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## ***Brakeless* Premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, October 27 on PBS**

### **Documentary on Catastrophic Japanese Train Crash Asks What Happens When Punctuality, Protocol, and Efficiency Are Taken to the Extreme**

(San Francisco, CA) — On Monday, April 25, 2005, a West Japan Railway commuter train carrying 700 passengers smashed into an Osaka apartment building at 117 kilometers per hour, killing 107 people, including the driver. Official reports later concluded that the cause of the accident was the driver, who was frantically speeding because he was 80 seconds behind schedule. Weaving together personal accounts of those affected by the crash, ***Brakeless*** is a cautionary tale for a society that equates speed with progress. It examines the ways in which characteristics that are considered national virtues — punctuality and obedience to protocol — have become societal impediments and ultimately dangers to the people of Japan. Directed by Kyoko Mikaye, *Brakeless* premieres on *Independent Lens* on Monday, October 27, 2014, 10:00-11:00 PM ET on PBS ([check local listings](#)).

Through the memories of survivors and bereaved family members, the film revisits the day of the tragedy, placing the events in the context of the country's historical and economic development. *Brakeless* offers fascinating insight into the railway's role in Japan's post-war boom — and the dangers of cost cutting in the prolonged economic stagnation that followed. In the country's drive for modernization, railroads were privatized, and corporations pushed for absolute efficiency. In 1987, West JR's commuter express to Osaka took 31 minutes; by 2005, as drivers were urged to increase speed and shorten braking times, the route was reduced to 22 minutes. Even small delays in the schedule were investigated, and the possibility of stiff disciplinary penalties or outright dismissal weighed heavily on the drivers.

West JR's corporate culture — which pushed for ever-faster timetables — also failed to recognize that it is part of human nature to make mistakes. The combination of cost-cutting measures with the belief that safety was achievable if there was never human error delayed the railroad's investment in critical safety technology. Calling this juxtaposition of factors the "Japanese disease," writer Kunio Yanagida argues that the train crash epitomized the national malaise he observed in post-bubble Japan.

*Brakeless* reveals the legacy of the accident through the eyes of those whose lives were changed forever: parents, spouses, injured college students, disabled victims, an artist who continues to create images of the disaster years later. The film raises questions about the ultimate cost of efficiency, and the human toll in a society that values ever-increasing speed.



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Visit the *Brakeless* companion website (<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/brakeless>) which features information about the film, including an interview with the filmmaker and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

## CREDITS

Directed and Co-produced by	Kyoko Miyake
Produced by	Rachel Wexler
Film Editor	Herbert Hunger
Co-producer and Additional Camera	Felix Matschke
Music by	Jack Ketch
Director of Photography	Kozo Matsuumi
Sound Recordist	Masashi Ikeda

*Brakeless* is a co-production of Brakeless LTD, Bungalow Town Productions, BBC, NHK, IKON, DR and the Independent Television Service (ITVS), with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

### About the Filmmaker

**Kyoko Miyake's (Director/Co-producer)** first feature-length documentary, *My Atomic Aunt* (a.k.a. *Beyond the Wave /Meine Tante aus Fukushima*) was supported by seven broadcasters and numerous grants including BBC, NHK, WDR, and Sundance and has been screened and broadcast in many countries.

Miyake's short documentaries have been shown at festivals internationally, including Berlin, London, Sydney and SilverDocs. *Hackney Lullabies* won the Berlin Today Award 2011 at the Berlin Film Festival. *Mrs. Birks' Sunday Roast*, commissioned by Film London, was added to the British Film Institute's National Archive collection, and in 2011 enjoyed a successful two-week run at New York's IFC Center. She has been selected for prestigious programs such as Berlinale Talent Campus, the Japanese government's Art Grant, Talent Campus Tokyo, Crossing Borders, and Pola Art Foundation Grant.

Miyake studied English history at Tokyo University, and originally came to the UK to study the history of English witchcraft at Oxford University as a Swire Centenary Scholar. While studying and working for British and Japanese media, she picked up a camera to fulfill her childhood dream of becoming a filmmaker and started to make short films on her own. She still intends to remain true to her roots in history by making films about witchcraft in the future.

### About *Independent Lens*

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 p.m. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens). Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](https://www.facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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