

Milestone Film & Video presents:  
Directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda  
Produced by TV Man Union

## MABOROSI

A Milestone Film Release  
P.O. Box 128 • Harrington Park, New Jersey 07640-0128  
Phone (201) 767-3117 • Fax (201) 767-3035 • Email: milefilms@aol.com  
www.milestonefilms.com

### MABOROSI

Japan. 1995. 110 minutes. Color. Aspect ratio 1:1.85. In Japanese with English subtitles.

Based on "Maborosi no Hikari" (Illusory Light) (published by Shinchoh, 1979) a short story written by Teru Miyamoto (past winner of the Akutagawa literary award). Miyamoto is known worldwide as the author of *Muddy River*, which was made into a film directed by Kohei Oguri.

*Maborosi* (mä • bo • ro´ • she) is a Japanese word that means illusion or mirage.

#### Crew

Executive Producer	Yutaka Shigenobu
Producer	Naoe Gozu
Director	Hirokazu Kore-eda
Original Story by	Teru Miyamoto
Screenplay	Yoshihisa Ogita
Music	Chen Ming-Chang
Cinematographer	Masao Nakabori
Lighting	Fumio Maruyama
Recording	Masatoshi Yokomizo
Art Director	Kyoko Heya
Costume designer	Michiko Kitamura
Editor	Tomoyo Ohshima
Sound Effects	Hideyo Sasaki
Decoration	Keiji Akatsuka
Assistant Directors	Iwao Takahashi, Akira Hibino, Akira Morii
Assistant Camera	Atsushi Kawabe, Toru Yamamoto, Tomotaka Hayakawa
Second Unit Photography	Tsumeari Yamaki, Ichiro Suzuki
Supplementary Photography	Isao Ishii, Akiko Ashizawa
Assistant Lighting	Yasushi Kawasaki, Kunio Ohshio, Mitsuo Kojima, Miyanobu Inori
Assistant Sound Recording	Hitoshi Tsurumaki, Kenichi Fujimoto, Shinji Watanabe
Assistant Decoration	unko Nakajima, Takayuki Sato
Assistant Art Director	Masato Inatsuki
Back up set up	Yoshiaki Fukuda
Assistant Costume Designer	Junko Kobayashi, Sayuri Iizuka
Hair/Make up	Yukiko Nishio
Location Co-ordinators	Takashi Sakurai, Chikako Nakabayashi, Motoki Ishida
Drivers	Motoki Nakazawa, Yoshimichi Kurita, Takeshi Yoshida, Katsuaki Atsumi
Assitant Editor	Ryuji Miyajima
Negative Editor	Ryusuke Ohtsubo

Timing	Yoshitaka Mori
Visual effects	Minoru Nakano
Recording Studio	Tsutomu Asakura, Jiro Miyazawa, Rokuro Ohtani
Assistant Sound Effects	Masahiko Okase
Still Photographer	Masao Okamura, Kensho Saka
Dialect Coach	Jyoko Ohara
Translation	Fumiko Osaka, Miwako Ouchi
Press Relation	Akiko Motoki
Advertisement Art Direction	Kaoru Kasai
Advertisement Photography	Tamotsu Fujii
Film Developing	Tokyo Developing Lab
Completion	Tokyo Television Center

### Cast

Yumiko	Makiko Esumi
Tamio (Yumiko's second husband)	Takashi Naitoh
Ikuo (Yumiko's first husband)	Tadanobu Asano
Yuichi (Yumiko's son)	Gohki Kashiyama
Tomoko (Tamio's daughter)	Naomi Watanabe
Michiko (Yumiko's mother)	Midori Kiuchi
Yoshihiro (Tamio's father)	Akira Emoto
Tomeno	Mutsuko Sakura
Master	Hidekazu Akai
Hatsuko	Hiromi Ichida
Detective	Minori Terada
Hiroshi (Yumiko's father)	Ren Ohsugi
Kiyo (Yumiko's grandmother)	Kikuko Hashimoto
Cop	Shuichi Harada
Driver	Takashi Inoue
Yumiko as a young girl	Sayaka Yoshino
Dog	Muku Muku

© 1995 TV Man Union, Inc.

Press notes © 1996 Milestone Film & Video

U.S. Theatrical Premiere: September 6, 1996, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, NYC

### Synopsis

Yumiko, a twelve-year-old girl, examines herself intently in a hand mirror. She hears the ringing of a bicycle bell and looks out the window to catch a glimpse of a young boy riding his bike through the tunnel. His mother calls after him, "Ikuo, Ikuo!"

Yumiko's grandmother is walking through a tunnel with a bag in her hand. Yumiko runs after her and catches up with her as she is crossing a bridge. Her grandmother tells Yumiko, "I want to die in my home town, so I'm going back to Shikoku." She walks away as Yumiko watches helplessly. Yumiko's father returns home and tells his wife and daughter that no one has seen any signs of Yumiko's grandmother. "At least in this weather she won't freeze," he says. "Besides, it's not the first time she's done this." When Yumiko asks, "If she doesn't come back, what shall I do?" her mother consoles her and tells her it isn't her fault.

It is night and Yumiko is on the bridge where she last saw her grandmother. As she returns home through the tunnel, Ikuo passes her on his bike and they stare at each other. Fade to black

Out of the darkness, we hear Yumiko's voice. "I had that dream again. I have it often these days. I wonder why?" As she turns on the light, Ikuo replies "I'm not the reincarnation of your

grandmother.” They are in their early twenties now. “Sleep,” says Ikuo, turning off the light. Yumiko continues in the dark, “But I wonder why I couldn’t stop her.”

Night — Ikuo rides his bicycle over a bridge and speeds down the road parallel to the train tracks, racing the train. He stops to watch it overtake him and turns around to go back the way he came. He arrives home to a modest second-floor apartment in the back alleys of Osaka. Ikuo’s bicycle has recently been stolen and he has gone to a rich neighborhood to steal another one. “I figured I’d steal from the rich. As they say, an eye for an eye,” he tells Yumiko. Outside their window, a train passes.

Yumiko walks to Ikuo’s workplace, a factory. She seems happy, almost skipping along the road. She puts her face against the factory window and looks in. Ikuo is standing at the other end of the building but he sees her. They stare at each other — Yumiko making faces and Ikuo grinning slightly. At a local coffeehouse where the owner knows them well, the couple drink and talk. Yumiko playfully removes the bell from a teddy bear on the counter and attaches it to Ikuo’s bicycle-lock key. They leave riding the bicycle together — Ikuo in the front and Yumiko in back, holding on. She seems pleased and at ease as she chats away.

Yumiko goes to Mrs. Ono’s tailor shop, located below their apartment, to pick up her three-month-old son, Yuichi. Mrs. Ono talks about how much the boy looks like his father and how handsome he will be. While she is hanging out the wash, Yumiko is surprised to hear the bell on Ikuo’s key. He explains he wanted to drop off his bike because he didn’t want to leave it out in the rain at the factory. Yumiko is delighted at his unexpected return and insists on seeing him off at the door. She watches his silhouette disappear through the tunnel.

Late that evening — Yumiko has fallen asleep waiting for Ikuo. She is awoken by a knock at the door. Two policemen ask Yumiko whether her husband has returned home yet — a young man was killed by a train that evening. They ask her to come to the station to verify the man’s identity. In the police car, an officer tells her that they found an envelope in the man’s pocket with a factory address on it — of the company’s three workers only Ikuo is unaccounted for. At the station, the police tell Yumiko that the body is in no shape to be identified. According to the conductor, Ikuo was walking on the tracks in the direction of the oncoming train. The train was going around a bend and couldn’t stop in time. Ikuo did not respond to the warning whistle or the screeching brakes — he just kept walking. The only thing found on his body was his bicycle key with the bell Yumiko had attached.

In her apartment, Yumiko sits on the floor in the dark.

Yumiko’s mother comes to help her because Mrs. Ono has told her that Yumiko often leaves Yuichi crying and she worries that Yumiko may hurt herself. Her mother is baffled — why would a young man leave his young wife and three-month-old baby behind? She wonders why Yumiko didn’t notice anything and tells her that she has to pull herself together. Yumiko looks into a mirror and holds the bell in front of it. She rides Ikuo’s bicycle through the tunnel. As she pushes the bike along the road, a train passes by.

Several years later — Yumiko’s mother visits Mrs. Ono to thank her for acting as matchmaker for Yumiko. Yumiko is leaving for Noto, a fishing village on the Sea of Japan, to marry Tamio, a widower. Mrs. Ono tells Yumiko’s mother that he is a good man and hopes they will be happy together. On the train, Yumiko and Yuichi, who is now a young boy, watch as the passing scenery becomes increasingly mountainous. They get off at Noto and wait in the empty train station for their new family to arrive. When they do, Tamio apologizes for his lateness and his daughter Tomoko, a first grader, says “Thank you for coming.”

The car speeds along the winding coast roads where the sky is gray and the sea rough against the rocky cliffs. They arrive at Tamio's home — an old, traditional-style house on edge of the water. Tamio's father sits with Yuichi while Yumiko prays at the small Buddhist altar set up for Tamio's former wife. Yumiko tells Tomoko kindly, "I'll be your mother from now on."

In their dark bedroom, Yumiko sits looking out the window and Tamio tells her she may not be able to sleep at first because the sea is so loud. The following morning, Tamio takes Yumiko around to meet some of the locals. He kids around with the old fishing women. That evening, they have a banquet at Tamio's home to celebrate the newlyweds. The whole town gathers to sing, drink and eat.

Yumiko remains in the safe confines of the kitchen but overhears locals outside her window talking about the weather. She opens the back door and steps out into the early spring light. The two children, Tomoko and Yuichi, set off on a walk together along a path. They climb a hill where the snow is melting in the sun and skip along the edge of a pool of water that reflects their movements. On the beach they discover a discarded old boat and Yuichi decides that he will keep it in his closet. They stop and pray by some Buddhist statues and run through a tunnel chanting the alphabet. The pair is picked up by a neighbor who takes them home on the back of his pickup truck.

Summer arrives — The whole family sits on the porch eating watermelon together. Yumiko laughs contentedly as Tamio spits seeds into the garden. While the children are outside, Yumiko and Tamio share an intimate moment in their bedroom. Yumiko, in her underwear, is leaning against Tamio. He complains that he is hot and exhausted and asks her to get off him. Also, he worries that the children will come back. But, mischievously, she refuses to move.

Yumiko takes the train to Osaka with the two children to attend her brother's wedding. It is the first time she has gone back since she left to remarry. Yumiko visits Mrs. Ono and stops in at their old neighborhood coffee shop. The owner is surprised to see her and tells her how worried he was about her when he read about Ikuo in the newspapers. He tells her that on the day he died, Ikuo had come by the coffeehouse on his way back from the factory. He had been his usual self — cheerfully making small talk. Ikuo had forgotten to bring any money with him and had offered to go home to get some. But the owner had told him to just bring it by the next day. All Yumiko can think about is how close to home Ikuo had come before he killed himself. After leaving the coffee shop, she cannot help but go back to revisit her old apartment.

When Yumiko returns to Noto, she is noticeably haunted by memories of Ikuo and his death. When Tamio asks her about her visit, she is aloof and withdrawn.

Ring of a bicycle bell — Yumiko wakes up and opens the window. It's a dark and blustery winter morning. She sees Tomeno, an old fishing woman, who calls up to Yumiko and promises to bring her back three crabs. Yumiko watches as the old woman heads out to sea. Tamio wakes up and asks Yumiko if anything is wrong — is she is homesick for Osaka? Yumiko tells him she was awoken by a dream. That evening, as the weather grows stormy, Yumiko, Tamio and Tamio's father await Tomeno's return and are becoming increasingly worried. Tamio's father reassures Yumiko that Tomeno is a tough cookie and that she knows the sea better than anyone. But Yumiko cannot shake the ominous feeling that she may be about to experience loss again. Tomeno, however, arrives safely with the three crabs she had promised Yumiko, to everyone's evident relief.

Yumiko and Yuichi run into Tomeno at the market. Yuichi goes to check out the bicycles while the two women chat. Tomeno asks Yumiko about Ikuo and tells her about Tamio's first wife. That night at home Yumiko takes out Ikuo's bicycle key and bell. She quickly hides it when she hears Tamio return home late and drunk. Yumiko has been worried because she did not know

where he was. She is angry and yells at him for not calling her and for driving drunk. Tamio, even in his drunken state, notices that she has hidden something and asks her about it. Yumiko replies that it's just an old bike key and that she wanted to take the bell off of it. Then, abruptly, she calls him a liar and says that he lied about the reason he came back to Noto. Tamio had told her that he returned for his father's sake — but Tomeno had told Yumiko that he came back to marry his first wife. Yumiko asks why he married her after losing a wife he loved so much. Tamio is stunned by this attack but is in no condition to respond. He tells her they will talk about it tomorrow. Yumiko falls silent.

Yuichi is playing outside with a ball. Tamio joins him and asks him where his mother is. Yuichi says he does not know and Tamio is puzzled that Yumiko would leave him alone like that.

A bus pulls away from a bus shelter where Yumiko is sitting. It seems she was about to take the bus but decided not to. As she walks away from the bus stop, she sees a funeral procession on the hillside. The procession moves slowly down the road as snow begins to fall. In one beautiful extreme long shot, the funeral procession is captured walking slowly along the beach as the lone figure of Yumiko follows far behind.

Tamio is driving around, frantically searching for Yumiko. He sees the cremation on the beach and discovers Yumiko standing there, watching the fire. He approaches her — his silhouette facing hers for a moment — and then walks away. Yumiko follows him. “I just don't understand why he killed himself,” she says. “Why was he walking on the tracks? It keeps going around and around in my head. Why do you think he did it?” Tamio replies “They say that the sea seduces you. Father used to be a fisherman, and he says that there is this illusory light that appears in the distance and lures you out to sea. It can happen to anyone.”

It is spring — Tamio is teaching Yuichi how to ride a bicycle and Tomoko is helping. Tamio's father is sitting on the porch watching them. Yumiko comes over to join him. She says, “It's getting warm, isn't it?” Pausing for a moment, he replies “It certainly is,” as the children's laughter echoes through the village.

### **Hirokazu Kore-eda**, Director

(Born 1962, Tokyo)

After graduating from Waseda University with a degree in literature, Hirokazu Kore-eda joined TV Man Union. He has since directed many documentaries for television including *But — In the Time of Government Aid Cuts* (1991) for which he won a prestigious award. This film could be said to have been the inspiration for *Maborosi*, for while filming it he met the wife of a government official who committed suicide for reasons that were unclear. The documentary followed the circumstances that led to his death through interviews with family, colleagues and friends. While making the film, Kore-eda was struck most by the inconsolable grief of the man's widow. Kore-eda has gained a reputation as a filmmaker who skillfully and quietly explores social ills in Japan today. Some of his other films have examined the lives of the first person to go public with AIDS in Japan and a Korean man who “passed” as Japanese for decades. Throughout, Kore-eda has remained true to one of his rules of documentary filmmaking: “Don't get too involved in your subject, but don't push them too far away either. Keep a comfortable filming distance.” However, it is precisely at the moments when he breaks this rule that his films take on an even greater humanity rarely seen in film today.

When Kore-eda made a documentary about two important Asian filmmakers, *When Cinema Reflects the Times — Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang*, Hou, the acclaimed Taiwanese director told him “When you decide to make a film, I will do everything I can to help you.” And when Kore-eda needed help contacting composer Chen Ming-Chang, for *Maborosi*, Hou was happy to lend a hand. One comment Kore-eda had about his success as a film director was that it arrived “a little earlier than I thought.”

Recently, Kore-eda was named the first-ever recipient of a grant given out to the most promising new director by the Tokyo International Film Association (the organizers of the annual Tokyo International Film Festival). The grant of \$450,000 is to be used in the making of his next film.

### **Hirokazu Kore-eda's Videography/Filmography**

- 1991 *But — In the Time of Government Aid Cuts* (winner, Galaxy Award)
- 1991 *The Other Education — The Education of One Class at Ina Elementary School* (winner, ATP Award)
- 1992 *I Wanted To Be a Japanese ...* (winner, Galaxy Award)
- 1993 *When Cinema Reflects the Times — Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang*
- 1993 *Four Times of Death*
- 1993 *This is How I'm Living — One Year of Coming Out with AIDS by Yutaka Hirata*
- 1993 *Soul Sketches — Every Person's Kenji Miyazawa*
- 1994 *August Without Him — Two Years of Living with AIDS by Yutaka Hirata* (winner, Galaxy Award)
- 1995 *Maborosi*

### Hirokazu Kore-eda on the Making of *Maborosi* (Excerpted from an interview with Kenichi Okubo)

“I love the novels of Teru Miyamoto and I enjoy watching the film *Muddy River* [directed by Kohei Oguri and adapted from a novel by Miyamoto] as a member of the audience. But I didn't want to make *Maborosi* in the same style as *Muddy River*, which was a story about the miseries of post war Japan and so the film takes that angle too. What I wanted to do in my film was a little different — I wanted to explore the sense of loss that one woman carried within her, independent of the poverty of the times or even her own poverty. I thought that way I could achieve a pure portrayal of this loss. For my generation, as well as Makiko Esumi's generation, there is a feeling of a lack of certainty about anything — a universal undefined feeling of loss. And that is not something just of these times but it's something we all carry inside of us as we go on with our lives. I thought it would be easier for me to convey this idea and this sense of loss as something set in today, set among our own generation, as opposed to a tale of the past.

“When I began discussing the movie with [costume designer Michiko] Kitamura-san I saw that her ideas about color and costume were cut off from reality in that they didn't convey any kind of poverty. But when I discussed this with my cinematographer [Masao] Nakabori-san and the others, I realized that I could tell the story better by using these costumes. This is not to say it is a fairy tale, but the story itself is not exactly based on realism. So it made sense to tell the story as a *sort of* fairy tale, through which I could directly convey the interior landscape of the sorrow she carries around with her. I also wanted to shoot the whole film under gray cloudy skies — to concentrate on how the human presence and colors appear under these conditions. I was intent on avoiding artificial lighting and wanted to construct the film around shooting naturally dark places *in the dark*, listening to the sounds that emerged from the darkness.

“I knew I had to find my main character, Yumiko, before I could cast anybody else, so there was a period when I was torn between a number of possible actresses. My producer was talking to a photographer friend of hers about what kind of film she wanted to make and he introduced her to Makiko. The photographer had taken a couple of pictures of her and when I saw them I was struck by the strength in her eyes. I felt a strong will in their glow. When we were talking face to face — looking into each other's eyes, forgetting the fact that she was an actress or a model — I felt a very strong will in her as a woman. I felt that she was a person who did things with a strong personal philosophy and belief. Not just that she could face others, but that she could face herself — her innermost self. Right from the beginning, I had no intention of telling her things like ‘Yumiko wouldn't do that,’ or ‘Yumiko wouldn't move like that.’ All I wanted her to do was to

think about and focus on ‘What do I look like when I’m faced with enormous loss? How would I act when I am struck with sadness?’ When I spoke to Makiko about the film, I told her not to try to understand Yumiko’s loss but to find the loss inside of *her* — her own loss.

“In filming the scenes between Ikuo and Yumiko, my first concept was to create a space that belonged to only the two of them by having them side by side all the time. I wanted to save the moment they faced each other as a significant and special occasion. The only place you have a medium shot is where she goes to pick him up at his factory — she looks through the window — he turns to her from inside. The film cuts back and forth between medium shots of each of them — capturing them from *within* their relationship. I really wanted to make this scene memorable and therefore I wanted to use this camera position exclusively for this scene. I specifically avoided using this technique anywhere else in this film and instead used long shots or had them looking in the same direction to show them sharing an emotion. There is a scene I love from Victor Erice’s *El Sur*. It’s where the daughter, who is outside the window, faces her father who is inside the café. I could never forget the feeling that was conveyed so well in that scene — the love the father and daughter felt for each other and, at the same time, the distance that separated them — never to be overcome. I thought to myself, ‘Someday I would like to portray the melancholy of people who face each other through a glass.’

“The children’s excursion scene is one of the few places in the film where there is a lot of movement, but it was not conceived as such. Originally, I just meant to make it easier for the children, because they get awkward when you restrict them. So I told them to move as they wished. To follow their natural movement was one goal, but also, I wanted to create a contrast between this scene and the scenes shot in Osaka which had a certain claustrophobic, closed space feeling. Those scenes are presented as a space wrapped in the dark. But after Yumiko goes to Noto and goes outside, the sounds and light that she encounters were the starting point for a change in mood. The children’s outdoor sequence is also an opening up of space and the tracking shot in the second half of that sequence brings a light that is more like spring. In other words, by having the camera move for the first time, I wanted to capture the change in scenery — to show that the light around Yumiko has changed and that the new expansive space around her affects her. I wanted to convey a certain emancipation of her emotions. By using a moving camera there, I could portray the children as pulling her along into the open space.

“In a later scene where the children are running along the edge of a pool of water, there is some snow left, dead trees and branches litter the ground, old cars and boats that have been discarded, a tunnel, a Buddhist statue — literally a passage to the other world. To see the children running full of life through a place of death — this scene can be seen in many ways. Some people just say the children are adorable. Others say it’s a beautiful scene, and this is all fine. But what I intended was for people to feel a little danger in that scene — to smell a bit of death. So this scene with the children and the line between death and life mirrors in composition the final scene on the beach with Yumiko and Tamio.

“I really don’t think it’s bad for people to be attracted to the idea of death or loss, or to portray it, or to approach it, or to measure one’s distance from it. I feel that by doing that you rethink the ideas of life and living. You can reaffirm life every time you think about death and loss and you can go back and forth like that.

“The first time I heard Chen Ming-Chang’s music was in Hou Hsiao-Hsien’s *Dust in the Wind*. I really liked the guitar. It was very emotional but not too sweet. After I started working on *Maborosi* it came time to ask someone to do the music. I was at first a little hesitant to ask Chen Ming-Chang. I thought it might seem blatantly a homage to Hou. And to have this film seen as a Hou Hsiao-Hsien film did not seem necessarily advantageous. On the other hand, by using him I could make a statement about how this was not a just a Japanese production — a Japanese film. So I got my guts together and asked Hou to introduce me to him. When I first wrote to Chen, I

didn't tell him what the film was about or what the mood of it was — I just told him it was a visually dark film. Thematically, it is also a very quiet film, but I wanted to have music that is like a ray of light illuminating the darkness. He really understood what I was trying to say. After all the rushes, I sent him the video. He can't write music, so he watches the film and plays along with it and records that.

“In making *Maborosi*, I really thought hard about how I could get this film to be seen by the world as just that — purely a film. I thought hard about where to show it; what kind of route I should take; and how I could make a film that can live up to that achievement. It's a question of how to keep it going, especially now, because directors like Ozu, Naruse and Mizoguchi are continuously being shown around the world and that's very important. But what's even more important for me is to figure out how the films of young contemporary Japanese directors can follow in their footsteps and continue in their path. I feel very strongly about that — and of course, I hope to do the same with my second film.”

### **“From Television to Film — from Film to Television”**

By Hirokazu Kore-eda

For the past few months, the question that has been asked everywhere I go is “So now you've graduated from television?” “No,” I reply, “documentaries for television are a lot of fun so I intend to continue.” Before I'd finished *Maborosi*, there were articles in the newspapers with headlines saying “TV Director Takes On Film.” When I got back from the film festivals they had changed to “A Victory for TV Man.” Every time I see headlines like these I get mad because it's not as if making documentaries for television was something I did until I “made it” in film. Since I started my job at TV Man Union I have thought a lot about what television is and what documentaries are — in my own way — while I made my documentaries. That resulted in my asking myself “Who am I?” *through* my documentaries. I used television to figure myself out. (I was not thinking about society or the world around me just because I chose socially conscious topics — that's why I hate it when they call me a journalist or a social documentarian.) So continuing on that line of thought, I came to the questions “What is film? What is cinema? What is fiction?” — these questions were very important for me personally. I wanted to know what new part of myself I would see at the end of the film. This time I wanted to think about myself through a film.

### **Makiko Esumi, Yumiko**

(Born 1968, Shimane-ken)

Makiko Esumi started playing volleyball in junior high and was a star player throughout high school. Upon graduation, she was recruited for a professional team in Osaka but an irreparable shoulder injury forced her to give up the sport. While she was in the hospital recuperating from shoulder surgery, Esumi caught the eye of a talent scout and her successful modeling career began. She is frequently featured in leading Japanese fashion magazines and has done runway shows for designers Hiromichi Nakano and Yohji Yamamoto. She has also appeared in numerous television ads, making her one of the top models in Japan today. Esumi also writes essays for women's magazines. She had refused many acting offers before making her screen debut in *Maborosi*. Currently, she is starring in a television series and intends to continue working as an actress.

Of her first meeting with Kore-eda, Makiko says, “I thought my height would be a disadvantage as an actress. So I did the opposite thing — I went in with really high heels on. But when I talked to him, he said he didn't care at all. I really have to get over my complex.”

Makiko's father died due to a doctor's error while she was in high school. “I really understand the sorrow of having to give up the person you love most, like Yumiko. When my father died, I even forgot to cry, I was in such shock. But I knew that I couldn't get over it if I stayed at home being miserable, so right after the funeral I went back to school. To live each day and to

appreciate it is something I learned from my father's death." Since then, Makiko has thought a lot about the meaning of life and death. She became interested in Teru Miyamoto's literature because these are themes he explores in his writing. "It's sounds a little heavy, but reading his stories, I could really imagine the smell, the colors and the characters very vividly. In "Maborosi," when I read it, I could totally imagine Noto, even though I had never been there. And who would have thought I would end up playing that character! I really feel that I didn't have to force myself to act, but that I let myself go and allowed a side of me to show naturally.

Esumi also actively involved herself in the shooting by suggesting certain scenes. For example, there is a scene in the bedroom — right after she sleeps with Tamio on a hot summer day — where she stares out the window. Originally, the scene was shot with her shirt over her shoulders. But Esumi talked to Kore-eda and fellow actor Takashi Naito and told them that if she were Yumiko she would not put her clothes on — it would be more natural if she were just in her underwear. So they reshot the scene with Esumi clad only in underwear that a crew member bought at a local supermarket.

Asked about all the attention *Maborosi* has received at film festivals around the world, Esumi says "It's not about making it big, or getting a lot of money. For me, the important thing is the way this all happened — coincidences and opportunities that have brought me together with important people and important work. Teru Miyamoto, the author, said to me "If you don't do things the way you want to, it's most likely not going to work out and you'll be sorry." So I intend to keep cherishing the opportunities that I encounter, even though my mother *would* love to see me married in the near future."

#### **Naoe Gozu, Producer, on the Long Struggle to Make *Maborosi***

There are many reason why I wanted to make this film, but one of the main ones is my love for the original short story by Teru Miyamoto. Of all tales written by this master of storytelling, "Maborosi" is one of the more unusual. The whole story is told by a young wife who sits by the window in the home of her new husband in Noto, talking to her first husband who committed suicide. I heard the waves and smelled the salt from the rough sea and various scenes came to mind vividly as I read this story. And above all, I really shared in the flow of emotion experienced by the main character as she moved from loss to hope. Even though she is talking to her dead husband, there wasn't a feeling of looking backwards, but instead an energy of looking forward to life.

When I was six, I lost my brother, who was three at the time. Until that very moment, he was playing by the river. But during the split second that I turned away, he fell in and drowned. Nobody blamed me for it, but it is something that I cannot possibly forget. When I think of my life, I always think of my brother's death. And I promise to live my life to the fullest. By talking about death, you think of life — by portraying darkness, you wish for light. I wanted to make a film like that. "Maborosi" was meant to be that film.

February 1992, I visit Teru Miyamoto for the first time. At first he seems very skeptical of making movies out of his stories. "In this day and age, do you really think that a low-key story like "Maborosi" can be made into a film?" he asks. But finally he simply says "Do you have ten bucks? That's all I want for the rights to this story — the rest is up to you." Thus, for a mere ten dollars, the film rights to "Maborosi" are mine, and I write him a thank you card as soon as I get back to Tokyo. It says "I am still a nobody, but through 'Maborosi,' I will definitely make something of myself."

I don't even know where to begin writing about the three years that followed until we finally completed the film. It was really hard for a television producer and a television director who were total novices in film. The door to the film world seemed to be shut tightly in front of us and

just when we thought it was opening slightly, and we thought we could slip through the crack, it would close on us — squeezing us right out.

One of the producers I really admire read the first line of the screenplay and said “It makes me happy that there are still people who are trying to make a project like this happen. If I can’t lend a hand to an occasion such as this, my thirty years in the film business are pointless.” He really encouraged us greatly.

February 1993, director Kore-eda and I follow the footsteps of Yumiko to Noto. We walk through the factories and downtown and arrive at the sea where we stand and think our ears and nose are going to tear off and fly away in the blustering wind. I think to myself — we are really being tested to see whether humans can withstand hardship and come out on top. We have no idea where we are going to get the financing for this film — it seems like we’ll have to give the project up — to be blown away in the wind ... But nature is omnipotent. Just when you think it is all over, it gives you the power to recover and it makes you realize that you are still here and you can still continue. This is also where Yumiko finds the power to keep going.

July 1994, through one photograph, I meet model Makiko Esumi. She comes to me having read the original story many times and looks me straight in the eyes and begins to tell me about having lost her father in high school, the despair and recovery that followed. We connected completely. Kore-eda says “I don’t care if you don’t have any acting experience. You will find the Yumiko within yourself .”

At the end of the month, we find the house in Noto that Yumiko arrives at when she remarries. The house was built in 1870, and the sea you watch from its windows is the sea I have been looking for these two years. Between Kore-eda, myself and one of the crew, we remove 40 tons of garbage from the house using a huge truck. A local carpenter comes in to fix the floors and the ceiling, creating a second floor, and the art crew comes in over New Year’s to fix it up. Thus we have the perfect house in Noto.

January 29, 1995 at 9:41 AM, in front of an Arriflex 535, full of a million emotions, we sound the clapperboard to commence shooting.

Mid-February, we spend in Wajima, filming four seasons in three weeks. The locals bring us miso soup out of the kindness of their hearts. At the motel we are staying at, Chen Ming-Chan, who had at first refused to do the music because “even Hou Hsiao-Hsien gave me six months to work on it. You don’t give me enough time,” has faxed back saying “Since you insist, why don’t I give it a shot? I’ll do the music for this film.”

Thanks to our wonderful luck in bringing the right people together, *Maborosi* was completed. Like the slow passage of time in the film, it was a four years that passed as slowly as an ox. But perhaps it was through this slow passage of time that *Maborosi* managed to gain its livelihood. All the amazing circumstances that brought us all together were somehow meant to be.

*Maborosi* is a quietly intense film. In its reserved silence, I hope you will find the depth of the value of a human being shine through. When the audience feels it has taken away with them a little bit of this internal flame, I can finally feel that I have achieved something. I am eternally grateful to all the staff, the crew, the cast of *Maborosi*, and to anyone who sees this film.

### **Teru Miyamoto** on the Making of *Maborosi*

I never thought in a million years that my short story “Maborosi no Hikari” would develop in this manner. “Maborosi no Hikari” was something I wrote when I was 31, right after I had won the Akutagawa prize. And even though I had won this prestigious award, I felt like I had only just earned the right to compete in the literary world, so “Maborosi” was like my first challenge.

However by that time, I was already very ill and I was coughing blood. I knew it was tuberculosis, but I could not go to the hospital before I had completed this work. So I wrote like crazy — as if I were possessed — and I have always felt that I did a good job.

After my hospitalization, “Maborosi” was up for another big award. I didn’t win this one, but one of the judges who read my story said “This is a promising writer who has a bright future ahead of him.” Another said “He might just be a genius.” These words were very encouraging to me and gave me a positive attitude about the future, which helped me recover from my illness. So in that sense, I see “Maborosi” as the work that gave me hope and confidence to keep writing.

“Maborosi” all began with a photograph I found in a travel magazine. It was a picture of the back of a lonely old woman walking against the wild and powerful wind, snow and waves of the sea in Noto in winter. The rest was created by stringing together bits of memories I had from my childhood — places I had lived in, the smells, the light, my grandmother disappearing. It made me realize that no experience is meaningless.

When a producer came to my door four years ago, to ask about “Maborosi” I just told her I’d leave it entirely in her hands. But I didn’t really believe that in today’s world, a modest story like mine could be made into a film. The producer had said “please entrust your work to me for five years” and I agreed. But on the financial side, it seemed that all I heard about were problems. When the filmmakers came back with the news that they had failed to get a grant from the cultural ministry, I told them it was better that way because then they wouldn’t have to compromise their views for money.

And I still believe that it *was* better this way. When you’re poor, you’re slow — and it’s true, it took them a long time to complete the project — but the producer and the director really made the film the way they wanted to. I believe this film is the triumph of people who expressed themselves in their *own* way. They took this story — that didn’t seem to belong anywhere — and made it belong everywhere. There have been many people who have come to me with big ideas and intentions, but these filmmakers actually came back with *something* — and something very substantial.

I had never before gone to the shooting of a film based on one of my stories, but I told myself it wouldn’t be a bad thing to see the Noto sea, and went to check the location out. When I saw the director and crew working, I really had a good feeling about the film.

Then I got the phone call that the film was done and that they wanted me to come and see it. By that time, I had heard an awful lot of talk about the film from the people around me and I was a little skeptical. But I went and I was honestly surprised that there was someone in today’s Japanese film industry who would make a film like this. Usually, when I am asked what I think of a film version of one of my stories, I can only say “it’s okay,” because film and writing are two separate mediums. But this time, I was really enthusiastic.

The most common criticism this film has received is that it lacks explanation. But I think those critics are wrong. In this day and age, there is an excess of explanation everywhere. It’s not like learning math or language — some things cannot be learned through explanation. Explanation and portrayal are two completely different things. Film and novels are to be experienced by each viewer in his or her own way — to be created freely in the mind of each. A good novel is one that doesn’t have to explain anything.

Regarding this film, I would like to repeat the note I left for the producer and the director after that first screening: “It has been a long time since I’ve seen such a good film. You did something in this film that cannot be done in a novel.”

## **TV Man Union**

TV Man Union, Inc., the first independent television production company in Japan, was founded on February 25, 1970 by a group of highly influential directors, all of whom had resigned from Tokyo Broadcasting System, Inc. Its foundation was proclaimed by the press to herald a new age of production companies. Since its formation, TV Man Union, which is owned by a consortium of directors and producers, has led the Japanese television world. Last year marked 25 years since the company's founding and to mark its silver anniversary, TV Man Union released its first attempt at feature filmmaking — Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Maborosi* .

## **Festivals**

- 1995 Venice Film Festival, Italy. Winner Osello d'oro, Cinemaavvenire and Ecumenical Jury Awards.
- 1995 Toronto International Film Festival, Canada
- 1995 Vancouver International Film Festival, Canada. Winner Dragon & Tiger Young Cinema Prize.
- 1995 Chicago International Film Festival, USA. Winner Golden Hugo for best film.
- 1995 London Film Festival, U.K.
- 1995 Festival des Trois Continents Nantes, France
- 1996 Rotterdam Film Festival, Netherlands
- 1996 Berlin Film Festival, Germany
- 1996 New Directors/New Film, New York, USA
- 1996 Hong Kong Film Festival
- 1996 Istanbul Film Festival, Turkey
- 1996 San Francisco International Film Festival, USA

## **Milestone Film & Video**

Milestone Film & Video, which is releasing *Maborosi* in the United States, was founded in 1990 by Amy Heller and Dennis Doros to bring out the best films of yesterday and today. Milestone's re-releases include restored versions of Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and his Brothers*, F.W. Murnau's *Tabu* and *The Last Laugh*, Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack's *Grass and Chang*, Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*, and Luis Buñuel's *The Young One*. This fall, Milestone will be releasing a new print of Kenji Mizoguchi's *Life of Oharu* in conjunction with Janus Films. Among its new releases are the films of artist Eleanor Antin, the documentaries of filmmaker Philip Haas, Wim Wenders's *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, Bae Yong-kyun's *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?*, Luc Besson's *Atlantis* and Fred Parnes's *Spread the Word*. Milestone is also known for discovering, restoring and distributing unknown "classics" that have never been available in the US and Canada, including Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Mamma Roma*, Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, a series of twenty-eight early Russian films (1908-1919), Mikhail Kalatozov's *I am Cuba* and, Jane Campion's first feature, *Two Friends*.

In 1994 Fumiko Takagi joined Milestone after working in film exhibition at Cinestudio in Hartford and later in music management at Original Artists. She was instrumental in acquiring *Maborosi* and has translated the many Japanese articles, interviews and press notes on the film. She is the principle author of this press kit.

*For more information on Maborosi or any of Milestone's releases, please contact us at:*

Milestone Film & Video  
P.O. Box 128 • Harrington Park, New Jersey 07640-0128  
Phone (201) 767-3117 • Fax (201) 767-3035 • Email: milefilms@aol.com  
www.milestonefilms.com

Press Kit © 1996 Milestone Film & Video, Inc.