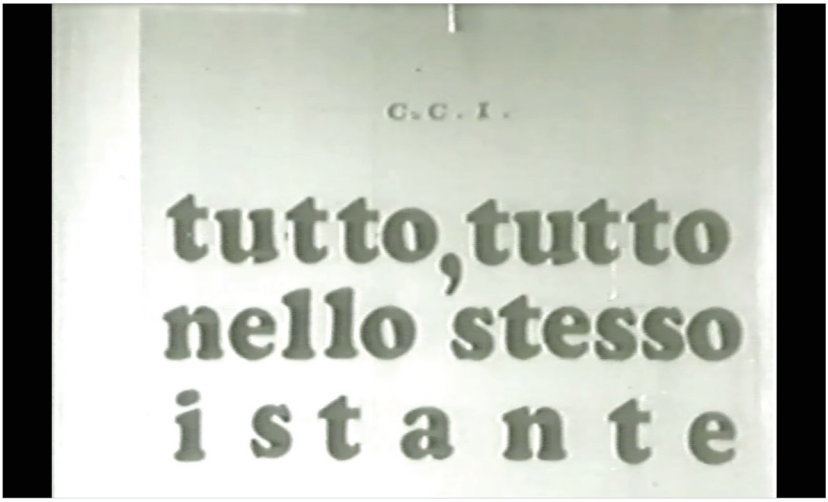
Immagine n. 30

Note di storia del cinema



ASSOCIAZIONE ITALIANA
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DI STORIA DEL CINEMA

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Sommario

ASTERISCHI

Shadows of the Sun: Hasegawa and the End of Post-War Japan in 1970s Japanese Cinema

EUGENIO DE ANGELIS

Introduction

At the time of the release of *Taiyō o nusunda otoko* (*The Man Who Stole the Sun*, 1979) by Hasegawa Kazuhiko, Japan was already the second economy in the world, an outpost of technological modernity and capitalism was in full swing[1]. During the post-high-growth period (1972-1991), a fully developed consumer society emerged, washing away memories of post-war poverty and watering down the ideals of the 'long 1960s' (1958-1972).

In *Japan, 1972*, Igarashi Yoshikuni analyzes the early 1970s as a period characterized by the widespread availability and pervasiveness of television, the homogenous urbanization of the country and the emergence of a new (multimedia) visual environment. Together, they led to an "explosive expansion of mass consumerism" at a time when "individuals had little choice but to accept the peace and prosperity of the postwar world"[2]. At the same time, he depicts the picture of a consumer deeply aware of the problematic nature of the society he lives in, exploring the feeling of unease permeating a series of popular culture's products defined as "counternarratives in the form of masculine drama, which valorized Japanese manhood as critical impetus"[3].

In this paper, I will read *The Man Who Stole the Sun* as a powerful example of these counter-narratives of masculinity and as a text paradigmatic of the Japanese post-high-growth period. Hasegawa devices the story of a disillusioned thirty-something middle school teacher, Kido Makoto (played by singer-actor Sawada Kenji), that steals plutonium

in a nuclear power plant in order to build an atomic bomb in his apartment, using it to threaten the authorities with absurd requests. While the police, led by Inspector Yamashita (Sugawara Bunta), gets closer to him, he starts a sort of romantic affair with a radio host called Zero (Ikegami Kimiko), which will help him along the way. Setting the atomic discourse aside[4], Hasegawa handles the hybrid and ambiguous nature of his work with great awareness, documenting the growing mediatization of the Japanese society and its progressive distancing from politics in order to embrace consumerism, doing so in the capitalist form of a *chōtaisaku eiga* (blockbuster)[5]. The movie is filled with black humor and spectacular action sequences, especially in the second part, combining American New Cinema's influences with a 'pop' touch,[6] while it also embodies the sense of loss felt by the main character (and his generation), along with his inability to fit in society.

The Man Who Stole the Sun is the second and, up to this day, the last movie directed by Hasegawa, who started his career at Imamura Production, where he was one of the assistant directors for *Kamigami no fukaki yokubō* (*Profound Desires of the Gods*, 1968). Afterwards, he entered Nikkatsu where he wrote scripts and worked as assistant director for Roman Porno *maestro* like Kumashiro Tatsumi and Fujita Toshiya, being also involved in some of the top grossing movies of the time like the *Danchizuma* series (*Apartment Wife*, 1971-79, 21 installments) by Nishimura Shogorō. After leaving Nikkatsu in 1975[7], he became one of the first young directors to collaborate with the independent production company ATG after the end of the 'New Wave' season[8]. With his debut film, *Seishun no satsujinsha* (*The Youth Killer*, 1976), he earned the top spot in the Kinema Junpo Best Ten, the most prestigious cinema award in Japan; he was only thirty years old. For his second directorial effort, he teamed up with Leonard Schrader, after the two had met in Hollywood. Schrader had already worked in Japan[9] and he provided to Hasegawa an original script that would later became *The Man Who Stole the Sun*. The fact that a 400 million-yen-budget movie like this was entrusted to such a young director with little to no experience in these kinds of productions

was not unusual in the 1970s, as exemplified by the *Kadokawa eiga* produced around the same time[10]. Nonetheless, the case of Hasegawa is a peculiar one, in light of the stark contrast in tone and atmosphere between the two films he directed. Moreover, conversely to what was happening at Kadokawa, he was able to retain his own vision without being overly influenced by producers or majors[11]. Unfortunately, the movie went over-budget and did not performed well at the box office[12]: Hasegawa has not been able to complete another movie ever since, but he became a mentor for many young directors when he founded the Director's Company in 1982. In its ten years run, the company produced some of the most memorable Japanese movies from the 1980s, such as *Taifū kurabu* (Typhoon Club, 1985) by Somai Shinji and *Gyakufunsha kazoku* (*The Crazy Family*, 1984) by Ishii Sōgo [Gakuryū].

Mimicking the 1960s

The Man Who Stole the Sun is a useful reference for post-high-growth era Japan, documenting the transformation of Japanese society in the 1970s after the 'long 1960s'. The 1960s were a decade of unprecedented political commitment for the younger generations – university students in particular – whom rallied in the streets to protest against, among other issues, the renewal of the ANPO (the US-Japan Security Treaty), the Vietnam War and the American control of Okinawa. The demonstrations grew more and more violent in the second half of the 1960s, with the occurrence of several clashes with the police and terrorist attacks on police boxes (*kōban*), American bases and symbols of power, until the infamous *Asama sansō jiken*[13] in 1972 put an end to this political season. Around this time, Japan reached economic well-being, and the students lost most of their causes for protest. The failure of the *Rengō sekigun* (United Red Army, URA) at the Asama lodge was a traumatic event for them; it became the place to 'bury' this decade and enter the next phase of life, ideally betraying the 1960s' ideals[14]. Furthermore, the unprecedented media coverage of the event and the subsequent exposure of the five URA members involved, reflected «the impossibility of escaping the media's vision,

which had become intertwined with Japanese society under the high-growth economy»[15].

Born in Hiroshima in 1946[16]. Hasegawa belongs to this same generation of political activists. He even attended the University of Tokyo, one of the epicenters of the protests, in the second half of the 1960s. He lived in the same environment and used to throw rocks at the police during demonstrations, but he preferred playing mahjong and American football to politics, defining himself as a *nonpori fūten* (non-political 'hippy', Miyahata 2021). Nonetheless, he was supportive of the URA during the *Asama sansō jiken* but was greatly shocked by the revelation of the *sōkatsu* killings. The project Hasegawa was working on following *The Man Who Stole the Sun* was based on those events, and he teamed up with screenwriter Tamura Tsutomu – one of Ōshima Nagisa's longtime collaborators – to write a three hour-long screenplay. He even negotiated the purchase of the Asama lodge to shoot the movie, but he gave up on the project due to his production company's financial troubles. Nonetheless, he thought himself the right person to direct the movie, precisely because he had lived through those events and had first-hand knowledge of the people involved but was not affiliated with – nor committed to – the student movement, while a project like this would have been too painful for his more politically engaged colleagues[17].

Even if the movie had never materialized, Hasegawa was still bound to the 'season of politics' and its cultural *milieu*. Not surprisingly, in *The Man Who Stole the Sun* he inserted several elements related to the 1960s, creating a stark contrast with the capitalistic Japan of 1979, which was entertainment-oriented and characterized by mass consumerism. The commitment of the 'long 1960s' was by then a distant memory, and the (once) revolutionaries had already become dedicated company 'salarymen'. These elements help to highlight the reasons behind Kido's actions and create a relevant commentary to contemporary society. For example, the first thing Kido does in order to accomplish his plan is to steal a gun from a police box. Attacks on *kōban* with guns, Molotov cocktails or rocks were almost a daily routine for militant groups in the late 1960s, as a means to express

their angst towards authorities or to steal weapons for their armory, which is exactly what the main character does, similarly using violence when he anesthetizes a police officer. Later on, when Kido goes to the nuclear power plant, his attack resembles those on the American bases. In this case, the violence is even more ferocious, because when the security guards discover him, he does not hesitate to kill a few of them, even using a flamethrower[18]. This can be considered a proper terrorist act in a period when the *Nihon sekigun* (Japanese Red Army, JRA) was performing similar attacks around the world[19]. Not surprisingly in this context, an alleged political radical is suspected of the crime, as Kido finds out watching TV. Hasegawa here inserts an explicit reference to the season of politics, since the host of the news program reports that the suspect is a former leader of the *Chūkakuha* (Japan Revolutionary Communist League-National Committee), one of the most active militant groups of the 1960s[20].

Furthermore, when Kido tries to retrieve money as his third demand, he decides to confuse the authorities by disguising himself and blending into a union's demonstration on the streets of Shibuya – quite a rare event after the 1960s[21]. Later on, trying to find a way of escaping the task force, which is closing in on him, he asks Yamashita's men to throw all the money from the roof of the building to take advantage of the ensuing chaos to escape. Assistant director Kurosawa Kiyoshi was even arrested after shooting this scene for throwing fake money from a building and almost starting a riot in the streets. Something similar happened in 1963 to 'anti-art' artist Akasegawa Genpei of the Hi Red Center collective, who used fake 1,000 yen notes to challenge the 'reality' of money and the boundary between art and criminality[22]. He mailed these notes in cash envelopes as invitations to his exhibition in Tokyo and in the following months he made several reproductions of the note, burning them in a performance or using them to wrap objects. He was then accused of *mozō* (imitation of currency), in what would come to be known as one of the most spectacular trials involving a Japanese artist: "for Akasegawa and his associates, the practice of art served as a means to problematize and challenge the state's will to dominate the everyday life of 1960s Japan,

where the high-growth economy seemed to have completely displaced earlier political energy"[23].

While Akasegawa challenged the authority of state-printed money, Kido on the other hand uses state money and the yearning for cash in a capitalist society to its advantage in order to flee from the state itself. In late 1970s' Japan the critical point highlighted by Akasegawa's work had already been crossed, the daily life shaped to fit consumers' new habits. Not accidentally, the cash is thrown from the rooftop of a big department store and this particular *depāto* is located right in Shibuya, an area famous for fashion and entertainment, where young people flocked from the mid-1970s onwards, leaving the streets of Shinjuku and what they embodied in the previous decade.

There is also another scene reminiscent of the 'long 1960s' in many aspects: the bus hijacking. The JRA and its predecessor, the *Sekigunha* (Red Army Faction), hijacked four flights between 1970 and 1977, usually with the aim of demanding the release of political prisoners. In the movie, the lone terrorist is a disillusioned old man (Itō Yūnosuke) who lost his son in the WWII and wants to talk to the Emperor, to persuade him to give him his son back ("*musuko o kaeshite itadakitai*"). Wearing a military uniform and armed with a machine gun and several hand grenades, he decides to accomplish his plan by hijacking the bus that Kido and his students were using for a school trip, taking them as hostages and driving the bus to the Imperial Palace. While the JRA were accomplishing their terrorist acts for political purposes, in this case the hijack is carried out for personal reasons. The old man is one of the last remnants of imperialistic Japan, unable to adjust to consumer society and frustrated by rapid changes, while the Emperor is one of the last standing symbols of that era, the only one who could understand his private request. There is also a technical aspect in the scene that recalls the 1960s: in order to get a more realistic shot of the bus launched at full speed towards the gate of the Imperial Palace, Hasegawa did not request the permission needed for location shooting. Instead, he adopted the so-called 'guerrilla style' (hand-held camera, no permissions, quick shooting), typical of many Japanese films

from the 1960s, because in this way the scene would be more realistic and exciting, even if the price for this was being arrested[24].

All the above-mentioned scenes have something in common: they mimic the 1960s activism and political commitment, but only to adapt them to the consumerist society of the late 1970s. Emptied of their anti-establishment value, these gestures play a performative role in portraying an individualistic society, where every act has value only *per se*, and serves to satisfy strictly personal (consumerist) needs. Commercial culture "easily converts images deemed cutting edge or avant-garde into appealing commodities" as it happened with *angura* theater and New Wave cinema in the 1970s[25]. *The Man Who Stole the Sun* shows that there is no 'outside' in consumerist society and the only available rebellion for Kido (and his generation) is to use capitalist society's features (symbolically, money falling from the sky) to his own advantage. In this sense, the movie self-reflexively mirrors its main character actions, as "the success of these counternarratives ironically owed much to the consumer capitalism that they ostensibly loathed"[26]. The hijack scene is also valuable in highlighting the generational gap at play, since it is the first time Inspector Yamashita meets Kido (who has not yet stolen the plutonium at this point). Together, they are able to save the students and catch the terrorist, who is killed by Yamashita's task force. Hasegawa devised this scene as a comparison of three generations of Japanese[27].The old man, who lived the war in his adult age, is the 'grandfather', representing imperialistic Japan and old values. He is killed by the 'father', Inspector Yamashita, who still has memories of the war and who grew up in post-war poverty, working hard to bring Japan back onto the international stage. Kido is the 'son' who does not have experienced the war and represents post-high-growth era Japan. Even if in this scene Kido and Yamashita cooperate in order to save the students, the stark contrast in their attitude highlights a form of jealousy on part of Kido. He regards Yamashita as a man with a purpose, living a meaningful life, while he is still struggling to find something worth to fight for[28]. In order to realize himself – and to overcome post-war Japan – Kido needs to confront and kill the father, as he does at the end of the movie.

Several aspects of Kido's character can be linked to the changing Japanese society of the 1970s, forming a bridge between the season of politics and the society of the spectacle. Hasegawa changed some of Kido's features (namely, age and job position) in the final draft of the script to make the character closer to the director's *persona* [29]. He describes him as "a school teacher with lofty ideals struggling to change society, but his own solitude amidst the crowd of students made him a lunatic terrorist armed with a nuclear weapon he created"[30]. A person "with lofty ideals struggling to change society» is certainly an apt way to describe young people from the 1960s, but what really stands out in Kido's character is his loneliness and his fundamental loss of meaning, as the brief homage to *Taxi Driver* (1976, scripted by Schrader's brother, Paul) suggests. He acts like a hero during the hijacking, but he is otherwise detached and oblivious to the world around him. He lives alone with his cat in a small apartment full of equipment, and he is never shown chatting with a friend or an acquaintance (except for a brief dialogue with one of his neighbors). Even at school, he is often alone, never interacting with colleagues or students outside the classroom. His alienation is reaffirmed when he has to resort to a loan agency to borrow some cash to buy new equipment, because he has nobody else to ask. The only relationships he establishes in the movie are those with his 'father', Inspector Yamashita, and with the radio DJ, Zero, which can be hardly considered a typical love story.

He struggles to adapt to consumer society, but his lofty ideals cannot be fulfilled, as there is nothing left to fight for, and so he becomes an outcast challenging the authorities, fully embracing the role of a tragic anti-hero, mortally ill because of the nuclear radiation he was exposed to assembling the bomb[31]. Sawada had already played a similar character – a criminal with nothing to lose, dying of a fatal disease – in the TV series *Akumu no yōna aitsu* (*Man Like a Devil*, 1975) scripted by Hasegawa himself. Kido is one – and probably the most vivid – of many lone wolfs designed for the screen by the director. As an anti-establishment artist, he feels keen to depict those who break the rules; because he is the first to doubt them (he has never voted at

the political elections[32]). That is why among his influences he cited[33] the British movie *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (Tony Richardson, 1962), where the lead character resists the authorities in non-conventional ways, at the cost of his own success.

Kido becomes this kind of anti-hero, an alienated terrorist who rebels against society, putting his life on the line through violence. Nonetheless, his obscure purposes hide the quintessential feature of the movie. Why use a threat that could end several thousand lives? When Schrader came up with the idea for the movie, he said something interesting to Hasegawa: "[Japan] is a very strange country where nobody makes any complaints even if everything, head to toe, is red taped by bureaucratic rules and regulations"[34]. Thus, Kido starts "complaining" about this "red-tape society" beginning with a single example: as his first demand to the authorities, Kido asks to air the live coverage of evening baseball games until the end, since they were usually interrupted at 9 pm to broadcast the news. This intentionally trivial demand is needed to contrast the serious nature of the atomic bomb, "so the anarchy inside of Makoto will directly come out to the audience"[35]. Once his demand is met, though, Kido is at a loss. His lofty ideals never really manifest, he is still part of a 'sanitized' society where, after the 1960s, the landscape has been commodified and strictly regulated, in exchange for the promise of economic well-being. Convenience stores, department stores, chain stores and *shōtengai* (shopping streets) are everywhere the same and the places of protest have been (quite literally) eradicated[36].

In Hasegawa's opinion, it is the reality of Kido's generation to think something like: "I have a handmade atomic bomb in my hand, but I have nothing to accomplish by using this life-threatening weapon"[37]. Young people have an enormous power in their hands, but they 'forgot' how to use it, as exemplified by Kido calling the radio station where Zero is working to ask the audience for advice about his demands. Zero then creates a new program in response, called *Mahō no genbaku kōnā* ("Corner of the Magical A-Bomb"), and she uses it as if the nuclear bomb were an Aladdin's lamp granting wishes. The atomic threat should have been a 'wake-up call' for the younger generations,

but nobody took it seriously, and replies from the audience vary greatly, from the personal to the universal, most of them shallow. It is not surprising that Kido's second request then becomes something as prosaic as a Rolling Stones' concert (the rock band was prohibited from entering Japan at that time, due to drug-related allegations). Maybe, then, we should not search for the answer among this generation's lofty ideals, but in each individual's quest for meaning.

The second half of the movie presents several instances of the growing mediatization of the Japanese society and the style of the movie changes accordingly. Referring to the *Sumatakyō jiken* of February 1968, Furahata defines a *gekijō hanzai* (theatrical crime) as a *media event* where "the criminal became a dramatist and an actor, scripting, staging and performing the event"[38]. Certainly, the *Asama sansō jiken* was the most renowned example from the 1970s, although in this case it was not so much the alleged criminals who acted for the cameras (in fact, they tried to hide from them), but rather policemen, reporters and even civilians. URA's political battle against capitalism ironically turned to a visual spectacle to be consumed at home by the audience. Something similar happens to Kido, who thinks he can control events, but eventually becomes a victim of the new multimedia environment. As noted by Kimoto[39], in *The Man Who Stole the Sun*, radio and television are the means through which Kido's theatrical crime is 'played' in the space of Tōkyō. In the beginning he playfully teases the authorities – and Inspector Yamashita in particular – calling from different public telephones and disguising himself in various costumes, already a form of performance. When he calls Zero during her radio program (hosted live in a crowded public square), it is the first time his nuclear threat becomes public, involving the audience to pick his next demand as if it were a TV show. Even if Zero refuses to cooperate with Yamashita to help him catch Kido, the police gets progressively closer to the criminal and a car chase ensues. Kido and Zero try to pull away in a sport car, chased by several police patrols in a dynamic action sequence that resembles those in *The Blues Brothers* (John Landis, 1980). Their exciting getaway quickly turns into a media spectacle, because a TV helicopter is following them recording the

chase, while Zero comments on the events live from the car. In the face of such a dramatic experience, the DJ chooses to sacrifice her own safety in the name of entertainment, and she is almost immediately 'punished' for her behavior: the car ends up going off a cliff, resulting in the death of Zero. Since Yamashita fires the bullets that cause the car to crash while hanging from the helicopter, one could go so far as to say that she was killed by television itself.

The progressive distancing from reality of the action sequences further highlights this exploitation of violence – somehow wanted by the medium itself. As noted by Higuchi[40], the movie includes two explicit references to superheroes: one to *Urutoraman Tarō* (*Ultraman Taro*, 1973-4, 53 episodes), which can be seen being broadcasted on the TV in Kido's apartment, and the other to *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978), whose movie poster is on display outside a Shinjuku cinema he passes by. Incidentally, Kido also has a 'superhero' kind of nickname his students have given him after the bus hijacking, namely "*Fūsengamu*" ("Bubblegum", as he is always chewing a gum). In the second part of the movie, Kido and Yamashita start acting like superheroes and the transformation into an escapist fantasy, detached from reality, is complete. Kido can retrieve the nuclear bomb the authorities took from him entering a skyscraper by breaking a window (several floors above the ground) while hanging on a rope and screaming like Tarzan. Even more astonishing is the fact that he flees the scene in the same fashion. Later on, when Yamashita tries to stop Kido, the inspector survives a spectacular car crash and even a jump from a flying helicopter. In the final scene, when the long-awaited showdown between the two takes place, Kido escapes serious injuries jumping off a rooftop with Yamashita by catching an electric wire mid-air, while the inspector dies hitting the ground.

After spending more than thirty minutes of screen time in the first half of the movie, documenting the building of the bomb in an almost scientific way (although with some comic relief)[41], Hasegawa turns *The Man Who Stole the Sun* in pure spectacle. He was well aware of the kind of product he was creating, exploiting the tropes of blockbuster movies (unrealistic action scenes, spectacular plot twists, su-

per-human characters) and of mass consumer society, to analyze the illusions they offer. These illusions or, in Kimoto's words, «fictions» (*kyokō*) are exactly what the mass desires[42] and what Hasegawa provides to the audience in a problematic but deliberate way. In post-high-growth era Japan, while revolutionary ideals were left buried in the Asama lodge, the media environment is instrumental in cleansing memories of the war (and of the United States) and forging images of a new Japan, making them appealing to consumers. In times of peace and prosperity (and consumerism), even nuclear energy is no longer a threat; on the contrary it has come to epitomize 'clean' energy and fear of the bomb can be dismissed as if it were a joke. Kido's struggles to find a purpose in his demands signal the inability of younger generations to think for themselves outside of what society asks them to desire through advertisement, television, etc.… The movie ends with a nuclear explosion in the soundtrack and a freeze frame on Kido's face and it sounds like the definitive demise of post-war Japan, with a new era looming over the horizon[43].

Conclusions

In this paper, I have attempted to frame *The Man Who Stole the Sun* as an example of the counter-narratives of masculinity typical of 1970s Japan. In this regard, Inspector Yamashita (and his actor, the yakuza film superstar Sugawara) embodies the traditional masculinity that dominated Japanese society and its cultural industry up until the 1970s. The society shaped by his generation has paradoxically engendered the very sense of crisis they feared, as the emergence of mass consumerism created a new consumer identity that bore feminine features[44]. Simultaneously, Kido represents an attempt to question this traditional narrative of masculinity, portraying a character who is acutely aware of the limitations of the society he lives in. However, as is often the case with several other characters in cultural products of the 1970s, he is unable to envision a new Japan through his actions. His quest thus exposes the fragility of the younger generation in the face of the consumerist society.

This perspective is further reinforced by the absence of prominent

female characters and by the relationship between Kido and Zero. Initially, Zero is depicted as an assertive woman with agency, working as a content creator in the entertainment industry – a rare occurrence in the male-dominated cultural sector of the time. However, when it comes to her relationship with Kido, despite not following the pattern of a typical love story, a gender imbalance subtly emerges. Zero ultimately assumes a supporting role to Kido and her actions are subordinated to his. Even though Kido is portrayed as an individual who does not comply with societal norms, he ends up reaffirming gender conventions in his pursuit of a redefined masculine identity, because "Japanese men seem to have clung to what they believed were their vested interests in heteronormative relations precisely because they experienced the crisis of masculinity as such an imminent threat"[45].

Thus, the movie can be regarded as a late manifestation of these counter-narratives of masculinity, emerging at a time when society had irrevocably embraced mass consumerism. The protagonist's desperate resistance and his failed attempt to find an 'outside', stripped of the political activism of the 1960s, make visible the very consequences of the consumerist society of the late 1970s. This is precisely why Kido is unable to "transcend the deleterious effects [of mass consumerism] and thus restore [his] masculinity. [His] failure on both accounts effectively debunked the myth of autonomous and independent masculine agency"[46].

Moreover, *The Man Who Stole the Sun* is a movie that extends its reach beyond the 1970s and into the present[47]. Kido's 'shallow' demands have become common facts nowadays. Of course, cash does not fall from the sky yet, but ATM are everywhere (including *depāto* and *konbini*), the Rolling Stones played in Japan several times after their ban was lifted in 1990 and sport broadcasting is so widespread that one could virtually watch every single baseball match of the NPB league from home. Furthermore, variations of styles and contaminations from several genres make the movie a highly modern one. Hasegawa's mix of styles reflects how Kido likes constantly changing

costumes to disguise himself as an old man, a woman, and a union laborer throughout the movie. This transformative feature recalls the "unknowable shape-shifter" *aidoru*[48] that would dominate Japanese entertainment industry starting from the *Kadowaka eiga* around the same time[49].

Activism and radicalism in the 1960s were deeply bound to post-war memories, but after the end of the season of politics in 1972, that was not a viable stance any longer, because politics became more and more detached from contemporary society due to the growing middle-class homogenization. Miyadai Shinji defines the daily life in post-high-growth era Japan as a "never-ending everyday" (*owarinaki nichijō*), in order to describe a state of sameness which seems impossible to escape[50]. Those who dare to imagine a potential 'outside' (i.e. a different way of life in contemporary Japan) – like Kido does in *The Man Who Stole the Sun* – are almost immediately re-assimilated in this 'sameness' by the emerging society of the spectacle and the new multimedia environment, as even oppositional discourses are constructed and contained within these boundaries.

Kido tries to rebel against these developments, but he does not know how to handle the power he has, nor what the 'outside' could ultimately offer him. His three demands remain firmly focused on matters related to the mass consumer society: sport, television, entertainment and money. Thus, his search for an 'outside' ends up in failure. Kido's struggles to find a purpose in his threats, while his actions are turned into a TV show, ultimately reaffirm the impossibility of rebellion within the consumerist society of the late 1970s. In the end, cutting ties with his 'father' (and post-war Japan) leaves Kido even lonelier than at the beginning of his journey, facing a literal and metaphorical death.

[1] E. Cazdyn, *The Flash of Capital: Film and Geopolitics in Japan*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2002, p. 30.

[2] I. Yoshikuni, *Japan, 1972. Visions of Masculinity in an Age of Mass Consumerism*, New York, Columbia University Press, pp. 3-4.

[3] Ivi, p. 4.

[4] I analyze the movie through an environmental and eco-critical lens in E. De Angelis, *The Walking Nuclear Disaster: Nuclear Terrorism and the Meaning of the Atom in The Man Who Stole the Sun*, in R. DiNitto (ed.), *Eco-Disasters in Japanese Cinema*, Ann Arbor, Association for Asian Studies - Columbia University Press, 151-163.

[5] The 'proper' blockbuster formula in Japan is usually ascribed to Kadokawa Haruki, starting from the second movie he produced with his own company, *Ningen no shōmei* (*Proof of a Man*, Satō Jun'ya, 1977). See A. Zahlten, *The End of Japanese Cinema. Industrial Genres, National Times, and Media Ecologies*, Durham, Duke University Press.
Hasegawa recalled that he was fired due to tensions with the Nikkatsu's workers union (K. Arai, J. Turner, "Interview with Kazuhiko Hasegawa", Available on the website: http://eigagogo.free.fr/en/interview-kazuhiko-hasegawa.php Retrieved November 12, 2025).

[6] N. Higuchi [樋口尚文], *'Suna no utsuwa' to 'Nihon chinbotsu': 70nen dai Nihon no chōtaisaku eiga*[「砂の器」と「日本沈没」: 70年代日本の超大作映画][*'Castle of Sand' and 'The Sinking of Japan': Japanese blockbuster movies of the 70s*], Tōkyō, Chikuma shobō, 2004, p. 236.

[7] Hasegawa recalled that he was fired due to tensions with the Nikkatsu's workers union (K. Arai, J. Turner, "Interview with Kazuhiko Hasegawa", cit.).

[8] After Terayama Shūji's *Den'en ni shisu* (*Pastoral: To Die in the Country*, 1974), the ATG partly changed its 'house style' and shifted its focus from the 'self-revolution of the everyday life' (J. Alekseyeva, "Self-revolutions of everyday life": the politics of ATG", *The Sixties*, Vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 133-150), established with the movies by New Wave directors produced until then, to smaller projects by emerging or more established directors.

[9] In fact, he even co-wrote the screenplay for the 24th entry of the *Otoko wa tsurai yo* (*It's Tough Being a Man*, 1969-95, 48 installments) series, *Otoko wa tsurai yo: Torajirō haru no yume* (*Tora san's Dream of Spring*, 1979).

[10] A. Zahlten, *The End of Japanese Cinema*, cit., p. 119.

[11] N. Higuchi, *'Suna no utsuwa' to 'Nihon chinbotsu'*, cit., pp. 235-236.

[12] On the other hand, as Hasegawa himself pointed out, the movie had a good critical reception, being second in the Kinema Junpo Best Ten and fourth in the PIA Top Ten (K. Hasegawa, "Shinbun no kyūjinran dake wa mame ni miteita. Kyakuhonryō ga

yasui nante negoto ni mo ienakatta" [新聞の求人欄だけはマメに見ていた　脚本料が安いなんて寝言にも言えなかった] [*The only thing I looked at was the jobs section of the newspaper. I couldn't tell you in my sleep that scriptwriting fees were cheap*], *Gekkan shinario*, May 1982, pp. 14-18). The movie achieved cult status over the years and it was included in the list of the best 200 Japanese movies of all time, ranking seventh (*Ōru taimu besuto - Eiga isan 200 nihon eiga hen*, 2009).

[13] The Asama Lodge Incident, February 19-28, 1972. The five remaining members of the URA (Sakaguchi Hiroshi, Bandō Kunio, Yoshino Masakuni, Katō Michinori and his brother Motohisa, who was only sixteen at the time), chased by the police, barracked themselves inside the Asama Lodge, in the Nagano prefecture, taking a hostage. Surrounded by more than 1.000 police officers, after a ten-day siege they were caught and the hostage rescued. Two police officers and a civilian were killed. This event represented the end of the season of politics, even more so when it was discovered that the group had killed twelve of its members in the previous two months to carry out a sort of internal purge through a political practice called *sōkatsu*. The last day of the siege, the NHK broadcasted live for more than ten hours, recording the highest share in the history of Japanese television during the final moments of the siege (W. Andrews, *Dissenting Japan. A History of Japanese Radicalism and Counterculture from 1945 to Fukushima*, London, Hurst & Company, 2016, pp. 138-146).

[14] C. Perkins, *The United Red Army on Screen: Cinema, Aesthetics and the Politics of Memory*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 80.

[15] Y. Igarashi, *Japan, 1972*, cit., p. 6.

[16] He is one of the so-called *tainai hibakusha*, meaning that he was exposed to nuclear radiation when he was in his mother's womb.

[17] K. Hasegawa [長谷川 和彦], "Oretachi no sedai no sensō eiga o: eiga 'Rengō sekigun' no tame ni" [俺たちの世代の戦争映画: 映画連合赤軍のために] ["War films of our generation: for the film United Red Army"]. *Bungei*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2000, p. 54. Hasegawa was proved wrong when his former collaborator, Takahashi Banmei, directed his version of the story in *Hikari no ame* (*Rain of Light*, 2001), once it was clear that Hasegawa had given up on the project. Shortly after, another URA-related director, Wakamatsu Kōji, directed the most popular film on the subject to date, *Jitsuroku rengō sekigun – Asama sansō e no michi* (*United Red Army*, 2007).

[18] Nonetheless, it is useful to point out that the entire sequence is shot in a highly stylized and manga-esque manner, so that the violence does not appear too realistic.

[19] After the Lod massacre at Tel Aviv Airport in May 1972, the JRA hijacks an airplane the same year, attacks a petrol oil refinery in Singapore and the French embassy in Den Haag in 1974, takes hostages at the American and Swedish embassies in Kuala Lampur in August 1975 and two years later hijacks another plane in the so-called *Dakka jiken* (See K. Coogan, C.Derichs, *Tracing Japanese Leftist Political Activism (1957-2017)*, New York, Routledge, 2023).

[20] Hasegawa mixed fiction with reality, because in the mugshot of the suspect – a fictional character – appears the face of Kurosawa Kiyoshi, who worked as assistant director and was briefly arrested for the movie.

[21] The scene was actually shot during a May Day demonstration.

[22] W. A. Marotti, "Simulacra and subversion in the everyday: Akasegawa Genpei's 1000-yen copy, critical art, and the State", *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 4, no. 2, 2001, p. 211.

[23] Y. Igarashi, *Japan. 1972*, cit., p. 9.

[24] The director made this choice also because obtaining a permit for location shooting at the Imperial Palace was extremely difficult. He even uses the term *totsugeki suru* ("to assault") to refer to the shooting of this scene (J. Kobayashi [小林淳一], "'Sakkashugi'. Sakka ga sakka x Jiko wo kataru. Hasegawa Kazuhiko", [「作家主義」 作家が作家×自己を語る 長谷川和彦] ["'Auteurism.' Auteurs talk about Auteur x Self. Kazuhiko Hasegawa"], *A People Cinema*, 2022, Available on the website: https://apeople.world/ap_various/various007.html (Retrieved on November 12, 2025).

[25] Other valuable examples include the exhibitions of avant-guard artists at the State-sponsored Expo 70 in Ōsaka and the mass production of *pinku eiga* by Nikkatsu with the Roman Porno series.

[26] Y. Igarashi, *Japan. 1972*, cit., pp. 6-7.

[27] Y. Nishimura [西村雄一郎], *Hasegawa Kazuhiko intabyū. 'Taiyō wo nusunda otoko' wa yōkyū no nai jidai ni ikiru ore jishin no messēji da*[長谷川和彦インタビュー「太陽を盗んだ男」は要求のない時代に生きる俺自身のメッセージだ] [*Interview with Kazuhiko Hasegawa: 'The Man Who Stole the Sun' is a message from me, living in an age without demands*]. *Besuto obu Kinema junpō* [ベスト・オブ・キネマ旬報] [*The Best of Kinema Junpo*], Tōkyō, Kinema Junpōsha, 1994, p. 1085. Hasegawa was also worried that the movie, and this scene in particular, would cause trouble with right-wing activists, but the shooting was completed without turmoil (K. Arai, J. Turner, "Interview with Kazuhiko Hasegawa", cit.).

[28] N. Higuchi, *'Suna no utsuwa' to 'Nihon chinbotsu'*, cit., p. 241.

[29] Y. Nishimura, *Hasegawa Kazuhiko intabyū*, cit., p. 1084.

[30] (Eigagogo 2011)

[31] There are a few scenes where Kido is shown losing his hair or with bleeding gums. Even if this does not affect his plan during the movie, becoming ill gives to Kido's actions a desperate and fatalist undertone.

[32] Y. Miyahata, [宮畑譲], "'Mō ippon totte shinu' Yonjūnen mo chinmoku tsudukeru 'densetsu no eiga kantoku' Hasegawa Kazuhiko ga gekihaku" [「もう 1 本撮って

死ぬ」40年も沈黙続ける「伝説の映画監督」長谷川和彦が激白] [Kazuhiko Hasegawa, 'legendary filmmaker' who has remained silent for 40 years, speaks out: 'I'll take one more film and then I'll die.'], *Tokyo Shinbun*, January 9, 2021. Available on the website: https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/152936 (Retrieved on November 12, 2025).

[33] K. Arai, J. Turner, "Interview with Kazuhiko Hasegawa", cit.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] See for example the establishment of *hokōsha tengoku* (Pedestrian Paradise) in the early 1970s and the case of the Shinjuku West Exit Underground Square converted overnight into an Underground Passageway in order to prevent the meetings of the folk guerrillas in 1969 (Y. Furuhata, *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2013, pp. 193-196).

[37] K. Arai, J. Turner, "Interview with Kazuhiko Hasegawa", cit.

[38] Y. Furuhata, *Cinema of Actuality*, cit., p. 68.

[39] S. Kimoto, [木本伸], *Kodoku to deai no eigaron: sukurīn ni utsuru toshi no nichijō* [孤独と出会いの映画論: スクリーンに映る都市の日常] [*A film theory of loneliness and encounters: urban everyday life on screen*], Tōkyō, Shin'yōsha, 2021, p. 12.

[40] N. Higuchi, *'Suna no utsuwa' to 'Nihon chinbotsu'*, cit., p. 242.

[41] The director even had to cut some footage for fear of possible copycats (T. Mes, J. Sharp, *The Midnight Eye Guide to New Japanese Cinema*, Berkeley: Stone Bridge, 2005, p. 276). This approach also highlights the fact that in a mass consumer society, everyone could easily find all the 'ingredients' (plutonium aside) required to create a nuclear bomb. See S. Kimoto [木本伸], *Kodoku to deai no eigaron: sukurīn ni utsuru toshi no nichijō* [孤独と出会いの映画論: スクリーンに映る都市の日常] [*A film Theory of Loneliness and Encounters: Urban Everyday Life on Screen*, Tōkyō, Shin'yōsha, 2021, p. 15.

[42] *Ibid*.

[43] Hasegawa stated in several interviews that Kido is not dead at the end of the movie, despite the sound of a bomb going off. See K. Hasegawa [長谷川 和彦] "Shinbun no kyūjinran dake wa mame ni miteita. Kyakuhonryō ga yasui nante negoto ni mo ienakatta" [新聞の求人欄だけはマメに見ていた　脚本料が安いなんて寝言にも言えなかった] ["The only thing I looked at was the jobs section of the newspaper. I couldn't tell you in my sleep that scriptwriting fees were cheap"], *Gekkan shinario*. May 1982, pp. 14-18; M. Osamu [松井修] "Hasegawa Kazuhiko renzoku intabyū. Part 1" [長谷川和彦連続インタビュー　Part I] ["Consecutive

interviews with Kazuhiko Hasegawa. Part I"], *Eiga hihyō*, September 2011, pp. 62-63; J. Kobayashi [小林淳一], " *'Sakkashugi. Sakka ga sakka x Jiko wo kataru. Hasegawa Kazuhiko*" [「作家主義」　作家が作家×自己を語る　長谷川和彦] ["*Auteurism.' Auteurs talk about Auteur x Self. Kazuhiko Hasegawa*"], *A People Cinema*, 2022. Available on the website: https://apeople.world/ap_various/various007.html (retrieved November 12, 2025).

[44] Y. Igarashi, *Japan, 1972*, cit., p. 7.

[45] Ivi, p. 8.

[46] Ivi, p. 265.

[47] See N. Higuchi, *'Suna no utsuwa' to 'Nihon chinbotsu', cit.*, p. 253; S. Kimoto, *Kodoku to deai no eigaron*, cit., p. 13;

[48] A. Zahlten, *The End of Japanese Cinema*, cit., p. 128.

[49] Singer-actor Sawada exhibited the same transformative attitude throughout his career. From his early days as a teen idol with the rock band *The Tigers* in the 1960s to his later success as a solo artist and fashion trendsetter, he consistently presented his persona as subversive and extravagant. However, despite this eccentric image, he remained firmly entrenched within the entertainment industry, thereby reflecting, in this regard, the failed attempt of his character in *The Man Who Stole the Sun* to break free from the established confines.

[50] See M. Shinji [宮台真司], *Owarinaki nichijō o ikiro: Oumu kanzen kokufuku manyuaru,* [終わりなき日常を生きろ] [*Live the endless daily life*], Tōkyō, Chikuma shobō, 2018.