

## Still Walking (2008)

### Major Credits:

Writing and Direction: Hirokazu Kore-eda

Cinematography: Yutaka Yamazaki

Cast: Hiroshi Abe (Ryoto), Yui Natsukawa (Yukari, his wife), You (Chinami, his sister), Shohei Tanaka (Atsushi, his stepson), Kirin Kiki (Toshiko, his mother), Yoshio Harada (Kyohei, his father)

### Production Context:

Following his first feature, *Maborosi* (1995), Kore-eda directed several films of different styles—including a philosophical fantasy about purgatory, *After Life* (1998), a semi-documentary about a family of abandoned children, *Nobody Knows* (2004), and an historical drama (*jidai-geki*) about a reluctant samurai, *Hana* (2006). With *Still Walking*, he embarks on a series of “home dramas” (*shomin-geki*) deeply influenced by two great Japanese directors of the studio era, Yasujiro Ozu and Mikio Naruse. As the scholar Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano (*Film Criticism*) has demonstrated, *Still Walking* includes several explicit allusions to Ozu’s films.

Kore-eda’s great theme in *Maborosi*, *After Life*, and this film is *memory*, perfectly expressed by the Japanese phrase *mono no aware*: an acute awareness of the impermanence of all things. The director has stated how *Still Walking* originated in his memories of his mother, who died in 2006, and is “focused on the premonitions and the reverberations of life. Because I believe that is precisely where the essence of life can be found.”

### Cinematic Aspects:

1. Narrative pace: Kore-eda deliberately withholds key information (the identity of Junpei, the occasion for the visit, the rift between Ryo’s parents) and concentrates attention on ordinary action (eating, walking, looking at photographs) to create a sense of events occurring nearly in real time (36 hours condensed to about two hours) and to focus attention on subtle details revealed in the *mise-en-scène* or expressed by the actors in close-up. Is there anything resembling a *climax* to the film’s narrative structure?
2. Wada-Marciano cites a number of “memory props” usually revealed in close-ups: the corn tempura, empty drawer, old record and phonograph, broken tiles, yellow butterfly, and (two she misses) Ryo’s school essay and the cherry blossom. Kore-eda often inserts these as transitional images, similar to Ozu’s “pillow shots.”
3. Fixed Camera: As in *Maborosi*, Kore-eda rarely moves his camera, creating in his carefully composed long takes (as in the sushi lunch scene) the effect of a still life or a framed photograph. Two conspicuous exceptions occur at the gravesite: the panning shot in the middle of the film that finds the family as the camera moves to the left, and the wonderful tilt and crane up to a panoramic long shot that concludes the narrative and introduces the credits.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Kore-eda's body of work has been marked by his interest in children; indeed, he is today generally acknowledged as the one of the world's great directors of kids. What role does Atsushi play in developing the ideas expressed in *Still Walking*?
2. Yoshio, the fat and clumsy visitor in the middle of the film, serves as a touchstone for revealing certain repressed qualities of each of the main characters. How does our view of the family dynamic change after his visit?
3. Similarly, Toshiko's response to the old pop song, "Blue Light Yokohama," slowly uncovers a secret past that helps us understand the tensions in her marriage. Kore-eda delays both the revelation of the song's title and its personal significance, which is conveyed by an abrupt cut and muted dialogue. How does this scene (and its aftermath in the bathroom) affect our understanding of the film as a whole? Note that the ambulance call for the neighbor also complicates our understanding of Yoshio.
4. The closing voiceover remains unique in Kore-eda's cinema to date. How does Ryo's narration alter your understanding of the characters and events he recalls in the film? Has he himself changed in the intervening years?