

The Western Screenwriter in Japan:  
Screenwriting Considerations in  
Transnational Cinema

by

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**Abstract**

This PhD investigates the writing of a feature film screenplay for mainstream Japanese-language cinema by a British screenwriter. As a long-term resident of Japan with production credits in Japanese cinema, I have for many years been interested in how to write stories set in Japan that will appeal to domestic and international audiences. The study examines the challenges I face as a Western screenwriter writing a screenplay for Japanese cinema, and how those challenges inform my creative practice, bringing into being a screenplay that is intended to enhance screenwriting craft in mainstream Japanese cinema and provide new knowledge to transnational cinema and screenwriting research.

The critical commentary that accompanies the screenplay takes a dialogic approach in practice-led research to explore how various issues emerge for the Western screenwriter in Japanese cinema. These problems are examined with regard to relevant theory, and contextualised in considerations of various films in Japanese-language cinema written by non-Japanese screenwriters. One salient issue is the application of the Hollywood ‘universal’ model of screenwriting to stories about Japan. I also explore the role of agency in screenplay authorship, in particular with regard to notions of ‘Japaneseness.’ I suggest notions of ‘Japaneseness’ are a particular challenge for my creative practice, and examine them in the context of national-transnational tensions in cinema. I draw on

theories of transnational cinema to argue that the screenplay written for this PhD, *Welcome to Prime-time*, is an ‘accented Japanese screenplay.’ I go on to outline how accented Japanese screenplays might be positioned in relation to Japanese national cinema and transnational cinema discourses. I then discuss ‘Japaneseness’ in terms of a related issue: Orientalism. I show how Orientalism remains a trenchant concern for non-Japanese screenwriters representing Japan. This leads to a discussion of how a process of reflective authenticity might equip such screenwriters to depict ‘the Other’ in ways that circumvent Orientalist tropes in order to synthesise both local and global concerns.

The process of critical reflection is threaded throughout the PhD, and concludes with a consideration of the notion of ‘becoming Japanese’ as it is depicted in my screenplay, and in my own journey within practice-led research. I posit that this PhD adds to our understanding of transnational screenplays and the contexts transnational screenwriters work within. Furthermore, I suggest the screenplay exhibits a new approach to achieving an ‘authentic’ representation of Japan and the Japanese by Western screenwriters.

Note: It is recommended that the reader start with Chapters 1-4 of the critical exegesis. Ideally, the screenplay should be read after Chapter 4 and before Chapter 5. This is indicated in the text.

**Accompanying Documents:**

# Welcome to Prime-time

a screenplay

by

Alexander McAulay

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Three Days in Kamakura: Academic Filmmaking in Japan. A paper presented at *The 1st Sightlines Conference*, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia, 2014.

Negotiating Representations of 'the Other': Writing for Japanese Cinema. A paper presented at *Screenwriting Research Network*, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, 2012.

**Author's Declaration:**

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program.

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## INTRODUCTION

I am a British writer resident in Japan. My screenplay, *Welcome to Prime-time*, is a feature romantic comedy intended to be a Japanese-language film. As such, it will appeal primarily to domestic audiences in Japan, but I also intend that it should appeal to overseas audiences. My context and intentions, thus stated, invite various considerations in practice-led research. Terms such as ‘British,’ ‘intend’ and ‘Japan’ point to critical theories I will invoke to interrogate and enhance my creative practice. Writing this screenplay reveals tensions that emerge in screenwriting craft when trying to synthesise the global and the particular; in trying to tell a story with a setting that is distant and unfamiliar for international audiences. This provides a research context for critical reflection on my own negotiation of the creative and theoretical considerations that are brought into play.

One key feature that frames my practice is that of the Western screenwriter living in Japan and writing for Japanese cinema. In labelling myself a ‘Western’ screenwriter, I am utilising the term as shorthand for certain (but not all) European nations and the USA, a custom often found in commentary on film in transcultural comparison, including much of the literature referred to in this PhD. For example, when Donald Richie talks of “a theater showing Western films” (2005, p. 134), we cannot be certain if he means all non-Japanese films, or all non-Asian films, or movies from a bounded set of countries. When Dudley Andrew talks of the “brief Western engagement” (2010, p. 67) of a Japanese film in 1928, we can confidently sense an overlap with Richie’s ‘West,’ but hesitate to say they are identical. Compare this with Claudia Sternberg’s

identification of “non-Western cinematic traditions” (2010, p. 259) that migrant and diasporic filmmakers introduce to British audiences. Clearly some, but not all, non-Western traditions are being referred to. All three authors imply similar binary oppositions, Western and non-Western, but we cannot say with certainty that the details of the definitions intended match. A centre-periphery relationship between the West and Asia is asserted, while centre-periphery considerations within ‘the West’ and ‘Asia’ are elided. A thorough investigation of all the nuances, applications, misapplications and slippages in the use of the term ‘Western’ is beyond the scope of this study. Usually, context obviates the necessity for a delineation of the national sub-categories inherent in each use of the phrase. Similarly, in this PhD, I assert that I am ‘Western’ in the sense that I am British, have grown up in the UK, and spent my formative years in that society and culture. Threaded throughout this PhD is an exploration of the ambiguity and inconsistency in my self-identification as ‘British’ or ‘Japanese’ in various contexts. The term ‘Western’ has import for me as a creative practitioner living in Japan, partly in order to consider the commonalities and differences I have with other non-Japanese screenwriters writing Japanese screenplays. In addition, it highlights the salience in certain situations of my ‘non-Japaneseness,’ which exists in the context of an on-going narrative of Japan’s engagement with things perceived to be ‘non-Japanese.’ The confluence of ‘the West’ and ‘Japan’ is far more nuanced and complex, and exists in a greater number of mediations, than the one I assert here to contextualize my creative practice. I make use of the term ‘Western’ in full acknowledgement of my own Anglophone tendencies and preferences, both in creative practice and research, and not to suggest that I am in any way representative of ‘all that is not Japanese.’

*Welcome to Prime-time* has been written in English and is presented in English for academic consideration. However, anticipating the film that the screenplay will become is an inherent part of screenwriting, and as such forms part of my considerations here. In an industrial context, the stages my screenplay would go through can broadly be categorised as writing and re-writing in English, translation into Japanese, development, production and exhibition. A consideration of the translation and production phases are beyond the limits of this PhD, which focuses on writing and re-writing of the screenplay in English, and anticipation of readings in the development and exhibition phases.

Western screenwriters writing Japanese-language films is a rare event: from the birth of cinema, through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japanese screenplays written by non-Japanese screenwriters were exceedingly scarce. Arnold Fanck's Nazi-sponsored propaganda feature *The New Earth/ Daughter of the Samurai* (1937) is possibly the first (Hansen 2015), the second being *Anatahan* (1954) by Josef von Sternberg. Leonard Schrader is credited with co-writing three Japanese films in the 1970s, including *The Man Who Stole the Sun* (1979) with Kazuhiko Hasegawa (Mes & Sharp, 2005). Despite these exceptions, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Western screenwriters take no part in mainstream, theatrically-released Japanese films. However, the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen the emergence of Japanese-language films in various genres scripted or co-scripted by non-Japanese writers, such as *Tokyo Eyes* (1998, wr. Jean Pierre Limosin, Santiago Amigorena, Philippe Madral, Yuji Sakamoto), *Firefly Dreams* (2001, wr. John Williams), *Starfish Hotel* (2006, wr. John Williams), *Babel* (2006, wr. Guillermo Arriaga), *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006, wr. Iris Yamashita, Paul Haggis), *Best Wishes for Tomorrow* (2007, wr. Takashi Koizumi, Roger Pulvers), *Tokyo!* (2008, wr. Gabrielle

Bell, Joon-ho Bong, Leos Carax, Michel Gondry), *Tokyo Sonata* (2008, wr. Max Mannix, Kiyoshi Kurosawa), *Rain Fall* (2009, wr. Max Mannix), *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* (2009, wr. Isabel Coixet), *Memoirs of a Teenage Amnesiac* (2010, wr. Gabrielle Zevin), *Sado Tempest* (2012, wr. John Williams), and *Like Someone in Love* (2012, wr. Abbas Kiarostami).<sup>1</sup>

Japanese screenplays by non-Japanese are in one sense ‘new,’ but are in another sense a predictable outcome of an increasingly globalised world. Globalisation is a contested term, but if, for the moment, we accept Giddens’ definition that it is “an ongoing relation between distanciation and the chronic mutability of local circumstances and local engagements” (1991, pp. 21-2), then the non-Japanese screenwriter participating in Japanese cinema can be seen as part of a broader historical “dialectic of the local and global” (p. 22). In 1891, Oscar Wilde wrote in *The Decay of Lying* that “the whole of Japan is a pure invention. There is no such country, there are no such people” (p. 14), an indication that the representation of Japan through the prism of the West is a well-documented and well-researched problem. However, within that discourse instances of writers critically reflecting on the written text coming into being are relatively rare. Rarer still are examinations of screenplays that forsake the hegemony of the English language and aim to represent the Japanese in their own language.

This PhD will attempt to reveal how, with regard to Western representations of Japan in cinema, *Welcome to Prime-time* articulates the new, and also what has gone before, as well as anticipating what is to come. A key focus in this creative practice research project is what Giddens labels “dilemmas of the self” (1991, p. 187). Giddens argues

that one tension inherent in a life lived in late modernity is “the looming threat of personal meaninglessness” (p. 201). Existential anxiety is alleviated through our ability “*to keep a particular narrative going*” [original emphasis] (p. 54). In one sense, then, this critical consideration of my creative practice in screenwriting exemplifies that project, providing a particular narrative of self with regard to situated circumstances, captured by Giddens thus:

In conditions of late modernity, we live ‘in the world’ in a different sense from previous eras of history. Everyone still continues to live a local life, and the constraints of the body ensure that all individuals, at every moment, are contextually situated in time and space. Yet the transformations of place, and the intrusion of distance into local activities, combined with the centrality of mediated experience, radically change what ‘the world’ actually is. This is so both on the level of the ‘phenomenal world’ of the individual and the general universe of social activity within which collective social life is enacted. Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global.

p. 187

One could read the act of non-Japanese screenwriters writing Japanese screenplays as an ‘intrusion of distance into local,’ a reading I intend not to resist, but to complicate and add texture to. For example, I have stated that I am a British writer writing a Japanese screenplay. I claim the label ‘British,’ and the proximity of ‘Japanese’ in the syntax implies an outsider gaze on Japan. However, I have spent close to three decades living in Japan, which is more than half of my life. I am fluent in the language, employed in a local (rather than an expat) role, and have two Japanese children. As such, the context of my creative practice allows no definitive statement of ‘we’ British and

‘they’ Japanese: I could equally lay claim to ‘we’ Japanese and ‘they’ British. Thus, while theory will be invoked to examine and enhance my practice, it is also the case that this multiplicity of readings of my situation as a practitioner provides an opportunity to explore intersections between theory and practice.

### **The Research Questions**

Against this background, the key research question of this PhD is:

*What considerations come to the fore for a Western screenwriter when writing a Japanese language film for mainstream Japanese cinema?*

This objectification of the research focus is approached through three subjective sub-questions. A consideration of these questions in separate chapters allows me to build towards a detailed, holistic response to the above-stated overarching research question:

- a. *What considerations do I take on in writing a screenplay?*
- b. *What considerations do I take on in writing a Japanese screenplay?*
- c. *What considerations do I take on in writing a Japanese screenplay as a Westerner?*

Representing a local particularity in a way that is globally understood is not a new challenge, as the words of Japanese painter and critic Taro Okamoto, writing in 1963, reveal:

The most urgent task of contemporary art is to synthesize the global and the

particular; to understand the particular in a global perspective, and to achieve a global perspective that is based on the particular.

Cited in Smith, 1997, p. 257

My intention with this PhD is to achieve such a synthesis through an application of mainstream screenwriting practice, including conventional three-act structure (see Bordwell 2006, Dancyger and Rush 2007), to my screenplay depiction of Japan and the Japanese. In one sense, I am suggesting a solution to an issue highlighted by Schmidt, who states: “Sometimes just watching a film created in another culture can be tough for westerners because it usually deviates from the traditional westernized Aristotelian structure” (2005, p. 4). While this comment could directly refer to a Western audience watching a Japanese film, it also implies a caveat to my own intentions to reach both Japanese and international audiences, namely that it can be equally tough for Japanese audiences to watch screen representations of Japan filtered through, or at times shoe-horned into, traditional Western narrative structures. I will illustrate this point through a critique of *Babel* (2006) in Chapter One. This is one of various critiques in the PhD that serve to contextualise discussions of the theoretical issues considered in each chapter.

The screenplay at the centre of this PhD, *Welcome to Prime-time*, is a feature-length romantic comedy, crafted as an emotional and engaging film for domestic Japanese audiences but also intended to have broad international appeal. This duality is one of many imbibed in the project. The writing of *Welcome to Prime-time* involves critical reflection on myself as an ‘other.’ It posits the creative act of writing a screenplay while

simultaneously viewing that act from a critical distance. In addition, as I will detail in Chapter Three, the screenplay explores tensions in national cinema discourse by claiming a position as a legitimate mainstream Japanese film and as a transnational cinema text. Furthermore, the writing of a screenplay for Japanese film by a Western screenwriter problematises notions of ‘Japaneseness’ and Japanese identity. As I will outline in Chapter One, these ostensibly contradictory positionings are approached through Bakhtinian dialogism to establish a theoretical framework suitable to interpret the context of my creative practice. In order to fully contextualise this, the antecedents to the screenplay as both a commercial film and also a research project will be outlined.

### **The Screenplay *Welcome to Prime-time*: Origins**

My four produced short film screenplays all represent Japan and the Japanese in some way. *Japan Conspiracy Theory #105* (1998) is an absurdist comedy set in New York about an American man who keeps his obsessive craving for ramen noodles a secret from his Japanese wife. *The Neighbour* (2004) is a suspense drama about a lonely suburban housewife in Yokohama who starts to receive love letters from a secret admirer. *The Errand* (2006) is the story of a seven-year-old girl in Tokyo who goes on a quest to procure cigarettes for her terminally ill father. Finally, *Three Days in Kamakura* (2012) tells the tale of an international couple whose marriage is under strain, until fate conspires to bring a small boy, half-American and half-Japanese, into their lives.

Looking back on these films, I can detect connecting thematic strands that recur across my writing, including family and relationships in crisis, children in vulnerable situations,

and people trying to keep secrets. There is also a preoccupation with inbetween-ness, liminality, flux and change. Three of the four films feature couples in international marriages. In *Three Days in Kamakura*, the fact that the boy is *hafu*<sup>2</sup> is crucial to the narrative, and visually the couple's seafront home is a liminal space, with much of the story taking place on the beach. Finally, my writing also continually explores a coming together of East and West.

*Welcome to Prime-time* is about a single father, Ron Suzuki, and a TV journalist, Michiko Kudo, who come together when Michiko inadvertently turns Ron into a reality TV star. I wanted to write these characters as engaging, vulnerable individuals, a man and woman with problems and aspirations that audiences in Japan and beyond could empathise with. The beginning of their story in *Welcome to Prime-time* (and my story as a practitioner-researcher) was a solitary image. The image came from my time putting my children on the bus to nursery in Yokohama. Twin girls sat at the front of that bus. Apparently they were being raised by a single father, and so every time I saw them, I would wonder how that father managed to balance seeing them off on the nursery bus with work duties. When we had the nursery Sports Day, and my wife woke at the crack of dawn to undertake the monumental task of cooking the Sports Day lunchbox,<sup>3</sup> I would wonder: who makes that single father's *bento* on Sports Day? Those musings led to the opening image in *Welcome to Prime-time* of protagonist Ron at his children's Sports Day.

Other inspirations that fed into the narrative came from two previous jobs in Japan: as camera assistant in the News Department of a local TV station, and during six years as a

lecturer at a women's university in a provincial part of the country. Over the years in Japan I was aware of the problem of *yarase*,<sup>4</sup> the practice in television of staging allegedly unscripted performances (Frey 1993). In my camera assistant job I saw first-hand how reports on local events routinely included *yarase* practices. This helped me construct the plot of the male protagonist Ron's experiences in the world of reality TV.

The inspiration for my female protagonist Michiko came in large part from stories I collected during my time at the women's university. In one case, a student had passed the entrance exam for a prestigious private university in Tokyo, but her father did not allow her to go. The family could only afford to send one child to Tokyo, and so she had to make way for her younger brother as, according to her father, education and career were not so important for a woman. Another student wishing to go on to graduate school was told by the male Dean that she should think again as, according to him, the more qualifications a woman had, the more difficult it was for her to marry. In another instance, a graduate found employment with a local bank that had a rule that female employees must live at home with their parents. On another occasion, a student who was at a recruitment event for a large travel agency caught her interviewer pointing a video camera up her skirt. These stories would come back to me during my years in Japan, memories prompted by wider events in society: a Cabinet minister referring to women as 'baby-making machines,'<sup>5</sup> a TV celebrity comedian assaulting and spitting on a female employee who did not display "proper deference,"<sup>6</sup> or a female politician in the Tokyo Assembly heckled for being single and childless.<sup>7</sup>

As an educator, as the father of a Japanese daughter, as a male screenwriter living in Japanese society, I felt there was a story coalescing around these fragments that I wanted to tell. Noting that romantic comedy can incorporate social criticism, Garrett suggests that Nora Ephron's screenplays "contribute to an ongoing post-feminist debate on gender, power and culture" (2012, p. 195). I intend for *Welcome to Prime-time* to make a similar contribution through engagement with various social issues in contemporary Japan. In moulding the fragments outlined above into the narrative of *Welcome to Prime-time*, I intend to explore themes including media representation of 'real' stories, and gender roles in the home and at work. Two aims of this PhD are pertinent here. One aim is to explore if, through the application of mainstream screenwriting craft, the narrative I create inspired by experiences rooted in my life in Japan can resonate with audiences beyond Japan. Another aim is to critically reflect on my own creative practice with a view to enhancing my own screenwriting craft.

### **The Screenplay *Welcome to Prime-time*: Research Focus**

Chapter One considers research methodology in detail, so here I simply note the assertion by Batty et al. that by writing a screenplay "in the academy we can use creative practice research to take ideas 'for a walk' and gain pleasure from interrogating both the creative process and the end product" (2016, p. 158). This succinctly encapsulates my intention to explore various interconnected theoretical concerns in *Welcome to Prime-time*. The screenplay is a mainstream genre feature that aims to amuse audiences and provide them with an enjoyable emotional experience, but also hopes to challenge them to consider contemporary issues.

One salient thematic concern of the narrative is notions of masculinity framed within the romantic comedy genre. Through *Welcome to Prime-time* I intend to highlight the fetters of language and representation, “to interrogate the ways men are restricted and frustrated by the culturally sanctioned models of masculinity... constricted and let down by the dominant myths of what a man should be” (McCabe 2009, pp. 164-5). My male protagonist Ron embodies Japanese masculinity in terms of Romit Dasgupta’s “hegemonic masculinity,” where “the ubiquitous salaryman came to signify both Japanese masculinity and Japanese corporate culture” (2013, p. 2). I intend for Ron’s journey from corporate samurai to full-time house-husband to test the boundaries of this hegemonic masculinity.

Through my depiction of female protagonist Michiko, I attempt to reveal how “representational paradigms have shifted in recent years, and transformations in images of modern women in love are, once again, upsetting established ideas and putting pressures on values and knowledges defining heterosexual relationships, romantic love, marriage and monogamy” (McCabe 2009, p. 167). Michiko is in one sense an everywoman figure, struggling to find a work-life balance in a patriarchal society. At 35, she still lives with her parents, and as such in another sense she embodies a particular demographic of Japanese young women, the ‘parasite single’ (see Yamada 2000, Lunsing 2003, Atoh 2008). Yamada, who coined the phrase, describes the parasite single thus:

Let us call her Hanako. Although by no means the norm, this composite 29-year-old single woman typifies a growing phenomenon in Japan: the parasite single. Hanako lives with her parents in a one-family home in

suburban Tokyo. Her father, 58, is a middle manager with a large appliance manufacturer. Her mother, 55, is a full-time homemaker. A graduate of a junior college, Hanako has worked as a bank clerk for nine years, and has a disposable monthly income of about 150,000 yen. She spends most of that on herself.

2001, p. 10

The facts of Japan's demographic challenges are well-known. Because of the low birthrate, the current population of 128 million is expected to fall to 100 million by 2050. The birthrate in Japan dropped to 1.58 in 1966, far below the replacement level of 2.07, and has steadily declined since, reaching 1.43 in 2013.<sup>8</sup> With negligible rates of immigration and no appetite for a mass influx of migrants, the possibility that the Japanese face "extinction" is seriously mooted by some commentators.<sup>9</sup> Faced with such a crisis, one pernicious sub-text in the social discourse on raising the birthrate is that the parasite single female is responsible for pushing the Japanese towards extinction. That sub-text is evident in the 'baby-making machine' and other news stories quoted above. In this context, the tale of my two protagonists struggling to balance work, personal ambitions and romance is intended to reach universal audiences, but will have particular relevance for contemporary Japan.

This characterisation of my two protagonists exhibits the concerns with inbetween-ness, liminality, flux and change that I noted earlier as recurring themes in my writing. They are concerns that Homi Bhabha characterises as inherent in 'hybridity':

The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex,

on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation.

1994, p. 2

The context of my own negotiation is this interrogation of processes of meaning-making in contemporary Japan in the screenplay, which is complemented in the accompanying critical commentary by a problematisation of my own position as a British screenwriter writing a Japanese screenplay, one of the challenges brought to the fore by the main research question.

Thus it is my intention to examine my positioning and creative practice in terms of extant theories of screenwriters writing in overseas settings. By doing so, I hope to enhance my creative practice, using theory to develop a fuller understanding of my own situation.

In Chapter One, setting the scene for how a screenplay is developed and can be conceived of in a research environment, I outline Bakhtinian dialogism as an approach that allows me to reconcile ostensibly contradictory notions that attend my screenwriting practice. Furthermore, I consider various critiques of practice-led research in order to justify this approach. I identify parallels between *Welcome to Prime-time* and *Babel*, as both screenplays involve Western screenwriters utilising mainstream screenwriting practices to depict Japan and the Japanese in Japanese-language cinema. This illuminates a particular challenge for *Welcome to Prime-time*, which is that using mainstream craft for purposes of universal appeal carries the potential for homogenisation, for the displacement of local and particular detail in favour of what

Ezra and Rowden call “a performance of Americanness” (2005, p. 2).

In Chapter Two, I explore the notion of writing Japan and the Japanese for universal appeal further by attempting to answer the question: “What does it mean to assert that one is writing a *screenplay*?” I approach this through a focus on my own intentions for *Welcome to Prime-time* with regard to my conceptualisation of screenwriting authorship. I suggest that this provides a necessary contextualisation to understand my intentions in writing *Welcome to Prime-time*. Through a consideration of agency and authorship inculcated in screenplay ontology, I frame agency in terms of an authorship contribution to a collaborative process. The contingencies of that collaboration with regard to the Western screenwriter writing a Japanese screenplay are explored in a consideration of the film *Tokyo Sonata* (2008). By considering the competing claims made by the Japanese director and Australian screenwriter with regard to imprinting meaning on the text, I show constructions of ‘Japan’ and ‘Japaneseness’ to be salient concerns for the Western screenwriter writing a Japanese screenplay.

In Chapters Three and Four I consider constructions of ‘Japan’ and ‘Japaneseness’ in cinema and social discourse, taking separate but inter-related approaches in each chapter. Chapter Three poses the question: “What does it mean to write a *Japanese* screenplay?” This leads to a consideration of Japanese national cinema, and how Japanese identity is constructed in terms of ‘purity’ within this discursive site. I explore how notions of Japanese cinema, like all national cinemas, are destabilised by the “shifting problematics” (Zhang 2010, p. 123) of transnational cinema. This brings to the fore contingent and existential challenges for *Welcome to Prime-time*, allowing me to

situate my own screenwriting practice in “the ‘liminal spaces and interstices’ where the local meets the global” (McLoone 2006, p. 92). I draw on Naficy (2001) to conceptualise *the accented Japanese screenplay*, a term that captures the inbetween-ness of screenplays (e.g. *Welcome to Prime-time*) written by Westerners for Japanese cinema. A consideration of two such texts, *Firefly Dreams* (2001) and the *Merde* segment in *Tokyo!* (2008), suggests various positionings accented Japanese screenplays can occupy with regard to Japanese national cinema.

In Chapter Four I again consider the ‘Japaneseness’ of the text, but this time in terms of the ‘non-Japaneseness’ of the screenwriter, framed by the question “What does it mean to assert that one is writing a Japanese screenplay *as a Westerner?*” I explore my intention to write ‘authentically,’ problematising the notion of authenticity in terms of product and process, and propose that my creative practice is a process of *reflective authenticity*. That process is then critiqued with regard to *Welcome to Prime-time* as a text in dialogue with Orientalist discourses. I outline the main tenets of Orientalist cinema, noting Western approaches to Japan on screen, and also self-Orientalising in Japanese cinema. A consideration of *Like Someone in Love* (2012) and *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* (2009) explores how accented Japanese screenplays engage with Orientalism.

Finally, in Chapter Five, I critically reflect on the process of my creative practice in the drafting and re-drafting of *Welcome to Prime-time* with regard to the critical theories delineated in previous chapters.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to reveal, through the specific lens of the screenwriting practitioner-researcher, how theoretical insights are

imbricated with creative practice. By reflecting on the process of developing *Welcome to Prime-time* in dialogic relation with theory, I intend to show the screenplay coming into being shaped by critical consideration of theoretical concerns, and theory in turn given added complexity by the screenplay as research. In this way I hope that this PhD can be an example of what is achievable through aligning craft with critical reflection in screenwriting research.

Although various issues such as agency, screenwriting craft, intentionality, the transnational, authenticity and Orientalism are considered discretely, in a dialogic approach there is polyphony and contingency, and so the boundaries of these topics and chapters are at times porous, and discussions of screenwriting craft and reflection on the creative practitioner self are threaded throughout each chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> While this sampling is purposeful and convenient rather than empirical or exhaustive, it is worth noting selection criteria at this point. Some of the films listed are exclusively Japanese-language (e.g. *Tokyo Sonata*, *Firefly Dreams*, *Like Someone in Love*), some include Japanese sections in a mix of languages across global locations (e.g. *Babel*), and some are multilingual, featuring characters in Japan mixing Japanese with other languages (e.g. *Rain Fall*, *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo*). As *Welcome to Prime-time* is intended to be a film set in Japan, about Japanese characters, with exclusively Japanese dialogue, I have foregrounded screenplays closest to that description. Therefore I have not considered English-language productions wholly or largely set in Japan such as *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006), or *The Wolverine* (2013). Similarly, I have excluded films with Japanese characters set in Japan but speaking English, such as *Memory and Desire* (1998) or *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005). I have also omitted Japanese-language films set outside of Japan, such as *Bondi Tsunami* (2004). As my focus is Western interpretations of Japan, I have omitted films by Asian screenwriters, such as *Café Lumière* (2003). While there is a dialogue to be had with these films regarding representations of Japan and the Japanese on screen, their distance linguistically and geographically from my own screenplay make them peripheral rather than central to this exploration.

<sup>2</sup> *Hafu*, literally ‘half’, is the term used in Japan for children who have one parent who is not Japanese. The term is in no way derogatory, and is used by *hafu* themselves.

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<sup>3</sup> For details, see ‘Close up: Japan’s amazing lunchboxes’ (Beurk 2011).

<sup>4</sup> *Yarase* is an unethical practice in TV programmes or sections of TV programmes. Material is presented to the viewer as spontaneous or unrehearsed, but is, in fact, staged.

<sup>5</sup> See ‘Japanese minister wants ‘birth-giving machines’, aka women, to have more babies’ (McCurry 2007).

<sup>6</sup> See ‘Ties to the Yakuza are No Laughing Matter’ (Adelstein 2011).

<sup>7</sup> See ‘Sexist remarks seen through a clouded lens’ (Brasor 2014).

<sup>8</sup> See ‘Can Japan Boost Its Low Birthrate?’ (*Nippon.com*, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> See ‘Is Japan becoming extinct?’ (Johnston 2015).

<sup>10</sup> *Welcome to Prime-time* emerged from four drafts of the treatment and three drafts of the script. Appendix I offers Draft 3 of the treatment as a sample of work undertaken.

## **CHAPTER ONE: Approach and Methodology**

### **Introduction: Contextualising My Creative Practice**

This chapter will detail how practice-led research opens up new ways to explore creative practice in screenwriting. This occurs not just in the breadth of practice and texts that becomes available for academic consideration, but also in how we frame our research of that practice and those texts. The review of the literature continues through Chapters Two, Three and Four with the intention of deepening and enriching the contextualisation of my creative practice. While a discussion of approach and methodology might conventionally be expected to follow such a review, I consider a more innovative approach by starting with this discussion.<sup>1</sup> The justification for this is that my practice-led research has not been a linear process: the reading of theory has informed my screenwriting craft, and at the same time my screenwriting craft has implicated theory. This symbiosis is underpinned by my dialogic reading of theory, therefore a discussion of that approach, and why practice-led research is the appropriate method for this exploration, needs to take place at the outset. How I interpret theory through the lens of dialogism is interspersed throughout the subsequent chapters, and so necessitates early consideration.

My position as a Western screenwriter creating stories set in Japan underpins my approach in this PhD, providing a context for critical reflection on the creative and theoretical considerations that arise in attempting to represent Japan and the Japanese in screenwriting. My intention is to write a screenplay that faithfully corresponds to my own extensive experience in Japan, but which also has universal appeal. I indicate in the

Introduction that various factors complicate my intentions, including the fact of my ‘non-Japaneseness.’ I am a ‘British’ writer writing a ‘Japanese’ story, “a context that cannot be confined to a single culture” (Marks 2000, p. 6). I consider my own border-crossing in terms of transnational cinema. Various definitions of the transnational are currently offered (e.g. Hjort 2010, Fisher and Roberts 2016), and I will explore these in detail in Chapter Three. However, I foreground cinematic transnationalism not to privilege the term, but because it helps to frame an important issue for my practitioner-research, namely whether the transnational context helps or hinders my intention to tell a story that resonates with audiences both globally and locally. Commentators suggest that both are possible, that a transnational imprint carries the potential to both benefit and undermine a film’s emotional appeal. For example, Andrew suggests that the diversity and multiplicity inherent in the transnational can be a benefit:

[T]here happily remain films that, while situated in one place and one time, reach viewers elsewhere, all situated differently, all out of phase with themselves and with each other. For nearly a century now... those who care about cinema have relished the choreographed temporality with which strong films keep us emotionally and politically agile, and within which we slip into moments of coincidence and alignment that intermittently grace the screen and quicken the heart.

Andrew 2010, p. 86

Andrew’s comments point to the alignments I seek in my own creative practice, both with the Japanese audience I appeal to and attempt to represent in *Welcome to Prime-time*, and with the international audiences I hope will also be kept ‘emotionally

and politically agile' by the narrative. However, a hint of caution is implicit in Hjort's exhortation that the transnational should offer "a resistance to globalization as cultural homogenization" (2010, p. 15). Throughout this study I will show that transnational cinema texts are not immune to this process of cultural homogenisation, and that screenwriting craft, particularly the mainstream three-act structure that I intend to utilise, can be complicit in the process. Ezra and Rowden (2005) characterise cultural homogenisation in cinema as a tendency to sameness, to assimilation, to the erosion of something local and genuine in favour of something ostensibly more palatable to the international marketplace: "The performance of Americanness is increasingly becoming a "universal" or "universalising" characteristic in world cinema" (p. 2).

The tension between Andrew's 'moments of alignment' and Ezra and Rowden's 'performance of Americanness,' is between a depiction of humanity in a particular place and time that emotionally connects and resonates with distant audiences, and a hegemonic, homogenising process that warps, alters or erases 'the other' for ideological intent. It is a tension always present in representations of Japan by non-Japanese in film. Said's (1978) *Orientalism* reveals how this ideology operates in Western cinematic representations of Japan.

### **Orientalism in Cinema**

In his seminal text, Said (1978) declares *Orientalism* "a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (p. 78), noting how binary opposition of West and East essentialises both, so that an exoticised, mysterious and primitive East is constructed in order to define the West as rational, civilised and

advanced. Orientalism is revealed as an imperialist project, ideologically loaded as “a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western Empire” (pp. 202-3). Foremost among postcolonial theories of Western appropriation of the East, the ideological drive of Orientalism allows the West to establish and maintain hegemonic dominance in representations of the Other.

Prakash (1995) surveys various criticisms of Said’s *Orientalism* over the years. He notes some commentators consider the text politically invested rather than academically curious, while others criticise a debilitating gender blindness. These criticisms notwithstanding, he concludes that Orientalism’s discursive operation “does not restrict or distort knowledge, but generates, encodes, and arranges it in diverse forms and locations” (p. 203). This mechanism of encoding for ideological intent is key to Orientalism’s analytical power:

We would be missing the significance of *Orientalism* and the postcolonial critique it has inspired if, in the urge to place them in context, we overlook their catachrestic appropriation of Western theory derived from cross-hatching the histories of knowledge and imperialism. This has placed the empire at the very center of Europe, deconstructing its self-same image. *Orientalism*’s subversive effect is derived from this postcolonial “writing back” it represents and has stimulated.

Prakash 1995, p. 206

With regard to cinema, that ‘writing back’ includes various considerations of on-screen representations of Japan and the East that have been encoded by Orientalism (e.g.

Marchetti 1993, Bernstein & Studlar 1997, Shibusawa 2006). The birth of cinema in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the popularity of ‘yellow peril’ novels in Victorian Britain, which played on popular fears of mass Chinese immigration and Japanese military might. Hashimoto argues that this evoked narratives in which “crises of domestic degeneration and imperial anxiety were polarized and simplified to a battle between a British hero and a foreign villain in popular novels” (2003, p. 64). The popularity of this storyline mingled with silent cinema’s drive to differentiate itself from theatre on the grounds of exotic visual appeal (see Andrew 1997), and so images of an Orientalised, exotic East became a staple of early cinema. Studlar notes that in the period 1916-26, “[f]ilms... often included isolated characters marked as oriental or were full-fledged Orientalist narratives” (1997, p. 100). Distinct tropes emerged within those narratives, and characters such as Fu Manchu, Sax Rohmer’s “despotic Chinese villain” (Seshagiri 2006, p. 163), became “recognizable, iconic, and fated to execute a stock repertoire of actions and attitudes in ever changing settings and contexts” (Mayer 2012, p. 398). That repertoire reiterated the West’s dominance over the East. The repertoire includes what Said calls the Orient’s “feminine penetrability” (1978, p. 206), and various commentators (e.g Hubinette and Tigervall 2009, Laemmerhirt 2014) expose how this lure of exoticised sexual transgression is manifest in cinema narratives where “Asian females are often depicted as sexually available to the white hero” (Marchetti 1993, p. 2). Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly* is “a master text of Orientalism” (Heung 1997, p. 160), providing a template for narratives of the Asian woman offering herself sexually to the Western man, and sacrificing herself for him. Bamford (2016) shows how, historically, the *Madame Butterfly* tale is a contested site of meaning-making. Searching for “the genetic identity” of the story, he notes each adapter wrote their own

iteration as “a moral response to a predecessor” (p. 117). In cinema, various iterations of the *Madame Butterfly* romance storyline have proliferated through the decades, a fetishisation of the Asian woman that Hubinette and Tigervall suggest sits within a “scopic regime of colonial images” (2009, p. 1).

Historically, one homogenising process has been the depiction of linguistic ‘others’ filtered through the language of English. A pertinent example is *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), a film set in Japan with Japanese actors playing Japanese characters, but speaking English. Robert Stam, in *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film*, notes how Hollywood has both caused and benefitted from the global spread of English, colonising other cultures and languages which, on screen, are “elided, distorted or caricatured” (1989, pp. 80-81). He calls dubbing “a kind of cultural violence and dislocation” (p. 76).

By representing Japanese characters and settings in Japanese, *Welcome to Prime-time* carries the potential to problematise Orientalist approaches to Western representations of Japan, and circumvent Stam’s ‘distortion’ and ‘cultural violence.’ However, as the following analysis of the film *Babel* (2006) will show, the fact that a screenplay by a non-Japanese screenwriter circumvents the hegemony of English and becomes ‘a Japanese film’ is no guarantee that Japanese culture will not be distorted. I suggest that *Babel* exemplifies how sacrifices are made with regard to local detail for the sake of global appeal, and this happens because the screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga applies Hollywood screenwriting ‘rules’ to make an emotional appeal in a story set in an unfamiliar Japan. This analysis highlights issues to be aware of in my own creative

practice.

### ***Babel* (2006): Problematising ‘Universalism’ in Screenwriting**

Universalism, by which I mean stories that transcend national boundaries to make an appeal to a wide range of international audiences, is supposedly the hallmark of the classical Hollywood style. Thus Snyder claims “the laws of physics that govern storytelling work every time, in every situation” (2005, p. 42).<sup>2</sup> Universalism is defined by the common *emotional* response of audiences, and many commentators (e.g. Iglesias 2005, Aronson 2010, Seger 2010, Batty 2011) suggest that managing and directing that emotional response is the cornerstone of mainstream screenwriting. Batty, for example, states that it is an emotional experience that lives with the audience after the film has finished, “the universal quality which connects audiences across the globe” (2011, p. 34). Crucial to helping the screenwriter achieve the desired emotional response is structure, which for Aronson is the most important tool among “carefully calculated narrative tricks” (2010, p. 45). A symbiosis of action and emotion is primary for many commentators. Whether they label it ‘action line and ‘relationship line’ (Aronson 2010), or ‘physical journey’ and ‘emotional journey’ (Batty and Waldeback 2008), the symbiosis is achieved through structure and depicting characters in relationships.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, screenwriters aiming for universal emotional appeal in their narratives may write utilising the classical Hollywood screenwriting model, characterised by Bordwell as “a stable, powerful body of conventions shaping virtually every film” (2006, p. 50). *Babel* is arguably one such film that attempts to make universal appeal through utilising mainstream screenwriting craft.

Mexican screenwriter Guillermo Arriaga's *Babel* has locations in four continents and a cast combining Hollywood stars Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett with local lay actors. The multilingual dialogue utilises English, Moroccan Arabic, Spanish, Japanese and Japanese sign language. As such, the film makes a relatively overt appeal to a sense of universal humanity, the extremes of linguistic, topographical, economic and technological diversity on display prompting Sorina Diaconescu (2006) in *The Los Angeles Times* to label the film "a sprawling meditation on the universality of the human condition." Various reviews of *Babel* are critical of the film's intended universal appeal. Shaw (2013b), for example, suggests the film fails because "this philosophical brand of liberal universalism is dependent on a lack of self-conscious recognition of specifics of class and socio-economic realities for its commercial success" (p. 23). Shaw notes that characters speak Arabic when, historically and geographically, they should be speaking Berber, an example of the "erasure of linguistic and ethnic diversity" (p. 22) the film exhibits. *Babel*, this argument suggests, eschews consideration of class, language and culture in order to appeal to an emotional commonality of experience that transcends borders, part of the "deterritorialization" that frames the narrative (Tierney 2009).

Significantly, mainstream screenwriting practices are implicated as causal in *Babel*'s failure. Shaw alludes to this when she comments on *Babel*'s "contrived connections" (p. 26). This echoes the review of Jim Ridley (2006) in *The Village Voice*, who opines: "The pieces of the story are just a booby trap snapping into place." The following analysis of the Japanese segment of *Babel* explores how the application of screenwriting craft weakens the film's universal appeal.

The Japanese story in *Babel* explores a troubled relationship between father and daughter. In the wake of his wife's suicide, Wataya struggles to communicate with his deaf-mute teenage daughter, Chieko. The story climax sees Chieko, her angst spiraling out of control, offer herself up sexually to a young policeman, Detective Mamiya. Mamiya is disturbed, but refuses tactfully, and exits the apartment. Downstairs he meets Wataya. The detective carries out his duty, questioning Wataya about a rifle he left behind on a hunting trip to Morocco. The gun business cleared up satisfactorily, Mamiya turns to go on his way. However, he stops and tells Wataya how sorry he is to hear that his wife killed herself by leaping off their balcony (information relayed to him by Chieko in the previous scene). To the young detective's surprise, Wataya reacts angrily. He tells the policeman that his wife did not leap to her death, but in fact shot herself with the very firearm they have just been discussing. The men part, leaving the atmosphere tense.

Considered in terms of screenwriting craft, this scene is one cathartic peak in the story. The scene exemplifies the guidelines of many prescriptive screenplay commentaries regarding structure, revelation and character arcs. For example, Syd Field posits two purposes for a scene: "Either it *moves the story forward*, or it *reveals information about the character*" [original emphases] (2005, p. 162), and Robert McKee states that well-written scenes change the "value-charged condition" (1997, p. 36) of a character, i.e. if they start positive, they should end negative.

The encounter between Wataya and Mamiya exhibits strong conformity to this pattern.

Mamiya starts the scene with Wataya positive, because he handled Chieko's sexual advance earlier with maturity and grace. However, the scene ends on a negative charge as Mamiya's clumsy attempt at offering his condolences backfires. The revelation by Wataya about the true nature of his wife's suicide is one that "propels... [the audience] back through the story" to seek "a rush of insight into character and world, a satisfying layer of hidden truth" (McKee 1997, p. 235).

In terms of McKee's notion of value-charge, Mamiya's value-charge is positive: he is relieved to have extricated himself relatively unscathed from the encounter with Chieko. His value-charge changes to negative when he inadvertently meddles in the father-daughter relationship. The scene moves the story forward because the connecting thread of the parallel narratives in the USA, Mexico, Morocco and Japan is revealed to be the rifle. It also gives new information about a character, Chieko, whose lie about the manner of her mother's suicide shows her to be much more damaged than we thought, and sparks the long rush back for insight noted by McKee.

In sum, when considered solely in terms of mainstream screenwriting craft as advocated by Field and McKee, the scene is exemplary. However, when we consider the encounter in terms of the representation of the pragmatics of social interaction in Japanese society, the scene becomes more problematic.

The drama derives from the young detective's decision to verbally express sympathy regarding the older man's bereavement. That moment flips the value-charge from positive to negative. However, for a Japanese audience, the scene jars on this line of

dialogue. As Smith notes: “There is nothing the Japanese are more accustomed to hiding than themselves, their inner beings” (1997, p. 46). Smith’s observation concurs with my own experiences living in Japan, and is backed by a wealth of studies (e.g. Rohlen 1986, Clancy 1990, Kim 2002) in fields such as language and social psychology that mark this line of dialogue as deviant with regard to Japanese cultural norms.<sup>4</sup> In the encounter between two strangers depicted in *Babel*, such a bold expression of sympathy from a younger – and thus socially subservient – man, to a senior, is incongruous. Of course, we cannot say that it would *never* happen. This is not a question of absolutes, but degrees of plausibility. The action is unmarked in terms of Western social discourse, but in the Japanese setting it brings to mind Ezra and Rowden’s ‘performance of Americanness.’ The point is that Wataya and Mamiya are Japanese men, in Japan, speaking Japanese, but the hand of the non-Japanese screenwriter is arguably on display, puncturing the suspension of disbelief for audiences fluent in Japanese, the sociolinguistic equivalent of a boom mike dropping into the frame.

My reading of the moment in *Babel* as a violation or misrepresentation of Japanese social norms raises interesting questions for my own creative practice. I identify common ground with Arriaga, a non-Japanese writing a Japanese screenplay, but I also note difference – based on my ‘insider’ knowledge, I would have written the encounter between Wataya and Mamiya differently. My line of departure is that through critical analysis of that scene, I conclude that Arriaga’s application of screenwriting craft has been at the sacrifice of fidelity to my own lived experience in Japan, a response that I make in one sense by positioning myself as a (qualified) surrogate for the Japanese audience.<sup>5</sup>

However, it is one thing to assert that Arriaga's depiction of Japan is inaccurate or uninformed, and quite another to say that my own depiction will be more 'authentic,' a highly-contested term that I will consider in detail in Chapter Four. I may argue that my screenwriting offers an alternative representation of Japan that is more 'plausible,' 'real,' or 'fact-based' given my extended residence in Japan, but with regard to such a position Pickering counters: "We need to ask if we are faced with the rhetoric of realism, facticity, authenticity and rationality operating imperially to guarantee the truth of arguments against bigotry and intolerance" (2001, p. 11). In this context, how I understand my position as an informed insider with regard to Japan, and utilise that position in my screenwriting craft, are key issues to be explored in this PhD.

*Welcome to Prime-time* is a mainstream feature film screenplay. Set in Tokyo, it depicts two Japanese lead characters, a female TV producer and a salaryman<sup>6</sup> who is a single father. The ideal for this screenplay is espoused by McKee (1997) as follows: "The archetypal story unearths a universally human experience, then wraps itself inside a unique, culture-specific expression" (p. 4). From my perspective as a critically-informed practitioner exploring theoretical debates in order to better understand practice, moments such as the Wataya and Mamiya scene in *Babel* are more than mere idiosyncratic flaws or misfires in McKee's 'culture-specific expression.' Rather, I suggest they are emblematic of tensions that permeate the process of applying screenwriting practices in plotting, characterisation and dialogue to cultures beyond Hollywood, a process that can result in a 'performance of Americanness.'

To conclude, through the analysis of *Babel* we can see that a dialogue emerges as to whether screenwriting processes are universal or part of a Hollywood hegemonic process. This dialogue guides my approach to a consideration of ideologies inherent in ‘universal’ screenwriting dictates and their encounters with other ideologies relevant to the local and particular of Japan. It is my intention to write *Welcome to Prime-time* through the application of the conventions of the Hollywood three-act screenwriting model, but I also intend to represent Japan and the Japanese with veracity and plausibility for Japanese audiences, which I define as audiences of native Japanese citizens, and those who have lived in Japan for extended periods of time and are fluent in the language. Thus the creative practice of writing this screenplay exposes the tensions engendered in trying to synthesise the global and the particular, framed in discussions of ‘agency and authorship’ (Chapter Two), ‘Japanese cinema and the transnational’ (Chapter Three), and ‘authenticity and Orientalism’ (Chapter Four). These issues provide a context for critical reflection on my own negotiation of the creative and theoretical considerations that are brought into play.

### **Methodological Considerations: A Dialogic Approach**

The tension between the universal and the local in my screenplay and also in my positioning means *Welcome to Prime-time* is a text imbued with simultaneity. Michael Holquist in *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* suggests simultaneity is not a matter of “binary oppositions,” but “asymmetric dualisms” (2002, p. 19). Those dualisms inhabit both the act of writing the screenplay, and the screenplay text itself. It is this multiplicity of experience, this plurality of interpretations that is key to my dialogic approach in this exploration of screenwriting as an event taking place in a particular

location at a specific time. Holquist suggests that “[c]onceiving being dialogically means that reality is always experienced, not just perceived, and further that it is perceived from a particular position” (p. 21). The particular position under consideration here is my intentions as a British screenwriter, resident in Japan and competent in Japanese, to write a feature-length screenplay primarily for the Japanese market, and how I experience and negotiate the challenges that arise in the undertaking. While the screenplay narrative attempts to portray characters and stories that will be familiar to contemporary Japanese, this accompanying critical commentary also intends to explore meaning in the act of screenwriting. Bakhtin (1986) suggests we attempt to make meaning through exchange, and exchanges are always contextualised. Our words, or “utterances,” are Janus-faced, embedded in the words of those who have gone before, and anticipatory of the words they will evoke in response. For Bakhtin, “[a]ny utterance is a link in the chain of speech communication” (1986, p. 84). In critical reflection on my own creative practice, I endeavor to reveal those linkages, and the processes that privilege some utterances over others. As previously stated, key to this reflection is objectivation of the self. Holquist notes that in a dialogic approach “the self is answerable *to*... the environment” and “responsible *for*... authorship of its responses” [original emphases] (2002, p. 168). By considering the tensions inherent in my own subjectivity in a particular moment in time and space that is inevitably in flux, I posit “a situated subject whose specific place is defined precisely by its inbetween-ness” (p. 181). The appropriate context for this dialogic approach to my inbetween-ness is practice-led research.

## **Methodological Considerations: Practice-led Research**

The emergence of the practice-led PhD in recent years has raised questions that to some are contentious. Various commentators (e.g. Arnold 2005, Yeates 2009, Gibson 2010, Hamilton and Jaaniste 2010, Paltridge et al. 2011, Arnold 2012, Nelson 2013) note a myriad of criticisms and resistances, the commonality being a historical valorisation of objectivity over subjective experience in research. This privileging of the so-called objective position has been destabilised, as Arnold notes, because “there has been a considerable growth of understanding the postmodernist position that qualitative methodologies based upon a singular experience contribute in a scholarly way to knowledge itself” (2012, p. 10). This shift creates a space for practice-led research to be heard.

Nelson cautions that despite the exciting opportunities afforded by new methodologies, practice-led research is still subject to historical imperatives to offer “new knowledge” or “substantial new insights” (2013, p. 66). Thus, in describing my experience as a practitioner-researcher, I focus on both the deeply subjective experience of creating a text, while also attempting to bring academic depth and rigour to the contextualisation of that experience. Much of the discussion around practice-led research concerns the performing arts rather than screenwriting *per se*, therefore in order to explain exactly how I intend to marry these two positions, practitioner and researcher, it is necessary to further unpack the concept of practice-led research.

The growth of the practice-led PhD has been accompanied by competing discourses that attend the concept within academia. Paltridge et al. discuss contested terminology, such

as ‘practice-based’ versus ‘practice-led,’ and state that the concept is “beset by institutional vagueness” (2011, p. 246). A central concern is explicating exactly how practice has value as research, with various commentators pointing out that there is often a disconnect between the creative practice and the accompanying, but inappropriately decontextualised, theoretical document (e.g. Hamilton and Jaaniste 2010). Thus, in creative practice research, the challenge is “to build creatively transformative bridges between the so-called two worlds of practice and theory” (Yeats 2009, p. 139). The practitioner self is required to perform the interior act of creativity, while the researcher self is required to critique that practice from an exterior standpoint. Melding these ostensibly split orientations is the definitive challenge of this undertaking.

In its broadest sense, then, reflective practice attempts to overcome the subject-object divide. In his interview with Loic Wacquant, Bourdieu suggests one framework for achieving this is *participant objectivation*:

The “methodological” intent of this research... was to overturn the natural relation of the observer to his universe of study, to make the mundane exotic and the exotic mundane, in order to render explicit what, in both cases, is taken for granted and to offer a very concrete, very pragmatic, vindication of the possibility of a full sociological objectivation of the object *and* of the subject’s relation to the object...

Wacquant 1989, p. 33

Just as Bakhtin sees the Self as relational, the subject recognising itself only by looking back on itself (Holquist 2002, p. 19), Bourdieu’s reflexive sociology offers a solution to

the paradox of the socially situated observer, “included in the very object he or she wishes to objectivize” (p. 32). It opposes a complete rejection of agency, while also recognising the slippages inherent in stated intentions. This is Bourdieu’s “theory of practice as the product of a *practical sense*, of a socially constituted ‘sense of the game’” (Wacquant 1989, p. 42). If we define the game in this particular discourse as stating one is a screenwriter, that avowed position is not simply a given, but is problematised and examined. We must demarcate how, as Giddens notes, such self-identifications are “routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual” (1991, p. 52). Giddens stresses that the self is constructed in modernity, and in turn shapes modernity. This symbiosis is crucial to my approach in this PhD. By choosing to write a Japanese screenplay, I am following the non-Japanese screenwriters introduced earlier who have shaped this discursive site. However, my reading is relational, and thus two-way: just as the self constructs and is constructed by modernity, my screenplay in turn re-casts, in some small but meaningful way, the essence of that site.

In practice-led research, one way to make this relational aspect explicit, as suggested by Hamilton and Jaaniste, is a “connective model” imbued with “polyvocality,” which they describe as follows:

[D]ual orientation... necessitates the adoption of multi-perspectival positions, and a reconciliation of the objective and disinterested situation of the observer/analyst adopted in some sections with the internal, invested position of the practitioner assumed in others.

2010, p. 39

Arnold echoes this, stating that theory, in the form of an ‘exegesis’ complementary to the artwork ‘artefact,’ does not “validate the practice as knowledge,” but rather “explicates how the practice is knowledge for both the academy and practitioner” (2012, p. 21). A key concern is to reveal the process of imbrication.

For my own creative practice research, the inevitable starting point is the project idea. The idea to write *Welcome to Prime-time* as a screenplay intended to become a commercial film in Japanese cinema preceded the idea of writing the script as “a knowing screenplay.” The ‘academic’ or ‘knowing’ screenplay emerges from “a practice in which the screenwriter makes use of the intellectual space offered by the academy and those within it to incubate and experiment with ideas” (Batty and McAulay 2016), although anticipation of the industrial context and the film that the screenplay will become are never absent from the process.<sup>7</sup> Put simply, in my own context the practitioner arrives before the researcher, hence this undertaking is *practice-led research*. The challenge then is to show the screenplay artefact, informed by theory, coming into being, and the exegesis being in its own way defined by the screenplay.

We can detect the influence of Bakhtin in these positions, in the problematising of the self as decentered subject. Holquist notes how, for Bakhtin, “The situatedness of the self is a multiple phenomenon” (2002, p. 24), always striving for but never finalising meaning, as meaning is always deferred. Nelson (2013) argues that creative practitioners have, through habit, an intuitive understanding of their practice that may ultimately defy articulation. However, he argues that “if practitioner-researchers wish

their embodied cognitions to be better recognised, means of identifying and disseminating them must be sought” (p. 39). This study intends to make one such identification.

Against this background, this PhD attempts to identify and contextualise issues of subjectivity, not just in terms of describing how *Welcome to Prime-time* came into existence as a text, but crucially, how this particular iteration of *Welcome to Prime-time* could only be achieved as a result of the research undertaken. To that end, Nelson argues that critical reflection, and “discovery through doing” (p. 40) are key. This is why, unlike a traditional PhD, approach and methodology are addressed at this early juncture, as the discovery process, including the reading of relevant theory, has been a dialogic process. This leads to the idea of a “knowing practitioner” (Batty et al. 2015, p. 12). As a self-aware practitioner writing a screenplay that ‘knows,’ I aim to add knowledge to the craft of screenwriting by making explicit the research that informs how I write. This takes place not by detailing every decision made, but by examining theories and contexts and reflecting on how they have developed my understanding of screenplay practice generally, and how they have at critical junctures had a specific effect on the writing of *Welcome to Prime-time*.

### ***Welcome to Prime-time: Approaches to Discourse and Literature***

In this study of my approach at this moment in time to writing this particular screenplay, practice leads research, and the subjectivity inherent in a practice-led research approach to my screenwriting means making explicit the concerns, influences and contexts of my creative practice. In her review of the history of Japanese cinema, Isolde Standish

suggests going “beyond the cataloguing of empirical ‘facts’ and ‘interpretation’ to look at cinema as social practice,” but notes “the inevitability that this methodological approach to the study of cinema will reflect my own personal history within this larger discourse” (2005, p. 27). This is a point equally if not more pertinent for a creative practitioner-researcher. The review of the literature that continues in the following chapters is shaped by this approach. Certain theories are selected and built upon because they have a bearing for my creative practice, while other theories and commentators, historically more reified in the process of canon formation, receive less attention. The consideration of Japanese national cinema discourses serves as an example.

Many conventional approaches to Japanese cinema are historical tracings of tradition and modernity, two elements which for Andrew (2010) are not chronological but ebb and flow in waves, and for Willemen are a problem of “differential temporal rhythms, that is to say, different epochal temporalities being folded over and into each other, generating composite or historically mixed discursive regimes” (2010, p. 248). In historical accounts of Japanese cinema contributing currents are identified, such as appropriations from theatrical forms such as kabuki, and how *jidaigeki* (period) and *gendaigeki* (contemporary) emerged from appropriations of *kyugeki* and *shinpa* theatrical styles (Komatsu 1996a, Davis 1996, Yoshimoto 2000, Richie 2005). Often allied to this approach is an attempt to identify traditional Japanese elements, most notably the prominent role and longevity of the *benshi*, film narrators who also emerged from theatrical traditions (Bernardi 1997). The influence of the extra-diegetic narrators in the 1910s was so powerful that production practices were shaped in order to accommodate the storytelling technique of the *benshi* (Komatsu 1996a, Bernardi 1997).

Set against the traditional Japanese elements are identifications of influence from America and Europe, such as German Expressionism (Komatsu 1996b, Richie 2005), with descriptions of the forms those influences took, when they came into Japanese cinema, and the degree of penetration achieved or resistance encountered. For Hansen, the question is “*how* filmmakers have appropriated Hollywood... in creative, eclectic and revisionist ways to forge aesthetic idioms” (2010, p. 301). Thus Komatsu notes that in the 1920s, “Shochiku used actresses who adopted facial expressions found in American films in order to represent psychological complexity” (1996a, p. 181), but suggests that the Japanese audiences would have found these methods strange. Richie, discussing Kenji Mizoguchi’s films in the 1930s, suggests that two clashing currents the director struggled to accommodate were “the pull of the traditional and the equally strong impetus toward things new” (2005, p. 81). The ‘Pure Film Movement’ in the first two decades of the twentieth century advocated for a break in Japanese cinema’s indebtedness to theatrical aesthetics, culminating in the first Japanese continuity script, Norimasa Kaeriyama’s *The Glory of Life* (1919), at which point “the Japanese film had finally come into its own” (Bernardi 1997, p. 366).

Intertwined with the focus on form is attention to content. In the pre-war era, Nikkatsu ‘tendency’ films, left-leaning melodramas, became a sub-genre in their own right (Richie 2005). The films employed “realist forms influenced by Soviet and German cinema” (Komatsu 1996b, p. 416) to turn a critical gaze on capitalism, something Komatsu contrasts with the “conformist ideology of American cinema” (1996b, p. 416) favoured by Shochiku. Many commentators are keen to avoid an ahistorical approach

that focuses on textual analysis isolated from the sociohistorical context of production, distribution and reception (e.g Schilling 1999, Standish 2005), so content is often analysed with regard to the cultural currents of successive eras, such as the Fascist ideology of the war years, the codes imposed by the Occupation, or the freedom and hedonism of youth in the 1950s and 1960s captured by the New Wave. Many commentators favour an auteurist approach, identifying ‘classic’ films by ‘key’ directors, and how they engaged with ideological and cultural concerns both stylistically (a focus on form) and in their stories (a focus on content). For instance, Desser (1988) considers ‘rebels’ such as Oshima, Imamura and Suzuki in terms of New Wave motifs such as youth or sexuality, while Standish (2005) considers these directors and others in terms of such themes as humanism, transgression, and gender. Bock (1985) considers ten directors and categorises them as ‘early masters,’ ‘postwar’ humanists’ and ‘New Wave.’ Writers like Schilling (1999), and Mes and Sharp (2005) continue this auteurist tradition. They note how the collapse of the studio system in the 1990s engenders the rise of independent directors feted at international film festivals. Their anthologies give chapter-length considerations to such directors as Makoto Shinozaki, Hirokazu Koreeda, and Naomi Kawase. Richie sees in the collapse of the studio system, and the rise of the independent auteurs, “a return to the presentational quality which had always defined the Japanese dramatic ethos” (2005, p. 215). Other writers raise some directors to iconic status in book-length considerations, notably Ozu (Richie 1977, Bordwell 1988) and Kurosawa (Richie 1998, Yoshimoto 2000).

These historical accounts provide one context for Japanese cinema in general, and can be seen as a survey of “the state of play” with regard to academic discourse on Japanese

cinema. The focus on directors as auteurs attenuates the relevance for screenwriting considerations, and I consider the problems auteur theory poses for screenwriting in Chapter Two. Within this discourse, this PhD identifies a specific context that impinges meaningfully on my creative practice in writing *Welcome to Prime-time*. In considering the cinema of Japan and how it resonates with my creative practice, I relate Japanese cinema as I experience it, and how I filter this through the sense of relevance it has for my artistic expression.

In conclusion, the review of the literature that continues in the subsequent chapters is one shaped by the practice-led methodology outlined to this point. This may open up new ways to combine research with explorations in creative practice.

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<sup>1</sup> See Bamford (2016) who similarly employs this structure.

<sup>2</sup> For a critique of structure and universalism with regard to “hybrid” independent American screenplays, see Murphy (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Koivumaki (2010) utilises dramaturgy to consider in more detail how emotional experience is a result of the screenplay’s literary “aesthetic independence.”

<sup>4</sup> Various studies (e.g. Clancy 1990, Kim 2002) suggest Japanese communicative style is relatively more empathic and intuitive, and disdaining of excessive verbalism. Other studies note that information exchange is less important than maintaining the correct status relationship (Graham 1983, Coulmas 1987, Tanaka 1988, Beebe et al. 1990, Marriot 1993), and in social identity terms (Tajifel & Turner 1986), Japanese inhabit their career roles to a much fuller extent than Westerners (Rohlen 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Chapters Three and Four will consider in detail my positioning as ‘Japanese.’

<sup>6</sup> ‘Salaryman’ may be defined as a white-collar Japanese male who devotes his life to his company, often at the expense of family and free time. See ‘Sayonara, Salaryman’ (*The Economist*, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> See Bamford for an extended discussion of why screenplays in practice-led research should not be considered in terms of their literary merits, but rather “the viewer’s experience of the intended film” (2016, p. 19).

## CHAPTER TWO: Authorship and Agency in Screenwriting

### Introduction

In this chapter I critique the film *Tokyo Sonata* (2008), a Japanese-language film written by Australian Max Mannix, and directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa. Like *Babel*, it offers parallels with my situation as a Western screenwriter in Japan writing for Japanese cinema. In addition, *Tokyo Sonata* engages thematically with social issues that I also tackle in *Welcome to Prime-time*, namely notions of masculinity in crisis and family breakdown.

The consideration of *Tokyo Sonata* illuminates my response to the question: what does it mean to assert that one is writing a *screenplay*? Having stated in the Introduction that it is my intention to write a mainstream feature-length screenplay, I interrogate various assumptions contained in that statement. An early consideration for any storyteller is what format to tell that story through. I have chosen to write this particular story as a screenplay, rather than as a novel, television drama, or stage play, etc. Practice-led research in screenwriting should not take the ‘screenplay’ aspect as a given, but instead problematise it, and consider why writers choose to frame their stories as screenplays. In exploring the challenges I face as a non-Japanese screenwriter writing a Japanese screenplay, my decision to tell that story through the medium of screenwriting provides a crucial context for understanding the undertaking as a whole. Thus in this chapter I consider the *why* and *how* of writers writing, and try to find commonalities with the experiences and impetuses of other writers. Noting that many writers write based on compulsion and choice, I explore my *choice* to frame this story as a screenplay. This

leads to a discussion of creativity-versus-craft tensions in writing and screenplay discourses, historically inculcated in screenplay ontology. I conclude that the key component of screenwriting is collaboration, which defines my notion of the self as author, because I am constantly aware that the act of writing is relational: I am not the author of the text, but am engaged in making one of many authorship contributions. The anticipation of the potential for other authorial contributions, rendering my attempts to make meaning contingent and negotiated, is an inherent part of my screenwriting practice that requires discussion in practice-led research. This leads from the considerations of *why* I write, to considerations of *how* I write.

Writing a mainstream, commercial screenplay means an inevitable involvement with pedagogical texts, some of which are labelled ‘how-to’ manuals. I briefly outline the differing positionings of these within academic and industrial arenas, and argue that despite academic ambivalence towards these texts, their ubiquity and usefulness require a thoughtful, critical engagement to enhance my own creative practice.

My conceptualisations of authorship and collaboration are then applied to an analysis of *Tokyo Sonata* (2008), taking a dialogical approach to published interviews with the director and screenwriter that reveals a symbiosis of theoretical and craft considerations particularly relevant to my own authorial intentions.

### **Why We Write**

What does it mean to assert that one is writing a screenplay? Before any consideration of what it means to write for Japanese cinema, or of how I, a non-Japanese writer,

represent Japanese characters, culture and society, an exploration of my holistic approach to screenwriting is required. Exploration of both the *why* and the *how* are relevant to precisely situate my foregrounded consideration of a particular iteration of transnational screenwriting. However, a definitive answer as to why writers write is ultimately elusive, as Yorke implies when he states that “anyone who pronounces with certainty one concrete reason for storytelling faces obloquy” (2013, p. 210). This echoes Orwell, who hints at something quintessentially unknowable about the impulse to write when he states: “All writers are vain, selfish, and lazy, and at the very bottom of their motives there lies a mystery” (1954, p. 320). That mystery is constantly re-visited by authors and critics alike, and one justification for writing emerges more than any other: writers feel compelled to write. Three reasons for that compulsion come to the fore: we write to get the inner voice out, to become our own audience, and to stay sane (e.g. Didion 1976, Gaiman 2007). We intend to create meaning in order to find it.

As a non-Japanese screenwriter feeling compelled to write a screenplay about Japan, I am aware that the undertaking is, in one way, my attempt to impose order on my surroundings. I am concerned with developing multi-dimensional characters who are complex and intriguing, and constructing plots that audiences will find engaging, entertaining and emotionally satisfying. An added dimension is that as a non-Japanese, I wish to find out what ‘Japan’ means to me by writing it on the page and hopefully discovering meaning there.

One reason why I write is the *intention* to order the world. However, what authors avow in terms of ‘intentionality,’ ‘creativity’ and ‘meaning’ is negotiated in social discourse.

Between the writer's attempt at agency by putting the inner voice on paper, and social interpretations of that agency, are extant mediations formulated in processes whose meanings are contested. For behavioural scientists Haensly and Reynolds (2013), attempts to define creativity are confounded by methodological issues to do with competence versus performance: creative behaviours are only exhibited in application, with no way of identifying underlying processes until that point. Pollock argues that such problems are not only methodological but also political, stating such essentialised conceptualisations are "founded upon not only the dispersion of art history's ideological figure of the artist as cause and effect of art, but upon the discursive structures through which such ideologies are produced, the literature of art, the narrative practices of history" (1980, p. 95). In other words, creativity as a concept is subject to discursive interpretation, which can then be deployed for ideological purposes.

### **Creativity in Context**

Schlesinger (2007) agrees that creativity takes place in an ideologically defined context. He notes how vested interpretations of 'creativity' engender relationships structured upon bias, and suggests we ask "in what form ideas about creativity and innovation become organisationally embedded and to what extent they shape the actual *management* of creative practice" [original emphasis] (p. 387). This is an insight particularly pertinent for a practitioner-researcher in screenwriting. Screenwriting's peripheral positioning within film theory discourses emerges from a historical process. MacCabe notes that "[a]t the moment of its invention, various possibilities remained open to film; possibilities which were closed down by a set of ideological choices" (1976, p. 8). The limitations and boundaries that have emerged as a result of those

choices form an ideological landscape within which execution of the screenwriter's intentions take place. As a dialogic act, authorial intention "inevitably orients itself with respect to previous performances in the same sphere, both those by the same author and those by other authors, originating and functioning as part of social dialogue" (Voloshinov et al. 1973, p. 95). This usage of 'dialogue' in terms of intertextuality is what I mean when I state that *Welcome to Prime-time* is 'in dialogue' with other texts. My creative practice has porous boundaries, and so threaded throughout this PhD are references to other cinematic texts that my screenplay both draws on and talks back to. One aspect of *Welcome to Prime-time* as a 'knowing screenplay' (Batty et al. 2015) is the intertextual references it evokes, an aspect of own creative practice that I explore in order to fully contextualize my creative practice.

### **The Unstable Author**

Creativity in screenwriting takes place within socially and historically determined circumstances, and so any avowal of authorial intention must negotiate various critical discourses on authorship, including those positing various shades of displacement or absence for the author. Whether one argues that the author is a natural inevitability or socially constructed, hidden or present, implied or real, discursively or culturally determined, the breadth of the discussion itself suggests authors occupy a role in society that is fluid and subject to interrogation. Barthes, for example, sees the book as "a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred" (1967; cited in Caughie 2005, p. 212). Bakhtin similarly rejects the notion of static, normative interpretation in favour of "a ceaseless flow of becoming" (1994, p. 32). These ideas draw attention to the situatedness of meaning as temporary, unstable, and ultimately unattainable.

This de-centering of the author attenuates all claims to agency and control in theoretical terms. This informs practitioner research on screenwriting not simply as academic abstraction; industrial evidence substantiates this approach. We see its shadow fall when broadsheets routinely imply that the success of the *Harry Potter* series is as much due to publisher Barry Cunningham's astute vision as the power of JK Rowling's prose,<sup>1</sup> or when the 'unique' authorial voice of Raymond Carver is reconsidered in light of revelations regarding the contribution editor Gordon Lish made in shaping his stories (Max 1998).

However, whereas the two examples above raise questions about the authorial voice of a novelist, there is a key difference with the screenwriter. Historically, textual considerations of the novel often foreground the novelist-as-author, a positioning rarely if ever afforded to the screenwriter. The ideological closing down of possibilities that MacCabe comments on is revealed in a consideration of screenplay ontology.

### **Screenplay Ontology**

If the compulsion to write is often fuelled by a sense of existential crisis, then the choice to channel that compulsion into writing a screenplay is ostensibly contradictory. This is because one potent strand of historical discourse frames screenwriting as a marginalised, industrial undertaking, where the screenwriter's attempt to stamp meaning on a film text is, at best, attenuated. Creativity is compromised by an industrial mode of production and competing voices for authorship of the completed text. Raymond Chandler captures this interpretation thus:

Everything derives from the screenplay, and most of that which derives is an applied skill which, however adept, is artistically not in the same class with the creation of a screenplay. But in Hollywood the screenplay is written by a salaried writer under the supervision of a producer - that is to say, by an employee without power or decision over the uses of his own craft, without ownership of it, and, however extravagantly paid, almost without honor for it.

1945, p. 1

Decades later, William Goldman put it more succinctly: “Being a screenwriter is not enough for a full creative life” (1984, p. 78). In the formative years of cinema screenwriting was quickly, according to Liepa, “thoroughly institutionalized” (2011, p. 7). Academia also “demeaned the screenwriter” (Fischer 2013, p. 63) in its reification of the director.

However, this received wisdom of screenwriting as a debased form of creative writing is currently being contested in various academic sites, exemplified by the establishment in 2006 of the Screenwriting Research Network. Various commentators attempt to re-cast screenwriting as a central tenet of film text authorship, what Pelo calls “retracing the handwriting of the screenwriter in the shadow of the director’s more visible approach” (2010, p. 113). For example, Scott (2006) celebrates the authorial contribution of screenwriter Robert Riskin to various Frank Capra films, while Pelo depicts ‘auteur’ directors Tarkovsky and Antonioni as “creative collaborators” (2010, p. 118) with screenwriter Tonino Guerra. While Parker labels the screenplay “the most industrialised form of dramatic writing we have yet invented” (1999, p. 3), other commentators attempt to assert the literary credentials of screenplay (e.g. Geerts 2014,

Corley & Megel 2014). For Maras (2009) and Price (2010), this tension between literary text and industrial template defines the screenplay text.

Maras, casting his eye over the historical discourses that have attended screenwriting, dates claims for literary merit back to 1943 with the publication of Gassner's *The Screenplay as Literature*, but concludes that ultimately, "[t]he intermediality of the script complicates the extent to which the screenplay can be considered an autonomous form" (p. 48). He sees the oft-cited 'blueprint model' of screenplay as inadequate and misconceived (p. 123), and suggests the 'universal' rules of screenwriting may actually "have a link to a particular social or cultural context" (p. 160). This contextualisation, this notion of screenwriting as contingent and sociohistorically situated, emerges as key to understanding all authorial claims, in interpretations both theoretical and practitioner-based. Maras is not alone in rejecting the two extremes of, on one hand, asserting sole authorial voice to the writer, and on the other, eschewing all screenwriter contributions for the sake of an ideological valorisation of the director as auteur (p. 97), what Price calls "metaphors of industry, but also... of loss, absence, erasure, and death" (2010, p. 44).

Maras, among others (e.g. Goldman 1984, Stollery 2009), suggests that a focus on collaboration might prove more fruitful to deconstruct historical normative practices in screenwriting. However, he adds a note of caution particularly pertinent to this PhD: "[E]stablished ways of thinking about screenwriting continue to structure or 'haunt' debates about screenwriting, and perhaps limit a more pluralistic understanding of writing" (p. 186). This is an implicit challenge to auteur theory. Caughie (2005) cites a

plethora of commentators who depict auteurism as “partial” (p. 32), prone to “rigidity” (p. 54), “fallacious” (p. 66), and a “catalyst” in the process that is “privileged” (p. 126). The reification of the director as author is exposed as a process underpinned by ideological intent, politicised selection and willful neglect. As a result, auteurism is prominent among “critical discourses, concepts and metaphors which... have persistently pulled the screenplay into a peculiar ontological state of non-being” (Price 2010, p. 42).

In the context of practice-led research by a screenwriter, a prominent consideration of poststructuralist ‘death of the author’ discourses (Barthes 1967), which Grodal (2005) labels “untenable objectivisms” (p. 16), might seem perverse. However, paradoxically, these discursive strands on the de-centered author serve in one way to reclaim screenwriting from the margins. Screenwriting, we might argue, has always been collaborative in nature and screenwriters have never made ideological claims for sole authorship. For Bakhtin, “any instance of self-awareness... is an act of gauging oneself against some social norm, social evaluation – is, so to speak, the socialization of one’s self and one’s behavior” (1994, p. 45). Caughie makes the same point when he talks of “the need to understand the relationship between the ‘self’ of the filmmaker and the institutional practices which surround and determine his/her work” (2005, p. 271). This is exemplified in Roger Ebert’s (1999) review of *The Bicycle Thief* (1948). He notes that screenwriter Cesare Zavattini’s status as a paid-up member of the Communist Party contributed to contemporary reviewers labelling the film “a Marxist fable.” However, he emphasises the way critical reception varies over time:

But if the film is allowed to wait long enough – until the filmmakers are dead, until neorealism is less an inspiration than a memory – “The Bicycle Thief” escapes from its critics and becomes, once again, a story.

Ebert is not implying that *The Bicycle Thief* has returned to some unencumbered primordial state of being. Rather, he suggests *The Bicycle Thief* as a text is historically situated, both in the meaning ascribed at the time of release and in present-day (re-)considerations.

The authorial voice for the non-Japanese screenwriter writing a Japanese screenplay is constructed with regard to a specific context. It can be constructed in terms of the degree of connectedness to Japan, and also through collaboration with voices deemed to be more centered, more authoritative, more ‘Japanese.’ The screenwriter engages with those voices and perhaps absorbs or rejects them, but in the act of engagement is inevitably, to one degree or another, shaped by them. I discuss how screenplays by non-Japanese screenwriters like Max Mannix, the writer of *Tokyo Sonata*, are evaluated as more or less ‘Japanese.’ This brings to the fore the issue of how my creative practice is informed by evaluations of my own screenplay as ‘Japanese.’

In sum, I suggest that for the screenwriter as practitioner-researcher, theoretical notions of meaning as negotiated and contingent, as borrowed rather than owned, are not so much revelatory, as affirmations of collaborative elements inherent in screenwriting. The self-aware screenwriter, when talking of ‘intention,’ does so knowing it does not “signify a direct correlation between inner plan and outer act directed toward a specific telos: for all deeds are connected to the deeds of others” (Holquist 2002, p. 155). It is

against this background that the following refinement of what I mean when stating my ‘intentions’ takes place.

### **Intentionality**

For Harper, “creative writing research deals with human agency, human intention, behaviour, reasons and meanings” (2006, p. 162), implying that the intentions of the writer are more of a start point than a question.<sup>2</sup> For other commentators, the issue is more problematic. Runco, examining the interface of creativity and conventionality, suggests the destructive potential of creativity implies a need for “creative morality” (1993, p. 25). Reviewing the literature on creativity and conformity/nonconformity, he notes the ascension of the latter across a range of authors, implicit in terms such as ‘anti-social’, ‘deviant’, ‘disruptive’, ‘conflict’, and ‘hostility’ (pp. 18-19). He concludes that “[c]reativity and morality require more than simply being unconventional. A great deal of work suggests that intentionality must also be taken into account” (p. 20). As we have seen, questions of agency and awareness are often framed along a continuum with, at one end, positivist assertions of an all-knowing, supremely aware author, Barthes’ “final signified” (1967, p. 2), in contrast with notions on artistic intent as an empty bourgeois ideology, displaced in favour of the text as “symbolic artefact... reinterpreted in ever new contexts” (Livingston 2005, p. 286).

As a practitioner-researcher, I wish to plant my flag on a point between these two extremes. Tybjerg (2005) offers a critique of *Authorship and Film*, Staiger’s (2003) attempt to allow a space for agency in authorship within a poststructuralist framework. Tybjerg<sup>3</sup> finds fault with Staiger partly because she sees agency in unqualified terms:

as either always present and coherent, or completely absent. Tybjerg argues that some auteur proponents concede that “the practicalities of filmmaking” (p. 41) mean establishing who is responsible for what, moment-to-moment in a film, can be problematic, a position that echoes that of Maras (2009) outlined earlier. Tybjerg concludes that “a more circumspect and modest conception of authorship should help us move beyond the false alternative of either prostrating ourselves before the Author-God or declaring him dead and gone” (p. 48). This view of authorship, which we might label *pragmatic positivist*, finds favour with other commentators. For example, Livingston (2005), surveying reductive and non-reductive notions of intentionality, argues that an intention is stated as part of a plan and is only affirmed when it comes to fruition, in the manner stated in the plan (p. 277). He notes that “some intentions are never realized and do not determine a work’s meanings, and some of the latter are, like various other relevant properties, unintended” [original emphasis] (p. 284).

In sum, an agent authors a text and imbues it with his or her intentions, and in order for it to be fully realised, “[t]he “horizon” of the reader/viewer has to converge towards or merge with the horizon of the author” (Grodal 2005, p. 33). However, discourses, social forces, ideologies, interpretations and reinterpretations both temporal and geographical will impinge, but in the view of pragmatic positivists such as Livingston, Tybjerg and Grodal, “Agency is one of the most powerful mental models, and although this powerful model may lead us astray, it is also a source of vital insight” (Grodal 2005, p. 34).

## **Authorship Contribution**

As a creative practitioner in screenwriting, I am aware, as I write, that the meaning constructed in reception cannot be controlled. My attempt to impose order, to represent Japan and the Japanese is contingent and changes over time and location, a statement that applies in both critical terms, and also in a very real sense for screenwriters as industry practitioners. The consideration of *Tokyo Sonata* will give a concrete example of this.

McKee (1997) questions the literary credentials of a screenplay by saying it anticipates the camera (p. 394), but this is only partly true. The screenwriter anticipates the director, the improvising actor, the composer, and the editor, amongst others. Writers often talk of their texts as their ‘babies’ being abandoned into the world. Arguably, for the screenplay more than any other literary text, this metaphor is apt, for the screenplay continues to grow and change until emerging fully-formed as a screened film, though new iterations will continue in critical reception, audience reaction, historical reinterpretations, Director’s cut DVDs, and so on *ad nauseum* into an infinite, unknowable future. The screenplay has historically been positioned as *exceptionally* intermedial, but becomes relatively less so as we envision the instability of the director, the film, the critic, and other voices whose meaning is similarly deferred. Thus we must conclude that the screenwriter writes to have *a* say, not to have *the* say, and writes in full awareness of – indeed welcomes – the contingent and situated nature of the undertaking. In short, we write not to author, but to make an authorship contribution.

In one sense, practice-led research in screenwriting “offers a way of freeing oneself of

the shackles of industry to pursue ideas and practices based on personal, philosophical and/or practical research interest” (Batty et al. 2016, p. 151). However, in writing a screenplay for mainstream Japanese cinema, the ‘shackles of industry’ remain a relatively salient consideration. Creativity and intentionality considered in terms of screenwriting are inseparable from considerations of craft and industrial practice, as well as critical ideologically-biased interpretation. To say that I have an idea and intend to give that idea creative expression in a screenplay is one thing. However, given the historical and ideological context outlined, we may surmise that while the genesis of that idea is impossible to define, we can, as Martin notes, “observe, chart, and study: *how... an idea (once it exists) [is] articulated, expressed, nurtured, developed*” [original emphasis] (2014, p. 17). Any discussion of screenplay creativity cannot be divorced from prevailing social and industrial practices, and any claims I make for intention or meaning-making are tempered and qualified by this awareness.

In the next section, I expand on my reading of this tension between creativity and industry demands. Given that my intention is that *Welcome to Prime-time* should have broad appeal for both Japanese and international audiences, I focus on whether existing practices, in particular the prominence of so-called ‘how-to’ manuals, help or hinder the screenwriter. This complements the critique of *Babel* in the previous chapter, which suggested screenwriting practices were misused, and anticipates the consideration of *Tokyo Sonata* in this chapter where ‘structure’ is shown to be one issue in the collaboration between writer and director.

## **Screenwriting in the Creative/Industrial Nexus**

Academic considerations of screenwriting are often confounded by the presence of a multitude of texts on the craft, often simply defined as ‘how-to’ manuals. These texts exist on a continuum from, at one end, those that offer a nuanced, reflective, critical consideration of screenplay craft (e.g. Parker 1999, Dancyger and Rush 2007, Batty and Waldeback 2008) through to volumes that aim at rule-setting (e.g. McKee 1997, Halperin 2003, Gulino 2004, Snyder 2005, Yanno 2006, Marks 2009, Seger 2010). This continuum can in crude terms be seen as travelling from the respectably academic to the blatantly commercial, with academic discomfort increasing proportionately as we approach the commercial end. The commercial how-to texts are in some quarters deemed “beneath academic value” (Batty 2014, p. 2), a quandary highlighted by Mills in his review of one how-to text:

What are academics to do with how-to manuals, and should we see them as a useful addition to the literature on the topic?... [M]y reaction may simply reaffirm how simplistic it is for academics to malign television tropes, while ignoring the contexts within which broadcasting comes to be made.

2012, p. 255

As Mills implies, outside of academia, in film industry arenas, the concepts outlined in these how-to texts, such as character arcs and act turning points, are often used in discussions with industry practitioners on project development. According to Langford (2012), the gap between theory and practice is narrowing. He argues for a dialectical approach, “to move critical approaches to the screenplay away from the futile and frankly bankrupt situation where a reductively formulaic application of

quasi-Aristotelian norms, on the one hand, is met with an equally reified valorization of pseudo-Brechtian strategies on the other, and in which the normative, hegemonic tendencies of the former (taken as given) are challenged by the presumptively insurgent character of the latter” (p. 255). This is relevant to this PhD because when writing *Welcome to Prime-time* I consciously structured the screenplay in terms of a restorative three-act structure (Dancyger & Rush 2007). I was conscious of where act turning points should appear and the emotional impact they should have. In writing scenes, I would refer to how-to manuals to remind myself what the scene should be doing, or what should be revealed (or hidden) about a character. This utilisation of mainstream screenplay practices is often seen as formulaic or overtly manipulative and commercial (e.g. Yorke 2013). However, various studies suggest that the reality of how screenwriters use how-to manuals is more complex and problematic.

For example, a close examination of taken-for-granted terms used in the texts reveals discrepancies and a lack of consensus in usage, one example being ‘three-act structure.’ Heyes sees “much consensus and validation” (2012, p. 216) in the three-act model of screenplay, but Brutsch (2015) finds “a surprisingly low consensus on how to divide films into three acts” (p. 301). Brutsch’s study statistically analyses the application of the three-act model in a consideration of 18 films by 32 authors, ranging from commercial texts such as Snyder (2005) to more scholarly writers such as Bordwell (2006). He notes that disagreement on where act breaks take place occurs 78 percent of the time, and claims “the discrepancies are largely a consequence of the imprecision and vagueness of the paradigm’s key terms and concepts” (p. 317). In order to develop precision in our understanding and deployment of these terms, more research on how

writers actually utilise how-to texts when screenwriting is essential, and I hope this PhD adds to that body of literature.

Nelmes (2008) outlines how how-to texts played a pertinent role in the crafting of one of her scripts. When she notes that the inspiration for her lead character came from deeply personal events, namely “my own life as a reluctantly divorced woman” (p. 340), we hear echoes of the compulsion to write as a form of expunging thought. She applies craft to that compulsion, citing Field, McKee, Bordwell and Seger as influencing the construction of the narrative. She develops characters with “clear wants, needs and qualities that would interact with each other in an interesting and dramatic way” (p. 341). There is collaboration through an industry programme, the Arista Script Development Programme, leading to characters strengthening their “arc of change” (p. 345). Changes are made to the script based on notes from a UCLA tutor, the director, and a casting agent, including re-setting the film in the UK rather than the USA. Crucially, she highlights re-writing as the phase when the screenwriting manuals prove most useful, and details how *Rewriting Secrets for Screenwriters* by Tom Lazarus (2007) helped focus her attention on areas of the script that needed work. Drawing on Nelmes’ experience, Chapter Five offers examples of how screenwriting craft manuals were utilised to identify potential problems in *Welcome to Prime-time*.

*Tokyo Sonata*, a Japanese film written by an Australian screenwriter and directed by a Japanese director, is particularly apt for consideration at this juncture. It not only illuminates the issues of collaboration and authoring meaning discussed in this chapter, but acts as a bridge to the discussion in Chapter Three of what it means for a Western

screenwriter to write a 'Japanese' film, an issue that I will explore through considerations of the national and the transnational as they relate to my own subject positioning.

### ***Tokyo Sonata* (2008): Authorship and Collaboration in Japanese Screenwriting**

Max Mannix wrote *Tokyo Sonata* based on his own observations during his eleven-year residence in Japan. The story centres on middle-aged patriarch Ryuhei Sasaki, who is dismissed from his office job. Rather than reveal the truth to his family, he dresses in his suit every morning and pretends to his wife that he is going to work, when he is actually attending job centres and frequenting soup kitchens, along with other men in suits carrying out the same pretence.

*Tokyo Sonata* and *Welcome to Prime-time* have strong thematic commonalities, most notably the crisis in masculinity in contemporary Japan. Dasgupta (2011) suggests one aspect of this crisis is "the continuing hegemonic power of the white-collar office, and the anxiety (and indeed emasculation) generated by its lack" (p. 384). Following humiliation in the workplace, Ryuhei experiences futility and powerlessness at home. His elder son Takashi defies him and joins the US military, while his younger son uses his lunch money to secretly take piano lessons, which have been expressly forbidden by his father. For the first hour the film plays out as a social realist tale, before taking a sharp turn in an absurdist, slightly ambiguous direction. Ryuhei's wife, Megumi, has horrific dreams of her son's death in the military. She is then kidnapped by a burglar, but seems to revel in the escape from monotony, at one point leaving the car to buy provisions for both herself and her erstwhile captor. Many reviewers note this shift in

tone (e.g. Elley 2008, Ebert 2009, Harmanci 2009), attributing it to director Kurosawa indulging in his penchant for horror, the genre for which he is best known.

Donald Richie notes how an exploration of tension in family relationships is the “perennial theme” (2005, p. 126) of Yasujiro Ozu’s films. Iles (2007) explores how contemporary Japanese films such as *The Family Game* (1983) and *Visitor Q* (2001) use satire to subvert this tradition and skew the representation of family seen in the classic post-war films of Ozu, Kurosawa and Mizoguchi:

In essence then these are the values which... immediate post-war films permit us to see: that the figure of the father, while perhaps on the edge of cataclysmic change, remains the source of stability and emotional security for the members of his family; that from their parents, children are able to learn morality and social responsibility; and that from the family comes social structure, tradition, yet also hope for society’s improvement in the future.

p. 193

Iles notes that *The Family Game* and *Visitor Q* utilise the trope of home invasion by a mysterious stranger to facilitate scenes of “absurdist exaggeration” (2007, p. 203), a device and tone that also appears in the final third act of *Tokyo Sonata*. This gives an ironic undertone to the ostensible return to normality that concludes all three films. In one interview director Kurosawa explicitly states that it was his wish to find an “abstract resolution” to *Tokyo Sonata* (Champion 2008a). Viewing this in purely industrial terms, one can assume that the director decided to re-write the third act of the script in a way that aligned it tonally with his own oeuvre, and with other absurdist takes on Japanese family.

I have suggested that collaboration is a key concern in my own creative practice. The collaborative act of authorship between director and screenwriter in the case of *Tokyo Sonata* is available for an unusual degree of scrutiny by virtue of the fact that Kurosawa's interview is complemented by a Max Mannix interview on the same website. These interviews offer a rare glimpse into the various meanings ascribed to the film generally, and into tensions inherent in writer-director collaboration amplified by the positioning of the non-Japanese screenwriter. They reveal the dialogic relationship of the authored screenplay text to the screen film as text.

Quizzed about the tonal shift in the film, Kurosawa states that he found the depiction of the Japanese family in Mannix's original screenplay to be "stereotypical." He states that anything in the film that seems to be old and traditional comes from Mannix, and any "wacky stuff"<sup>4</sup> comes from him (Champion 2008a). Following the publication of Kurosawa's interview, Mannix seems to have contacted the website to conduct an interview that is, in effect, a right of reply. The following excerpt is quoted at length, as it offers a rare insight into a screenwriter's frustration over authorship clashes with the director:

Q. *"Were you responsible in any way for the various dei ex machinis near the end of the film?"*

"Not at all. The original screenplay that I wrote didn't ask the audience to trust me here and there, then suspend belief when it was convenient for me. The script I wrote was a consistent piece about what appeared to be an average family. An average family that could not communicate, love, or trust one another."

Q. “How much of the film’s final thirty minutes were yours and how much were Kiyoshi’s?”

“There were, in my opinion, some pretty bizarre story threads in the film. You mentioned that you interviewed Kiyoshi Kurosawa, so I’m sure you already have the answer to this question.”

Champion 2008b

Both interviews make clear that the tone shift in the last third is down to Kurosawa, and that the original script by Mannix maintained the social realist approach throughout. In addition, Mannix points out that Japanese audiences have attributed the storyline of the elder son joining the US military to him, when it in fact came from Kurosawa:

I have heard quite a few Japanese people say — to me directly — that *Tokyo Sonata*, in part, is quite bizarre. I doubt that Japanese people would say such to Kiyoshi, in fact, I am sure that they wouldn’t. Furthermore, Japanese people have actually accused me of the military angle in the film, when in reality I had nothing to do with it, because it is so far removed from reality in Japan that it verges on fantasy, and it is therefore a story line that I would not consider.

Champion 2008b

This exchange reveals how meaning-making for audiences can spring from the ‘non-Japanese’ positioning of the screenwriter, and the urge to contest such meanings that Mannix clearly feels the need to put on record. Although overall in the interview Mannix is keen to praise Kurosawa and respects his authority as director, he nonetheless is definitive in rejecting responsibility for the final third of the film, and even hints that he may have authored a better ending that never made it to the screen:

Q. “Do you regret that certain elements were thrown out?”

“I don’t regret it because I was not the person that dismissed those elements. Am I disappointed that some things were changed? That’s a different question.”

Champion 2008b

Gubrium and Holstein (1998) note how ownership of a narrative is “increasingly mediated by widely available communication frameworks and, thus, is more diffusely proprietary than ever” (p. 180). These interviews exemplify this. In dialogic terms there are various utterances in play here. We have the competing claims of director and screenwriter, but those claims are made not only at each other as co-authors, but also respectively in regard to other utterances, namely the film *Tokyo Sonata* that audiences watch and the last draft of the screenplay for *Tokyo Sonata* that Mannix wrote. Holquist notes that the literary text is an utterance that enables perception of the world to be communicated:

In a literary text, the normal activity of perception, of giving order to chaos, is performed at a heightened degree. The difference between perceiving the world by textualizing it into an utterance in everyday speech on the one hand, and, on the other, perceiving it by authoring a literary text, is not absolute, but rather one of degree. Every time we talk we give order to the world; every time we write or read a literary text we give the greatest degree of (possible) order to the world.

2002, p. 85

Elsewhere I have discussed the normative representation of the script-to-screen process as one of continual enhancement of the narrative text as it passes from the hands of the screenwriter to director, actors, editors, composers and other contributing collaborators,

noting that “this forward momentum is overwhelmingly represented as progress towards a Platonic ideal of the film” (McAulay 2014, p. 190). And yet, in the subjective perception of the screenwriter, that ideal film may have been achieved in a draft of the script that did not survive intact, but that underwent further debilitating changes in a misfiring collaborative process all the way to the screen, to a film text that is not an enhancement of the writer’s screenplay, but a corruption of it. In this sense Kurosawa’s film and Mannix’s script are utterances competing to order the world, to impose a representation of “Japan” in a spatiotemporal moment. The interviews, utterances in themselves, enhance, complement, strengthen and attenuate those film/screenplay utterances. Given the parallels between *Tokyo Sonata* and *Welcome to Prime-time* as texts, and between myself and Max Mannix as non-Japanese screenwriters authoring Japanese screenplays, these interviews also allow me to anticipate possible readings of my screenplay. This anticipation feeds back reflexively into my screenwriting practice, for instance causing me to consider what characterisations or depictions may seem stereotypically Japanese, or ponder if certain aspects of my narrative are an outgrowth of my non-Japaneseness.<sup>5</sup>

For the non-Japanese screenwriter in Japan, the privilege in meaning-making sits on the axis of ‘Japan’ and ‘Japaneseness.’ Kurosawa and Mannix are making competing claims for legitimacy of their respective texts, namely the film *Tokyo Sonata* and the final draft screenplay that Mannix wrote. The meaning of *Tokyo Sonata* as a text is forged amongst those competing claims, but Mannix’s utterance is likely to be seen as marginal given the power imbalance between screenwriter and director in cinema. Quite simply, Kurosawa’s film will be seen, but Mannix’s screenplay will not be read.

Mannix’s postulation of a Platonic ideal of the screenplay that did not make it to screen is academically intriguing, but in industrial terms it is no more than a footnote.

Mannix’s experiences on *Tokyo Sonata* illuminate certain limitations on authorial intentions, focusing my awareness of potential readings of my screenplay that filter meaning in terms of how ‘Japanese’ certain aspects of the screenplay (and the screenwriter) are perceived to be. The consideration of *Babel* made apparent the challenges I face in applying screenwriting craft to depictions of Japan and the Japanese. *Tokyo Sonata* adds another dimension to the problem of attempting to represent ‘Japan.’ Mannix’s claim for his screenplay of *Tokyo Sonata* as an attempted depiction of a “reality in Japan,” the fault line of his disagreement with director Kurosawa, reverberate to a myriad of potential future perceptions of *Welcome to Prime-time* as a text that writes “Japan” and “the Japanese,” filtered through the ‘non-Japaneseness’ of the screenwriter. Screenplay authorship is attempted among a range of competing claims. In the context of Japan, the pre-eminent discursive site of competition is “Japan” and “the Japanese.” It is to the contestation of those terms in cinematic discourse that I now turn in Chapters Three and Four.

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<sup>1</sup> See ‘That magical day when Barry met Harry’ (*The Scotsman*, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See Batty (2015) for a consideration of how, conceptually, screenwriting sits between creative writing and screen production.

<sup>3</sup> Tybjerg tends to use filmmaker, auteur and director interchangeably. However, in this context the arguments made could equally apply to the screenwriter.

<sup>4</sup> “Wacky stuff” is the translator’s rendering of Kurosawa’s “hen na koto” 「変なこと」 (‘strange,’ ‘weird,’ ‘odd’) and “hame wo hazushita” 「羽目を外した」 (‘cutting loose,’ ‘going wild’).

## CHAPTER THREE: National and Transnational Cinema in Japan

### Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the competing notions of ‘Japan’ and ‘Japanese’ with regard to the national cinema of Japan, testing the credentials of *Welcome to Prime-time* as a text within that discursive site. I note that definitions of the national cinema of Japan are contested and sociohistorically contingent, and expand this consideration to the concept of national cinema generally. I outline how transnational cinema has emerged to complicate national cinema discourse in general (e.g. Berghahn & Sternberg 2010; Fisher & Roberts 2016), and notions of ‘purity’ in the national cinema of Japan (and discourse on Japanese identity) in particular. I draw on Naficy (2001) to postulate *the accented Japanese screenplay*, my term for Japanese-language screenplays written by non-Japanese, in order to create a space within which to position *Welcome to Prime-time*. I suggest that these texts test the boundaries of Japanese national cinema and add context to considerations of the transnational in screenwriting. I then refine this consideration by discussing how the national cinema concept still has critical purchase and needs to be accommodated alongside the transnational. I consider how ‘the other’ has been engaged within Japanese cinema, in order to add richness to the conceptualisation of *Welcome to Prime-time* as a national-transnational text. I conclude with a consideration of *Firefly Dreams* (2001, written and directed by John Williams) and the *Merde* segment of *Tokyo!* (2008, written and directed by Leos Carax) to show how *Welcome to Prime-time*, as a text marked as both national and transnational, negotiates the continuum of potential positions a screenplay by a non-Japanese could claim in relation to Japanese national cinema and transnational cinema discourses.

## **Writing ‘Japan’**

What does it mean to assert that one is writing a *Japanese* screenplay? By asking this question, I invoke notions of ‘Japanese cinema,’ a discursive site which, like all national cinema discourses, is a site of struggle, both reflective of and participating in constructing the edifice of the myth of ‘nation’ (Anderson 1991, Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012). Stam (1989) notes “Bakhtin’s emphasis on a boundless and ever-changing context as interacting with the text” (p. 56), and crucially that the individual is “not passive or helpless in this process” (p. 54). This echoes the positivist pragmatist approach outlined in Chapter Two. Applying this approach to national cinema, I will outline the particularities of its ‘ever-changing’ nature, and I consider what action I might take to position my creative practice within that context, especially with regard to how transnational cinema has emerged to complicate notions of national cinema.

## **Japanese National Cinema**

I am constantly aware of *Welcome to Prime-time*’s dialogue with other texts, a dialogue that takes place within the broader context of ‘national cinema.’ This brings my screenplay into dialogic interaction with contemporary films that are thematically similar in the Japanese iteration of that canon, such as *Still Walking* (2008, written and directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda). Identifying the commonalities reveals the limitations of the discursive site that my creative practice, if transgressive, can highlight and possibly complicate. A consideration of the theoretical strands on the national cinema of Japan tests the assertion that my screenplay is a text within Japanese national cinema, and simultaneously complicate notions of ‘Japanese film.’ Through this consideration I

aim to deepen my understanding of my intention to write a *Japanese* screenplay, identifying thematic elements of the text and aspects of my own positioning as author that complicate notions of ‘Japaneseness’ and ‘Japanese cinema.’

My creative practice engages with competing voices that attempt to privilege a particular articulation of cinema in Japan as defining of an era, national characteristics, social milieux, and most of all, cinema itself. Prominent among these is Noel Burch’s (1979) treatise negating the notion of a post-war Golden Age for Japanese cinema in favour of championing a pre-war cinema that, he claims, is imbued with domestic virtues borrowed and transformed from historical elements such as Heian era aesthetics and *kabuki*. Presenting as key the fact that Japan had never experienced occupation before 1945, he argues that Japanese cinema of the period, unlike that of the West, is richly intertextual, as “tradition inclines the Japanese to read any given text in relation to a body of texts” (p. 53). Japanese cinema, he argues, has no taboos on borrowing, and unlike the West, does not privilege meaning over form. He considers the utilisation of *benshi*, oral storytellers, who took responsibility for narrative cohesion away from intertitles and the diegesis, liberally and performatively interpreting the story for audiences, “as a deconstruction of the Hollywood film” (p. 79). In short, Burch suggests Japanese cinema stands in antithetical relationship to Western cinema, and “the contrast... with Western art, is absolute” (p. 33). Burch presents early cinema in Japan not as an imported form that imposed new aesthetics, but one assimilated into a continuing tradition that absorbs, rather than replaces or supersedes, the aesthetics of that tradition.

Critics of Burch point to his essentialist tendencies and question whether the Japan/West contrast is, indeed, ‘absolute.’ Kirihara, noting the political repression prevalent at the time, suggests that the *benshi* “improvised and commented at their peril” (1992, p. 60). Gerow, meanwhile, contends that Burch’s absolutist argument is less rooted in Japanese tradition and more in the particular concerns of 1970s criticism, identifying “a European postmodernism attempting to critique the universalist pretensions of Western modernism by finding an effectively a-, or antimodern, culture in the age of modernity” (2010, p. 29).

These critical interpretations of cinema constructing the nation sociohistorically clearly connect with my intentions to depict Japan and the Japanese in a particular time and space in *Welcome to Prime-time*. I am conscious of writing a Japanese film, and feel compelled to reflect on which notion of ‘Japan’ and ‘the Japanese’ I am representing through my screenwriting. There is a canon of works whose weight is brought to bear on my own creative practice. However, for a screenplay written within the context of practice-led research, not only awareness of the canon itself, but also critical consideration on the process of canon construction, is key.

Various commentators (e.g Bordwell 1988, Cazdyn 2002, Richie 2005, Lowenstein 2005) reclaim historicism from Burch’s ‘timeless tradition’ approach, claiming filmmakers married traditions, prevailing social events, and the received (Hollywood) wisdom on good practice to create changes that are iterative rather than free-standing entities. Baskett (2008), for example, notes how Japanese imperial cinema emphasised the similarity of Asian peoples (especially in contrast with the colonising West). This

stands in marked contrast with late 20<sup>th</sup> century film text discourses (e.g. Burch 1979, Hirano 1992), emphasising Japanese ‘purity’ and uniqueness, a prominent issue for my own research. Hirano, in her study of Japanese cinema under the American occupation, chronologically and thematically complements Baskett when she notes:

the purification of the populace through the purging of evil wartime militarism is one of the main themes of the occupation period Japanese cinema; similarly, the wartime Japanese cinema concentrated on the purification of the populace through the purging of Western-influenced decadent and individualistic ideas.

1992, p. 10

This fluctuating and contested dialogue on the ‘purity’ of the Japanese is a significant consideration for my practice, in the sense that its prominence and trenchant positioning in cinematic and social discourse serves as a constant reminder that I am ‘not Japanese.’ This is a rejoinder to my own assertions that beyond the narrow definitions of passport nationality, in terms of language, length of tenure, lifestyle, family and many other factors, I *am* Japanese. Therefore, my act of writing ‘a Japanese screenplay’ can in one way be viewed as an intervention in the on-going dialogue of constructing ‘Japaneseness’ in cinema in terms of purity.

Arguably, all national cinema discourses attempt to identify what is unique or ‘pure’ about the cinematic output of a particular nation state. However, the privileging of ‘purity’ occurs in critical and popular discourse in a way that seems particularly heightened when the subject is Japan. For example, there is a consensus that *Wake in Fright* (1971) is a classic of Australian cinema, but the fact that director Ted Kotcheff

was Canadian is regarded by *The Age* as a “quirk.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the fact that screenwriter Evan Jones was Jamaican goes unremarked. Similarly, Gay finds in *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) “multiple textual intersections for audiences to make meaning from,” including “the Austen industry, [and] the genre of English Heritage film” (2003, p. 92), but the aspect of a Taiwanese director addressing a primarily English audience is not foregrounded for meaning-making. Contrast this with Gerow’s comment on *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006) in which he suggests “one can sense Eastwood treading carefully, trying not to offend his audiences” (2006b, p. 3). Clearly the director’s non-Japaneseness and his address to a Japanese audience are regarded as the salient points in reading the film. Inevitably, my writing of Japan and the Japanese engages with these utterances and conceptualisations, and arguably my practice complicates our understanding of what we mean by ‘Japanese’ when we talk of Japanese cinema.

Gerow (2010) identifies the problem with all these accounts as being a problem of discourse, as defined by Foucault (1972) in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

The conditions necessary for the appearance of an object of discourse, the historical conditions required if one is to 'say anything' about it, and if several people are to say different things about it, the conditions necessary if it is to exist in relation to other objects, if it is to establish with them relations of resemblance, proximity, distance, difference, transformation – as we can see, these conditions are many and imposing.

p. 45

For Gerow, the issue is establishing the historicity of cinema in relationship to Japan, because the “primary question is how the object cinema appeared not only on Japanese

soil but also in discourse, molded and defined by the operations of those talking and writing about it” (p. 6). This point is central to my concerns writing *Welcome to Prime-time*, because certain discourses on Japanese cinema reveal a common concern, namely a representation of a bounded Japan, specifically constructing and/or maintaining boundaries between Japan and the West. Richie cautions that in the cinema of Japan, “achieving Japaneseness was never an ambition” (2005, p. 42), but the ‘Japan’ of certain discourses exists in both the Western and Japanese imagination, codifying Japanese cinema in a way that feeds back into itself. This received image of Japanese national cinema, while noting concerns about ruptures, disjunctions, political representations, changing social milieux, etc. is still an overarching discourse about Japanese practitioners producing Japanese-language cinema for primarily domestic audiences, with international audiences and critics a secondary, minor concern (Gerow 2002).

As a non-Japanese screenwriter intending to contribute to Japanese cinema, it is disturbing to realise that non-Japanese authors of texts within Japanese national cinema are less than a minor concern: they are practically invisible. As Gerow notes, “in emphasizing the walls the West has created, these studies reify them rather than focus on cracks in the wall, on the contradictions in the system or on alternative constructions” (2006, p. 32). This lack of attention to the contradictions is illustrated in Hirano’s summation of the American occupation’s attempt to censor Japanese cinema:

Despite their legal authority and underlying military and economic power, the Americans were inevitably forced to compromise, not only because of the lack of unity in their own ranks, but also because of the problems inherent in

trying to change the millennia-old thought and behavior patterns of a proud people in its native land.

1992, p. 260

In this construction of ‘millennia-old thought’ inhabiting a ‘proud people in its native land,’ we glimpse the challenge that faces the positioning of *Welcome to Prime-time* as a ‘Japanese’ text. That challenge is compounded by my intention to write a Japanese screenplay that tells a universal tale. Gerow detects in prominent independent Japanese films of the 1990s “a repudiation of the metanarratives or universal truths... such as ‘humanity’ and ‘progress’” in favour of “the unknowability of the ‘other’” (2002, p. 5). This discourse of Japanese filmmakers as a monolithic, impenetrable entity takes for granted that Japanese cinema has been, is, and will be the exclusive purview of Japanese practitioners, and thus labels *Welcome to Prime-time* as unworthy of inclusion in a pre-ordained canon.

However, as outlined in the Introduction, the recent emergence of Japanese screenplays authored by non-Japanese complicates this discourse, and re-casts consideration of Japanese national cinema in a way that forces engagement with hybridity, polvocality, cross-fertility, and other globalising trends. As such, it is my contention that the authorship of *Welcome to Prime-time* be considered one of the ‘cracks in the wall’ that Gerow (2006) suggests can provide fruitful alternatives in Japanese national cinema discourse.

A consideration of Japanese cinema invokes wider notions of ‘national cinema,’ a discursive site that has endured particularly intense interrogation in recent years, its

applicability questioned in light of nationalism mythology, postcolonial identities, transnational filmmaking, and accelerated mobility in global capital and labour. Somewhat paradoxically, to claim a place for my screenplay in Japanese national cinema, I must first of all destabilise the concept through a consideration of critical concerns informing the broader concept of national cinema.

### **National Cinema**

Essentialist notions of national cinema are delineated by Higson (1989) as manifesting themselves in one of four ways. Two of the definitions, to do with film ownership and national box office, are unrelated to this thesis. The other definitions are, firstly, text-based, where a key concern is to what extent the films are engaged in “exploring, questioning and constructing a notion of nationhood in the films themselves and in the consciousness of the viewer” (p. 36). Secondly, there is the criticism-led approach which, Higson states, “tends to reduce national cinema to the terms of a quality art cinema, a culturally worthy cinema steeped in the high cultural and/or modernist heritage of a particular nation state” (p. 37).

The definitions of national cinema outlined by Higson have been critiqued within various disciplines. Benedict Anderson’s postulation of nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (1991, p. 6) is the springboard for a number of criticisms of nation-based approaches to cinema. Hayward, focusing on French national cinema, problematises ‘nation,’ echoing Crofts (1993), and Hjort and McKenzie (2000) when she notes: “the signification of the term ‘national’ changes according to political, social and economic pressures and mutations, which

means that a national cinema... is historically fluctuating” (2005, pp. 34-35). Elsaesser (2005), too, notes the reification of the national, and like Walsh (1996) points to the inherent tautology that follows it, namely that only films which confirm the pre-established profile tend to be selected as representative of the national cinema. Yoshimoto suggests the issue is not the *problematic* but more the *perfidious* functions of ‘national’:

Is it still possible to examine critically the specificity of the national in/of films against the overwhelming force of transnational capital without falling back on nostalgic, and decidedly fraudulent, notions of nationalism?

2006, p. 259

In response to these criticisms, new concepts have been put forward to occupy the space that is opened up by the destabilising of ‘national.’ Ashby and Higson, for example, argue for ‘post-national,’ a term supposedly more capable of accommodating text-based concerns such as “themes of diaspora and liminality” (2004, p. 20). Ponzanesi and Waller are also intrigued by “playing with margins and marginality” (2012, p. 12), and suggest the term ‘postcolonial cinema’ offers a way of “reformulating the conventions of cinema for the purposes of narrating, visualizing and rendering the effects of subjugated histories and emergent subjectivities” (p. 11). Khorana (2013) suggests the term ‘crossover cinema,’ claiming that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we need to re-conceptualise hybridity in film production as having broken free from the margins to position itself in mainstream cinema production.<sup>2</sup>

I suggest ‘postcolonial’ and ‘crossover’ are overstatements with regard to the Japanese

context under consideration. The implication of ‘crossover’ is that a historical break has occurred or is occurring, which puts a definitive stamp on a process (i.e. Western screenwriters writing Japanese films), suggesting a strand of cinema that is mature and fully formed. This is inappropriate for the nascent arena of Western screenwriters writing Japanese films. As for ‘postcolonial,’ Marks considers it “a conceptually omnivorous term that swallows distinctions of nation, location, period and agency” (2000, p. 8). Nagib (2016), too, notes the potential for Eurocentric bias in the term, a significant point for research in the context of Japan. Japan was never colonised by the West, though colonising forces undoubtedly shaped Japan’s historical course (Smith 1997). As such, for my own practice-led research, as a white, middle-class, male professional who has moved by choice from one first-world location to another, the postcolonial approach and its focus on “narrative discourses of supremacy” (Ponzanesi and Waller 2012, p. 12), implies a power imbalance that does not appropriately reflect my situated practice.

Therefore transnationalism, one site that contests the space occupied by national cinema, seems to carry more potential to encapsulate notions of liminality, hybridity and various iterations of ‘national’ evident in current filmmaking and in my writing of *Welcome to Prime-time*. ‘Transnational cinema’ is subject to contested definitions, addressed directly by a number of commentators in *Transnational Cinemas: A Critical Roundtable* (Fisher and Roberts 2016). The term has been defined in terms of funding, locations, personnel, distribution, exhibition, reception, and more importantly for my concerns, “textuality, themes, and narrative” (Galt 2016). Some commentators (e.g. Mazdon 2016) note that this broad application means all cinema can be considered

transnational, which strips the concept of critical utility. Higson, however, suggests the transnational is most useful as a challenge to commentary focused on the national, “which often assumes that the national is a self-contained entity, when the evidence is often to the contrary” (2016, p. 14). With regard to my own context, I favour definitions which see the transnational as a matter of two complementary aspects: firstly, personnel and the experience of practitioners (e.g. Galt 2016, Bergfelder 2016, Burgoyne 2016); and secondly, thematic content (e.g. Higbee 2016, Higson 2016). I have spent nearly three decades living in Japan, and have written four Japanese short-film screenplays that have been produced. My screenplay *Welcome to Prime-time* thematically explores issues involving transgression in Japanese identity. Therefore, by virtue of my experience in Japanese screenwriting, and the thematic content of my screenplay, I lay claim to the label transnational for *Welcome to Prime-time*.

This conceptualisation of transnational screenwriting contests the imperative towards a culturally pure, bounded discourse of film production in criticism centered on the nation, an imperative fuelled by what Ezra and Rowden label an “anxiety of authenticity” (2005, p. 4). As previously noted, this concern with purity and bounded discourse is a particularly salient feature in considerations of film texts that requires negotiation by non-Japanese screenwriters within Japanese cinema. In this regard, it is worth exploring how the purity of Japanese cinema is complicated by transnational cinema generally, and by *Welcome to Prime-time* as a transnational cinema text in particular.

### **Transnational Cinema**

Considerations of the transnational in screenwriting in Japanese cinema are scant. Part

II of *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema* (2014), edited by Daisuke Miyao, is a section called ‘What is Japanese Cinema? Japanese Cinema and the Transnational Network.’ The eight chapters cover such topics as adaptations of Western literature and film in Japanese cinema (Raine 2014), the appropriation of the Madame Butterfly narrative in constructing Japanese female film stardom (Miyao 2014), and Hollywood hegemonic practices in 1950s Japan examined through Paramount’s marketing campaigns (Kitamura 2014). More ground is covered in volume IV of Nikki J. Y. Lee and Julian Stringer’s 2015 anthology *Japanese Cinema*, entitled ‘Transnational Japanese Cinema.’ The eighteen chapters conceptualise Japanese cinema as transnational in a variety of ways. In terms of production, for example, the considerable interaction in personnel and finance between Hong Kong and Japan in the 1950s and 1970s is explored by Yau Shuk-Ting (2015), while Tezuka (2015) considers the cultural differences that arise when the Japanese film industry hosts blockbuster Hollywood English-language productions. With regard to audiences, considerations of American reaction to and assimilation of Japanese cinema (Desser 2015, Morley & Robbins 2015) are complemented by explorations of Japanese audience reaction to American cinema (Kitamura 2015, Chun 2015). The anthology concludes with a variety of papers on the theme of ‘Anime as Global Brand.’ However, it is interesting to note that in both books the only mention of Japanese screenplays by non-Japanese is Hansen’s (2015) analysis of the production and reception of Arnold Fanck’s *The New Earth* (1937).

Ezra and Rowden date the transnational as concurrent with “the expansion of popular culture,” (2005, p. 3) and the current “hybridized and cosmopolitan identities of so many contemporary filmmakers” (p. 4). Like Berry (2010), they suggest that

transnationalism is an outgrowth of late capitalism's globalisation; that the current heterogeneity in global film culture has emerged from a relatively homogeneous past. Transnational, it is argued, is a term that has not only emerged but expanded, no longer coterminous with niche approaches such as Third Cinema or arthouse, but equally applicable to mainstream genre filmmaking (Burgoyne 2016). *Welcome to Prime-time* is a mainstream genre screenplay, a format often "interpreted primarily as evocative of conformist or mainstream ideologies" (Alvaray 2013, p. 70). Alvaray, among others (e.g. Appadurai 1996, Iwabuchi 2002), attempts to de-centre 'America' in globalisation considerations, arguing that genre filmmaking in Latin America, for instance horror production in Argentina, reveals globalisation as multi-polar:

transnational industrial practices, transcultural film languages and an array of dominant and subaltern ideologies are now understood to be some of the multiple determinants converging on a single film. Many films around the world are evidence of the transgressive power that a genre film may convey.

2013, p. 70

As well as the potential for genre filmmaking to be imprinted as transnational, another aspect that merits consideration relates to my own status as a privileged (i.e. white, heterosexual, middle class, educated male) minority. Mendes and Sundholm suggest transnational approaches bring into focus "the cultural implications of crossing hard and soft borders" (2015, p. 120). My situated practice has commonalities with other transnational filmmakers, but we should be cautious about generalisability. Higbee and Lim note that as a concept, transnational cinema "risks celebrating the supranational flow or transnational exchange of peoples, images and cultures at the expense of the

specific cultural, historical or ideological context in which these exchanges take place” (2010, pp. 11-12). Examples of border crossing examined in some transnational cinema studies include “gradations of whiteness in Latin America” (Dennison 2013, p. 193), actor performances blurring boundaries of race, ethnicity and gender (Peberdy 2014), the restorative nostalgia of desire for an illusory homeland in post-Soviet cinema (Beumers 2010), or the challenges faced by North African filmmakers in France (Higbee and Lim 2010). These are all contexts that have been labelled ‘transnational,’ but they bear little or no relationship to my own first-world to first-world border-crossing experience. Conversely, Rugo’s consideration of ‘hybrid traditions’ in the work of Asghar Farhadi notes that “his work stands the scrutiny of the American cinematic tradition and the issues that inform the West’s transition to modernity, exposed through questions of marriage, self-knowledge and publicness” (2017, p. 9), a comment that is suggestive of parallels with my own thematic concerns in *Welcome to Prime-time*. In short, the caution expressed by Higbee and Lim to pay attention to specificity and context in transnational considerations is valid.

Having noted these caveats, I want to suggest that portrayals of the transnational as a recent phenomenon concur with the early 21<sup>st</sup>-century emergence of non-Japanese participants in Japanese cinema. However, we should note the contrast with Richards (2004), who details the significant contribution to British films over the years of immigrants and sojourners, and so argues for a heterogeneous view of 20<sup>th</sup> century British film production as an amalgam of imported continental talent and “Hollywood narrative drive” (p. 28). This still leads, according to Richards, to a projection of “Britain” and “British” that is “encrusted with myth” (p. 29). Richards argues that the

currency of the term ‘national cinema’ is interrogated not just with regard to an enervation of the concept induced by late 20<sup>th</sup> century globalisation, but also in terms of questioning what degree of validity ‘national cinema’ has ever had as an analytic tool. Higson (2004) echoes this when he invokes Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (2012) notion of ‘invented tradition’ in reference to *Howards End* (1992). He suggests that given the heterogeneity of the funding and staffing of the Merchant-Ivory production, “It makes just as much sense... to read *Howards End* as the product of *invented* tradition, rather than *inherited* tradition” (p. 37). In sum, it is argued that the concept of nation is modern and ambiguous, contingent on what Bhabha terms “the questions of nation as narration” (1994, p. 212), and so it follows that the concept of ‘national cinema’ is at best embryonic and contingent, and as such may be undeserving of the unmarked critical usage some commentators afford it.

Arguably, this destabilisation of the national and ascendancy of the transnational delineates one – but not the only – discursive space within which to consider *Welcome to Prime-time*. If I am to apply the stamp of ‘Japanese film’ to my screenplay, then that stamp arguably brings into focus tensions swirling around invented versus inherited tradition, in particular purity versus hybridity, or perceptions of homogeneity and heterogeneity, in Japanese cinema. The screenwriter is but one consideration among many when determining the ‘nationality’ of a film, but by virtue of my non-Japaneseness, and the privileging of ‘purity’ in defining Japanese identity, it is possible to forecast that the case for *Welcome to Prime-time* as a Japanese text will have to be argued. That is to say, unlike a screenplay written by a Japanese screenwriter, its status as a Japanese text will not be taken for granted. These tensions *Welcome to*

*Prime-time* evokes can be interrogated through the prism of Higson's second, text-based, definition of national cinema.

Higson posits film as both reflective of and complicit in the construction of the national myth both "in the films themselves" and "in the consciousness of the viewer" (p. 36). In considering *Welcome to Prime-time* it is necessary to decouple those two elements. The critique of *Firefly Dreams* (2001) and *Merde* (2008) at the end of this chapter will consider the aspect of "the films themselves." In terms of "the consciousness of the viewer," critical consideration of Japanese screenplays by non-Japanese screenwriters may be marked in terms of their 'Japaneseness.' Bourdieu, in positing language as power, states that "speech presupposes a legitimate transmitter addressing a legitimate receiver, one who is recognised and recognizing" (1977, p. 649). In stating that one is writing a Japanese film, as a non-Japanese, this 'legitimacy' becomes a salient concern. Bourdieu labels full legitimacy 'competence,' noting: "Competence implies the power to impose reception" (p. 648). We can argue that such 'competence' is constructed and undergoes a process of calibration in the consciousness of the viewer of a 'Japanese film' authored by a non-Japanese. By way of example, note how the opening paragraph of Roberts' (2009) review of *Rain Fall* (2009) problematises the film's credentials as a 'Japanese film' by interrogating the 'competence' of Australian writer-director Max Mannix:

How should we approach a film like *Rain Fall*? Here we have an international co-production from Sony Pictures, set in Japan, the cast and dialog are mostly Japanese, eight of the nine producers attached are Japanese, the primary market for the film is evidently Japan, while the original story was penned by

Barry Eisler, an American, then adapted and directed by Max Mannix (co-author of Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Tokyo Sonata*), an Australian. How should we speak about such a film in relation to Japan or, for that matter, any other nation?

This approach mirrors that of Gerow to *Letters from Iwo Jima* cited earlier in this chapter. Thus the dialogue *Welcome to Prime-time* has with Japanese cinema can be considered in terms of two distinct but inevitably intertwined elements: 'the film itself', and 'the consciousness of the viewer.'

Various 'viewers' of a screenplay can be conceptualised from potential backers through to cinema audiences, which Sternberg (1997) categorises into three types of 'reader:' the property reader, the blueprint reader, and the reading stage reader. I choose to define 'reader' and 'viewer' here in the broadest sense, to include script readers and other potential collaborators in the Japanese cinema industry. In terms of these potential viewers, *Welcome to Prime-time*'s relationship with Japanese cinema takes place from a liminal position, the non-Japaneseness of the author marking the film as transnational rather than national. This positioning is explored by Naficy (2001), who suggests that we filmmakers who live and work in overseas settings are not so much sojourners as 'displaced.' The term invokes peripheral positioning, and marginalisation. It is evocative of the refugee, of a journey one has been reluctant to make. As such, it is a label that does not sit comfortably with my own lived experience, a first-world native permanently resident in another first-world culture by choice. However, Naficy posits the transnational as an 'accented cinema,' which he further sub-categorises as exilic, diasporic or ethnic:

[E]xilic cinema is dominated by its focus on there and then in the homeland, diasporic cinema by its vertical relationship to the homeland and by its lateral relationship to the diaspora communities and experiences, and postcolonial and ethnic and identity cinema by the exigencies of life here and now in the country in which filmmakers reside.

p. 15

These three definitions – exilic, diasporic, and ethnic – allow me to calibrate linkages of non-Japanese screenwriters with Japan and their country of origin. Furthermore, they allow me to find linkages for my own creative practice with other displaced writers around the globe, and also note commonality and difference within the category of non-Japanese screenwriters writing Japanese films. The concept of *accented cinema* affords a necessary degree of refinement to considerations not only across, but within the sub-categories of transnational screenwriting.

Furthermore, Naficy plays on Derrida's "valorization of difference" (Appadurai 1996, p. 14), suggesting that 'difference,' so often an excuse used to marginalise and oppress, is in fact to the advantage of the accented cinema practitioner.

[A]ll great authorship is predicated on distance – banishment and exile of sorts – from the larger society. The resulting tensions and ambivalences produce the complexity and the intensity that are so characteristic of great works of art and literature.

p. 12

Concepts such as transnational and accented cinema, by decoupling 'nation' from

'cinema', allow a de-valorisation of privileged insider status. Berghahn and Sternberg argue that migrant and diasporic filmmakers have cross-border appeal "because they are in tune with more than one culture and the expectations of multiple audiences" (2010, p. 40). Jones suggests migration has brought about "a revolution in the way we see ourselves," (2010, p. 290), and film is in the vanguard of that revolution. If we accept that "[i]n the realm of culture, outsidership is a most powerful factor in understanding" (Bakhtin 1986, p. 7) then it follows that historically marginalised and ostracised voices are now being heard, and even privileged. With this in mind I propose Japanese screenplays by non-Japanese be re-claimed from the periphery, and suggest that *Welcome to Prime-time* be considered an *accented Japanese screenplay*.

### **The Accented Japanese Screenplay**

Naficy's argument that difference leads to 'greatness' is a seductive definition of liminality, and clearly one worth aspiring to for the accented Japanese screenplay. In the project of seeing myself as 'other,' the implication of 'other' is always of peripheral positioning, and aberrant voice. However, by privileging outsidership in terms of heightened perspective and understanding, the accented Japanese screenplay is plucked from the margins and re-positioned at the heart of a burgeoning discourse reconfiguring our understanding of 'Japanese cinema.' Holquist notes that "simultaneity of self and other is a contested space, and as such is mediated by politics" (2002, p. 135). Given the very small number of non-Japanese screenwriters writing for Japanese cinema, this 'difference' operates as cultural capital in Japan, in the sense that "any given cultural competence (e.g. being able to read in a world of illiterates) derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction

for its owner” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 245). The process of ‘yielding profits of distinction’ requires conscious strategising by the non-Japanese screenwriter.

Transnational cinema approaches allow us to contest readings of Japanese cinema that privilege ‘purity’, so that being non-Japanese, the very factor that can be used to marginalise, becomes a loaded weapon redeployed as heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism. Such qualities become not only accepted, but also, arguably, required. Globalised, mobile lifestyles and the blurring of boundaries both external and internal, public and private, have led to what Naficy calls new “fears and freedoms” and to “opportunistic identity politics” (2001, p. 269). This notion of difference as a strategy to be utilised for cultural profit, as opportunity, is one I will return to later in consideration of *Welcome to Prime-time* as Japanese cinema.

### **National Cinema: Further Considerations**

I have suggested that national cinema as a social construction has had its inadequacies revealed, and the hybridity and heterogeneity identified in transnational theories such as accented cinema provide a more suitable analytical framework to critically reflect on my own intentions as author of *Welcome to Prime-time*. However, we need to pause at this juncture and note that despite the destabilising critical waves, the concept of national cinema evidences considerable critical traction, as Vitali and Willemen note:

As a rule, books on specific national cinemas acknowledge that it is impossible, or at least difficult, to write film history in terms of national cultural formations, only to proceed to do precisely that. What is swept under the carpet in this way is the question of ‘the national’ in the demarcation of

the objects of study.

2006, p. 3

This observation brings into sharper focus a key issue for my consideration of writing a feature screenplay for the Japanese film industry. While we may posit that notions of Japanese cinema, and indeed the very notions of ‘Japan’ on which they are founded, are in a state of critical destabilisation, we must also acknowledge that in film industry terms, for many practitioners and critics, the notion of a ‘Japanese film’ is current, deep-rooted, and, if not exactly inviolable, at least necessitates consideration.

In the Introduction I considered Japan as a constructed, contested space, formed in discourse for ideological intent. In Bakhtinian terms, Japan is formed in the utterance, as is my concept of self invoked by the first-person pronoun. For Bakhtin, “At the level of performance, in the event of an utterance, the meaning of “I” can always be seen” (Holquist 2002, p. 28). As McKee might note, *Welcome to Prime-time* is a text that anticipates the camera. That anticipation encompasses script negotiation, and it is that event where considerations of identity will inevitably be foregrounded and the meaning of “I” will be seen. In other words, in any script negotiation, “I” has a strong potential to be perceived as “non-Japanese,” and the anticipated salient criteria in the reading of my script by Japanese industry practitioners is how ‘authentically Japanese’ my narrative is. That calibration takes place against a received wisdom of what constitutes a Japanese film. Therefore the accented Japanese screenplay has to consider not only the degree of mythology inherent in the definitions, but also how to negotiate them as practical, industrial concerns during the writing process.

The particularities of that negotiation are revealed in various considerations of Japanese cinema vis-à-vis ‘otherness.’ King’s (2012) *Under Foreign Eyes* is one of the few studies of Japanese-language production by outsiders.<sup>3</sup> He asserts that non-Japanese filmmakers “seek to create a version of the “true” Japan that they will attempt to portray realistically... from the perspective of outsiders” (p. 1), a statement that some might apply to my creative practice. King evaluates each film in terms of the greater or lesser degree of Orientalism they display. For example, *Firefly Dreams* and *Tokyo Eyes* (1998) are praised because they “demonstrate the abilities of their *gaijin* [‘foreigner’] directors to work convincingly with Japanese casts” (p. 254). Ridley Scott’s *Black Rain* (1989) garners respect as it “presents the American-Japanese binary in a... convincing manner, suggesting as it does that the West’s values are sometimes corrupt next to Japanese ones” (p. 182). However, *Wasabi* (2001) is condemned because “the film never attempts to harness and thus focus its use of Japan in any serious way” (p. 268).

King’s analysis is not without merit, but is ultimately problematic in two interrelated senses. First of all, like Hirano, he assumes a monolithic, homogeneous West fixing its gaze on a desired East with various degrees of avarice. All the Western filmmakers are generically labelled ‘*gaijin*,’ with no account given of their differing affiliations to and investments in Japan, be it temporal, emotional, linguistic or intellectual; or exilic, diasporic or ethnic (Naficy 2001). He ignores the heterogeneity, discordances and clashing narratives that compete to be heard *within* West and East, as well as *between* them.

The second problem is that King seems unaware of the paradox he creates by setting himself up as worthy to judge, despite being a *gaijin* himself. This contradiction is revealed in his conclusion:

Japan remains a conundrum to the West. This is how it should be. Many of the directors whose work is studied in this book realize that Japan may invite their creative attention but that it must always remain a separate entity. Only when differences are respected can the West learn and appreciate the East. In the end, the West can adapt Japan, but Japan can never be adopted.

p. 287

King is echoing the position of 1990s Japanese filmmakers, noted by Gerow, as asserting the “basic, ineluctable difference” (2002, p. 6) of ‘the other.’ The boundaries that King assumes are inviolable here, the implication that a univocal ‘Japan’ exists and can be internalised by a Japanese filmmaker but will always be external to non-Japanese, further defines the strain of discourse that *Welcome to Prime-time* must negotiate in Japanese cinema.

### **The ‘Other’ in Japanese Cinema**

King’s analysis of *gaijin* representing Japan on film posits Westerners as Other to an essentialised and unknowable Japan. Ko (2006) offers a complementary commentary in her consideration of how ‘outsiders’ are represented within the diegesis of Japanese cinema. She considers a process of othering of non-Japanese in the films of Takashi Miike and his peers. She utilises Morris-Suzuki’s (1997) term “cosmetic multiculturalism,” a definition of multiculturalism only rendered visible in Japan when

it conforms to prevailing norms, which, as such, lacks substance. Referring to the on-screen representation of foreigners in Japanese films, Morris-Suzuki states: “Positioned in Japanese culture as ‘objects’, these ‘other’ cultures are acknowledged only to the extent that they are to be seen, enjoyed, spoken of and consumed” (1997, p. 186).

Ko’s commentary is on Japanese cinema, but resonates with a wider social reality. I have intimated that the boundaries in Japan between Japanese and ‘other’ are relatively hard and impermeable. This is noted by various commentators in a variety of social arenas. Borrowed lexical items in Japanese have their own alphabet – katakana – and Gottlieb (2005) suggests that coding outsidership in the written form of the language means orthographic boundary markers are emblematic of processes that invent the tradition of Japan as homogeneous or ‘pure.’ Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) note that “all invented traditions... use history as a legitimator of actions and cement of group cohesion” (p. 12), and in Japan, one discourse of history selected to narrate the nation is resistance to the corrupting or hegemonic forces of the West (see Sakamoto 1996, Smith 1997, Kerr 2002, Vickers 2002,). For Sakamoto, this “maintains the fiction of pure Japaneseness in the clearly demarcated realm of the ‘spirit’ as opposed to the superficial realm of ‘technology’” (1996, p. 114). That demarcation, in various iterations, arguably remains intact in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly in the discursive arena of *Nihonjinron*, where essentialised notions of a unique Japanese ‘spirit’ are reified and renewed (Befu 2001) along the lines of racial homogeneity (Shipper 2008, Weiner 2009). *Nihonjinron* ideology urges a ‘pure’ Japan in full awareness of the various diverse populations, both ancient and recently imported, that inhabit Japan (Lie 2004).

For any creative practitioner in transnational cinema the degree of tolerance and inclusivity implicit in the narration of nation in the adopted homeland defines a discourse that is unavoidable. As such, this broad canvas of discourse of ‘Japaneseness’ current in Japanese society constitutes a site of struggle with regard to the particularities of non-Japanese participation in Japanese cinema. In King’s consideration of non-Japanese representations of ‘Japan’ in cinema, and Ko’s consideration of representations of non-Japanese in Japanese cinema diegeses, the common factor is the marginalisation, the tenuous ‘competence’ of the non-Japanese presence in an ostensibly Japanese text.

### ***Welcome to Prime-time as a National and Transnational Text***

For my own creative practice, the notion of ‘competence’ as defined above becomes key. I consider *Welcome to Prime-time* to be both Japanese and transnational, one of the “tensions and aporias” (Ponzanesi and Waller 2012, p. 12) that inevitably arise in writing an accented Japanese screenplay. If *Welcome to Prime-time* is to claim a position in Japanese cinema discourse that avoids the objectification processes revealed by King and Ko, a strategic act of transgression is required. Clearly, transgression in this context means testing the limits of what it means to be Japanese. Jenks (2003) states: “Limit finds meaning through the utter fragility of its being having been exposed, and transgression finds meaning through the revelation of its imminent exhaustion” (p. 90). The episteme of Japanese cinema as the exclusive domain of Japanese practitioners has, I would suggest, had its limits exposed by the recent rash of 21<sup>st</sup> century films outlined in the Introduction, and with which *Welcome to Prime-time* shares many

commonalities. These challenges are not unique to Japanese cinema. As Levi-Strauss shows, they are but iterations of larger concerns in cultural contact:

The paradox is irresoluble. The less one culture communicates with another, the less likely they are to be corrupted, one by the other; but, on the other hand, the less likely it is, in such conditions, that the respective emissaries of these cultures will be able to seize the richness and significance of their diversity.

1961, p. 45

If the flurry of Japanese-language films by non-Japanese screenwriters is indeed a rupture, a new Japanese particular within a global perspective, then *Welcome to Prime-time* positions itself, self-aware, at the heart of this discursive awakening.

To this point I have explored boundaries of ‘Japaneseness’ and peripheral positioning for non-Japanese. And yet, paradoxically, while crossing those boundaries from the outside, *Welcome to Prime-time* simultaneously lays claim to a central positioning as a mainstream genre script. *Welcome to Prime-time* is a screenplay with the clear genre stamp of a romantic comedy, dealing with contemporary Japanese themes that include masculinity in crisis, family dissolution, and female emancipation, and will hopefully attract A-list cast and have broad, mainstream appeal. This contextualisation of the project as both marginal and centered, as a text that both challenges and inhabits Japanese cinema, can only be understood dialogically. There is a double-voicedness to the script, a skein of heteroglossia, “another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 324), which allows me to defer, delay or even be duplicitous about the nature of *Welcome to*

*Prime-time*. Smith, referring to the fact that the Japanese term for foreigner, *gaijin*, literally means ‘outside person,’ notes that for foreigners, “It is one’s first notice that life in Japan will consist of a series of acceptances and rejections” (1997, p. 44). Within a dialogic framework, those acceptances and rejections do not have to be passively encountered, but actively negotiated, re-conceptualised and utilised. Naficy’s ‘opportunistic identity politics’ is at play here. As Bakhtin states:

[T]he word is the most sensitive index of social changes, and what is more of changes still in the process of growth, still without definitive shape and not as yet accommodated into already regularized and fully defined ideological systems.

1994, p. 54

What Bakhtin labels “the word,” I appropriate to mean “screenplay.” Bakhtin presents heteroglossia not as tension, not as cognitive dissonance, but as play, as an awareness held in check and deployed in pragmatic terms when and as needed. Elsaesser, acknowledging the criticisms of national cinema in a consideration of European cinema, surely has Bakhtin in mind when he asserts, “[h]ow important it is to keep all [European Cinema’s] possibilities – comic, tragic and utopian, but also duplicitous, disguised and flamboyantly displayed – persistently in play” (2005, p. 20).

I contend that it is this Bakhtinian notion of ‘all possibilities, persistently in play’ that encapsulates *Welcome to Prime-time*’s positioning within the discursive site of Japanese cinema. The project functions as a mainstream Japanese genre piece with elements common to thematically similar films, and also brings new and added perspective to

Japanese cinema from a previously marginalised discourse by virtue of its non-Japanese author.

*Tokyo Sonata* illustrates how the collaborative authorship of a film can lead to a distortion of the screenwriter's intentions. It also reveals representations of 'Japan' as a probable site of conflict for accented Japanese screenplays. In this context, I will now consider two accented Japanese screenplays that illustrate the various dialogues it is possible for non-Japanese screenwriters to have with Japanese cinema. The critiques reveal the complexity and fluidity that is both inherent and required in readings of accented Japanese screenplays with regard to the national-transnational considerations in the cinema of Japan. This suggests pathways to engagement with Japanese cinema in my own screenwriting.

### ***Firefly Dreams* (2001) and *Merde* (2008)**

Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *Cafe Lumiere* (2003) is an explicit homage to Ozu's *Tokyo Story*.<sup>4</sup> Shochiku, Ozu's old studio, commissioned the film as a commemoration of Ozu's centenary. In its opening images utilising Ozu motifs of trains and laundry, knee-high camera positioning and ample use of pillow shots, the film lovingly recreates the Ozu aesthetic in contemporary times. *Firefly Dreams*, by Welsh writer-director John Williams, was not commissioned as a tribute to Ozu, but in many ways functions as one in its mimetic thematic concerns with family breakdown, and shot flow in sequences that appropriate the Ozu aesthetic.<sup>5</sup>

*Firefly Dreams* sees the protagonist, teenage rebel Naomi, sent to work at her aunt's

country inn after her parents' marriage collapses. Naomi has to look after her elderly relative, Mrs. Koide, a former actress who gives teasing glimpses of her past life as she slips into dementia. Naomi's curiosity grows, and as she begins to explore Mrs. Koide's past and share her own present, a genuine bond is formed.

This sort of family melodrama connotes Ozu's main concerns. Richie notes that "though Ozu creates a world that is the family in one or another of its varied aspects, his focus is on its dissolution" (1977, p. 2). Within this overarching theme, very little that is odd or unnatural takes place:

The conventionality of the events in an Ozu film is even by Japanese standards extreme. Marriage and death are the only conclusions permitted in many of the later pictures, and the appreciations or misunderstandings that mark the progress toward the conclusion are usually unexceptional. Truisms abound, as do both coincidence and the obvious, and Ozu's manner and method match his material. He never attempts to unsettle.

p. 19

This progression of the unexceptional is how the narrative of *Firefly Dreams* proceeds. In the country, Naomi meets a boy, and gives herself to him. However, she is rejected soon after, a moment offered up as her gaze onto the boy across the street with another girl. The boy does not see her, there is no meeting of eyes, and the boy is never engaged with again. Naomi finds her younger, mentally diminished cousin bothersome at first, but slowly warms to her. In Mrs. Koide's ramblings, she finds a similar tale of young love and rejection, from the director who made the film Mrs. Koide starred in as a young woman (*Among the Fireflies*). The narrative climaxes in a death off-screen,

presented in the “quiet and contemplative” style of Ozu, where “sometimes we learn of important narrative events only after they have occurred” (Bordwell and Thompson 2004, p. 433). Just as the death of the grandmother in *Tokyo Story* takes place between scenes, the death of Naomi’s father – possibly by suicide, we cannot be sure – occurs off-screen. Naomi’s aunt takes a phone call, she drops a glass, and then we cut to a wide shot of Naomi and family dressed in black funeral garb. We are then presented with a series of pillow shots, camera locked down, of mountains, rivers, trees and clouds. When we return to Naomi, the funeral has been over for some time and she is back in her street fashion. There are no tears, and close ups are eschewed. Bordwell and Thompson state of this style: “Key narrative events are deemphasized by means of ellipses, whereas narrative events that we do see in the plot are simple and understated” (2004, p. 434). The final sequence of *Firefly Dreams* is one such moment. Mrs. Koide, too, has passed, and Naomi is back in the big city, looking for a VHS of Mrs. Koide’s film. She finally finds it at a flea market. At home, she plays the tape, and a younger, beautiful, black-and-white version of Mrs. Koide appears on screen, surrounded by long, wavy grass, looking over her shoulder and through the screen directly at Naomi. There is no dialogue.

In its mimetic evocation of Ozu, *Firefly Dreams* is both confident and self-aware in centering itself at the heart of Japanese national cinema discourse. It would be a mistake to label this film ‘homage,’ as the term implies outsider status and respect given from a deferential position. Fluent in Japanese and resident in the country for almost three decades, Williams’ Japanese credentials carry more weight than a slavish facsimile of the Ozu style.<sup>6</sup> The *MidnightEye* review of the film calls the nationality of the director

“a moot point,”<sup>7</sup> before going on to list the ‘pure’ Japanese films that *Firefly Dreams* can be categorised with:

The past few years in Japan have seen quite a run of dramas featuring rebellious, directionless teenage girls, running from Masato Harada's *Bounce KoGals* (1997), to Ryuichi Hiroki's *Tokyo Trash Baby* (Tokyo Gomi Onna, 2000) and Kaze Shindo's *Love/Juice* (2000). *Firefly Dreams*, with its grounding in the "rite of passage" genre also sits neatly alongside the recent strain of films (Makoto Shinozaki's *Not Forgotten / Wasurerarenu Hitobito*, for example) that contrast this lost generation with their older counterparts to suggest just how far the offspring of Japan's 1980s bubble economy have totally lost touch with their roots.

Sharp 2001

Arguably, an unadulterated viewing of *Firefly Dreams* that did not include the credit roll would give no clue as to the non-Japanese elements collaborating in authorship of the text. By writing a script dealing with perennial themes in Japanese cinema, and employing a mise-en-scene and shot flow that evokes the most Japanese of Japanese films, screenwriter John Williams stakes a claim for inclusion in the category of culturally competent practitioner in the discursive arena of Japanese cinema.

While Williams opts for mimesis, Leos Carax's *Merde* segment in the triptych *Tokyo!* adopts provocation as its stance towards Japan and Japanese cinema. In *Merde*, a monstrous *gaijin* creature living in the sewers of Tokyo emerges periodically to terrorise its citizens. In an opening segment presented against the Godzilla theme tune, the creature smashes through Ginza streets stealing cigarettes, spitting in prams, eating flowers and money, and flattening bystanders.

In his *New York Times* review, Denis Lim (2009) notes that the other two segments of *Tokyo!* are rather respectful in the outsider gaze they settle on Japan, but Carax opts “to play the bad boy and insult his hosts.” The comment is made tongue-in-cheek, because there is more going on in *Merde* than simple provocation – though that is present, too. In court, the monster declares he does not like human beings, and among human beings, finds the Japanese the most despicable of all.

Whereas in *Firefly Dreams* the non-Japaneseness of the author is not prominently featured, Carax’s ‘otherness’ is always front and centre in *Merde*. The antagonism of the *gaijin* monster to the citizenry of Japan is symbolic of Carax and his text. This multi-layering, which keeps ‘the other’ and its consequences a central concern of the narrative, means that “[u]ltimately, the character proves to be more of an orientalised threat than a tangible entity, reflecting the spectral realities and fictions of terror and its portrayals in the media” (Rizvi 2014, p. 125). After each attack by the creature we have a news report on the government “tightening immigration.” When the creature is captured, reprisals take place against random foreigners in Tokyo with similar physical features.

*Merde* invokes Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque to function as a Menippean satire on Japanese national cinema:

Very characteristic for the menippea are scandal scenes, eccentric behavior, inappropriate speeches and performances, that is, all sorts of violations of the

generally accepted and customary course of events and the established norms of behavior and etiquette, including manners of speech.

Bakhtin 1994, p. 191

In *Merde* the ‘scandal scenes’ include a hand-grenade attack on Shibuya citizens, scandalous not just because of the indiscriminate nature of the assault, but by virtue of the fact that the bombs used are taken from a WWII Japanese Imperial Army arms cache found in the sewers. The ‘eccentric behaviour’ includes eating only chrysanthemums; also scandalous as this flower is the symbol of Japan’s imperial household. The creature’s ‘inappropriate performances’ include being captured naked, confounding the media taboo in Japan on pubic hair (Napier 2001), while breaches of etiquette include the creature declaring in court that Japanese eyes are disgusting because they are shaped like “women’s sex.” Finally, manners of speech are violated by the creature speaking a unique, and auditorily unpleasant, language.

For Bakhtin, Menippean satire utilises these features “for the provoking and testing of a philosophical idea, a discourse, a *truth*, embodied in the image of a wise man, the seeker of this truth” [original emphasis] (1994, p. 189). The truth that Carax seeks to test in *Merde*, through his creature as seeker of that truth, is not self-evident. Lim sees it as “a xenophobic attack on Japanese xenophobia.” There is some credibility to this, and multi-layering and self-awareness inherent in this interpretation is in keeping with the Menippean satirical concept, which retains a tension between various genres:

The presence of inserted genres reinforces the multi-styled and multi-toned nature of the menippea: what is coalescing here is a new relationship to the

word as the material of literature, a relationship characteristic for the entire dialogic line of development in artistic prose.

1994, p. 192

This hybridity, this polyvocal combining, pervades *Merde*, because while the film squarely confronts nationalism and racism in their Japanese guises, it also utilises the tropes of *Godzilla* and other *kaiju* movies, and ends with a clear reference to Oshima's film *Death by Hanging* (1968). These nods to two quite different icons of Japanese cinema, respectfully if not reverentially done, complicate the provocation of the diegesis, obfuscating the ultimate message of the film. *Merde* is a Japanese film, self-aware of its relational aspect to the canon, which confronts Japaneseness through the avowed outsider gaze that Carax claims for himself. If *Firefly Dreams* can be interpreted as Williams' attempt to bolster his Japanese credentials through dialogue with Ozu, the same analysis could be applied to Carax by virtue of his dialogue with Oshima. Ostensibly, the two texts occupy opposite ends of the continuum of dialogue with Japanese national cinema, mimesis and provocation, but a closer reading suggests the gap may not be as wide as it first appears.

### **Implications for My Creative Practice**

This exploration of how the mythology of 'Japanese national cinema' and 'Japaneseness' are constructed brings me to the realisation that the engagement of the *accented Japanese screenplay* with national cinema in its Japanese iteration is inevitable, and best conceptualised dialogically, in terms of Bakhtin's double-voiced discourse, "an intention on the part of the author to make use of someone else's discourse in the direction of its own particular aspirations" (1994, p. 106), where a clash of ideas

through proximity and conflict is not resolved, but in the very act of clashing defines the discursive moment. However, 'defines' may be an inappropriate term, as double-voicedness concerns 'endless becoming,' a lack of stasis that is necessary for definition to take place.

Bakhtin allows us to see how non-Japanese screenwriters, in engaging with Japanese cinema, position their writing at a point on a continuum that stretches from mimesis at one extreme, to Menippean satire at the other. A textual consideration of contemporary Japanese films by non-Japanese screenwriters informs the writing of *Welcome to Prime-time* by illustrating the possible relationships the screenplay can have with Japanese national cinema. One can pay homage to the strictures of Japanese cinema, or one can flagrantly defy them, or occupy a position somewhere between those two extremes. However, what may in practical terms be impossible is to behave as if one is outside of, or immune to, 'Japanese cinema.' No matter how much one may avow such a theoretical positioning, the position ascribed will draw author and text ineluctably into a relationship with 'Japanese cinema.' This is the dialogic inevitability I engage with in writing a Japanese screenplay. Heteroglossia presents this multiplicity of ostensibly conflicting positions not as an oppressive ideology fettering an idealised freedom and authenticity. The polyvocal, multilayered act, or rather the realisation of the nature of that act, is not to be viewed as a corruption of any 'pure authenticity' (as conventionally understood), but instead is to be celebrated as the polyphonous event that it is.

When considering the screenplay at the centre of this PhD, then, it becomes clear that a plethora of strategic positionings can be claimed for *Welcome to Prime-time* and my

intentions to explore various themes and concerns relevant to contemporary Japanese society and emblematic of Japanese cinema. As I have shown, family dissolution is a central concern of Japanese cinema. I confront those concerns directly through the male protagonist of my screenplay, Ron, a single father raising two daughters. I explore masculinity in crisis in contemporary Japan through the storyline of potential infidelity by Ron's wife Haruka on the night she died. Through the storyline of how family commitments hamper his contributions to work, which means he faces ostracism and possible redundancy, I examine tensions relevant to many Japanese men. In his home, I intend to show how Ron maintains delicate relationships across generations with his mother-in-law, and two daughters.

The texts that these themes resonate with include *Tokyo Sonata*, discussed in Chapter Two, the story of a patriarch who loses his job, and in the process struggles to relate to his two sons, and becomes estranged from his wife. He conceals his unemployment from his family, a concern with loss of face that mirrors Hiroshi Abe's Ryota in *Still Walking* (2008). Ryota is on a visit to his parents in the country, and is at pains to make sure his new wife does not reveal his recent unemployment. This is what Standish labels "masculinity beset" (2000, p. 189). Noting the self-sacrifice of Japanese men that built the post-war 'economic miracle,' she states, "The conditions of work in an advanced industrial society reduce most men to a state of dependency and powerlessness. This is in some sense compensated for in the family through the role of household head as provider" (p. 161). My protagonist, Ron Suzuki, negotiates dependency and powerlessness through the narrative in that he becomes reliant on the female protagonist, Michiko, babysitting his children so he can secretly work overtime. His moment of

powerlessness comes when he is swept up in (and ultimately abused by) the media machine. How he learns to overcome powerlessness is the arc of his story.

When considering *Babel* in Chapter One, I noted the tensions evoked by applying the universals of screenplay craft when depicting ‘the other.’ The themes of *Welcome to Prime-time* are explored in the particularities of a contemporary Japanese setting, but in a way that can be universally understood, for reasons both artistic and commercial:

Topicality is elusive and conjectural, but it cannot be ignored, especially when it comes to films designed for the commercial marketplace, where the topical is a significant attraction, a source of pleasure and a reminder of the ties that link the screen to the discourses that circulate in and comprise the public sphere.

Waller 2006, p. 44

As a Japanese text, the intertextual references of *Welcome to Prime-time* will be clear for Japanese audiences. The problems that beset Ron Suzuki are familiar to the protagonists of *Tokyo Sonata* and *Still Walking*. Simultaneously, as a text within transnational cinema, the concerns of my protagonist with regard to work and family resonate with the protagonists of *The Full Monty* (1997) and *Billy Elliot* (2000). In this way, the screenplay can be read as occupying the inbetween space of the national-transnational.

Japanese details and universal concerns also inform the themes that concern the female protagonist, Michiko. The ‘parasite single’ concept is interrogated through Michiko’s narrative journey. That journey also problematises ‘Japaneseness,’ when it is revealed

that Michiko, by virtue of her American ex-husband, has an American passport. Her decision to reclaim her Japanese passport opens up a space to consider Japaneseness, belonging and displacement. As outlined in the Introduction, there is a strand of public discourse in contemporary Japan that sees the current malaise, including a perilously low birthrate, as a distillation of the pure Japanese spirit. 'Family' in Japan is under threat and the emancipated young Japanese woman forsaking marriage and child-raising for career and conspicuous consumption is, so the argument goes, a major factor in that decline. Some see these women as by-products of globalisation, and Michiko's taint of Americanness is symbolised by her US passport. When she re-claims her Japanese passport, I intend the moment to be not a reversion to a mythical past, but laying claim to a progressive future.

In this consideration of *Welcome to Prime-time*'s textual relationship with national and transnational cinema, I have relied on Bakhtinian analysis to make sense of the multi-faceted, one might say ostensibly contradictory positioning of the screenplay within this discursive site. This analysis circumvents the East/West binaries that can fetter such conceptualisations. By virtue of my own investment in terms of time, language and belonging in Japan, I problematise the dominance of binary approaches, and instead favour a heteroglossia model that foregrounds Naficy's 'opportunistic identity politics,' and strategically for the screenplay, draws on Elsaesser's notion of 'keeping all in play.' However, the difficulty of this challenge is captured by Shepherd:

Bakhtinian textual analysis, if predicated on a proper, thorough understanding of dialogism and the utterance, offers possibilities of working 'from the inside out' in such a way that the very difficulties of 'active understanding' can

become a means of making explicit the conditions of possibility of that understanding and past understandings of the text – that is, of grasping the untenability, celebrated time and again by Bakhtin, of a too stark opposition of ‘inside’ and ‘outside,’ ‘text’ and ‘context’ so often initially challenged but ultimately reinstated by other theorists of reading.

1989, p. 105

The understanding that one is writing from both inside and outside Japan, that is, as a competent practitioner writing for Japanese cinema, and a Westerner representing Japan through an ‘outside’ gaze, has enriched the screenplay, as the methodology of seeing the ‘self’ as ‘other’ involves offering an empathetic vision of difference and diversity, placing oneself in the role of the other. As I have written *Welcome to Prime-time* as a creative practice research artefact, not only is the Japanese ‘other’ conceptualised in relation to the accented screenwriter self, but also my ability to frame Japanese identity after extended immersion in the community comes into sharp focus. This awareness leads to the necessary engagement of the next chapter, where I will further explore the complexity of writing a Japanese screenplay as both an insider and outsider in negotiation with ideas of Orientalism.

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<sup>1</sup> See Wilson (2009).

<sup>2</sup> See Heffelfinger and Wright (2011) for a detailed comparison of related terminology and methodologies including ‘intercultural,’ ‘postcolonial,’ ‘global,’ ‘accented’ and ‘third cinema’.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that King’s canvas is broader than just Japanese-language production, encompassing over sixty cinematic representations of Japan.

<sup>4</sup> See Vasudevan (2016) for a consideration of *Café Lumière* as a transnational hybrid, incorporating not only homage, but a dialogue between Japan and Taiwan, and the aesthetics of Ozu and Hou.

<sup>5</sup> See Bordwell (1988) for a detailed critique of Ozu.

<sup>6</sup> Arguably, the one trope that marks *Firefly Dreams* as transnational is the use of a lone acoustic guitar for the non-diegetic soundtrack. It hints at a hybridity that emerges more fully-formed in Williams’ subsequent features. Lewis Carroll is playfully evoked in *Starfish Hotel* (2006), in which a salaryman

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protagonist named ‘Arisu’ (Alice) follows a giant rabbit into a nightmarish world centering on a club called Wonderland. *Sado Tempest* (2012), set in a dystopian future on the island of Sado and featuring contemporary Japanese rock music, is marketed as ‘a radical reworking of *The Tempest*.’ At the time of writing, Williams is in post-production on another adaptation of the Western canon, a version of Kafka’s *The Trial* set in contemporary Japan.

<sup>7</sup> The review slightly contradicts itself later when it labels *Firefly Dreams* “an *ostensibly* Japanese film” (emphasis added).

## CHAPTER FOUR: Authenticity and Orientalism

### Introduction

What does it mean to write a Japanese screenplay *as a Westerner*? Developing the considerations in Chapters Two and Three on, respectively, my screenwriting intentions, and the issues surrounding notions of a Japanese screenplay, in this chapter I foreground my non-Japaneseness and how it impacts on my intention to write a mainstream screenplay that appeals to both domestic and international audiences. I suggest that a non-Japanese screenwriter representing Japan and the Japanese invites readings through the lens of Orientalism, which I re-visit and problematise through a process of writing my screenplay ‘authentically.’ I construct my definition of authenticity in terms of reflective authenticity, a reflective act committed to a project. I argue that the notion of a ‘pure’ Japanese text contrasted with an Orientalist text is a false dichotomy, as Orientalist cinema texts are produced by both the Western and Japanese imagination. I then consider how accented Japanese screenplays can be read with regard to Orientalism through a consideration of *Like Someone in Love* (2012, written and directed by Abbas Kiarostami) and *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* (2009, written and directed by Isabel Coixet).

The tensions evoked in my consideration of ‘authentically’ writing an ‘Orientalist’ screen text are exemplified by a previous experience of writing a Japanese screenplay. During script development of my short film *The Errand* (2006), the Japanese director wrote a director’s draft. This included introducing a new character at the end of Act II, a *chinpira*, a thuggish yakuza foot soldier. I felt this character was overblown, bringing

comedy to a scene that should instead be dark and foreboding. The director and producer accepted my argument, but there was a problem: the contract with the actor had been signed, and he was extremely specialised. Playing *chinpira* was all he did. The compromise was that the character stayed, but with all his dialogue removed.

Because of this *chinpira* character, I asked the director to share the writing credit, but in the end I was given sole credit for the screenplay. The film achieved good exposure on the festival circuit and won some awards. However, at a film festival in Tokyo, the director and I took part in a post-screening Q&A with the audience, and one man asked why I had written a *chinpira* character. Foreigners always write stories about Japan with *yakuza*, he complained, and it is stereotypical and unrealistic.

That audience question, similar in many ways to the experiences of Max Mannix writing *Tokyo Sonata*, led me to ponder potential erroneous ascriptions to my screenplay that readers and audiences might make on the basis of my ‘outsider’ status. As much as I might avow ‘belonging’ with regard to Japan, there is always some degree of awareness that I am writing ‘the other’ when I write about Japan and the Japanese. I see myself as both insider and outsider with regard to Japan, and anticipate and try to identify such reactions in potential collaborators. In short, an integral part of writing as ‘a Japanese’ is continually feeling that I have to justify that assertion, especially as I intend to depict Japan ‘authentically.’ The notion of being situated both inside and outside is one I explore thematically in *Welcome to Prime-time*, an aspect of my creative practice arguably affected by the theoretical considerations of this chapter.

Authenticity is a contentious issue, any consideration of which has to take place within the context of creative-practice/academic-industrial tensions, discussions of which are threaded throughout this PhD. A conceptualisation of authenticity in terms of plausibility for an imagined Japanese audience would be reductive and utilitarian, and critically untenable. However, equally untenable is a declaration that because an authentic text does not exist, all texts are equally inauthentic. The film festival episode has import in terms of my own awareness of writing Japan while being perceived as “non-Japanese,” and finding a quality in my characters and stories that satisfies my own desire to represent Japan in a way that challenges readers and audiences to re-consider, and perhaps look beyond historical interpretations of Westerners representing Japan purely in terms of whether the writing exhibits greater or lesser Orientalist tendencies (e.g. Marchetti 1993, Shibusawa 2006, King 2012). This is a notion of authenticity as a personal project, but also contains awareness of the social aspect of creative practice. *Welcome to Prime-time* might be labelled an Orientalist text, and categorised and critiqued with regard to other Orientalist screenplays. It is that intertextuality that makes authenticity in this particular context social as well as personal. Through a consideration of various theoretical approaches to authenticity and Orientalism, a conceptualisation of authenticity that negotiates that duality will be outlined in this chapter. By taking a dialogic approach to these issues, I hope to complicate existing notions of both authenticity and Orientalism, leading to a discussion in Chapter Five of how *Welcome to Prime-time* is performative of these theoretical concerns.

### **Authenticity**

When accented, diasporic or displaced filmmakers deal with issues of marginality or

liminality in their screenplays, there is a temptation for textual analysis to conflate the positioning of the filmmaker with the themes explored in the narrative. Consider, for example, the comments below by Heffelfinger and Wright on displaced Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta:

[I]t is quite possible to read *Water* as Mehta's metafictional commentary on her own displacements: the film is haunted by a desire, by protagonist and filmmaker, to return to an inaccessible home.

2011, p. 164.

With this comment in mind, I realise that it is possible to read *Welcome to Prime-time* as an exploration of the 'inaccessibility of home.' My protagonists, Ron and Michiko, are marginalised with regard to 'home' in their own way. Ron is marginalised at work and in society by virtue of being a single father. Michiko has career ambitions in the patriarchal world of television. Both could be seen as outsiders, and as such can be read as avatars for an exploration of my own outsider positioning. Heffelfinger and Wright's (2011) studies of NRI (non-resident Indian) filmmakers Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta reveal what readings might be privileged when the work of an accented or displaced filmmaker is under consideration within transnational cinema. Noting that authenticity is "a highly contested term" (p. 5), they suggest "the supposed authenticity of female Indian filmmakers... is complicated by their status as non-resident Indians" (p. 18). Heffelfinger and Wright suggest that not only non-residency, but also issues of gender, class and privilege complicate "the authority of the outsider filmmaker to speak 'truth'" (p. 167). In their consideration of Mehta's trilogy *Fire* (1996), *Earth* (1998) and *Water* (2005), they note how "her provocative feminist narratives strive to articulate the

liminal, in Homi Bhabha's sense, a space that is at once co-opted by various audiences as alternatively transnational, universal, or inauthentic" (pp. 151-2). Heffelfinger and Wright allude to the complexity and at times contradictory nature of these readings. As such, this highlights an issue for my own creative practice, namely the tension evoked by my intention to write a story that is locally authentic but also has universal appeal:

Within the context of Mehta's status as a transnational filmmaker... there appears to be a necessary tension between the need to be "authentically" Indian and "universally" acceptable, and it would seem... neither position is attainable. To be authentic would mean to be male, to be Hindu, and to live in India; to be universal would be to undermine the specific religious, gendered, political and national frameworks that Mehta's work so assiduously interrogates.

pp. 153-4

Some might argue that, analogous to my own position writing a Japanese screenplay as a non-Japanese, to be authentic would mean to be Japanese, born and raised in Japan, speaking Japanese as a native tongue; to be universal would be to offer an outsider gaze on notions of gender, family, work and relationships in Japan in my screenwriting.

Heffelfinger and Wright help bring into focus questions of authenticity, intention and displacement in screenwriting. My intention to write *Welcome to Prime-time* as an 'authentic' text gives rise to two questions: How is authenticity to be defined in this context? And, relatedly, authentic for whom? Clearly, the concept of authenticity itself is problematised in this discussion: historically, the concept is infused with ambiguity and contradiction. For Trilling, authenticity consists largely of being true to one self,

though he suggests a consideration of the history of the concept of ‘self’ involves “dealing with shadows in a dark land” (1972, p. 54). Vannini and Williams, while acknowledging that authenticity is socially constructed, nevertheless find merit in “studying how authenticity is made meaningful, rather than a quest for finding the meaning of authenticity” (2009, p. 13). This notion of authenticity as located in process, rather than as endowed with fixity, is key. Vannini and Williams see authenticity emerging from a dialectical relationship of the self with society. Guignon agrees, noting that an authentic life does not just concentrate on the improvement of the self, but adds to the aggregate social good. He rejects a purely subjectivist definition, where intense, passionate individuals are labeled ‘authentic’ regardless of the object of that intensity and passion. Authenticity lies in the social, not the personal:

We need to see that our identity-conferring identifications are drawn from, and are answerable to, the shared historical commitments and ideals that make up our communal life-world. What imparts authoritative force to our decisions and commitments is not the wholeheartedness of the commitment, important as that may be, but rather the authority of the cultural traditions and social practices that form the shared background of intelligibility for our beliefs, commitments, feelings and decisions.

2004, p. 155

A claim to authenticity, then, must carry authority. I suggest that *Welcome to Prime-time* is an authoritative text based on the cultural capital my subject positioning carries, as an integrated member of Japanese society, and as a writer committed to depicting the lived experience I share with other members of Japanese society. However, other commentators feel that claim is itself problematic:

By pushing to the limit the self-examination of knowledge production in relation to the Other, postmodern critical ethnography has radically put into question not only the position of the analyzing subject, equipped with the latest knowledge of theory and critical methodologies, but also those of the expert subject and the “radical European [or American] humanist conscience” that claim to know the Other based on the authenticity of experience and self-claimed deep understanding of the Other’s culture.

Yoshimoto 1993, p. 342

A claim for *Welcome to Prime-time* as an authentic text would fall foul of Yoshimoto’s critique. However, I suggest that this exegesis offers evidence of an authentic process in the writing of the screenplay. The reflexive practice methodology that incubates the conception of the screenplay avoids an essentialist notion of the author-self, by imposing a critical awareness of the limits on “the project of the self” (Giddens 1991, p. 5). This is a process Ferrara conceptualises as *reflective authenticity*:

The concept of “reflective authenticity” offers the advantage of connecting and keeping in balance, in ways that competitors such as “difference” have difficulty to match, the two distinct aspects of the relation that the self entertains with itself: namely, the *cognitive* moment of that relation, oriented towards knowing something about oneself, and the *practical* moment of that relation, oriented towards committing oneself to something.

2009, p. 27

Guignon sees this process as “motivated less by a concern with making than with finding, less by calling forth than being called” (2004, p. 167). This resonates with the compulsion to write discussed in Chapter Two. Just as there is a perhaps indefinable but clearly discernable compulsion to write, the ‘call’ to write *authentically* requires response, a “rational and emotional response to life in a world perceived to be deeply

inauthentic” (Vannini & Williams 2009, p. 10). The inauthenticity that I perceive in screenwriting practice exists in the substitutability (Appadurai 1996, p. 31) exhibited by *Babel*, where the assumed universalism of story, filtered through mainstream screenwriting tropes, leads to a depiction of a Japanese particular that is ‘deeply inauthentic,’ and a ‘performance of Americanness.’ However, Yoshimoto argues that a more fundamental challenge lies within the process of representation itself. He suggests that “constructing the Other as the sole bearer of difference” with regard to the self is fundamentally problematic, because “The Other cannot be misrepresented, since it is always already a misrepresentation” (1993, p. 353).

As Yoshimoto implies, an authentic *product* is unattainable, which is why Guignon stresses *process*. Arguably, practice-led research offers one site for an authentic screenwriting process to take place. Guignon suggests authenticity arises from social interaction, a shared project in search of a greater truth, a definition that has overlaps with the process of writing the ‘knowing screenplay,’ where “*thinking through the screenplay* as a research endeavour, one can open up possibilities of writing for the screen that are *different*” [original emphasis] (Batty et al. 2016, p. 151). In taking on the challenge, framed by Heffelfinger and Wright, of attempting to reconcile the authentic and universal, I engage in a process where meaning is constructed dialogically:

[D]ialogue always implies the simultaneous existence of manifold possibilities, a smaller number of values, and the need for choice. At all the possible levels of conflict between stasis and change, there is always a situated subject whose specific place is defined precisely by its inbetween-ness. To be responsible for the site we occupy in the space of nature and the time of history is a mandate we cannot avoid – in the ongoing

and open event of history we have no alibi.

Holquist 2002, p. 181

With regard to my screenwriting practice, considering that my self-imposed mandate is to write authentically, the previous chapters show that my ‘inbetween-ness’ is defined in dialogue with Japanese cinema, with other accented Japanese screenplays, and with notions of screenwriting itself. But ultimately, in considering ‘authentic for whom,’ the only legitimate answer is, ‘for myself.’ In considering how I will write ‘the other’ in my screenplay, I become “an object for my own perception” (Holquist 2002, p. 28). By writing this story through a process of critical reflection in practice-led research, I am in dialogue with myself. This is what it means to say *Welcome to Prime-time* has been written as a ‘knowing screenplay’ (Batty et al. 2015), a concept that draws on Gibson’s definition of knowing as “a state of being imbued with some illumination, blessed with the ability to see into a mystery, to dispel the ignorance [and] an after-effect of understanding” (2010, p. 4). For the self as relational, writing authentically means achieving this state, with audience and critical reception secondary, if not insignificant, concerns.

The claims for *Welcome to Prime-time* as a relatively authentic text need to be critiqued with regard to some of the “manifold possibilities” Holquist mentions. Foremost among these is the inevitable ascription applied to the screenplay, namely the label of Orientalist text. The next section offers a critical consideration of this context.

## **Orientalism Re-considered**

In the Introduction, I noted that any discussion of a non-Japanese screenwriter writing a Japanese language screenplay invites considerations with regard to Orientalism. As a practitioner researcher positioned both within and outside Japanese cinema discourse, I experience the ‘othering’ of Japan on a personal, visceral level, but also have moments where I inhabit the role of the Western screenwriter tempted to insert an iconic or heightened representation of Japan into characterisation or action for narrative, and thus ideological, purpose. This double-voiced discourse, “the presence of two differently-oriented speech acts inhabiting the same words” (Bakhtin 1994, p. 13), requires dialogic understanding, as key in these moments is self-awareness on two levels: awareness of the double-voicedness of the self writing an accented Japanese screenplay, and awareness that the depiction of an Orientalised Japan is not merely a Western imposition, but emerges from multi-polar sites including within Japan itself.

Some commentators (e.g. King 2012) might suggest that the very act of writing Japan and the Japanese in my screenplay could be read as a presumptuous addition to a perfidious tradition. However, it is important to note that certain factors complicate Orientalism, and question any monolithic, unitary notion of the concept. One factor is moments of resistance and contradiction within Orientalist texts themselves. A second factor is texts that reveal the Japanese as self-Orientalists.

With regard to the former, Marchetti, in a comparison of *Shanghai Express* (1932) and *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933), states:

Perhaps one reason for the staying power of these narratives can be found in their ability to voice resistance, to allow for at least a moment the possibility that women may be right to demand independent thought and action, that other races may not be inferior, that other ways of life may have a right to exist. Here, the historical circumstances that shaped Hollywood discourses on Asia during the depression seem to determine the nature and force of this resistance to the white, male, middle class norm, as well as the violence with which this whispered opposition is eventually hushed.

1993, p. 66

Like Bernstein, who suggests Orientalist texts “sustain a measure of ideological contrition and incoherence” (1997, p. 11), Marchetti sees other complexities, inconsistencies and contradictions, such as the proliferation of Eurasian characters in the silent era (1993, p. 68), liminal individuals embodying the ambivalence of the Orientalist project. In a similar vein, the death of *Madame Butterfly* can be read as a triumph of Western values, or an indictment of Western immorality (p. 81). With many of these texts situated during the time of the Motion Picture Production Codes, some argue the mere representation of romantic miscegenation is notable for foregrounding racial intolerance and blurring difference (Shohat 1990). Ultimately, however, Marchetti suggests that puritanical, heteronormative moulds remain intact as resistance “is devoured by the Hollywood absolutes of heterosexual romantic love, the sanctity of marriage, and the middle-class, male-dominated domicile” (1993, p. 160).

Modern day productions, unfettered by production code concerns and self-aware in their Orientalist engagement, might be expected to characterise intercultural contact with verisimilitude and ascribe agency to Japanese characters. However, various films continue to facilitate a Western gaze onto Japan that constructs ‘Japan’ in order to reify

the West. *Silk* (2007), labeled “vacuous, arid and terminally dull” by Todd McCarthy (2007) in *Variety*, concerns the journey of a young French trader to Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, where he meets the concubine of a local baron. Despite the linguistic, geographic and cultural barrier, a romance ensues, for no other reason than, according to Roger Ebert (2007), “the movie’s blatant exoticism.” A narrative centered on a vapid monolingual Japanese trader arriving in a European town where Keira Knightley, on sight, wants to go off with him, would be patently absurd, and yet *Silk* clearly expects its audience to go along with the notion that a Japanese woman would want to elope with the first white man who shows up. According to Marchetti, “When set in Asia, the romantic hero functions as a white knight who rescues the non-white heroine from the excesses of her own culture while “finding” himself through the exotic sexual liaison” (1993, p. 109). In *Silk*, the signifiers of Asian setting and white male protagonist scaffold a legitimising system of knowledge for such a storyline.

*Japanese Story* (2003) ostensibly subverts these tropes by having a Japanese male travel to the West (Australia), and form a sexual liaison with a white woman. However, the narrative ultimately succumbs to Orientalist forces: having experienced a sexual encounter with a white woman, the Japanese man learns to undo his top shirt button and free himself from automaton salaryman drudgery, only to be punished by death for his racial transgression.

*Silk* and *Japanese Story* are examples of trenchant Orientalist practices in 21<sup>st</sup> century cinematic texts. The West is given voice and agency in both films, while the East is merely spoken about and done to:

Without significant exception, the universalizing discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world. There is incorporation; there is inclusion; there is direct rule; there is coercion. But there is only infrequently an acknowledgement that the colonized people should be heard from, their ideas known.

Said 1994, p. 50

In sum, Orientalism, historically and contemporaneously, allows the West to construct the East in a manner that benefits its own ideological agenda. For my own screenwriting practice, if we assume for a moment that my position is that of outsider, then there is a danger that I can be codified as a Westerner constructing Japan for my own ends – in other words, participating in an Orientalist project. Heffelfinger and Wright in their consideration of Deepa Mehta note that the tendency to foreground filmmaker as ‘outsider’ and narrative as ‘inauthentic’ is heightened when the portrayal of India is negative (2011, p. 167). The critique of social issues I write in *Welcome to Prime-time* could be perceived as negative, and thus expose the screenplay to potential charges of inauthenticity and Orientalism.

However, this argument is complicated by the fact that Orientalist representations of Japan come not only from outsider, but also insider positionings. Just as it is possible to view the history of cinematic relations between Japan and the West in terms of cross-fertilisation rather than dominance and assimilation,<sup>1</sup> similarly, with regard to Orientalist practices, it is too simplistic to cast Japan in the role of passively co-opted victim, as I will discuss in the next section.

## **Japanese Orientalism**

Smith notes that “‘Japan’ has long been an act of the imagination among the Japanese, too, and to call some Japanese Orientalists is to stretch the term but slightly” (1997, pp. 9-10). Sakamoto considers prominent discursive activities extant in early Meiji Japan that contributed to the creation of a social imaginary of ‘Japan’ and ‘the Japanese’ (1996, p. 113). She argues that Yukichi Fukuzawa’s work, heavily influential in Meiji Japan’s path of rapid Westernisation, can be considered a form of hybridity because it creates a Japanese identity influenced, but not dominated by, the West. She focuses on a typological and temporal difference, showing how Fukuzawa subverted the former and asserted the latter, meaning Japan could become ‘civilised’ like the West merely by ‘catching up.’ The Orientalist notion of the West as inherently civilised (and the East inherently non-civilised), is thereby complicated. Crucially, she challenges Bhabha’s claim that hybridity elides difference by pointing out that Japan’s adoption of a hybrid ‘civilised’ identity could only be achieved through creation of another ‘other,’ an inferior ‘Asia’ that Japan stood apart from and above.<sup>2</sup> Iwabuchi suggests this continues in modern times as “Japanese connections with ‘Asia’ are tenaciously pervaded by a perceived temporal lag between Japan and the rest of Asia” (2002, pp. 21-22). Based on the dominance that Fukuzawa’s doctrine of Japanese superiority over Asia achieved, Sakamoto concludes that “to ‘go beyond’ one dichotomy without creating yet another dichotomy may not be an easy project” (p. 126).

## **Japanese Orientalism in Domestic Cinema**

Conceptualising Orientalism as a discourse similarly situated both ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ Japan casts a new hue on creative and ethical choices made while writing *Welcome to*

*Prime-time.* As various commentators note (discussed below), self-Orientalising tendencies in representations of Japan and the Japanese can be detected in domestic cinema texts. Furthermore, depictions of ‘the other’ in Japanese cinema show traces of Sakamoto’s notion that Japanese hybridity exists through domination and co-option of an Asian other.

One example of self-Orientalism in Japan is what Davis (2001) calls “auto-orientalism” in Takeshi Kitano’s *Hana-Bi* (1997). Davis agrees with Stuart Hall that “globalization intensifies rather than attenuates national cultural identities” (p. 62). He talks of “changing historiographical paradigms” (p. 66) that Japanese cinema needs to evolve and adapt to: “One such paradigm is globalization and transnational cultures, in which national specificities jostle, catalyze, and “thicken” without eclipsing or canceling one another out and without synthesizing into some new postnational order” (p. 66). Exploring how *Hana-Bi* makes use of iconic Japanese imagery, Davis considers Kitano himself as a site of multi-signification, differentiated as provocative TV comedian and film festival director, but in addition a director more linked aesthetically to Quentin Tarantino and Guy Ritchie than Japanese directors established in the *yakuza* genre, such as Fukasaku Kinji (p. 71). He argues that in *Hana-Bi* Kitano’s utilisation of Japan iconography such as cherry blossoms, Mount Fuji, and Zen temples, is conscious and strategic, deployed in full awareness of his own transnational positioning and an evolving intertextual relationship with British and American gangster films. Kitano, he suggests, offers up familiar signifiers in an overt appeal along lines of ‘Japaneseness’ for the international audience. *Hana-bi* is about a former police officer who borrows money from the yakuza to take his terminally ill wife on a sightseeing tour of Japan, a

tour they both know will end in death. Davis, possibly invoking *Madame Butterfly* tropes of sacrifice, notes that Kitano is on record as saying the narrative focus on a dying female character is what legitimises the use of such sentimental images, an argument he finds problematic:

Kitano sells Japanese tradition, the icons of “Japaneseness,” by selling out gender. The “blatantly stereotypical Asian look” (epitomized by samurai films) that Kitano claims to hate is here domesticated, made palatable to a global market, by feminizing it. This is Orientalism at its most stark.

Davis 2001, p. 72

For Davis, Kitano “represents himself in mutually incompatible, even incomprehensible, dual registers” (p. 74). An Orientalist Japan may be a fabrication, but it is one in which the Japanese participate and evolve for ideological ends of their own.

The second issue, imbricated with the first, is the representation of ‘other’ in Japanese cinema. Sakamoto argues that Fukuzawa constructed ‘Asia’ as an inferior other in order to valorise Japaneseness. Ko (2010) suggests that internal others, namely Okinawans, mixed race Japanese, and ethnic Koreans are invoked in Japanese cinema to fulfill a similar function. She argues that the presence of ‘the other’ in contemporary Japanese cinema masks “the oppressive reality hidden underneath the seemingly progressive discourse of multiculturalism and its collusion with contemporary Japanese nationalism” (p. 26). Like Davis, she sees pernicious intent in the overtly Orientalist images of *Hana-Bi*, observing that “the project of aestheticizing Japan as a subtle and fragile place may be detected” (p. 49). In a consideration of the films of Takashi Miike, where mixed

race characters proliferate, Ko suggests that pollution of national identity is very much foregrounded:

In *Dead or Alive* as well as in Miike's other films – such as *Shinjuku Triad Society*, which contains mixed-race characters – 'mixed raceness' is presented as an erosion of the boundaries of Japaneseness or, in other words, as a 'contamination' of Japanese blood.

p. 59

Mixed heritage characters serve to bring into focus the notion of Japanese identity as a restriction, a glimpse of a transgressive Japanese identity that is ultimately impossible (so the narrative concludes) to realise for the 'pure' Japanese protagonists.<sup>3</sup> Okinawa, meanwhile, becomes "a space where Japanese nostalgia for its own pre-modernity may be projected" (p. 87), and in *All Under the Moon* (1993), a hybrid Japanese-Korean identity is given carnivalesque treatment that "mocks the dogmatism and fanaticism of existing *zainichi*-related discourses" (p. 151). The connecting thread is Japanese identity as an oppression from which the characters wish to escape, but inevitably fail. Because of that failure, the hard boundaries and 'purity' of Japanese identity are reinforced:

In a sense, contemporary Japanese cinema accommodates the desire for recognition from ethnic minority groups by including them in films. However, it often does so without unduly disrupting the dominant structure of Japaneseness, since 'others' merely provide a spectacle of differences or become pleasurable objects of consumption.

p. 172<sup>4</sup>

As I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, this notion of problematising Japaneseness

through invocation of an internal ‘other’ is utilised in *Welcome to Prime-time* in various ways, including gendered representations. My male protagonist Ron has the role of domestic caregiver thrust upon him. With regard to my female protagonist, Michiko, Jacey suggests that a screenplay has one of four feminine superthemes, which “reflects your conscious and unconscious attitudes about women and gender and shapes all your narrative choices” (2010, p. 5). As a Japanese woman with a full-time career working in a patriarchal industry in Japan, a country notoriously lagging behind in the area of gender equality,<sup>5</sup> Michiko very much embodies the “Fighting femininity” supertheme, and in the narrative battles sexism, patriarchy, misogyny and the “backward attitudes” of “cruel control freaks” (p. 13) both male and female, at work and at home, as well as in the wider culture. By ‘othering’ my protagonists in this way, I am consciously drawing on tropes that both ‘outsiders,’ and the Japanese themselves, have used to represent Japan.

I discussed Heffelfinger and Wright at the beginning of this chapter to show that themes of marginalisation and liminality in the narrative can be read as evidence of the outsider positioning of the filmmaker. Anticipating such a positioning being ascribed to my own screenwriting in the context of Japan means negotiating ascriptions of Orientalism to my screenwriting practice. However, by showing that Orientalist practices also emerge from inside Japanese cinema as well as outside, I intend to complicate any ascription of my position as ‘outsider,’ and strengthen my claims for *Welcome to Prime-time* as an ‘authentic’ Japanese text.

Orientalism is revealed as a discourse invoked by the Japanese themselves, and

historically, as a method of hegemonic control by Westerners. This leads to the question: by writing a screenplay that will become a Japanese film, which allows Japanese characters to speak in their own language, can the accented Japanese screenplay complicate this discourse? I will address this question through a consideration of two accented Japanese screenplays, *Like Someone in Love* (2012) and *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* (2009).

**Orientalism and the Accented Japanese Screenplay: *Like Someone in Love* (2012) and *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* (2009)**

Both the West and the Japanese utilise ‘the other’ for imperialist and/or cosmetic multiculturalism purposes. In terms of my own creative practice, the question that comes into focus is what dialogic relationship the accented Japanese screenplay has with this definition of Orientalism. The accented Japanese screenplay, I suggest, cannot escape a consideration in terms of a Japanese/non-Japanese dichotomy in popular and critical readings. As a screenwriter anticipating those readings, I must consider critical questions including: Is the accented Japanese screenplay a break with hegemonic practices and a more critically and thoughtfully engaged representation of Japan and the Japanese? Or is the use of Japanese language simply a veneer of ‘authenticity’ coating trenchant Orientalist tropes?

The answer, of course, is that, dialogically, both are possible. The former case is exemplified by *Firefly Dreams* and *Merde* (see Chapter Three). However, the latter case is evident in *Like Someone in Love* and *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo*. In the Introduction I noted how ‘universal’ notions of a well-crafted scene trump considerations of

authentic social interaction in the climactic scene of the Japanese segment of *Babel* (2006). The Japanese storyline exhibits this uneasy imposition of universalism throughout. The teenagers drink whisky and take Ecstasy, decidedly Western takes on juvenile delinquency that are incongruous in the Japanese setting. Chieko kisses her dentist during a check-up, an important action in her characterisation as a sexually troubled teenager, but also a visually inauthentic moment for Japanese audiences as the scene ignores the fact that all dentists in Japan wear surgical masks.

An assumption of an easily transportable universal narrative also underpins and problematises *Like Someone in Love* (2012). Weber, in a consideration of Kiarostami's "Neo-Orientalism" (2013, p. 98), suggests that while there is a distinctly Persian aesthetic in the director's work, it exists to "suggest the similarities between his characters and a universal everyman" (p. 103). This doubling of characters as both particularly Iranian and also archetypes "flies in the face of Orientalism which insists on difference and racial stereotyping" (p. 103). Indeed, in an interview with the *Village Voice*<sup>6</sup> Kiarostami states: "I consider cinema a universal language, and I consider human beings as universal beings... so there's no reason why people should not be able to relate to a film, or we shouldn't be able to make films, in different languages and different cultures than our own." Kiarostami wishes to circumvent cultural specificity, but this is difficult to reconcile with the heightened sexual representation of the female lead character in *Like Someone in Love*: a teenage prostitute. Perhaps the intention is to invoke the Orientalist stereotype in order to interrogate it, but as the narrative arguably offers no evidence of such an interrogation, the characterisation invites a reading of the film as another outsider construct offering up the sexualised Asian woman for overseas

consumption.

Chamarette (2013) also questions the notion of universalism in relation to Kiarostami. She highlights scholarship that detects a Persian aesthetic in Kiarostami's cinema (p. 260), and questions the validity of a universally understood performance in a consideration of the director's 2004 installation *Looking at Tazeih*. She takes issue with commentators who see universal emotional responses achieved only through the condition of spectacle: "Simply put: European audiences cannot possibly participate knowingly in the affective and cultural logic of the performance" (p. 262). Kiarostami, an Iranian director primarily financed from France making incursions into the national cinemas and landscapes of Italy and Japan, probes the very vocabulary we use to talk about cinema in terms of the national. When Chamarette asserts that Kiarostami's art and films "appear to recognize the incommensurable gap between looking as an Iranian and looking from the perspective of the European, high-brow cultural environments" (p. 269), one response is to agree with the indeterminacy, the constant modes of becoming, displacements and evolutions that are being brought into play. Yet another response is to wonder if, by ignoring difference, diversity and disagreement within the categories 'Persian' and 'European,' another binary is being invoked through an essentialised Persianness.<sup>7</sup> Considering *Like Someone in Love* as one of Kiarostami's "on-going cultural interventions with the moving image" (p. 269), we are being asked to engage with an auteurist perspective on the text as representative of a distinctive, in some ways essentially Persian perspective on a universally understood story. The quandary of the transnational in dialogic relation with Japanese cinema is exemplified by *Like Someone in Love*, in that there seems no way to reconcile readings of such a text that make it

quintessentially Persian, universally accessible, and fundamentally Orientalist. However, one might suggest that that irrevocability is the defining element of a transnational text.

Arguably, this irrevocability is the privileged reading of another accented Japanese screenplay, *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo*. Kim suggests that Ryu, the female protagonist of Isabel Coixet's film, "serves to invent a new prototype of Japanese women detached from stereotypical submissiveness and docility" (2014, p. 287). Calling the text "enticingly Orientalist" (p. 287), Kim suggests that Coixet's characterisation of Ryu invokes the exotic to update and re-invent it, "a new type of exoticism that no longer has an ideological slant but is a necessary sentiment in our time for global, yet existentially isolated souls to feel free and consoled" (p. 288). Kim concedes that the opacity with regard to Ryu's motivations and background somewhat attenuates this argument, meaning she functions primarily as a *femme fatale*. As an assassin, Kim argues, she is stripped of stereotypical Asian "submissiveness and docility" (p. 287), but lacking any connectivity or resonance with the social, economic or cultural reality of the modern-day Japan setting, she is represented as "a shadowy, enigmatic Asian woman with a strong will, concocted in the mind of a European feminist" (p. 291).

Kim qualifies her criticism of the text by asserting that Ryu signifies a "feminist Orientalism... She is not exoticized but embodies the exotic that allows for change" (p. 297). Unfortunately, this reading relies on accepting the argument that "the notion of the exotic rooted in cultural difference has become nearly irrelevant" (p. 296), a position that is fatally undermined by the trenchant invocation of exotica in texts such as *Silk*, *Japanese Story*, and *Tokyo Fiancée* (2014). Kim also seems to contradict her own

suggestion that *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* codes the exotic as irrelevant when she states: “Ryu’s primary function is that of a cultural mediator as well as guide for the Western viewer with curiosities. It is through her that the viewer is allowed to learn about cultural practices and attitudes not easily accessible and comprehensible” (p. 292).

The statement gives rise to various tensions. It is worth noting the complete absence of any consideration for a Japanese, or any other non-Western audience. Ryu is a Japanese character crafted by a European screenwriter. Kim suggests that through Ryu “[t]he viewer also learns about the different attitude the Japanese hold towards death” (p. 293), but what we actually have is a representation of those attitudes skewed through the mediating prism of the European screenwriter. Thus a bereaved Japanese father keeps a photo of his family on his office desk - an imported Western practice that is alien to the Japanese workplace. The unnamed narrator, a middle-aged Japanese man, reveals his failure to get to know lead female Ryu in any way, stating he never asked her such “important” questions as “Have you read *War and Peace*?” and “Do you believe in God?” The questions seem odd in the Japanese setting, and there is nothing in the characterisation that hints at why a Japanese middle-aged man would prioritise questions from the Western literary canon and Abrahamic religions. The same narrator visits graves on a Sunday, a marking of the Christian Sabbath that is unfamiliar in Japan.

Just as *Babel* invokes a tension between Hollywood screenwriting practices and Japanese social behavior, I would suggest *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* offers another

lesson for my own creative practice, in the confusion it exhibits in the details of existential crisis as experienced by Europeans and Japanese. Notwithstanding the slightly surreal tone the film intermittently employs, this seeping through of a Western undercoat to the layer of the Japanese narrative is problematic. Like the Persian aesthetic of *Like Someone in Love*, these moments allude to the irrevocable tensions of the transnational in the context of Japan when the screenplay has not emerged from a process that carries the authority that authenticity requires.

Another aspect of the Orientalism inherent in *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* and *Like Someone in Love* derives from the mediated cinematic representations of the city. Just as Ko says Japanese filmmakers invoke ‘the other’ to provide a “spectacle of difference” (p. 172) on a broader canvas of cosmetic multiculturalism, Coixet offers up Tokyo as “a city endowed with memories, with a multidimensional reality as it feels and reacts to the characters’ emotions and at the same time tells its own stories” (Urios-Aparisi 2014, p. 110). Those memories are cinematic. Barber notes how Tokyo’s “vast sensory domain” (2002, p. 153) has been productively mined by domestic cinema in such texts as Suzuki Seijun’s *Tokyo Drifter* (1966) and Toshio Matsumoto’s *Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969), texts which mediated the city invitingly to non-Japanese audiences and filmmakers. Chris Marker in *Sunless* (1983) and Tarkovsky in *Solaris* (1972) “imposed European preoccupations on Tokyo’s visual surfaces and allowed Tokyo to function as an unwilling, deviant screen for the reflection into Europe of insights into sex, memory and death within the urban arena” (pp. 107-8). But ‘imposition’ is a less apt term than ‘cross-fertilisation’: Matsumoto’s film apparently influenced Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), but was itself influenced by the novels of Jean Genet (Barber 2002).

At the heart of these tensions is the frequency with which Tokyo is portrayed as preeminently futuristic and postmodern, “a transnational space that looks alienating and threatening with its... glittering neon signs” (Wu 2008, p. 172). In his consideration of Yoshimitsu Morita’s *The Family Game* (1983), Gerow notes contemporary Japanese critics prevaricated over whether the film was critiquing or embracing postmodernism, because “the issue of its own interpretation is anticipated or even doubled by its own thematic foregrounding of the problems of interpretation, if not signification itself” (2007, p. 243). Against this background, we could argue that Kiarostami and Coixet are not reading Tokyo anew, but that *Like Someone in Love* and *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* are iterative in their dialogue with *The Family Game*, a film that “posits a playfulness beyond its textuality... [that is] one possible way of coping with postmodern Japan” (p. 249). Morita, according to some Japanese critics, achieves this through presenting a simulacrum of family (Gerow 2007, p. 241). The European auteurs, however, arguably achieve the same playfulness through cosmetic multiculturalism, a conscious strategy akin to Kitano’s in *Hana-bi* of invoking the Orientalist trope to bring into focus the process of signification itself. This self-referential, self-aware invocation means the text constructs a ‘mediascape’ or ‘ideoscape’ (Appadurai 1990), where Tokyo and Japan are overtly commodified, ideologised, and aesthetised:

The lines between the 'realistic' and the fictional landscapes [audiences] see are blurred, so that the further away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct 'imagined worlds' which are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other 'imagined world.'

Appadurai 1990, p. 299

The question this brings to the fore for my writing of *Welcome to Prime-time* is this: Can an exploration of universal human experience through a cinematic representation of Japan only be achieved by foregrounding and problematising signification itself? Is that the cinematic legacy Ridley Scott (*Blade Runner*, 1982), Seijun Suzuki (*Tokyo Drifter*, 1966), Andrei Tarkovsky (*Solaris*, 1972) and Wim Wenders (*Tokyo Ga*, 1985) have conspired to leave us with? Instead of this artifice of Tokyo as a postmodern everywhere/anywhere, can a more authentic narrative of Japan be achieved? As my analyses of *Babel*, *Like Someone in Love* and *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* have highlighted, the mere eschewing of the hegemonic trope of English dialogue and utilisation of Japanese language is not enough to overcome an engagement with Japan on Western terms that are historically problematic. The siren call of Orientalism can prove fatally seductive, and as *Babel* reveals, an over-reliance on 'universal' screenwriting practices can prove corrosive in terms of an authentic representation of cultural particulars.

By virtue of the involvement of the Western screenwriter, the accented Japanese screenplay can never, in some circles, fully escape the ascription of inauthenticity. Of course, this is an authenticity measured in terms of an essentialised Japaneseness, a trite

comparison of passport nationality and a reification of experience from birth that automatically assigns a superior creativity and insight to that of the ‘insider.’ While the quintessential Britishness of a text such as *Sense and Sensibility* viewed as heritage cinema is in no way seen to be compromised by the fact that the director, Ang Lee, is Taiwanese, the same criteria do not apply to the accented Japanese screenplay because, as discussed in Chapter Three, no discourse of purity and homogeneity in the current and historical national population exists to the same extent in the UK as it does in Japan. The potential for the accented Japanese screenplay to re-cast considerations of the Orientalist text is encapsulated by *Firefly Dreams* and *Merde*. These texts, self-aware in their dialogue with Japanese cinema, show that ‘opportunistic identity politics’ that operationalise inbetween-ness can, through the accented Japanese screenplay, offer something both familiar and new.

Holquist states that “Dialogism is a way of looking at things that always insists on the presence of the other, on the inescapable necessity of outsideness and unfinalizability” (2002, p. 195). In *Firefly Dreams* Williams writes from an insider positioning. Carax, in *Merde*, takes an avowed outsider positioning. Both screenwriters observe the insistence on the presence of the other, as commented by Holquist, and in this way their stories emerge from an authentic process and tell a universal tale. By contrast, Coixet and Kiarostami feign to be ‘inside’ and try to tell a universal tale, but paradoxically alienate the Japanese audience and draw attention to their own (non-Japanese) particularity. As a creative practitioner writing an accented Japanese screenplay, I am disbarred from falling back on lazy invocation of unitary national myths, and must squarely face the other, make salient my inbetween-ness, and through this process of critical reflection on

my creative practice endeavour to write a screenplay that will be both authentic to Japanese audiences and tell a universally resonant story.

### **Conclusion: Authenticity, Orientalism and *Welcome to Prime-time***

Authenticity emerges as a social process, engaged in from a position of authority, aware of tension between stasis and change. Yoshimoto's suggestion of the impossibility of an essentialised authentic product is persuasive, which is why a process of reflective authenticity must be stressed. I argue that this process, exhibited through this PhD, means *Welcome to Prime-time* does not impose universal screenwriting practices to the detriment of accurate portrayal of Japanese social interaction. It does not posit Japan as a postmodern dystopia for exploration of European angst. Unlike *Hana-bi*, it does not invoke self-Orientalising tropes. Instead, it explores a story with universal resonance inhabited by characters given voice and agency: A young woman facing dilemmas as domestic and professional pressures begin to mount; a father who is a widower struggling with work-life balance in a modern, late capitalist society. The screenplay considers our ever-more mediated lives and the consequences of the expansion of public space and enervated private lives. It does this through applying screenwriting craft to a romantic comedy genre film, not at the expense of the Japanese setting, but through a careful imbrication of craft with local knowledge, which I will detail in the next chapter.

I have argued that Japanese characters given voice but merely speaking Japanese in order to 'perform Americanness' is, at best, a Pyrrhic victory. Through a depiction of the socioeconomic and sociocultural realities of contemporary Japan allied to considerate application of screenplay craft, *Welcome to Prime-time* is intended to

display a level of reflective authenticity that pays attention to the particulars of the society and characters it depicts, while achieving an emotional resonance with audiences both domestic and international.

In this consideration of what ‘authenticity’ can be achieved by *Welcome to Prime-time*, a final comment on emotional response to the narrative is required. This is because while a critical consideration of authenticity skewers towards anticipating an intellectual response, it is important to recall that *Welcome to Prime-time* as a mainstream romantic comedy aims to connect emotionally with audiences. Tensions inherent in creative practitioner research have been discussed, but I note similar tensions between the academic and the creative inform the notion of writing authentically:

Our feelings for cinema should be like those during an eclipse or when we see a close-up of the sun... or the same fascination I felt as a child when I looked through a telescope and saw the mountains and craters of the moon, or those instances of special intensity in a piece of music, when suddenly you hear something so startling that it rails against the most basic rules you are accustomed to. I remain in awe when I think back on those moments. Academia stifles cinema, encircling it like a liana vine wraps around a tree, smothering and draining away all life. Construct films, don't deconstruct them. Create poetry, don't destroy it.

Werner Herzog, cited in Cronin 2014, pp. 177-8

A full endorsement of Herzog's views in the context of an academic exegesis would be disingenuous, perhaps even reckless. However, his comment, echoing those of Andrew about the potential of cinema to cross borders and “quicken the heart” (2010, p. 86), resonates with my own intentions, and encapsulates the search for poetry that

screenwriting can be. It is relevant to my own creative practice because it touches on the emotion that is invoked not just in the external audience being written for, but also in that first audience, the self. Writing authentically means striving for that insight, that poetry, that emotion, in full awareness that an authentic product may be an unattainable dream. However, the process of reflective authenticity is one which I undertake in full awareness that in my screenplay I am representing the lived experience of Japanese from a position of authority, while also participating in various cinematic and social discourses that exist within the transnational space.

*(Welcome to Prime-time, the screenplay, is intended to be read here)*

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<sup>1</sup> Iwabuchi suggests globalisation takes place in “multiple and multilayered ways” (2002, p. 210). We see this in cinema in the two-way flow between contemporary Hollywood and Japan. Re-makes of Japanese films such as *Shall We Dance* (1996) or *The Ring* (1998) garner attention in social discourse, but less attention is paid to Japanese re-makes of Hollywood films. For instance, *Sideways* (2004) and *Unforgiven* (1992) were remade in Japan, as, respectively, *Saidoweizu* (2009) and *Yuresarezaru Mono* (2013). Certainly the exchange is unequal, but Iwabuchi’s point on globalisation as multi-polar and de-centered should be noted. The indebtedness of *Star Wars* (1977) to Akira Kurosawa’s *The Hidden Fortress* (1958) is a matter of record (see Kaminski 2008), a prominent example of a historical symbiosis. Andrew, for example, suggests that success at European film festivals in the 1950s for Japanese filmmakers like Mizoguchi and Kurosawa helped “enlarge the sensibility of humans everywhere, letting Westerners comprehend the world... from within the feeling-structure of the Japanese” (2010, p. 73).

<sup>2</sup> We should note contemporaneous commentators took an ideologically opposed view, Kakuzo Okakura notably declaring in *The Ideals of the East* that “Asia is one” (1903, p. 1).

<sup>3</sup> As mentioned earlier, in Japanese social discourse, people of mixed heritage are referred to as *hafu*, 「ハーフ」 a derivation of the English ‘half.’ By way of contrast, anyone wishing to assert that they are not ‘half’ but have two Japanese parents will say that they are *junsuina nihonjin*, 「純粋な日本人」, literally “a pure Japanese.”

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<sup>4</sup> We can see a contemporary iteration of this in Toho's *Shin-Godzilla* (2016). Satomi Ishihara plays Kayoko Ann Paterson, a US Special Envoy dispatched to Japan during the monster crisis. The character is a second-generation Japanese, a comic figure designed to highlight the 'Japaneseness' of her male counterparts in the Japanese government. Like Bryan Cranston's random code-switching to Japanese in Hollywood's *Godzilla* (2014), Kayoko's sudden switches to English are bizarre and sociolinguistically aberrant.

<sup>5</sup> In the Global Gender Gap Index (2015) produced by the World Economic Forum, Japan ranked 101 of 145 countries. See Japan. *World Economic Forum* [online]. Available from: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2015/economies/#economy=JPN> [Accessed 10 October 2016].

<sup>6</sup> See Hynes (2013).

<sup>7</sup> See Rugo (2017) for a discussion of how the work of Asghar Farhadi is suggesting re-alignments and re-interpretations of Persian cinema.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Critical Reflection on the Writing of *Welcome to Prime-time*

Critically reflecting on my creative practice, I find myself faced with the paradox of attempting to stamp meaning on a process that I have suggested is one of meaning constantly deferred. Holquist notes that “dialogism’s primary thrust is always in the direction of historical and social specificity” (2002, p. 32). As the preceding chapters reveal, the creative practitioner self is not static but active, constantly in dialogue with such notions as ‘authorship,’ ‘agency,’ ‘intentionality,’ ‘mainstream screenwriting practice,’ ‘national cinema,’ ‘transnational cinema,’ ‘Orientalism’ and ‘authenticity.’ This is a question of the performativity of address, where “nothing means anything until it achieves a response” (p. 48). In Chapter One I suggested my responsibility in this project should be defined thus: “the self is answerable *to*... the environment,” and “responsible *for*... authorship of its responses” (Holquist 2002, p. 168). I argued that in practice-led research the dialogue between artefact and exegesis is free-flowing and ongoing. In this chapter, to highlight the historical and social specificity of my creative practice, I will freeze-frame one aspect of that performative address in order to reveal how the theoretical considerations explored in previous chapters have informed crucial moments in the writing of *Welcome to Prime-time*, making visible in detail the imprint considerations that creativity, craft and theory have had on the process of bringing the screenplay to fruition.

My intention has been to write *Welcome to Prime-time* as both a viable screenplay for mainstream Japanese cinema and a research artefact exploring new territory in transnational screenwriting. Furthermore, by choosing to write an academic screenplay

(Batty and McAulay 2016) through practice-led research, I have also explored my own positionings and identity as a transnational screenwriter. As previously discussed, *Welcome to Prime-time* embodies tensions between claims for sole authorship and authorial contribution, national and transnational cinema, and complicates notions of ‘authentic’ and Orientalist representation. The central concern has been representing Japan and the Japanese, and exploring, problematising and reflecting on the application of Hollywood screenwriting craft considerations to that representation. Yoshimoto (2006) notes that mediation informs all representation, therefore it is flawed to talk of ‘misrepresentation.’ However, this idea is complicated by my intention to make my screenplay ‘authentic,’ defined as a social undertaking, a process of creative practice that means I write for myself and impose order on my narration of Japan and the Japanese in a way that is realistic with regard to the authority I claim from extended integration in Japanese society, and for the first audience: myself. That ‘authenticity’ is intended to resonate with anticipated but unknowable future readers of the screenplay. This is the process of ‘talking back’ to the considerations in this exegesis, culminating in the document presented here, and in this final chapter.

First of all, I outline my approach to the process of turning an English-language screenplay into a Japanese screen work. My awareness of future collaborations on this process provide a particular example of my creative practice that adds to the research on how screenwriters in transnational settings write for foreign-language cinema. Next, as discussed in Chapter Three, I consider *Welcome to Prime-time* in terms of mimesis and provocation, framed within the context of the national cinema of Japan, and the transnational. I then look at balancing considerations of universalism and authenticity.

After that, I examine how my screenplay negotiates Orientalism, before discussing other pertinent screenwriting craft considerations. These section headlines are mere guidelines: inevitably, in a dialogic approach where polyvocality is key, other considerations bleed into the analysis. There is overlap, as well as tangential considerations, and discussions of screenwriting craft and reflection on the creative practitioner self are threaded throughout this chapter.

### **Writing a Japanese Screenplay in English**

*The Neighbour* (2004) was the first Japanese-language screenplay that I wrote. The experience of making that film formed the approach I have taken to writing Japanese screenplays ever since. *The Neighbour* is about two women, next-door neighbours, who meet for the first time. A key scene involves the two women chatting over tea. The protagonist, Masako, reveals to her neighbor, Suzuko, that she is trapped in a loveless marriage. Suzuko gives Masako advice on how to re-ignite the passion between her and her husband.

As I was writing the scene, I was aware of the emotional effect and plot progression I wanted to achieve. I knew my two characters intimately, but the exact words these two women would say in such a situation would not come to me. I wrote the dialogue in English interspersed at times with ‘key’ Japanese phrases. The words on the page were unconvincing and inauthentic. As I was also directing the film, I decided to work with the two Japanese actresses to craft the scene. I decided to schedule the shooting of this scene first, as it was crucial to the success of the narrative overall. If the scene did not work, then the film would not work, so I decided this experiment in collaboration had to

take place early in the shoot. In the event of failure, I could save time and money by closing down production. There was no time for rehearsal. On the day of the shoot, I told the actresses what information about the characters needed to be conveyed, and what emotions I wanted the audience to feel. The actresses then rehearsed, improvising the dialogue and performance. The three of us worked together in this way to craft the scene. When the camera rolled, the actresses were outstanding, achieving performances that more than matched my intentions for the scene. They acted a ten-minute dialogue that I edited to four minutes in the final cut.

In writing *Welcome to Prime-time* I think of the spoken word not as dialogue, but as dialogue cues. The anticipation of collaboration discussed in Chapter Two begins with collaboration with the Japanese translator who transforms the screenplay into a document for Japanese actors and directors to read. The emotional nuances of each line, pause, and silence will be discussed in terms of my intentions, but how that intention is realised in Japanese dialogue is something I may defer to a Japanese collaborator. The Japanese version of the script will be read and re-interpreted by Japanese cast, and by a Japanese director. The performance achieved, the execution of my words that one ultimately views on screen, is a result mediated by this process of collaboration, and my awareness of that process feeds back into how I write.

### **Mimesis and Provocation**

In Chapter Two I critiqued *Firefly Dreams* and *Merde*, noting that as accented Japanese screenplays their dialogue with Japanese national cinema can be read in terms of degrees of mimesis and provocation. My writing of *Welcome to Prime-time* invites both

readings. If we consider mimesis in terms of relational aspects with other contemporary Japanese films more conventionally categorised as Japanese cinema, a comparison with *Still Walking* (2008) reveals many commonalities. I noted that various Japanese cinema texts (e.g. *Family Game*, *Visitor Q*, *Tokyo Story*) take up the theme of family in crisis. *Still Walking* is about a family gathering to mark the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of Junpei, the family's oldest son. Junpei, we learn, died saving Yoshio, a young boy who, now grown up, attends the memorial for Junpei every year. Ryota, Junpei's younger brother, arrives with his new wife and stepson. His sister Chinami is there, with designs to move back in with her parents.

Similarities in areas such as plot, theme and characterisation between *Still Walking* and *Welcome to Prime-time* position both texts within the national cinema of Japan. These include, first of all, the fact that Michiko in *Welcome to Prime-time*, and Chinami in *Still Walking*, are torn between living independently and living with parents. Second, with regard to the male protagonists, both Ron and Ryota are in precarious situations at work. Furthermore, they are haunted by the ghosts of the dead: Ryota knows his father feels the wrong son drowned, and also suspects his wife loved her deceased first husband more than him. In *Welcome to Prime-time*, Ron is wracked by the thought that his wife was cheating on him on the night she died. Finally, dark family secrets surface in both texts. In *Still Walking*, Yoshio is uncomfortable at the gathering, and we learn that Toshiko, Junpei's mother, invites Yoshio not despite of his discomfort, but rather because of it – in a calculated act of vengeance, she invites him to watch him suffer. In *Welcome to Prime-time*, Michiko's corrosive first marriage is revealed as one reason she is reluctant to commit again.

My depictions arose from a process of observing my surroundings in Japan. Michiko is a composite of various Japanese women I know – colleagues, former students, family friends – who have ‘parasite single’ lifestyles, holding down full-time jobs while living with their parents in their thirties and forties. Chinami in *Still Walking* wants to live with her parents for personal reasons, but with Michiko I wanted to make her choice resonate with current social concerns (outlined in the Introduction). Therefore I align her much more closely to the ‘parasite single’ archetype in a way that asks the Japanese audience to engage with this issue. My male protagonist Ron is a middle-aged widower struggling to keep up at work. He shares family and work concerns with *Still Walking*’s Ryota, as well as the protagonist of *Tokyo Sonata*, and is intended to add to the social dialogue on masculinity as defined through work in Japan.

These mimetic tropes are intended to allow *Welcome to Prime-time* to be read as a text within the national cinema of Japan. However, there are also provocative aspects to the screenplay, which arguably emerge from my transnational positioning (outlined in Chapter Four), the inbetween-ness that makes me both insider and outsider, analogous to what Heffelfinger and Wright label “the neither/nor of the diasporic position” (2011, p. 153). Many of these aspects were present from the inception of the project. For example, in the first draft of the treatment from November 4, 2010, the opening image of Michiko frames her inbetween-ness in gender terms, but also in terms of her Japaneseness (Scene 1). I introduce gender roles as a salient concern for the screenplay by having Michiko lead a three-person film crew where the other two members are men. I signal that her Japaneseness will be explored when she goes to the Foreign Passport

section. Gender and nationality are then intertwined by Michiko's gaze onto the family in front of her. The treatment states:

She watches an international family of four – black Mum, Japanese Dad, two gorgeous kids – file through in front of her. She smiles at the daughter.

Yazdiha discusses how hybridity deconstructs boundaries and suggests “the hybrid rejects claims of boundedness within race, language and nation” (2010, p. 31). This image of a hybrid Japanese family, in the liminal space that is Passport Control, is a provocation and challenge to notions of a racially pure Japanese identity posited in social discourse and various Japanese films, as discussed in Chapter Three. The scene is polyvocal, addressing Michiko, whose gaze we share, and her own past/present as an American. Michiko eventually regains her Japanese passport (Scene 163), and through that storyline I intend to ask what form empowerment takes for Japanese women in contemporary Japan. Michiko becomes Japanese again, but in doing so symbolises a break with the normative image of the Japanese woman. When Michiko regains her Japanese passport, as a character she ‘becomes Japanese.’ On reflection, as my journey of theoretical exploration and writing the screenplay progressed, this notion of ‘becoming’ Japanese’ emerged as the key dialogic engine of the project, a notion I will return to at the end of this section.

In Chapter Three, I discussed Mika Ko's notion that non-Japanese appear in Japanese films framed through cosmetic multiculturalism, to reinforce notions of Japaneseness rather than challenge them. This international family at passport control reveals

hybridity as part of Japaneseness, and suggests ‘the other’ as being *in* and *of* Japan. I was keen to avoid cosmetic multiculturalism in writing this family, and so this scene expanded and evolved through the drafts to show Michiko interacting awkwardly with one of the children. For the domestic audience, through the child being *hafu*, Japaneseness will be invoked, but for the female protagonist the question being asked is of her personal resistance to the normative role of wife and mother. Furthermore, her reaction to the family takes for granted notions of hybridity, through which I invite the audience to share in her acceptance of this image of Japaneseness. The notion of this international family as signifier of unmarked diversity in the Japanese family grew as the drafts progressed, and in later drafts I decided to bring the family back in a sequence in Act III (Scenes 133, 140, 141), a montage of families all around Japan gathering in front of the TV to watch the protagonist’s climactic moment in his reality TV sojourn. Visually, I felt making a connection with the opening scene added a richness to the screenplay, and thematically it reinforces the notion of hybridity, situating this family as one of many other ‘Japanese’ families.

Another salient aspect of *Welcome to Prime-time* as an accented Japanese screenplay, outlined in Chapter Three, is the fact that Michiko as a character interrogates the parasite single demographic in contemporary Japan. This degree of salience for a social concern is unusual in the romantic comedy genre in Japanese cinema. Mainstream romantic comedy is often told as a fairytale, with the characters exhibiting no relation to the socioeconomic concerns of their time. For instance, in *Densha Otoko* (2005), a beautiful wealthy woman falls for a geek after he intervenes on her behalf with a lout on the train. Freedman (2009) notes that the tale is told completely from the *otaku* male

point of view. No agency or interiority is given or implied for the lead female character, Hermes, leading Janet Ashby (2004) to label the tale “an *otaku* wish-fulfillment fantasy.”<sup>1</sup> Jacey and Batty suggest writers ask themselves if their romantic comedies “challenge social demographics and gender representations” (2014, p. 102). One thematic concern of *Welcome to Prime-time* has been meeting this challenge, especially in the characterisation of Michiko. This serious treatment of contemporary gender politics in a Japanese romantic comedy is intended to offer a fresh inflection on the domestic genre.

Arguably, this occurs through a transnational influence, namely the utilisation of restorative three-act structure screenwriting craft. This is exemplified in how the character of Michiko is developed and strengthened throughout the screenplay. Michiko’s journey, in terms of the Hero’s Quest, is one where she travels out from the world of documentary, into the hostile terrain of prime-time, only to return transformed to the world of documentary. The TV station is her Ordinary World, where “[n]egative associations are usually made between the protagonist and [her] physical world; [she] may be trapped by rules, regulations or people” (Batty 2011, p. 83). On this level Michiko’s character arc is structured along a contrast between ‘wants’ and ‘needs,’ similar to the main characters in *Following* (1998) or *The Game* (1997), protagonists who do not value what they have till they lose it. Michiko gains success in prime-time TV (her ‘wants’), but loses her integrity as a journalist and needs to find a way to regain it (her ‘needs’). Her character arc proceeds in a conventional fashion, but is expressed through a consideration of problems faced by women in work in Japan that domestic audiences will recognise as familiar.

Craft considerations also informed the writing and re-writing of my female protagonist. Jacey (2010) suggests that there is an over-emphasis on character conflict in screenwriting, and that character harmony and union requires more attention. She argues that characters are connected to their story world through various “Layers of Union” (p. 139). While re-writing, I assessed what Michiko has and loses through Jacey’s Layers of Union, including the seventh, World Union, which can bestow “a global dimension to [an] otherwise very localized story” (p. 150), which aligned with my intention to synthesise the global and the local. Thus I show Michiko, through her documentaries, has spent time in Cambodia and India, and is therefore marked as a ‘global citizen,’ relatively more cosmopolitan and international than her contemporaries.

In this way, I have characterised Michiko as an archetypical Japanese woman but also a woman who exhibits a transgressive international element. This is threaded into the narrative in two main strands: first, through the backstory of her failed marriage to an American; and second, in the storyline on her forthcoming interview with a Somali asylum seeker.

The story of the failed marriage is revealed when Ron and Michiko share a drink (Scene 86). Ron is becoming aware of his romantic attraction to Michiko, but Michiko is there out of politeness and wishes to leave quickly to go to her waiting lover. I wrote the exchange in this scene with the intention of forcing both characters to examine their motivations thus far. When Ron realises Michiko is involved with a married man, his

expression of “pity” makes Michiko bristle. She fires a series of ‘home truths’ at Ron, about how her American husband slowly chipped away at her independence, about how marriage has turned her mother into a ‘slave’ and her sister into a ‘harridan.’ She tells Ron to save his pity “for the wives stranded at home while their husbands work all hours then drink themselves into a stupor afterwards.” For the Japanese audience, I hope that Michiko’s bitterness at her own lost years will reverberate with the ‘lost decades’ of Japan’s stagnating economy.

Another intention in this scene was to counter the trope in Japanese cinema of fairytale, saccharine depictions of intercultural marriage in films such as *My Darling is a Foreigner* (2010) and *The Kodai Family* (2016). Exhibiting a cosmetic multiculturalism approach, these films depict intercultural relationships in a highly implausible manner, with unlikely conflicts that bear no relation to reality.<sup>2</sup> Intercultural marriages are on the rise in Japan, but the divorce rate in this demographic is also higher than the national average, and on the rise (Yang and Lu 2010). Through Michiko’s explanation of the demise of her marriage, I intend to point to the very real, prosaic challenges that Japanese who enter intercultural marriages face.

Michiko’s speech in the scene rather overtly plays on the gender polemics threaded through the narrative, and could almost be the manifesto of the parasite single woman. However, I intend it to add complexity to the romance story, specifically on Ron’s line that counters Michiko’s speechifying: “You deserve better.” This line resonates when the scene changes, and we see Michiko rush to the other bar to meet her lover Matsunaga, only minutes late, and finds that he has already given up and left (Scene 87).

Again, this scene is one that exemplifies how screenwriting craft has been aligned to and accommodates local, particular concerns. Michiko's speech, by overtly stating the problems faced by contemporary Japanese women, places the narrative within Japanese national cinema, but through her wish to assert herself and also escape to her lover, I try to write a character with agency and subjectivity. Both her motivation as an individual, and as an archetype, are called into question by the negative value charge that the scene ends on.

Perhaps the most provocative aspect of Michiko's characterisation is her research of female genital mutilation. This is possibly the first time FGM has been referenced in a Japanese mainstream romantic comedy.<sup>3</sup> Michiko gradually becomes less concerned with Sheana, the Somali teenager she is to interview about FGM, as she becomes more and more absorbed in the world of prime-time. The first time we see Sheana, we share Michiko's gaze on to her (Scene 115). The symbolism, invoking FGM to remind Michiko (and the audience) of the patriarchal ideology that she is sacrificing herself to, is possibly a little heavy-handed in this scene. However, it is crucial to set up the climax of Michiko's emotional journey, which occurs the next time we see Sheana on screen. At that point in the story, both Ron and Michiko are isolated, utterly alone, and respectively in their darkest moments. The isolation is emphasised for Michiko when late at night she watches a powerful, disturbing interview with Sheana carried out by her junior, Hirose (Scene 154). With Michiko estranged from World Union at this point (Jacey 2010), Sheana's graphic description of her FGM experiences allows some sobering perspective on Michiko's dilemma, while reminding the audience that not only does she not belong in Shin-chan's world, she is watching an interview that she was

supposed to carry out, and so is also estranged from the world she sacrificed for prime-time.

The FGM storyline is one of a range of thematic elements in the screenplay that are intended to question patriarchy in Japanese society. The tale of Michiko's own international marriage reveals that patriarchy, in its American guise, was the cause of the marriage ending in divorce (Scene 86). I mentioned earlier that 'becoming Japanese' was a key thematic element. Michiko makes her choice to re-apply for Japanese citizenship, and in that moment and in consideration of the FGM storyline the Japanese audience will reflect on changing interpretations of gender in Japan, and engage with the question of what 'Japan' Michiko is coming back to, and how Michiko will shape what Japan is becoming.

In addition, just as Heffelfinger and Wright identify "the dialectic of immigration" (2011, p. 130) in the work of female Indian filmmakers, as my own creative practice journey from initial idea to final draft progressed, so too did my awareness that Michiko's journey to re-claiming 'Japanese' and my own journey to claiming a position as a 'Japanese screenwriter' have existential and emotional parallels. As such, Michiko can to a certain extent be read as my avatar, a character that foregrounds my own inbetween-ness, my own claims to Japaneseness, and what kind of Japan I believe I am claiming, and what Japan I am attempting to shape.

In my characterisation of Ron, my intended resonances to the transnational are less overt, and thus less provocative. However, I intend his journey from corporate warrior

to full-time house-husband to be a transgressive one that tests the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity in Japan. His final choice, to reject work completely for full-time domesticity, is possibly the most polemical aspect of the screenplay, especially for the domestic Japanese male audience. Ryota in *Still Walking* is unemployed, and throughout the narrative that status never loses its stigma for him. The father, Ryuhei, in *Tokyo Sonata* loses his white-collar job and becomes a cleaner in a shopping mall, a storyline that leaves intact the notion that, for Japanese men, self-esteem is formed through paid employment. It is difficult to imagine a more provocative challenge to Dasgupta's (2013) hegemonic masculinity of the salaryman than Ron's decision to define himself as a father first and foremost and completely reject paid employment.

*Welcome to Prime-time* finishes with Michiko as the breadwinner, coming home from an overseas work trip to Ron, who is in an apron (Scene 175). This symbolism feels appropriate, partly because the antecedents were seeded early in the screenplay: Michiko is first seen coming back to Japan from an overseas work trip, and Ron – wearing an apron – is now fully integrated into the domestic environment that, at the beginning of the film, he was clearly positioned outside of in gendered terms. It is a happy end, a conventional end, but also an ending that challenges normative notions of 'family' in Japan.

Following my analysis of *Firefly Dreams* and *Merde*, I have characterised elements of my writing of *Welcome to Prime-time* as mimetic or provocative in terms of how those elements might be read with regard to parallels in national and transnational cinema. I have also touched on how screenwriting craft has been utilised, and will expand on this

in the next section.

### **Universalism and Authenticity**

Following on from a description of how I identified and re-wrote elements of the screenplay that can be considered either mimetic or provocative, I will now consider another salient – and complementary – concern, my attempt to ensure the narrative has universal appeal, but is also faithful in detail to the Japanese context as a result of the reflective authenticity process that framed the writing of *Welcome to Prime-time* as a knowing screenplay. Throughout the preceding chapters, in particular Chapter Four, the tension between writing a screenplay with universal emotional and intellectual resonance that is also ‘authentically Japanese’ has been explored. A focus on various points in the development of the narrative will exemplify how the screenplay imbibes those concerns.

Michiko’s final confrontation with media star Shin-chan was particularly challenging to write. Through the character of Shin-chan, I wanted to interrogate what I regard as the uncomfortable levels of humiliation in Japanese prime-time TV. Harsh criticism and ridicule by confident, charismatic TV personalities is one reason mass audiences are drawn to prime-time reality TV programmes (Barton 2013). By showing Shin-chan’s particular penchant for misogyny, I have written a heightened but, I believe, realistic depiction of prime-time practices in Japan. Through Shin-chan I hope to give the audience a sense of the unease that I feel at on-screen humiliations (often sexist in nature), an unease that arises both from my position as a Westerner with an outsider gaze, and as an insider, in that I am also the father of a Japanese daughter. I have written

Shin-chan as eloquent, popular, charismatic, and with a strong streak of sadistic humour. When we first see him he is making a female panelist cry over her recent divorce, a hint of the misogyny that will be fully unleashed later:

14 RSK TV, SHIN-CHAN STUDIO - NIGHT

Raucous LAUGHTER from a TV studio audience.  
SHIN-CHAN, 40, slicked-back hair, prowls in front of the camera.  
A GUEST PANEL of six minor celebrities sits opposite him.  
One VETERAN COMEDIENNE is smiling weakly at him.  
Shin-chan sets her in his sights.

SHIN-CHAN

You can't understand why your  
husband left you?

She nods.

SHIN-CHAN

It's a mystery why he took off with  
another woman?

She nods again, the tears welling up.

SHIN-CHAN

There is a mystery there.  
(to the rest of panel)  
We've all wondered about it.

Shin-chan looks at the studio audience.

SHIN-CHAN

It's why he ever married you in the  
first place.

The members of the Guest Panel feign outrage, but they are laughing. Shin-chan mugs to the studio audience. The comedienne lets the tears come, trying to laugh through them.

SHIN-CHAN

Why are you crying, woman? A good man  
has been saved from a terrible fate!

The Panel all laugh again.

In early drafts of the treatment, I wrote a scene where Shin-chan attacks Michiko physically and spits on her. However, in re-writes I decided this moment was too literal in referencing the past of disgraced TV star Shimada Shinsuke. It may have intrigued domestic audiences to make the connection with Shimada, but that reference would not be recognised by international audiences. More importantly, the moment was tonally incongruous with the rest of the film. It may have happened in real life, but in the context of my narrative it was implausible. Shin-chan's humiliation of Michiko became a verbal attack – more insidious, more relevant to the theme of public humiliation through mass media, and, in the end, more powerful.

I also cut a scene where Michiko punches Shin-chan as she leaves the office. It felt like a moment too referential of Hollywood cinema, an example of Ezra and Rowden's 'performance of Americanness.' Michiko knocking out Shin-chan might have appealed to an American mainstream audience, but on reflection I realised the moment felt like an interloper, just as ill-fitting in the Japanese context as *Babel's* condolences scene, or

the family photo on the desk in *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo*.

These decisions were relatively unproblematic as the tonal inconsistency of these scenes was conspicuous when re-writing. More complex in terms of universal storytelling was the exploration of our increasingly mediated lives through the storyline of Ron's elevation to reality TV star. Japanese terrestrial TV is dominated by domestic programming and features genres, conventions and formats unfamiliar to Western audiences (see Yoshimoto et al. 2010). This offered a challenge for my practice in terms of allowing events to unfold on screen that would be familiar to the Japanese audience, but might require explaining through exposition for overseas audiences. Thus my panel of B-list celebrities had to be depicted in a way that identified their role for the international audience, without resorting to exposition that would slow down the narrative for the Japanese audience (Scenes 14, 32, 136, 140, 141, 142, 145). One salient image of Japanese popular TV in the UK, largely manufactured by Clive James and his clips of *Za Gaman* ("Endurance"), a 1980s Japanese TV show featuring torture and humiliation, is cruelty and mockery. The formats have evolved, but humiliation remains popular. Gamble and Watanabe (2004) find problematic the degree of control and lack of accountability in Japanese media, suggesting it stands as a warning to Western nations. The rise of reality TV, pioneered by Japanese TV but with celebrities rather than members of the public, suggests their warnings have gone unheeded.

Ron's journey through Japanese prime-time TV, as I have written it, is in one way a result of British influence. In the Introduction I mentioned various inspirations for *Welcome to Prime-time*. It is pertinent to mention one other source of inspiration,

namely the YouTube clip of Susan Boyle's audition on *Britain's Got Talent*. Viewing the clip for the first time, aware that I was being manipulated and attempting to remain skeptical and aloof, I nonetheless succumbed on a visceral level to its incredibly powerful narrative of triumph in the face of overwhelming adversity. Enli attributes such reactions to "a general fascination for 'the authentic', 'the real', and 'the genuine' in participatory culture" (2009, p. 483). In writing *Welcome to Prime-time*, one way for me as a creative practitioner to research how to authentically write the Japanese was to utilise double-voicedness, namely by depicting the construction of such an 'authentic' moment in the plot. Thus the construction of my climactic scene (Scene 136) on the reality TV show in the narrative, *Blind Date*, was drawn from a consideration of the mechanics of emotional manipulation in British reality TV, as I outline below.

With regard to Susan Boyle, Enli notes that the strategy of reality TV producers includes "constructing narratives of ordinariness" (p. 483), a ploy that is fully operationalised with this Scottish, working-class, middle-aged woman: "Susan Boyle was regarded as an icon, and her success represented hope for everyday people, and for a general protest against a commercialized and standardized culture industry" (p. 488). However, commentators note that these programme makers have another, less noble purpose: to humiliate. Barton (2013) utilises gratifications research in an empirical study of what compels mass audiences to watch these programmes. She identifies *schadenfreude*, enjoying the misfortune of others, as one factor. Quite simply, "people are tuning in to these programs with the desire to see contestants perform badly or make fools of themselves" (p. 224). Dialogically, the Susan Boyle moment cannot be defined in isolation; its meaning is constructed in relation to the context of the

programme-makers intentions.

With regard to *Strictly Come Dancing*, Enli notes that despite the stated aim of the programme being to educate viewers about ballroom dancing, contestant John Sergeant was courted relentlessly by the producers precisely because he was an avowed non-dancer. The refusal of the voting public to accept the judges' dismissal of Sergeant can thus be seen as "institutional arrogance in relation to its public, and a disdain of ordinary people's judgment" (p. 486). These moments of imposition and resistance in media culture fascinate me, and I felt compelled to address the multiplicity of concerns that attend such events in participatory culture in Ron's story. This allowed me to explore aspects of Japanese media and society that I am uneasy with, namely the comedy of abject humiliation and the overt manipulation of narratives on TV.<sup>4</sup>

This is why, at the Act II turning point (Scene 136), I attempt to utilise the emotional power and explore the social control that a Susan Boyle YouTube moment can generate. In the scene, Ron performs in what he believes is "an authenticity story of non-glamorous, everyday people who succeed against all the odds" (Enli 2009, p. 491). The scene seems to build towards emotional triumph and vindication for Ron, only to volte-face into a moment of humiliation and rejection. Ron discovers later that this was a deeply inauthentic, stage-managed moment (Scene 166). The audience will realise that the key female performer in the event is a plant, but the twist that I suspect they will not anticipate is that all three women were plants. An application of screenwriting craft here allows me to time the emotional impact of the reveals to the maximum (Jacey and Batty 2014, p. 127), and what is more, through depicting corrosive *yarase* practices, I believe

I manage to pose meaningful questions about ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ in our contemporary mediated lives, and about our complex emotional responses to such moments.

Considerations of universalism and local particularity were also salient writing the first encounter with Ron (Scene 3), in a social ritual that plays out in gendered terms: the unveiling of the lunch-boxes on school Sports Day. In the Introduction I noted that this image was the creative origin of *Welcome to Prime-time*. The absence of Ron’s wife, the absence of a prepared lunch, the conspicuous delivery of pizza, the reactions of his children, the curious glances of other families: all these visual action line elements combine to create a tension that the audience senses will frame Ron’s emotional journey. We do not know why the mother is missing, but the weight of her absence is keenly felt.

The attention to detail in this scene emerges in part from my lived experience as a parent in Japan, but also thematically addresses universal concerns, through the absence of the mother, that will engage domestic and international audiences. McCabe (2009) comments on the construct of absence in her analysis of romantic comedies, noting that in *Lost in Translation* (2003), Lydia, the wife of Bill Murray’s character Harris, is never seen on screen, a depiction that McCabe sees as crucial:

Encircling the couple is absence – a distracted husband and a literally absent wife. In particular, Harris’ wife Lydia emerges as an important structuring absence that puts pressure on the text, on the fulfillment of the romance in fact, as she provides a constant reminder of what he already has.

In my screenplay, Ron's deceased wife Haruka, introduced in Scene 3 through her physical absence, is intended to fulfill a similar role, a constant reminder to Ron of what he *thought* he had. Structured absence, deceased characters having causal influence on events in the narrative, is utilised in various mainstream Western texts: Charlie Babbitt kidnaps his brother as revenge against his deceased father in *Rain Man* (1988), while in *Billy Elliott* (2000), Billy's father finally supports his son's ballet ambitions when he realises it is what his deceased wife would have wanted. Structured absence is also present in Japanese cinema, as shown by the previous discussion of Junpei in *Still Walking*. By introducing the absence of Haruka so early and in the setting of an iconic event in Japanese family life, I intend my screenplay to exhibit its concerns with tropes that resonate to universal audiences combined with an authentic portrayal of Japanese particularities.

If Michiko is inbetween in a transnational sense, through her experiences with Cambodia, India and Somalia, and her U.S. passport, Ron is inbetween in gendered terms. After that opening scene during Sports Day, I show Ron conspicuous by his gendered actions three more times.

The first is also on Sports Day, when Ron is the only father *not* pointing a video camera at his children (Scene 6). In showing Ron forsaking the video camera to have a less mediated experience with his children, I hope to achieve two things. First, to suggest that Ron is, at heart, closely connected to his children; and second, to introduce the theme of our ever-more mediated lifestyles.

The second time Ron is rendered conspicuously male is when he asks not to be sent on overnight business trips (Scene 10). His ‘punishment’ for such an act is to join the stock-taking crew, which is entirely female. This is a comment on the relatively regimented gender roles in many Japanese workplaces. Banks are one example: when one enters a Japanese bank, the counter staff are invariably female, and the managers sitting behind them are almost exclusively male. It is a role division the visitor from overseas cannot fail to notice, and one which I intend to problematise in this small scene.

The third example, which takes place across a number of scenes, is when Ron is at home with his daughters (e.g Scene 15). At different points he is cooking, ironing, administering medicines, checking homework, etc. The intention here is to visually and verbally bring Haruka’s absence into play, but for many audiences, both Japanese and international, considerations of the contribution of men to domestic work will be invoked.

Michiko’s characterisation is also intended to make salient gendered considerations at different junctures. In the workplace, the challenges of patriarchal practices are depicted in her clashes with male superiors. In scene 39 Michiko negotiates a central role in the Blind Date project, which follows soon after we see Ron feted by female neighbours and colleagues (Scenes 35 & 37). In contrast to the heightened pastiche of those scenes, Michiko’s encounter with her male superiors is intended to be much more prosaic and hard-nosed. Michiko is initially ignored as the men talk among themselves. Shin-chan

patronises her. This display of power harassment is brought to a halt by one word from Michiko, “No.” I wrote the scene taking care to establish a rhythm in the dialogue among the men that is punchy and brisk, in order to make Michiko’s brake on proceedings all the more jarring and pronounced. Shin-chan turns to engage with Michiko directly. In this moment we see the promise of the opening image, of Michiko as a woman who can hold her own with the men, coming to fruition. A prominent consideration in writing Shin-chan in this scene, prompted by mainstream screenplay craft, was the notion that the antagonist be a *worthy* adversary. McKee states: “The more powerful and complex the forces of antagonism opposing the character, the more completely realised character and story must become” (1997, p. 317). Thus in this scene Michiko does not quite get everything she asks for. The final dialogue of the scene, a “Welcome aboard” to Michiko, carries a veiled threat. Having seen that Shin-chan is a formidable opponent, the audience will know that Michiko is in for a stormy ride.

It was crucial to plot these inbetween nationality and gender positionings for the characters to make salient the transgressions they achieve, and for the commentary on Japanese society that I intend to make. I have noted how accented Japanese screenplays by John Williams and Max Mannix have proved problematic for critics, and I suspect my transnational positioning means *Welcome to Prime-time* will meet with similar contradictory responses. It will be read as national and transnational, an insider and outsider perspective, and as authentic and inauthentic. The currency of the meanings I have privileged in this exegesis is unknown and unknowable, an element of the embrace of collaboration discussed in Chapter Two that is part of the compulsion to write and drives the choice to write a screenplay.

Another aspect of the universalism I attempt to achieve in my craft is that as the writing of *Welcome to Prime-time* was carried out with restorative three-act structure as a guiding framework, I felt certain beats needed to be hit at certain times. In writing those moments, I was aware of trying to achieve a portrayal that would be authentically Japanese, but also achieve the emotional impact that such moments in three-act structure unleash.

One example is the first time we see Michiko at home (Scene 19). The universally recognised dramatic tension here is family pressure put on a daughter ‘of a certain age’ to marry. In striving for the authentic, I frame this scene in terms of *omiai*, “a formal introduction arranged by a go-between with a view to marriage”.<sup>5</sup> Michiko’s parents are intended to represent the unreconstructed Japanese marriage celebrated in the domestic ‘Showa nostalgia’ genre of Japanese cinema (Hillenbrand 2010).<sup>6</sup> Michiko’s father is parked on the sofa watching *Shin-chan’s Funniest Home Videos*, while her mother sits in the dining room, preparing and serving food. ‘Parasite single’ Michiko takes it for granted that her mother waits on her hand and foot.

Two lines of conflict for Michiko with her parents drive the scene. First, her father is a big fan of Shin-chan’s show, asking Michiko, “Why can’t you make stuff this good?” This ruffles Michiko’s feathers: she has no respect for Shin-chan’s programme, and we see later that no one, including her father, watches Michiko’s programmes. It also touches on her want (versus her need): her desire to reach large mainstream audiences.

Second, Michiko's conflict with her mother, Fusako, is revealed when Fusako pressures her to get married. As stated above, this is a moment of family tension universally recognised, but also the first truly Japanese cultural moment that may be more challenging to read for the international audience. Fusako makes mention of a Mrs. Tanaka and produces a professional portrait photo of her son Yoshi. There is no direct reference to Mrs. Tanaka as a *nakodo* (official matchmaker or go-between) or to the conversation being about *omiai*, but the mention of Yoshi's high social status and salary, and the fact that the photo is a formal, posed, professionally-taken one, marks the conversation as clearly about *omiai* for the domestic audience. For the international audience, the nuances may be more difficult to detect, but my intention was to convey the meaning without resorting to overt exposition, maintaining an authentic representation of Japanese mother-daughter exchange about *omiai*.

One more piece of expository information, the fact that Michiko was previously married, is also relayed. When revealing information through exposition, I bear in mind Aronson's (2010) point that exposition can cause the plot to drag, and so should be used productively, such as revealing character while simultaneously seeding a plot point (p. 447). Fusako's comment tells us backstory about Michiko's character, but it also stokes the tension in the *omiai* conversation, Fusako referring to divorcee status as "damaged goods." This sets up Michiko's emotional challenge to move on from her own stasis.

Batty and McAulay (2016) suggest the academic screenplay allows for a more informed answer to a question often asked in screenwriting: "Does this work?" They suggest that "*research into* a subject enables a better *practice of* that subject (capability), and at the

same time a *greater awareness of what we know* about the subject (knowledgeability)” [original emphasis]. I would argue that the writing of Scene 19 is an example of how craft and cultural awareness can combine to create a scene that carefully balances universal understanding with society-specific detail.

Craft considerations are also salient in the scene that quickly follows, the first meeting between Michiko and Ron (Scene 23). This scene is structurally crucial as it sets out Ron’s dilemma, posing the active question that will drive the plot: “Who would take me?” Unlike the *omiai* conversation, there is no particularly Japanese aspect: it is a typical drunken heart-to-heart at the tail end of a party. The theme of mediated lives is touched on by Michiko accidentally recording on camera Ron’s anguished outpouring about his non-existent chances of meeting someone. Ron’s final line, “Who would take me?” is not only an active question for the audience, it is also polyvocal in its function. It is a trigger for Ron fandom when it plays for the online and terrestrial TV audience of the narrative, and it is also a question posed directly to Michiko that, ultimately, she will answer to resolve her own emotional dilemma.

In screenwriting craft terms, this scene was consciously written as the ‘disturbance,’<sup>7</sup> “an apparently harmless event that leads to serious trouble” (Aronson 2010, p. 51). One question I have explored in writing *Welcome to Prime-time* is how to negotiate tensions that arise from applying a restorative three-act structure to a story set in a ‘foreign’ culture. When to comply with the rules and when to break them is a perennial issue in my screenwriting practice. The scene in *Babel* analysed in Chapter One is an example of how an application of ‘the rules’ can be detrimental in terms of realistic portrayal of

Japanese social interaction. Therefore, when looking to hit certain beats in the narrative of *Welcome to Prime-time*, the plausibility of the scene for a Japanese audience – assessed in terms of whether or not it felt ‘authentic’ to my lived experience of Japan – was as much if not more of a consideration as conforming to three-act structure guidelines.

In re-writing, the how-to manuals were at times a consideration to ensure, for example, that certain scenes were necessary, or functioning in the way I intended. Such considerations were undertaken in tandem with a concern for an authentic representation of Japan and the Japanese. Scenes, dialogue, characterisation and thematic concerns would be ‘tested’ against screenwriting manuals in structuring the narrative.

An example of this is Scene 32, which is the Act I turning point. *Welcome to Prime-time* is about a man who inadvertently finds himself a reality TV star. In Scene 32, Ron is surprised to see himself on TV stating the central question: “Who would take me?” A number of intentions are fulfilled here. First of all, the first-act turning point involves stepping into a new world (Vogler 1998), and as Ron is on TV in this scene, he is already, in one sense, ‘inside’ prime-time. Second, the first-act turning point relates directly to the film’s ending, as it “raises a question that the rest of the film seeks to answer, a question that is finally answered in the film’s climax” (Aronson 2010, p. 100). For the climax to deliver on the emotional promise of the narrative, the first-act turning point has to seed in the necessary antecedents/building blocks. Thus when rewriting the scene of Ron watching himself on TV, I added a short scene to follow, only three lines,

of Michiko watching the same footage, and seeing how it emotionally impacts on her father.

This visual moment affects the relationship line between Michiko and her father, but also shows that Michiko, visually conjoined in this moment with Ron, has also crossed the threshold into the new world of prime-time. Batty notes that the Call to Adventure problematises the Ordinary World by offering up an alternative, an opportunity to dispense with “the familiar and exhausted” in favour of “the fresh and new” (2011, p. 84). In this way choices were justified with regard to screenwriting ‘rules’: for the romance storyline a call to ‘the fresh and new’ is clearly what is happening, but it also applies to the signification both characters carry as representations of contemporary Japanese: both romantically and socially, the protagonists are launched on their transgressive journeys at this point.

In Chapter One I suggested that in *Babel* the moment of condolences offered jars in terms of sociolinguistic incongruity. Analysis of that *Babel* scene made me more sensitive to the spoken interaction in the party scene where Ron and Michiko first meet. I have argued that *Babel* seeks easy acceptance as a transnational, universal exploration of the human condition, but is in fact fraught with contradictions and implausibility when examined with particular reference to the localities it attempts to exploit for its universalising purposes. My party scene has been crafted in a way that will circumvent such a critique, and meshes the universal and particular. It is universally recognisable, I believe, as a late-night heart-to-heart at a party, and in terms of creative practice in screenwriting it is a strategically well-placed disturbance. The interaction between the

two characters does not become a ‘performance of Americanness;’ rather, through my commitment to authoritative authenticity it gives voice, agency and plausibility to two characters whose nationality and ethnicity take a back seat to a foregrounding of their humanity and burgeoning intimacy. As such, the scene exemplifies my intentions for the screenplay as a whole.

My creative practice in *Welcome to Prime-time* encompassed both mimetic and provocative engagements with the national cinema of Japan, informed by my transnational positioning. It also explored tensions in applying mainstream screenwriting practices to writing a story intended to have universal appeal while remaining faithful in detail to the particulars of Japan. A further consideration, arising from my positioning as a Western screenwriter representing Japan, is the degree of Orientalism that might be read in the screenplay. The next section will explore this in more detail.

### **Negotiating Orientalism**

In Chapter Four I suggested that my positioning as both insider and outsider with regard to Japan complicated any reading of *Welcome to Prime-time* as an Orientalist text. However, as a Westerner representing Japan and the Japanese, there were undoubtedly moments when, in trying to make scenes more comedic or dramatic, or introducing moments of parody or pastiche, I had to consider whether or not I was tipping scenes towards an Orientalist interpretation.

One such scene is when Ron confronts Michiko for airing his image without his

permission (Scene 41). Michiko apologises in *dogeza*<sup>8</sup> fashion, and while there is still, at this early stage in her inculcation into prime-time, a genuine aspect to her apology, the extremity of the physical action comically highlights her underlying insincerity. At all stages of writing and rewriting I felt that, for comic value, the choice to have Michiko perform *dogeza* was appropriate. However, I wondered whether bringing *dogeza* into the narrative could be construed as an Orientalist construct. The action is certainly a prominent trope in Japanese drama, and recently featured heavily in the popular TV drama *Hanzawa Naoki* (2015).<sup>9</sup> However, it is an action that I have only rarely seen happening (on TV) in real life. According to Philip Brasor (2013) in *The Japan Times*, the popularity of *Hanzawa Naoki* sparked a flurry of stories about *dogeza* in the media. Brasor analyses the phenomenon and concludes: “The main issue with *dogeza* is not that its meaning as a gesture has been diminished by overuse, but that in a world where class and other arbitrary differences are supposed to be irrelevant to the treatment of one’s fellow humans, *dogeza* is, in and of itself, repugnant.”

Brasor’s point is well made. In addition, the fact that *dogeza* is widespread in Japanese fiction might merely be further evidence of self-Orientalising tendencies discussed in Chapter Four, and as I have asserted an ‘insider’ positioning for myself, it could be argued that I participate in self-Orientalisation. However, I conclude that my depiction of *dogeza* resists categorisation as Orientalist, because the comedy in the scene does not rely on Michiko’s humiliation. It comes from the fact that Michiko, in prostrating herself, has an ulterior motive – to convince Ron to take part in the Blind Date programme. The cut to Michiko on the floor is visually amusing, and the comedy in the scene builds to show that Ron is in no way dominating Michiko, but is in fact being

manipulated by her. In the end, I felt the insincerity of Michiko's *dogeza* outweighed potential accusations of Orientalism.

With regard to Michiko, the screenplay avoids Orientalist depictions on my part. However, there is a caveat that should be noted. In Chapter Two, I conceptualised screenwriting as an authorial contribution to a collaboration, and the actions of those potential collaborators can be anticipated. In Chapter Four, I noted how the accented Japanese screenplays *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* and *Like Someone in Love* represent their Japanese female protagonists in a highly sexualised manner, conforming to historical Orientalist tropes. *Babel*, too, has multiple female protagonists in various international locations, but only the Japanese woman is characterised in overtly sexual terms, and the only full frontal nudity in the film is exclusively reserved for the Japanese schoolgirl character. Awareness of these texts made me cautious in *Welcome to Prime-time* to avoid a sexualised depiction of Michiko. However, there is a potential to overtly represent Michiko sexually for the Western male gaze. The potential is especially pronounced in the scene where we discover that Michiko is having an affair with her married boss Matsunaga through a cut to them in bed (Scene 40).

I believe the scene is necessary to reveal Michiko's problems with intimacy. Considering this in terms of Significant Other Union (Jacey 2010), we are introduced to the knowledge that Michiko's Significant Other is a married colleague with whom she has sex in 'love hotels.' Jacey asks: "What kind of sex life does your heroine have? Think about how she feels pleasure, and whether intimacy is easy for her" (p. 145). Unlike the eroticised depiction of a Japanese woman in *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo*,

*Like Someone in Love*, and *Babel*, Michiko has agency and individuality, and the problems she faces are shared by contemporary Japanese women. My intention here is to show that Michiko, having failed in intimacy in her marriage, is keeping up her guard. Matsunaga provides physical pleasure, but there is no emotional bond. Michiko states that she wants it that way, words that are undercut when we see her look to Matsunaga to share a meal, and to back her up at work, expectations that he fails to meet. This storyline establishes that Michiko ‘wants’ to keep her distance, but ‘needs’ a romantic partner she can open up to and connect emotionally with.

With this in mind, I start the love hotel scene post-coitus, and imply no on-screen nudity. However, I can anticipate a director and other collaborators who decide to make the sexual content of the scene more graphic than I have written it. With regard to my discussions in previous chapters of authorial collaborations and Orientalist depictions, this scene seems to carry considerable potential for meaning-making by future collaborators that collide with or undercut my own intentions. If future collaborators opt to exoticise and eroticise this scene more than I have written it on the page, I will be left in the situation of Max Mannix as discussed in Chapter Two, pondering the ‘ideal’ iteration of the text that never made it to the screen. Such an on-screen sexualised portrayal of Michiko would not simply deviate from what I have written on the page; more significantly, it would bring to on-screen fruition the very representation I set out to avoid when writing the scene.

The incubation of *Welcome to Prime-time* through practice-led research has opened up a space to allow considerations of Orientalism that, arguably, would be compressed or

eliminated by the pressures of a purely industrial context. *Welcome to Prime-time* as a research artefact imbibes these considerations. Critical reflection in practice-led research has allowed me to explore my intention to counter both essentialist national cinema discourses and "othering" by non-Japanese filmmakers with more authentic representations of Japan and the Japanese. As outlined in Chapter Four, this is authenticity as a process, situated and arising from process and interaction in a "dialectic of self and society" (Vannini and Williams 2009, p. 46). In my engagement with authorship, national cinema and Orientalism, the issue is not whether or not I am an 'authentically Japanese screenwriter,' but how my own sense of self as a screenwriter based in Japan writing for Japanese-language cinema emerges in my screenwriting practice. Within this dialectic of self and society, the practice-led research context allows me to enhance precision of meaning and richness of depiction in the process, and facilitate an overall social, historical and theoretical resonance to be imprinted on *Welcome to Prime-time* in a way that would arguably be absent had the screenplay been developed in a non-academic context.

### **Further Screenwriting Craft Considerations**

Throughout this exegesis I have been concerned with craft considerations, and wish now to explore further the question of applying universal notions of screenwriting craft to writing in the transnational context of Japan.

In terms of writing the ending, various considerations informed the process. The ending gives a stamp of finality to the meaning intended by the author, and so it is a moment privileged in interpretations of the text. As the considerations of the endings of *Babel*

(in Chapter One) and *Map of the Sounds of Tokyo* (in Chapter Four) reveal, it is also the moment where the potential for universalising purposes to displace fidelity to local Japanese concerns is high. In any screenplay endings are crucial, as they have the power to give meaning to everything that has gone before as an audience casts back to re-evaluate all that they have seen to this point. That is fairly obvious in the reveal of a thriller such as *The Usual Suspects* (1995), *Primal Fear* (1996) or *Fight Club* (1999), where the reveal primarily re-colours the action line. However, more subtle use of the same mechanism can be used to add complexity to the relationship line, such as in the vacant stares ahead in the back of the bus at the end of *The Graduate* (1967), which Stevens terms “the silence of absence, of a void” (2015, p. 110). It was my intention that the protagonists of *Welcome to Prime-time* be redeemed from absence, not propelled towards it, but I reference *The Graduate* because I felt *Welcome to Prime-time* required a similar hint of shadow in its ending.

In *Welcome to Prime-time* issues of gender in contemporary Japan are interrogated within a conventional genre framework. This foregrounding of social issues in a Japanese genre film means the narrative challenges conventional representations and tests boundaries, and it is important to have an ending that lives up to and encapsulates this. McCabe notes the tensions involved in attempting to subvert the romantic comedy genre while working within it, stating that to “re-write the rules of the rom-com” involves revealing “the difficulties involved in doing different and strains the limit of media representational forms firmly rooted to age-old heterosexist-based fantasies of romance, marriage and monogamy” (2009, p. 168). This is evidenced in the work of Judd Apatow, who has received popular acclaim for his iconoclastic approach to the

romantic comedy, but whose endings uniformly involve a couple finding true love and coming together (Soles 2013).

Viewed in these terms, a completely conventional ending for *Welcome to Prime-time* would be a wedding ceremony with Ron and Michiko, featuring Keiko and Aya as flower girls. The whole cast of characters would gather as guests and a huge party with dancing and revelry would ensue. However, this *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994) style ending was never a consideration. My intention to interrogate stereotypical gender roles in Japanese society would be completely undercut by such a generic scene. At the same time, having structured the film as a three-act screenplay to this point, I did not want to completely dispense with convention. Thus the screenplay ‘bookends’ the ending with a similar scene to the opening. Michiko arrives back in Japan from an overseas film trip. She makes her way home – to Ron. In an earlier draft, when Michiko returns Ron is where we first met him, at the school, helping out with all the mums at the Culture Festival. He is not isolated and physically apart as he was during the Sports Festival in the opening sequence. Instead, he is part of the group, wearing an apron, a visual display of the transgression he has achieved. The problem with book-ending the location like this is that it is not clear that Michiko is actually now living with Ron. Therefore, I re-wrote the scene to have Michiko come home, with a key, to Ron and the children. When she enters, Ron is cooking, in an apron, and the way the children greet Michiko make it clear she is now part of the family.

I feel the scene is so overtly self-aware in its gender transgressions that it is not a narrative full stop – instead, I hope it functions as a question mark. The audience will

understand that a contrapuntal reading of this ending *is* the ending, and that “the text probes our investment in the fantasy of true love and finding the one as it at the same time perpetuates it” (McCabe 2009, p. 171). The final scene of *Welcome to Prime-time* is intended to be the climax of a narrative that both probes and perpetuates. By bookending the situation of the protagonists with those I depicted in the opening, I bring the narrative full circle, show the transformations achieved, and foreground the social issues the narrative has brought into focus. But I have put something else in there, and it may best be conceptualised as structured absence, namely the absence of ‘marriage.’ My decision not to provide a more definitive ending leaves open the possibility that Ron and Michiko cohabit, but are not married. In this reading, Michiko’s continued ‘rejection’ of marriage allows the film to end framed on the problematic of the parasite single woman and the consequences for contemporary Japan. It is the happy ending the genre demands, but also a polyvocal one, as it simultaneously interrogates both the myth of romantic love and marriage as the life goal of women in Japan, and also the myth of the workplace as the only arena where fulfillment can be achieved by Japanese men.

The indeterminacy of this ending offers another reading with regard to my own sense of self as a non-Japanese screenwriter writing a Japanese screenplay. My research question asks what considerations come to the fore for me as a Western screenwriter writing a Japanese-language film for mainstream Japanese cinema. I framed this with regard to Giddens’ (1991) notions of the self as a project, formed in a narrative that we construct with regard to situated circumstances. The situated circumstances explored in this PhD are my own approach to authorship in screenwriting for mainstream audiences, my

positioning as transnational with regard to the national cinema of Japan, and my intentions to write an authentic narrative that complicates any ascription of *Welcome to Prime-time* as Orientalist. In this process, following the dictates of Bourdieu, I have tried to make the exotic mundane, and the mundane exotic. To paraphrase Heffelfinger and Wright (2011), it may be that the neither/nor of the accented screenwriter positioning informs my choice to end *Welcome to Prime-time* with the sense that a marriage may or may not have taken place. However, the negative hue of ‘neither/nor’ is one I resist. In line with the pragmatic positivist stance I have asserted for my creative practice, I instead claim ‘not only/but also;’ not only British but also Japanese, not only national but also transnational, not only mainstream but also transgressive. Claiming these ostensibly contradictory positionings is, I suggest, the logical conclusion of a dialogic approach to exploring my own creative practice. It is an understanding that emerges from the process of researching the screenplay to write it, and writing the screenplay to guide research. In one sense, I can characterise this project as one where I set out to write a story about Japanese characters who go on a journey in restorative three-act structure, answering the call to adventure and setting out ‘into the woods,’ from where they emerge transformed. That journey, however, also encompassed me as a character, answering my own call to adventure, and through research undertaken to critically reflect on my creative practice, in the act of carrying out that practice, I believe I also emerge transformed. The screenplay as a whole, and the ending in particular, arguably embody my definition of an accented Japanese screenplay, and myself as a transnational screenwriter, and also a practitioner whose craft has been enhanced through this journey in practice-led research.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ashby (2004).

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<sup>2</sup> In *My Darling is a Foreigner*, for example, the American protagonist lives in Japan and is fluent in Japanese, but behaves like a cultural novice with his partner's family when he takes a joke made at a wedding speech literally.

<sup>3</sup> The issue of FGM is relatively unreported in Japan compared to the UK, and the discourse exists within a harsh regime Japan imposes on asylum seeking refugees. See, for example, Egbedi (2016).

<sup>4</sup> A historical documenting of the rise of reality TV is beyond the scope of this PhD, but it is worth noting that when I left the UK, in 1989, *Opportunity Knocks* was still being broadcast, and *Britain's Got Talent* and *The X Factor* had yet to arrive. At the same time, Japanese TV was already exploiting *schadenfreude* with various programmes designed to humiliate members of the general public.

<sup>5</sup> See Ito (2003).

<sup>6</sup> The UK equivalent to 'Showa nostalgia' would be films that cast a nostalgic gaze on 1970s Britain, such as *Dad's Army* (2016) and the *Carry On* re-boots that are in the pipeline. See Stolworthy (2016).

<sup>7</sup> This moment is variously called the Inciting Incident by McKee (1997, p. 189), and the Call to Adventure by Vogler (1998, pp. 15-16). Aronson's 'disturbance' is favoured here as her definition closely matches the function of the scene in *Welcome to Prime-time*.

<sup>8</sup> Yei-Won defines *dogeza* as "the act of physically getting down on one knee and bowing down head first to show an apology" (2015, p. 220).

<sup>9</sup> See Blair (2013).

## CONCLUSION

This study has investigated two inter-related aims. The first has revealed the challenges faced by a screenwriter writing within a particular transnational cinema setting. The second has been to reveal how those challenges have informed and are informed by my own screenwriting practice, bringing into being a screenplay that is intended to give added dimension to mainstream Japanese cinema and contribute new knowledge to transnational cinema and screenwriting research. The dialogic approach (Holquist 2002) has foregrounded the relational aspect of my creative practice. This has helped identify the strengths and weaknesses in my screenwriting of this particular project, and has also led to a deeper understanding of my own positioning as a screenwriter. In this concluding section, I will briefly consider the findings that have emerged from my journey in practice-led research.

This PhD began with the research question: “What considerations come to the fore for a Western screenwriter when writing a Japanese language film for mainstream Japanese cinema?” By drawing on the work of theorists such as Bakhtin, Holquist, Higson, Ko, Elsaesser and Naficy, I have conceptualised screenplays like *Welcome to Prime-time*, texts by non-Japanese screenwriters intended to become Japanese-language films, as accented Japanese screenplays. In addition, I have suggested that an appropriate space for consideration of such screenplays is offered by national-transnational tensions currently widespread in cinema. By taking a dialogic approach to these issues, I can engage with those tensions through Elsaesser’s (2005) notion of ‘keeping all possibilities persistently in play.’ That is to say, adopting the label ‘transnational’ for

my screenplay, and for myself as a screenwriter, does not automatically exclude the national. The relationship between the national and the transnational is symbiotic. Invoking that symbiosis, throughout this critical commentary I have tried to show that *Welcome to Prime-time* has sufficient parallels with the canon of Japanese cinema to merit inclusion in the national cinema of Japan, while simultaneously, and paradoxically, posing significant questions for the critical concept of 'Japanese film.'

Furthermore, while authoring in my screenplay the transgressive journey of two Japanese characters in contemporary Japanese society, I have also undertaken a personal journey of exploration in my own creative practice. The analysis of *Babel* cautioned against an over-reliance on mainstream screenwriting craft, and made me realise just how much of an asset my own extended experience in Japan and level of integration in the society could be. That realisation was emphasised but also complicated by the critique of *Tokyo Sonata*, specifically the competing authorship claims of the director and screenwriter which foregrounded the issue of 'Japaneseness.' My characters question definitions of gendered work and family roles in contemporary Japan, explored along lines of 'Japaneseness' that I have shown to be relational with discourses in cinema and society. Through an application of mainstream screenwriting craft I have attempted to show that those issues resonate to universal concerns, and it is through critical exploration of those resonances that my own journey in screenwriting craft has become clear.

I stated in Chapter Two that in common with many other writers, I write to find meaning. In this PhD, through exploring the journey of turning my intentions into a

screenplay, I have found meaning in my own border-crossing journey. I reject certain ascriptions of the transnational experience as one of exile or diaspora, as they are restricting and over-determined with regard to my own lived experience. However, I find parallels in some commentaries that capture my own experience of displacement and inbetween-ness, such as the hybridity exhibited by the films of Farhadi (Rugo 2017), discussed in Chapter 3, and Heffelfinger and Wright's (2011) notion of the 'inaccessibility of home' in the work of Deepa Mehta, considered in Chapter Four. Reading my screenplay narrative as about 'becoming Japanese,' I am brought to the realisation that the journey of 'becoming Japanese' is one that I share with my characters. More important is the realisation that the journey is ongoing; that, for me, the meaning of 'becoming Japanese' is endlessly deferred, always in dialogic flux. That lack of stasis defines the journey – there is no destination, only a nuanced awareness of the creative potential offered by the endless journey of 'becoming Japanese.' *Welcome to Prime-time* is one iteration of my experience of that journey, an experience enriched and enhanced through being undertaken in practice-led research. In short, I began this journey as a practitioner writing a commercial screenplay, and through the undertaking of creative practice research I have arrived at this point as a practitioner-researcher more capable and self-aware with regard to the context and meaning of my own creative practice. In line with recent theories of screenwriting practice research, my own screenplay *Welcome to Prime-time* is performative of that insight, expressing what it means to 'become Japanese' in a globalised world.

Another aspect of that insight is that while I draw on Naficy (2001) to postulate, in Chapter Three, the accented Japanese screenplay as a label for screenplays written by

Western writers for Japanese cinema, I wish to offer refinements and caveats to that concept. I suggest that the concept is valid; that the emergence of Japanese-language cinema from screenplays by Western writers is a notable break with historical hegemonic practices, a removal of one layer of linguistic elision and distortion (Stam 1989). However, depiction of Japan through the language of Japanese alone is insufficient to avoid imposing Orientalist processes. As I argue in Chapter Four, a process of reflective authenticity, a process imbued in *Welcome to Prime-time*, is required in screenwriting depictions of Japan if the aim of the screenwriter is to synthesise the global and the local. Therefore the emergence of the accented Japanese screenplay is notable, but should not automatically be privileged in reading Japanese cinema by non-Japanese screenwriters. Instead, it should serve to complement readings in discourses such as Orientalism, national cinema and transnational cinema that continue to offer fruitful critical inroads to such texts.

Thus I echo Mazdon when she states that “Understanding cinema as transnational means being aware of its porosity, its intersections with others (including the national), its indeterminacy and its contingency” (2016, p. 16). In the Introduction, prompted by Giddens (1991), I suggested that Japanese screenplays by non-Japanese screenwriters can be seen as an intrusion of the global into the local. This implies the West intruding on the East, but by postulating the accented Japanese screenplay, I am able to identify key instances of differentiation within both ‘the West’ and ‘the East.’ The relational affinities *Welcome to Prime-time* shares with other accented Japanese screenplays are with texts such as *Firefly Dreams* and *Merde*, films that are self-aware and multi-layered in their engagement with the project of ‘becoming Japanese.’

This provides a point of departure with other ostensibly accented Japanese screenplays, those by Arriaga, Kiarostami and Coixet, which I have argued exhibit more parallels with Orientalist texts. My initial curiosity and sense of affinity with other non-Japanese screenwriters has undergone adjustment through this journey in practice-led research. There is a line of differentiation between Western writers depicting Japan in English, and those doing so in Japanese, but I suggest a more critically rewarding differentiation is between those who engage with Japan along the lines of cosmetic multiculturalism, and those who through cultural capital of extended tenure in Japan, fluency in the language, and familiarity with the lived experience of Japanese society, depict Japan through a process of reflective authenticity. I have attempted to detail how this difference reveals itself among screenplays written for Japanese cinema by non-Japanese screenwriters.

Finally, presenting *Welcome to Prime-time* as an accented Japanese screenplay, I offer an approach and highlight issues other non-Japanese screenwriters writing Japan might wish to consider. The fact that my screenplay is an academic screenplay, a knowing screenplay (Batty et al. 2016) that knows the potential of embracing national-transnational tensions, and knows that ‘authenticity’ can only ever emerge through a process of interrogating representation, I propose not only adds knowledge to the academy, but also suggests new pathways for creative practitioners to enhance their own screenwriting craft in transnational screenwriting.

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## **APPENDIX I: *Welcome to Prime-time Treatment*, Draft 3, May 9, 2011**

WELCOME TO PRIME-TIME: A Treatment by Alexander McAulay

### ACT I

#### THE CAREER WOMAN & THE SINGLE DAD

Passport Control at Narita Airport. MICHIKO Owaki, 35, in camouflage pants and t-shirt with cut-off sleeves, lugs an equipment bag towards the passport lanes. With her is hippy cameraman SHUN, 41, and bearded Sound Guy SHIGE, 29.

Shun and Shige go through Japanese passports. Michiko goes towards Foreign Passports. She is roughly overtaken by two kids. She glares at the back of their heads. The kids beckon their parents forward. Michiko watches as the international family of four – black Mum, Japanese Dad, two gorgeous kids – file through in front of her. One kid smiles at her. Michiko returns a totally false smile. She hands over her American passport to the official, who slightly raises one eyebrow.

Colourful bunting blows in the breeze, shouts carry on the wind. Five girls carrying relay batons race round the school track, red, yellow or blue ribbons billowing from their caps. The crowd cheers them on. It is Sports Day at Nishi Shinano Primary School in Tokyo. A huge scoreboard above the track area shows the red and yellow teams surging ahead. Blue are losing badly.

Lunchtime In the gymnasium. Families eat their packed meals, lovingly prepared by mothers from the crack of dawn. Row and rows of these intricate, colourful lunches being unpacked from their boxes.

Then an empty mat.

Around it sits RON, 43, and his blue-ribboned daughters KEIKO 9, and AYA, 6. Keiko acutely feels the curious glances of her friends. She glares across the empty mat at Dad. Weaving his way through the crowded gymnasium, a Domino's pizza delivery guy arrives at Ron's mat with two big boxes.

Ron pays. Aya is delighted. Keiko sulks.

Early evening in Tokyo Bay. In a TV studio editing suite, Michiko is cutting together her documentary on Cambodian orphans. Her slightly soiled boss, TAKAHASHI, 50, watches the footage. He nods, and leaves – unimpressed.

Meanwhile, in the imposing downtown head office of Nippon Allied Metals, the boss gives a speech to the assembled middle-managers. They are all male. Times are grim. They are being sent out to solicit more custom. Ron is assigned an overnight trip to Sapporo.

After the meeting, he asks his boss to assign him somewhere nearer. He is scheduled to read 'Baby Bear Can't Sleep' to Aya's class. He'd change, but he's already ducked out of the PTA Culture Fair committee... The boss understands, and gives the job to someone else instead. Ron is re-assigned to the stock-taking crew. They are all female.

Later that night, at home, Michiko's family are all in the living-room. Michiko reads an article on FGM (female genital mutilation) in Somalia. Michiko's Dad HIROFUMI, a portly 60-year-old, laughs his head off at top variety show ; 'SHIN-CHAN'S CRAZY HOME VIDEOS'. He chides Michiko for not making TV like this. Michiko's Mum FUMUKO, 59, produces an 'omiaiai' photo of a friend's son, a limp-looking university associate professor. Michiko tries to ignore her, but Fumuko brightly points out that the don will be well-disposed to her – after all, he too has a failed marriage behind him.

It is too much for Michiko. She makes a hasty exit from the house.

Evening in the Ron home. Ron irons a shirt while trying to control the girls. Keiko won't eat her dinner, and Aya's nebulizer half hangs off her nose as she gawps at the TV. The kids are being stroppy, Ron is fighting to control his temper. He says the TV should be off at mealtimes, and when Keiko responds: "Mum used to let us", Ron has to leave the room.

He goes to the bedroom. He opens a drawer, and takes out a well-hidden mobile phone. He switches it on. A standby photo of a woman smiling and hugging Keiko and Aya. Tension is written all over Ron's face. He goes to "messages" and plays the last message. A man's voice: "Haruka, it's me. I want you to be happy with this choice -"

The doorbell rings. Ron hastily switches the phone off and hides it back in the drawer.

GRANNY, 75, Ron's mother-in-law, arrives to babysit. There is an awkward greeting with Ron. Then he says good-bye to the girls (who are too wrapped up in the TV to respond) and leaves. In the blink of an eye, Granny the disciplinarian has the TV off and the girls doing homework. Granny rolls her sleeves up and cleans the house.

#### THE BEST DOCUMENTARIES NEVER SEEN ON TV

Michiko arrives at a raucous party at Shun's trendy Tokyo apartment. Shun tells her the Cambodia documentary has been scheduled – for 3 AM on a Tuesday. On the digital channel. Michiko is despondent.

She has a heart-to-heart with Shun. Why can't she reach big audiences? Maybe she should meet the professor, settle down as a housewife, have babies... Shun and Michiko laugh at the absurdity of such an idea.

The cliques have been formed at the party and Michiko is isolated. She gets her video camera out and begins to record. Images pan through her monitor - drunken exchanges, uninhibited dancing... then Shige, hitting on a gorgeous guy in a red shirt. Exchanging a look with Shige, she makes her way to the balcony garden. She is startled to encounter Ron all alone in a quiet corner. There is an awkward exchange, Ron introducing himself as an old school friend of Shun's, making a clumsy attempt at flirting. Michiko politely nods, clearly uninterested. Ron, drunk and maudlin, realises she is Shun's colleague, and tells her Shun calls her work 'The best documentaries never seen on TV.' Stung, commenting on Ron trying to hit on her, she jibes about his wife. Ron reveals his wife is dead. Michiko looks for a hole in the ground to jump into.

Later. The party has thinned out. Only the diehards remain, clinging to the dregs of the night.

Michiko and Ron are in confab. Ron talks about his children as his saviours. When Michiko suggests he will meet someone else one day, Ron gives her an odd look. He then decides to speak from the heart. He talks about the single women in his company, who live a 'parasite single' lifestyle at home with their parents, and use all their money

on spa treatments, tapas bars, and trips to Guam and Hawaii. The young, single, good-looking men in his company can't even get a look in. "I'm a middle-aged single father of two children" says Ron. "Who would have me?"

A beep. Michiko's video camera reaches "full" on these words.

## RON GOES VIRAL

Ron comes home. The children are asleep in futons with their granny. Ron's futon is laid out in the next room. He opens the fridge and takes out a carton of orange juice – but it is empty.

Michiko comes home. Her mother is waiting up. She feeds Michiko soba and honey melon, then goes to bed.

The next day, Michiko is at work reviewing her Cambodia footage. She puts on the tape of Ron, and watches him again say "Who would have me?"

Behind her, Takahashi has been watching. He is very impressed.

Ron is at home, battling on three fronts - ironing, getting Keiko to do her homework and have Aya eat up her dinner. A scream from Aya alerts him to the TV. He sees himself on TV, Michiko's footage of his speech playing to the nation. Aya and Keiko are delighted. Ron stares at the TV, burning his shirt with his iron.

The next morning, Ron is drinking coffee. A scream – he spills the coffee on his vest. He runs to the bathroom, where Aya and Keiko are huddled in fear. They point – a Kangaroo Spider sits on the edge of the bath. Ron does a poor job of hiding his own fear. He takes the shower head to try and drown the spider. When he turns on the water, it jumps – chaos. Ron gets water all over himself and his screaming daughters. Panic as they lose sight of the spider. Ron sprays water everywhere trying to kill it.

There is a knock at the door. Ron, hair and pajama bottoms soaked, coffee stain on his vest, opens the door. A long line of female neighbours, one after another, in an almost religious procession. They give him leftovers, hand-me-down clothes, freshly baked bread... Aya and Keiko, delighted with the novelty of it all, take the goodies into the

house. They do not hear the last woman tell Ron; “We all knew your wife.” Ron is dumbfounded.

At work, Ron arrives in the office, and feels the stares of his colleagues. A female brings him a coffee, which she presents with a look bordering on adoration. Ron looks up from his desk. One guy starts to applaud. Then another, and another. Soon, the whole room is on their feet, giving up applause to Ron. Ron is deeply moved.

Later, at Shun’s place, Michiko is prostrate on the floor in apology. Ron despises being the victim of deception. Does she realise what she has done? He milks the moment. His neighbours now shun him, his colleagues laugh at him, and worst of all, his kids are totally distraught.

Michiko apologies profusely. She promises it stops here – she will destroy the thousands of fan letters and emails that have come in. Ron is intrigued. Michiko reveals the clip is on YouTube, and has 200,000 views already. Comments from women charmed by Ron’s words are gushing. Michiko reveals she has a meeting this afternoon with the TV bosses. She thinks they want to build on Ron's success. But Ron rejects this possibility completely. There is no telling where this would lead, and that unknown element terrifies Ron.

At work, Ron reveals Michiko's comments to a colleague, and his rejection of any further involvement. The boss overhears, and suggests Ron re-consider. He could find a woman, re-marry, and so have more time to carry out his work duties "properly". Ron picks up on the threat.

#### PRIME-TIME OPPORTUNITIES, AND SECRETS

Takahashi sets up a meeting for Michiko with prime-time variety star Shin-chan and his distinguished producer, MATSUNAGA, 50. Shin-chan wants to use the footage of Ron on his show. The women of Japan are in thrall to Ron; he has struck a chord that Shin-chan will mine for all it’s worth. They will run it as a Blind Date spot; three women will win the right to go on dates with Ron, and he will choose one to be his girlfriend.

They keep referring to Ron as if he is already on board, making Michiko more and more

uncomfortable. Also, the men talk amongst themselves, barely acknowledging her presence.

Michiko's mobile rings. It is Ron. Somewhat contrite, he tells her he'd like to hear her ideas for a follow-up on his small moment of fame. Delighted, Michiko tells him she'll call him back.

Michiko returns to the meeting a changed woman. She makes the men engage with her, and demands a central role, directing the blind dates. She ensures that she will be given prominent credit for the project. Shin-chan shows her grudging respect, aware that to get Ron they need to accede to Michiko's demands.

Later, Michiko is in a love hotel having sex with Matsunaga.

Pillow talk. She tells him he could have warned her about the meeting with Shin-chan. He tells her not to press her luck too far with Shin-chan – he is a tough character. He asks if Michiko is sure she can get Ron on board. Of course, she tells him, but her look to herself in the mirror reveals her doubts.

Michiko suggests going for some noodles. Matsunaga declines, saying his wife is expecting him.

Michiko meets a group of female friends – in a Tapas Bar. They congratulate her on the Ron footage. She laps up the attention.

Michiko comes home alone. It is 3 AM. She switches on the TV, and watches her Cambodian documentary play. She looks out the window – there are no lights on in any of the surrounding apartments. Michiko presses 'record', and goes to bed.

At Nippon Allied Metals, Ron gets a call. He goes to the boss – Aya is sick, he has to pick her up from school. The boss understands, and Ron leaves.

Ron picks up a wheezy Aya from school. Keiko is there, too. He takes them home and puts Aya on the nebulizer.

Ron goes through his wife's mobile phone. He looks at 'last number dialled' – on March

11<sup>th</sup>, at 6.16 PM, to "KS".

The doorbell rings. He looks at the video security screen, and sees Michiko outside.

Michiko puts the proposal to Ron. Ron expected something refined, sophisticated, mature... he rejects the Blind Date as stupid and condescending. Michiko pleads with him, but he is unbending. Michiko knows this is her big break, her chance to reach mainstream audiences, and it is slipping away. Their argument becomes heated. They raise their voices.

Aya and Keiko arrive in their pajamas. They tell their Dad it will be fun, their classmates all want to see him on TV. (Michiko comments obliquely on how 'un-traumatized' the kids seem to be...). Michiko recruits the girls shamelessly to her cause. Ron, picking up his wife's mobile and putting it back in the drawer, bows to the pressure from his daughters. Ron agrees to take part, but he presents one final condition – Michiko must babysit the girls once a week. Michiko reluctantly agrees. The deal is struck.

## ACT II

### MICHIKO GETS TO KNOW THE GIRLS/ RISING STARS AT WORK

At the TV studio, Matsunaga and Takahashi ask Michiko to work late to help pick the blind dates for Ron. But she has to babysit – reluctantly, she tells them she will leave it up to them. Michiko jokily implies Matsunaga should not be jealous of Ron, and she is slightly disappointed to realise that he is not. Matsunaga gives her the four Golden Rules on handling kids – crisps, ice-cream, fizzy drinks, and lots of TV.

She arrives at Ron's apartment. He gives her a quick tour; Aya's asthma medicines, Keiko's special shampoo, TV off time ("Before 9 PM, as it is all rubbish after that" "That's when my documentaries are on" "Exactly"), bathtime, bedtime... Michiko asks for the WiFi access code. The girls ask Ron where he is going. He picks up a gym bag, and tells them: "To relax."

Downstairs, Ron goes to the storage room and changes the gym bag for a briefcase.

Michiko logs onto her computer and works. Keiko and Aya ask does she want to play cards with them? No. Video games? No. Dressing up? No. She switches on the TV for them, produces ice-cream and fizzy drinks, pours out a big bowl of crisps, and puts it all in front of them. The girls settle down to that.

Michiko works on her shot list for the first date.

Ron catches up on his paperwork at the office.

When Michiko looks up, it is way past the girls' bedtime. Aya has fallen asleep, her face covered in chocolate ice-cream. Keiko is watching a violent movie. Michiko hastily gets them changed into pajamas, reluctantly allows them to brush their teeth, then puts them into their futons. It's a battle - they are tired and grumpy the whole time.

Ron rides the train home, exhausted salarymen asleep all around him.

Michiko sees Ron walking up the street. She hides all the evidence of crisps and fizzy drinks, and shuts down her computer just as Ron enters. When he asks how everything was, she lies. When she asks him how he relaxed, he lies.

Ron asks about the women. He is worried and hopes Michiko has chosen carefully. Michiko lies again, reassuring him they are wonderful, kind, caring women. Ron is relieved.

Blind Date One is filmed in a restaurant. Ron is poked and prodded like a piece of furniture by the ADs and make-up people. Woman One approaches a nervous Ron in the restaurant. She is pleasant looking, nice smile – but turns out to be a bipolar manic depressive who scares the shit out of Ron.

Behind the monitors, Michiko gets a glimpse of Ron's discomfort. However, a comment from Matsunaga that this show is "solid gold" displaces any concern.

Ron returns and Granny is there. She makes to comment on the Blind Date project, but Ron cuts her off. They talk about the death of Ron's wife, Haruka. Something is bothering Ron, but he won't open up to Granny about it.

The show is broadcast. Despite the woman, Ron's decency shines through. Female neighbours gush, his colleagues praise him. Keiko and Aya love it – though Granny seems less impressed. Matsunaga and Michiko celebrate over dinner. Matsunaga suggests going to a hotel, but Michiko has to go babysit Keiko and Aya. She sets up the ice-cream, crisps, fizzy drinks and remote in a now established routine. But she overhears Aya talking about being the only one in her class who can't swim, and how she can't tell Dad about it because he is too busy.

Ron works late in his office. His boss notices and praises him – then gives him more work.

When Michiko gets home, her mother and father tell her how much they enjoyed the show. Michiko is pleased by this. Dad even recorded it – he had to delete her late-night documentary to make space for it. Michiko is conflicted by this.

Blind Date Two approaches. Ron sits in his make-up chair, doing office work.

Shun makes some catty comments about the whole Blind Date circus, but Michiko does not go along with this 100 percent. We glimpse Shun's concern about the new Michiko.

On Blind Date Two, Woman Two is petite, mousy, gushy and teary-eyed. She is a fan of the media persona Ron has built for himself. Ron tries to comfort her, while remaining uncomfortable himself.

When the recording finishes, Michiko congratulates Ron on his performance. She praises him as a considerate soul, selfless, a good listener who makes people feel better about themselves. Her words make him think better of the event – and start to look at Michiko in a new light. When she casually mentions to Ron that they should go for a drink, he readily agrees.

Michiko then bumps into Matsunaga, who invites her for a drink. She says she'll get there by nine at the latest.

In the bar, Ron tries have a heart-to-heart with Michiko. However, with one eye on the clock, she quickly turns the conversation to Aya and her swimming troubles. Ron, surprised, engages with this anyway. When Michiko thinks it is settled, she makes to

leave, saying she has "a date with my boyfriend." When Ron presses for more, she reveals that it is complicated. Ron picks up on the sub-text, and makes a sour comment about people who cheat on their marriage partners. Before she can take offence, he clarifies this by saying she deserves better than to be "the other woman." Michiko kindly, but firmly, puts Ron right – she is happy with her lot. She has what she wants from Matsunaga – having a 'normal' relationship would be too much trouble. He should save his pity for the poor wives who are left stranded at home while their husbands work all hours and drink afterwards.

Ron smiles, but resolutely insists she deserves better. The thought of staying with Ron flickers in Michiko's mind – but she goes. Ron sits at the bar alone.

Michiko arrives at another bar just after nine. Matsunaga has already left. Michiko sighs heavily.

At work, Ron has a lot more responsibility, and struggles to keep up. The more time he gives to work, the more the work expands to fill that time. He is coerced into drinking with colleagues. Their talk of sports and macho drinking is alien to him. He drunkenly mentions trying to get Keiko to eat her dinner up, of Aya's dread of getting shampoo in her eyes. The men smile at him indulgently.

At the TV station, Michiko goes to talk to Shun and Shige about plans for Blind Date Three. However, they have been re-assigned to the documentary on female genital mutilation. Michiko forgot all about it. Not to worry, says Shun, she is moving on to bigger things. Not better, just bigger. Michiko brushes off the jibe.

Ron prepares to go off on Blind Date Three. Granny asks Ron if he knows what he is doing. The conversation turns again to Haruka. Ron implies Granny was complicit in keeping a secret from him.

It is the evening of Blind Date Three. Ron is so busy with work that he hardly seems present on set at all. Even Michiko notices his distraction. His head is in paperwork, laptop, mobile phone texts – till Woman Three shows up. She is spectacular. Beautiful, mature, down-to-earth, sexy laugh – Ron is smitten (any man would be...). There is real chemistry between them, so much so that Ron forgets he is on TV. She draws from Ron a heart-rendering speech about his love for his children. She replies: "They sound

wonderful. I can't wait to meet them."

Morning in the Ron household. Ron is woken by Keiko and Aya bringing in the newspaper. The ratings for Ron's show are through the roof, and there is an 'exclusive' on Woman Three in the newspaper. Keiko and Aya ask about her. Ron tells them she might just be the one.

Michiko arrives to babysit. Before Ron can leave, there is a scream from the bathroom. They all rush to find Aya pointing at a Kangaroo Spider. Ron, Keiko and Aya are terrified. Michiko casually leans over, lifts it by the back leg, opens the window and deposits it outside. They watch her, awe-struck.

Aya asks Ron about the upcoming swimming test, but he brushes her off. He leaves. Michiko sees Aya is despondent. She shuts down the computer, and takes the girls swimming. She teaches Aya to swim.

Keiko has a party invitation, but doesn't go because she has nothing to wear. Michiko takes her on a girls shopping expedition, kitting her out in trendy clothes. She then does her hair, and drops her off at the party.

Michiko is called in by Shin-chan and Matsunaga. The show is a huge hit, the nation is hooked. The finale will go out live. Michiko is thrilled – but slightly soured by Shin-chan's two-faced comments about Ron as a "loser."

Michiko visits Ron at home to brief him. Keiko and Aya are at Granny's. Ron thanks Michiko for the swimming and shopping. She tells him he might just end up with a new wife soon who can do these things. He tells her she might just make a good mother herself. Michiko retorts that he would make a good mother if he was brave enough to break free of gender stereotypes. Ron tells her she can only have what she has with Matsunaga because she is female. Why is she so scared of commitment? They argue like an old married couple.

Michiko reveals how she used to be married, to an American. She always had to prove her love. Give up going out with friends. Give up work. It was never enough. It got to the point where he insisted she prove her love by giving up her Japanese nationality to become an American citizen. When that proved not to be enough, she knew it would be

endless. She left him and returned to Japan. She's done with 'commitment'. A married man like Matsunaga makes no demands. Perhaps Ron, as a widower, has an idealised picture of marriage?

Ron reveals how his wife lied to him on the night she died. She was in a car crash in Chiba, miles away from where she said she was. The last number she dialled on her phone was a man, KS. Her old boss had the same initials.

Michiko advises Ron to meet the boss. It could be a simple misunderstanding. At worst, she says, the truth can do no more damage to him than his own imagination.

Back home, Michiko goes to her computer, and brings up the information on re-gaining Japanese citizenship.

#### REJECTION GIVES BIRTH TO RESOLVE

At Shinjuku station, millions of commuters crush through in the early morning rush hour. Many stop off at the kiosk to pick up their newspapers. There is only one story for the tabloids today – tonight, live on air, Ron makes his choice.

Matsunaga comes into Michiko's office to brief her on the show.

In school, Keiko is passed a note by her classmate. When Keiko looks, the girl mouths: "It's from my mum!" She opens the note, which reads "Tell your Dad - it has to be Three."

Granny buys fruit. The greengrocer is reading the tabloid story. Granny's look of disdain.

Seven PM. The nation settles down in front of the TV.

Ron approaches the TV station, looking up at the illuminated sign. He reaches into his pocket and takes out Haruka's mobile. He hits play: "Haruka, it's me. I want you to be happy with this choice. You deserve to be happy. I love you, and only want you to be happy." He throws the mobile in the river, and walks towards the studio.

Shin-chan surveys the studio, immensely proud.

Michiko visits Ron in the dressing room. He is excited. He has never said it before, but he is really grateful to her for this opportunity. She has changed his life. Michiko is torn inside. She makes to tell him something, but time runs out. The show is about to begin.

Granny brings cut fruit and barley tea to Keiko and Aya, and tells them to study. A howl of disapproval from the girls. Granny relents, and the girls bundle excitedly onto the sofa and flick on the TV. Granny sits back at the table.

The music plays, credits roll, we are live in the studio. Ron comes on and Shin-chan fawns all over him. Shin-chan uses all his charm and experience to rack up the tension. The three women appear on stage. Ron is ready – he chooses Woman Three. Shin-chan congratulates him. The audience go wild. Keiko and Aya jump up and down and scream. But there is a surprise – Woman Three has had a change of heart. She rejects Ron live on TV. She loves another man, and they are about to get married.

Keiko and Aya turn to Granny, who tries to make light of it for them. But they are worried about their Dad.

Tears in the studio audience. Shin-chan milks the moment, comforting Ron while asking him "How do you feel?"

Ron, devastated, muddles through. But he gets off-stage as quickly as he can – not even Shin-chan can stop him.

Upstairs, Michiko watches despondently. She gives the cue to roll credits. The show ends. Michiko rushes out.

Michiko visits Ron as he gets ready to go home. She tries to comfort him, but he is simply in a daze.

In the Tapas Bar with her friends, Michiko is roundly congratulated. She takes no pleasure in it.

Ron comes home, and Granny squeezes his shoulder in comfort, before leaving.

At breakfast, Ron puts a brave face on for the girls. But they can see he is hurting.

Going to work, neighbours avoid Ron's gaze. On the subway, people stare and whisper. He gets to the front door of Nippon Allied Metals. His co-workers are similarly distant. Ron turns around and walks away.

Ron storms into a publishers' office. He opens the door of Keisuke Sato, Chief Editor, a handsome fortysomething. Keisuke greets Ron warmly, but Ron asks him if he was sleeping with Haruka. Keisuke laughs, but Ron is in no mood to be laughed off. Keisuke thinks, then buzzes in his business partner Takahiro, a well-built, bearded man, also in his forties. Keisuke introduces Ron. Takahiro offers his hand, and condolences. Keisuke tells Takahiro about Ron's accusation. Takahiro laughs, then feels guilty, looking apologetically at Ron. It's not funny, but it really is – he laughs again. Ron is utterly confused, till the body language hints finally make him realise - Keisuke and Takahiro are a couple.

They comfort the thoroughly embarrassed Ron. When Ron talks about Chiba, Keisuke gives him the address of an illustrator they once employed and whom Haruka knew – Kohei Sadomura.

#### MICHIKO'S DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

Shin-chan is revelling in the tabloid celebration of the Blind Dates. He is telling Michiko they will do a second round of Blind Dates for Ron. Michiko interrupts his flow - Ron is not up to it. Shin-chan insists, but Michiko cannot stomach it again. The discussion escalates, Michiko failing to note Shin-chan's changing mood – he forces her into a cupboard, beats her, spits on her, and tells her to mind her place.

Bloodied and bruised, Michiko goes to Matsunaga for help. He tries to placate her. She is incredulous, and forces him to choose between her and Shin-chan. Matsunaga chooses – he dumps her.

Meanwhile, Ron is walking in the street with Keiko and Aya. There is a film crew shooting a TV drama scene on the street. The girls point, and Ron sees Woman Three, who is playing a walk-on part. He approaches her, and she greets him warmly. There is

confusion, as Ron slowly realises Woman Three is an actress. She tells him their date was wonderful improv and his reaction to her rejection was so realistic - he was in on the act, wasn't he?

A furious Ron confronts Michiko. Did she know Woman Three was planted? Not till the last minute, she confesses, by which time it was too late. Ron calms down, wonders if Woman Two might still be interested. Michiko's silence reveals the horrible truth – all three women were actresses, none of the genuine applicants were used. Shin-chan thought staging the dates would make for better TV. Michiko wasn't there to stop it because she was babysitting for Ron. Ron takes this as her saying it is his own fault, and accuses her of being cold-hearted. She throws it back at him, saying he'd rather do overtime than spend time with his kids. Ron says all he wants to do is spend time with his kids, and Michiko responds that he should stop talking about it, and do it, rather than obsessing over his dead wife's last phone call. Ron tells her he destroyed the phone long ago. He tells her she is a hypocrite, despising her father while living off his earnings at the age of 35.

Ron cuts Michiko off and bars her from meeting Aya and Keiko.

At home, the girls are surprised Michiko is not coming as scheduled. They ask about her, and Ron tells them they won't see her anymore. They pester him about this. They tell him Michiko was a better parent than him. Ron loses his temper. Tears.

### ACT III

#### NEW BEGINNINGS

At work Michiko is called into a meeting. Shin-chan talks past her, acting like nothing happened. They have found a new Internet star, a little blind orphan girl with a great singing voice. They want Michiko to give her "the Ron treatment." It's a promotion.

Matsunaga whispers to her that they should get together again.

Michiko retreats to the quiet of her editing studio. Shige is there, playing Ron's original tape on the balcony – it is a guilty pleasure for him, the rawness and honesty of Ron's heartfelt speech. Michiko asks about the party, when he picked up the guy in the red

shirt. At a straight party, how do gay men 'recognise' each other? Shige smiles. Eye contact, he tells her. You know from the way someone looks at you. Shige has to go as the woman they are interviewing for the FGM piece has arrived. In the corridor, a Somali woman in traditional dress walks down the corridor, flanked by Shun and ADs. Her eyes meet Michiko's. Michiko is unnerved.

Michiko plays the tape to the end. It freezes on Ron, and his eye contact with Michiko – a look that she never saw. Till now.

"Who would have me?" Michiko considers the question.

Back home, Michiko has some post. She opens it up – her Japanese passport.

Michiko goes to Ron, just as he is leaving the apartment. An awkward moment. He tells her he is going to confront Kohei Sodomura. She offers to watch the kids, but Granny is already there. Just so he knows, she quit the TV studio, got work with a grant-funded NPO making documentaries. She shows him her Japanese passport. Ron nods. He quit, too. The savings will see him right for a while, while he re-connects with the kids. Michiko nods. That's that then, and she makes to leave. Just before she disappears from sight, Ron tells her she could tag along for moral support.

Eye contact again. The look.

She gets in the car.

Ron and Michiko make the long drive to Chiba. She takes his hand and holds it.

When they arrive, Michiko waits by the car while Ron enters the home of Sodomura, a woodblock painter. Sodomura immediately knows who Ron is, and invites him in. Ron is flustered, accusatory. She died driving to be with Sodomura. Two young girls have lost their mother because of him. Sodomura meets Ron's bluster with silence. When Ron finishes venting his spleen, Sodomura corrects him.

Haruka died driving away from Sodomura, not towards him.

Sodomura loved her, and gave her an ultimatum to choose.

She chose Ron.

Sadamura was a distraction, but Ron would always be the love of her life – even though, because of work, he was never there. The next morning, Sadamura called and left a message, saying he hoped her choice made her happy. She never heard the message. She was already dead. He had urged her to stay that night. If she had chosen Sadamura, she would be alive.

Ron goes out to the car. He makes to speak, but he can't. A tear rolls down his cheek. Michiko kisses him. They kiss again, like they mean it this time. She has to work, she tells him. He'd insist on it, he replies. She'd be away a lot, she says. I bloody hope so, he replies. They kiss again.

Back home, Granny can see the new relationship between Ron and Michiko. She approves. The girls are delighted to see Michiko back. They'll be seeing a lot more of her, she promises.

Ron sees Granny out. She knew about the affair, but she also knew Haruka would come back to Ron. He is a good father.

END SEQUENCE

Michiko arrives back in Japan from an overseas film trip. She makes her way home – to Ron. He is at the school Cultural Festival, helping out with all the mums. Aya and Keiko welcome Michiko back. Ron is now a full-time house husband and father, and Michiko is the bread-winner.

## APPENDIX II: Welcome to Prime-time: Character Outlines

### Ron Suzuki, 43

Born and brought up in the heart of Tokyo's Ueno as the middle child of three brothers, Ron Suzuki spent a pleasant if uneventful childhood in the local state schools. Pressured at an early age, like many of his peers, to choose 'bunkei' (humanities-track) or 'rikei' (science-track), Ron opted for science. Stories and fantasies were never his thing. He had a gift for electronics, earning money in high school fixing electrical goods for the growing number of elderly in his shitamachi neighbourhood. When he entered a national rather than private university, he knew his parents' joy was as much about finances as prestige. Ron was a drummer for a while in a high school band, the perfect role for a shy boy that let him express himself musically but stay out of the limelight. Dating and drinking were things the singer and guitarists did – a good woman, a quiet life, healthy children, and satisfying work were all that Ron wanted from life. Marrying Haruka, having kids, working for Nippon Allied Metals – all this, for Ron, was living the dream. That dream ended when Haruka died.

### Michiko Kudo, 35

Michiko was born and grew up in an affluent corner of Kichijoji in West Tokyo. Her 'kyoiku mama' sent her to piano lessons, abacus and art calligraphy classes, but Michiko took up Shorinji Kempo of her own accord. It was all paid for by the considerable earnings of her banker father. After doing well in her private elementary and junior high school, Michiko entered the prestigious Keio University by virtue of her 'returnee' 「帰国子女」 status, having spent her final two years of high school on homestay in Vancouver. After the thrill of living away from home in Canada, university bored her. For stimulus, she taught in a cram school in the evenings and volunteered in the local cat-and-dog home on the weekends. Aware of the elite status her looks, English fluency and Keio background gave her, Michiko bristled at the air of 'privilege' she knew others ascribed to her. She took an interest in social issues, joining the model UN in her final year in university. When she expressed an interest in a career in television, her parents, friends, and even teachers assumed she would be an 'announcer' 「アナウンサー」, but Michiko's ambition was about telling her own stories, not reading out someone else's. Aware of how the demands of corporate overtime had drained the life out of her father, making him largely absent in her childhood, she was determined to forge her own path between the patriarchy and dictates of the TV station and exploring her own interests. She carved a comfortable niche for herself in late-night

TV, exploring and telling tales she was interested in. The only thing missing was an audience.

#### Shin-chan, 40

Shin-chan's rise to fame mirrors that of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who rose from peasant class to be the ruler of all Japan – a comparison Shin-chan made sure featured prominently in his Wikipedia page, edited by one of his staff. Raised in Shinsekai, Osaka, by a single mother in a two-bedroom flat above the 'snack' bar-restaurant she ran on the ground floor, Shin-chan dropped out of school the first chance he got, and started hanging out with *bosozoku* motorcycle gangs. He was smart enough not to physically challenge the gang leaders, and his quick wit and brutal put-downs made him the favourite jester of the gang. Shin-chan quickly realised that humour was his ticket to Tokyo, and the money and fame that the capital offered. Comedy gigs in tiny clubs led him quickly to Yoshimoto and Namba Grand Kagetsu Theatre. He befriended all the right people, and ignored the rest. When his agency refused to release him from his contract so he could move to Tokyo, he got some of his new yakuza 'friends' to persuade them otherwise. Shin-chan's take-no-prisoners style, in quick-fire Osaka dialect, became sharper and more brutal as the years went on. At 40, he hosts eight TV shows and is on TV for forty hours a week. Guests on his TV show know he can make or break them. He feeds off the laughs of the audience, and thrives on the fear of his contemporaries.

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Welcome to Prime-Time

A screenplay

by

Alexander McAulay

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a  
Doctor of Philosophy.

It is recommended that the exegesis be read before the screenplay.

Faculty of Media and Communication  
Bournemouth University

May 2017

### A note on language and translation:

*Welcome to Prime-time* is intended to be a Japanese-language film. The screenplay has been written in English and is presented in English for the purposes of this PhD. The exegesis examines considerations in writing and re-writing to achieve a final draft in English. In industrial terms, the next stage for the screenplay is translation into Japanese. The subject of translation in literature and screenwriting is one that could form a PhD in its own right, and is beyond the scope of this study. I will work with a Japanese translator to achieve a version of the screenplay that is properly formatted for Japanese collaborators such as directors, producers and cast, and also preserves my intentions as they have been expressed in the English version. The translation process is one collaboration that involves negotiation and compromise, primarily with regard to dialogue. I anticipate that dialogue is the element of the screenplay that will change the most as it travels through the various stages of collaboration, with the translator, producer(s), director and Japanese cast all offering authorial input. When writing dialogue for *Welcome to Prime-time*, I often thought of the lines as they will be said in Japanese, and the English in this draft is my translation of those thoughts. As such, the dialogue should be considered a placeholder for the 'true' dialogue that will be spoken on screen. Giving time and effort to the nuances, cadence and rhythm of English dialogue that will never be spoken or heard is a pointless exercise. This dialogue may not even be used for subtitling purposes, as there is an art and craft related to subtitling, and limitations imposed by the technology, that mean any eventual English subtitles will most likely be generated from the Japanese screen work, rather than my 'placeholder' dialogue.

See 'Writing a Japanese screenplay in English' in Chapter 5 of the exegesis for more details on my process of transforming an English-language screenplay into a Japanese-language screen work.

FADE IN:

1 INT. NARITA AIRPORT ARRIVALS, PASSPORT CONTROL - DAY

A mass of tourists and business people amble through the busy terminal. They are outpaced by MICHIKO KUDO, 35, short-cut hair, tanned, in army camouflage pants and cut-off t-shirt. She walks briskly despite carrying heavy camera equipment. Beside her is SHUN, 40, surfer good-looks, and SHIGE, 27, beard, glasses. The men also carry sturdy equipment bags.

Shun and Shige enter the Japanese passports lane. Michiko enters Foreigner Re-entry.

Shun and Shige go through quickly, signal to Michiko that they will be at Baggage.

Michiko waits. In the line in front of her, a FAMILY OF FOUR - Mum (black woman), Dad (Japanese man), and two very cute kids; a son of 9, and daughter of 6. The daughter turns and smiles at Michiko. She returns a smile - forced and awkward.

Michiko hands over her American passport. The PASSPORT OFFICER glances at her quizzically.

Michiko is fingerprinted and photographed. She watches the family go off to collect their bags.

2 EXT. HIGASHI SHINANO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

A school playground, decorated with colourful bunting. Sports Day.

Six girls sprinting hard in the baton relay race, red, yellow and blue ribbons billowing on their caps. Parents SHOUT and CHEER.

Three big hand-made boards, with scores next to each - Red Sharks 127, Yellow Carp 125, Blue Lions 13.

3 INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Lunchtime. Wall-to-wall families pushed up against each other on mats.

Bento boxes are opened to reveal - the greens, pinks and purples of lovingly crafted hand-rolled sushi, sausages sculpted into forest animal shapes, broccoli flowers...

Rows and rows of these colourful bentos, each a unique work of art. Kids and Dads delve in, Mums smile and steal glances at their rivals' bento boxes. This ripple of opening, unpacking and squealing spreads through the gym.

In the middle of the colour and activity, an empty blue mat.

Around the empty space sits RON SUZUKI, 43, weathered face, greying hair. KEIKO, 9, and AYA, 6, Ron's daughters, are in Sports Day uniforms, with blue ribbons on their hats.

Keiko is glaring at her Dad.

Ron looks at his watch.

4 EXT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

A moped wheel, braking.

A booted foot kicks the stand on the moped.

5 INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

The boots are smoothly taken off at the entrance next to a mass of neatly lined-up shoes.

The feet move deftly through the crowded gym.

Keiko looks, followed by Aya.

The feet belong to a DOMINO'S PIZZA DELIVERY BOY, the box carried high above his head.

Other families watch the sight.

The Delivery Boy puts the pizza on Ron's mat. Ron pays.

Aya, smiling, dives in and grabs the biggest slice.

Keiko is aware of her friends' amused glances. She pushes a few slices of pizza around, and sulks.

6 EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Dozens of blue balls bouncing in a basket.

Keiko and Aya and all the Blue Lions team throw their balls towards the basket. They are excited, screaming, running around.

On the sidelines, all the MUMS AND DADS watching:  
Dads point video cameras, Mums clap and cheer.

Ron, alone, watches Keiko and Aya excitedly throw  
blue balls. Ron smiles proudly.

7 EXT. RSK TV, TOKYO - DAY

Planes bank over the space-age RSK TV building.

8 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - DAY

Michiko sits at the editing bay, hits play.

On the monitor, ORPHANS run around in front of a  
dilapidated wooden building.

MICHIKO (V.O. ON TAPE)

"...the western benefactors  
send money for the orphan  
they are sponsoring. But  
they never visit."

On the monitor, close-up of one gap-toothed,  
grinning CAMBODIAN CHILD.

MICHIKO

"For five-year-old Lim, the  
clothes on his back, the  
food he eats, and the very  
roof over his head, depends  
on the fickle conscience of  
an anonymous adult half-way  
around the globe."

The footage cuts to Lim drawing a picture at an  
outdoor wooden table.

MICHIKO

"Lim writes to a woman he  
knows only as Blanche from  
Wisconsin, sincerely  
grateful for this month's  
offering, and yet riddled  
with fear that next month,  
for Blanche, the novelty may  
have worn off, and the  
cheque, that for him means  
survival, may not arrive."

The footage fades to black.

Sitting next to Michiko is her boss TAKAHASHI; 55, a small, sickly-looking man. On the other side of him are Shun and Shige.

Takahashi nods.

Michiko and Shun look at each other.

Takahashi, still nodding, stands and leaves.

Shun looks knowingly at Shige.

Michiko throws her pen on the console and slumps in her chair.

BU-CHO (O.S.)  
Japan is enduring the worst  
recession in living memory.

9 EXT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS BUILDING - DAY

A large concrete skyscraper in the business district.

BU-CHO (O.S.)  
Our company is not immune.

10 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - DAY

'Office Ladies' in rows of desks under fluorescent lights, all busily working.

Behind them, a glass-walled meeting room. Ron and ten other men sit around the desk. All are younger than Ron.

The balding SECTION CHIEF (BU-CHO) stands at the top of the table, conducting the meeting. Beside him is a simple LINE GRAPH, showing a steady decline.

BU-CHO  
Our order book is shrinking;  
halved in the last decade. We  
need to put in double the  
effort just to stand still.

Ron watches him intently.

BU-CHO  
I want you to go out and talk  
to our most loyal customers  
face-to-face. Schmooze them,  
listen to their woes.  
(MORE)

BU-CHO (cont'd)  
Sympathize with their marital  
troubles. Laugh at their  
jokes.

Ron glances at an eager YOUNG SALESMAN (KODA) taking  
notes.

BU-CHO  
Give them an experience that  
they'll remember fondly when  
things pick up and they are  
ready to order again.

Lots of earnest nods.

BU-CHO  
Watananbe, take Osaka and  
Kobe; Yoshida, Kitakyushu;  
Suzuki, Sapporo.

Ron sits up. Everyone stands and leaves the room.  
Ron approaches the Bu-cho.

RON  
Excuse me Bu-cho...

BU-CHO  
Yes?

RON  
It's just, I have to read  
Little Bear Can't Sleep

Bu-cho glances quizzically at Ron.

RON  
At the school.

Ron smiles nervously.

RON  
...obviously.

An arched eyebrow from Bu-cho.

RON  
He's scared of the dark.  
Wants Big Bear to, you know,  
tuck him in...

Bu-cho stares hard at Ron.

RON  
... I can get out of that,  
but then there's this PTA  
thing after, about the  
Culture Fair, and-

BU-CHO  
(to exiting salaryman)  
Koda!

Koda turns round.

KODA  
Yes?

BU-CHO  
Take Sapporo instead of  
Suzuki.

KODA  
Understood!

Koda exits briskly.

RON  
Thank you.

Bu-cho organises his papers.

RON  
I know things are tough... I  
want to contribute, but  
overnight trips are  
difficult. I'll do anything  
else.

Bu-cho purses his lips. A thought comes to him.

BU-CHO  
Anything?

11 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, WAREHOUSE - DAY

Ron, wearing an apron, counts boxes of staples.

All around him in the warehouse are dozens of women  
in similar aprons, counting stock.

Ron is the only man.

12 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, BU-CHO'S OFFICE

- DAY

Bu-cho looks at a document in front of him -  
'Restructuring Plan.' He frowns.

13 INT. CHUO LINE TRAIN - NIGHT

The screen of a smartphone. It pans the ads inside the train, and settles on an ADVERTISEMENT for a news magazine, with the main headline: "RECORD LAY-OFFS AS UNEMPLOYMENT CLIMBS."

Michiko leans in the corner at the door, panning with her smarthphone.

On her screen, the frown of SCARY MAN.

Michiko switches of her phone. She takes out a copy of NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC.

In her magazine, a huge DIAGRAM OF A VAGINA.

14 RSK TV, SHIN-CHAN STUDIO - NIGHT

Raucous LAUGHTER from a TV studio audience. SHIN-CHAN, 40, slicked-back hair, prowls in front of the camera. A GUEST PANEL of six minor celebrities sits opposite him. One VETERAN COMEDIENNE is smiling weakly at him. Shin-chan sets her in his sights.

SHIN-CHAN

You can't understand why your  
husband left you?

She nods.

SHIN-CHAN

It's a mystery why he took off  
with another woman?

She nods again, the tears welling up.

SHIN-CHAN

There is a mystery there.  
(to rest of panel)  
We've all wondered about it.

Shin-chan looks at the studio audience.

SHIN-CHAN

It's why he ever married you  
in the first place.

The Guest Panel members feign outrage, but they are laughing. Shin-chan mugs to the studio audience.

The comedienne lets the tears come, trying to laugh through them.

SHIN-CHAN  
Why are you crying, woman? A  
good man has been saved from a  
terrible fate!

The Panel all laugh again.

15 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - CONTINUOUS

Shin-chan LAUGHS on the living-room TV screen.

Ron is ironing a shirt. His heavy-handed technique makes as many creases as he irons out.

Aya has a nebulizer over her nose - except it is not on properly. She gawks at Shin-chan on TV.

RON  
Aya...

No reaction from Aya.

Keiko at the dinner table, a spoonful of food frozen half-way to her mouth, as she too gawks at the TV.

RON  
Keiko, eat please.

The shirt creases and he has to smooth it out.

Aya's nebulizer is down at her chin.

RON  
Aya! Do it properly!

Keiko GIGGLES at the TV.

RON  
Keiko, finish your dinner!

Keiko is oblivious. She drops food on the floor.

Ron bangs down the iron.

RON  
Right! That's it! TV off at  
dinner times!

Ron grabs the remote and switches off the TV.

Aya lets out a PIERCING SCREAM.

KEIKO  
Not fair!

RON  
We don't watch TV at dinner!

KEIKO  
How do you know?

RON  
What?

KEIKO  
We did before!

The word 'before' stops Ron in his tracks.

He stares at Keiko. She glares back.

Ron takes the half-finished shirt, and makes to leave the living-room.

Aya FARTS.

Ron salutes. Aya smiles at this. Ron leaves.

Aya picks up the remote and turns the TV back on.

16 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, TATAMI ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Tatami mats in a spartan room.

Ron puts on the half-ironed shirt.

He looks at his dishevelled self in the mirror.

He looks behind him at the FAMILY ALTAR (BUTSUDAN) sitting on a chest of drawers. In the Family Altar, a framed photo of HARUKA, bob cut, beautiful smile. On the shelf next to it, another photo of her hugging Keiko and Aya.

Ron looks at this photo, SIGHS.

The doorbell RINGS.

HALLWAY

Ron opens the door. GRANNY, white-haired, straight posture, strides in.

GRANNY  
Evening.

Ron smiles, bows.

LIVING-ROOM

Granny stares at Aya and Keiko. They are both in the same semi-catatonic state as before.

RON  
Ehm... Keiko has homework, I  
think... Aya, ehm-

GRANNY  
Go. Enjoy your party.

Ron smiles.

RON  
(to girls)  
Bye!

The girls are absorbed in the TV.

Ron shrugs, leaves.

Granny looks around the living-room.

She walks over to Aya, puts the nebulizer on properly, and holds it there.

GRANNY  
Keiko, finish your dinner.

Keiko finishes her dinner in three quick spoonfuls.

GRANNY  
What homework do you have?

KEIKO  
Japanese and maths.

GRANNY  
Go run the bath, then get  
started on your homework.

Keiko takes off.

GRANNY  
(to Aya)  
Bath, pyjamas, and bed for  
you, little one. Go brush  
your teeth.

Granny ruffles her hair. Aya goes off to the bathroom.

On the TV, commercials finish and we return to SHIN-CHAN'S CRAZIEST HOME VIDEOS. The comedienne is now distraught, tear tracks on her cheeks, snot dangling out her nose. The panel and Shin-chan find it hilarious.

Granny walks to the sofa, picks up the remote, and switches off the TV.

19 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME, LIVING-DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A TV SCREEN: The distraught comedienne, laughing panel and Shin-chan.

On the sofa, Michiko's portly father HIROFUMI, 60, chortles at the TV.

Michiko sits at the dining table, reading her article on FGM (Female Genital Mutilation).

Her mother FUSAKO, 59, in apron, hair dyed dark, cuts fruit at the kitchen counter.

HIROFUMI  
(to Michiko)  
Why can't you make stuff  
this good?

Michiko glares at the TV screen, SIGHS.

FUSAKO  
(to Michiko)  
Mrs. Tanaka was at the  
Neighbourhood Watch today.

Michiko turns a page in her magazine.

FUSAKO  
Her son Yoshi is full  
professor now.

Michiko munches on melon, keeps reading her magazine.

FUSAKO  
On 10 million yen a year.  
More, probably.

She serves more fruit to Hirofumi, then sits opposite Michiko.

Fusako brings out a studio portrait PHOTO of Yoshi: Spectacles, bowl haircut, crooked smile. She lays it on the table.

Michiko looks at the photo, then at her mother.

FUSAKO  
No issues about 'damaged  
goods' - he has a failed  
marriage on his CV, too.

Michiko stares at her mother, blinks hard.

MICHIKO  
Bloody hell...

She stands up briskly and leaves.

Fusako SIGHS, eats some fruit.

Hirofumi GUFFAWS again at the TV.

20 EXT. CHUO LINE RAILWAY CROSSING - NIGHT

The CLANG CLANG CLANG as the orange Chuo train  
speeds through the crossing.

21 INT. CHUO LINE TRAIN - NIGHT

Michiko sits on the train. Opposite her, an elderly  
couple, extremely well-dressed, hand-in-hand. She  
looks at them, looks away.

22 EXT. YOYOGI STREET - NIGHT

The low tones of DANCE MUSIC. Michiko walks down the  
street, enters an apartment building.

23 INT. SHUN'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Michiko exits an elevator. MUSIC fills the corridor.  
One door is open, shoes spilling out the entrance.  
Michiko goes in, struggling to find an empty space  
for her shoes.

REVELLERS in the hallway drinking and chatting.  
Dancing in the living-room.

SHUN  
Michiko! Well well... Come  
in!

Michiko stands awkwardly.

Shun comes over, trips, spills some beer from his can on her top.

SHUN  
Sorry! Sorry!

Michiko wipes herself off. Shun is looking at her strangely.

SHUN  
Here to drown your sorrows?.

Michiko, wiping her top, looks inquisitively at Shun.

SHUN  
You didn't hear? They've scheduled the Cambodia piece.

Michiko stops wiping, looks at Shun.

MICHIKO  
Out with it.

SHUN  
Tuesday 26th. On the digital channel. At three AM.

Michiko SIGHS.

SHUN  
It's an hour earlier than your India dam protest piece.

Shun smiles.

MICHIKO  
Maybe I should just marry the professor. Have baby professors. Spend weekends in professor park.

Shun puts a comforting arm on her shoulder.

SHUN  
Genital mutilation awaits.

MICHIKO  
Something to look forward to.  
(a beat)  
Washroom?

Shun points towards the washroom.

WASHROOM

Michiko splashes water on her face, looks in the mirror.

A TRENDY COUPLE burst in, LAUGHING and GIGGLING. They see Michiko, stop guiltily. The man reaches into the bathtub and grabs two cans of beer from a huge pile in ice water. They leave.

Michiko drops the towel and looks at herself in the mirror. She makes a half-hearted attempt to style her hair - no use.

She takes a can of G&T from the ice water.

LIVING-ROOM

On a VIDEO CAMERA MONITOR, we glimpse party revellers.

Michiko moves through the room, can in one hand, video camera in the other, a smile of voyeuristic pleasure on her face.

Shige in intimate conversation with a RED-SHIRTED MAN. Shige nods a greeting at Michiko. She makes a cheeky face and moves on.

She moves out onto the spacious balcony.

ROOF BALCONY

Michiko sits in a chair, and pans round the balcony. Plants and flowers everywhere.

The pan brings Ron, hidden in a corner, suddenly into frame. He smiles.

RON

Am I being watched?

Michiko puts the camera down.

RON

On your own?

Michiko takes in the hopeful tone. She smiles.

MICHIKO

My boyfriend's in there.

Ron takes the brush-off.

RON  
Of course he is. Sorry.

Michiko sees Ron's wedding ring.

MICHIKO  
Hiding from the ball and  
chain?

She nods towards the party room.

RON  
My wife? No, she's dead.

Ron takes a big gulp of his drink.

Michiko stands, mortified.

MICHIKO  
I'm... sorry.

Ron is lost in his own thoughts.

RON  
You're Michiko, the  
reporter.

Michiko sits down.

MICHIKO  
You've seen my work?

RON  
No, Shun told me about you.  
"The greatest documentaries  
never seen on TV."

Michiko is unsure how to take this remark.

Ron takes in her earnest expression.

RON  
Don't mind me. I'm drunk.

Michiko, curious, stares at Ron.

24 INT. SHUN'S FLAT, LIVING-ROOM - NIGHT

People are dancing in the living-room, raucous  
shouts and laughter.

Shun, drunk, sits in the corner, bobbing his head to  
the music.

Later. The crowd has thinned. Quieter music. Shige and Red-shirted Man are slow-dancing. Shun is asleep.

ROOF BALCONY

Michiko and Ron are ensconced in the corner.

Michiko sits forward, listening to Ron.

RON

Balancing work, bringing up  
children, running a home...  
It's hard being a woman.

Michiko nods, shifts a little.

MICHIKO

How did it happen?

Ron sits back. He looks at Michiko for a second.

RON

Truck driver, in Chiba, a  
year ago now. Texting his  
girlfriend on his mobile...  
crossed the centre line, hit  
her head on.

Michiko looks down, then back at Ron.

MICHIKO

It must be tough.

Ron shakes his head.

RON

My two angels keep me going.  
The younger one, Aya, she's  
only six. She never really  
understood, you know? But  
the older one, Keiko, she's  
nine... It was hard on her.

(a beat)

I'm supposed to get them  
through. But they get me  
through.

Ron sits back.

Michiko glances to the living-room. Stragglers  
mingle around. Shige and Red-shirted Man leave hand-  
in-hand.

MICHIKO

In time, there could be  
someone else...

Ron looks at Michiko, smiles.

He sits forward.

RON

In my office, there are five  
single women in their  
thirties. They all live at  
home. They spend their money  
on... holidays to Bali, or  
tapas bars. They think  
marriage and kids is what  
their mothers did.

Michiko smiles in recognition.

RON

There are guys in my office,  
younger than me, better-  
looking. Better prospects.  
Single guys.

(beat)

No kids.

(beat)

These women, they aren't  
interested in them.

Ron sits forward.

RON

If those guys can't get a  
woman, what chance does a  
forty-three-year-old single  
father of two young children  
have?

(beat)

I mean, these days, who'd  
take me?

Ron stares now at Michiko. A gentle but sad smile.

Michiko smiles at him.

There is a BEEPING noise.

Michiko looks at her camera. The sign on the screen  
says 'MEMORY FULL'.

26 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME, LIVING-ROOM - NIGHT

Fusako sits reading a celebrity gossip magazine.

Michiko returns from the party.

FUSAKO

Okaeri.

MICHIKO

Tadaima.

FUSAKO

Want some soba?

MICHIKO

Yeah.

Michiko sits at the dining table. Fusako serves her up some soba.

FUSAKO

Don't stay up too late.

Fusako exits.

Michiko hungrily eats the soba.

27 INT. RON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ron comes home, tired and drunk. He is unsteady in the genkan taking off his shoes.

He goes to the kitchen fridge and takes out a carton of orange juice - empty.

He slides open the door on the

BEDROOM

Keiko and Aya are sound asleep, snuggled up in the futon with their Granny.

Ron looks at them, smiles.

TATAMI ROOM

Ron enters, takes in the solitary futon laid out for him.

He goes to the Family Altar. He opens the top drawer and takes out a scratched and dented mobile phone. He goes to 'Calls received.' The initials - 'KS'.

He goes to messages, presses 'play'.

MAN'S VOICE

"Haruka, it's me. You once told me life is about making the right choices. You've made the right choice. I love you, and love is always the right choice. I'll be waiting-

The message cuts out suddenly.

Ron stares at the PHOTO of Haruka and the girls. Haruka's frozen smile.

28 EXT. RON'S APARTMENT - DAY

Early morning sunlight makes the white-walled apartment building glow red.

29 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - DAY

Ron sits at the table reading notices from the school. Granny serves up breakfast: toast, rice, natto, o-cha. The girls eat their breakfast.

GENKAN

Granny puts her coat on.

RON

Thanks.

GRANNY

You look awful.

RON

I didn't get much sleep.

Granny smiles, concerned.

GRANNY

I can come again next weekend.

Ron smiles.

RON

We're fine.

Ron opens the door for her. Granny hesitates, as if to say something, but thinks better of it and leaves.

LIVING-DINING ROOM

As soon as Granny leaves, the girls whip out manga and start reading at the table.

Ron sits down and reads the school notices.

Aya farts. Ron salutes.

AYA  
Can we go to the pool today?

RON  
(to Keiko)  
Was I supposed to give you  
4000 yen?

Keiko nods. Ron SIGHS.

RON  
(to Keiko)  
You need to tell me these  
things.

Aya looks hopefully at Ron, but his mind is elsewhere. Aya sulks, but Ron does not notice.

30 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - DAY

Michiko re-plays the party footage.

Shige comes in with two coffees, gives one to Michiko. He glances at the screen.

SHIGE  
300 yen please.

Michiko goes into her purse.

MICHIKO  
"The greatest documentaries  
never seen on TV." That's what  
Shun calls my work.

Shige cocks his head.

SHIGE  
It's a compliment. Prime-time  
is bullshit.

Michiko shrugs.

Shige and Red-shirted man are on screen.

MICHIKO  
Can I ask you something?

SHIGE  
No.

Michiko takes out her smartphone and starts to video Shige. Shige rolls his eyes - he's used to Michiko taping him.

MICHIKO  
This guy... how did you know?

SHIGE  
What do you mean?

MICHIKO  
It's a straight party. In a situation like that, how do you... find each other?

Shige smiles, teasing Michiko with the pause.

SHIGE  
Eye contact.

MICHIKO  
Eye contact?

SHIGE  
There's a look.

MICHIKO  
What kind of look?

SHIGE  
The look.

Michiko is baffled.

SHIGE  
When you get 'the look', you know.

Shige leaves.

Michiko stops video-ing.

Michiko looks at the monitor. On screen, Ron looks straight at her. She turns up the volume:

ON MONITOR

RON

There are guys in my office,  
younger than me, better-  
looking. Better prospects.  
Single guys.

(beat)

No kids.

(beat)

These women, they aren't  
interested in them. If those  
guys can't get a woman, what  
chance does a forty-three-year-  
old single father of two young  
children have?

(beat)

I mean, these days, who'd take  
me?

Ron stares now at Michiko.

EDITING ROOM

Michiko looks at Ron, remembering the moment.

TAKAHASHI

Wow.

Michiko turns round. Takahashi has been standing  
behind her watching the footage.

31 INT. RSK CANTEEN - DAY

Employees line up, making their way towards the till.

Michiko puts a salad and cut fruit on her tray.

Takahashi is in front, loading his tray with oily  
pork katsu and french fries.

TAKAHASHI

Shin-chan wants to take  
"Craziest Home Videos"  
somewhere new. He wants  
footage that moves people,  
raw human stories that touch  
the heart. Like that mutant  
Scottish pensioner, singing  
on YouTube, remember?

MICHIKO  
Cambodian orphans don't  
touch the heart?

TAKAHASHI  
Not on prime time.

Takahashi squeezes mayo onto his french fries.

TAKAHASHI  
Not yet, anyway. Small steps,  
small steps.

Michiko is intrigued.

32 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - NIGHT

Wisps of steam hang in the air, slowly evaporating  
to reveal cartoons on TV.

Aya sits on the sofa with a nebulizer attached to  
her mouth and nose. She GIGGLES at the cartoons.

AYA  
Dad, his bum's on fire!

TATAMI ROOM

Ron is putting out futons.

RON  
Aya, breathe, don't talk!  
You'll waste it!

LIVING-DINING ROOM

Keiko sits at the table, watching TV, a half-eaten  
dinner in front of her. Her chopsticks with a piece  
of meat dangle in suspended animation in front of  
her open mouth.

Ron comes in.

RON  
Keiko, hurry up.

Keiko doesn't move.

Ron looks at Keiko's open school satchel. He pulls  
out a piece of paper. He takes it to Keiko.

RON  
Keiko, you have homework!

KEIKO  
Forgot.

Ron TUTS. He goes into the kitchen, starts piling together the unwashed dishes. He pulls on rubber gloves, starts to fill the basin with water.

Aya changes channel.

KEIKO  
(to Aya)  
Change it back.

Aya puts the remote out of reach.

AYA  
Dinner and homework!

Keiko leans over and pinches Aya. Aya SCREAMS.

AYA  
(crying)  
She pinched me!

KEIKO  
Did not!

RON  
Keiko, I saw you!

KEIKO  
You always take her side!

Keiko starts CRYING. Aya screams at her, and Keiko screams back.

Ron grips the edge of the sink, closes his eyes.

The water rises to the top of the basin.

The SHOUTING and CRYING suddenly stops.

AYA  
Daddy...

Ron opens his eyes, stunned by the silence.

He comes into the living-room. Aya and Keiko stare at the TV, where the video footage of Ron plays.

ON SCREEN:

RON

If those guys can't get a woman, what chance does a forty-three-year-old single father of two young children have?

(a beat)

I mean, these days, who'd take me?

Keiko, and Aya - through a cloud of steam - look at Ron.

On screen, two FEMALE CELEBRITIES on the Guest Panel have tears in their eyes.

Cut to the audience - all the women are crying.

MALE GUESTS on the celebrity panel are crying.

Shin-chan is beaming.

AYA

Yaaaaaaaaahhhhh!

The girls laugh, scream and bounce up and down delightedly.

AYA

Dad's on TV! Dad's on TV!

Ron is stunned.

The water fills the basin and overflows.

33 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME - NIGHT

Ron's footage plays. Fusako and Hirofumi are engrossed.

A tear escapes Hirofumi's eye.

Michiko watches them from the table, smiles.

34 INT. RON'S APARTMENT - DAY

KITCHEN

Ron, in PJ bottoms and vest, sips coffee. He is on the phone.

RON  
Shun, it's Ron Suzuki. Call me  
when you get this message.  
I'm... anyway, call me.

He hangs up.

Aya, in another room, is SINGING loudly.

Then a SCREAM.

Ron spills the coffee down his vest. He runs to the  
bathroom.

BATHROOM

Aya and Keiko are huddled in fear. They point - a huge  
Kangaroo Spider sits on the edge of the bath.

Ron does a poor job of hiding his own fear.

He gingerly takes down the shower head to try and drown  
the spider.

He turns on the water and... the spider jumps.

Chaos!

The girls SCREAM. Panic as they lose sight of the  
spider, Ron scatter-gunning water all over them.

The doorbell RINGS.

35 EXT. RON'S APARTMENT BUILDING, CORRIDOR - DAY

Ron opens the door. He stands there, soaked, in his  
PJs and stained vest.

Standing in the corridor are TWELVE FEMALE  
NEIGHBOURS, all bearing gifts.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 1 hands over a large cooking pot.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 1  
I made too much stew. I'd  
hate to throw it out. Could  
you help?

Ron takes the pot. She moves away.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 2  
My mother-in-law sent us far  
too many apples. Could you  
possibly take some?

She holds out a box. Ron is still holding the pot,  
looks around.

Keiko and Aya have appeared behind him, towels  
wrapped round their heads.

The women see the kids, utter a collective SIGH.

Ron, Keiko and Aya form a chain to shuttle the  
offerings into the house.

A procession of near religious solemnity takes place:

OFFERINGS MONTAGE

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 3  
We picked too many  
strawberries at the  
weekend...

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 4  
My children won't eat these  
dumplings...

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 5  
...rice going to waste...

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 6 offers pasta sauce, then leaves.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 7 offers curry.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 8 offers dim sum.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 9 offers fried noodles.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 10 offers melon.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 11 offers barley tea.

END MONTAGE

There is one neighbour left.

FEMALE NEIGHBOUR 12  
My daughters are teenagers  
now, and I was going to give  
these clothes to  
recycling...

Ron takes the bundle, passes it back. Female Neighbour 12, ISHIWATA-SAN, a small woman with bright eyes, bows.

RON  
Thank you. But...

Ishiwata-san smiles.

ISHIWATA-SAN  
We knew your wife.

Ron is rocked by this - he has never met these women before.

She smiles, bows, leaves.

Ron watches Keiko and Aya excitedly examining the offerings.

36 EXT. SCHOOL GATES - DAY

Keiko and Aya enter the school gates. Their friends rush towards them and surround them, CHATTER about their Dad on TV.

37 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - DAY

Salarymen and OLs working away at their desks.

Ron enters, takes off his coat.

Ron does not notice the glances towards him.

Ron sits at his desk and starts up his computer.

OFFICE LADY 1 brings a coffee, puts it on the desk beside him.

She smiles at Ron, walks away.

Ron looks in amazement at the coffee.

He looks around the office. His eyes meet those of his colleagues.

Someone starts clapping.

The applause grows from one person, to two, three... the whole room.

They give him a standing ovation.

At the far end of the room, the Bu-cho looks at a memo on his desk - a short list of names, entitled 'Proposed Redundancies.' Ron's name is on the list.

Ron's eyes meet those of the Bu-cho. Bu-cho takes the memo and puts it in his drawer, smiles.

38 INT. RSK TV, CORRIDOR - DAY

Takahashi walks briskly down the corridor. Michiko trots behind.

39 INT. RSK TV, SHIN-CHAN'S ROOM - DAY

A small table in a tatami room. On one side, silver-haired handsome producer, MATSUNAGA, and YOKOI, a stubbly, oily director in a crumpled green t-shirt. Michiko and Takahashi sit opposite.

Shin-chan enters, smoking, bows curtly to them, and then sits between Matsunaga and Yokoi.

SHIN-CHAN

(to Michiko)

You're the woman who does the late-night documentaries.

MICHIKO

You've seen my work?

SHIN-CHAN

Of course not. Process of elimination. You're the only female director we have.

MICHIKO

Oh.

Shin-chan and Matsunaga direct all their comments to Takahashi.

SHIN-CHAN

We want your man.

TAKAHASHI

Okay.

Michiko looks at Takahashi. He ignores her.

SHIN-CHAN

The response has been incredible. We think it has legs.

(MORE)

SHIN-CHAN (cont'd)  
I'm picturing a match-making  
corner on him. Three women,  
each goes on a date with him.  
He chooses a winner. We follow  
it all the way.

MATSUNAGA  
Maybe to the altar.

MICHIKO  
Reality TV?

Shin-chan is irritated by her interruption.

SHIN-CHAN  
Real TV. Human TV.

TAKAHASHI  
Where do you get the women?

MATSUNAGA  
Auditions. We could bang out  
six episodes on the selection  
process alone. Would he be up  
for that?

TAKAHASHI  
Of course.

Michiko's feeble protest is ignored.

SHIN-CHAN  
This guy has harpooned the  
zeitgeist. The women of Japan  
are ga-ga for him. We are  
going full tilt, prime-time,  
all out advertising on this. I  
present, Matsunaga produces,  
and of course she  
(nods at Michiko)  
found the guy, so she will be  
at the heart of it...

Michiko beams.

SHIN-CHAN  
...as first-AD to Yokoi.

Yokoi grins, a row of uneven yellow teeth.

TAKAHASHI  
Thank you.

Takahashi bows.

Michiko stares at Takahashi.

The men stand, gather their things, ready themselves to go. Michiko fixes Shin-chan in her gaze.

MICHIKO

No.

Matsunaga is taken aback. Yokoi looks around confusedly.

Takahashi blushes furiously.

Shin-chan sits down again, stares straight at Michiko.

SHIN-CHAN

Let's hear it.

MICHIKO

I direct.

SHIN-CHAN

Not going to happen.

MICHIKO

I direct the date locations.  
Yokoi can take care of studio  
segments.

Yokoi snorts.

SHIN-CHAN

OK.

YOKOI

But-

Shin-chan silences Yokoi with a cursory slap round the head.

Shin-chan sizes Michiko up.

SHIN-CHAN

Welcome aboard.

Michiko smiles.

40 INT. LOVE HOTEL - NIGHT

Matsunaga with his head on the pillow, takes a drag of his cigarette, exhales.

MATSUNAGA

You might have warned me you  
were going to do that.

Michiko rolls over and puts her arm around him.

MICHIKO

Like you warned me about the  
meeting?

Matsunaga smiles, ruffles her hair, rolls out of bed.

He starts to dress.

MATSUNAGA

Don't push too hard with Shin-  
chan. He can be funny with new  
people.

MICHIKO

He's a misogynist.

MATSUNAGA

He's a professional.

MICHIKO

He's a professional  
misogynist.

Matsunaga smiles, goes to the wash-hand basin, gargles.

Michiko starts to dress.

MATSUNAGA

I thought primetime was  
bullshit.

MICHIKO

It is. But if I'm going to  
change it, I have to be on the  
inside.

Matsunaga raises an eyebrow.

Michiko takes out her smartphone, and starts to video  
Matsunaga.

MICHIKO

Will we get something to eat?

Matsunaga spits.

MATSUNAGA

I promised I'd be home for  
dinner.

Michiko catches sight of herself in the mirror, looks away.

MATSUNAGA  
You're not video-ing, are you?

MICHIKO  
No.

She switches off the phone and puts it away.

MATSUNAGA  
So who exactly is Ron Suzuki?

MICHIKO  
A friend... of a friend.

MATSUNAGA  
Right... And he's on board with this?

MICHIKO  
Oh, absolutely.

Michiko examines her fingernails.

MICHIKO (O.S.)  
I'm so sorry!

41 INT. SHUN'S FLAT, LIVING-ROOM - DAY

Shun and Ron stand on one side of the living-room. They exchange a look, then stare straight ahead.

Michiko is prostrating herself flat on the floor.

Ron does his best to sound furious.

RON  
Well, I should sue you. I really should. You had no right to use my image like that. No right at all.

Michiko raises her head, looking bewildered.

Shun gives her a look of rebuke, and she prostrates herself again.

SHUN  
(to Ron)  
Has it been awful?

RON

Well... yes. Yes it has. The kids, they're... distraught! My neighbours won't talk to me. At work, they laugh behind my back...

Ron walks around, hiding his facial expression.

He sits down.

Michiko glances up from on the floor. Shun looks at her, at Ron. Shun signals for Michiko to get up.

Michiko, contrite, slinks into a seat.

MICHIKO

If it's any consolation, the public liked it. We've had lots of letters.

Ron snorts.

A glance between Shun and Michiko.

MICHIKO

From women of all ages.

Ron thinks.

A long, awkward silence.

RON

How many letters?

Michiko sits up.

MICHIKO

Letters? Two hundred and six.

Ron blinks a couple of times.

RON

Wow.

MICHIKO

We got roughly seven hundred phone calls, and about 5000 emails.

Ron blinks.

RON

Five... thousand?

MICHIKO  
About. And then there's  
YouTube.

RON  
YouTube?

BEDROOM

Michiko and Ron sit in front of the computer, Shun stands behind them.

The YouTube interface has the still of Ron's face from the video.

MICHIKO  
847,945 plays.

Ron struggles to take this in.

Michiko is scrolling down the comments, reading extracts.

MICHIKO  
"I wish my boyfriend was as  
sensitive and caring"...

Ron smiles.

MICHIKO  
"I would marry this man in a  
heartbeat"...

Ron mugs to Shun, who smiles wide-eyed.

MICHIKO  
"Don't you just want to hold  
him?"... "His eyes make me  
melt"

Ron's beaming smile suddenly disappears. He points at the screen.

RON  
"I'm gonna find this deadbeat  
and punch him into a coma."

Michiko cocks her head.

MICHIKO  
There's always one.

Ron frowns.

KITCHEN

Michiko sits across the dining table from Ron, a hopeful look on her face.

Ron ponders.

Shun takes up a third side.

Ron stands, walks around the kitchen.

RON  
Reality TV?

MICHIKO  
Real TV. Human TV.

Ron walks, thinks.

Michiko looks at Shun.

Ron takes an eternity to decide.

Michiko can't bear the wait. Finally

RON  
No... I'm sorry. It's not me.

Michiko is crushed.

42 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - DAY

The Bu-cho is conducting a meeting.

BU-CHO  
We can't afford to lose this bid. It will mean lots of overtime. Sacrifices. But it is for the future of this company. Our futures. So I need everyone to step up.

Bu-cho looks at Ron.

BU-CHO  
Everyone.

Ron blinks, looks around at his nodding, determined young colleagues. He gazes out the window.

43 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - DAY

Michiko is putting together a graphic of a vagina with detailed labeling.

MICHIKO

So?

Before Shun can answer, a young female researcher HIROSE puts her head round the door.

HIROSE

You wanted me?

MICHIKO

Hirose, good. The High Court decision today is bound to uphold the deportation order. Get a quote from the girl's lawyer on their strategy for the Supreme Court appeal. And get reaction from the Tokyo Somali community.

HIROSE

Got it.

Hirose exits.

Shun watches Michiko.

SHUN

He was my senior in high school chess club.

Michiko turns to look at Shun.

MICHIKO

Chess club!?

Shun fixes her with a look.

SHUN

We all have a past!

Michiko blushes slightly.

MICHIKO

Well, can't you pull the old senpai-kohai trick, get him to play along?

SHUN

No chance.

Shun sighs.

SHUN  
Now his wife, Haruka... She  
knew how to enjoy herself.  
She'd have gotten him to do  
it.

Michiko looks at Shun like he's a moron.

SHUN  
What?

Michiko shakes her head.

SHUN  
You'll just have to go to Shin-  
chan and tell him you lied.  
Ron will never agree.

A KNOCK behind them. Shige has escorted Ron to the booth.

RON  
(to both)  
I'll do it.

Michiko smiles broadly. Shun is stunned.

RON  
There's one condition.

MICHIKO  
Sure! Anything!

RON  
I need you to babysit.

MICHIKO  
OK!

Shun is shocked at Michiko agreeing so quickly.

Ron nods, smiles. Michiko smiles too.

Then Ron catches sight of the vagina graphic, frowns.

44 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME, DINING-ROOM - DAY

Family gathering around a table laden with food.  
Fusako brings roast pork cutlets. Michiko is putting  
out chopsticks. Michiko's sister CHIE, baggy  
clothes, harassed looking, is breast-feeding a baby.

Her son HAYATO, 7, is bouncing a small ball off the walls.

Hirofumi is reading the newspaper. At the table RYOHEI, Chie's husband, sneaks food, oblivious to Hayato's shouts and bangs.

Hayato barges into Michiko.

CHIE  
(to her parents)  
Did you watch Michiko's  
India dam protest piece last  
night?

FUSAKO  
Was that on last night?

HIROFUMI  
Four in the morning. Who's  
awake at that time? Pimps  
and ne'r do wells, that's  
who.

CHIE  
And breast-feeding mothers!

MICHIKO  
(to Chie)  
You watched it?

CHIE  
Some. I nodded off. Woke in  
the chair five hours later  
with this one still glued to  
my nipple.

Michiko blinks.

Hayato's ball bounces off Michiko's head. He roars past, bumping into her.

Michiko SIGHS hard.

FUSAKO  
(to Chie)  
You know, she's going to be  
working with Shin-chan.

HIROFUMI  
She's going to be on "Shin-  
chan's Craziest Home  
Videos"? Fantastic!

MICHIKO  
I'm a director Dad, I'm not  
on the programme.

HIROFUMI  
Well, maybe one day, eh?

Michiko rolls her eyes.

CHIE  
Will they pay you more? Enough  
to find your own place?

Michiko makes to respond but Fusako interrupts.

FUSAKO  
This is her place, isn't it  
dear?

Michiko's hackles are rising.

CHIE  
(to Fusako)  
Get Shin-chan to introduce her  
to one of those comedians on  
the celebrity panel. Those  
boys go for older women.

Michiko looks at Chie.

The baby throws up. Hayato points and laughs. Everyone  
rushes to get towels, napkins.

Michiko stands and watches the fuss.

45 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, MEN'S TOILET - DAY

Ron is having a pee. The Bu-cho lines up beside him.

The men pee in silence for a while.

BU-CHO  
My wife saw you on TV.

RON  
Uh-huh...

The Bu-cho pees for a very long time. Ron waits.

BU-CHO  
She says you're a saint.

Ron smiles ironically.

RON  
I'm no saint.

BU-CHO  
You should find a new wife.  
Men need wives. Men working,  
women looking after the  
home. That's what built this  
country.

RON  
Yes...

BU-CHO  
And we will re-build it. If  
we men remember we're  
workers first and foremost.

RON  
Yes.

Ron moves off. The Bu-cho joins him as they wash  
their hands.

BU-CHO  
Tell me - what exactly is a  
tapas bar?

Ron looks at him in the mirror.

RON  
I have no idea.

46 EXT. RSK TV - DAY

The sun glints off the shining chrome and steel  
building.

TAKAHASHI (O.S.)  
...we want you to just relax  
and enjoy the experience.

47 INT. RSK TV, MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ron sits on his own, opposite Michiko, Takahashi,  
Yokoi, Matsunaga and Shin-chan.

TAKAHASHI  
Be yourself, the man in the  
video these women fell for.

RON  
I was drunk.

TAKAHASHI

Dear God, don't get drunk!

Yokoi lets out a creepy GIGGLE.

Michiko, agitated, sits up straight.

MICHIKO

It's a date Ron, that's all.

Ron looks at her.

RON

I haven't been on a date in  
over 20 years.

Matsunaga speaks in re-assuring tones.

MATSUNAGA

Anything you want us to do  
to put you at ease, please  
ask.

RON

I just want it to be done...  
nice, you know?

TAKAHASHI

Suzuki-san, you have nothing  
to fear. You are looking at  
the team responsible for the  
award-winning "Divorcee Boot  
Camp" and "My Odd-Looking  
Granny".

Ron's nerves get worse.

Shin-chan stands up. He goes and crouches in front of  
Ron - friendly, deferential. They all immediately sit  
up to listen.

SHIN-CHAN

Ron, I am going to be honest  
with you. TV is very fake. All  
gloss, manufactured surface  
sheen. Shabby. You, on the  
other hand, are the genuine  
article. That clip on  
YouTube... People are watching  
that clip because they crave  
purity. A gentle spirit. An  
honest heart. People like us  
need people like you to come  
along every now and then, and  
keep us humble.

He pats Ron's arm. Ron smiles.

SHIN-CHAN  
Your wife was a very lucky  
woman. I'm sorry for your  
loss.

Ron is moved by this tribute.

Michiko watches Shin-chan, reluctantly impressed.

SHIN-CHAN  
It is a privilege to host  
this event for you on my  
show, and I will do  
everything I can, sir, to  
make this experience worthy  
of the empathy and  
compassion you have stirred  
throughout this nation.

Ron nods, smiles.

MATSUNAGA  
We've picked three great  
women for you to date.

Ron frowns.

RON  
(to Michiko)  
I thought you were going to  
pick them?

Michiko blinks, thinking what to say.

A glance between Shin-chan and Matsunaga.

SHIN-CHAN  
We all picked them. You must  
be dying to meet them.

Another pat on the arm.

SHIN-CHAN  
They are dying to meet you.

A nervous smile from Ron.

48 EXT. DOWNTOWN CITY STREET - NIGHT

A lively strip of bars, restaurants and late-night  
shops. Revellers bustle up and down the street.

In the window of an Italian Restaurant sits Ron, ADs and Make-up Assistants poking and prodding him.

49 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - NIGHT

In the back of the van sit Michiko, Shun and Shige. They all wear headphones, hi-tech machinery and monitors in front of them.

MICHIKO  
And run your checks please.

LOCATION SHOOT MONTAGE

Shun and Shige flick switches.

SHUN  
Camera 1 ready.

SHIGE  
Table Mic A, check.

SHUN  
Camera 2, little tighter.

SHIGE  
Principal Mic B, check.

Shun and Shige carry on their preparations, getting STATIC-FILLED REPLIES.

On the monitors we see every imaginable camera angle on Ron's table.

END MONTAGE

Michiko glances at one of the monitors.

MICHIKO  
Visual on Funny Lady! Clear  
the frame!

The ADs and Make-up Assistants scatter.

Ron, very alone, fiddles with his pinhole mic.

50 EXT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A short, buxom, well-dressed woman, FUNNY LADY (MATSUKO), approaches the restaurant.

51 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - SAME

MICHIKO  
Here we go...

52 INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - SAME

Ron pats his suit jacket. He sees MATSUKO, smiling, approach the table. He stands.

RON  
Ron Suzuki. Nice to meet  
you.

Ron bows.

Matsuko smiles, then gives him a great big bear hug. She's shorter, but lifts him right off his feet.

53 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - SAME

SHUN  
Wow! Fiesty!

54 INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - SAME

Matsuko puts Ron down.

MATSUKO  
I'm going to call you Ron.  
And you will call me Ma-  
chan.

RON  
Fine.

MATSUKO  
Ma-chan.

RON  
Yes, good.

MATSUKO  
Ma-chan.

RON  
You want me to call you Ma-  
chan...

Matsuko smiles.

RON  
...Ma-chan.

MATSUKO  
Now we're cooking!

The WAITER appears.

MATSUKO  
Two gin and tonics please.

The waiter nods, heads off.

RON  
I don't drink gin.

MATSUKO  
Oh you must. You simply  
must.

RON  
OK...

He smiles, looks out the window. Matsuko's intense  
gaze never leaves him.

55 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Michiko stares at the monitors.

MICHIKO  
Come on Ron...

56 INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Ron tries to think of something to say.

RON  
You know-

MATSUKO  
You lovely, lovely man.

She grabs his hand across the table.

Again, the intense gaze.

The G&Ts arrive. Ron takes the opportunity to  
release his hand and picks up his drink.

MATSUKO  
Cheers!

RON

Cheers!

Matsuko takes a big gulp. Ron sips his tentatively.

A curious look from Matsuko.

Ron nods with fake enthusiasm.

RON

Mmm!

Matsuko looks at him sternly. Ron drinks more. And more.

Matsuko is satisfied.

She takes his hand again.

MATSUKO

Do you know what I thought  
when I saw your video?

Ron shakes his head.

MATSUKO

I thought: "He, too, knows  
loss."

Ron nods slowly.

RON

You're a widow?

Matsuko SLAPS the table hard.

MATSUKO

No! The wanker fucked off  
with my sister!

RON

Oh.

Ron nods, panicked. He grabs his drink, takes a gulp.

MATSUKO

Took all my jewelry!

Ron's smile/grimace.

RON

Oh dear.

Matsuko's hard stare at Ron.

MATSUKO  
He'll clear her bank account,  
too, no doubt about it!

She stabs a chopstick into a coaster.

Ron glances at it in horror.

RON  
Yes...

WAITER  
Ready to order?

Ron raises the menu like a shield.

RON  
Oh God yes.

57 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - NIGHT

Michiko and Shun watch the monitors with an  
expression of mild horror.

58 INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Matsuko, drunk, maudlin, splashes the last of a  
bottle of white wine into her glass. She shakes the  
bottle, getting every last drop.

MATSUKO  
...one bastard after  
another. A procession of  
them. Lying, cheating  
toerags, every last one. A  
conveyor belt of bastards.

Matsuko moves her head like watching items pass on a  
conveyor belt.

MATSUKO  
Bastard... bastard...  
bastard... bastard...  
bastard... bastard...  
bastard...

Ron looks like a small, trapped animal.

RON  
You could... go out with  
women instead?

Ron smiles at his own joke.

MATSUKO  
I tried that.

Ron chokes on his drink.

Matsuko SIGHS.

The bill arrives. Ron snatches at it.

RON  
Well, thank you for a lovely evening.

MATSUKO  
No dessert?

She winks at him suggestively.

59 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - NIGHT

On the monitor, Ron waves good bye to a taxi.

MICHIKO  
And... that's a wrap.

Shun and Shige start to power down the machinery.

On the monitor, a CLOSE UP OF RON, looking very stressed.

Michiko stares at the monitor sympathetically.

The monitor switches off.

60 EXT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

An AD takes the mic from Ron.

Michiko approaches.

RON  
That was-

Michiko shusses him, nods at the mic.

The AD goes off with the mic.

Ron is in shock.

RON  
That was...

Michiko smiles. She rubs his arm.

MICHIKO  
We'll fix it in the edit.

Ron SIGHS.

MICHIKO  
We'll get you a car.

RON  
No, I... think I'll walk.

Ron turns and wanders off. Michiko watches him go.

61 EXT. TOKYO STREET - NIGHT

A strong breeze. Ron watches a couple, arm in arm, enter the station for shelter. Ron puts his collar up and continues on.

62 INT. RON'S APARTMENT BUILDING, ISHIWATA HOME - NIGHT

Ron enters the living-dining room. Aya and Keiko are sat on the couch playing video games with Ishiwata-san's two boys.

RON  
Hello girls.

The girls barely GRUNT a reply.

RON  
(to Ishiwata-san)  
How were they?

ISHIWATA-SAN  
Good as gold.

RON  
Aya? No wheezing?

ISHIWATA-SAN  
A little. The nebulizer cleared it.

Ron nods.

RON  
I should thank your husband.

ISHIWATA-SAN  
Oh, he's never home before midnight.

Ron nods. He looks at the girls.

RON  
(to Ishiwata)  
Thank you.

Ishiwata smiles.

ISHIWATA-SAN  
How did your TV thing go?

Ron thinks for a while.

RON  
She was very different from  
my wife.

Ishiwata-san smiles.

ISHIWATA-SAN  
Well, you'll never find  
another Haruka.

Ron forces out a smile.

63 INT. RON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The PHOTO of Haruka next to the family altar, lit by moonlight.

Ron lies awake, staring at the photo.

Keiko's arm moves across him. She is sound asleep. Aya sleeps cuddled into Ron.

Aya farts in her sleep.

Ron salutes.

Ron sleeps.

64 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - DAY

Ron working at his desk.

An OFFICE LADY arrives, smiles at Ron. He smiles back. She suddenly dumps a huge pile of paperwork in Ron's in-tray, and walks off.

Ron stares at the pile.

65 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Keiko and Aya sit at the table, staring suspiciously.

Ron stands with Michiko.

RON  
Michiko is in charge,  
understand? I'm sure you'll  
have lots of fun together.

Michiko smile nervously at the girls.

GENKAN

Ron puts on his shoes as Michiko sees him off.

RON  
They've had their dinner. No  
drinks after 8 PM for Aya.  
She takes the brown  
nebulizer before bed, the  
blue if there is any extra  
wheezing. The cream in the  
red tin is for the back of  
Keiko's knees. Before  
bedtime. Their pyjamas are  
out. It's all on the list.

Ron nods at a LIST on the dining table.

RON  
You have my mobile number.

MICHIKO  
What sports club will you be  
in?

Ron blinks.

RON  
Central. We have a company  
account. I'll have my mobile  
with me.

Ron picks up his sports holdall and exits.

Michiko comes back to the girls.

MICHIKO  
So, how about we play some  
card games?

The girls just stare at her.

MICHIKO  
Colouring in?

No reaction from the girls.

MICHIKO  
Ehm...

KEIKO  
Can we watch TV?

MICHIKO  
Well, just for a little-

The girls run to the TV, switch it on, then fly onto the sofa, bringing up their favourite channel in a familiar move.

Michiko sighs, takes out her laptop, opens up her file on FGM, bites into an apple from the fruit bowl, and works.

66 INT. RON'S APARTMENT BUILDING, STORAGE CLOSET -  
CONTINUOUS

Ron opens a storage cupboard. From his sports bag, he takes out the briefcase inside, and puts the sports bag in the storage closet.

67 EXT. RON'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Ron exits the building. High above, Michiko looks out the window watching Ron go.

She takes in the change of sports bag to briefcase.

68 EXT. TOKYO STREET - NIGHT

Ron exits a subway station and walks down the street. Around him, revellers and couples on dates. He glances at them as they pass.

He comes to a tall building and looks up at the sign  
- NIPPON ALLIED METALS.

He takes out his card key, swipes, and enters.

69 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - NIGHT

Ron works feverishly, accounts and ledgers in a pile in his in-tray.

His desklight is a pinprick on the vast, empty floor.

70 INT. RON'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Michiko is engrossed in her work on her vagina graphic.

She turns round - the girls are standing behind her, looking curiously at the laptop screen.

Michiko swiftly shuts down the computer.

MICHIKO  
Okay, bathtime!

71 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - CONTINUOUS

Ron stretches, looks at the time. He surveys his work, the empty in-tray. He is pleased. He starts to pack up.

72 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - CONTINUOUS

Michiko is engrossed in a photo slideshow of Somali women.

BEDROOM

Aya and Keiko pull out the futons themselves. It is hard going for them.

They get into the futons, switch out the light.

KEIKO & AYA  
Goodnight!

MICHIKO  
(absent-mindedly)  
Good night...

Michiko watches the photos.

73 I/E. CHUO LINE TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

The packed orange train speeds along the line.

Exhausted salarymen sleep at crooked angles.

Ron, standing, yawns and looks out the window.

74 INT. RON'S APARTMENT BUILDING, STORAGE ROOM -  
CONTINUOUS

Ron swaps the briefcase for his sports holdall.

75 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - CONTINUOUS

Ron comes home.

Michiko packs up her laptop as he enters.

MICHIKO

Okaeri.

RON

Tadaima.

Michiko looks at him as he takes off his jacket. She takes in the sports holdall.

MICHIKO

Good work out?

RON

Just the thing, thanks.

Michiko nods.

MICHIKO

Yes. You do look shattered.

Ron smiles, picks up the list.

RON

No problems?

Michiko purses her lips, shakes her head.

RON

Aya used her nebulizer OK?

Michiko blinks hard.

MICHIKO

Ehm...

BEDROOM

Aya sleeps soundly, but there is a wheeze in her breath. Ron kneels next to Aya's futon, Michiko stands at the door.

Ron lays the nebulizer next to Aya, and the steam envelops her nose.

MICHIKO

Sorry.

Ron brushes his hand over Aya's head.

RON

You have to watch them. All the time.

Michiko watches Ron gazing on his daughters.

GENKAN

MICHIKO

Are you going to let them watch tomorrow night?

Ron, puzzled, looks at her.

MICHIKO

Your date. It goes out tomorrow.

Ron thinks about this.

MICHIKO

Prime-time.

Michiko's beaming smile.

76 I/E. MICHIKO'S HOME, LIVING-ROOM - NIGHT

Michiko sits up late with the TV on.

Her Cambodian orphans piece plays.

Michiko goes to the window. She looks outside. The view encompasses half-a-dozen apartment buildings. No lights are on. Everyone is asleep.

The bright moon hangs over a dark town, the one speckle of light coming from Michiko's living-room.

77 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - DAY

Ron stands in front of the Bu-cho, who flicks through Ron's report.

BU-CHO  
Good work. Very good.

Ron smiles.

BU-CHO  
I hope you can keep this up.  
Because...

Bu-cho's voice trails off. Ron looks at him suspiciously.

BU-CHO  
My wife tells me we'll be  
seeing you in the living-room  
tonight.

Ron blushes.

78 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - NIGHT

On the TV SCREEN Matsuko is cursing her ex-boyfriends. The expletives are so thick and fast that the soundtrack is continuous censor's BEEPS.

On the sofa, Aya, mouth gaping, stares at this horror show. She snuggles into an equally horrified Keiko. They both snuggle into Ron.

Ron, numb, watches the TV.

79 EXT. RON'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Keiko and Aya dangle ice skates from their necks. They run towards Granny, bumping into her and getting a hug.

AYA  
(to Granny)  
Daddy was on TV! Did you see?

Granny smiles.

GRANNY  
Yes, I saw.

The girls get in Granny's parked car.

GRANNY  
(to Ron)  
Are you sure you know what  
you're doing?

Ron SIGHS.

Granny smiles. She gets into her car and drives off.

80 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - NIGHT

The AD puts a mic on Ron.

Michiko and Shun stand in front of him. Michiko has her arms folded. She looks at her watch.

RON  
That first woman, for example.

MICHIKO  
She had character.

RON  
My boss called her a circus  
act.

MICHIKO  
That's unkind.

The AD tugs hard at Ron's suit jacket, almost knocking him over.

RON  
It's just, well...

Michiko looks at her watch.

MICHIKO  
OK Ron, how about we go for a  
drink after tonight, have a  
chat about it then, eh?

Ron smiles.

RON  
Yes. Yes, that would be nice.

Michiko pats him on the arm.

MICHIKO  
Good.

She turns round and walks away, speaking into a walkie-talkie.

MICHIKO  
People, ten minutes to Koala  
Bear!

Ron is being pulled again by the AD.

RON  
(to Shun)  
Koala Bear...?

Shun smiles, walks off.

81 INT. IZZAKAYA RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Ron spears some deep-friend tofu with his chopstick.  
Across from him sits KOALA BEAR (TAMIE), small,  
pointy features and a worried expression.

RON  
So...

Tamie jumps, in turn startling Ron.

She looks at him, blinking rapidly.

RON  
So... you're a teacher.

Tamie nods.

RON  
That's interesting.

Tamie smiles, oozing nerves.

Ron takes a drink.

RON  
Primary school?

Tamie shakes her head.

Ron smiles.

RON  
Junior high?

Tamie shakes her head again.

RON  
Oh, high school?

Tamie shakes her head again. She speaks in almost a  
whisper.

TAMIE  
Kindergarten.

Ron nods, smiles.

He takes some sashimi. Chews.

82 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Michiko and Shun watch the monitors.

Michiko goes to the close-up of Ron. She takes in his discomfort.

83 INT. IZZAKAYA - CONTINUOUS

From Tamie's side of the table, Ron hears a tiny SOB.

RON  
I'm sorry, did I upset you?

Tamie fishes in her bag, brings out a tissue and dabs at her eyes with it.

TAMIE  
You are so brave.

Ron shifts awkwardly.

RON  
Well, that's...

TAMIE  
You are so brave.

Ron SIGHS, looks down at the table. Tamie SNIFFS.

TAMIE  
Your wife must have been so  
happy.

Ron looks up at this. His mind goes elsewhere.

84 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Shun looks aghast at this scene. Michiko is embarrassed for Ron.

MATSUNAGA  
This is pure gold.

Standing behind Shun and Michiko, Matsunaga folds his arms contentedly.

85 INT. IZZAKAYA - NIGHT

Ron sits alone, the empty dishes from the meal filling the table top.

Crew buzz around taking off his mic, dismantling lights.

Ron still stares off vacantly. Michiko wanders into his point of view.

RON  
I'm ready for that drink.

Michiko's MOBILE RINGS.

She looks at the screen, signals 'wait' to Ron.

MICHIKO  
Hello.

MATSUNAGA (O.S.)  
Let's get something to eat.

Michiko looks at Ron.

MICHIKO  
Don't you have to get home?

MATSUNAGA (O.S.)  
There's a Belgian bar round the corner. Meet me in there.

Michiko looks at Ron again. He meets her gaze, smiles.

She bites her lip.

She looks at her WATCH - 8.25 PM.

MICHIKO  
I'll be there at nine.

She kills the call and goes over to Ron. Fixes a smile on her face.

MICHIKO  
Ready?

86 INT. SHOT BAR - NIGHT

Ron and Michiko sit at the counter in the crowded bar.

Ron is well into his beer. Michiko glances at the clock behind the bar: 8.35

Michiko has her Smartphone out and is panning the faces of the customers during the conversation.

RON  
I'm not sure this is working out.

MICHIKO  
What do you mean? That was wonderful tonight.

Ron looks at her sideways.

RON  
Wonderful?

MICHIKO  
Pure gold!

Ron reaches his hand out, places it over Michiko's and gently lowers the smartphone.

Michiko looks at him properly now.

RON  
Whoever that woman thought I was, it wasn't me.

Michiko looks at Ron, and sees his confusion.

She puts the phone away, and sits in closer.

MICHIKO  
What I saw tonight was a considerate, selfless man, who tries hard to make people feel better about themselves.

RON  
I looked like a sap.

MICHIKO  
You looked like a gentleman. You see things. You read situations well.

Ron looks at her, wanting to believe it.

MICHIKO  
Both times. Tonight with Koala  
Bear just as much as with  
Funny Lady.

Ron frowns.

RON  
Why do you call them that?

MICHIKO  
What?

RON  
Koala Bear... Funny Lady...  
They're people. With names.

MICHIKO  
It's the way the industry  
works. We have over one  
hundred people, cast and crew.  
If we use names, it gets  
confusing. That's why we have  
code names for the principals.

Ron nods, then stops.

RON  
What's Date Three's code name?

Michiko bites her lip.

RON  
What?

MICHIKO  
I'm not really supposed to  
say...

RON  
Come on! You can tell me.

MICHIKO  
I shouldn't.

RON  
Tell me! I promise I-

MICHIKO  
Barracuda.

Ron's eyes widen.

Michiko stares at him. Then she LAUGHS.

MICHIKO  
I'm joking!

Michiko looks at her watch: 8.45. Michiko finishes her drink and signals to the barman that she will pay.

MICHIKO  
This is on me.

Michiko brings out stuff from her bag looking for her purse. Ron spots her American passport.

RON  
Stay for one more.

She steals an anxious glance at the clock.

MICHIKO  
I can't.

Ron looks at her in surprise.

MICHIKO  
(sheepish)  
I have a date.

Ron looks at her for a beat or two, then smiles.

RON  
You have a boyfriend...

MICHIKO  
Boyfriend... It's...  
complicated.

Ron thinks about this. He looks at her, then it dawns on him.

RON  
Ah.

He sips his drink.

MICHIKO  
See? You see things.

RON  
(sourly)  
Why do people even bother  
getting married?

Michiko straightens up to say something, but Ron halts her with a raised hand.

RON

All I'm trying to say is, you  
deserve better than to be just  
'the other woman'.

Michiko smiles, but she is touched by his naivete.

MICHIKO

It's not about what I deserve.  
It's about what I want.

Ron looks at her.

RON

You don't want a normal  
relationship?

Michiko smiles, looks at the clock - 8.59 PM.

MICHIKO

What, like my slave of a  
mother? Or harridan of a  
sister?

Michiko laughs bitterly.

MICHIKO

Anyway, I tried marriage once.  
It's over-rated.

Ron thinks about this.

RON

To an American?

Michiko still has the passport and purse in her hands.  
She puts them away.

MICHIKO

First it was, if you love me,  
you'll quit your job. Then if  
you love me, you'll come to  
America. Then live with his  
mother. Then take American  
nationality. Eventually it  
dawned on me - nothing I did  
would ever be enough.

RON

So you left?

Michiko nods.

RON  
But you didn't get your  
Japanese passport back.

MICHIKO  
I haven't got round to it.

RON  
That's what happens, isn't it?  
We put it off, and put it off,  
until-

Michiko checks the time again.

MICHIKO  
I have to go.

She gets up, gathers her things, turns to go.

RON  
I pity you.

Michiko stops, turns round, puts her things back down  
on the bar stool.

She fixes Ron in her gaze.

MICHIKO  
Is that right? Well, save your  
pity for the wives, stranded  
at home while their husbands  
work all hours then drink  
themselves into a stupor  
afterwards. They put on the  
white dress, get their photo  
taken, enjoy their moment in  
the spotlight, and then spend  
a lifetime living in the  
darkness.

Ron looks at his drink.

MICHIKO  
My... boyfriend, is there when  
I want him, and that suits me  
fine.

Michiko gathers up her things.

Ron looks at her. He speaks with conviction.

RON  
You deserve better.

Michiko looks at him, softens a little.

She turns and goes.

Ron, alone at the bar, sips his drink.

87 I/E. BELGIAN BEER BAR - CONTINUOUS

Michiko runs up to the bar and enters.

She looks around the busy interior. No sign of Matsunaga.

Her MOBILE BEEPS. She looks down - a message from Matsunaga.

ON MOBILE SCREEN:

Fed up waiting. Going home.

BAR

Michiko looks at her WATCH: 9.07 PM.

Michiko SIGHS.

She exits the bar. A laughing couple bump her on their way in.

She turns and goes back to the shot bar. Ron isn't there.

She turns and goes home.

88 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME, LIVING-ROOM - NIGHT

Michiko comes in to the living room. There are strawberries and pastries left out for her.

She takes the strawberries and opens up the computer. She brings up PASSPORT APPLICATIONS. She begins to type.

89 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - DAY

Takahashi sits at the console watching footage of Date 2. He wears headphones. Every few seconds, his body shakes and he lets out a low SNIGGER.

Shun is doing camera maintenance.

Michiko is on the computer. On her SCREEN we glimpse shots of various restaurant interiors.

Michiko glances at Takahashi sniggering. She smiles.

Shun takes in this moment. Expressionless.

SHUN

The Sheana interview is  
scheduled for Wednesday.

Michiko looks at one restaurant interior intently.

MICHIKO

What do you think of octopus  
balls?

Shun looks at her.

SHUN

What?

MICHIKO

For Date Three... Too low-  
brow?

She clicks on another restaurant.

Shun puts down a lens and sits up.

SHUN

Michiko?

Michiko has to fight to avert her eyes from the screen.

MICHIKO

Mm?

SHUN

Sheana?

Michiko thinks about it.

MICHIKO

Is that... Korean buffet  
style?

Shun glares at her.

SHUN

The Somali asylum seeker? The  
one the government is going to  
deport to her FGM fate?

Michiko, mortified, sits back in her chair.

Takahashi lets out a SNORTING LAUGH.

MICHIKO  
Sheana... Oh my God, yes, of  
course, yes. I'm sorry.  
Wednesday.

Shun nods.

SHUN  
Can we go over the format?

Michiko grimaces.

MICHIKO  
I have to scout these  
restaurants.

Michiko looks at Shun, thinks.

MICHIKO  
Go over it with Hirose. She  
can fill me in on the details  
later.

She goes back to the computer. Shun looks at her, but  
Michiko is already engrossed in restaurants.

Suddenly, she looks up at Shun.

Shun raises a hopeful eyebrow.

MICHIKO  
Tapas!

She picks up the phone and starts to dial.

Takahashi SNIGGERS.

Shun leaves.

90 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Aya and Keiko are in their pyjamas, in the futon.

Ron comes in.

AYA & KEIKO  
Mum's book! Mum's book!

Ron looks at them. He hesitates, then slowly turns and  
goes to the bookshelf and takes out a picture book.

On the cover, a PICTURE of a little girl, her back to us, staring at a sunset. She holds her little brother by the hand. The Title:

THE ADVENTURES OF ELENA-PELENA by HARUKA SUZUKI

Ron sits on the futon. The girls cover him up with the duvet and snuggle in next to him. He opens the book.

RON

In a faraway land where the sun seldom shone, Elena-Pelena continued her journey.

Aya GIGGLES.

AYA

Elena-Pelena!

Ron smiles at her.

RON

Elena-Pelena searched for the old woman with the cask that held the dying breath of the Yellow Peacock. Legend stated that the breath restored life to those who were gravely ill, and Elena-Pelena had someone she desperately needed to help. Only the cask could save her now.

Keiko listens intently. Aya's eyes grow heavy.

RON

Elena-Pelena had tricked her way past the Warty Goblin, and tamed the Two-headed Snake. She had travelled so very very far. Her body was bruised and weary. She was hungry, thirsty and tired. Oh so tired. She longed to be back home. Now she came... to the River of.. the River of...

Ron's voice begins to trail off.

His eyes tear up.

Ron tries to keep reading, but his voice falters.

He sobs quietly.

Resting their heads on his lap, Aya and Keiko sleep soundly.

91 EXT. HIGASHI SHINANO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Michiko waits outside the school gates. Her camouflage pants and retro Soviet t-shirt are in stark contrast to the Mitsukoshi mummies around her.

The BELL RINGS and the children exit, running, shouting, laughing.

Aya, head bowed, walks slowly. She reaches the school gates and sees Michiko.

Michiko kneels down to her level.

MICHIKO

Hi Aya.

Aya's head goes down.

MICHIKO

I'm picking you up today.

Aya looks up.

AYA

Dad told us.

Michiko purses her lips.

MICHIKO

How was school?

AYA

Same.

MICHIKO

So what did you do today?

Aya looks at the ground, scuffs her feet.

AYA

Swimming.

Michiko smiles.

MICHIKO

I love to swim! I know a pool down in Shonan with great big slides. Maybe we could go there one day, eh?

AYA  
I can't swim.

Michiko frowns.

MICHIKO  
Oh. Never mind, I'm sure lots  
of girls and boys your age  
haven't learned yet.

AYA  
Everyone else in my class can  
swim.

Michiko is surprised.

Aya looks at her.

AYA  
Their mummies taught them.

Michiko thinks about this.

Over Aya's shoulder, she sees Keiko approach.

Keiko is in tears.

Michiko looks down at the two forlorn girls.

92 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - DAY

At the dining-table, Aya drinks juice and eats crisps.

Keiko is still crying.

Michiko is looking at her dumbfounded.

MICHIKO  
Margherita...

Keiko sniffs.

MICHIKO  
Why, exactly, do the  
Basketball Club members call  
you that?

Keiko SOBS.

KEIKO

At Sports Day, we had no bento, everyone had a bento, but not us, only us, and Dad called Dominos, and everyone saw them bring it, and they laughed, and... and... and...

Michiko looks down at her shopping bags - two FROZEN PIZZAS. She nudges them under the table with her foot.

MICHIKO

Pizzas delivered to school Sports Day. That's cool.

KEIKO

No it's not.

MICHIKO

Why not?

Keiko looks at her.

KEIKO

I want to be like everyone else.

Michiko takes Keiko's hand.

MICHIKO

No, honey, you don't.

93 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - NIGHT

A smattering of salarymen working at their desks.

One TIRED SALARYMAN yawns, stretches.

Bu-cho is working away at his desk.

Ron looks at Bu-cho, then the huge pile of work in front of him.

He checks the time.

He picks up the phone.

94 INT. RON'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

ENTRANCE

Michiko pays a NOODLE DELIVERY MAN and takes the food.

LIVING-DINING ROOM

Keiko, Michiko and Aya slurp noodles contentedly.

Michiko's mobile BEEPS.

She looks at the screen: MATSUNAGA

She opens the message:

A DRINK AT NINE?

She replies:

GREAT

The landline RINGS. Aya answers.

AYA

Hello?... Daddy! We're having  
noodles... Yeah, they're  
good... When are you coming  
home?... She's here, hold on.

She passes the receiver to Michiko.

MICHIKO

Hello?

95 INTERCUT BT. RON'S APARTMENT AND RON'S OFFICE

RON

Could you possibly stay  
longer?

Michiko thinks, smiles at the girls.

MICHIKO

Well, how much longer are we  
talking about?

RON

I'm not sure...

MICHIKO

You're working very hard on  
your fitness, aren't you?

Ron tries to think on his feet.

RON

It's just I've bumped into an  
old friend, who mentioned a  
drink...

Michiko isn't fooled.

MICHIKO  
A drink? Nice evening for  
it...

RON  
So, could you...

MICHIKO  
The thing is, I've made plans.

Now Ron is not fooled.

RON  
Plans?

MICHIKO  
Plans.

The silence goes on a beat too long.

RON  
Okay, I... won't hold you up.

MICHIKO  
Sorry.

96 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - CONTINUOUS  
Ron folds away his mobile. He stares out the window.

97 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - NIGHT

The girls sprawl at impossible angles on the sofa. They watch LOUD CARTOONS on TV. Crisps, juice and sweets litter the folding table in front of them.

At the dining table, Michiko works on her vagina graphic.

Michiko does not hear Granny entering. Granny stares at the vagina graphic.

Michiko turns round. Startled, she jumps to her feet, hastily getting rid of the vagina graphic.

MICHIKO  
How do you do. I'm Michiko.

GRANNY  
I'm your relief.  
(to girls)  
Hello girls!

Keiko and Aya know the tone. They sit up straight, make a half-hearted attempt to hide the sweets, crisps and juice.

Michiko goes over to them and hastily clears up.

MICHIKO  
Girls. I said bath-time.

KEIKO  
No you didn't.

Michiko smiles sheepishly at Granny.

Granny goes over and lifts Aya up.

GRANNY  
Bath and bed little one, eh?

Aya snuggles into her.

She carries Aya out of the room.

Michiko watches them go, then clears the mess.

BEDROOM - LATER

Keiko and Aya sleep soundly in their futons.

LIVING-DINING ROOM

Granny and Michiko sit at the dining table. Granny pours them both green tea.

MICHIKO  
He's fortunate to have you  
nearby.

Granny lifts her cup.

GRANNY  
Do you really think so?

MICHIKO  
Well, being on his own and  
all, having Mum close to hand-

GRANNY

Mum!

Granny LAUGHS.

GRANNY

I'm his mother-in-law.

Michiko nods.

GRANNY

Which explains you.

Michiko frowns.

MICHIKO

How do you mean?

Granny looks at her.

GRANNY

For Ron, the less I am around,  
the better.

MICHIKO

I'm sure that's not true.

Granny smiles.

GRANNY

I remind him too much of  
Haruka.

Michiko thinks about this.

MICHIKO

What was she like?

Granny sits forward, cups the green tea in both hands.

GRANNY

Strong-willed, impetuous,  
talented, driven.

Michiko thinks about Ron with such a woman. She smiles.

Granny reads her thoughts, smiles too.

GRANNY

When Haruka was young, very  
young, before she could walk,  
we visited a neighbour. Her  
daughter was slightly older  
than Haruka.

Granny uses the green tea cups to illustrate the next point.

GRANNY

The neighbour's little girl had a toy. Haruka took it off her. The little girl was good at sharing - she let Haruka have the toy, and picked up another. Haruka wanted that toy, too. And she got it. It went on like that for a while. My toy is my toy. And your toy... that's my toy, too.

Michiko purses her lips.

MICHIKO

Sounds like a lot for Ron to handle.

GRANNY

A lot for any man. Ron's a worker. A provider. And a good father. Haruka was fortunate to have him.

MICHIKO

A lot of women in Japan think so.

Granny smiles.

GRANNY

But not you.

MICHIKO

Please don't misunderstand. I think that came out wrong. What I mean is - I kind of do my own thing.

GRANNY

An independent woman.

MICHIKO

Well, yes.

GRANNY

Ron tells me you live with your parents.

Michiko nods, not sure if Granny is pushing her buttons. She sips her drink.

GRANNY

Ron always feared deep down  
that Haruka was too good for  
him. Truth be told, she didn't  
deserve him.

Michiko drinks her tea.

MICHIKO

"These days, who'd take me?"

Michiko smiles, looks at Granny.

MICHIKO

It's what Ron said, on the-

GRANNY

I know about your TV  
programme.

The smile leaves Michiko's face.

GRANNY

(gently)

Ron's been through a lot.  
Don't hurt him.

Michiko thinks about this.

The sound of KEYS IN THE DOOR.

Ron enters.

GRANNY

You're home.

RON

Hi.

He takes off his coat. He looks at Michiko.

RON

Didn't you have to be  
somewhere?

Michiko blinks hard. She looks at the CLOCK - 10.35 PM.  
She fishes out her mobile from her bag - THREE MISSED  
CALLS. She SIGHS.

GRANNY

I'm sorry dear, did I keep  
you?

Michiko looks again at the mobile.

MICHIKO  
It wasn't important.

Ron opens the fridge and takes out some beer.

RON  
Anyone else?

Granny stands, gets her coat.

GRANNY  
I'll leave you to it.  
(to Michiko)  
It was lovely to meet you.  
(to Ron)  
Keiko needs you to give her  
money for the school trip in  
the morning. Aya got paint on  
her school jumper - I've left  
out a clean one.

Ron nods.

Granny moves to the door.

GRANNY  
Good night.

RON  
Good night. And thank you.

MICHIKO  
Good night.

Granny exits. The CLICK of the door closing behind her.

Ron brings out a poured beer, hold it up to Michiko -  
want one?

Michiko bows.

MICHIKO  
(tired)  
Please.

Ron puts it in front of her, gets his own.

They chink glasses, drink.

RON  
Did I get you into trouble?

Michiko smiles.

MICHIKO

It was worth it. Your mother-in-law is not exactly old school, is she?

Ron smiles, drinks.

MICHIKO

Was Haruka like her mother?

RON

Polar opposites.

Michiko looks at him.

RON

What you see is what you get with Granny.

Michiko sips her drink, thinks.

MICHIKO

What did Haruka do?

Ron looks at her.

RON

You seem very interested in Haruka. Research for the show?

Michiko smiles.

MICHIKO

Just you and me, at the end of the day, having a drink and a chat.

Ron looks at her, gets up, leaves the room.

Michiko sits there, uncertain.

Ron comes back with the children's book, and puts it in front of Michiko: THE ADVENTURES OF ELENA-PELENA.

Michiko looks at it.

RON

She was a children's author. She won a national award for that book.

MICHIKO

(smiles)

My niece has this.

Ron drinks.

RON  
Everybody's niece has it.

Michiko looks at Ron, who is drifting to someplace else.

MICHIKO  
She was a success. Good for her.

Ron smiles bitterly.

RON  
She started as an agent at a publishers. Then she realised she could do better than her clients. Book fairs, award shows, conventions... she travelled here, there...  
(beat)  
Everywhere.

Ron drinks.

MICHIKO  
That must have been difficult.

Ron sits forward.

RON  
She made more money than me.

Michiko looks at Ron. He reads her thoughts.

RON  
No, I didn't resent it. We were clearing the mortgage, the kids had all they asked for. As she spent more time at work, I spent more time here to take up the slack. So, we rarely met... But she enjoyed the travelling. I was happy for her.  
(with force)  
Spending so much time at work.

Michiko take in the change in tone. Ron sips his drink.

RON

She was on her way home from a  
fiction conference in  
Yamanashi when the crash  
happened.

Michiko nods, thinks. Then stops.

Ron swigs his beer - empty. He gets another. He gives  
one to Michiko without asking. He sits down, opens the  
can, drinks hard.

Michiko is watching him intently.

MICHIKO

You said the car crashed in  
Chiba.

Ron is tense. The words come hard.

RON

Yes I did.

Michiko treads very carefully now. She watches Ron.

RON

I checked. There was no  
fiction conference in  
Yamanashi.

Ron is breathing hard, fighting to stay in control.

MICHIKO

Maybe you mis-heard, or made a  
mistake...

Ron slowly, deliberately, shakes his head.

RON

I got her mobile back. At the  
hospital. There was a message.

Ron stares straight at the wall, his head rocking  
slightly.

MICHIKO

Oh Ron...

RON

K.S. Her boss. Kohei Sadomura.

Ron fights the tears.

RON  
God, you're the first person  
I've told.

It is too much for him. He starts to cry.

MICHIKO  
Shhhh..

Michiko looks at Ron. She makes to go over to him, but stops. She thinks. Then, she takes his hand, gently massages it.

Ron composes himself.

RON  
If I ask you something, will  
you give me an honest answer?

Michiko nods.

RON  
Keiko and Aya... Do they look  
like me?

Michiko blinks hard, looks at Ron's pleading face.

MICHIKO  
Don't do this to yourself...

She clasps Ron's other hand.

RON  
Honest answer?

Michiko thinks. She looks at the photos of the girls on the wall.

She searches her thoughts, but all she can come up with is

MICHIKO  
I don't know!

Michiko lets out a desperate LAUGH. Ron looks at her, smiles.

He laughs, too. She smiles at him.

They fall into a comforting hug.

Michiko laughs, rubs the back of Ron's neck.

Ron smiles.

A little nuzzle.

Michiko blinks, thinks.

Ron gets closer, kisses Michiko.

One kiss, fleeting. But she lets him.

They look at each other for a moment.

Michiko stands and walks away.

They take a moment apart to re-compose themselves.

MICHIKO

I should-

Ron stands, runs his hand through his hair.

RON

Yes, yes, it's late. Thank  
you... for the kids, I mean.

(beat)

The kids.

Michiko grins nervously. Then turns to go, turns back,  
turns to go again. Back and forth, a little confused  
dance.

Ron CLAPS HIS HANDS and smiles, all bonhomie.

RON

So, date three, eh? Where are  
we off to?

Michiko smiles desperately.

98 EXT. SPANISH RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The sign outside says TAPAS! TAPAS!! TAPAS!!!

99 I/E. SPANISH RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Crew mill around, setting up lights and stands.

The ADs and Make-up people poke and fiddle with Ron.

Ron stares at Michiko, who is talking intently to an  
AD. She turns to Ron. They exchange awkward smiles.

She walks away. He watches her go.

100 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Shun and Shige on walkie-talkies, carrying out their checks.

Technicians hooking up flashing and beeping devices.

In the centre of it all sits Michiko. Still. Staring at the monitor, into Ron's lonely, vacant gaze.

A hand goes round her shoulder. She turns to face Matsunaga.

MATSUNAGA

Does he ever smile?

Michiko looks at Ron's sad face on the monitor.

MICHIKO

I'm sorry about the other night.

MATSUNAGA

No problem! Hirose kept me company. That young woman can hold her drink.

Matsunaga smiles, walks off.

The STATIC of a walkie-talkie.

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT 1 (O.S.)

Five minutes to The Fox!

Michiko snaps into action.

MICHIKO

Clear the frame please!

101 INT. SPANISH RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Crew start to melt away, leaving Ron sitting alone at the table in the empty restaurant.

One SCRUFFY AD stands by his side.

The AD's walkie-talkie:

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT 1 (O.S.)

Sixty seconds to The Fox!

Ron frowns, mumbles to himself.

RON  
The Fox...!?

Scruffy AD signals to a WAITER then walks away. The waiter comes over and lights a candle on the table.

The background lights are dimmed, and at the same time, a tungsten light fades in on the table.

Ron sits framed in a warm, romantic glow.

The frame is cleared. The set is still.

Ron's look of nervous anticipation.

The CLIP of heels on the stairs.

The CREAK as the door of the restaurant opens.

Ron looks up. And smiles.

DATE THREE (THE FOX) walks toward him. Tall, 40, elegant good looks, effortless grace. She smiles, and suddenly all is right with the world.

Ron moves round. They bow.

RON  
Thank you for coming.

THE FOX  
I've been looking forward to this.

Ron pulls out her chair. She sits.

102 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Shun looks at Michiko, raises an eyebrow. Michiko is happy but nervous.

103 INT. SPANISH RESTAURANT - LATER

The Fox is helping herself to some mozzarella and tomato.

THE FOX  
Mmmm! Aren't these just the best tapas you have ever had?

RON  
(enraptured)  
Yes, they are.

The Fox tops up Ron's wine glass.

They drink, smile at each other.

THE FOX

I have a confession to make.

Ron's look of dread.

The Fox smiles and it is all OK.

THE FOX

I was married.

Ron nods.

RON

You're.. divorced?

THE FOX

Widowed.

Ron slowly twirls his glass.

RON

I'm sorry.

THE FOX

I have a son. He's 12. Kazuo.  
Baseball mad.

She smiles at the name, and Ron smiles too.

THE FOX

What you have with your two  
girls... I understand.

Ron nods.

The Fox sips her drink. Ron refills it.

THE FOX

That's why I have to be  
honest.

Ron's face falls.

RON

Do you?

The Fox looks at the table.

THE FOX

I'm not looking for a husband.

RON  
(whiny)  
You're not?

The Fox shakes her head. Touches her glass.

THE FOX  
I've been with... potential  
husbands. It's not enough. I  
never knew why.

She looks up and gazes at Ron.

THE FOX  
Until I saw you. And then I  
realised.

Ron's mouth is agape.

THE FOX  
I need a man who can be a  
husband...

Her hand leaves the glass and travels across the table,  
coming to rest gently on Ron's.

THE FOX  
...and a father.

104 MOBILE STUDIO - SIMULTANEOUS

As The Fox says these words, Shin-chan says

SHIN-CHAN  
...and a father.

Michiko turns round, glances at Shin-chan.

TAPAS BAR

Ron glances at The Fox's hand on his, blinks.

THE FOX  
Finally, a man who can fulfill  
all my needs.

Ron gulps.

105 INT. MOBILE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Michiko is engrossed in this scene.

SHIN-CHAN  
Hook, line and sinker!

Michiko turns round. Shin-chan puts a congratulatory hand on Matsunaga's shoulder.

Michiko looks at the monitor.

ON SCREEN: Ron is smitten.

106 EXT. MOBILE STUDIO - NIGHT

Technicians pack away all the equipment.

Michiko walks with Shin-chan and Matsunaga to their car.

SHIN-CHAN  
We need to get a rough cut  
asap. I'm so in the moment  
with this. Assemble at 9 AM  
tomorrow. We'll work through  
the day.

Michiko glances pleadingly at Matsunaga.

MICHIKO  
Tomorrow? I have an interview  
with a Somali asylum seeker  
that-

Shin-chan spins on his heels violently, his face contorted.

SHIN-CHAN  
A somelier? What?? For God's  
sake woman!

He stares at Michiko incredulously. She is lost for words.

SHIN-CHAN  
(to Matsunaga)  
Can you control your woman,  
please?

Matsunaga passes the question to Michiko with a look. She blinks, bows her head.

Shin-chan walks away.

Matsunaga gives Michiko a reproachful look, then follows Shin-chan.

107 INT. SPANISH RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Michiko comes in just as Ron is freed of his mic.  
They look at each other. Ron is still in raptures.

RON  
Thank you.

Michiko, conflicted, smiles.

108 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - DAY

The girls in school uniform. Ron puts books in Aya's bag. Keiko puts on her coat. The girls bounce excitedly around him.

AYA  
Is she beautiful?

RON  
Very.

KEIKO  
Can she cook?

RON  
Yes.

AYA  
Does she like video games?

RON  
Not sure...

KEIKO  
Does she like tennis?

RON  
Yes.

AYA  
Does she like children?

Ron smiles. He hugs Aya.

RON  
Very much.

The girls smile.

Aya farts.

Ron salutes.

They all leave together.

109 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - DAY

MONTAGE:

MUSIC: "Stop Children, What's That Sound" by Buffalo Springfield

Michiko sits with an EDITOR, editing the Date Three footage.

Shin-chan sits behind them, on the back wall, Takahashi next to him.

Michiko tells the editor to do something.

Shin-chan frowns.

Michiko asks the editor to make a cut.

Shin-chan leans in, overrules her.

Michiko looks to Takahashi, making an appeal.

He shrugs.

Michiko sighs, looks down.

110 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - DAY

Ron goes through his workload with a new energy.

Bu-cho watches him, frowning.

111 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - DAY

Michiko sits further back. Silent.

Shin-chan sits forward, giving the editor instructions.

Matsunaga enters.

Michiko makes eye contact with him, not hiding her fury. She gets up and leaves.

Shin-chan carries on oblivious.

112 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, MALE TOILETS - DAY

Ron and Bu-cho are peeing at the urinals.

RON

...the portions are small,  
bite-sized really, for two.  
Lots of cheese, ham, fish.  
Complemented with rioja.

The Bu-cho listens intently, nods.

113 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - DAY

Michiko, tense, drinks a cup at the water cooler.

END MONTAGE

114 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - DAY

Michiko enters. Shin-chan, Matsunaga and Takahashi are LAUGHING. Even the editor is shaking with mirth. Michiko looks at the monitor.

A shot from the date, when a piece of squid slipped from Ron's mouth, only for him to suck it back in at the last moment.

The squid slip is on a loop, so that the squid seems to oscillate in and out of Ron's mouth. A wacky SOUND EFFECT has been added.

And a LAUGH TRACK.

Michiko's look of horror.

MICHIKO

No!

The men turn round.

Matsunaga looks at her, closes his eyes.

Michiko stares at Shin-chan, who looks straight ahead, slowly tapping his thigh with his hand.

SHIN-CHAN

We have a critic.

Michiko fights to stay calm.

MICHIKO

Please don't.. ham it up.

Shin-chan stands and faces Michiko.

SHIN-CHAN

It's funny.

Michiko gulps - Shin-chan's face is very close.

MICHIKO

Don't humiliate him.

Matsunaga bristles.

Shin-chan stares at her.

SHIN-CHAN

Shin-chan's programmes, my famous, widely-viewed programmes, are about entertainment. Entertainment means comedy. My sense of comedy has made me the highest-paid entertainer in Japan.

He leans in closer to Michiko.

SHIN-CHAN

You, on the other hand, are humourless.

MICHIKO

I'm not humourless.

Shin-chan suddenly stands back, giving Michiko room.

Shin-chan folds his arms.

SHIN-CHAN

Make me laugh.

Michiko stares at the four men.

MICHIKO

This is ridiculous.

No one moves.

SHIN-CHAN

Come on. If you are such a comic genius, make us laugh.

Michiko, forlorn, glares at Shin-chan.

She looks to Matsunaga. He averts his gaze.

MICHIKO  
This is childish.

Shin-chan puzzles over this.

SHIN-CHAN  
I don't get it.

He looks at Michiko, making her squirm.

He waits. She squirms.

His expression becomes very serious.

SHIN-CHAN  
You're not funny, woman.

Shin-chan hits the play button on the console. ON  
SCREEN: Ron and the in-and-out squid sequence.

Takahashi, Matsunaga and the editor can't help but  
smile.

SHIN-CHAN  
(to Michiko)  
That's funny.

Michiko glares at them all, then turns to go.

SHIN-CHAN  
Welcome to prime-time.

Michiko leaves.

115 INT. RSK TV, CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Michiko walks down the corridor, shedding angry tears. She is stopped in her tracks when she sees Shun and Hirose accompanying a WOMAN in traditional flowing Somali robes down the corridor. SHEANA, 15, has elegance beyond compare, that other-worldiness that only Somalis can pull off. She is beyond beauty. She is a vision.

A brief exchange of looks between Sheana and Michiko.

Stunned, Michiko watches as Sheana seems to levitate down the corridor, then disappears.

116 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - NIGHT

Ron is working hard. He sits back, rubs his eyes.

At the door, Koda and the other younger salarymen are leaving.

KODA

Sato, don't get drunk tonight.

SATO

You can talk! I'm not carrying you home again!

They all laugh, leaving for a night out.

Ron smiles.

Ron is left alone in the office. He starts packing up.

117 EXT. TOKYO STREET - NIGHT

Ron comes out and walks to the station. He takes in the ADVERTISING BILLBOARDS. A smiling salaryman holds up an energy drink. Three Office Ladies promote the joys of shopping in Hawaii.

Ron walks down the street.

118 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, TATAMI ROOM - DAY

Ron sleeps soundly in his futon.

BOOF! Aya and Keiko land right on top of him. He is suddenly awake.

Aya and Keiko thrust the newspaper at him excitedly.

KEIKO

Look! Look!

On the back page Entertainment section, there is a photo of Ron in the restaurant with The Fox. The headline is RATINGS HISTORY? The newspaper advertising a colour piece on the programme on the inside pages.

KEIKO

She has big teeth.

Ron looks at the newspaper, smiles.

RON

She's nice.

The girls smile.

119 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN/DINING - DAY

Ron cooks pancakes in the kitchen.

Aya and Keiko are eating pancakes at the table. Ron brings in his own and starts to eat.

AYA  
Can we go to the pool today?

RON  
Michiko is coming today, honey pie. I have to be somewhere.

AYA  
Where?

RON  
Just a place.

KEIKO  
It's Saturday!

Ron pats her hair.

RON  
It's the way things are right now.

The doorbell RINGS. Ron goes and opens it.

Michiko enters.

MICHIKO  
Hello girls.

AYA & KEIKO  
(lukewarm)  
Hello...

RON  
(to girls)  
Brush your teeth before I go so I can finish them off.

Aya farts. Ron salutes.

Michiko smiles at this ritual.

The girls go off to the washroom.

RON  
I'll be back as soon as I can.

MICHIKO  
Take your time.

Ron thinks for a second.

RON  
No plans?

Michiko's sad smile.

MICHIKO  
No plans.

A SCREAM from the washroom.

Ron and Michiko run to the girls.

WASHROOM

The girls stand terrified. On the edge of the bath - a KANGAROO SPIDER.

Ron gulps.

Michiko walks over and grips the spider by the back leg. The girls and Ron cower as she passes them.

GENKAN

Michiko places the spider outside the front door. It hops away.

She turns around. Ron, Keiko and Aya look at her in awe.

Michiko smiles.

120 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, ELEVATOR - DAY

Ron and Keiko descend in the elevator. Keiko is in basketball gear with a basketball under her arm. Keiko bumps Ron playfully. He bumps her back.

121 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - DAY

Aya looks at Michiko's bag.

AYA  
Did you bring crisps?

MICHIKO  
No, I brought this.

Michiko goes in the bag, takes out and holds up a  
SWIMMING COSTUME.

Aya grins.

122 INT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY

LEARNING TO SWIM MONTAGE

Michiko shows Aya how to kick her legs.

Aya kicks and does breathing exercises under Michiko's  
instruction.

Aya's swimming motions, supported by Michiko.

Aya swims a little distance herself.

Aya swims under the water then kicks up into Michiko's  
arms. Michiko claps excitedly. Aya grins.

END MONTAGE

123 INT. POOL CAFE - DAY

Aya, hair wet, towels draped round her shoulders,  
drinks juice and dips into a bowl of french fries.

Michiko smooths Aya's hair.

AYA  
Daddy says you're married.

MICHIKO  
I was married.

AYA  
He says you're American.

MICHIKO  
My passport is American, but  
I'm Japanese.

Aya sips juice. Michiko stares at her intently.

MICHIKO  
What do you think Aya, am I  
Japanese?

AYA  
You sound like one.

Michiko smiles.

MICHIKO  
Drink up. We have to pick your  
sister up from basketball  
practice.

Aya drinks.

124 INT. SCHOOL GYM - DAY

Keiko and other BASKETBALL PLAYERS in the middle of a  
game.

125 EXT. HIGASHI SHINANO SCHOOL - DAY

Keiko exits the school with her friends.

Suddenly, a LIGHT.

Michiko, mic in hand, runs over to Keiko. Shun follows  
with a TV camera, Shige close behind with a spotlight  
shined on Keiko.

MICHIKO  
(to camera)  
We're here for an exclusive  
interview with Keiko Suzuki,  
the primary six girl making  
all the headlines.

Keiko is dumbstruck. The rest of the basketball club  
watch in awe.

MICHIKO  
(to camera)  
For years Sports Day has meant  
the same old tired bento  
formula. But one small girl  
caused a revolution by bucking  
that trend in favour of...  
delivery pizza. News leaked  
out, and now families up and  
down Japan are opting for  
pizza on Sports Day.

Michiko swings the mic towards Keiko. Shun moves in with the camera.

MICHIKO

Keiko Suzuki, how does it feel to be a trendsetter?

The Basketball Club members are stunned into envy.

KEIKO

Well, ehm, pretty good, I suppose.

MICHIKO

What kind of pizza did you order?

KEIKO

Uhm, Margherita.

MICHIKO

(to camera)

The rumours are true.

(to Keiko)

How did it taste?

KEIKO

Pretty yummy.

MICHIKO

And what the glossy magazines want to know is - will you be going with pizza next Sports Day, or do you intend to start another supercool trend?

Keiko is enjoying herself now.

KEIKO

Well, you'll just have to wait and see.

Michiko turns to camera.

MICHIKO

Bentos out, pizza in, and the world waits with bated breath to see what surprises this nine-year-old will throw up next. Michiko Owaki, reporting for Leading Global Trends.

Michiko does a 'cut' gesture to camera, and they all pack up, get in a van, and go.

Michiko gives a fly wink to Keiko.

Keiko walks over to her friends, who SQUEAL and SHOUT excitedly.

126 INT. TV VAN - DAY

Shun, Shige and Aya watch as the girls crowd around Keiko.

Keiko is loving the attention.

Michiko's PHONE rings.

MICHIKO  
Hello Matsunaga-san... Uh-  
huh... Uh-huh...

Shun and Shige exchange a look.

MICHIKO  
I see... Yes. Thank you.

Michiko hangs up.

MICHIKO  
They are doing a live show for  
Ron's choice. Seven PM, Friday  
evening, one-hour special. The  
sponsors are queuing up for  
it. I direct.

SHIGE  
Wow. Friday prime-time.

Shun looks at her.

SHUN  
Wow. Well done.

Michiko, conflicted, looks out the window.

127 I/E. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

Michiko walks down the street and enters the store.

STAFFER 1 is a Goth female, 19. STAFFER 2 is a portly woman, 50. Michiko takes up a basket of cut fruit and yoghurt.

STAFFER 1  
(to Staffer 2)  
I wonder if they'll show the  
wedding?

STAFFER 2  
She won't allow it. Once she  
has him, she'll protect him.  
She knows what he needs. You  
could see it in her eyes.

STAFFER 1  
I still hope they show it.  
Maybe Shin-chan will make a  
speech.

Michiko pays for her items.

128 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - NIGHT

Michiko eats her fruit and yoghurt. She is watching  
footage of Hirose's interview with the Somali girl.

The camera frames Sheana in close-up.

HIROSE (O.S.)  
Is my eyeline slightly left?

Matsunaga enters.

Michiko looks at him coolly.

Matsunaga sits down.

MATSUNAGA  
I warned you not to cross him.

Michiko gives him a withering look.

MICHIKO  
How do you do it?

MATSUNAGA  
What?

MICHIKO  
Be near him. Every day.

MATSUNAGA  
Date 3 got the highest ratings  
of any programme this year.

Michiko looks at Sheana's image, stops the tape.

MICHIKO  
And that makes it right?

MATSUNAGA  
It makes it powerful. Do you  
want out?

Michiko thinks about this.

MATSUNAGA  
Yayoi is gasping to take over  
the live show.

Michiko is conflicted.

MATSUNAGA  
Shin-chan respects you. He  
knows you're good. He's  
testing your limits. If you  
pull off this live show,  
you'll be made. Untouchable.  
You can leave him behind.  
That's all he is to you - a  
stepping stone, right? So  
don't stumble. Step.

Michiko thinks, SIGHS heavily.

129 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - DAY

Ron sits at the dining table with Aya on his lap. She  
is colouring in.

RON  
Isn't it a bit.. risky?

Michiko sits opposite. She smiles.

MICHIKO  
Yes. That's the thrill.

Ron frowns.

MICHIKO  
For us, I mean. Technical  
hitches, the unexpected. You  
don't have to worry. If  
anything happens to you, I'll  
cut away.

RON  
Anything happens? Like what?

MICHIKO  
I don't know. A nosebleed.

Aya farts.

Ron salutes.

Michiko is amused.

RON  
(to Michiko)  
Why would I get a nosebleed?

MICHIKO  
You won't. Just... for  
example.

Keiko comes in all dressed up.

KEIKO  
(to Michiko)  
See!

MICHIKO  
Wow! You look fantastic! You  
are going to wow them at this  
party. Do you want me to do  
your nails?

KEIKO  
Yes!

MICHIKO  
(to Ron)  
Is it okay?

Ron, taken aback at first, nods consent.

AYA  
Me too!

Michiko looks enquiringly at Ron.

Ron gives in.

Michiko gets out her nail varnish and starts work on  
Keiko's nails. Aya watches excitedly.

Ron smiles at the three women absorbed in their own  
world.

130 INT. KEIKO'S FRIEND'S HOUSE - DAY

A birthday party with TEN GIRLS all running, jumping screaming.

Keiko laughs, playing hand-clap games with a classmate.

Ten MOTHERS sit at a table watching. One of them approaches Keiko, and gives her a note. She smiles.

Keiko looks at it. It is addressed to her Dad. She unfolds it and reads. The NOTE says "Pick 3!"

131 INT. RSK TV, BLIND DATE STUDIO - NIGHT

ADs, camera people, lighting people, grips and runners run around organising the studio. A row of seats for the celebrity guests is wheeled in.

A huge illuminated banner is lowered into place as a backdrop, with the show's title: THE CHOICE.

Michiko sits up in the control room, directing it all.

Shin-chan walks onto set. He strolls around, familiarizing himself with his arena. A nod of approval.

Michiko watches him. He looks up at her. She tenses.

132 EXT. TOKYO STREET, RIVERSIDE - NIGHT

Ron approaches the studios. He looks up at the large illuminated RSK sign on the studio building.

A huge banner hangs off the building, advertising The Choice. Shin-chan's face, 3 meters tall. Ron's face, too, but much smaller.

He takes out Haruka's mobile. He starts to play the message. He SIGHS heavily, looks at the mobile.

Ron is on the riverside walkway. There is no one around. He takes in the night sky, the silhouettes of skyscrapers.

With the message still playing, he throws the phone in the river. Ron walks to the TV studio.

133 MONTAGE: THE NATION SETTLES DOWN TO WATCH

BOSS'S HOME

Ron's Boss sits on his mat in a tatami room. His WIFE serves up green tea and sweet delicacies, then settles in opposite him.

ROPPONGI BAR

Koda and young colleagues gather in a crowded bar. A trailer for the THE CHOICE plays on large TV screens round the bar. A group of HOT WOMEN are at a table behind them. Koda leans over to them.

KODA

He's our workmate, you know.

The women SCREAM and gush. Beaming smiles from Koda and friends.

ISHIWATA APARTMENT

Ishiwata-san washes dishes in her kitchen, all the while watching her portable TV.

INTERNATIONAL FAMILY

The family of four from Narita, Japanese Dad and black mum, two kids, settle down with popcorn and lemonade on the sofa in front of a huge TV.

RON'S APARTMENT

Granny brings cut fruit and barley tea to Keiko and Aya, studying at the kitchen table. The TV is off. The girls look at Granny with pleading eyes - irresistible. Granny relents. The girls fly into action, bundling excitedly onto the sofa and flicking on the TV. Granny sits behind at the dining table.

END OF MONTAGE

134 INT. RSK TV, BLIND DATE STUDIO, DRESSING ROOM -  
CONTINUOUS

A make-up lady fusses over Ron's hair.

Ron looks in the mirror, sees Michiko smiling at him. He smiles back.

MICHIKO

You ok?

Ron nods, smiles.

RON

I think... everything's going  
to be alright.

Michiko smiles, but her look clouds over.

MICHIKO

You know, Ron, you  
shouldn't...

AD (O.S.)

Two minutes!

Ron mugs a GULP! At her. Michiko forces a smile,  
leaves.

135 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - NIGHT

On the TV screen, the music plays, credits roll, we are  
live in the studio. CLOSE-UP of Ron.

Aya and Keiko look at each other wide-eyed.

136 INT. RSK TV, BLIND DATE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Close-up of Ron staring at the camera.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)

Japan has watched. Japan has  
discussed. Japan has argued.  
And Japan has waited. Tonight,  
the discussion, the waiting,  
will end. Ten thousand  
hopefuls...

The shot on the TV screen dissolves to a CLOSE-UP of  
Matsuko (Date One).

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)

..whittled down to three  
wonderful candidates.

The shot on the TV screen dissolves to a CLOSE-UP of  
Tamie (Date Two).

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
But for one very special man,  
there can only be one lucky  
woman.

The shot on the TV screen dissolves to a CLOSE-UP of  
The Fox. She smiles modestly, lighting up the screen.

The shot on the TV screen dissolves to a CLOSE-UP of  
Ron.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
Tonight, live on RSK, Ron  
Suzuki, tragically widowed  
husband...

Close-up of Celebrity Guest 1, FAILING COMEDIAN,  
looking grave.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
...doting father of two  
daughters...

Close-up of Celebrity Guest 2, CELEBRITY ACADEMIC,  
looking serious.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
...loyal, hard-working  
salaryman...

Close-up of Celebrity Guest 3, VETERAN ACTOR, nodding  
approvingly.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
...the man who felt unwanted..

Close-up of Celebrity Guest 4, EX-OLYMPIC GYMNAST,  
nodding.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
...an exemplar of samurai  
spirit...

Close-up of Celebrity Guest 5, TALENT-LESS OFFSPRING OF  
FAMOUS PARENT, teary-eyed.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
...the man who has shown us  
what it means to be a Japanese  
male in the 21st century.

Close-up of Celebrity Guest 6, DUMB MODEL, smiling  
vacuously.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
The man embraced by the nation  
for asking one basic  
question... Who would have me?

Close-up of Ron, blinking at the memory.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
Tonight, Ron Suzuki, that  
question will be answered.

Dissolve to a close-up of a beaming Shin-chan.

SHIN-CHAN  
Welcome, ladies and gentlemen,  
to The Choice.

Rapturous APPLAUSE from the studio audience and  
Celebrity Guests.

The TV shot goes wide - Matsuko, Tamie and The Fox are  
on a stage opposite Ron, Shin-chan, and the Celebrity  
Guests.

Shin-chan approaches Ron, puts his arm around his  
shoulder. The applause goes on.

137 INT. RSK TV, BLIND DATE STUDIO, CONTROL ROOM -  
CONTINUOUS

Michiko watches, in grudging awe of Shin-chan's  
performance.

138 EXT. APARTMENTS IN CITY STREETS - NIGHT

All the living-room lights glow as the nation tunes  
into The Choice.

A solitary electronic NOTE plays.

SHIN-CHAN (O.S.)  
There are two buttons in front  
of each woman. One is YES, the  
other is NO.

139 INT. RSK TV, BLIND DATE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

A large GREEN BUTTON with YES on it, next to a large  
RED BUTTON with NO.

The lights are dimmed. A spotlight frames Shin-chan, his arm around a tense Ron. The three women are also spotlit.

SHIN-CHAN

Ron Suzuki, it's time to  
make... The Choice.

Ron steps forward. The music intensifies.

Ron approaches the buttons for Matsuko. She winks at him.

Ron is unnerved. He presses NO.

The lights go out on Matsuko.

Failing Comedian nods.

Dumb Model pouts.

Ron approaches the buttons for Tamie. Her head is down. She looks up, steals a glance at Ron, puts her head down again.

Ron sighs heavily. He hesitates.

He steals a glance at The Fox. She smiles back.

Ron looks at Tamie. She blinks rapidly.

Ron pushes NO.

The lights go out on Tamie.

REACTIONS - A SERIES OF SHOTS

Ishiwata-san puts aside her washcloth and sits down in front of the TV.

The Boss and his wife watch the screen intently.

Aya and Keiko wriggle excitedly on the sofa.

Granny bites her bottom lip.

140 INT. RSK TV, BLIND DATE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Ron approaches the buttons for The Fox.

An intensely grave look from Shin-chan.

The celebrity panel in suspense.

Ron looks at the buttons.

Michiko stares at the monitor.

Ron's eyes meet those of The Fox. She smiles.

Ron smiles, relaxes. He presses YES.

BANG! Firecrackers pop, frantic trumpets chime in, streamers are released from the ceiling.

The audience goes wild.

The Celebrity Panel clap, cheer, cry.

A huge intake of breath from Michiko.

REACTIONS - A SERIES OF SHOTS

The black woman's family are giving high-fives.

The Boss stares, his wife in tears.

Koda and the boys, the girls now sitting with them, toast and drink.

Ishiwata-san smiles and nods.

Keiko and Aya shout, scream and bounce up and down on the couch.

Granny smiles. She looks at the TV, and the smile leaves her face. She is looking at

141 INT. RSK TV, BLIND DATE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE-UP of The Fox, looking distressed.

Shin-chan, beaming, has his arm round Ron, who is looking around, bewildered. He has not seen the change in The Fox.

But he does see Shin-chan - who is staring at The Fox. And frowning.

Ron follows his gaze to The Fox. A tear rolls down her cheek. She bites her lip.

The studio goes quiet.

Michiko closes her eyes.

The Fox looks at Ron. Shin-chan steps away from him. A spotlight falls on Ron.

THE FOX

You're... a lovely man. But I came on this show because I'd been hurt. Because there was someone I wanted to forget. I thought it was over. But he saw me, on TV...

Ron is white as a ghost, fighting to control his breathing.

THE FOX

He called, we talked, and... The things is, love is always the right choice.

Ron is rocked by these words.

THE FOX

I'm getting married.

Shock, horror and tears from the celebrity panel.

Ron stares at The Fox. He looks into the camera. He lets out a nervous laugh, gone as quickly as it appeared. He looks at the studio audience, mere silhouettes in the strong lights.

REACTIONS - A SERIES OF SHOTS

The black woman hugs her children.

The Boss stares at the screen, blinks hard.

Koda and the boys are numb. The girls get up and quietly go back to their own table.

Ishiwata-san cups her hands to her mouth.

END OF MONTAGE

142 INT. RSK TV, BLIND DATE STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Ron looks up to Michiko's booth, pleading. Lost.

A spotlight comes up on Shin-chan, standing away from Ron.

SHIN-CHAN  
How do you feel?

Ron is snapped back into the present by Shin-chan's voice.

SHIN-CHAN  
(to celebrity panel)  
Who among us comprehends the  
vagaries of the human heart?  
(beat)  
How do you feel, Ron Suzuki?

Ron, spotlit, alone, looks at Shin-chan.

RON  
Ehm...

Ron thinks. Then he pulls the radio mic off his shirt, and walks off.

Shin-chan watches him go. A faint smile.

Michiko watches Ron leave.

143 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - CONTINUOUS

Keiko and Aya are in shock. Keiko speaks through tears.

KEIKO  
What happened Granny?

Granny marches to the TV, switches it off, then sits on the sofa and pulls the girls towards her. The girls sob. Tears well up in Granny's eyes, too.

144 EXT. RSK TV - CONTINUOUS

Ron exits the building, breaks into a run.

145 INT. RSK TV, BLIND DATE STUDIO - NIGHT

The set is being broken down. The studio audience have gone, the celebrity panel all shake hands.

Shin-chan looks up at Michiko's booth. And smiles.

Matsunaga puts a hand on Michiko's shoulder and leans in.

MATSUNAGA  
The initial reports say  
ratings of 66% in the Kansai  
area alone.

Michiko blinks, stares straight ahead.

MATSUNAGA  
Congratulations.

He leaves her. She stares at the empty studio.

The lights go out on Michiko.

146 EXT. SUMIDA RIVER - NIGHT

Ron sits by the river at the spot where he threw away  
Haruka's phone. A tug boat sails into the distance.

APPLAUSE (O.S.)

147 INT. TAPAS BAR - CONTINUOUS

Michiko enters the Tapas bar where the after-show party  
is in full swing. She takes in her clapping, cheering  
colleagues.

Her conflicted look comes off as modesty.

At the bar, Shin-chan and Matsunaga laugh and joke,  
paying Michiko no attention.

In a corner, Shun and Shige. Shun raises a glass to her  
- an ironic toast.

An AD puts a glass in her hand.

Everyone goes back to their own little clique.

Michiko looks at the glass, puts it down. She shakes  
her head at Shun and Shige. She turns and leaves.

Only Shun and Shige see her go. They smile, clink  
glasses.

148 EXT. TOKYO STREET - CONTINUOUS

Michiko walks briskly down the street. She dials on her  
mobile.

149 EXT. SUMIDA RIVER - CONTINUOUS

Ron stares out at the water. His MOBILE, on silent, vibrates.

He looks at it - Michiko.

He lets it ring. He stands and hails a taxi.

150 EXT. TOKYO STREET - CONTINUOUS

Michiko looks at her phone. She SIGHS. She puts the phone in her bag, walks into the subway station.

151 INT. RON'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Ron enters. Before he can even get his shoes off, the two girls rush him, hold him tightly. He fights to keep his composure, then kneels, and holds the girls tightly. He kisses their heads rapidly, in turn.

Granny looks at him, smiles.

152 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME, LIVING-ROOM - NIGHT

Michiko looks at the clock - 2 A.M.

Her mobile BEEPS. She grabs it and checks the mail: Matsunaga.

MESSAGE: Where are you? Let's celebrate!

Michiko closes the mail. She brings up Ron's address, types a message:

MESSAGE: Call me, OK? Mx

She sends the text.

153 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ron's phone VIBRATES SILENTLY.

Ron is in the futon, Aya's hand draped across his neck, Keiko's legs resting across him at a right angle.

The girls sleep soundly, their mouths wide open.

Ron stares at the ceiling.

Aya farts.

Ron does not salute.

154 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME, LIVING-ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michiko puts down her phone.

She looks at it, thinks.

She puts on the TV.

ON SCREEN: Sheana (Somali woman) in Close-Up.

SHEANA

I remember they came for my  
older sister, Nadifa. My  
grandmother did the cutting.  
But they could not stop the  
bleeding. She died. They  
buried her in a ditch at the  
edge of the desert. She was  
nine years old.

A REACTION SHOT of Hirose nodding sympathetically. Back  
to Sheana.

SHEANA

If the Supreme Court does not  
let me stay in Japan, this  
will happen to me.

Sheana, beautiful, composed, stares at Hirose.

Michiko watches intently.

155 EXT. MICHIKO'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Michiko's TV screen is the only pinprick of light in  
the darkened building, the darkened street.

156 I/E. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - DAY

Ron, dressed for work, is seeing the girls off to  
school.

RON

Have you got your art project  
Aya?

He looks at Aya. She stands at the door holding a  
large, homemade dinosaur.

RON

Oh.

Keiko comes running and they all put on their shoes and go out the door.

At the elevator, Ron smacks his head.

RON

Forgot something. You girls go on. Don't be late, OK?

The girls get in the elevator. The doors close.

Ron goes back in the apartment. He takes off his overcoat. He puts away his briefcase.

He looks at the photo of Haruka. He takes out his mobile and dials.

RON

Suzuki from Sales here. I'm very sick today, I won't be in.

He closes the mobile, leaves.

KOHEI (O.S.)

We can't have the launch till there is a festival strategy in place...

157 I/E. DAIDAN PUBLISHING - DAY

A sign saying 'DAIDAN PUBLISHING' with a huge book display.

OFFICE DOOR with the name KOHEI SADOMURA on it.

Kohei, hair slicked back, blue shirt with cufflinks, sits at his desk talking on the phone.

KOHEI

No, they don't like authors at Frankfurt Book Fair...

The door opens. Ron walks in.

KOHEI

(on phone)

We could tout her round the glossies if we tart her up a bit... Listen, have to go, an old friend just dropped by.

Kohei hangs up.

KOHEI  
Ron! It's been a long time.  
How are you?

RON  
How did it start?

Kohei furrows his eyebrows.

KOHEI  
Sorry?

RON  
KS. You called my wife the day  
she died. You told her you  
loved her. How did the affair  
start?

Kohei shifts uncomfortably.

KOHEI  
Ron... did something happen?

Ron glares at him.

RON  
Really? You want to mess me  
about? Yeah? Yeah? Okay!

Ron's eyes dart around. There is a heavy glass  
paperweight on the desk. He picks it up, launches it at  
the wall. It smashes one of Kohei's framed Book Awards.

Kohei's eyes widen.

A beat.

Ron picks up a small brass statuette, launches it at  
the wall, smashes another award.

Kohei blinks hard.

Ron glares at him. He picks up a heavy ashtray.

Kohei holds up a hand.

KOHEI  
Okay...

Slowly, he picks up the phone, dials an extension.

KOHEI  
Could you come in here please?  
... Yes, now.

Kohei smiles at Ron. They wait. Ron breathes hard, full of bristling intent, unsure what to do next.

A small, balding man, RYOHEI OHKI, enters. He takes in the mess. He gingerly moves round and stands next to Kohei.

KOHEI  
(to Ryohei)  
This is Ron Suzuki.

Ryohei is baffled.

KOHEI  
Haruka's husband.

Ryohei gets it, nods.

KOHEI  
(to Ron)  
This is my partner, Ryohei  
Ohki.

Ron looks at them, waiting for more. Nothing comes.

Ron picks up the ashtray, raises it above his head.

KOHEI  
Ron!

Ron stops. Kohei stands up.

KOHEI  
This is my partner, Ryohei  
Ohki.

Kohei slides his arm around Ryohei's waist and holds him close. Ryohei smiles.

Ron stares at the gay couple. Slowly, the penny drops.

Ron stands up.

RON  
Oh God... ehm... Sorry.

Ron turns to go. He looks around at the broken glass.

RON  
I'll pay for that.

Ron exits. Kohei and Ryohei watch him go.

158 EXT. DAIDAN PUBLISHING - CONTINUOUS

Ron walks away from the building. Kohei catches him up.

KOHEI

Ron!

RON

I'm sorry, I just-

Kohei hands him a business card.

Ron is confused.

KOHEI

An illustrator we used a couple of times.

Ron stares at the card.

RON

Kenji Sasaki.

Ron looks at Kohei.

RON

KS.

Kohei hesitates briefly, then speaks.

KOHEI

He works from his home studio, in Chiba.

Ron stares at Kohei.

159 INT. RSK TV, EDITING STUDIO - DAY

Michiko clears her desk and walks out of RSK. She looks down the corridor. Matsunaga is flirting with Hirose.

Michiko turns and walks away.

160 INT. NIPPON ALLIED METALS, SALES DEPT. - DAY

Ron works at his desk. Two Office Ladies talk at the water cooler. Ron looks up to see them looking at him. They look away guiltily.

Bu-cho stares at Ron. On his desk, Ron's redundancy notice. He closes his eyes.

161 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME - DAY

Michiko at home, researching Somali culture on the computer. She fills out a Grant Application. Her Dad laughs at Shin-chan on the TV. Michiko glances at the TV, then goes back to work.

162 EXT. KEIKO & AYA'S SCHOOL - DAY

Ron, Keiko and Aya along with neighbours clear up litter around the school. Ron in an apron, like all the mothers.

163 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME - DAY

Fusako hands Michiko an envelope. She opens it - it is her Japanese passport.

164 INT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY

Aya is swimming in a school competition. Ron and Keiko cheer her on in the stands.

165 INT. SWIMMING POOL, RECEPTION - DAY

Keiko brushes Aya's hair.

Ron puts Aya's things into his own rucksack.

KEIKO

Mayu-chan says her mum wants you to meet her aunt, 'cos she's single and not really ugly. Her husband, that's Mayu's uncle, he died fishing. Mayu's mum said she's ideal for you. That what she said. Ideal.

Ron looks up at Keiko.

RON

That's all done now, OK?

166 EXT. TRAIN STATION ENTRANCE - DAY

Ron, Keiko and Aya walk home from the swimming.

AYA

Look!

Aya points to cameras, cranes, lights at the station entrance. Vans and trailers are parked nearby.

Ron sees The Fox standing watching. She spots him, comes over.

THE FOX

Hi! Fancy meeting you here!

Ron is embarrassed, but fights not to show it.

RON

So... how are you?

THE FOX

Oh, good, you know, working away.

Ron nods. The Fox smiles. She nods her head towards the film crew.

THE FOX

A commercial. For tights.

Ron nods.

THE FOX

I have to say, I thought we were amazing together. Not a dry eye in the house!

Ron is flummoxed.

THE FOX

I got this gig on the back of it.

Ron stares at her.

A beat.

RON

You're an actress...

THE FOX

A great actress. And you are a wonderful actor.

Ron stares at her.

RON  
Your son, Kazuo, he...

THE FOX  
I don't have a son!

AD  
All actors on set please!

The Fox goes off. She looks back at Ron, worried now.  
She returns to the set.

Keiko and Aya are bewildered.

Ron's expression turns dark.

167 INT. MICHIKO'S HOME, LIVING-ROOM - DAY

Michiko is reading the newspaper. Fusako is dusting.  
Hirofumi is getting a massage from a massage cushion on  
the sofa.

The doorbell rings. Fusako goes to the door.

MUFFLED SOUNDS from the genkan. Then Ron comes into the  
living-room.

RON  
(to Michiko)  
It was a set-up!?

Ron paces the room. Hirofumi stands. Ron doesn't even  
notice him.

MICHIKO  
I'm sorry.

RON  
So you knew!

MICHIKO  
No... Yes... I suspected  
but... Not for sure, not till  
the last minute.

Fusako comes in and stands next to Hirofumi.

HIROFUMI  
(to Fusako)  
He's on the TV.

Fusako goes into match-maker mode.

FUSAKO  
(to Ron)  
Let me get you something.

RON  
(to Michiko)  
You promised me you'd pick the  
women!

FUSAKO  
(to Ron)  
Tea?

Ron, suddenly mindful of his manners, nods politely.

MICHIKO  
(to Ron)  
I couldn't. I was baby-sitting  
for you!

RON  
Oh, it's the girls' fault is  
it!

Michiko sighs heavily.

RON  
I knew it. Just before I  
pressed that button, I knew  
something was wrong. She was  
too good for me, I know that,  
but there was something else,  
an undercurrent. I should've  
trusted my gut.

Ron shakes his head.

RON  
I should've gone for Koala  
Bear.

A look comes over Michiko's face. Ron catches it.

It slowly dawns on him.

RON  
No... all three?

Michiko hangs her head.

MICHIKO  
Shin-chan thought it would be  
more dramatic.

HIROFUMI

Now, to be fair, he wasn't  
wrong - the ratings were  
phenomenal! I mean, everyone  
saw it.

Ron glares at him. Michiko does, too.

Fusako arrives with tea.

FUSAKO

(to Ron)

Please, sit down. Have some  
tea. So, you're single...

Fusako looks from Ron to Michiko. Michiko rolls her  
eyes.

RON

(to Michiko)

How do you live with yourself?

Michiko stands, picks up her jacket.

MICHIKO

With great difficulty.

Michiko turns to go.

MICHIKO

(to Ron)

I'm sorry.

Michiko leaves.

Ron stands looking at her parents, lost.

FUSAKO

She feels terrible.

HIROFUMI

(to Fusako)

Does she?

Fusako silences her husband with a look.

RON

She'll feel worse when she has  
to go in to work tomorrow and  
tell them I demand an apology.

Ron goes to sit on the sofa. The massage cushion is  
still on, causing him to jump up, startled.

Fusako is looking at him.

FUSAKO  
She quit.

Ron LAUGHS ironically.

HIROFUMI  
What! No one told me...

Fusako ignores her husband.

FUSAKO  
Quite noble of her, really.

RON  
I would be full of noble  
gestures, too, if I lived off  
Mummy and Daddy.

A beat.

FUSAKO  
TV hides your mean side.

Ron looks at her, holds a hand up in apology.

FUSAKO  
She likes you, you know.

Ron is lost in his own thoughts, Fusako's words not  
really registering with him.

Fusako pulls out a chair at the table. Ron sits down,  
sips his tea. Fusako sits opposite.

Hirofumi comes to sit, too, but Fusako's eyes shoo him  
away.

FUSAKO  
I hear you played chess.

Ron looks at her.

RON  
I was rubbish at chess.

FUSAKO  
Then why were you in the chess  
club?

RON  
I thought it was a good way to  
meet girls.

Fusako looks at him. They LAUGH.

FUSAKO  
If you leave now, you'll  
probably catch her.

Ron looks at Fusako.

He stands up and leaves.

Fusako smiles.

168 EXT. MICHIKO'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Michiko unchains her bicycle and gets on.

RON  
Michiko!

Michiko stops and turns round.

Ron holds up the Elena-Pelena book.

169 EXT. SUMIDA RIVERSIDE BENCH - DAY

The bike is parked and Michiko and Ron sit looking out at the water. Michiko holds the book. At the bottom of the front page; ILLUSTRATOR: KENJI SASAKI. She hands it back to Ron.

MICHIKO  
You should go there.

RON  
You think so?

MICHIKO  
What's the worse that could  
happen?

RON  
I find out that my whole  
married life was a lie.

Michiko nods.

MICHIKO  
Maybe. But then the sun comes  
up on a new day. Haruka's  
ghost is laid to rest, and you  
get on with the rest of your  
life with your two beautiful  
daughters.

Ron looks at her.

RON  
Is it always better to know?

Michiko looks at him.

MICHIKO  
You're a good man Ron. Anyone  
who sees you with those two  
girls knows that. You don't  
have to be a corporate samurai  
to prove your manhood.

RON  
Just as well. I got fired.  
'Restructuring.' That's what  
I'm doing now. Restructuring.

Michiko is lost for words.

Ron stands, makes to go. He stops.

RON  
What do you have on today?

MICHIKO  
Work.

RON  
You quit.

MICHIKO  
I'm applying for a grant. To  
go to Africa. Research.

RON  
Does it have to be done today?

Michiko looks at him.

170 I/E. RON'S CAR - DAY

Ron's car passes the SIGN TO CHIBA.

Ron is driving, Michiko is in the passenger seat.

MICHIKO  
How did you and Haruka meet?

RON  
Through the Chess Club.

Michiko is surprised.

RON  
No, she wasn't big on board  
games... We booked a classroom  
for the culture festival.  
Turns out we were double-  
booked with Volcanic  
Revolution - a girls' hip-hop  
dance crew. The two leaders  
had to arm wrestle for it.

Michiko looks at him.

RON  
Best of three. She wiped the  
floor with me. 3-0.

MICHIKO  
Three nothing?

RON  
That was Haruka.

Michiko looks at him.

171 EXT. KENJI SASAKI'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ron's car pulls into a small drive lined with bamboo trees. They come to a stop in the dirt drive in front of a spacious, one-storey Japanese farmhouse. The building is a stylish modern upgrade of a traditional design.

Ron and Michiko get out. They look at the building.

Ron hesitates.

MICHIKO  
I'll be waiting right here.

Ron looks at her, turns, and goes to the door.

At the door, he slides it open and enters the genkan.

A long corridor, paintings piled up in disorder.

RON  
Hello? Anyone home?

A MUFFLED SOUND from inside. A door in front of Ron slides open. Kenji Sasaki, broad-shoulders, beard, stands in the doorway. His apron is covered in paint.

RON  
I'm Ron Suzuki. Haruka's  
husband.

Kenji looks Ron over. He walks into the studio space,  
leaving the door open. Ron follows.

172 EXT. KENJI SASAKI'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Michiko watches Ron disappear inside.

173 INT. KENJI'S STUDIO - DAY

Ron enters and takes in the sight of vivid water-  
colours, comic-book sequences of women in white robes  
meeting giant serpents, a dark forest path with the  
white-robed woman facing a winged beast... The room is  
crowded with pencil drawings, acrylics, oils, of no one  
style, genre or subject matter.

Kenji lights a cigarette, and sits down. He looks at  
Ron.

KENJI  
What do you want?

Ron looks at Kenji.

RON  
You know Haruka is dead?

Kenji nods.

A beat.

RON  
I want to know why.

Kenji looks at him.

Ron walks around, looking at the paintings.

RON  
Why did she feel the need to  
be here? Be with you...

Ron is fighting very hard to stay composed.

RON  
How long was it going on?

KENJI  
Two years.

Kenji is very calm. He stares at Ron.

Ron looks back at him, meeting his gaze.

RON

And the girls? What excuse was she going to give to them? Did she think she could drag them out here to live with you two?

Kenji watches Ron warily.

RON

You called her the day she died. I heard the message.

Kenji's expression changes.

RON

I'm an idiot. We thought she was in Yamanashi. And all the time she was driving here to be with you.

Ron is fighting hard to maintain self-control. He stares hard at Kenji.

RON

(angry)

My daughters lost their mother, and it's your fault.

Ron looks at Kenji, but Kenji is inscrutable.

RON

You cause all this pain. Destruction. Don't you have anything to say?

Kenji just looks at Ron.

Ron LAUGHS ironically, turns to go.

As he reaches the door, Kenji speaks quietly, but forcefully.

KENJI

She was going home.

Ron stops, turns round.

KENJI

The truck hit her and spun the car around. She was travelling southbound.

RON  
But the police said-

KENJI  
The police were wrong.

Ron's mind is racing.

RON  
But your message...

KENJI  
I gave her an ultimatum. She  
said I was "an infatuation".  
She made her choice.

Kenji looks disparagingly at Ron.

Ron takes this in.

Ron looks at him, his mind swirling.

RON  
She chose love.

Kenji's look of despair confirms this.

Ron turns and walks towards the door.

KENJI  
You know, if she had chosen me  
that day, she would still be  
alive.

Kenji looks haunted. Ron gives him a look of pity. He  
leaves the room.

In the hallway, lots of paintings piled up against the  
walls. Ron sees the corner of one sticking out from  
behind a pile. He goes over and draws it out.

It is the book cover, Elena-Pelena holding her  
brother's hand. Ron takes the painting, and displays it  
high on a shelf.

He takes in the painting for a moment, then leaves.

174 EXT. RON'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ron walks to Michiko. She tries to read his expression.

Ron stands in front of Michiko. They gaze into each  
other's eyes.

Ron and Michiko look at each other, the past behind them, wondering about the future.

Michiko reaches out and strokes Ron's arm.

Michiko gulps, licks her lips.

She touches Ron's hair, runs a finger down his cheek.

RON

It's over.

Michiko smiles. Her finger lingers longer on his cheek. Ron reaches up and takes her hand.

They get closer. And closer...

They kiss. Tenderly at first, then passionately.

They hold each other, foreheads touching, Michiko stroking Ron's hair.

MICHIKO

You need to know, I'll always have a job!

RON

I expect no less.

MICHIKO

I can't cook.

RON

I'm a great cook.

MICHIKO

You'll have to iron your own shirts.

RON

Yours too.

They laugh. Then kiss again.

175 INT. RON'S APARTMENT, LIVING-DINING - NIGHT

Ron, wearing an apron, is laying the table. Keiko and Aya read manga.

RON

Dinner's going out you two!

The sound of a KEY in the door. Michiko enters.

MICHIKO  
I'm home!

AYA & KEIKO  
Hello!

Michiko kisses Ron lightly.

RON  
Good flight?

MICHIKO  
Painless.

The girls run to Michiko.

MICHIKO  
Hello you two!

She hugs them both. She puts down the heavy shoulder bag she has been carrying, and takes out two small wooden percussion instrument.

MICHIKO  
From a street market in  
Beledweyne.

The girls happily make random notes with the instruments.

MICHIKO  
(to girls)  
What are you reading?

RON  
All books and presents away  
please. Dinner on the table  
girls. Now!

They clear the table and put things away.

Ron puts large dishes on the table. Michiko, Keiko and Aya serve up. Ron takes off his apron and joins them at the table. They eat, and chat.

A family.

FADE OUT