, she lashes out violently and disappears. Yuho's father, believing that Lu has kidnapped Yuho – along with being pressured by fishermen – captures Lu in a cage and threatens to expose her to the sun. This causes Lu's "papa," a colossal sea monster, to rush to her aid, however, he too is captured by Yuho's father. This finalizes the construction of an oppressive, hegemonic force, as Yuho's father's wealth and position allow him to inflict suffering onto other characters. The events that have ensued – the forceful kidnapping of a mermaid that is then made to suffer – are reminiscent of those in the town's folklore, and, as pointed out by the local shrine priest, the signs of a repeat disaster – green, magical water flooding the town – begin to show themselves. Kai, Yuho, and Kunio, with the help of Kai's father and Yuho's grandfather, are able to free Lu and her father, thereby confronting and, subsequently, overcoming the draconian source of malaise. The threat of the flood, however, still looms, causing the group to begin the rush to evacuate the village. When it appears that evacuation efforts will not be good enough, a profusion of mermaids appear and begin helping. The mermaids, determined to stop the large tidal wave, attempt to use their powers, however, the sun begins to rise, endangering them and impeding their efforts. The people of Hinashi Town, including those that held grudges against the mermaids – after having found out that their loved ones were bit, and subsequently turn into mermaids, in order to save them – rally together and, by using umbrellas to block the sun, protect the mermaids, thereby allowing the disaster to be averted. This final collective building, then, the bringing together of individuals from

54

disparate groups, saves the village – by way of magical or fantastical powers – and prevents further suffering by holding nature in reverence.

The films analyzed here, I argue, are representative of both crisis cinema discourse and the filmic mediation that followed Japan's 3/11. Moreover, these films accomplish this, specifically, by utilizing key elements of postmodernism and magic realism to offer an avenue for those affected by the disaster to heal, as well as an opening for nationalist ideas that are meant to cure Japan's current identity crisis. The dichotomy between rural and urban cropped up, in some way, in each of these films, being used to establish identity crises that lead to characters' suffering, as well as to create defined, disparate communities. For example, the underground society in *Sakasama no Patema* represents a rural community, in this case free from the totalitarianism of Aiga, which represents the urban community. These communities lead to the suffering of protagonists, with Patema wishing to escape the mundaneness of rural life, and Age wanting to be free of the oppressive state. This pattern is similarly found in *Kimi no Na wa,* where rural life's humdrum causes Mitsuha to question her very identity. Furthermore, the tightknit nature of the rural community of Itomori is what allows death to be avoided entirely. As for *Yoaketsugeru Ru no Uta,* Kai suffers from a near-homogenous affliction to Mitsuha's, and Hinashi Town is, in many ways, Itomori's sister. This element is an axiomatic allusion to the disparate nature of the communities affected by 3/11. The rural, coastal zones devastated by, in some cases, a triple attack found themselves differentiated – sometimes palpable due to the fear of radiation – from those in the inland, urban centers. That notwithstanding, Japanese people embraced their national spirits, stepping across these geographical boundaries to stand together in solidarity.

Additionally, each film analyzed relies on a catastrophe to create suffering, boundaries, and subsequent salvation through unanimity. For *Sakasama no Patema*, the disaster was an anthropogenic affront on mother nature occurring in the past, thereby forcing the protagonists to recover and "carry on." This is emblematic of the immediate state of recovery following 3/11, where national calls for solidarity and perseverance filled the public sphere, and voices of disquietude pointed to the human involvement of the disaster. In *Kimi no Na wa*, the predicted, credible threat of a disaster is heeded, removing the danger posed to hundreds of innocent civilians. Perhaps as wish fulfillment, this finds itself closely aligned with the threat of a possible repeat to a millennium-old earthquake and tsunami that were ignored by Japan's energy officials. The cataclysm in *Yoaketsugeru Ru no Uta,* while ultimately avoided, betokens the unpredictable essence of natural disasters, washing away whatever plans humanity had to begin with. Each film, too, features the crossing of boundaries by perceived "outsiders," without whom the destruction would be exponential. In *Sakasama no Patema*, the efforts of *Patema* and *Age*, outsiders bouncing between communities, are what made it possible for humanity to shake off the yolk of a tyrannical hegemony. Without the experience of becoming outsiders in the bodies of others, Taki and Mitsuha would not have saved Itomori in *Kimi no Na wa*. Likewise, *Yoaketsugeru Ru no Uta's* Lu, an outsider to human culture, was paramount to saving humanity from an insidious curse. These "salvific misfits," then, represent the reliance that victims of 3/11 had on outside aid, without which the death toll could have been much higher.

Finally, each film uses unique blends of magic realism's common elements – the mysticality of nature, magical or fantastical powers, and the blurring of space and time –

ensuring that, while fictitious enough to avoid compounding the repetitive nature of trauma, the narratives are able to begin to offer mediated recovery. As for *Sakasama no Patema*, nature's mockery of mankind's attempted ascension to godhood is symbolic of its mysticality, which manifests itself in the form of the fantastical power of flight. Furthermore, the understanding of space is thrown into doubt when it is discovered that the sky is manufactured, and even more so when we discover Aiga's truth. In *Kimi no Na wa*, Mitsuha and Taki's experience is tied closely to the mystical spirituality of nature – as Mitsuha's grandmother reminds us – and allows for the magical or fantastical power of body-swapping, which transcends normal perception of time. *Yoaketsugeru Ru no Uta* features the creation of an entire mythos surrounding nature's mysticality, giving us the mermaids that, through the magical power of controlling water, eventually save the day. This, of course, compounded by the seemingly timelessness of their existence, blurring our understanding of humanity's role in the world. These elements, then, offer healing and redemption by constructing motifs such as the cooperation of humanity across boundaries and the need to revere, not destroy, nature and tradition, each of which are steeped in the cultural national discourse that is used to reinforce Japanese national identity.

> One of the inspirations for the film was the earthquake in 2011. It was the largest in a thousand years, and there was something similar 1,000 years ago, which we all forgot about. But if you look closer there were warnings, like stone inscriptions in the cave in the film: don't live in this valley. But we forgot those warnings or dismiss them as something from 'ancient times.' We think they're

just dangers from the past. When we have a disaster in Japan, I wonder, how can we prevent our lives and traditions and history from the disaster (Shinkai, 2016).

CHAPTER 6

THE CRISIS CYCLE CONTINUES: IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSTION

Having provided concluding thoughts in the previous section, I would like to take

the time to posit this study's relevance to the future. First, this work provides the

opportunity for a more centralized discussion on a cohesive definition for crisis cinema,

regardless of the validity of the provided paradigm. Crisis cinema discourse, as of this

stage, is constituted by varying, disparate claims that, apart from the initiated, hardly

convey a pattern. By composing a "master" pattern for crisis cinema, film's mediatory

power in the face of crisis will be more readily substantiated. This, as shown here, does

not constrict the individual elements found in each "wave" of crisis cinema, which will

allow for the variation required to hold scholarly debates on crises that exhibit vast

dissimilitude. Furthermore, this study helps to provide additional proof of the link

between film studies and trauma studies in the first place, which is key to the vitality of

crisis cinema discourse. Finally, this paper will be beneficial when studying the patterns

of Japanese film in the coming years, with films similar to those studied within releasing

regularly. For example, 2019 saw the release of Hiroyuki Imaishi's *Puromea* and Makoto

Shinkai's *Tenki no Ko*. The former, being the work of anime giant Studio Trigger, carries

a plot very similar to that of *Sakasama no Patema*. Humanity finds itself on the ropes due

to the never-ending modernistic pursuit of innovation, which has, once again, caused a

tremendous calamity that engenders suffering. The latter, Shinkai's follow-up to the

record-breaking *Kimi no Na wa*, presents identity crisis and salvific cooperation in much the same manner as its older sibling. Thus, crisis cinema – especially in reaction to 3/11 – is alive and well in Japan, giving room for future scholarship of this strain. This paper, then, is a steppingstone in the perennial pursuit of turning humanity's greatest calamities into lessons for the future.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abe, Seiji. "The Fukushima-1 Nuclear Power Plant Accident." *The 2011 Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant Accident: How and Why It Happened*, by Hatamura Yōtarō et al., Woodhead Publishing, 2015, pp. 1–20.

Allbritton, Dean. "Prime Risks: The Politics of Pain and Suffering in Spanish Crisis Cinema." Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies, vol. 15, no. 1-2, 2014, pp. 101–115.

Anderson, Joseph L. "Content." The Japanese Film: Art and Industry, by Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie, Princeton University Press, 2010, pp. 315–331.

Befu, Harumi. "Symbolic Vacuum." *Hegemony of Homogeneity: an Anthropological Analysis of Nihonjinron*, Trans Pacific Press, 2001, pp. 86–104.

Bingham, Adam. "Postmodernism and Magic Realism in Contemporary Japanese Cinema." *Contemporary Japanese Cinema since Hana-Bi*, Edinburgh University Press, 2015, pp. 120–143.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Chock, Gary. "March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tohoku Tsunami."

    *Tohoku, Japan, Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011*, by Gary Chock et al., American

    Society of Civil Engineers, 2013, pp. 4–9.

Combs, James. "Pox-Eclipse Now: The Dystopian Imagination in Contemporary Popular

    Movies." *Crisis Cinema: The Apocalyptic Idea in Postmodern Narrative Film*, by

    Christopher Sharrett, Maisonneuve Press, 1993, pp. 17–36.

Dinitto, Rachel. "Narrating the Cultural Trauma of 3/11: The Debris of Post-Fukushima

    Literature and Film." Japan Forum, vol. 26, no. 3, 2014, pp. 340–360.

Fischer, Michael M. J. "The Pedagogical Work of Film for Technology Disaster Studies:

    Reassessing Fukushima through Film." East Asian Science, Technology and

    Society, vol. 13, no. 2, 2019, pp. 345–354.

Friedberg, Anne. "The Virtual Window." *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of

    Transition*, by Henry Jenkins and David Thorburn, MIT Press, 2004, pp. 337–349.

Iida, Yumiko. "Approaching the Questions of Japanese Identity and Nationalism."

    Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics, Routledge,

    2013, pp. 1–24.

Ikeda, Yoshiko. "Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II: From a Scapegoat of the

    Americans to a Saviour of the Japanese." *Archaeologia Lituana*, vol. 1, 2011, pp.

    43–62.

Kaplan, Elizabeth Ann. "Trauma Studies Moving Forward: Genre and Pretrauma
Cinema." *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Film and Fiction*,
Rutgers University Press, 2016, pp. 23–34.

Kushida, Kenji E. "Japan's Fukushima Nuclear Disaster: An Overview." *Learning from a
Disaster: Improving Nuclear Safety and Security after Fukushima*, by Edward D.
Blandford and Scott Douglas Sagan, Stanford University Press, 2016, pp. 10–26.

Lowenstein, Adam. "Allegorizing Hiroshima Shindo Kaneto′s Onibaba as Trauma Text."
*Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*, by E. Ann. Kaplan, Hong
Kong University Press, 2008, pp. 145–161.

McDonald, Keiko I. "Animation Seminal and Influential: Hayao Miyazaki's My
Neighbor Totoro (1988)." *Reading a Japanese Film: Cinema in Context*,
University of Hawaii Press, 2006, pp. 176–186.

Napier, Susan J. "Matter Out of Place: Carnival, Containment, and Cultural Recovery in
Miyazaki's Spirited Away." The Journal of Japanese Studies, vol. 32, no. 2, 2006,
pp. 287–310.

Onda, Morio. "Restoration of Communities Following the Great East Japan Disaster: The
Transformation of Mutual Help Networks Through the Eyes of the Victims."
*Recovering from Catastrophic Disaster in Asia*, by William L. Waugh and Ziqiang
Han, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017, pp. 61–84.

Richie, Donald. "Making Audiences." *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film: A Concise History, with a Selective Guide to DVDs and Videos*, Kodansha USA, 2012, pp. 213–259.

Samuels, Richard. "Never Waste a Good Crisis." *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*, Cornell University Press, 2013, pp. 24–45.

Satoshi, Ando. "Regaining Continuity with the Past: Spirited Away and Alice's Adventures in Wonderland." Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature, vol. 46, no. 1, 2008, pp. 23–29.

Shinkai, Makoto. "Meeting the Director of 'Your Name,' the Latest Anime By the 'New Miyazaki.'" Interview by Hannah Ewens. *Vice*, 06 Nov. 2016.

Smits, Gregory. "Setting the Stage." *When the Earth Roars: Lessons from the History of Earthquakes in Japan*, by Gregory Smits, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, pp. 1–26.

Stahl, David. "Victimization and 'Response-Ability': Remembering, Representing, and Working Through Trauma in Grave of the Fireflies." *Imag(in)Ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film*, by David Stahl and Mark Williams, BRILL, 2010, pp. 161–201.

Suzuki, Tatsujiro. "Nuclear Energy Policy Issues in Japan After the Fukushima Nuclear Accident." *Learning from Fukushima: Nuclear Power in East Asia*, by Peter Van Ness et al., Australian National University Press, 2017, pp. 9–23.

Tezuka, Yoshiharu. "Japanese National Identity and Banal Cosmopolitalization."
*Japanese Cinema Goes Global: Filmworkers' Journeys*, Hong Kong University
Press, 2012, pp. 9–25.

Williams, Tony. "Space, Place, and Spectacle: The Crisis Cinema of John Woo." Cinema
Journal, vol. 36, no. 2, 1997, p. 67.

Wilson, Sandra. "Rethinking Nation and Nationalism in Japan." *Nation and Nationalism
in Japan*, Routledge Curzon, 2002, pp. 1–20.

Yoshino, Kosaku. "Ideas of National Distinctiveness: Comparative Perspectives."
*Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan: A Sociological Enquiry*,
Routledge, 2015, pp. 39–67.

Yotsumoto, Yukio, and Shunichi Takekawa. "The Social Structures of Victimization of
Fukushima Residents Due to Radioactive Contamination from the 2011 Nuclear
Disaster." *Japan after 3/11: Global Perspectives on the Earthquake, Tsunami, and
Fukushima Meltdown*, by Pradyumna P. Karan and Unryu Suganuma, University
Press of Kentucky, 2016, pp. 251–268.

# APPENDIX A: FILMOGRAPHY

*Kimi no Na wa*. Dir. Makoto Shinkai. Toho, 2016. Amazon Prime.

*Sakasama no Patema*. Dir. Yasuhiro Yoshiura. Studio Rikka, 2013. Amazon Prime.

*Yoaketsugeru Ru no Uta*. Dir. Masaaki Yuasa. Toho, 2017. Netflix.