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JIDAIGEKI'S POSTWAR:
VISIONS OF THE PRESENT IN JAPANESE PERIOD FILMS

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INTRODUCTION

...the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be.

—Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*¹

... Feelings flowed and flowered to what Ohio would have thought extravagant lengths. The screen was awash with undammed emotion. Yet, though decidedly allergic to the displays of Joan Crawford and Bette Davis, I did not mind the emotionality of women I later discovered to be Kinuyo Tanaka and Hideko Takamine.

Wondering why I so willingly wept along with them, I decided that the very fact that they were so far away, and crying for such a long time, compelled my moving nearer, and hence feeling more. So different from the big and demanding close-up of Joan, with nostrils large enough to drive a truck into. Being apparently asked for nothing I gave more. And so, sitting there, smelling the pomade, I was learning my first lesson in Japanese art.

—Donald Richie²

In his wildly polemical venture into Japanese cinema, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Film*, Noël Burch observes that one of the primary criteria of genre classification in Japanese cinema is historical: “the Japanese divide their films as rigorously as they divide the periods of their history or the many natural seasons of the year.”³ Burch further notes that the two major categories according to this criteria, *jidaigeki* (‘period plays’) and *gendaijeki* (modern or contemporary plays’), are “purely descriptive, not hierarchical”; they are

¹ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility [Second Version],” in *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

² Donald Richie, *Donald Richie: The Japan Journals, 1947-2004*, ed. Leza Lowitz (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2004), 30-31.

³ Noël Burch, “Some Remarks on the Genre Syndrome,” in *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Film*, reprinted with an introduction by Harry Harootunian (1979; repr., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2004), 151.

“variants on a single object, the film.”⁴ For Burch, Japanese genre practice is yet another instance of the surface patterns through which Japan organizes itself; “to the distant observer, they are chatting of the blossoms.”⁵ By taking *Ki no Tsurayuki*’s insight to heart, Burch endeavored to delve into “the deeper structures of Japan’s cinema.”⁶

Reviewing the book in 1979, renowned American film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum remarked, “To call his book controversial would almost be an understatement.”⁷ Rosenbaum’s reference was to the book’s radical difference from the dominant perception of Japanese cinema of the time, and hence to the heated debate that the book sparked among film critics in the late 1970s. The book was digitally reprinted in 2004 with a new introduction by Japanese intellectual historian Harry Harootunian. Emphasizing the geopolitical context in which the book was written, namely, “the most intense moment of the Cold War and the heyday of modernization theory,” Harootunian wrote positively about the disorienting effect that the book brought to “a moribund area studies mired in the stale mission of supplying useful information to the security

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The title of the book is allusion to the poem of *Ki no Tsurayuki*:

To the distant observer
They are chatting of the blossoms
Yet in spite of appearances
Deep in their hearts
They are thinking very different thoughts

Neither the author nor reviewers of the book mention the original poem.

⁶ Ibid., 153.

⁷ Jonathan Rosenbaum, “From a Far Country (Review of Burch’s *To the Distant Observer*),” originally published in *American Film* (July-August 1979), accessed July 2016, <http://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/1979/07/from-a-far-country-review-of-burchs-to-the-distant-observer/>.

state.”⁸ Burch, in Harootunian’s view, paved a path for the fledging field of Japan film studies distinct from that of “a moribund area studies,” constructing a critical or radical Japan or Japanese cinema in the manner modeled on Barthes’s *L’Empire des signes* (1970) but with a sharper Brechtian edge. While being more culturalistic than historical in his attempt to describe Japanese cinema in terms of Japan’s century-old cultural practices and artistic forms, Burch held a view of film culture that is distinct from that of functionalists and essentialists as well as from the more orthodox Marxist “epochal” view. He regarded Japanese cinema’s decisive turn to older cultural practices and artistic forms—its untimely timelessness—as a sign of resistance to the Western mode of representation. Seen in this way, Burch’s emphasis on older cultural practices and artistic forms in his analysis of Japanese cinema was a way to endorse the immanent critique of Western modes of representation by Japanese film practices. In Burch’s critique of the Western mode of representation and its cinematic equivalent, Classical Hollywood cinema, Japanese cinema assumed agency.

Burch also differentiated his approach from that of the writers affiliated with the literary magazine *Tel Quel* who turned to the East in order to further develop their theory of dialectical materialism. They turned to ancient China for the implications of its thought-systems for contemporary developments in China and for their socialist future, but they rarely paid attention to Japan. It was “partly, no doubt,” Burch argues, “because modern Japanese history would seem to indicate, on the contrary, remarkable compatibility between ‘Japanese thought patterns’ and the ideological superstructures of capitalism.” Unlike China or India, “Japanese artistic and

⁸ Harry Harootunian, “Detour to the East: Noel Burch and the Task of Japanese Film: History, Signs, and Difference,” introduction to reprint of Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (1979; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2004), 2.

social practice have, moreover, produced almost no theoretical practice.”⁹ From this observation, two seemingly incompatible views concerning Japanese cinema emerged. One is that the very resistant practices of Japanese cinema were of theoretical value in themselves. The other one concerns one of the most contested claims in the book: “the very notion of theory is alien to Japan” and thus the theoretical implications of its cultural and artistic practices need to be “derived through a reading conducted from outside the culture which has produced them.”¹⁰ While the latter perspective is often cited as injurious to understanding of Japanese film history, to say the least, the implications of the former are less noted. The insight of the former prevented him from reducing cultural history to intellectual history. Without the aid of theoretical texts produced within, however, Japanese culture was said to remain more opaque to the distant observer than China’s or India’s. This opacity was creatively “exploited” by cultural critics and artists alike in Burch’s time often at the expense of a more rigorous conceptualization of mediation.¹¹

Specifically, Burch envisioned his work on Japanese cinema to be an example of “an immensely productive relationship [...] between contemporary European theory and Japanese practice.” One, but by no means insignificant, complication to this much criticized dichotomy between the theoretical/subject/West and the practical/object/East is the position which Burch occupied as an American critic living in Paris and writing for an English-speaking audience. As Rosenbaum perceptively noted, “Caught between two languages and not entirely at home with

⁹ Burch, 12.

¹⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹¹ Instead Burch grappled with Kato Shuichi’s view of the history of Japanese culture not as one of succession but superposition.

either, Burch has to worry about translating French concepts as well as Japanese concepts into English, and the ensuing crossfire is sometimes rather thick.”¹² In other words, Burch was not sitting in a safe seat of timeless Western theory per se; he was actively constructing English film theory out of contemporary French thought. To say that the objective of his use of Japan or Japanese cinema was “to prove the efficacy of Western critical theory” would be to miss the challenge that Burch faced in the very production of film theory as well as the nature of its failure.¹³ It would also miss the offense which his claim about Japanese film history and his proposal for an alternative canon of Japanese cinema provoked in the sensibility of his fellow liberal critics and American Cold War ideologies.¹⁴ As Rosenbaum pointed out, Burch, in his search for a radical difference, went so far as to argue that “the most fruitful, original period in the history of a nation’s cinema” coincided with the years between 1934 and 1943, the period during which the Japanese embraced “a national ideology akin to European fascism.”¹⁵

Burch’s view of Japanese cinema has been productively argued against, not least on grounds that Japan does have theory.¹⁶ Moreover, Japanese cinema eventually lost its

¹² Rosenbaum.

¹³ Naoki Yamamoto, “Eye of the Machine: Itagaki Takao and Debates on New Realism in 1920s Japan,” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 56.2 (Fall 2015), 369.

¹⁴ While being critical of Burch’s culturalism, Harootunian highlights how Burch’s Japan diverged from American Cold War ideologies.

¹⁵ Burch, 143.

¹⁶ See for instance, Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Catherine Russell, *The Cinema of Naruse Mikio: Women and Japanese Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008); Aaron Gerow, “Introduction: The Theory Complex,” in “Decentering Theory: Reconsidering the History of Japanese Film Theory,” ed. Aaron Gerow, special issue, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 22 (December 2010); Naoki Yamamoto, “Realities That Matter: The Development of Realist Film Theory and Practice in Japan, 1895-1945” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2012); Yuriko Furuhashi, *Cinema of Actuality:*

“privileged” position in theoretical debates over the aesthetic and political value of the medium in the field of film studies. While building on more properly historical approaches and contemporary theories of mediation, this dissertation takes a bold stance against the utter rejection of Burch’s use of Japan or Japanese cinema. It is an indiscreet attempt to consider Japanese cinema practices for their theoretical value. But instead of a “detour to the East” via Paris, it will make a detour into postwar *jidaigeki* via contemporary film scholarship.

In particular, my dissertation makes a case for tracing the histories of postwar Japanese cinema from the perspective of *jidaigeki*. This detour is not a “retreat” into the distant past. On the contrary, the detour into postwar *jidaigeki* is a critical and engaging journey into history. *Jidaigeki*’s often confined geohistorical space and limited distribution circuit has posed a hermeneutic problem, obscuring its implications for broader debates about geopolitics, media environment and social changes. *Jidaigeki* has thus received strikingly little attention in English scholarship on postwar Japanese cinema and its relationship to postwar modernity and democracy. It has primarily remained a backdrop against which the singular artistic vision of auteurs like Kenji Mizoguchi and Akira Kurosawa is projected. While a few of the subgenres of *jidaigeki* (e.g., *chambara* films, *samurai* saga, Lone Wolf and Cub series) have been the object of cult following, they have rarely entered academic discussion of Japanese cinema.¹⁷ This dissertation is partly a response to this gap.

Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics, Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹⁷ Though beyond the scope of this dissertation, the reception of *jidaigeki* outside Japan from the 1950s through the 1970s is a fascinating research topic. The account of the reception of *jidaigeki* abroad is often limited to that of Western critics and tends to be lumped together under the rubric of postwar orientalism. By preemptively narrowing what counts as non-domestic reception of *jidaigeki* to that of influential Western critics, critique of such reception is actually complicit in the very bias that it attempts to criticize: 1) Lumped together, the individual stakes that these critics address tend to get lost. 2) The subcultural dimension of *jidaigeki*’s reception (e.g., in 1960 New York) is rarely considered in its own light (cf. the

Japanese-language scholarship on *jidaigeki* excels in reconstructing its history in detail, and in providing sophisticated film analysis within the framework of film studies. But the interrogation of the hermeneutic problem that concerns my study of the history of *jidaigeki* in the world as well as the medium of film is outside the scope of their approach. In addition to adopting a historical approach to *jidaigeki*, my dissertation treats it as expressive of a search for the present. If contemporary Japanese-language scholarship might rightly be able to take for granted the fruitfulness of a historical approach to *jidaigeki*, one of the central goals of my dissertation is to bring into view the legitimacy and fruitfulness of that approach by problematizing it and by discussing the ways in which *jidaigeki*'s engagement with pastness has itself been seen with suspicion.

For all the biases and fascinations still surrounding *jidaigeki*, I believe that very few genres or types of cultural practice reward careful hermeneutic practice and enrich one's appreciation as much as *jidaigeki* does. There is, however, a paradox to this hermeneutic potential: *jidaigeki*'s fundamental anachronism. To put it simply, although *jidaigeki* films are set prior to Meiji Japan, they thematize and play on their complex relationship to this past while embracing the present-tense of the medium; they are projected in the present as signs of the past addressed to a contemporary audience. Hence paradoxically, *jidaigeki* is a film practice that calls into question the very idea of the historicity of cinema. This paradox is the central theme of my dissertation. I build on *jidaigeki*'s hermeneutic potential and anachronism as the two pillars of the historical and theoretical motivations for the project. I analyze *jidaigeki*'s relation to its contemporaneous historical events and social changes as well as to its contemporaneous

reception of Kung Fu films. 3) *Jidaigeki* has held diverse social, cultural, and artistic forces together in other national contexts.

discourses and aesthetic practices, while interrogating the impact of the rapidly changing conditions of moving image making practices on cinema's historicity and on *jidaigeki*'s hermeneutic problem.

***Jidaigeki* and Modernity**

My engagement with *jidaigeki* will contribute to the ongoing discussion of cinema's relationship with modernity by defining *jidaigeki* as quintessentially modern. The question is what kind of modern it embodies. Insofar as film is a technological medium, and insofar as *jidaigeki*, just as *gendaiigeki*, to put in Burch's terms, is "simply [a] variant[s] on a single object, the film," it is modern technologically. I will analyze the ways in which *jidaigeki* has incorporated modern technology into its aesthetics. I will also highlight *jidaigeki*'s modern characteristics as a mass-culturally produced, circulated, and consumed object.

Methodologically, this means that I will draw on various sources such as trade journals, major film journals, fan magazines, memoirs of the filmmakers and actors, and statistical data on the reception of a corpus of key films as well as other popular cultural forms and media, domestic or otherwise, that *jidaigeki* film interacted with.

I will attempt to locate the transformation of *jidaigeki* aesthetics in relation to the shifts in the cultural and social practices of the fast developing urban-industrial society against the backdrop of high economic growth in postwar Japan. I will consider *jidaigeki* as a sensorial matrix that negotiates the relationship between human beings and the technological apparatus. Miriam Hansen's account of Walter Benjamin's reflections on film "as both an aesthetic phenomenon with its own logics and a medium through which he registered salient tendencies

and contradictions of mass-based modernity” is particularly useful in thinking about *jidaigeki*.¹⁸ Considering postwar *jidaigeki* as “an aesthetic phenomenon with its own logics,” I argue that *jidaigeki* pushed the limits of existing film practices in order to transcend their often confined geohistorical situation; it used aesthetic means to expand the political and social imagination available in terms of both definitions of art, and audiences’ embodied experience. At the same time, *jidaigeki* was a medium through which the discourses on postwar modernity and democracy were generated and circulated.

The idea that *jidaigeki* is quintessentially modern itself is not my own invention. *Jidaigeki*, often appearing untranslated or accompanied by a common translation of the term “period film” in English-language scholarship, not only refers to a genre but also marks a distinctive characteristic of the Japanese cinema’s genre system, being one of its meta-genres. In this regard, *jidaigeki* is a category that embodies a historical and epistemological transition in the history of Japanese cinema. The shift from the *kyūgeki* (literally old drama, Kabuki-style period drama)/*shinpa* (new school, or modern drama influenced by traditional kabuki styles) paradigm and the mixed-media *rensageki* (chain drama), which bear theatrical origins, to the dichotomy of *jidaigeki*/*gendaigeki* was one of the critical changes *jun'eigageki undō* (Pure Film Movement) brought in the understanding and practices of cinema in Japan.¹⁹ Though the consequences of the Pure Film Movement are often sought in the development of *jidaigeki*’s its counterpart *gendaigeki*, the birth of *jidaigeki* nonetheless marked a radical change in the history of Japanese

¹⁸ Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 82.

¹⁹ See Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010); Joanna Bernardi, *Writing in Light: the Silent Scenario and the Japanese Pure Film Movement* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

film industry. While it is speculated that “*jidai*” of “*jidai-geki*” comes from Kabuki’s *jidaimono* (historical play – plays that depict pre-Edo history), what was celebrated was its radical newness.²⁰ Prominent critics and scholars such as Sato Tadao and Iwamoto Kenji have even said that “*shin jidaigeki*” (new *jidaigeki*) precedes “*jidaigeki*” as a term.²⁰ The first “*jidaigeki*” *Woman and Pirate (Onna to kaizoku)*, directed by Nomura Hotei in 1923, was loudly advertised for its newness (“with a new script! New direction!”) and was said to bring a “grand revolution” to *kyugeki*.²¹ How did this analytic schema sustain itself in postwar Japan? How does it also fit the more pragmatic approach to genre dominant in film studies today?²²

Postwar *Jidaigeki*

According to Japanese film historian Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, *jidaigeki* faced a fundamental temporal estrangement after the war. As “postwar (1945)” replaced “post-Restoration (1868)” as

²⁰ Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro says it’s “probably” derived from kabuki’s *jidaimono* (Kurosawa: *Film Studies and Japanese Cinema*, 224). Film historian Tanaka Masumi and film critic Sato Tadao say it is. See Tanaka Masumi, “Jidaigeki eiga shiron no tame no yobi-teki shoshikō” [Preliminary Thoughts for a Historiography of *Jidaigeki*], in *Jidaigeki eiga to wa nani ka: nyū firumu sutadhizu* [What is Period Film?: *New Film Studies*], ed. Kyoto Eigasai Jikkō Inkai (Kyoto: Jinbun shoin, 1997), 25 as well as Sato Tadao [*Jidaigeki eiga to wa nani ka*], in 25) and Sato Tadao, *Kimi wa jidaigeki eiga o mitaka* [Have You Seen a Period Film?], (Tokyo: Jakometei shuppan, 1977), 66.

²⁰ Sato, 66.

²¹ Advertisement, *Asahi shinbun*, 10 June 1923, 2.

²² See for instance, Rick Altman, “Where Do Genres Come From?” in *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999); Barry Langford, “Who Needs Genres?” in *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2005). Japanese film historian Hatori Takafusa has pointed out that the discrepancy between the old classification *kyūgeki* (set in pre-Meiji Restoration) and *shinpa* (set in post-Meiji Restoration, either Meiji and Taisho) and the new classification *jidaigeki* (pre-1968)/*gendaigeki* (the ever-changing “present” from the mid-1920s onwards) posed a question as to where *shinpa* film could fit. He argues that *matatabi eiga* (films about wandering gamblers) emerged out of the negotiations on the relationship between *jidaigeki* and *gendaigeki*. Hatori’s work on *jidaigeki*, a detailed film analysis combined with historiographical considerations, seems a promising approach to what he calls a new Japanese film history/historiography. See Hatori Takafusa, *Nihon eiga no taishū-teki sōzōryoku: Bakumatsu to matatabi no sōkan zu* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 2016), especially chapter 2.

a point of disjunction, *jidaigeki* no longer played a central role in Japanese cinema's project of conceiving a 'new' modern Japanese history. Its past became passé, or at least no longer a productive one. Furthermore, it is this historiographical ambition which Yoshimoto's diagnosis identifies with *jidaigeki*'s unique historicity upon its conception. Yet, he argues, this unique historicity has given way to the new hegemonic mode of historicity of postwar Japan. The linear narrative of *jidaigeki*'s rise and fall that Yoshimoto delineates fails to account for not only the enduring popularity of the genre in the postwar but also some of the most powerful aesthetic experience and critical discourses that a not so insignificant number of postwar *jidaigeki* films brought to the history of cinema in response to the ongoing historical events. It is precisely their continued relevance that interests me for rethinking the relationship between history and aesthetics.

More importantly, if we are to accept the claim that the immediate past and "postwar" distinction took over the role of setting the pivotal point of historical disjunction from the established classification after the end of the war, then we may also consider how this replacement and the historiographical reification which Yoshimoto suspects is at work complicate our analysis of postwar *jidaigeki*. To some extent, I want to argue that this temporal twist makes postwar *jidaigeki* even more intriguing and in some cases, its historicity more politically and ethically urgent and poignant. Then the question is rather how *jidaigeki* engaged the new temporal order brought by "the radical newness of postwar Japan" and the historical mythologization and ideological reconfiguration, but also the whole rescaling of affective and cognitive distances that followed.²³ In what follows, I will pursue various formal techniques and stylistic features under the rubric of intensifications of certain versions of history. While I'm

²³ Yoshimoto, 209.

skeptical of Yoshimoto's argument about the "disguise of the "new," I brought it up not so that I can dismiss it; on the contrary, the anxiety over this problem of the structure of repetition in history and modern historiography embedded in "reading" postwar *jidaigeki* as a powerful mode of storytelling concerns me deeply.

The theoretical ambition of this study is to expose, along its historical journey, how *jidaigeki* represents not simply an object of analysis but also a visceral threat to the assumptions about modernism in which postwar Japanese intellectuals and film studies as a discipline have invented. Through close readings of film, archival records, vernacular discourses, and theoretical debates unfolding in the postwar era, this study explores the nature of this threat.

Overview of Dissertation

The four chapters of this dissertation are organized around the key moments in the postwar history of Japanese cinema in which *jidaigeki* presented a distinctive mode of engaging history. In chapter 1, "Embedded Film, Embodied Reception: Tsurumi Shunsuke's Autobiographical Film Criticism," my primary concern will be the production and reception of *jidaigeki* after the US Occupation. In the emerging Cold War context of Japan's compromised sovereignty, members of the multidisciplinary intellectual group *Shisō no kagaku* (*Science of Thought*) sought possibilities of *shisō* ("thought") in 'the people' and turned their attention to the reception of mass media and culture. Their work on film reception practices are, however, often dismissed on ideological and aesthetic grounds in critical film discourse for their empirical methodology and naïve reflectionist view of film. Drawing on prior scholarship on the group's intellectual legacy, the present chapter reconsiders *Shisō no kagaku*'s work in the area of film reception within the context of their larger project which was formed in what were still the early years of postwar Japan.

Few forms of popular culture lend themselves to this reconsideration as *jidaigeki* (period films), and even fewer intellectuals were so deeply implicated in negotiating with US-led ‘democratic’ programs of shifting emphasis to ‘the people’ as Tsurumi Shunsuke, one of the group’s founders. U.S. occupation censorship called into question *jidaigeki*'s legitimacy in the contemporary cultural process. While scholars’ opinions on the exact content of its censorship criteria with respect to *jidaigeki* seem to vary, there is a consensus around *jidaigeki*'s relationship to the past (“feudal remnants”) having been perceived as a potential threat to the (re)construction process of postwar Japan. Vis-à-vis the US government's democratic reforms and re-education programme for the masses, *Jidaigeki* assumed what Raymond Williams called a “residual” form of culture. Born into one of Japan’s most politically and intellectually prominent families, Tsurumi struggled to define the significance and political utility of *jidaigeki* not only by negotiating his own position in relation to ‘the people,’ but also by positioning “Japan’s” postwar modernity against that of the “West.”

I will focus on Tsurumi’s critical review of 1952 *jidaigeki* film *The Mad Woman in Kimono* (*Furisode kyōjo*) and examine his populist defense of *jidaigeki*. I will first discuss Tsurumi’s interest in *jidaigeki* in the context of the developing agenda of *Shisō no kagaku*’s project. By downplaying his upper class origin, political connections and educational background, and instead emphasizing his “cultural” education in *jidaigeki* and other mass cultural forms such as *kodan* and *manga* in his childhood, Tsurumi repositions himself out of the rhetoric of the intellectual and into the vernacular of the masses. This re-positioning allows him to direct what he considers to be *The Mad Woman in Kimono*’s immanent critique of Japanese male intellectuals, including himself. I will then attempt to re-animate his critical performance in my close analysis of the film in order to reveal his ambivalence towards *jidaigeki*’s critical

potential as a residual or even reactionary form of culture. On the one hand, the film's narrative seemingly undermines the destructive aspect of the political act of revenge—one of the main reactionary characteristics of *jidaigeki* which the occupation government conceived as threat—favoring instead the productive aspect of its failure in gender and cultural terms. On the other hand, the film insists on foregrounding the proximity and reciprocity of revenge and its failure in the dynamic economy of performance and film narration.

In chapter 2, “Calico-World in Rainbow Color: 1950s Tōei *Jidaigeki*,” I shift my focus from discourse to production culture, and from broader historical context to social and cultural context. More specifically, I trace the development of the unique production culture of the Tōei Company in the 1950s. Against the background of the international success of auteur *jidaigeki* such as Akira Kurosawa's blockbuster samurai films and Kenji Mizoguchi's historical melodrama, the newly-established Tōei studio turned inward and expanded its niche market in the domestic sphere by specializing in entertainment *jidaigeki* with their strong star system. While veteran directors worked on larger and more expensive productions with established stars by drawing on popular *jidaigeki* themes, young directors worked on less expensive productions with young stars by drawing on celebrity discourse, changing gender and sexuality mores, and other film genres or popular culture practices. In this chapter, I focus on the latter kind of productions, as they brought a significant aesthetic and demographic shift in postwar *jidaigeki*. Most notably, despite their general lack of interest in Tōei *jidaigeki*, a significant number of young girls went to see *jidaigeki* featuring their favorite stars such as Misora Hibari, Nakamura Kinnosuke, and Okawa Hashizo. This shift led to the development of a unique aesthetics of gender at Tōei. Central to the emergence of this new aesthetics was Tōei's in-house star Misora Hibari, whose cross-dressing and cross-gender performance has attracted critical attention ever

since. Discussion of her star persona has focused on her physical, social, gender, and affective mobility. Her performance has been said to offer “the fantasy of transgressing the dominant gender norms,” allowing the young female audience to identify with roles that are reserved for men.²⁴ Drawing on such insights, this chapter engages the aesthetics of gender on a more sensorial and affective register. Shifting focus from gender representation and the problematic of identification to the *aesthetics* of gender, I address fantasies and sensorial pleasures that are less defined by gender even in cases where they are mediated by gendered representations.

Among fantasies and sensorial pleasures, I will focus on the depiction of romance in Sawashima Tadashi’s mixed-genre *jidaigeki* featuring young Tōei stars. Best known for his *jidaigeki* musical, Sawashima made some of the most commercially successful and critically acclaimed entertainment *jidaigeki* in the late 1950s. In the remaining of the chapter, I will analyze how romance is entertained, and its utopian feel generated through music and other means in his films from that period.

In chapters 3 and 4, I will trace the major transformations in the aesthetics of *jidaigeki* throughout the 1960s. The films shifted from a lighter, pastel-colored, soft-dazed aesthetic to a darker, violent, anarchic one in the early 1960s. If violence was theatrically, colorfully displayed for the enjoyment of children and young women in the Tōei *jidaigeki* of the 1950s, the depiction of violence in the 1960s became unprecedentedly explicit and cruel. In the mid 1960s, Kudō Eiichi, who had made his directorial debut in 1959 at Tōei, made a series of films called *shūdan kōsō* (collective struggle) *jidaigeki*. Because the Japanese film industry was in steep decline in

²⁴ Itakura Fumiaki, “Shisen to memai—Misora Hibari no iseisō jidaigeki” [Gaze and Vertigo: Misora Hibari’s Cross-dressing *Jidaigeki*], in *Tatakau onna-tachi—Nihon eiga no josei akushon* [*Fighting Women: Female Action in Japanese Cinema*], ed. Yomota Inuhiko and Washitani Hana (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2009), 66.

the 1960s, studios were keen to develop new strategies for attracting audiences, and Tōei studio more open to ambitious young directors' experiments with *jidaigeki*. Conceived independently from Tōei's entertainment repertoire, often based on original scripts, the films of this subgenre share their aesthetic ambitions both with the auteuristic *jidaigeki* of Kurosawa, and with the edgy and rough style and the allegorical bent on the contemporary political climate more characteristic of the avant-garde filmmaking practices. Chapter 3, "Engaging Aesthetics: *Great Killing* (Eiichi Kudō, 1964)," considers *Great Killing* as an attempt to conceive history not as a bygone past but rather something that unfolds in the present and inevitably draws one in. While bearing the above-mentioned characteristics of the *jidaigeki* of the period, the film takes on the question of possible forms of engagement with the historical present.

Chapter 4, "Reorienting *Jidaigeki*: Matsumoto Toshio's *Shura* (1971)," returns us to the question of *jidaigeki*'s problematic relationship to pastness. Once hailed as one of the most important and beautiful films made in Japan since Kurosawa's prime by Burch, experimental filmmaker, video artist Matsumoto Toshio's "dark" film *Shura* (*Pandemonium*, 1971) has remained relatively unknown compared to its more playful and lively "white" counterpart, *Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969). Shot entirely in black-and-white—except the mysterious extradiegetic opening scene of the sunset—*Pandemonium* casts its drama on the verge of pitch blackness and invisibility. *Shura*'s drama focuses on a man who sacrifices his chance of joining the vendetta planned for his deceased master in order to save the woman he loves, but turns into a ruthless murderer when he finds out that she has betrayed him.

By offering a genealogy of the relationship between *jidaigeki* and Japanese avant-garde practices of the 1960s, this chapter challenges the view of the film as Matsumoto's "turn" from politically engaged avant-garde film to politically disengaged, if not reactionary, *jidaigeki*

(period) film. I argue that *Shura*'s anachronism—its purported disengagement from its historical present—is better understood as a hermeneutic challenge than as a political or aesthetic compromise. I discuss *Shura*'s engagement with the “modern present” through a discussion of Matsumoto's conception of spectatorship, and of his interpretation of the *kabuki* play on which the film is based: Tsuruya Nanboku's recently revived *The Lover's Pledge*. On the formal register, I highlight Matsumoto's preference for destabilization over the rejection of narrative as an avant-garde filmmaking strategy, and analyze his deliberate play on spectatorship through the constant reconfiguration of the viewer's assigned position and orientation within the spatial coordinates of the image. This enables us to see that *Shura* is a sophisticated effort to confront the spectator to her hermeneutical situation rather than a reactionary recoil into the “premodern past.” Blackness in cinema, in black-and-white film in particular, oscillates between an embodied, color (black) and the absence of light (darkness). One of the central themes of the chapter is how in *Shura* Matsumoto masterfully harnesses this ambivalence of blackness/darkness as a destabilization device.

What follows is an attempt to engage *jidaigeki*'s anachronism in a more emphatic sense of the term, closer to its original meaning—“against time.” It is in this context in which *jidaigeki*'s anachronism poses a challenge to standard hermeneutic approaches that take for granted that *jidaigeki* is experienced by the audience as ‘some history’ being brought back to life. The question, I am convinced, is not in what way *jidaigeki* is historical, but what kind of historicity *jidaigeki* possesses; not the extent to which *jidaigeki* represents a past that lies beyond the birth of *jidaigeki*, or not just the ways in which *jidaigeki* was an expressive force through which filmmakers, audiences, critics, theorists and policy-makers alike sought to engage their

present with a deep and lucid consciousness of the pervasive presence of Japan's past within it, but rather, if and how *jidaigeki* engages history at all. But that's precisely the question *jidaigeki* as a historical practice raises.

Chapter 1

Embedded Film, Embodied Reception: Tsurumi Shunsuke's Autobiographical Film Criticism

In 1945, after the ending of the wars with Germany and Japan, I was released from the Army to return to Cambridge. University term had already begun, and many relationships and groups had been formed. It was in any case strange to travel from an artillery regiment on the Kiel Canal to a Cambridge college. I had been away only four and a half years, but in the movements of war had lost touch with all my university friends. Then, after many strange days, I met a man I had worked with in the first year of the war, when the formations of the 1930s, though under pressure, were still active. He too had just come out of the Army. We talked eagerly, but not about the past. We were too much preoccupied with this new and strange world around us. Then we both said, in effect simultaneously: 'the fact is, they just don't speak the same language'.

—Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*¹

***Jidaigeki*'s Return as Postwar 'Thought' (*shisō*)²**

In the November 1952 issue of *Eiga hyoron* (Film criticism), a major critical film journal of the time, Tsurumi Shunsuke (1922-2015) published an influential essay "A Certain Theory of Japanese Cinema: On *The Mad Woman in Kimono*" ("Hitotsu no Nihon eiga-ron: *Furisode kyōjo ni tsuite*").³ It begins with a personal anecdote about the results of the prestigious Mainichi Film

¹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 11.

² *Jidaigeki* is a term that has been used in Japan since the early 1920s to refer to films set in pre-Meiji Restoration (pre-1868) period Japan. It is often translated as period film, period drama or costume drama. It also includes so-called *chambara* and *samurai* films. Recent Japanese film historiography has generally accepted the claim that the shift from the classification according to the pre-existing dramatic forms (*kyūgeki* versus *shinpa*, i.e., old versus new) to the one characterized by historical periodization (*jidaigeki* versus *gendaigeki*, i.e., past versus present), if not itself a sign of ideological significance as Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano suggest, was indeed a significant part of the larger transition that the Japanese film industry went through from the early to mid-1920s. My project concerns the question of how *jidaigeki* engaged the new temporal order brought by the "postwar."

³ *The Mad Woman in Kimono* (*Furisode kyōjo*, Yasuda Kimiyoshi, Daiei, 1952) was an A-budget film released during the summer, one of the two most profitable seasons: based on the serialized novel written by best-selling book author and Daiei's own film producer Kawaguchi Matsutarō, published in the major national newspaper Asahi, it was adapted into a film by member of the legendary prewar screenwriter

Awards for the preceding year. Tsurumi received notice of the awards nominations at the beginning of January 1952 upon his release from the hospital where he had been undergoing treatment for several months. Still feeling light-headed and not quite ready to go back to work, he spent day after day going to see the nominated films. He remembers the experience as refreshing, perhaps not surprisingly so, after an extended period of confinement in the hospital, during which he does not recall even reading a newspaper. As vivid as his impression of those films were, the selection results came as a surprise to him—the films that he thought were good received little praise. Drawing on this personal anecdote, Tsurumi launches a critique of the sensibility of the selection committee that is consisted of “culturati (*bunkajin*)”: “I do not like films without a breakthrough, and yet, when it comes to the films regarded as ‘high-brow (*kōkyū*)’ in Japan, they are all without a breakthrough.”⁴ For Tsurumi, Mainichi’s Best Film of the Year Naruse Mikio's *Repast* (*Meshi*, Shōchiku, 1951) is one such film.⁵

group "Narutaki-gumi" Yahiro Fuji and scored by acclaimed classical music and film music composer Ifukube Akira, featuring star Hasegawa Kazuo. It was the eighth most commercially successful film produced by Daiei between April 1952 – March 1953. Its *haikyū shūnyū* (box-office gross minus exhibition cost) was 64,504,000 yen. See the table “Hōga sakuhinbetsu haishū besuto ten” [Japanese cinema best ten by *haishū*], *Eiga nenkan 1954-nen ban* [Film yearbook 1954] (Tokyo: Jiji Tsūshinsha, 1954). 363. The English title of the essay offered here is my translation. Titles of books, essays, and films that are quoted in this dissertation appear in the original followed by an English translation in parentheses. There are quite a few exceptions to this rule in this dissertation. For instance, whenever an English translation is available, or the original title is too obscure, I use it in order to make the text more reader-friendly.

⁴ Tsurumi Shunsuke, “Hitotsu no Nihon eiga-ron: *Furisode kyōjo* ni tsuite” [“A certain theory of Japanese cinema: On *The Mad Woman in Kimono*”], in *Gokai suru kenri: Nihon eiga o miru* [The right of misunderstanding: looking at Japanese cinema] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1959), 4.

⁵ Not to undermine Tsurumi’s argument, *Repast* was equally as “popular” (commercially successful) as *The Mad Woman in Kimono* between April 1951 – March 1952. It was the twelfth most commercially successful film that year with a *haikyū shūnyū* (box-office gross minus exhibition cost) of 66,947,912 yen. See the table “Hōga haishū besuto nijū (1951-nen 4-gatsu—1952-nen 3-gatsu)” [Japanese cinema best twenty by *haishū*], *Eiga nenkan 1953-nen ban* [Film yearbook 1953] (Tokyo: Jiji Tsūshinsha, 1953). 363.

With its ability to call attention to the delicate details of everyday life and render them in a refined manner, he argues, the film merely consoles the audience, leading them to accept life as it is.⁶ For Tsurumi, the film's appeal to the sensibility of the cultural elite is more than just a matter of taste. They relate to film as a medium as innocuously and passively as the film addresses, and relates itself to, reality. Their endorsement of the film simply supports their attitude towards life as well as film: a belief that one should do nothing, just learn to appreciate its complexity. Tsurumi Shunsuke was one of the postwar intellectuals who attempted to drastically re-orient their intellectual life through engagement with the mundane, as well as with mass cultural forms like film, as part of Japan's postwar "democratization" processes. They did not think it was enough to extend their intellectual life by emulating the occupation government's various outreach projects or by bringing new objects of analysis into view. They instead sought to reconceptualize what counts as thought (*shisō*, 思想) in the first place.

Film was one of a number of important media and cultural forms that needed to be defended based on the new conceptualization of *shisō*, where it figured both as a depository of thought and as a means to investigate its manifestation. In other words, *shisō* refers not only to an object of analysis, but also to what defines the very object and the appropriate approach to it. Film criticism thus provided Tsurumi an opportunity to practice *shisō* on both a critical and a meta-critical level. In what follows, I will focus on Tsurumi's discussion of 1952 *jidaigeki* film *The Mad Woman in Kimono* (*Furisode kyōjo*) in the aforementioned essay. I will show how *jidaigeki* becomes the cornerstone of his practice of *shisō*, enabling him to reposition himself outside of the rhetoric of the academic and into the vernacular of the people in order to critique

⁶ *ibid.* 「そうして、今あるままの人生に、そのまま流されていくことに、ねうちを見つけてゆくようにしむける。」

Japanese male intellectuals, but also to project “Japan’s” postwar modernity against that of the “West.” In order to show the complexity of Tsurumi’s intellectual engagement with the film, I will briefly introduce the multidisciplinary intellectual group *Shisō no kagaku* (Science of Thought) and their “Philosophy of Ordinary People” (“*hitobito no tetsugaku*”) project. Along the way, I will discuss Tsurumi’s biography and his interest in philosophical autobiography as it is related to his critical stance and insight. I will then turn to the historical context, where most cultural authorities regarded *jidaigeki* with such suspicion as to put Tsurumi at odds with other progressives in light of his interest in *jidaigeki*’s potential. Finally, I will demonstrate Tsurumi’s own ambivalence towards *jidaigeki* through a close reading of the dynamic performance both in the film’s narration as well as in the madness of “the mad woman in kimono.”

**“Where Should the Basis of Thought be Located?”
Science of Thought, “Philosophy of Ordinary People”⁷**

Defeat in WWII brought a new political and ethical urgency to the question of what constitutes theory in Japan. Launched in light of the failures of intellectuals from across the political spectrum under the wartime regime, and carried out during the period of negotiating Japan’s compromised sovereignty vis-à-vis the United States in the emerging Cold War context, the research association *Shisō no kagaku* (Science of Thought) was founded by a group of seven young intellectuals. Their goal was to seek possibilities of ‘thought’ (*shisō*) in the lived experience of ‘the people.’ Closely tied to the ongoing debate over the forms and agents of ‘democracy’ vis-à-vis the United States, where four of the founding members had been partly

⁷ “Dokoni *shisō* no konkyo o okuka” [Where should the basis of thought be located?] is the title of a 1967 debate between Tsurumi Shunsuke and the poet and philosopher Yoshimoto Takaaki. Tsurumi Shunsuke and Yoshimoto Takaaki, “Dokoni *shisō* no konkyo o okuka” [Where should the basis of thought be located?], *Tenbō* no.100 (April 1967): 96-111.

educated, the group's "Philosophy of Ordinary People" (*hitobito no tetsugaku*) project, particularly its effort to extend the object and method of analysis beyond the written records and rhetoric of the intellectual to include various popular cultural forms, prompted a highly reflexive engagement with the media of (mass) communication.⁸

The specific conditions of knowledge production that the group faced—ranging from the physical location of its editorial office, the occupation censorship before and after the so-called "reverse course," and access to foreign publications, to the possibility of radical language reform in immediate postwar Japan—complicated the engagement of its members with communication as the central subject of their research. This can be seen in their historiographical and theoretical reflections, as well as in their practice. The evolution of the Science of Thought group that Adam Bronson so diligently traces in fact reveals a volatile existence in the first two decades of its existence. As Bronson remarks, many of its original founders moved toward other intellectual pursuits, which is not surprising given their diverse backgrounds, ranging from political theory and Marxian economics to Christian activism and physics. Nonetheless, considering Tsurumi Shunsuke to be "the important exception" to this tendency in that he remained heavily involved in making editorial and logistical decisions for the group throughout his career, Bronson argues, "To a considerable degree, his intellectual turns both mirrored and influenced that of the overall group even as its membership changed and enlarged over time."⁹ Indeed, few intellectuals are so deeply implicated as Tsurumi in negotiating their position in-

⁸ For a more comprehensive and excellent historical analysis of *Science of Thought* in English, see Adam Bronson, "*Science of Thought* and the Culture of Democracy in Postwar Japan, 1946-1962" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2012).

⁹ Bronson, 6.

between prewar Japanese nationalism and the postwar US-led ‘democratic’ programs that shifted emphasis to ‘the people.’

Addressing the historical specificity of the project from a broader synchronic perspective, Bronson argues, “The project shared important parallels with synchronous attempts to investigate the life of the masses in Europe.”¹⁰ “Yet,” he continues:

[I]n part due to uncertainty over the feudal or modern nature of mass society in Japan, the group expressed a more acute concern over the separation between intellectuals and their imagined public, placing particular emphasis on the need to simultaneously popularize philosophical thinking and intellectualize popular culture.¹¹

In this context, expanding the definition of “*shisō*/thought” can be seen as a social practice, albeit discursive, for bringing the two, philosophical and popular thinking, closer together. The acute concern Bronson notes informs the group’s choice of “people” over “class,” “*shisō*/thought” over “taste,” as well as its emphasis on “a pluralistic exchange among different systems of thought” (*shisō no tagenteki kōryū*) and collaborations across the boundaries of pre-established “isms.” If the assigned task of the expanded notion of “thought” is mediation between “intellectuals and their *imagined* publics,” Tsurumi’s goal in his essay on the Mainichi Film Awards is to show that such “thought” can be *embodied* and mass-mediated in cinema. But as I noted earlier, his choice of film form—*jidaigeki*—is equally significant in his explanation of this mediation, for it also serves as a theoretical basis for the critical analysis of a contemporary *jidaigeki* film that he carries out in the remainder of his essay. In order to discuss that, I now need to turn to another

¹⁰ Ibid., 112.

¹¹ Ibid.

important dimension of his essay, also inspired by the project of “Philosophy of Ordinary People”: (auto)biography.¹²

Tsurumi Shunsuke

Before discussing Tsurumi’s philosophical interest in autobiography and its relevance for his interest in film reception and criticism, I will provide a brief sketch of his life. They are, as we shall see, intricately related to one another and bound to his critical inquiry into film in general and *jidaigeki* in particular.

Tsurumi was born into one of Japan’s most politically and intellectual prominent families. He was the grandson of Gotō Shinpei, a Meiji/Taisho physician-turned-bureaucrat, an influential engineer of colonial policies in Taiwan and the first director of the South Manchurian Railway; Shunsuke was also the son of Tsurumi Yūsuke, a liberal politician and bestselling writer. As is often pointed out, in recounting his childhood Tsurumi always emphasized his delinquency—how he was kicked out of three different schools, and how he was put in a psychiatric hospital for attempting suicide as an act of rebellion. That is, according to his account, why he was sent to the US at the age of 16. Upon his arrival in the U.S. he attended Middlesex School in Concord thanks to arrangements his father made with the Harvard historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. He then entered Harvard University, where he majored in philosophy. He attended lectures by Rudolf Carnap as well as Paul Sweezy, Talcott Parsons, and Bertrand Russell; had W. V. O Quine as a tutor, and wrote his BA thesis on Peirce.¹³ Besides the

¹² Other influential autobiographical projects led by Science of Thought include the *Seikatsu Tsuzurikata* (“Life Writing”) method used to teach children how to write about themselves, their family life and school; and the group’s oral history project of *tenkō* (“conversion” or “political apostasy”).

¹³ Bronson says Tsurumi wrote his BA thesis under the supervision of Quine while Harada Tōru says in *Tsurumi Shunsuke to kibō no shakaigaku* [“Tsurumi Shunsuke and the sociology of hope”] that it was under Ralph Barton Perry, who wrote a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of William James. I am in the

intellectual training he received at Harvard, the importance of the social connections he made during his time there and their influence on his subsequent intellectual activities cannot be overemphasized. For instance, as Adam Bronson points out, Tsurumi was able to secure a Rockefeller Foundation grant for a Science of Thought project through his relationship with Charles W. Morris from the University of Chicago, whose class on the Pragmatic Movement in Philosophy he attended while Morris held a visiting professorship at Harvard.

Once war broke out between Japan and the United States, Tsurumi was sent to a detention center in East Boston, from which he submitted his BA thesis.¹⁴ He stayed there for several months before choosing to go back to Japan, a choice he would later claim was due to his desire to be in Japan at the time of its inevitable defeat. Thus he returned to his homeland in 1942, enlisting as a military translator in order to avoid being drafted. He passed a mandatory physical examination in spite of spinal tuberculosis, with which he was diagnosed while studying at Harvard, and served in Java until his tuberculosis worsened and he was sent back to Japan at the end of 1944.

process of verifying this. See Harada Tōru, *Tsurumi Shunsuke to kibō no shakaigaku* ["Tsurumi Shunsuke and the sociology of hope"] (Tokyo: Sanwa Shoseki, 2001).

¹⁴ Tsurumi Shunsuke was among the two Japanese citizens and one American citizen of Japanese descent who were interviewed by the daily student newspaper *The Harvard Crimson* one day after the Pearl Harbor attacks. Concerning the possibility of his internment, Tsurumi is reported to have "adopted the philosophical attitude" and said, "If it has to be done, I shall resign myself to it willingly, and I am willing to take whatever comes." *The Harvard Crimson*, "Japanese Students Give Impressions of Startling Action of Fatherland: sudden war shocks one; internment also of concern," December 8, 1941. *The Harvard Crimson* also reported his arrest. See *The Harvard Crimson*, "Japanese Student Arrested by F. B. I., Held in Detention," May 12, 1942. Sixty-five years later in 2006, *The Crimson* reports that Tsurumi was interrogated by FBI agents and asked if he supported the U.S. or Japan in the war. He was not available for comments, but *The Crimson* refers to his response from an interview published in the Japan Foundation newsletter in which he said that he told the FBI that he was an "anarchist" and supported neither side. Siodhbhra M. Parkin, "For One Grad, Day Still Lives in Infamy: Fujimoto '42 through Pearl Harbor wouldn't affect him; He was wrong," *The Harvard Crimson*, December 8, 2006.

Tsurumi's obsession with autobiography and his insistence on his deviant—if not also sexually perverse—childhood are well-known. Instead of insisting upon them, what I would like to do is highlight the significance of this interest in autobiography for Tsurumi's practice of *shisō* and its problematic role in his identification with 'hitobito' (the people). Problematic insofar as, while it is true that he lived through a tumultuous time in his youth, it is also the case that very few Japanese at the time were as removed from "people" as Tsurumi was. In the following section, I will analyze how Tsurumi bases his populist defense of *jidaigeki* on his autobiographical past.

Embedded Film, Embodied Reception

Growing up reading popular *kōdan* tales¹⁵ and *manga* books, Tsurumi feels most comfortable articulating his thought through idiomatic expressions he acquired from these cultural forms, which lie embedded deep in his psychic life.¹⁶ The books he read later in his life—such as those of Thomas Paine, Emerson, and Kropotkin—did not wipe away the traces that his early reading left in him. Referring to the Harvard philosopher George Santayana's autobiographical reflections on his relationship to Spanish Catholic heritage,¹⁷ Tsurumi argues that for someone who acquired his idiomatic expressions of 'thought' through *kōdan* and *manga*, *jidaigeki* is an accessible form, that the embodied knowledge of the idioms and the reading habits

¹⁵ *Kōdan* refers to "historical tales and legends, recited by professional storytellers, that were very popular (as were *rakugo*) in the late Edo period and in the Meiji era." (Japan Encyclopedia s.v. "*kōdan*").

¹⁶ Tsurumi, "A Certain Theory of Japanese Cinema," 5-6. 「漫画と講談とが、ぼくの心の深くに植えてくれたもの」「漫画や講談が、ぼくの精神に「慣用語法」をあたえた。このイディオムを通して、今も、ぼくは、自分の思想を表現しやすい。」

¹⁷ Tsurumi published a three-part review of Santayana's work in *Shisō no kagaku* from 1946 (August and December issue) to 1948 (January issue).

developed earlier through *kōdan* and *manga* provides an access route to the knowledge embedded in *jidaigeki*.¹⁸

Insofar as his own experience of *jidaigeki* relies on his childhood experience of cultural forms such as *kōdan* and *manga*, it is a regressive form of experience. While these idiomatic expressions rarely define the content of thought itself, when they do, they can restrict one's thinking. On the one hand, Tsurumi warns us of the possible adverse consequences of such regression, illustrating it, for instance, through the case of a former advocate of Western modernization turning into an ultranationalist in his old age, a turn that Tsurumi sees as being largely the result of the influence of these deeply embedded forms of thought. Thus, it is all the more important to pay attention to those persistent idiomatic expressions that inform thought and to the cultural forms that nurture them. On the other hand, he sees something fundamentally valuable about the enduring nature of the sociality and embodied cultural forms that characterize these genres, which themselves operate as a mode of protest. In particular, he recalls his childhood admiration for Robin Hood-like outlaw figures that he read about in *kōdan* books, figures such as Kunisada Chūji and Nezumi Kozō Jirokichi whose codes of ethics and heroic opposition to authority left a deep impact on Tsurumi. He describes how this informed his rebellious spirit, even while recognizing the limits of its carryover to politics.

¹⁸ Tsurumi, "A Certain Theory of Japanese Cinema," 6. 「西洋人の生涯のはじめに、キリスト教やユダヤ今日の神話が、精神の「慣用語法」(サンタヤナ)をあたえるとおなじ意味で、漫画や講談が、ぼくの精神に「慣用語法」をあたえた。このイディオムを通して、今も、ぼくは、自分の思想を表現しやすい。「団子串助漫遊記」や「相馬大作」に慣用語法を得たものは、そこから、きわめてたやすく時代劇映画に移って、時代劇映画の中に自分にとって勝手な思想の流露を経験する。」

And yet a broader explanation is needed to account for such speculation on Tsurumi's part, and the apparent tension in his ambivalence towards the historical (i.e. the regressive in the sense of being 'older') and the ideological (the regressive in the sense of being 'juvenile').

From a methodological perspective, Tsurumi's evocation of childhood experience, his "deep roots," can be viewed as a strategic means by which to undercut his class origin, family and educational background, which might otherwise suggest his complicity with those who advocate high-brow films—as a means, that is, to instead try to connect with the nameless mass audience that lay behind the popularity of this film form on the cultural front.¹⁹ To put it another way, his theoretical insights into film reception were partly by-products of Tsurumi's attempt to reposition himself outside of the rhetoric of the intellectual and inside the vernacular of the masses.

Regression can also be a critical method. Tsurumi derives such a view of regression from the autobiography of philosopher George Santayana, and in particular from Santayana's reflection on his own intellectual trajectory. As Bronson nicely puts it, for Tsurumi, Santayana was a thinker who, while being torn between his Catholic upbringing/Spaniard roots and his philosophical agnosticism/New England academic environment, "understood the critical force of 'reactionary' religious ideas of original sin that ran counter to deeply rooted tendencies among American intellectuals—the tendency to adopt an optimistic view of progress and human nature in particular."²⁰ Tsurumi's defense of *jidaigeki*, where the subaltern experience of the audience is embedded in the films and (re)embodied by him through the practice of viewing them, echoes Santayana's appeal to his early Catholic upbringing as a means to criticize American/New

¹⁹ Tsurumi, 5.

²⁰ Bronson, 217-218.

England bourgeois intellectuals. In Santayana's case, his Catholic upbringing was associated not only with backwardness, but also with the subordinate population in the U.S.—that is, with the masses at large. In “A Certain Theory of Japanese Cinema: On *The Mad Woman in Kimono*,” Tsurumi models his criticism on Santayana's philosophical autobiography and thereby treats the film as if it were the evolution of his own thought. In the process, what he considers to be the film's immanent critique of Japanese male intellectuals becomes the autobiographical critique about his own thought processes.

The Past and Future of *Jidaigeki* in 1952

The year of the release of *The Mad Woman in Kimono* was of political and historical significance for *jidaigeki*. The Treaty of San Francisco had gone into effect earlier that year, and with that US occupation censorship was lifted. Occupation censorship had called into question *jidaigeki*'s legitimacy in the contemporary cultural process. While scholars' opinions on the exact content of censorship criteria with respect to *jidaigeki* seem to vary, there is consensus around the fact that the genre's oblique relationship to the past (“feudal remnants”) was perceived as a potential threat to the (re)construction process of postwar Japan.²¹ Vis-à-vis the US government's democratic reforms and re-education program for the masses, *jidaigeki* assumed that position of what Raymond Williams called a “residual” form of culture that “has been effectively formed in the past” but “is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present.”²²

²¹ See, for instance, Kamiyama Akira, “Ken o ubawareta jidaigeki—senryōka de no mosaku,” in *Nihon eiga-shi sōsho 11: Senryōka no eiga: kaihō to ken'etsu* [Japanese film history series 11: cinema under censorship: liberation and censorship], ed. Iwamoto Kenji (Tokyo: Shinwa-sha, 2010), 39-62.

²² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature: Marxist Introductions Series* (London and New York, Oxford University Press, 1977), 122.

Williams introduced the concept of the residual, along with the dominant and the emergent, as an analytical category in order to counter the orthodox Marxist "epochal" view of cultural processes and to understand them instead as dynamic and uneven interplays between movements and tendencies. But the following description of a residual culture and its relationship to the dominant culture seems to suggest that this dynamic view of culture was the default mode of the US censorship of *jidaigeki*:

A residual culture is usually at some distance from the effective dominant culture, but some part of it, some version of it—and especially if the residue is from some major area of the past--will in most cases have had to be incorporated if the effective dominant culture is to make sense in these areas. Moreover, at certain points the dominant culture cannot allow too much residual experience and practice outside itself, at least without risk.²³

While *jidaigeki* as a form of residual culture is not my default approach to diverse films subsumed under the rubric of *jidaigeki*, and I largely contest such a view of *jidaigeki* in the chapters that follow, I can hardly overemphasize the persistence of such a view and its theoretical and historiographical implications. It was not just the occupation government that expressed concerns over the threat to the political and social imagination of postwar Japan's 'democratic future that arose through *jidaigeki*'s often confined geohistorical space. While day-to-day censorship was 'Japanized' in 1949 with the establishment of *Eirin* (*Eiga Rinri Kanri Inkai*), the Japanese film industry's self-censorship board, the threat of U.S. disapproval lingered long after 1952.

In the period immediately after the end of U.S. censorship, the producers of major Japanese studios and critics enthusiastically discussed the future prospects of *jidaigeki* in post-occupation Japan, but the anxiety generated by potential U.S. disapproval was not completely

²³ *ibid.*, 123.

absent from their discussion. In that same year's New Year issue of *Kinema junpō*, for instance, the lead editorial is titled "The Status of Japan and Escapism." It laments that the day when Japanese literature and cinema liberate themselves from escapism will not simply arrive with the end of the occupation because of the increasingly volatile international situation and the position that Japan occupies within it. The editorial picks up "action films" and "*chanbara*" as malignant versions of escapism.

It is within this context in which most cultural authorities regarded *jidaigeki* with suspicion—as conservative or as escapist—that Tsurumi sought *jidaigeki*'s critical potential as a residual or even reactionary cultural form. In the final section of this paper, I will offer a close reading of *The Mad Woman in Kimono* in light of Tsurumi's critical reading of the film. The film's narrative seemingly undermines *jidaigeki*'s reactionary politics and points towards its productive failure in gender and cultural terms. I will argue, however, that the film insists on foregrounding the proximity and reciprocity of revenge and its failure within the dynamic economy of performance and film narration.

Performing Film Criticism

As I mentioned earlier, Tsurumi's familiarity with *jidaigeki* and other related popular forms of art and entertainment—which he considers a repository of people's thought—grants him access to the experience of the people. In the essay "A Certain Theory of Japanese Cinema: On *The Mad Woman in Kimono*," he demonstrates this familiarity through a certain performative demonstration of 'thought,' one that performs into being an equation between 'the residual' and 'the people' as they exist within Tsurumi himself. The performative aspect of his essay is also quite literal. Part of the freshness of Tsurumi's writing that renowned leftist critic, essayist and novelist Hanada Kiyoteru noted in his 1956 essay "The New Faces of Film Criticism in Japan"

(“*Eiga rondan no shinjintachi*”) comes from the improvisational quality of the manner in which Tsurumi describes the film—he picks up several highlights of the film, and not only describes them but also narrates them in a clipped accent, as if he were speaking to an audience.²⁴ Moreover, he provides his reader important lines spoken by the film’s characters and draws a moral from them in a manner reminiscent of a *benshi*. Tsurumi also takes up what he considers to be the film’s self-reflexive storytelling. Commenting on the film’s rendition of eroticism in a scene in which the male protagonist Yauemon is taught the art of puppetry by a young daughter of the puppet troupe leader, he argues that the film is fully aware of its status as public mass art and thus registers eroticism in a highly sophisticated manner so as to offer different levels of interpretation depending on an audience member’s degree of experience. For children, this scene is simply about passing down puppet-making techniques, while for adults it is sexually suggestive.

In the following paragraphs, I will supplement Tsurumi’s analysis of the film with my own close reading in order to make visible the overlap between the film and his own fascination with performance, particularly as it concerns (non)identity and the dialectics of appearance and truth, the relationships between politics and entertainment and between gender and embodiment, and questions about the institutionalization of artistic or philosophical practices.

The film begins as a story of three retainers of the Toyotomi clan, Sae, Yauemon (played by Hasegawa Kazuo), and Sōuemon, who are trying to save Princess Tsuru, the daughter of the

²⁴ Hanada Kiyoteru, “*Eiga rondan no shinjintachi*” [“The New Faces of Film Criticism in Japan”], in *Kinema junpō*, no. 146 (May 15, 1956). Hanada went so far as to endorse Tsurumi’s analysis regardless of the quality of the film that he had not yet seen himself. But his interest in *jidaigeki* as a popular art form and in its political nature, was nonetheless genuine. Thus, when he started publishing fiction in the early 1960s, he turned to period drama (*jidai-mono*). E.g., *The Tale of Animal Caricatures (Chōjū giwa)*. For a further discussion of Hanada’s essay, see Chapter 4.

late Toyotomi Hideyori after the Toyotomi clan has been destroyed by the Tokugawa clan in the Siege of Osaka. Sae, who is entrusted with the life of Princess Tsuru, has fled with Sōuemon and joined Yauemon in the mountains, where he has been working among blacksmiths since he left his position as aide to Hideyori prior to the siege. But the three are not left in peace for long, as the other workers quickly become suspicious about their backgrounds. Upon realizing that there is no place to hide the princess in a small country like Japan, where people are constantly subject to “*seken no me*” (“society’s judgment”), Yauemon tells Sōuemon that he is going to kill Ieyasu to avenge the killing of his lord. After describing the dialogue between Yauemon and Sōuemon, Tsurumi inserts a note indicating that he was shaken by the appearance of the name of Ieyasu, because it made him think of things that he hates. What comes to his mind now, he writes, is different from various images he used to associate with Ieyasu during his childhood.

Nonetheless, he explains, “Ieyasu” and the “surviving retainers of Toyotomi” (“*Toyotomi no ishin*”) are idiomatic expressions that he familiarized himself with in childhood and that still remain close to his heart. In other words, idiomatic expressions such as these are still effective in setting the basic tenor of his relation to the world. Tsurumi continues his idiomatic thinking and offers an interpretation of the situation faced by the three characters in the scene by drawing an analogy between their situation and that of Japanese society as a whole: “the entire country of Japan is a village [...] if you do not follow the customs of the village, you will be ostracized. The film depicts well the emotion of the three characters being cornered.”²⁵ He goes further with this allegorical reading, one that seems to echo the characters’ understanding of their own situation: two young men and one young woman living together in the same house and raising a small

²⁵ Tsurumi, “A Certain Theory of Japanese Cinema,” 9.

daughter without forming a family is not acceptable in Tsurumi's day, just as it was unacceptable in the past.

The film, however, complicates such an interpretation. Sōuemon proposes to Sae that they enter into a sham marriage and adopt the princess as their daughter. Sae is stuck for an answer, which upsets Sōuemon, who is actually in love with her. He accuses her of taking pleasure in the current situation, in that she can finally be close to Yauemon, whom she has always secretly admired. Yauemon in turn makes a different proposal to Sae: that they disguise the princess as a boy. Sae replies that that is not enough; the girl needs a pair of parents. Sae in fact steals Sōuemon's idea and proposes a sham marriage to Yauemon. For both Sōuemon and Sae, the scheme of a sham marriage involves disguise on two levels: they attempt to hide their feelings for Sae and Yauemon, respectively, under the guise of a sham marriage.

To Sae's surprise and joy, Yauemon instead proposes a true marriage to her. However, enraged by her rejection, Sōuemon forgets his loyalty to his late lord and betrays the other two. Sae and Yauemon become separated during the fight and subsequent flight, taking separate paths, and eventually both join itinerant performing troupes. Sae joins an all-female kabuki troupe led by Ikushima Tango, who used to serve as a lady-in-waiting to Lady Yodo, mother of the late Hideyori. Yauemon joins an itinerant puppet troupe (*kairaishi*), accompanied by the princess who is now dressed as a boy. Unlike Sae, he tries to keep his identity secret in order to protect the princess. The retainers of Tokugawa Ieyasu decide to organize what might be today called a variety show in order to console their master, who is now old and sick and deeply preoccupied with the search for the missing princess. The troupe leader of the all-female kabuki Ikushima Tango encourages Sae to seize this opportunity to avenge her late lord. Tsurumi is

moved by Tango's decision, by her willingness, that is, to risk not only her own life but that of her entire troupe in order to assist Sae in her revenge.

This form of bonding reminds Tsurumi of the good old feudalistic Japan that is now lost to self-interested individualism. Here the adjective “feudalistic” (*hōkenteki*) stands for a type of sociality that is past and lost rather than for a formal political or economic system. The two popular theatrical forms in which Sae and Yauemon participate—an all-female kabuki (which was soon banned by the Tokugawa shōgunate) and an itinerant puppet troupe (*kairaiishi*)—actually belonged to a domain of people who were socially more marginal than the “villagers” whose mentality Tsurumi criticizes. Regardless of the historical accuracy of the film's representation of different social classes, the film clearly differentiates the two, the settled people (e.g., a village of blacksmiths) and the nomadic entertainers, in terms of their modes of living and the types of community that they form, emphasizing the latter's mobility and associating it with radical politics, a point to which I shall return shortly.

Critical Gender Performance

Sae works hard in order to be selected for the talent show. In the meantime, Yauemon lingers in the puppet troupe and eventually marries Utsugi, the daughter of the troupe leader. The two, Sae and Yauemon, meet at a competition to determine who will participate in [??] the command performance. Feeling betrayed, Sae confronts Yauemon about his marriage to Utsugi. To her surprise, Yauemon replies that “it is just a marriage for convenience.” In a boldly reductive manner, Tsurumi makes the case that Sae stands for a new woman who commits herself to an ideal/ideology for its own value rather than blindly following the ideology of the man whom she loves. In other words, her commitment to avenge the death of her lord is presented as independent of Yauemon's own commitment. Utsugi, on the other hand, also ends

up committing herself to their mission, although as she makes clear in a scene in which she corrects Yauemon's reading of her motivation, she does not commit to it for the sake of its cause, but rather, to borrow her own words, because of "the truth that she dedicates to the man to whom she vowed undying love." This line fuels Tsurumi's critical reading of the film in terms of gender. Compared to Sae, he finds Utsugi's thought process "feudalistic." But for him, the point of laying out the opposition between these two female figures is not so much to valorize one over the other as it is to direct his critique against the male protagonist and ultimately what the male protagonist stands for: Japanese male intellectuals ("*nihon no interi no otoko-tachi*").²⁶

According to Tsurumi, "even if [Utsugi]'s way of thinking is feudalistic, it is just as genuine and virtuous as Sae's and seems to prove its own consistency. On the other hand, Tsurumi is much harsher in his evaluation of the male characters: "while preaching ideals that seems to be consistent on an abstract level, in their own life contexts, they can't even reach the degree of consistency that the most feudalistic women can reach—such is the state of intellectual men in Japan."²⁷ Though Tsurumi may sound utterly dismissive towards what he calls feudalistic women apart from their consistency, his true interest lies in Utsugi's ability to observe the situation well, make what seem to be wiser judgments than her husband's, and act accordingly. Tsurumi takes the film's acknowledgment of her discretion and virtue as presenting an acute criticism of what the leading literary critic of the time Hirano Ken called "*nyōbo no me*" or "the wife's gaze," a concept that Hirano developed within the context of one of the most infamous postwar debates over the proper relationship between literature and politics.²⁸ The basic idea

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 19.

²⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the debate and of Hirano's misogynistic understanding of the interwar proletarian movement, see, for instance, J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar*

behind Hirano's claim is that a wife's perspective and worldview is confined to her immediate surroundings and matters related to mundane happiness, such as family life and romantic love, so that no matter how astute her observations of everyday details, including her husband's activities, she remains fundamentally incapable of understanding their meanings from the perspective of the larger society. Without knowing the context in which Tsurumi is writing or the intended target of his critical performance, one might find both Hirano and Tsurumi to be patronizing the wife's perspective. But in fact, Tsurumi's reading of *The Mad Woman in Kimono* is intended to counter such an evaluation by foregrounding her superiority over Yauemon. By extension, one may argue that Tsurumi's reading of the film, and his criticism of its male protagonist, implicitly exposes the male-centered nature of the early postwar debate over the problems of the "housekeeper" and women's relationship to politics between the writers associated with the journal *Kindai Bungaku* and those affiliated with *Shin Nihon Bungaku*. Moreover, Tsurumi avoids using a victim narrative in accounting for the relationship between the two female characters and the male protagonist.

Tsurumi, however, neglects significant difference between the two female characters that factors into the narrative: their different relations to art. Sae does indeed try to pursue her political goal without Yauemon. After their performance, Utsugi drags him out of the performance venue, fearing that he will join Sae in carrying out the revenge. Sae continues her performance even after she finds out that Yauemon is not going to fulfill his promise of collaboration. Veteran Sugiyama Kohei's dynamic cinematography assists Sae's passionate performance by capturing her almost direct address and forward movement towards Ieyasu with

Japan (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and *Politics and Literature Debate: Postwar Japanese Criticism 1945-1952*. eds. Michael Bourdaghs, Richi Sakakibara, Hirokazu Toeda, and Atsuko Ueda. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, forthcoming.

a series of complex camera movements, combining forward movement with crane shots and tilting techniques.²⁹ As she is about to switch her prop from a fan to a knife, Ieyasu halts her performance. Her knife drops to the ground and she is arrested. Upon being informed that a man and woman have just left the castle, Ieyasu sends his men out to find them. When they are about to be captured, Utsugi surrenders herself and her own daughter in order to save Yauemon and the princess. Ieyasu, who was not convinced by Sae's performance in the earlier scene, once again doubts that the captured girl is Princess Tsuru. In this case, what gives the pretense away is that Utsugi's performance was too good for anyone to be able to master in such a short period of time. In other words, Ieyasu questions Utsugi's affiliation with the Toyotomi clan, believing that Utsugi is a well-trained *kairaiishi*—a true artist—unlike Sae, whose imperfect performance aroused his suspicion. The film, therefore, draws a far more intricate picture of women's engagement with arts and politics than the male intellectuals who participated in the literature and politics debate.

The film goes even further. In order to clear up his doubt, Ieyasu's aide decides to mount another experimental "show." Sae is given permission to walk in the garden in front of Ieyasu's room. When she enters the garden, Utsugi and her daughter Tamaki are standing in the direction of her gaze. Ieyasu and his aides are observing them from behind drawn blinds. Neither the purpose of this show nor the fact that the two are being observed is communicated to Sae or

²⁹ Sugiyama Kōhei (1899-1960) was a leading Japanese cinematographer. In the West, he is best known for his collaborations with internationally acclaimed Japanese directors such as Mizoguchi Kenji and Kinugasa Teinosuke, including *47 Ronin* (Mizoguchi, 1941-42) and *Page of Madness* (Kinugasa, 1926) and *Crossroads* (Kinugasa, 1928). He won *Prix de la photographie et de la composition plastique* for his cinematography for *The Tale of Genji* (Yoshimura Kōzaburo, Daiei, 1951) at Cannes in 1952. Sugiyama was the chief cinematographer for Kinugasa's *Gate of Hell* (1953), the first Japanese Eastman color film, which won various prizes including the *Palme d'Or* at Cannes in 1954 and the Best Foreign Language Film at Oscars in 1955.

Utsugi in advance. Nor is Sae made aware prior to this scene that Utsugi and Tamaki have been captured. The camera shows Sae casting a glance in the direction of Ieyasu's room without changing her posture. Utsugi looks straight at her without changing her facial expression. No word is spoken. Eye contact is suggested by the way in which they gaze, but the unusual camera angle and direction (a high-angle shot taken from a high-level camera) seems to refuse to communicate such an exchange in a common cinematic visual language. The camera alternates between Sae, Utsugi/Tamaki, and Ieyasu/his aides. Sae and Utsugi/Tamaki start walking towards each other. Their collaborative performance in this scene is a tour de force: Sae successfully saves the princess by (mis)recognizing Tamaki for the princess when she frantically addresses the former by the name of the latter. In so doing, she dispels Ieyasu's doubt about the identity of the princess. Utsugi, on her part, tacitly agrees to let the whole thing happen at the expense of her daughter's life and her own. Despite the cruelty of their decision, their performance emphasizes harmony, and its elegance conveys the depth of feeling and the meaning of sacrifice. What we get is a familiar story of female solidarity across class and other differences, such as is found in King Vidor's 1937 melodrama *Stella Dallas*.

As a result of her calling out the princess's name frantically and berating Ieyasu hysterically for disrespecting the princess, Sae is violently captured and brought back to her room, where she starts singing and performing as if she has gone mad. The reaction of the servants who gather in the room, as well as of one of Ieyasu's close aides, seem to confirm this conclusion. The music that accompanies her performance, a beautiful atonal non-diegetic piece by composer Ifukube Akira, also seems to support this view. But might it perhaps be the case that the music is supporting yet another act that Sae is putting on in front of us? Tsurumi speculates on the possibility that she is performing madness, but he does not pursue this reading,

since she seems to fail to recognize Sōuemon and Yauemon in the following scene. Instead, Tsurumi concludes, she is suffering from a temporary neurosis (*shinkeishō*). Close observation of the decoupage in the scene, however, reveals otherwise: Not only does she recognize the two, but through her performance of madness she also guides Yauemon in the direction of the room where Utsugi is about to commit suicide.

The scene in question begins with Sōuemon and Yauemon breaking into the castle. Sōuemon and Yauemon quickly locate Sae, who is singing and dancing in a corridor facing the garden, and slowly approach her. There is a cut to a medium frontal shot of Sae whose facial expression clearly marks her recognition of the two. She halts her performance. Then a cut to Yauemon looking up at her, soliciting her response. The next shot—back to a medium shot of Sae—shows her shaking her head no. In the following shot, in which Yauemon appears at the center, Sae's upper body is cut off in the frame; she slowly resumes her performance and starts moving down the corridor, towards the right edge of the frame. Her movement draws Yauemon's attention to the right. He follows after her in the same direction. As they both exit the frame to the right, there is a cut to a shot of Utsugi contemplating suicide. In the next shot, Yauemon arrives just in time to save her life. At the rhetorical level of cinematic language, it is of course Sae who saves Utsugi's life.

Yauemon, on the other hand, is too late for the revenge. Despite Utsugi's protest, he recklessly breaks into Ieyasu's room only to find out that he is already dead. Instead of letting the audience share his disappointment, the film seems to foreground the meaninglessness or even absurdity of his act by revealing the information to the audience prior to this scene. After all, even Ieyasu's closest aide does not see the point of killing the princess (Tamaki) when Ieyasu may die at any moment. Accordingly, upon delivering to Ieyasu a lock of her hair as a proof of

the execution, the aide safely returns the child to Utsugi through the back door. One may conclude that the film, therefore, undermines the act of revenge and a culture of honor. Tsurumi locates the film's stakes elsewhere. The film ends with a long shot of Princess Tsuru and Tamaki walking together hand in hand as they head back to the mountains. Tsurumi draws an analogy between the future of the princess and the future of culture. Like Princess Tsuru, who is now exempted from being held up as a political symbol and who will now live among the people (*minshū*), the future of Japanese culture should be entrusted with the people rather than being subject to institutionalization.

Conclusion: Satō Tadao and the Authentic Spectator as Critic

The duality of the two female characters is taken up in a surprising way in Hanada's above-mentioned essay, "The New Faces of Film Criticism in Japan" ("*Eiga rondan no shinjintachi*"). In this essay, Tsurumi and Satō Tadao—with whom Tsurumi is often paired—are contrasted with one another, likened respectively to the West and Japan, bourgeois and feudal, and analytic and synthetic.³⁰ According to Hanada, they are both struggling to grow out of their respective positions. Satō shares with Tsurumi his dissatisfaction with bourgeois realism and love for *chanbara* film, yet he finds its engagement with reality to be escapist in nature: it speaks of reality in a language system totally different from reality. The difference between Tsurumi and Satō that Hanada emphasizes in his essay, but also in terms of their attitude toward *jidaigeki*, points to a crucial issue in Tsurumi's analysis of *jidaigeki* via the discourse of *shisō*.

³⁰ For an instance of their 'pairing' see, for example, Hasumi Shigehiko, Ueno Kōshi, and Suga Hidemi in the roundtable "'1968-nen' towa nandatta/nandearu noka?: 1968-nen no kyōhaku" ["What was/is '1968'?: The threat of 1968"] in *1968*, ed. Suga Hidemi (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2005).

Nowadays one of the most widely recognized authorities on Japanese cinema, Satō Tadao was born in Niigata in 1930. After graduating from a local technical high school, he joined the Imperial Japanese Naval Preparatory Flight Training Program. He remained in Niigata after the war and started working for the Japanese National Railways as a mechanic. He was an avid and regular contributor to the correspondence column of the film journal *Eiga Hyōron* and later *Kinema junpō*.³¹ Within the *Shisō no kagaku* group, Tsurumi in particular welcomed Satō's contribution when he submitted an essay on *ninkyō* film in 1954. Satō eventually joined the group. In terms of his geographic, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, as well as his occupation, Satō was on the side of "the people" in a way Tsurumi was not, and as such he embodied the ideal spectator for *jidaigeki*—perhaps too well. Whereas Tsurumi could only *perform* such spectatorship via the discourse of *shisō*, Satō's performance was thought to be authentic. In fact, Satō does not seem to exhibit "the sort of 'double consciousness'" that Aaron Gerow finds in Japanese thinkers who "'do' theory at the same time they are conscious of what it might mean to 'perform' theory."³² Compared to Satō's self-assured authorial and critical voice, Tsurumi's reading of *The Mad Woman in Kimono* is affective and masochistic.

The irony is that it is the same discourse that gave Satō's critical performance the aura of authenticity in the first place that allowed him to forget the necessity of cultivating it. Later he would also be the first to deny the existence of film theory proper in Japan with the exception of Imamura Taihei. The tension between *shisō* and "the people" is no longer maintained by

³¹ For Satō's own account of how he became a film critic, see Satō Tadao, "Eiga rondan tōjō no koro," in *Gendai Nihon eiga-ron taikēi 2: kojīn to chikara no kaifuku* [Contemporary Japanese film theory series 2: recovery of individual and power] (Tokyo: Tōjusha, 1970), 91-92.

³² Aaron Gerow, "Introduction: The Theory Complex," in "Decentering Theory: Reconsidering the History of Japanese Film Theory," ed. Aaron Gerow, special issue, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 22 (December, 2010), 6.

discourse as they become one and the same in Satō, and yet—or precisely because of that—his work has been more extensively translated into English than that of any other Japanese film critic. British-born film critic Robin Wood, who is largely dissatisfied with Satō’s work, got right to the point of the problem: “The quite widespread sense that Satō must be ‘right’ about Japanese films because he is Japanese has no firmer basis than a belief that, say, Judith Crist must be ‘right’ about American films because she is American.”³³ To be fair, unlike almost everyone else one could read in English about Japanese cinema at that time, Satō had *been* to Japan (not to mention watched thousands of films). Nonetheless, in Satō’s film criticism, “the people’s *shisō*/thought” tends to slip into meaning Japanese—*my* people’s—thought. Such might likewise point to the limits of the immanent critique imagined by Tsurumi: “the people’s *shisō*/thought” cannot in itself be a theory. On the other hand, Satō is not alone in forgetting the discourse of *shisō*. Neither authentic nor properly theoretical, Tsurumi’s “performance” in film criticism is largely dismissed in Japan today by both academic and cinephile critics.

Sociologist, media and cultural studies scholar Yoshimi Shun’ya offers a concise account of how and why *Shisō no kagaku*’s approach to culture increasingly lost its actuality in the face of the all-too-pervasive “cultural logic” (Frederic Jameson’s term) of capitalism in the late 1950s onwards.³⁴ He writes:

In the end, although the [*Shisō no kagaku*] Group’s research into popular culture avoided a simplistic reduction of the popular to a Marxist conception of class determinism, they still presumed ‘common feeling’ in the unconscious of the masses to be at the base of popular culture. As capitalism advanced and the reality of the consumer society emerged, it became obviously unsustainable to take the cultural uniformity of the masses as a basic

³³ Robin Wood, “Resistance to Definition: Ozu’s ‘Noriko’ Trilogy,” in *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 98.

³⁴ Yoshimi’s work in this area is extensive. Here I only name a few: Yoshimi Shun’ya, “The Condition of Cultural Studies in Japan,” *Japanese Studies* 18, no. 1 (1998); *Karuchuraru tōn* [Cultural turn] (Tokyo: Jinbun shoin, 2003); “Kitaru beki karucharu sutadhīzu no tame ni” [“For cultural studies to come”], roundtable discussion with Kitano Keisuke, *Shisō* [Thought], no. 1084 (May 2014): 7-38.

assumption. What analyses in the 1970s and afterwards needed to do was to clarify how ‘popular’ culture in Japanese post-industrial society related to the articulation of social segments such as gender, generation, class, and region, while simultaneously considering the capitalist strategies of the media industries. It seems, however, that such points of view never emerged from the *Shisō no kagaku* Group, nor from the researches it conducted.³⁵

The current discourse of cultural studies in Japan and elsewhere seems to endorse this conviction.³⁶ In this chapter, I approached Tsurumi’s film criticism in a different manner. My purpose was not to initially explain his critical practice in terms of the contexts or circumstances that are perceived as external to them, in order to subsequently incorporate those into my reading. It was rather to make his critical performance inform my own reading of his criticism. If his critical performance was at all compelling, it was because of the ambiguity that it enacted—the ambiguity of working in the liminal space between a universal language of theory and the vernacular, lingering between enchantment and enlightenment, and evoking the thrill of deceit and celebrating the collaborative performance of the two female characters in its triumph over the incompetence of the male protagonist. Like Sae’s final performance of madness, such critical performance should not be judged on its truth value but on its felicity.

While the study of popular cinema has been accepted in film studies for some time now, recognizing its historical predecessors becomes important when considering *jidaigeki* films made in the 1950s and 1960s. As I will show in the chapters that follow, both filmmakers and critics were constantly negotiating with different ideas of popular cinema during this period, ideas

³⁵ Shunya Yoshimi, “The Condition of Cultural Studies in Japan,” *Japanese Studies* 18, no. 1 (1998): 67.

³⁶ On the other hand, the audience research surveys conducted by the *Shisō no kagaku* do indicate that they were interested in differentiating audience by age, gender, region etc. Two of their most famous projects— *Seikatsu Tsuzurikata undō* (“Life Writing Movement”) and the oral history project on *tenkō* (“conversion” or “political apostasy”)—focused on the experience of two distinctive groups of subjects: underprivileged children and *tenkō-sha* (those who committed political apostasy).

which were inextricably tied to their practices. I do not mean that they were “practical” in the sense that Satō Tadao uses in his description of a Japanese conception of film theory.³⁷ Whether they were tied to the postwar “popular” culture and intensified mass communication that enabled *jidaigeki*’s uncontested commercial success in the domestic market in the 50s, or to its decline and transformation in the 1960s against the background of the rise and fall of radical politics and the counterculture of the 1960s, they are indispensable as films themselves for situating our ongoing debates on democracy and mass culture in relation to those in the recent past.³⁸ This chapter is an attempt to initiate such a dialogue.

In this chapter, I have been highlighting the special interest that *jidaigeki* holds for those debates: the question of the past, or rather “pastness,” and the political sentiment surrounding *jidaigeki*’s unique appeal. This realism—perhaps we could even say actuality—sits uneasy with

³⁷ Satō Tadao makes a case that Japanese film theory is unique in that it is fundamentally vernacular: it is passed down by word of mouth among practitioners. Though such an informal or vernacular form of theory is by no means uniquely Japanese (see, for instance, James Lastra’s discussion of how vernacular and professional discourses about new representational technologies informed common understanding of the nature of the new medium in James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2000]), Aaron Gerow argues that Satō’s appeals to a more expansive definition of film theory is a way for him to differentiate his/Japanese/unique conception of film theory from a more standard/Western conception of film theory (Gerow, 2010): 4.

³⁸ Miriam Hansen’s scholarship is both exemplary and exceptional in that she insisted on historicizing theory vis-à-vis contemporary media landscape and debates surrounding it. In the preface to her posthumous book, she writes: “The question of how ‘to engage a living thought that is no longer historically current,’ raised by Fredric Jameson with regard to Theodor W. Adorno, has a particular urgency when the body of thought revolves around the cinema, especially in today’s rapidly changing media environment. If that ongoing future increasingly became one of the concerns ticking in the background of this study, it also made me more keenly aware of the specific historicity of the writings discussed – less in the sense of their loss of ‘currency’ than in their contemporaneity with key junctures in the history of the cinema and the social and political histories of the twentieth century. Much as they illuminate those junctures, they often do so from an untimely angle, which lends them a different kind of actuality in the present.” Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), ix. To borrow Susan Buck-Morss’s words, in Hansen’s work, “scholarship becomes theory.” Susan Buck-Morss, “Scholarship Becomes Theory: Learning from Miriam Hansen,” *New German Critique* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 6.

the discourse of modernity and the tenets and assumptions about modernism in which film, and film studies as a discipline and recent scholarship on Japanese cinema, have been deeply invested. Some of the *jidaigeki* films that I am interested in, for instance, embraced the theme of emotionally-laden power imbalances—through which they certainly justified their appeal to violence—in order to contest the contemporary 1950s and 60s forms of corporate ethics and governance.

Chapter 2

Calico-World in Rainbow Colors: 1950s Tōei *Jidaigeki*

Children are not ashamed, since they do not reflect but only see.
—Walter Benjamin¹

The World Poorly Made

A giant red paper lantern with black lettering fills the first image of the film's diegetic world. As the camera slowly moves down, the horizon appears under a gate, orienting the viewer's body forward and through the gate. A crowded street runs through the gate to the main hall of what is taken to be Sensōji temple in Asakusa. In the next shot, the camera position shifts abruptly to right side of the worship hall.

The camera movement in these two shots conjures a passageway and our entry. The movement that suggests our entry into the space that the image opens up is surprisingly minimal and subtle. Or rather, upon our entry, a world unfolds both inward and outward. We do not choose whether or not to enter; our gaze transforms the open space of a temple's inner precinct into a phantasmagoria when we recognize the world out there, beyond the gate, as existing on the screen. More than the hard lines of the physical space and architecture of the temple that vaguely resembles those of Sensōji, it is the crowd in motion that constructs the screen space topographically. It draws us further into the world. Asakusa Sensōji once again revives as a place

¹ Walter Benjamin, "A Child's View of Color (1914-15)," in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1996), 51.

where praying become playing and vice versa.² The flow of the crowd draws a line of digression from the passageway, guiding our gaze to the first character in the film.

His name is Gorohachi. Standing in the center of the shot, he calls the crowd's attention to the voice that sings the tune which we have been hearing from the opening, the voice that the contemporary audience would not fail to recognize as belonging to celebrated actress and singer Misora Hibari. In the film, Gorohachi attributes the voice to Oshichi, the winner of this year's beauty contest in Asakusa's Abekawa District. His speech moves what may be otherwise thought of as non-diegetic music into the foreground of the film audience's perception of the diegetic world, blending the image of Hibari with the image of Oshichi, the heroine of the film.

Gorohachi introduces two more characters. First, he calls out to an old man who sits on a nearby bench. Gorohachi taps his shoulder and urges him to check out the beauty contest. The old man turns around, choking on food, and glares back at him in silence. As Gorohachi recognizes the old man (the heroine's guardian, as we learn later), he hastily apologizes and hurries to the beauty contest. Then he bumps into a blind man. They bicker for a few seconds before bonding over their adoration of Oshichi. The blind man not only correctly guesses Oshichi's voice but also praises her bright eyes. Gorohachi joins him in imitating her "flashing" eyes with sound and hand gestures in rhythm, through which the pleasure in nonsense gains momentum and carries us into the site of the beauty context. (fig. 2.1.)

² For a detailed historical account of the intersection between praying and playing in Asakura Sensōji, see Nam-lin Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan: Asakusa Sensōji and Edo Society*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 185 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).



Fig. 2.1.
Hibari as beauty queen in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin* (1958)

The flamboyancy and richness, the centrality of celebrity figures who drive the film and to some extent even the industry, the gaiety and playfulness, and the musicality are all characteristic of a certain type of *jidaigeki* that saw the light in the course of the 1950s and left a deep mark in the history of Japanese period films.

In the previous chapter, I proposed to approach Tsurumi Shunsuke's film criticism by focusing on its performative aspect. As I noted, critics often attempt to discredit his critical work on *People's Philosophy* by pointing out his privileged background, hoping thereby to disqualify him as someone who is in a position to speak about people's philosophy from the perspective of the people. Tsurumi himself was aware of the problem, and as I argued, in his review of *Mad Woman in Kimono* he makes a case for his qualifications by emphasizing his childhood "education" in forms of residual culture that remained popular among commoners during the interwar period and by describing his engagement with those cultural forms as his most

formative experience. I also discussed the implications of his affect-based, rather than class-based, way of thinking about his own identity for his understanding of *jidaigeki* in general, and his critical review of *The Mad Woman in Kimono* in particular. Instead of dismissing *jidaigeki* for its regressive ideology from an outside position, Tsurumi defends its affinity with the people's thought and reads *The Mad Woman in Kimono* as a critique of male intellectuals whose means-to-an-end approach is, he shows, not only destructive but also often thoughtless and inconsistent in practice. It is the two female characters in that film who see themselves as instruments for furthering their husband's ends who perform compellingly. I argued that both Tsurumi's film review and the film itself derive their critical force from performativity. And by shifting the focus to these performative aspects as they relate to each other, I drew the conclusion that the critical performance of Tsurumi's film review as well as that of the film is best understood not in terms of its truth value but of its felicity.

In *Eiga no shakaigaku* (Sociology of cinema, 1955), dramatist and theater critic Innami Takaichi reports the results of a survey on leisure activities conducted in six major Japanese metropolis.¹ One question asked in the survey was whether the respondent considers the revival of *kengeki* ("swordplay") in various cultural forms to be a positive tendency. According to Innami, there were very few who thought this was the case. Innami notes that only half as many wives as their husbands—8.3% of the wives—thought it was a positive tendency. 43.8% of the people who participated in the survey thought it was a negative tendency. Those who welcomed the revival were more likely to be farmers and fishermen, of whom 22.5% thought it was a positive tendency. Innami further notes that this number corresponds to the overall percentage of

¹ Innami Takaichi, *Eiga no shakaigaku* [Sociology of cinema] (Tokyo: Waseda Daigaku Shuppan, 1955), 47-48.

*rōkyoku*² and *kōdan*³ fans, as well as that of *jidaigeki* film fans and *chanbara* fans in particular. This seems to confirm Tsurumi's argument that the vernacular cultural forms of *rōkyoku* and *kōdan* were linked to *jidaigeki*, and that it was for this reason that his childhood familiarity with these forms placed him in an ideal spectatorial position with respect to *jidaigeki*, one that authorized his critical engagement with it.

This kind demographic analysis of film audiences, which gained importance in the 1950s, provides a useful resource for understanding the history and transformations of the *jidaigeki* form. My goal in this chapter is to deploy this resource in order to better understand what is no doubt the most emblematic style of *jidaigeki* produced in the fifties, a style characterized by the playfulness and exuberance of films like *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin*, the film described at the opening of this chapter. For this purpose, I will focus on a series of films produced by the Tōei film company, and on the history of the company itself, as Tōei played a central role in the development of this particular type of film, with its particular aesthetics and production 'protocols.'

The Birth of Tōei

The Tōei *jidaigeki* of the late 1950s and early 1960s stands out in the history of postwar *jidaigeki*. Against the background of the international success of auteur *jidaigeki* such as Kurosawa's blockbuster samurai films and Mizoguchi's historical melodramas, the newly-established Tōei studio turned inward and expanded its niche market in the domestic sphere by specializing in the so-called *goraku-ban* (entertainment) *jidaigeki*. With "goraku-ban" *jidaigeki*,

² A style of Japanese narrative singing popularized in the early Meiji period.

³ A style of Japanese oral storytelling.

Tōei aggressively capitalized on the “high-volume, low-budget production system dominated by stars and genres” and secured its place in the Japanese film industry.⁴

Tōei’s Ancestry

On April 1, 1951, the Toyoko Film Company, Oizumi Films and Tokyo Film Distribution Company merged to establish Tōei. Toyoko Film had been established in 1938 as a subsidiary company of the Tokyo-Yokohama Electric Railway (currently known as the Tokyū Corporation). It ran seven movie theaters along its railway line, but all of them were burnt down in air raids during the war. In 1947, it entered into business tie-ups with Daiei in order to expand the latter’s exhibition network, but also to extend its own business into production and exhibition.

Makino Mitsuo, a son of Makino Shōzō (the father of Japanese cinema), was appointed as the head of the production department. Among the founding staff were Manchuria Film Studio returnees, Mitsuo’s brother Makino Masahito and his half-brother Matsuda Sadatsugu, director Inagaki Hiroshi, and prominent scriptwriters such as Yahiro Fuji, Hisa Yoshitake, and Oguni Hideo. In addition, in 1948 Toyoko Film recruited two major *jidaigeki* stars, Kataoka Chiezo and Ichikawa Utaemon, from Daiei, and in late November of the same year, it moved into self-distribution when Tokyu (its parent company) launched a new distribution company, Tokyo Film Distribution Company (Tokyo Eiga Haikyū). Competition among distributors to serve the relatively small number of theaters became even fiercer when Shin Tōhō became independent from Tōhō and started to distribute its own productions as well. Distribution would remain a crucial issue even after Tōei was established in 1951.

⁴ Michael Raine, “*Crazed Fruits: Imagining a New Japan—The Taiyozoku Films*,” accessed June 23, 2016, <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/373-crazed-fruit-imagining-a-new-japan-the-taiyozoku-films>.

Tōei's Strategy in the Distribution Race: The Birth of *Goraku-ban*

In order to secure distribution, Tōei directed its attention to movie theaters in rural areas that were not controlled by more established companies such as Shōchiku and Toho. Double bills were the predominant exhibition practice at second- or third-run movie theaters in rural areas. Since most film companies were not able to provide both features for a double bill, they usually had to share profits with the provider of the second film, but it was not a fifty-fifty split. Less established companies like Tōei received a lower percentage than more established ones.⁵ Tōei tried to “take over” these theaters by providing both films. Central to this effort was a new production line called “Tōei *goraku-ban*,” which launched into *jidaigeki* production in 1954.

Tōei goraku-ban refers to a medium-length feature film that was one segment of a three-part film [*sanbusaku*]: each title was produced as a single long film but divided into three parts for exhibition purposes. The standard full-length feature film of the time was about 7,000-8,000 feet long, while the total length of a Tōei three-part film was about 15,000 feet-long, making each *goraku-ban* feature about 5,000 feet long.

The double feature being the predominant exhibition practice, Tōei was not the first to establish a production line that focused on producing the second, shorter features. Shochiku (one of the other production companies) in 1952 started producing the so-called “Sister Picture (SP)” as a supplement [*soemono*] to its feature line, films with a running time around fifty minutes. Toho soon followed suit by introducing its “Brother Pictures.” But both of these “second feature” production lines were rather short-lived. Shochiku continued to produce medium-length features without calling them SPs, and Toho did not resume their BP production line until their “Diamond series” in 1956. The ingenuity of Tōei’s production line system was the three-part

⁵ Taichi Kasuga, *Akan'yatsura: Tōei Kyōto satsueijo keppūroku* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2013), 57.

production. In other studios, actors and staff were paid for their work in the second, shorter features as much as they were for their work in regular, full-length features. Therefore, the second features made little business sense. At Toei, the budget for each three-part production was set the same as the budget for a single full-length feature film. In other words, one *goraku-ban* feature cost one third as much as a full-length feature film, and the production costs that went into each double-bill screening of one full-length feature and one *goraku-ban* feature would be two thirds of those of a double-bill involving two full-length features. Tōei *goraku-ban jidaigeki* were made quickly and cheaply. All three parts of one *goraku-ban* production were usually shot at once. And by reducing production cost, Tōei also managed to substantially reduce the screening costs for theaters, which in turn helped it to expand its distribution circuit. Tōei quickly climbed out of debt and by the late 1950s was able to generate the highest box office revenue among Japanese studios.⁶

***Goraku-ban* Trans-Mediality and its Importance in Distribution**

Sanada jūyūshi (The Sanada ten braves, Kōno Toshikazu, 1954)– a popular legend about ninjas fighting against Tokugawa – was the first *goraku-ban jidaigeki*. Though it was divided into three parts, it was more of a series than a serial, and all three parts were released simultaneously. The second *goraku-ban* trilogy, *Nazo no ōgonjima* (Mystery of the golden island, Kōno Toshikazu, 1954), was based on a fantasy novel called *Shima kara kita mazō* (A devil from an island) written in a popular “relay” style by six members of the *Torimono* Writers Club.⁷ It was serialized and released in three consecutive weeks in February 1954.

⁶ In 1955, Tōei generated the highest box office revenue among Japanese studios, and in 1959 its box office revenue comprised one third of the total domestic box office sales for Japanese films. In 1955, 1956, and 1959, the top-grossing film of the year was a Tōei all-star *jidaigeki*. See Kasuga, 145.

⁷ The club was founded in 1949 by writers who specialize in the genre of *torimono*. A casebook was

Almost from its origin, *goraku-ban* involved a certain degree of trans-mediality. Thus *Shin shokoku monogatari* (The new tales of the provinces), one of the most successful *goraku-ban* adventure-action films, was also one of the most successful instances of film adaptation of radio drama in postwar Japan. An eponymous popular radio drama series was broadcast by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) from 6:30 pm to 6:45 pm Mondays through Fridays starting in 1952 and eventually ran successfully for seven full series, finally ending in 1960. The second series of the radio drama ran from January through December, 1953 and was adapted to film in April, 1954 (*Fuefuki dōji*, Hagiwara Ryō, 1954). It was a three-part *goraku-ban* which, like *Nazo no ōgonjima* (Mystery of the golden island), was released across three consecutive weeks. A second film series *Beni kujaku* (Scarlet peacock, Hagiwara Ryō, 1954-55) was produced as the radio drama was about to end its third season in December 1954. This five-part film was released across five consecutive weeks.

Demographic Analysis

Most accounts of the success of the *goraku-ban* adaptation of *The New Tales of the Provinces* explain it in terms of its popularity among children. Indeed, it was not the first time that film drew on a popular radio drama in order to harness its pre-established familiarity for audiences. In this regard, the most notable precursor was *What is Your Name?* (*Kimi no na wa* 1953-54), which was extremely popular among women. In fact, film and media critic Uryū

called a *torimono-cho* in Edo period, but as a literary genre, *torimono* refers to crime stories set in Edo in which an amateur detective investigates a crime. The *torimono* writers who formed the club originally intended to join The Detective Writers Club founded by Edogawa Ranpo two years earlier, but they were turned away by Kigi Takataro, the president of the club at that time. Edogawa Ranpo then suggested that they formed their own club.

Tadao noted at the time of its release that the *Kimi no na wa* film series, unlike most films of the day, seemed to have attracted relatively few audience members under the age of 24—the key demographic of the Japanese audience in the 1950s— while the median age of its audience members at first-run theaters in Asakusa was higher than that of general Sunday audiences.⁸

Like Shochiku films of this period in general, *Kimi no na wa* was certainly a women's film, generally attracting a larger number of female audiences than an average Japanese film of that time (the average male-to-female ratio for Sunday film audiences in the years between 1955 and 1957 was 62.9 : 37.1). But its male-to-female ratio seems to have fluctuated a bit depending on the second feature. For instance, *Kimi no na wa* part 1 was released on September 15, 1953. When it was shown at a first-run theater in Asakusa with a documentary recording of the female oriented SKD (The Shochiku Revue)'s revue titled *Shichisai no Hanafubuki* (Flower blossom in seven colors) as a “sister picture” in the third week of September, the ratio was 45.6 : 54.4, with female audience members constituting not just a higher-than-average proportion, but actually a majority. A week later, it was shown with a film based on a standard radio drama series adapted from a serialized novel based on *Kurama tengu* written by popular historical fiction writer Osaragi Jirō and published in *Sandē mainichi* magazine (Weekly Sunday magazine). The male-to-female ratio of the audience shifted to 55.6 : 44.4, thus reverting back to a female minority, although still one larger than in the average film audience.

In addition, Uryū observed the variety of reactions among the female audiences he encountered at theaters in Tokyo and elsewhere. He was particularly struck by the fact that in Tokyo, the women dressed in the latest fashion were crying alongside the mothers who brought

⁸ Uryū Tadao, “Merodorama e no kanshin” [Interest in Melodrama], *TBS Chōsa Jōhō*, no. 92 (November 1966): 28.

their children to watch the films, and he further noted that while female junior high or high school students in Tokyo tended to be dismissive of *Kimi no nawa* for its old-fashioned ethos, in rural areas the series seemed to have no less appeal among female students than among adult women. Another significant factor in the success of the film version was due, Uryū argued, to Shochiku's expertise in melodrama and its primary target audience being women.

Uryū's attempt to understand the success of *Kimi no na wa* in terms of the films' appeal to specific socio-economic demographics helpfully delineates the ecology of film culture at the time.⁹ Interestingly, much in the same way that Shochiku had carved a niche in melodrama targeting female audiences, the production value, film crews, stars, and themes of Tōei were loosely divided in accordance with audience demography. More established directors worked with veteran stars such as Ichikawa Utaemon and Kataoka Chiezo on larger productions and well-known *jidaigeki* themes, while younger, new-fledged directors worked with young stars on the more topical and exuberant films that became emblematic of 1950s *jidaigeki*. While both attracted predominantly male audiences, the former was popular among adult male audiences and the latter among the young. *Goraku-ban*'s popularity among even younger audiences had a significant impact on the film culture of Tōei.

New Stars, New Audience for *Jidaigeki*

As I have been noting, Japanese film audience was predominantly male across the major studios. According to the joint research conducted by the major five Japanese studios in 1953, the average ratio of the female audience was 36%. Shochiku's 46% was the highest percentage,

⁹ The study was published in the mid-1960s as part of the series on the relationship between broadcasting and film in *TBS Chōsa Jōhō* (research reports published by TBS Media Research Institute). See Uryū Tadao, "Kimi no na wa' e no michi" [Towards "What is your name?"], *TBS Chōsa Jōhō*, no. 91 (October 1966) as well as his "Merodorama e no kanshin" [Interest in melodrama].

whereas women made up of 38% of the audience at Daiei, 33% at Toho, 32% at Tōei, and 31% at Shin-Toho.¹⁰ The largest age group consisted of those in their twenties, and a wide variety of professions were represented. Genres such as melodrama and romantic comedies were particularly popular among women, which explained the particularly high ratio at Shochiku, which had specialized in those genres since the 1920s.¹¹ Yoshimi Shun'ya emphasizes the close relationship between female audience and cinema, noting that women's film attendance rate was much higher than those for other popular leisure activities of the time such as sports events and concerts. Drawing on research on entertainment districts jointly conducted by Shochiku and a sociology research group at Tokyo Metropolitan University led by Isomae Eiichi in the 1950s, Yoshimi notes that female audiences appear to be more careful in choosing not only which films to watch, but also which theaters to go to.¹²

The Rise of Star Driven Productions

Goraku-ban was an important star vehicle for Tōei. In particular, it was used to introduce young new actors. For instance, the *goraku-ban* version of *Yuki no jō henge* (known as *An Actor's Revenge*, Kōno Toshikazu, 1954) debuted Azuma Chiyonosuke. And he and Nakamura Kinnosuke, a kabuki-actor-turned-movie-star who had debuted only a couple of months earlier, co-starred in *Shin shokoku monogatari* (*The new tales of the provinces*).

¹⁰ Published in Uryū Tadao, “Tenkanki ni tatasareta eiga-kai” [Turning point of film industry], *TBS Chōsa Jōhō*, no. 94 (January 1967): 32.

¹¹ See, for instance, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

¹² Yoshimi Shun'ya, “Eigakan to iu sengo—henyō suru Tokyo no sakariba no naka de” [Postwar as movie theatre: transformation of *sakariba* in Tokyo], in *Nihon eiga wa ikite iru* [Japanese cinema is alive], vol.3, *Miru-hito, Tsukuru-hito, Kakeru-hito*, ed. Kiyoshi Kurosawa et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010): 105.

But it was not only the rising stars who benefited from this feature of *goraku-ban*. As might be expected, the appearance of stars also drew audiences to the theaters, and the trans-medial aspect of production practices made it possible to harness the fame acquired by celebrities in other media and to put it in the service of the studio's interests. Young movie stars were clearly the main attraction for younger female audiences, a tendency that was particularly exploited by the studios without established "women's genres," such as Tōei and Toho.¹³ As noted above, at the peak of its commercial success, females rarely constituted more than 30% of the audience at Tōei. In contrast, it was not rare for males to make up more than 80% of the audience for a film. Despite their general lack of interest in Tōei *jidaigeki*, a significant number of females went to see *jidaigeki* with their favorite stars such as Misora Hibari, Nakamura Kinnosuke, and Okawa Hashizo.¹⁴ It is no coincidence that some shots from Tōei films from this period look like pages from photogravure magazines, as they were a more familiar and intimate media of image consumption that cinema emulated. As Tōei grew over the 1950s, it developed a star system, and was much more sensitive to the hierarchy among their in-house stars. The space and time of any given film had to be carefully coordinated and distributed among the stars depending on their popularity, age, relationship with each other, etc.

¹³ The statistics on the male-to-female audience ratio were published by TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System) as part of Uryū Tadao's serialized articles on the relationship between broadcast and cinema. Please refer to Uryū Tadao, "Merodorama e no kanshin" [Interest in melodrama] for the data from the years 1953 and 1954, and Uryū, "Tenkanki ni tatasareta eiga-kai" [Turning point of film industry] for the data from the years 1957 and 1958.

¹⁴ For instance, the male-to-female ratio for a double bill of *Futari daimyo*, starring Okawa Hashizo in two roles, and a middle-length feature *Tetto no kaijin* (Detective Boys series), was 49.6 to 50.4; the ratio for a double bill of *Isshin Tasuke: tenkai no ichidaiji*, starring Nakamura Kinnosuke in two roles, and the first feature-length animation, *The Tale of the White Serpent*, was 53.2: 46.8; the ratio for a double bill of *Oedo shichininshu* (Seven in great Edo) and *Renai jiyushugi* (Free Style Love) starring Misora Hibari was 49.1: 50.9; the ratio for a double bill of *Hibari torimonochō: kanzashi koban* (*Casebook of Hibari the detective: the mystery of the gold hairpin*) and *Tabigasa dochu* was 50.7: 49.3. As these examples show, it was a very common practice to cast these stars in more than two roles in a single film.

Production Excess, Aesthetic Excess: TŌEI at 2.07m frames a day

With the success of *goraku-ban* in the early 1950s, Tōei was to become the leader in a Japanese film industry of the late 1950s characterized by overproduction due to fierce competition among major studios and the upsurge in movie theaters. A new outdoor set was built for every new film completely from scratch, and large set-pieces such as gates, samurai residences, and gardens with ponds were quickly assembled and dismantled overnight. New plants were delivered to the set by a commissioned gardening company every day. The same applied to studio sets: they were built from scratch and taken apart overnight. Several production units took turns using several studios in a tightly scheduled rotation, but each production unit would design and build its own new sets. In fact, the turn-over was so rapid that Tōei's in-house art director Ikawa Norimichi recalls that newly painted walls or pillars did not have time to dry before shooting commenced.¹⁵ As units needed to keep up production speed, there was often no time for location-shooting. In 1956, Tōei opened the first Japanese animal star training center.¹⁶

To illustrate, the crumpled pastel color paper flowers, the parasols fringed with those flowers, and the small paper decorations hanging out on the *kago* (a single beam litter) seen in the opening of *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin* (described at the beginning of this chapter), all otherwise standard *jidaigeki* props, will never make it into the history of *jidaigeki* props proper. (fig. 2.2.) Traditionally, a division of roles existed in which *gendaigeki* were produced in Tokyo

¹⁵ Ikawa Norimichi, *Ikawa Norimichi, Rizumu to yōshiki bi* [Ikawa Norimichi: rhythm and beauty of form], ed. Tada Isao and Taoka Hiroshi (Tokyo: Wides Shuppan, 2009), 28.

¹⁶ “Dōbutsu sutā ikuseijo” [Animal star training center], *Jidai Eiga* 2. no.10 (1956). anonymous.

suburbs, and *jidaigeki* were produced in studios in Kyoto. The reason was that Kyoto had been the capital before the Edo period. As the traditional center of government and culture, Kyoto had many temples and shrines, and the traditional craftwork techniques for making props had been passed down from generation to generation, making the city the most suitable for the production of *jidaigeki*. But the paper flowers in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin* probably did not involve such traditional techniques. It is equally unlikely that they found their way into collectors' treasure houses, where they might wait to recover their social character.¹⁷ They were ephemeral, produced through the cheap, feminized manual labor of *naishoku* (literally meaning “work at home”), using machine-made paper. Like their natural counterparts, they had a short life-cycle, as they were most likely discarded after their initial or at most a second use. From this standpoint, Tōei *jidaigeki* of the 1950s is a rare record of the culture in which these paper flowers flourished.



Fig. 2.2. *Kago* (a single beam litter) adorned with colorful paper flowers in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin* (Sawashima Tadashi, 1958).

¹⁷ Benjamin, “Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian,” in *Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, trans. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2002): 260-302.

Calico World in Rainbow colorss

Speed was demanded at the level of form as well. Film researcher Kasuga Taichi, who conducted extensive interviews with Tōei filmmakers and technicians, notes that in order to keep up the pace, Tōei *jidaigeki* often “cut out” manners and ceremonial gestures characteristic of *jidaigeki* and “condensed” narrative by making characters articulate their course of action in advance.¹⁸

This madness in filmmaking at Tōei makes a good comparison and contrast with the “Calico-World” of the UFA complex that Siegfried Kracauer analyzed in the 1920s. Siegfried Kracauer’s report on the UFA complex, “Calico-World: The UFA City in Neubabelsberg,” was first broadcast as a Frankfurt radio feature in January, 1926 and then subsequently published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. Kracauer writes, “The dismantling of the world contents is radical; and even if it is undertaken only for the sake of illusion, the illusion is by no means insignificant.”¹⁹ “The heroes of antiquity have already made their way into the schoolbook,” continues Kracauer.¹ His reference to the schoolbook here can be easily read as a stand-in for an official history and

¹⁸ Kasuga, 69.

¹⁹ Siegfried Kracauer, “Calico-World: The UFA City in Neubabelsberg (1926),” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 281-282.

¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

ideology, and hence the radical consequences of the illusion.² Indeed the essay is often read as an ideological critique of UFA productions.³

Debates over the nature of the cinematic illusion and ideological critiques of the dangers it entails are far from settled. What has received less attention until recently is Kracauer's sensibility to film's materialist work on, or play with, "the world contents." As the world contents of film, Kracauer observes, things and people are no longer set apart as "rare museum pieces" or as the spectators in "their traditional state," but instead they are together "stretched and shortened" and "melt" in light and mingle with "make-believe objects" and "miraculous apparitions."⁴ More recently, Miriam Hansen has argued that this aspect of film—its "ability to mobilize and play with the reified, unmoored, multiply mediated fragments of the modern *physis*, a historically transformed world that includes the viewer as materially contingent, embodied subject"—is essential to Kracauer's conception of film's relationship with photography. "Calico-World" is almost a literal instantiation of such play. The link is further elucidated by Hansen who suggests that photography be understood as "a general warehousing of nature," considering it "an *an*-archive—a heap of broken images—that lends itself to the task precisely because it

² For instance, Thomas Y. Levin in his introduction to *Mass Culture* writes, "Kracauer's methodological strategy [...] is to grasp a film's ideological reconfiguration of the world as itself a socially symptomatic—and thus in an important sense "real" – political fact." Thomas Y. Levin, introduction to *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 24.

³ Cf. Levin.

⁴ Miriam Hansen writes, "As the photography essay makes sufficiently clear, Kracauer's conception of film's relationship with photography is not grounded in any simple or 'naïve' referential realism. On the contrary, it turns on film's ability to mobilize and play with the reified, unmoored, multiply mediated fragments of the modern *physis*, a historically transformed world that includes the viewer as materially contingent, embodied subject. The concept of realism at stake is therefore less a referential than an experiential one, predicated on the encounter with that world under radically changed and changing conditions of referentiality." Miriam Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 37.

lacks any obvious and coherent organizational system. It is closer in spirit to Dadaist or surrealist montage.”⁵

Furthermore, Kracauer’s reportage on the UFA studio resonates with Walter Benjamin’s account of the figure of flâneur walking through the mythical, naturalized images of the disenchanted modern world of Berlin and experiencing its transfiguration in “The Return of the Flâneur,” his review of Franz Hessel’s *On Foot in Berlin*. Here Berlin is the “Calico-World,” a world in which we spectate and read but not from a position that guarantees the kind of “ontological status” of the cinema spectator that Stanley Cavell discusses in his *The World Viewed*; our spectating and reading acts and bodies are sensory data of the world viewing and viewed, constituting and transfiguring the world in and through themselves. Kracauer’s analysis of the “Calico-World” is at once an ideology critique of cinema and a surrealist depiction of our world.

Misora Hibari, Icon of 1950s, and Tōei’s Distinctive Aesthetics of Gender

Being one of the most popular singing stars of 1950 Japan, Hibari not surprisingly occupied the center of the star-driven Tōei film culture. The scene described in the opening of this chapter is the opening sequence of *Hibari torimonochō: kanzashi koban* [*Casebook of Hibari the Detective: The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin*] (Sawashima Tadashi, 1958). The film itself is the third in the popular detective series *Hibari torimonocho*. It was also the first color film in the series. She plays seven roles in the film. First, she plays three distinctive characters: Princess Tae (fig. 2.3.), who is disguised as a local male (?) detective Oshichi (fig. 2.4.), and a local beauty queen Oshichi (fig. 2.5.). Second, there are other roles or characters she adopts

⁵ Ibid., 36.

while solving the case: A male trainee at a *kendo* practice center (fig. 2.6.), a female dancer (fig. 2.7.), widow of the Shōgun (fig. 2.8.), and an actor playing the role of Benkei the Warrior Monk in an all-female kabuki performance. (fig. 2.9.)



Fig. 2.3. Hibari as Princess Tae in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin* (Sawashima Tadashi, 1958)



Fig. 2.4. Hibari as a male (?) detective Oshichi in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin*



Fig. 2.5. Hibari as a local beauty queen Oshichi in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin*



Fig. 2.6. Hibari as a trainee at a *kendō* practice center in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin*



Fig 2.7. Hibari as a dancer in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin*



Fig 2.8. Hibari as the widow of the Shōgun in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin*



Fig. 2.9. Hibari as an actor playing the role of Benkei the Warrior Monk in an all-female kabuki performance in *The Mystery of the Gold Hairpin*

As one can see from the list, she is not just performing different characters or roles; she also crosses gender and age boundaries. Moreover, she demonstrates different types of performing arts, and even martial arts in the case of the trainee at a *kendo* practice center. In this film and others at Tōei, she led spectators through a dream of swirling color and music. As the trailer for *Hibari Chiemi no oshidori senryogasa* (*Lovebirds' million dollar umbrella*, Sawashima Tadashi, 1963) says, “Dreams painted in seven colors!” (fig. 2.9)



Fig 2.10. Trailer for *Hibari Chiemi no oshidori senryogasa* (*Lovebirds' million dollar umbrella*, Sawashima Tadashi, 1963)

The series also points to a unique aesthetics of gender developed at Tōei in the 1950s in response to the dynamic shift that I have been highlighting in the demographics of the audience.

Hibari's transmedial celebrity in postwar Japan, and her film persona, has attracted special attention ever since. The popularity of Hibari among young girls in the 1950s in

particular is well-established in the critical discourse. As early as 1958, *Kinema Junpo* published a special feature on Hibari. Contributors included Hosei University professor and psychologist Inui Takashi and Yanagi Masako, a member of the Social Psychology Research Center founded by Hitotsubashi University professor and Cornell-educated social psychologist Minami Hiroshi. In her article titled “Hibari’s Ten years and Her Role” (*Hibari no jūnen to sono yakuwari*), Yanagi Masako reports that the majority of Hibari fans are found in two age groups, those in their teens and those aged over 40, while the 25-39 age group is missing.¹ Considering Hibari’s own age (twenty-one in 1958), film scholar Itakura adds that many of her fans were people of her own generation.² Itakura also emphasizes the significance of a remark on Hibari’s star persona made by Inui.³ That is, young men in their 20s and 30s do not fantasize about Hibari as a romantic partner, a crucial feature of Hibari’s stardom during the period in which she played many adolescent girl roles, roles that were neither those of a child nor of a mature woman.⁴ But what is it about Hibari’s films that subverts the so-called male gaze? What sort of desire and fantasies did the audience engage in relation to her?

The unique film persona of Hibari is often discussed in terms of her cross-gender acting and cross-dressing performance. According to Yanagi’s report, Hibari’s fans expressed a shared interest in films in which Hibari perform male and female roles. As Itakura notes, those films

¹ Yanagi Masako, “*Hibari no jūnen to sono yakuwari*” [Hibari’s Ten years and Her Role], *Kinema junpō*, no. 202 (April 1958): 64.

² Itakura Fumiaki, “Shisen to memai—Misora Hibari no iseisō jidaigeiki” [Gaze and Vertigo: Misora Hibari’s Cross-dressing *Jidaigeiki*], in *Tatakau onna-tachi—Nihon eiga no josei akushon* [*Fighting Women: Female Action in Japanese Cinema*], ed. Yomota Inuhiko and Washitani Hana (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2009), 65.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Inui Takashi, “Misora Hibari o sasaeru mono” [What Supports Misora Hibari], *Kinema junpō*, no. 202 (April 1958): 63.

were indeed produced at the height of her stardom at Tōei and at the peak of Tōei's commercial success.⁵ This focus on identification with characters has one major consequence. Scholars considered Hibari's queer potential exclusively in terms of sexuality/sexual orientation. Other expressions of erotic experience such as romantic feelings are considered primarily in terms of objects of (sexual) desire (and tend to be dismissed if the desires are hetero-normative) rather than explored in depth, as though alternative forms of erotic experience were critically uninteresting.⁶

But it seems to me that two interrelated but separate and analytically distinct issues need to be raised regarding her cross-dressing and stardom. One is the question of agency, and the other is subjectivity. Scholars have approached Hibari's appeal to young girls primarily through the question of agency, of gendered agency, by raising the question of what kind/gender of agency is embodied by Hibari through her serial identity shifts. They have argued that through her cross-gender acting and cross-dressing performance, Hibari manifests the physical, social and affective mobility that is traditionally reserved for male lead characters in *jidaigeki*.⁷ In so doing, they reduce the fantasy that is played out in her movement through various roles to a hetero-normative desire to occupy a position of power or, in psychoanalytical jargon, to the symbolic coping with the castration complex. The issue of subjectivity concerns the desires and fantasies that her characters are capable of addressing. But crucially, these desires and fantasies

⁵ Itakura, 68.

⁶ See, for instance, Izumo Marou, *Chanbara kuin* [Chambara queen] (Tokyo: Pandora Films and Books, 2002), especially chapter 2 “Hana no doragu kingu: Edoya Kichisaburō”; Washitani Hana, “‘Onna no katsugeki’ no keifu-ron—onna kengeki kara ‘Kunoichi ninpō’ made” [Genealogy of female action cinema: From female swordplay to *The Female Ninja*], in *Eiga to shintai/sei* [Film and body/sex], Nihon eiga-shi sōsho 6 [Japanese film history series 6], ed. Saitō Ayako (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2006), 267-312; and Itakura (2009). Izumo's queer reading is much more affirmative than the other two.

⁷ Ibid.

are not understood as gendered desires ultimately traceable to or at least bound up with sexual desires that are to be catalogued into hetero or non-hetero normative; the emphasis is laid instead in the object and tonality of those desires and fantasies, so to speak. This dimension of her star persona is best explored around her “queer” potential.

As Christine Glendhill states, “genres and stars as generic beings [...] embody shifting structures of feeling and perception on which cultural gendering turns.”⁸ Hibari’s star persona can be regarded as a paradigmatic case of the “aesthetics of gender” through which “shifting structures of feeling and perception” are expressed. By focusing on the “aesthetics of gender” rather than on direct depictions and discourse about gender, we will be able to address fantasies and sensorial pleasures that are less defined by gender even in cases where they are mediated by gendered representations.

Interestingly, the unique aesthetics of gender in *jidaigeki* developed around the reception of Hibari among young girls is similar to the ways in which the first narrative *shōjo* (girls) manga *Ribon no kishi* (*Princess Knight*) was carved out of the already established male comic book culture by Tezuka Osamu in the 1950s. First serialized in *Kodansha’s Shōjo Club* from 1953 to 1956, *Princess Knight* proved extremely popular among girls. An important characteristic of the manga that is relevant here is the cross-dressing and cross-gender performances of the protagonist Sapphire, who lives a double life as Princess Sapphire by day, Phantom Knight by night. As *shōjo* manga scholar Oshiyama Michiko points out, *dansō* female-to-male cross-dressing continues to be one of the main attractions of popular *shōjo* manga. She notes that while *dansō* is not absent in manga targeted at boys and men, it has played a special

⁸ Christine Gledhill, “Introduction,” in *Gender Meets Genre in Postwar Cinemas*, ed. Christine Glendhill (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 2012), 7.

role in *shōjo* manga, which developed around the otherwise marginal figure of the *shōjo*. Oshiyama argues that *dansō* pushed the boundary of *shōjo*, extending and diversifying expressions of *shōjo* by articulating what cannot be confined to the existing image of *shōjo*.⁹

Music and the Aesthetics of Gender in 1950s Tōei *Jidaigeki*

Central to the unique aesthetics of gender at Tōei was the performance of young handsome stars including Hibari, but she brought another important dimension to it: music. Though the *jidaigeki* musical as such had existed in prewar Japan, it returned in the late 1950s with a blast of color in widescreen cinema. At Tōei, Sawashima Tadashi, who excelled in introducing new generic combinations (e.g., thriller, musical, comedy, marine spectacle), playfully incorporated musical moments into his films. Many of his films from this period were both popular and critically acclaimed (though Tōei *jidaigeki* in general received relatively less attention from critics). He was among the up-and-coming directors who debuted in 1958, along with Masumura Yasuzo (Daiei), Nakahira Ko (Nikkatsu), and Imamura Shohei (Nikkatsu). He collaborated with Hibari for the first time in his third film (the first for him in color), *the Mystery of Gold Hairpin* (1958), which won him the new face award at the Kyoto Citizen Film Festival (Kyoto shimin eiga sai). His 1960 *Tonosama Yaji Kita* (Samurai vagabond) won a prize at the 7th Bordighera Festival of Comedy and Humor Films in Italy. In 1961, Okamoto Taro published an article on the new generations of postwar *jidaigeki* directors in *Jidai Eiga*, a monthly journal on *jidaigeki*. He singles out Sawashima as the leading figure of the second wave of postwar *jidaigeki*. Words such as brightness, novelty, and energy are often used to characterize Sawashima's work. His films were also known for their up-tempo. He was, for instance,

⁹ See Oshiyama Machiko, *Shōjo manga jendā hyōshō-ron: "dansō no shōjo" no zōkei to aidenthithi* (Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 2007).

interviewed for the essay “*Jidai Eiga* (Period Film) and Speed” as part of the special issue on *jidaigeki*’s 3S (sex, speed, suspense), published in *Jidai Eiga* in January 1960.

One of the important aspects of his films is that he wrote most of the scripts for his films, often in collaboration with his wife Takamatsu Fukuko, using the composite penname Takasawa Kazuki in these collaborative projects. Born into a family of filmmakers, Takamatsu worked as a script supervisor at Toho (e.g. Kurosawa’s 1945 film *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger’s Trail*) before coming to Tōei. At Tōei she worked mainly with the god of program pictures, Watanabe Kunio. Sawashima met her on the first day of his assistant directorship under Watanabe. After they were expelled from Watanabe’s team upon getting married, Takamatsu retired from Tōei and began working as a scriptwriter. In his autobiography, Sawashima states that though he was deeply inspired by Italian neorealism and French cineastes such as René Clair, Jacques Feyder, Julian Duvivier, and Jean Cocteau, his main influence was American cinema.¹⁰ It was through his wife, he notes, that he became a fan of the American musical, learning much that he would use in his own *jidaigeki* musicals.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on Sawashima’s mixed-genre *jidaigeki* featuring young Tōei stars in order present a more detailed account of the distinctive aesthetics of the emblematic *jidaigeki* of the 1950s, and to bring fully into view its relation to gender.

The Rainbow Romance of *jidaigeki*: heteronormative, yet queer.

Through focusing exclusively on the ideological critique of heterosexual romance, the critical reception of Hibari’s performance in *jidaigeki* has tended to overlook the rich affective

¹⁰ He names six directors—Billy Wilder, William Wyler, Frank Capra, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, and Elia Kazan—as his favorite. Sawashima Tadashi, *Sawashima Tadashi zen shigoto: bon yukkuri ochiyaine* (Tokyo: Wides Shuppan, 2013), 120-122.

dimension of gender and sexuality in *jidaigeki*—the meaning of romance in the 1950s. That is, romance or romantic love was not (a major) part of heterosocial life in 1950s Japan. Romantic marriage was still less common than arranged marriage in the 1950s, and there was little space for romance for the sake of romance.

The rarity of ordinary romance in Japan partly explains why the romanticized view of romantic love in magazine coverage of the royal wedding of Crown Prince Akihito to not-so-ordinary commoner Shōda Michiko (Micchi) was so eagerly consumed by women.¹¹ Yoshimi Shunya discusses a similar reaction to William Wyler's *Roman Holiday* (1953), which was released in Japan in the spring of 1954. He argues that royal wedding of Crown Prince Akihito to Shōda Michiko and Wyler's film both offer a sense of gender liberation in the form of fantasy.

Depiction of romance in popular cinema had some limitations. *Kimi no na wa* (What is Your Name? 1953-54), for instance, the most commercially successful film series of postwar Japan, depicts an ill-fated romance between Machiko and Haruki. The novelty of the drama lies in the fact that even though Machiko initially gives up on her love and marries an ambitious bureaucrat under difficult circumstances, she eventually leaves him and her mean mother-in-law and embarks on a wandering journey in the hope of eventually being reunited with the man she was in love with from the start. While her choice of love over social mobility and acceptance was considered audacious and well received by critics, most of the drama followed the conventions of the so-called "*surechigai*" (brushing past) melodrama, and that was not received all that well.

¹¹ See Jan Bardsley, "Fashioning the people's princess: Women's magazines, Shōda Michiko, and the royal wedding of 1959," *US-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement* (2002): 57-9; and Yoshimi Shun'ya, "Media ibento to shite no 'goseikon'" [Loyal Marriage as a Media Even], in *Sengo Nihon no media ibento [Media Events in Postwar Japan]*, ed. Tsuganesawa Toshihiro (Tokyo: Sekai shisōsha, 2002), 267-287.

The principle of “*surechigai*,” Uryū writes, centers around the denial of romantic love as well as the defeat of free will. Furthermore, the drama also points to factors other than the lack of love that made Machiko’s marriage unhappy (e.g., an overly suspicious husband, a mean mother-in-law). Both the drama’s conformity to the principle of *surechigai*, and these factors make her decision to leave her husband seem more reasonable. And this was deemed to render the film ‘less progressive,’ so to speak, than what it might have otherwise been. Most contested in the reception of the film was her final decision at the end of the drama: she decides not to get together with Haruki, and instead waits until her divorce is made legal *and* her decision to end her first marriage is accepted by society. The reception of *Kimi no na wa* illustrates how difficult it was to succeed in telling a simple romantic tale that was perceived as genuinely romantic.¹²

But doesn’t this indicate that contrary to what I suggested, romantic love was in fact a central part of life in the 1950s? While this does show that it was a focal point of interest and a matter of widespread concern, I shall argue that it was in fact the case that this interest in romantic love was the counterpart of its absence from life.

In *jidaigeki*, whose drama is set predominantly in Edo Japan, social roles were often clearly identified not only by gender but also by class in a hierarchical order. On the other hand, the diegetic world of *jidaigeki* can also easily slip into an imaginary elsewhere and is more open to fantasies, as we find in 1950s Tōei *jidaigeki*. Hibari, in particular, is said to offer “the fantasy of transgressing the dominant gender norms” in her cross-dressing and cross-gender performances, allowing the young female audience to identify with roles that are usually reserved for men.¹³ Hibari’s characters also, however, obeyed some unique constraints. In the

¹² Uryū Tadao, *Nihon no eiga* [Japanese cinema] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1956), 89-90.

¹³ Itakura, 66.

case of *torimono-cho* (detective) series, for instance, she rarely manages to defeat the bad guys without the help of her male supporters. In the case of *Hibari no Mori no Ishimatsu* (*Hibari's Ishimatsu: The One-Eyed Avenger*, 1960), Hibari's adventure as Ishimatsu is presented as a story within the film told by a tea harvester who is played by Hibari herself. But one of the major constraints that critics and scholars observe in her performance is her penchant for heterosexual romance.¹⁴ By dismissing this as a disappointing aspect of her liberating cross-gender performance, critics overlook the significance of the theme of romance or romantic love and fail to discuss its liberating characteristics on its own terms. I argue that Hibari's Tōei films foreground—sometimes in more obscure or fantastic ways—romantic *feelings* as the key to human life as such.

In these films, romance is often presented as less of a goal to achieve than a feeling to experience. In his discussion of musicals as entertainment, Richard Dyer argues that entertainment does not present models of utopian worlds but rather “what utopia would feel like.”¹⁵ It deploys both what Dyer calls representational signs and non-representational signs. Non-representational signs include qualities such as color, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, and camerawork, and it is through them that musicals embody feeling. What guides Dyer's film analysis is his assertion that to be effective, the utopian sensibility has to be drawn from the real experience of the audience. Musical as entertainment must “manage” the contradictions between the real experience of the audience and their utopian sensibility in such a way so that, in Dyer's terms, they seem to disappear.¹⁶ In his film analysis, he focuses on the task of identifying

¹⁴ See Izumo, Washitani, and Itakura.

¹⁵ Richard Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia” in *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 2002), 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

such contradictions at various levels of signification in order to assess musicals' unique engagement with reality. In his terms, my interest lies in the utopian sensibility generated through romance as it is brought to the screen in 1950s *jidaigeki*. Accordingly, building on this idea of a utopian sensibility, I shall now focus on the ways in which romance is *entertained* and its utopian feel is generated through musicals within a film.

In *Hibari's Ishimatsu*, Hibari plays the role of *I*, a punk henchman of Jirocho of Shimizu, the legendary chivalrous yakuza. This role was previously played by famous comedians such as Enomoto Ken'ichi, Morishige Hisaya and Frankie Sakai, but also a young Katsu Shintarō and Tōei's Nakamura Kinnosuke. Advertised as “a dream burlesque,” the film is an action comedy that revolves around Hibari's adventures. As I mentioned earlier, the tale of *Hibari's Ishimatsu* takes the form of a story-within-a-story. The frame story takes place in a scenic tea field where tea-harvesting girls beg Hibari's character (also a tea-harvesting girl) to tell the story of Mori no Ishimatsu. Throughout the film, an intimacy between Hibari's character Ishimatsu, and Sanji, the character of her co-star – Satomi Kotarō – is hinted at, but it is in Ishimatsu's dream sequence that we find its most emphatic articulation.

Ishimatsu falls asleep on the deck of a ship. In his dream, he becomes the main character of the famous Japanese folktale “Urashima Tarō,” about a fisherman Tarō who rescues a turtle and is rewarded with a visit to an undersea dragon palace. In the original folktale, a beautiful princess welcomes Tarō to the palace and entertains him with various types of performances and amusements. Upon his return to land, the princess gives him a small box and tells him not to open it. After learning that many years have passed on the land during his short stay at the undersea palace, and that there is no trace of him left in that world, Taro opens the box. Mysterious smoke comes out and turns him into an old man. In Ishimatsu's dream, the blind girl

whom he saved outside the dream appears as the princess. She presents him with a box, too, but the smoke turns him into a beautiful, young samurai, and cures his left eye, instead of turning him into an old man. Instead of treating Tarō to entertainment, as happens in the tale, Ishimatsu/Hibari treats the film audience with a musical.

Fading out to an elaborate musical set with a gigantic bivalve shellfish on the right and a mammoth starfish on the left, the film opens up yet another dimension of diegesis. Ishimatsu/Hibari appears on top of a mounted stairway built in the very back of the deep stage. In the foreground, you see female dancers form a coral with their legs in red tights spread in the manner of the Tiller Girls. (fig. 2.11.) The camera slowly moves forward as Ishimatsu/Hibari descends the stairs, singing with orchestral music in her own natural voice rather than Ishimatsu's thick voice. S/he gracefully winds through the "coral" girls towards the center of the stage. To the sweet trilling sound of harp, the pickpocket Sanji/Satomi Kotaro, also dressed as a beautiful young samurai, jumps into the frame. Surprised by his unexpected appearance, Ishimatsu asks Sanji why he is still around. Sanji answers, "I, too, wanted to come to the Dragon Palace." Ishimatsu nods at his answer, and says "Why don't you give it a shot (i.e. to singing)?" Sanji picks up the tune. Ishimatsu joins in. They perform a duet. (fig. 2.12.-13.)



Fig. 2.11. “Coral” legs in *Hibari’s Ishimatsu: The One-Eyed Avenger* (Sawashima Tadashi, 1960)



Fig. 2.12. Ishimatsu and Sanji’s duet in *Hibari’s Ishimatsu: The One-Eyed Avenger* (Sawashima Tadashi, 1960)



Fig. 2.13. Ishimatsu and Sanji's duet 2
in *Hibari's Ishimatsu: The One-Eyed Avenger* (Sawashima Tadashi, 1960)

This dream sequence seems to have little to no repercussions for the main narrative of the film. Though the sequence certainly invites a queer reading, a more superficial reading of the sequence may suffice to capture the ornamental character of romance that makes up the fabric of the film text but is not part of the film's narrative line. That does not mean this ornament is of no importance to the experience of the film. On the contrary, the film presents this musical moment as a bonus in an otherwise non-musical film, seeking to engage the audience in a sensual pleasure. The displaced romantic feeling highlights its significance without explaining it.

In *Tono-sama Yaji-Kita* (1960), the final episode of a popular mixed-genre film series following the adventures of two mischievous princes, romance is presented as the key element of human (*ningenrashii*) life. Loosely based on *Tokaidochu Hizakurige*, a comic picaresque travelogue of a middle-aged commoner, Yajirobei, and a young former male prostitute, Kitahachi, the film cast Nakamura Kinnosuke as Yaji and his younger brother Nakamura Katsuo

as Kita, and features other young Tōei stars, including Misora Hibari. In the film, Prince of Owari Domain Munenaga is played by Kinnosuke and Prince of Kishū Domain Yoshinao by Katsuo. Both princes refuse to become the 8th Shōgun. The two meet each other while on the way to Edo where the final decision will be made, and they decide to run away together (once again, as they have already done so in the past), or at least to enjoy their trip to Edo on their own. As in the previous episodes, they travel under the disguise of Yaji and Kita. Retainers of Echizen Domain are conspiring to make their own child prince the 8th Shōgun and plot to assassinate Munenaga and Yoshinao. Meanwhile, Munenaga and Yoshinao develop a liking for the girls they meet during their travel. The film features a Tashlinesque slapstick denouement, staging chases that involve Yaji-Kita, their retainers, the Echizen conspirators, and reporters/paparazzi who are racing to get a scoop on who will be the next Shōgun.

Many of the prince- and princess- series produced during this period present implausible, if not also impossible, romantic situations in which mischievous princes and princesses fall in love with their retainers or commoners. The films seem less concerned with the dramatization of the dilemmas of lovers separated by class, or to borrow Dyer's phrase, with making the dilemmas "seem to disappear," than with highlighting the character's appreciation and enjoyment of the experience of romance, among other kinds of experiences.

In *Tono-sama Yaji-Kita*, "*ningenrashii*" ("like real human") is the phrase Yaji-Kita recite in characterizing their travel. Away from responsibilities, duties, busy schedules, boring customs and formalities, they embark on a trip that has the sole purpose of providing leisure time.

Leisure was one of the key subjects of sociological studies in Japan in the late 1950s and the early 1960s. Yoshimi Shun'ya makes an interesting observation on the differences in attitude

towards leisure between small-factory workers and large-factory workers.¹⁷ Carefully studying the Ministry of Labor’s 1953 Survey, “Life of Working Class Families in Small Factories,” Yoshimi Shun’ya identifies a tendency among small-factory workers and their wives to spend more time on cultural activities than large-factory workers and their wives. According to the survey, while small-factory workers worked for longer hours than large-factory workers, and hence had less time for leisure during the week, they seem to have spent much more time on cultural activities than large-factory workers during the weekend, that is, when they actually had a chance. It was also reported that the wives of small-factory workers generally had a richer social and cultural life than the wives of large-factory workers, and that they, too, spent more time on cultural activities. While noting that the actual nature of these cultural activities is unknown, Yoshimi argues that the difference between the two groups has to do with their different habitus. Large factory workers were bound by family values, while “more traditionally-minded” small factory workers and their wives treated the weekend as a once-in-a-week special “*hare*” (festival) day. Based on these findings, Yoshimi argues that a strong demand for cultural activities among working class people should factor in our understanding of the expansion of the entertainment industry in general, and of movie audiences in particular.

The patterns of moviegoing among young working class members of the society that Uryū observed in the 1950s, along with Yoshimi’s analysis of the relationship between labor time and leisure time in the life of working class families, seem to fit the description of the bored *and* distracted audience of Weimar Germany provided by Siegfried Kracauer.¹⁸ In his influential

¹⁷ Yoshimi, “Eigakan to iu sengo—henyō suru Tokyo no sakariba no naka de.”

¹⁸ Siegfried Kracauer, “Cult of Distraction,” “Boredom,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed. and trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 323-330, 331-334.

essay on boredom, Kracauer considered boredom as the quintessential experience of time in modern world. Kracauer identifies two kinds of boredom. One kind is what he calls the “vulgar boredom of daily drudgery.”¹⁹ He acknowledges that many people have very little time for leisure. They “expend all their energies” on making ends meet. To compensate for their dissatisfaction with their lives, and make their obligations more tolerable, Kracauer argues, they have invented “a work ethic that provides a moral veil for their occupation and at least affords them a certain moral satisfaction.”²⁰ In this case, boredom is just another name for dissatisfaction with life (e.g., lack of meaning). Such dissatisfaction—perhaps along with its moral veil—would “immediately disappear” if a better life opportunity arose. Kracauer contrasts such “vulgar boredom of daily drudgery” with real boredom, which is actually hard to experience. Even when one manages to find some free time, the world does not leave us alone. It tries to keep us busy with one thing or another so as to make sure that “one does not find oneself.” Kracauer argues that real boredom brings one in contact with one’s own alienation. In real boredom, one becomes present by finding oneself bored by all the distractions around one that do not allow one to exist, and at the same time, by finding oneself “boring for existing in it.” Kracauer’s diagnosis is marked with a certain optimism regarding the “vulgar boredom of daily drudgery” (e.g., a better job can make life more meaningful) on the one hand, and a pessimism towards “real boredom” (the world is full of traps, e.g., entertainment) on the other hand.

At first, the type of boredom displayed in *Tono-sama Yaji-Kita* seems radically alien to the ordinary life of contemporary audience members, many of whom lacked the resources needed to get around to being bored. The film does, however, show the dynamic relationship

¹⁹ Ibid., 331.

²⁰ Ibid.

between boredom and distraction that Kracauer analyzes. For the audience, the film projects the experience of boredom onto the problem of royalty, a position from which one can begin to imagine what it would be like to get bored and therefore seek relief from it through entertainment. The life of the two princes provides a revelatory example of “vulgar boredom” since their boredom has little to do with the “bare necessities” of life and rather pertains to a more abstract sense of dissatisfaction with one’s life. If the source of the optimism of “vulgar boredom” is the belief that the world can be better for me, the utopianism of the film lies in the presumption that the better “work” ethic of the two princes will mean a better society. But this better society is a society covered with a moral veil, as in the case of the work ethic that dispels vulgar boredom. At the end of the film, the two princes resolve to accept their responsibilities even though this will result in a hierarchical relationship between the two, as only one of them can become the Shōgun. They reach this resolution by cultivating their moral being through none other than entertainment.

The film is also a playful reflection on its own precarious status treading the line between boredom and distraction. The two princes decide to travel to Edo on an oxcart. “Finally like humans,” their plan is to go “leisurely, as slowly as possible” (“*nonbiri, narubeku yukkuri*”). Upon noticing that the princes are missing, their retainers set out to catch up with them and race at full speed on horseback with the non-diegetic music of William Tell Overture swelling in the background. They soon catch up with their masters, but without being aware of their masters’ plan, they storm along the road, pushing the driver and oxen off the road. The cart gets hooked up to the horses without the princes being aware of it. The processed shot (with rear projection)—reminiscent of the rollercoaster ride sequence at the end of *Janken musume* (*Janken Girls*, Toho, 1955)—shows the two princes inside the cart, being carried along on a headlong

dash. Despite their wish for a slow, leisurely travel, the film puts them into a more exciting ride and mobilizes them into a scene of entertainment. Another playful instance of such reflexivity occurs when the conspirators finally find Munenaga and Yoshinao and try to attack them. Complaining that “they have no time today” Munenaga and Yoshinao decide to counter their attack by playing their “wild card” – fast-forwarding the film!

The highlight of their adventure are the sweet romances they develop with a reporter and a peddler girl selling *yakiimo* (roasted sweet potatoes). Their class differences could easily become an obstacle for the film to further dramatize, but such conflict is avoided when the film does not develop these romances into full-fledged romantic relationships. The film instead focuses on the appreciation of romantic feelings.

Yae, the peddler girl, initiates Kita into this kind of appreciation by giving him a comical aesthetic education. In one scene, Kita is shown walking along with Yae over a bridge at night, practicing the *yakiimo* peddler’s chant. The aesthetic lesson on romance given here concerns getting the tune right. Yae corrects his high-pitched and upbeat chant by demonstrating it herself. She is not in anyway a better singer than Kita, but her chant registers the familiar melancholic melody of the *yakiimo* chant in a way that feels correct. Kita praises her voice, comparing it to *yakiimo*. This nonsensical commentary on her voice does more than shift the sensorial register, making it more corporeal: the ability to appreciate her voice becomes a question of taste.

Though the film puts forward the importance of romantic feelings for one’s subjectivity and the growth of individuals, such feelings are often shared and appreciated communally. Music again plays a crucial role in producing and sharing such feelings. The popular male choral quartet Dark Ducks have no other role in the film than to stage such a musical experience for the two princes and the audience. The tone of the *mise-en-scene* of the scene is altered to reflect the

mood of the song, with falling yellow leaves adding a touch of autumn to a film whose season is otherwise unspecified. Synching between sound and image is quite off even by the standard of Japanese cinema from this period, and Dark Ducks' appearance might have been considered nothing more than a cameo appearance. At the same time, the film's emphasis on their diegetic presence and the way their performance becomes part of the film's world deserve some consideration. On the one hand, the musical moment maintains relative realism. Insofar as Dark Ducks's performance is motivated by the profession they are given in the film, they appear practicing one of their songs. On the other hand, the film exaggerates the importance of their performance—giving the sense that it must be listened to—by having another character trying to communicate with Dark Ducks' characters through gestures during their performance, as if to avoid disrupting the song. This emphasizes that this music is part of their shared world and will reach uninterrupted the ears of the two princes sitting by the window on the second floor. The scene ends with the princes' commentary on the song (“what a sad tune!”) and them remembering the two girls. The scene in turn allows the audience to fantasize about their own favorite stars fantasizing romance with commoners like themselves. Through music and atmospheric mise-en-scene, the experience of romance is detached from individual subjects, and its affect gets amplified and diffused so that it becomes sharable. The audience learns what it feels like to be in love.

At the end of the film, Yaji/Munenaga reminds his friend Kita/Yoshinao who is now the 8th Tokugawa Shōgun, how wonderful it will be to be able to hear Yae's *yakiimo* chant every day from the castle, drawing an aesthetic conclusion to the film. The memory of her chant and taste of the sweet potato overshadows the moral of the story about their relationship with commoners/fans that Yaji points to: isn't it wonderful to be friends with a peddler girl?

Culmination of romance is not only always possible, but it might also better be forever suspended. Further development of the romantic relationship between Oshichi and Hyōma (Azuma Chiyonosuke) is not only hinted at throughout the detective series *Hibari torimonocho*, but it was also much anticipated by fans and was a topic spoken about by the actress and actor at a roundtable discussion.²¹ When the series ended with *Orizuru kago* (Kudo Eiichi) in 1960, they were still not together, and Oshichi nearly enters into an arranged marriage with someone from her own class (e.g., prince). The film ends with a shot of Oshichi, Hyōma and an orphan boy child whom Oshichi has promised to take good care of. The shot is framed like a family photo. A fake photo perhaps, but it is an image which one can fill with imagination.

²¹ Misora Hibari, Azuma Chiyonosuke, “Konbi taidan: nakayoshi kaigi,” dialogue between Misora Hibari and Azuma Chiyonosuke, *Kindai eiga* 3. No.16 (December 1959): 42-47.

Chapter 3

Engaging Aesthetics *Great Killing (Eiichi Kudō, 1964)*

It was involuntary. They sank my boat.
—John. F. Kennedy (1952)

I've never trusted neatness. Neatness is always the result of deliberate planning.
—*North by Northwest* (1959)

On November 20, 1963, President John F. Kennedy recorded a message to the people of Japan for the special occasion of the inauguration of the television broadcast satellite relay from the United States to Japan. This message was to be the centerpiece of two trans-Pacific television broadcast experiments with telecommunications satellite RELAY 1 that were planned for the early morning of November 23, 1963, Japan Standard Time (JST). The first experiment went off successfully, as images of the Californian Mojave Desert, where the transmitter was located, reached the eyes and ears of the Japanese public around 5:27 AM JST (3:27 PM EST on November 22, 1963). The relay lasted about twenty minutes. The second experiment was carried out according to schedule, from around 9 AM (JST). But contrary to the original plan, Kennedy's pre-recorded message was never relayed to the Japanese public through the satellite. Instead, what the satellite delivered *live* across the Pacific was the news of President Kennedy's assassination. Maeda Jirō, a Japanese correspondent at the New York branch of the Mainichi Broadcasting System, improvised over the phone a real-time narration to accompany the NBC news live coverage of the events as it appeared on American television, while occasionally adding reports that were handed to him as he spoke.¹

¹ *Purojekuto X chōsensha-tachi* (November, 30 2004) *Shōgeki no Kenedhī ansatsu Nichi-Bei eisei chūkei (Project X challengers. Kennedy's assassination: Japan-US satellite broadcast)* (Tokyo: NHK Studios, 2006)

The live satellite broadcast about the assassination of Kennedy is said to have had a profound impact on the scriptwriter of *Great Killing* Ikegami Kaneo, who was preparing a script for the film when the news of the assassination swept the globe.² In reaction to the newscast, he would wonder: “How can film compete with this!”³

The veracity of this anecdote may be called into question, but even so, the story itself is revelatory of the reconfiguration of the relations between historical consciousness, film practices, and political and spectatorial agency in the aftermath of the events. To put it succinctly—there will be time to develop this in detail below—the development of a new communications technology, a technology capable of bringing into domestic space “intensely disruptive crises” as they unfolded, and the fact that even in its second use, this new technology delivered no less than the assassination of the leader of one of the world’s most powerful nations, went in hand with, I will argue, a series of transformations in historical consciousness, and in the aesthetics and forms of spectatorial engagement of *jidageki*.

In this chapter, I propose to examine Kudō Eiichi’s *Great Killing* (*Daisatsujin*, 1964), the film whose script Ikegami was preparing at the time of the assassination newscast, as exemplar of these reconfigurations and shifts. To be clear, my goal is to look at the film not as Ikegami’s individual material (i.e. non verbal) response to the question that he reportedly asked, but as an instance of the way film making practices adjusted to rapidly changing forms of political consciousness, of historical and spectatorial experience, and of aesthetic forms and norms.

In the opening of the *Great Killing*, the black calligraphic title fills the first frame to the brim. The kinetic energy of the black ink bold brush strokes on a white surface, electrified by the

² Kasuga Taichi, *Akanyatsura: Tōei Kyoto satsueijo keppūroku* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 2013), 175.

³ Ibid.

medium of film, evokes the force of the calligrapher's body in the spectator whose eyes meet the image. The body of the inscription weighs in more heavily as the drama begins to unfold, harnessing the initial spectatorial encounter towards a specific rhetorical end. The way in which the intense visceral experience precedes or obfuscates recognition and understanding, the way in which it fuels spectatorial passion for the narrative action, foreshadows the aesthetics and ethos of the film.

At the level of diegesis, this visceral experience figures as violent action. Violence, and the 'value' and visceral depiction of violent action in *jidaigeki* of the period, will be the running thread and one of the central themes of this enquiry. But the violence *in* the action is not just the violence characteristic of *jidaigeki*, unavoidable in *jidaigeki* because of the narrative content of period dramas. It is not just the violence that is unavoidable in the narration of violent events. To say that the violence at issue here is visceral is to emphasize that the aspect of violence that I shall focus on is mainly in the form wherein those events are brought onto the spectatorial aesthetic environment (an environment whose dimensions are not only image, sound, and motion and temporality, but also, let me insist, historical and political consciousness). If violence was theatrically, colorfully displayed for the enjoyment of children and young women in the Tōei *jidaigeki* of the 1950s, the depiction of violence in the 1960s is unprecedentedly explicit and cruel.

Since the sensational success of Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (*Yojinbo*, 1961), *jidaigeki*'s realism became primarily associated with its depiction of violence. Kurosawa rejected various conventions of the entertainment *jidaigeki* that Tōei excelled in by deploying innovative techniques to bring the visceral experience of the fighting scenes ever closer to the spectator's

guts.⁴ In the mid 1960s, Kudō Eiichi, who had made his directorial debut in 1959 at Tōei, became the key figure in the emergence of a subgenre that was called *shūdan kōsō* (collective struggle) *jidaigeki* films in the 1960s, when the Japanese film industry went into steep decline. Perhaps for that reason, the studio was more open to ambitious young directors' experiments. Conceived independently from Tōei's entertainment repertoire, based on original scripts (like Ikegami Kaneo's script for *Great Killing*), the films of this subgenre share their aesthetic ambitions both with the auteuristic and carefully stylized *jidaigeki* of Kurosawa, and with the edgy and rough style and allegorical focus on the contemporary political climate that were characteristic of the avant-garde.

From the Fantasy of Transgression to the Reality of Struggle: an Aesthetic Shift in the *Jidaigeki* of the 1960s

In his analysis of Orson Welles's *A Touch of Evil*, Stephen Heath considers violence as fundamental to the system of narrative. According to him, narrative unfolds as a state of homogeneity is interrupted or violated: "the point of the action, the goal of its advance, is the recovery of homogeneity according to a movement of reconvergence-reinvestment which, precisely, realigns, contains the violence anew."⁵ In *jidaigeki*, injustice often makes a claim on a hero-protagonist character. Violence is ritualized around a moral universe that is partitioned into good and evil. The act of violence is codified in such a way that upon being performed by a hero-

⁴ See, for instance, Stephen Prince, "The Aesthetics of Slow Motion Violence in the Films of Sam Peckinpah," in *Screening Violence*, ed. Stephen Prince (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000): 175-201; Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "Seven Samurai" in *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 245.

⁵ Stephen Heath, "Film and System: Terms of Analysis Part II," *Screen* 16, no.2 (1975): 91.

protagonist, it is recognized by audience and characters alike as the means through which justice is restored.

In the critical reception of *jidaigeki*, this account of the form persisted. Tōei's popular entertainment *jidaigeki* excelled at deploying the codification of the narrative structure of its films at the service of spectacular performance by its in-house stars (a typical Tōei *jidaigeki* would have about one fighting scene of about a minute and a half roughly a third of the way through the film, , another two to three minutes of fighting in the middle, and a final showdown that lasts about four to five minutes at the end).⁶ In the words of Michael Raine, “If individual films flicker by like so many frames in the meta-text of popular cinema, the salient semiotic units become the series and transmedia celebrity.”⁷

As discussed in the previous chapter, this emphasis on the spectacular performance of stars and celebrity-driven film culture—entertainment for the sake of entertainment—at Tōei led to an exploratory and playful, if not exploitative and kitsch, sensory extravaganza.⁸ For instance, in a manner reminiscent of a child's birthday party, the fast-edit, festive mood of the showdown scene in Sawashima Tadashi's 1960 *Hibari's Ishimatsu: The One-Eyed Avenger* [*Hibari no Mori no Ishimatsu*], provides a nice visual contrast with the sense of harmony generated by the geometric display of one hundred women moving and singing in synch while harvesting tea

⁶ Tadashi Sawashima, *Sawashima Tadashi zen shigoto: bon yukkuri ochiyaine* (Tokyo: Wides Shuppan, 2013), 170. 「東映の時代劇は、最初三分の一すぎた時に約一分半ぐらいの立ち廻りがなきゃいけない。真ん中には二分から二分半の立ち廻りがなきゃいけない。最後には大立ち廻りが。これは四分から五分にわたるのがなきゃいけないっていう、ひとつの法則のようなものがあったんですよ。」

⁷ Michael Raine, “Youth, Body, and Subjectivity in the Japanese Cinema: 1955-60” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2002), 132.

⁸ See Izumo Marou, *Chanbara kuin* [*Chanbara queen*] (Tokyo: Pandora Films and Books, 2002).

leaves against the beautiful landscape of the field at the foot of Mt. Fuji at the beginning of the same film. The contrast is not between the artificial and the natural, but rather lies in different combinations of shapes, colors, rhythms, and tones. (fig. 3.1.-4., fig. 3.5.-8.) All of this colorfulness, all of the action, are background for the performance by Misora Hibari. And note that the intensity and dynamism of the spectacle defies the very concept of ‘background.’ If the star is not outshined by and does not fade into this spectacular background, it is because she absorbs the energy in the eyes of the spectator of this form of *jidaigeki*. In this way, the style of spectatorship that goes in hand with this star-driven form of *jidaigeki* requires the sensorial extravagance that characterizes it, and that might otherwise seem gratuitous or even distracting.



Fig. 3.1. *Hibari's Ishimatsu: The One-Eyed Avenger* (Sawashima Tadashi, 1960). Showdown takes place in a bowling center.



Fig. 3.5. *Hibari's Ishimatsu*. Mt. Fuji in the opening shot.



Fig. 3.2. *Hibari's Ishimatsu*. Showdown scene. 玉 = ball.



Fig. 3.6. *Hibari's Ishimatsu*. Opening scene drawing a visual analogy between the shape of the mountain and that of conical hats.



Fig. 3.3. *Hibari's Ishimatsu*. Showdown scene. More balls.



Fig. 3.7. *Hibari's Ishimatsu*. Hibari and Mt. Fuji – Hibari as Japan's second nature.



Fig. 3.4. *Hibari's Ishimatsu*. The end of the showdown scene. More balls.



Fig. 3.8. *Hibari's Ishimatsu*. Closing scene. Hibari standing and singing in the center of the field and the screen.

A notable change in the aesthetics of *jidaigeki* films occurred in the early 1960s. The films shifted from a lighter, pastel-colored, soft-dazed aesthetic geared towards popular audiences to a darker, violent, anarchic one that gave rise to a new subgenre called “*shōdan kōsō* (collective struggle) *jidaigeki*.”

The change was partly due to a demographic shift. As I showed in the previous chapter, Tōei’s popular entertainment *jidaigeki* enjoyed its commercial success in the late 1950s by extending its targeted audience to young children through their strong star system and ingenious approach to double bill programming. On the other hand, its overproduction and the oversaturation of exhibition venues are said to have prepared the way for its steep decline in the 1960s.⁹ With the rapid growth of television from around 1960 both in terms of its penetration rate and programming, cinema began losing its family audience.¹⁰ In the meantime, Nikkatsu action cinema quickly rose in popularity among young male audiences after the company resumed business in 1954.

One can hardly overemphasize the role Kurosawa Akira’s films played in the aesthetic shift in *jidaigeki*. Film scholar Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro, for instance, regards the box office success of *Yojimbo* (1961) as “the fatal blow to Tōei’s crumbling kingdom,” and “[t]he end of Tōei

⁹ See, for instance, Kitaura Hiroyuki, “Kōgyōsha tachi no chōsen,” in *Nihon eiga wa ikite iru [Japanese cinema is alive]*, vol.3 *Miru-hito, Tsukuru-hito, Kakeru-hito*, ed. Kiyoshi Kurosawa et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010):13-41. See also Furuta Hisaharu, “Geki eiga ‘kūhaku no 6-nen’ sono ichi” [*The Cinema and Broadcasting in Japan: The Six Years Feature Films Disappeared from the TV Screen* (part 1)], *Seijo Bungei* no. 197 (2006): 75-100.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the relationship between film companies and television in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Furuta Hisaharu. About women and children audience, please refer to UryūUryū Tadao’s research mentioned in Chapter 3.

jidaigeki was sealed in 1962 with the success of Kurosawa's *Sanjuro*.¹¹ Yoshimoto suggests that these films by Kurosawa precipitated Tōei's departure from its old formula and production of "shōdan kōsō (collective struggle) *jidaigeki*." Film scholar Kasuga Taichi also emphasizes the "Kurosawa shock," noting that *Sanjuro*'s *haikyū shūnyū* (box-office gross minus exhibition cost) was double that of Tōei's new year production *Tōkaidō no Tsumujikaze (Tokaido Vortex, Makino Masahiro, 1962)*, which featured its top young star Nakamura Kinnosuke.¹² The shots of gushing blood made *Sanjuro* famous, especially for its expressive use of special effects in the depiction of violence. It was "a revolution," Kasuga writes, that transformed *jidaigeki* constitutionally.¹³ New *jidaigeki* was marked by cruelty ("zankoku"), explicit graphic violence, and intensified swordfight scenes. Notable examples of such *jidaigeki* include: the award-winning *Seppuku (Harakiri, Kobayashi Masaki, Shochiku, 1962)*; *Zatōichi monogatari (The Tale of Zatoichi, Misumi Kenji, 1962)*; the film adapted from a popular TV series *Sanbiki no samurai (Three Outlaw Samurai, Gosha Hideo, Shochiku, 1964)*.¹⁴

Tōei turned to large-scale production in 1962, as Daiei had done a decade earlier. Kasuga's account emphasizes the competition between Nakamura Kinnosuke and Okawa Hashizo, the two ambitious young *jidaigeki* stars from kabuki families. They were the leading force in some of notable productions that involved inviting cutting-edge directors from outside Tōei. Oshima Nagisa's *jidaigeki*-inspired historical drama *Shirō Amakusa, the Christian Rebel (1962)* was one such example. It was Okawa's request that the film be directed by Oshima.

¹¹ Yoshimoto, 245.

¹² Kasuga, 152.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Misumi Kenji's earlier film series *Daibosatsu toge (Great Buddha Pass, Daiei, 1960)* already bears many of the characteristics mentioned here.

Okawa hoped to break away from his codified kabuki-style performance and pretty-boy image. The film certainly destabilized both the romanticized image of the teenage leader who is said to have led the famous 17th century rebellion in southwestern Japan and Okawa's star persona, but its anti-spectacle, ideational approach to what could have been a perfect epic *jidaigeki* proved unpopular with the audience. Nakamura Kinnosuke followed with *Bushido zankoku monogatari* (*Bushido, Samurai Saga*, Imai Tadashi, 1963) and *Adauchi (Revenge)*, Imai Tadashi, 1964). Okawa then produced *Bakumatsu zankoku monogatari (Cruel Story of Bakumatsu)*, 1964) with Tōei's up-and-coming director Kato Tai. In addition to the above-mentioned characteristics of new *jidaigeki*, these works had one feature in common: a "revisionist" approach to *jidaigeki*'s theme or its codified, if not idealized, treatment of historical incidents. This revisionist approach bore a strong allegorical overtone.

When the star system became less effective in producing financial stability, Tōei adopted a project-based approach to film production. Watanabe Tatsuhito, director of the department of screenwriting in the studio's Tokyo head office, was sent to Kyoto to rebuild the *jidaigeki* in 1963. As the deputy director of the planning department in Kyoto, he helped train a number of young producers with his "*shōdan kōsō* (collective struggle) *jidaigeki*" project, among others.¹⁵

Despite these various efforts to give new life to *jidaigeki*, the widely-accepted view is that the form's decline was irretrievable, and at Tōei *jidaigeki* was soon replaced by yakuza films that proved popular among the young male audience. Nonetheless, the nature of the shift was neither smooth nor homogeneous. In his interview with film director and critic "Dirty" Kudō (Kudō Koichi), Kudō Eiichi emphasizes that Tōei's search for new directions at the time was quite heterogeneous and exploratory in practice.

¹⁵ Tatsuhito Watanabe, *Watashi no Tōei 30-nen [My Thirty Years at Tōei]*, Private collection.

A demographic shift in audience, the growth of television, a market oversaturated with *jidaigeki*, the influence of Kurosawa's aesthetic innovations—all these factors no doubt played an important role in the notable shift in *jidaigeki* in the 1960s. Without meaning to dispute or deny their importance, I want to draw attention to, highlight, and account for another important dimension that is central to the *jidaigeki* of this period, one that is indissociable from, but also irreducible to, the aforementioned aesthetic shift from the spectacular, playful depictions of fantasies of hierarchical mobility, to the darker, more visceral depictions of violence that were perceived as more realistic: historical consciousness. This aesthetic shift was bound up with, and expressive of, a shift in the kind of experience of history, relation to history and conception of history that is one of the constitutive dimensions of the aesthetic environment within which the experience of period film unfolds. To put it differently: if there is a space within which aesthetic experience takes place, my goal is to underscore the importance of (and address the neglect of) the fact that *historical consciousness* is one of the dimensions of the space within which the period films that are *jidaigeki* unfold. Once we enlarge and restructure our conception of aesthetic space by bringing this dimension into view, other aspects of the shift from the 1950s to the 1960s fall into place.

The Irruption of History into the Present and the Reconfiguration of Historical Experience

As I mentioned in the introduction, on November 20, 1963, President Kennedy recorded a message that, as a result of the assassination, would never be transmitted to Japan. The event is noteworthy for a number of reasons. First, the contents of the recording bear an uncanny resemblance to the early synch sound newsreels featuring “talking celebrities,” to borrow Holly Rogers's words, such as Benito Mussolini's message on Fox Movietone expressing feelings of friendship for the American nation, or George Bernard Shaw's humorous mimicry of Mussolini

in his first talkie appearance in the United States. In the first of these two cases, the stationary camera captures the Italian dictator emerging, as New York Times movie critic Mordaunt Hall mockingly writes, “from his palatial domain in Rome with the tread of a cavalry officer and the bearing of a Napoleon.”¹⁶ In the second case, a similar long shot shows Shaw “issu[ing] forth from an English bush...wearing a Northfork jacket and knee breeches.”¹⁷ The comic effect of the latter is achieved by the cinematography reenacting the pretentious long-take of the Mussolini newsreel, while subverting its intended effect. Against their respective backgrounds, Mussolini and Shaw directly address the camera and speak of a new kind of relationship made possible by the new medium, in both cases addressing the people of America. Shaw’s playful performance and speech reflect the possibilities and limitations of the medium, thereby undermining Mussolini’s rhetoric of uninterrupted communication and mutual understanding. Like these early sound newsreels of celebrities, the beginning segment of Kennedy’s message to Japan takes the form of a shot that emphasizes the context from which he speaks. A long shot captures Kennedy outside and to the left of the main facade of the White House. The camera zooms in, as he starts walking along the facade to the right and down the steps towards the microphone stands that are in front of the main entrance. It continues to zoom in to a full and then medium shot as he delivers his speech. In his message, Kennedy blurs the cause-and-effect relationship between the new satellite communication technology and a new relationship between the U.S. and Japan. On the one hand, he emphasizes that this trans-Atlantic satellite television broadcast is a product and part of a larger, collective, and deliberate efforts on all fronts—diplomatic, scientific, economic,

¹⁶ Mordaunt Hall, “Movie Review,” New York Times, June 26, 1928, accessed June 10, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E06E3DE153CE73ABC4E51DFB0668383639EDE>

¹⁷ Ibid.

and cultural—to strengthen the ties between Japan and the U. S. On the other hand, he attempts to communicate a sense of urgency in his diagnosis of the present in light of the recent technological developments that made it possible to “speak simultaneously across the Pacific, which has appeared to many as a barrier rather than as a bridge.” Throughout, he implies that the importance of establishing “the most intimate relations between Japan and the United States, between Japan and the United States and other countries of the world” is an inevitable consequence of our world shrinking.¹⁸ [Cuba missile, nuclear war].

The idea of a new medium at once making possible and rendering necessary a new type of relation runs through all three recordings. But contrary to the formality and gravity of Mussolini’s speech, and the hilarity and lightness with which Bernard Shaw mocks it, the

¹⁸ Kennedy’s pre-recorded message is transcribed below:

“Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me a good deal of pleasure, through this first television transmission of the orbiting satellite relay, to extend a very warm greeting to the people of Japan.

That we’re able to speak simultaneously across the Pacific, which has appeared to many as a barrier rather than as a bridge, indicates how shrinking our world is and how important it is that we establish the most intimate relations between Japan and the United States, between Japan and the United States and other countries of the world.

We’ve been attempting in recent months in recent years to make those ties more intimate. We met last may in Japan to discuss how our scientific communities could work more closely together. We met here in Washington with some of your leading scholars to discuss how we could have a greater understanding of our cultural traditions. There in Japan, here in the United States. And now at this time they’re meeting in Japan to take [??] part in the economic study of trade and economic progress, a group of cabinet officers from the United States who are returning a visit of your cabinet officers who came here to the White House a year ago.

In all these ways we’re working to strengthen the ties of friendship between Japan and the United States, ties of understanding. And I hope this quick communication by satellite, many thousands of miles away from us all, will be a means of making our people live more closely together bringing peace to them.

To the people of japan I send the best wishes of the united states for happiness for prosperity and for peace.” Accessed June 10, 2016, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Search.aspx?nav=N:4294926999>

emphasis in Kennedy's variation lies in the need to consolidate intimate and close relations that are already growing between the United States and Japan.

Needless to say, this could generate a certain sense of paradox. The intimacy in relations between Japan and the United States that Kennedy's speech calls for is an unmistakably politically motivated and instrumental one. After all, the satellite communications system itself was a product of the Cold War space race, and Japan was the United States' vital ally in the Pacific. While those political motives remain unspoken, the diplomatic and strategic character of the relationship that Kennedy calls for, and the geopolitical situation and respective positions the two countries occupy, would render a genuinely intimate relationship unattainable. The tension between the content of the speech and its context and form is most clearly manifested by the fact that what was a carefully choreographed pre-recorded message is rendered as a live heart-to-heart call for cooperation, for in watching the message, one may even wonder whether the rigid posture and nervous gestures of the Kennedy, who somewhat amateurishly lifts his right arm slightly only to bring it back to his side again a number of times—are not part of the deliberate effort to reinforce the sense of frankness, openness, and immediacy. How plausible is it, after all, that the by-then already well-seasoned president who had managed the Cuban missile crisis would have been uneasy recording a message to one of its allies?

But that implicit tension, the unspoken context, and the distinctive quality of the medium, are perhaps what would have rendered the message all the more effective. For there is a certain degree of pretense in the invocation of intimacy, it is the kind of pretense that one could expect the sense of complicity of a well-disposed ally—and of a population for whom the Kennedys were celebrities—to turn a blind eye to. Complicity, therefore, in entertaining the possibility of such intimacy, in the desire for the close friendship to work. And as I mentioned above, we

cannot neglect the distinctive qualities of the medium: live television. In this case it matters less that the message would have been pre-recorded, that only its transmission was live, than that its audience would have taken it to be live: thus the importance of making it feel live, of making the president's speech seem a bit tentative, a bit improvised. But it matters also that the message would be delivered from the president to the family, from a presidential but also domestic setting—it could have easily been, but was not, recorded from an office—to a domestic setting. From household to household. Global politics and political celebrities of historical stature were entering into domestic space, and were doing so not in the form of spectacularly staged narratives or carefully produced reports, but in the form of an improvised and open hearted address transmitted from domestic setting to domestic setting.

But as I mentioned in the introduction, the pre-recorded message was not transmitted through the TELSTAR 1 satellite or broadcast on Japanese television. What was relayed through the satellite instead was the NBC news live coverage of the aftermath of the assassination (making it the first simultaneous trans-Pacific broadcast), with commentary in Japanese by Maeda Jirō, the New York correspondent of the Mainichi Broadcasting System.

Interestingly, it is reported that the Japanese audience was initially surprised to hear that the commentary that accompanied the images was in Japanese.¹⁹ As if to confirm this, just as in the case of the plan to transmit a pre-recorded message with an improvised feel to it, what was important for the reception of the live transpacific broadcast was more *that it felt like* an experience of immediate access to ongoing distant events than *its being* an experience of actually ongoing events. Equally interestingly, those who reported surprise upon hearing a Japanese voice commenting on the images did not express any surprise at the fact that the images that were

¹⁹ Source was the above-mentioned TV show with the people involved in the broadcast (producers, etc.)

being displayed, the NBC news coverage shown during the brief period of the satellite relay (17 minutes), consisted of an studio-produced retrospective of the “life of the late President John F. Kennedy,”²⁰ largely consisting of recordings of important events in his life such as his inaugural address. What seemed essential for the experience of a “live” transmission was that it felt like it provided instant access to distant events. Even if the event being accessed was what was being displayed on the television sets across the houses of the United States on the occasion of the assassination, and even if what was being displayed were images of past events.

That initial surprise over the fact that the transmission was in Japanese quickly gave way, however to a realization of the scale and gravity of the events. In other words, it is clear that the very first simultaneous public broadcast was experienced as a violent disruption. The voice and improvised narration of the correspondent, although in Japanese, as well as the political context, lent the montage of the otherwise opaque images a sense of urgency and contingency, foregrounding the link between the past events they displayed and the reason for their being displayed in the present on TV sets across the United States and Japan, foregrounding the existence of the transmission in real time (unfolding).²¹

It was these powerful features of the transmission that made Ikegami Kaneo wonder how film might be able to compete with the broadcast. The broadcast was, first of all, the intersection of two major historical events: a major breakthrough in communications technology, and the magnicide. Second, there was the feeling of immediacy or proximity of these events that

²⁰ According to the content of the second ‘TV Demonstration’ was the “Record, life of the late President John F. Kennedy, simultaneously broadcast in USA and Japan.” See *Final Report on the Relay I Program*, prepared by Goddard Space Flight Center, Greenbelt, Maryland (Washington, D.C.: NASA, Scientific and Technical Information Division, 1965): 663.

²¹ *Ibid.*

characterized this experience. Here, it is important that, as I have been insisting, these feelings of immediacy were not themselves immediate; they were mediated by the awareness of the historical scale of the events in question, of their geographical distant location, and of the conditions of production and transmission of the message: it was important that the transmission feel live. Third, the medium itself, television, brought this experience into the domestic sett. Taken together, these factors afforded an unprecedented form of historical experience. Unlike the television newscasts transmitted since the first television broadcast in 1953, that these transmissions were *live* meant that they were not received as reports of events and crises that had already taken place, and had already more or less been resolved or at least stabilized. What the live transmission delivered was history as it unfolds, before it is curated within the walls of the studio, before its roughness is evened out on the historian's work desk. In other words, the broadcast, with its juxtaposition of the studio-produced images of the life of the late President Kennedy that were simultaneously broadcast across the Pacific, and the live Japanese commentary on the unfolding reports about the assassination, revealed to its viewers in a crystalized image the two complementary faces of history: the 'neat,' stylized and meticulous history of events that have receded into the past and are only recoverable through deliberate craft, and the chaotic presentness of history as it unfolds, as well as the improvised form of engagement that it renders unavoidable. And if this is what the transmission delivered, the new form of historical experience that it afforded, and that its reception required, was the experience of the presentness of history, of the roughness, chaotic and improvised character of the historical present, the experience of the chaotic, uneven liminal space that fails to cleanly separate the neat historical past of historians and storytellers from the fragile optimistic promises of peace and stability that they project into a future that is in fact open-ended and as such, ultimately unstable.

And it is perhaps not too far-fetched to suggest that, because the images were channeled through a live television broadcast directly into the private context of the household, the experience of the irruption of this form of historical consciousness into the intimacy of domestic space seemed all the more violent.

The question attributed to Ikegami in reaction to the broadcast—how can film compete with this?—is thus to be understood not as the question of an entertainer, asking himself how to captivate and induce an experience comparable to the experience of the broadcast, but as the question of how a film whose subject-matter is period drama can adapt to and respond to the emergence, through the development of new communications technologies, of a new historical consciousness, and of a corresponding new form of historical experience.

The response materialized in the *jidaigeki* of the 1960s, was elegant and simple: project the roughness and violence of the unfolding of history onto the historical past, reconfigure the aesthetics of violence so as to cause the spectator to experience the pervasive sense of haphazarness of unfolding history in its full-force, a force that is not wielded by individuals and shaped by individual or collective designs, but which is impersonal and sometimes carries over, sometimes bends, and sometimes break-down individual wills to which it is indifferent.²²

Great Killing (1964)

1. The Opening Sequence: Spaces, violence and engagements

Unmistakably modernist, reminiscent of 1920s and 30s constructivist photography, the visual narration of the opening sequence that follows the calligraphic title shot does more than express the political system of 17th century Edo Japan through the power of form. The first

²² This is not, as I mentioned, Ikegami's own response, but rather the general 'response' of *jidaigeki* to changes in conditions of reception.

diegetic image of the film seems a pure exercise in film composition. The wall of the castle and a narrow moat that runs parallel to it recede diagonally into a vanishing point, slightly below and to the right of center; the converging lines of wall, and the play between the different shades visible on the surfaces and in the gap where a lighter grey sky can be seen create a geometrical shape, a heavy and somewhat sharp vortex of sorts. The stone wall standing on the right side of the screen sharpens the image cast in mist by adding an extra layer of black. (fig. 3.9.)



Fig. 3.9. Opening. *Great Killing* (Kudō Eiichi, 1964).

Against the backdrop of the sound of rain, which has gradually replaced the music of the title shot, a voice-over narration informs us of the agony of the farmers due to the regime's oppressive taxation and famine and of the tragic outcome of their recent revolt. In this way, the film sets out to explore the space of possibility for action and change that lies in-between the oppressor (the regime) and the oppressed (nameless farmers).

The second shot is an instance of extreme framing. As the continuing narration explains, the Junior Elder Lord Hotta Bicchu no kami is or has been interrogated on suspicion of conspiracy inside the conference hall located right outside Edo Castle. He appears kneeling in

the left third of the frame, facing right in perfect stillness through the twelve second duration of the shot. Though much more simple in terms of composition than the first shot, this one boldly leaves empty the two thirds of the screen where Lord Hotta's gaze is directed. The figure of authority that he is facing or has faced is left out of the wide CinemaScope frame, letting the force of his power be felt, to borrow Jacques Rivette's phrase, in "the beauty of the void," his absence the sign of his omnipresence.²³ The low position of the camera, set below the floor on which Lord Hotta is kneeling, further emphasizes the horizontality of the screen space.

Combining recessive staging with edge-to-edge framing, the next shot provides a first visual display of the binding force of hierarchical power. We see the same room, at the same time, Lord Hotta in the same position, always in perfect stillness. But this time we see only an image of Lord Hotta's back, in the well-lit center of the frame of a long shot, and consequently occupying considerably less of the screen surface than his image did in the previous shot. This reduction of his size is emphasized by the two kneeling samurais facing one another in the foreground, positioned at opposite edges of the image, occupying the whole vertical axis of the screen. Evoking the ornamental statues guarding ancient gateways, the staging of the shot makes it clear that these are guards. The ninety degree shift in the direction of this shot relative to the previous one also reveals that beyond the empty space where Hotta was gazing lay only the empty wall that we now see in front of him. Because of his position at the center of the screen, the lines of the wooden planks on the floor, the beams that run along the walls and ceiling, the direction of the faces and bodies of the guards all converge toward Lord Hotta. But what is most striking in the shot is that throughout this seventeen-second, single-shot sequence consisting, the

²³ Jacques Rivette, "The Age of metteurs en scène," *Cahiers du cinema*, no. 31 (January 1954); reprinted in Jim Hillier, ed., *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 279.

characters all remain motionless. All the action lies in their stillness, also that everything is coded in the composition of the shot. If Lord Hotta, who is not physically bound and who, as shown in the previous shot, is still wearing a sword on his waist, can be held in perfect stillness by two low ranking officers, it is because he is bound by the very hierarchy that he is suspected of conspiring against; the very same hierarchy that vests the lower ranking officers with the power to suppress his life; the same hierarchical structure whose lines now converge on him and compel him to accept that even if he is not physically bound, any action he might attempt to carry out would be futile.

In the following shot, power is again asserted through the transgression of the frame. Inspector General²⁴ (Ometsuke) Hōjō Awano kami walks from the center of the screen towards his assistant (rank unspecified), who is in the foreground with his back to the viewer and at a lower level in the diegetic space. The camera, also set low, captures Inspector General Hōjō at the center of the frame, his torso disappearing from the frame as he further advances straight toward the camera's viewpoint. When sufficiently close he halts and lets a document to the floor for his assistant to pick up, presumably an order. In translating the movement of Hojo into the two dimensions of the vertical axis of the screen, this ingenious use of the widescreen exaggerates his height. The film form thus emphasizes the hierarchical relationships that exist here. Hojo dismissively drops the order in front of his assistant. The pictorial order harnesses the non-reversible law of gravity to translate it into an image of the force of power that exists within an institutionalized hierarchy.

The subsequent shot, a high view of a hall where squads are assembled to receive an order from the General's assistant, goes further in pictorial abstraction. The view of the hall is

²⁴ *Wakadoshiyori* – the officials who supervised samurai below the rank of Daimyo.

split horizontally by a supporting wooden beam that cuts across the frame. Two additional supporting beams running from the bottom corners of the screen to about one-fifth of the way down from the top of their respective sides, as well as two wooden columns that support the beams at their intersection, add complexity to the resulting geometric sectioning of the frame. The wooden beams are turned into bold strokes, black bands stretching across the screen sectioning the space below and accentuating the image's abstract composition.

The area of the hall that remains visible in the upper half of the screen is filled by an assembly of squads, their members seated in narrowly and evenly spaced rows and columns, facing towards the area of the hall located in the bottom partition of the screen. The area visible in the bottom is empty except for two squad leaders who can be seen seated just below the horizontal wooden beam and who are also facing the empty remainder of the hall. At the beginning of the sequence, General Hojo's assistant enters the frame from the left and halts at the center, coming face to face with the squad members and leaders. (fig. 3.10.)



Fig. 3.10. An assembly of squads. *Great Killing* (Kudō Eiichi, 1964).

The perspectival effect created by the unusually acute camera angle, the geometrical partitioning of the space through the supporting beams and columns, and the disposition of

characters in diegetic space, make it so that the squad members in the top partition form a pyramid, while the squad leaders and the General's assistant once he has taken position at the center, form an inverted pyramid in the bottom partition. Everyone, with the exception of the General's assistant, is facing downwards. The authority of his gaze supports all of the other characters' expectant gazes. The disposition of gazes and the difference in mass at the top and bottom of the screen renders this otherwise static image intensely dynamic: the visual imbalance is brought into equilibrium through the hierarchical imbalance. The visual inversion of the hierarchical order, with subordinates at the top and authority at the bottom, is thus used to emphasize the difference in status and power between the elements of that hierarchy. The sectioning of the screen through the wooden slabs might serve as a reminder that such differences in power are not independent from the hierarchical structure that supports them, that the fragile equilibrium achieved between effective mass and hierarchical force is largely dependent on the ritualization of the space that serves as a stage for the exercise of hierarchical power.

As we hear the General's assistant command the squads to track down, capture and bring in for interrogation--or should they resist, to kill "with impunity"--the people whose names he proceeds to read, the credit titles begin. As background for the credit titles, we see images of the manhunt taking place in the rainy and muddy streets of the town, and the sound of the General assistant's voice as he continues to read the names on the list, as well as the sound of the flute that also accompanied the opening title-shot. The images of the manhunt are somewhat chaotic. The camera tends to be positioned at a low level, just below the waist of a character in the foreground, hand held [???] but below shoulder level, in the space between the floor and the supporting beams of a house. The clashes between characters are messy; rather than precise

moves designed to convey martial expertise, we see groups of attackers and victims falling into the mud, clumsily struggling to disentangle themselves from the confusion of bodies, either to slay and capture or to flee. In the last segment of this sequence, we see the twisted grimaces of a conspirator who screams in agony as he is wounded.

There is a striking contrast between these images and the calm but forceful and severe voice of the General's assistant and the slow and simple sustained wooden sound of the flute, which occasionally breaks into a brief silence after high pitch notes. Already we begin to sense, in this juxtaposition of image and sound, in the contrast between, on the one hand, the dry and heavy wooden stillness of the ritualized and carefully staged indoor spaces where the voice of power *calmly issues its commands*, and on the other hand, the wet and muddy streets where the chaotic face of the unrestrained violence of power at work is exposed, where the improvised and inevitably messy character of the struggles inherent to the exercise of power are in the open—in this juxtaposition of sound and image, and the ensuing stark contrast between the closed ritualized space where institutionalized power speaks, and the chaotic open space where power is exercised, the presence of the new form of historical consciousness that whose emergence went in hand with the transformation of *jidaigeki* in the 1960s. But before explaining this in some detail, I want to consider the following sequence of the film, the first after the credits, which we may regard as the last segment of the introduction.

After the credits, the film shifts its focus to Jinbo Heishiro, a newlywed young palace guard (*shoinban*), played by Tōei's young, handsome star Satomi Kōtarō. Jinbo is ostensibly leading a comfortable life with his wife in a quiet residential area. A long shot of his residence cuts to a shot inside the house, where a woman paces rapidly through a corridor towards the camera. In the next shot, we see her from the back as she opens a sliding door towards the right.

As the door opens, beyond her, we get a glimpse of Jinbo, who is now at the center of the screen. He appears almost naked, only a small towel covering his upper thighs. He is about to begin his bath, and the woman offers to scrub his back. He agrees. She quickly grabs a bowl and a brush nearby and starts washing his back skillfully. Satisfied, he tells her that this is his favorite thing when he is off duty. The viewer is reminded that this is part of their mundane and routine life. The flow of her action is interrupted when he teases her by commenting on the power of habituation (“*nare to wa osoroshii mono*”): “Only three months ago, you were afraid to even touch my back.” She blushes over his shoulder. He replies by a compliment, “You became good at it.” These words, through which we learn that they are a newlywed couple, suggest what has become habitual while foregrounding the erotic undercurrent of the scene for the viewer. The intimacy expressed is implicit but foregrounded in their conversation and interaction, and it is rendered even more erotic by the scopophilic framing of the camera. After the wife enters the bathroom and closes the sliding door, the camera moves towards the door and then climbs up in order to let us have a peek of the couple through the latticework and thus explore “the private and forbidden” that exists within the familiar domestic scene.

Suddenly, an off-screen sound is heard. The couple looks in the direction of the sound. In the next shot, we see a man storming into the house. He appears to be in a terrible state: disheveled, drenched in rain, losing composure. Upon finding Jinbo’s wife, who quickly recognizes him, he frantically asks for Jinbo. Shortly after that, Jinbo appears at the end of the corridor in the background, adjusting his clothes, while the man, his friend Nakajima, hides behind the corner at the other end of the corridor in the foreground. Surprised to find his friend in such a state, Jinbo walks towards him and inquires what is on the matter. Turning around the corner, Nakajima reels backward with his back against the sliding doors. Terror-stricken, he

seems to be barely able to speak. He apologizes and asks Jinbo to let him hide for a while, promising that he will explain later. The camera edges in him at the other end of the hallway. Sensing the urgency of the situation, Jinbo turns to his wife and asks her to check outside. She immediately steps outside the door through which Nakajima presumably entered the house. All of this is captured in two long-duration shots. There is a third cut between Nakajima and Jinbo towards the end of the sequence, but otherwise, the film relies on remarkably complex choreographic work by the camera to register the dynamic tension that is building up around the actions and interactions of these three characters. Our visual field is stretched out across two typically narrow household corridors that meet at a 90-degree angle through a recessive composition (in the case of corridor 1) as well as a lateral layout (in the case of corridor 2). The long, continuous shots allow the camera to react to the characters' subtle trembling, hesitation, fright, and desperation. The characters come in and out of focus and of the frame, generating a sense that the situation is almost beyond grasping in its totality.

The situation remains incomprehensible. Jinbo's wife Kayo goes outside to find out what Nakajima might be running away from, whereupon she gets violently dragged out and thrown to the ground by officials who are searching the neighborhood. She tries to go back inside but is pushed into a chaotic crowd of people out on the street, presumably her neighbors. A number of officials (the exact number remains unclear) break into the house. In the course of the raid, Jinbo is mercilessly and rather haphazardly drawn into action. Once inside the house, the officials quickly locate Nakajima. Jinbo tries to stop the assault so that he can receive an explanation from either or both sides, but the officers mistakenly jump to the conclusion that he too must be part of the conspiracy, the existence of which he is unaware

After slaying Nakajima, the officials capture Jinbo and drag him out into the street. Seeing her husband taken away, Kayo pushes her way through the crowd and the officers around her and runs after her husband.

Here *Great Killing* evokes the iconic imagery of Italian neorealism, in particular a scene from Rossellini's *Open City*: The pregnant Pina is shot to death by the Gestapo as she breaks away from a line of people and chases after the truck that is carrying away her fiancé Francesco, who was seized during a raid on their tenement building. Kayo extends her left arm towards Jinbo as she falls to the ground upon being slashed by an officer, in the same manner as Pina who extended hers towards Francesco upon being shot. Here, the reference to *Open City* in *The Great Killing* underscores the absence in the latter of what was essential in the former. As the unfolding of the narrative of the *Great Killing* makes clear, unlike the case of Pina and her fiancé, who are depicted as active participants in the Resistance, Jinbo the palace-guard and his wife Kana are not politically engaged. They lack any awareness of the political dimensions of the events into which they are drawn.

Three interrelated aspects of this sequence seem to me particularly worth of interest. The first is the introduction of a third type of space, the domestic space of intimacy with its own aesthetic, rules and dynamics, alongside what I have called the ritualized space from which power commands, and the chaotic space where it is exercised.²⁵ The second noteworthy aspect of the scene is the distinctive form of violence at work in it and the distinctive form in which it is

²⁵ This is the only glimpse that we get of this type of space in the whole film—although another of the important locations in the diegetic world is a distorted version of domestic space, the household of the disenchanting *bonne-vivant*—which after being ransacked in this scene, figures more as an idyllic space worth fighting for than as an actually accessible space.

displayed. The third is the distinctive way in which Jinbo is drawn into action in the scene and throughout the film. Allow me to discuss each of these in turn.

Like the political stage where power issues its commands, domestic space is indoors, but it lacks spaciousness: it consists of narrow corridors and small rooms and bathrooms rather than ample and sparsely furnished halls. Also by contrast to the space from which power issues its commands, domestic space lacks stillness—the first shot of Jinbo and Kayo’s house is, after all, of her quick steps as she rushes through the narrow corridor toward the bathroom. And yet, for all its lack of spaciousness and stillness, domestic space is all the more peaceful and unconstraining, the movement within it all the more fluid. Unrestrained by the formalities of political ceremony, characters move at ease, they speak tenderly and playfully. In the domestic space of intimacy, they are simultaneously at their most vulnerable and their safest. The sequence is not shot with static cameras, but rather with a handheld, or more precisely, with a static camera weighing fifty kilograms and carried by several crewmembers. The momentum of the apparatus adds to its movement a certain degree of stability and fluidity, if only for as long as it is focused on Kayo and Jinbo’s playful exchange; this sense disappears when it frantically attempts to navigate the struggle with the officers after they have come in.

The second noteworthy aspect of the scene is the distinctive form of violence that drives it formally and narratively. In the raid scene, violence is not restricted to physical acts but also involves, and perhaps is even more fundamentally rooted in, various forms of disruption: disruption of the quiet intimacy of domestic space by the chaotic messiness of the exercise of power on the streets; the destruction of the architectural space of the home environment itself; the elimination of the possibility of political insouciance. On a formal register, the “hand-held” camera not only records these disruptions but also the sensation of its own disoriented

movement. The heavy, the labor-intensive movement involved in what, as noted earlier, was in fact a fifty-kilogram camera used as a hand-held, registers the violence as formal and sensorial ruptures. The rupture between the fluidity of the slow camera work in the domestic sequence, and the abruptness of its faster movements as the raid takes place, causes the images to lose composure. The edges of the frame are only loosely fixed; the surface of the image is constantly blurred and obscured; and the camera pivots back and forth, moving irregularly forward, backwards, sideways. The result is a disorienting sensorial outburst that, makes it difficult to understand who is doing what to whom and where. It is through this sensorial rendering of the violence that is involved when one space with its own dynamics, style of movement, and form of sensory experience irrupts into another that the film targets its spectator, so that her disorienting intake of the images of the screen becomes an echo of Jinbo's own.

This brings us to the third aspect of the scene that I wanted to bring attention to, the distinctive way in which Jinbo is drawn into the action. He is not drawn into the action, as in the case of Pina and her fiancé, through a pre-existing political commitment that requires him to become engaged. On the contrary, under the circumstances, he does everything in his capacity to remain at the margins of action. He does not attempt to attack the officers. He first addresses them as they enter into the household, asking them what they are doing. A few moments later, after they have found and cornered Nakajima, after an officer has disentangled them and pushed aside Jinbo, who was being used as a human shield by his friend, Jinbo steps back in between the two officers and his friend. And at this point, upon hearing the officers' leader issuing a command to kill Nakajima on the grounds that he is resisting arrest, Jinbo, still unarmed, authoritatively commands the officers to put down their drawn swords. The officers, indifferent to his command, attack him with their swords. He manages to avoid the attacks and reaches out

for his own sword, adopting a defensive stance that indicates that he is ready to draw. It is at this point that the leader says that Jinbo must also be a conspirator and orders his arrest.

Throughout the scene, Jinbo always takes the path of least resistance while attempting to avoid compromising his values or what he takes to be his status. He demands an explanation from the officials, he commands them to put down their swords, he reaches for his sword after he has been attacked but does not draw. Yet in spite of his best efforts, he is inevitably drawn into the violence once domestic space has been overtaken and transformed into a theater of political struggle. Where violence is pervasive, its urgency renders engagement inevitable, making passive and impartial contemplation impossible. Thus Jinbo is mistaken for a conspirator, Jinbo's friend and his wife slain as he is taken away. He is helplessly and absurdly swept into the arena of political struggle in which he had no part due to the violent irruption of the space of power into the intimacy of domestic space.

This long opening sequence thus introduces the main themes of the film: the configuration and partition of spaces by power dynamics; the violence of the irruption of the space of political struggle into the intimacy of domestic space which reveals the fragility of the latter; the fragility of stability in moments of crises; and the sweeping force of that violence, which will render impartiality impossible even where the reasons for taking sides and choosing one course of action over another seem opaque. As we shall see in the next section, these themes are developed throughout the film and carried out in a formal, narrative and conceptual stream, ultimately displaying a history that is as haphazard and senseless as the present can seem to be, where the violence of the space of political struggle is pervasive and nobody is beyond its reach.

The Figures of Samurai and the Dialectics of Engagement

While the narrative of political engagement centers around Jinbo's decision to play a key role in the conspiracy—significantly, the same conspiracy that he had been wrongly accused of belonging to, a mistake that led to the death of his wife Kayo—the final sequence of the film is centered around another character, Asari.

As we shall see, Asari is in many ways like a mirror-image of Jinbo. The film dedicates two scenes to them alone, scenes that complement each other. The first one takes place the night after the raid. Asari offers shelter to Jinbo after he finds him wandering outside his house (i.e. Asari's) in the rain. The house, as we find in the first interior shot, is a gathering place for gamblers. Once inside, Asari asks his fellow gamblers to get dry clothes for Jinbo and offers him a few drinks. When night comes, Asari invites Jinbo to sleep in the same room as him. They enter the room in the midst of a conversation. Jinbo wants to turn himself in and explain what happened, while Asari insists that “a man like him” will be killed before he has a chance to explain himself and points out that Jinbo doesn't even have his sword. As he introduces himself, explaining that his wild life caused him to lose his position and that he lives off his cut from the gambling, he notices that Jinbo is looking at the sword on display. The sword, which will bind together the fates of Asari and Jinbo, is here foregrounded in another daring shot. Cutting two thirds into the frame from the left, its hilt obstructs the view of Jinbo's torso, whose figure occupies the center of the frame in a medium shot of the room, as well as the dark folds of Asari's kimono and hands, the only parts of his body that remain visible on the left of the frame after he has walked towards the sword. (fig. 3.11.) As he reaches the sword, Asari says: “And this thing, this is the one thing I haven't sold. It's a family heirloom, has been for generations. If I lose this, I might as well slit my stomach.”



Fig. 3.11. An heirloom sword. *Great Killing* (Kudō Eiichi, 1964).

Jinbo then explains who he is: a Shogunate bodyguard. As he goes on to explain that he is innocent, and is being chased by mistake, Asari tells him that he does not want to know anything. This is followed a few moments later by an explanation of why he does not want to hear anything, a brief manifesto of his way of life:

I don't care what you do. But you should always think before you act. Nowadays, the fastest way to succeed is to bribe your way through the ranks. And once you succeed, you get bribed. Sure, it's all a game of giving and taking... but it will eventually pay off. They all talk about loyalty... It sounds good on the surface, but who are you being loyal to? Great Elder Sakai is getting away with this [the manhunt] because the Shogunate clan are fools. It's not my style to remain loyal...to morons like that. "For the sake of society, and for the sake of the people." That's their most impressive slogan, but me, I want no part of it whatsoever. I just live and play using my own money. And I don't bother anyone. So I don't want anyone bothering me either.

Note the relation between Jinbo and Asari. They are both politically apathetic. They both seek comfort through isolation. But Jinbo's apathy is passive and unreflexive, while Asari's is active and reflexive: Jinbo is part of the establishment, and though a principled man, Asari's speech reveals the mismatch between his principles and the world he lives in. He is loyal to morons, and thus his loyalty only serves the scheme of the man responsible for the manhunt, the destruction of his home, and the death of his wife. Asari's apathy, by contrast, is deliberately

apathetic. Unlike Jinbo, he understands that there is no space left in the world for someone to live by the code of the samurai, so rather than go through the motions, serving the interests of the tyrants, he has given everything up to live on the margins, serving only himself. The spaces they inhabit are expressive of their respective attitudes, Jinbo's idyllic home the fragile fantasy that he carved out for himself to preserve the illusion of an honorable life, Asari's broken home, a run-down house turned into a gambler's den, the only appropriate setting for an outcast who understands that the world as it is holds no place for him.

And yet, two features of the scene indicate that Asari has no clearer understanding of his lifestyle than Jinbo. First, sheltering is not particularly apolitical nor particularly self-serving; it is not the best way to ensure that one is left alone. Second, of course, there is the strength of his attachment to the heirloom the sword that has been in the hands of his family for generations, an attachment strong enough that he might as well slit his stomach if he were to lose it. This reveals that his apathy is not the result of a purely hedonistic pragmatism, but rather is expressive of his commitment to a way of life and a system of values that can no longer find a place in the world. The very incongruity of the presence in a gambler's house of a valuable heirloom serves as an indication of the tension in Asari's own stance.

In this way Jinbo and Asari are both apathetic, both seeking to place themselves as bystanders in a context where there is no place for the samurai, and both are drawn into the political arena, albeit in opposite ways. Jinbo, whose apathy is passive and unreflexive, is drawn in by the violent irruption of the space of power into the intimate space of his home. Asari, whose apathy is active and reflexive, is drawn in by his residual but powerful attachment to the way of life that he understands is not possible in the world he lives in. Once drawn into political

space, Jinbo has the will to wield a sword but lacks a sword to wield, while Asari has the sword, but lacks the will.

Before discussing a complementary scene, a second exchange between Jinbo and Asari, let me highlight the claim with which Asari opens his speech: “I do not care what you do, but you should always think before you act.” This brief statement, seemingly innocuous, introduces, as I will argue, one of the central themes of the film itself (not merely of the narrative): that “you should always think before you act,” that action must issue from understanding.

The complementary scene (fig. 3.12.) takes place in the same room after Jinbo has borrowed Asari’s sword without permission and slain one of the leaders of the conspiracy for having attempted to save himself by revealing the details of the plot to the Inspector General. The exchange that ensues is rendered in two long-duration shots, both centered around the sword. The first is a low-angle shot that captures Jinbo as he enters the room and places sword back on its stand, recreating the image of the first exchange between them, the sword once more in the foreground, cutting two-thirds through the middle of the frame from left to right. During this time, Asari, whose figure occupies the center of the screen, imposingly looking down at Jinbo, who is also facing the camera’s point of view, says: “You, why did you kill someone? Alright, I won’t ask why, but I want you to leave. I’ll help defenseless people on the run, but murderers are too much trouble. I want to do nothing with them.” Upon hearing Asari’s words Jinbo pauses, slowly turns his back to the camera and walks towards and then past Asari’s right hand side. He begins to reply, with his back now to both Asari and the viewer. Asari listens, slightly turning his head in Jinbo’s direction. Upon realizing that Jinbo is about to describe his worldview, he looks bored and walks towards the sword. He sits down to its right, reaching the foreground of the frame in a medium close-up, ready to listen with an expression of boredom

that he struggles increasingly hard to sustain as it is interrupted by gestures of attention that indicate the grip of Jinbo's words over him.

Once settled in this position, there is a cut to a high-angle close up of Jinbo in which Asari can be seen off-focus in the background, occupying the right fourth of the screen, while the hilt of the sword is visible next to his face in the upper right corner. As Asari continues to speak, the camera slowly pans down, slightly pivots on its axis to the right, and shifts the focus to Asari. As the camera continues to move towards the ground, we see a small portion of Jinbo's kimono, which now occupies between a third and a half of the left side of the frame, and it rotates as Jinbo turns to face to the Asari. The camera reaches the ground, where it comes to a rest as Asari finishes his speech.



Fig. 3.12. Jinbo and Asari in *Great Killing* (Kudō Eiichi, 1964).



Fig. 3.12, continued.

Throughout the sequence, camera angles, camera movement, the movements of the characters as they stand and sit, as well as the shift in size of their images as they approach and move away from the camera's point of view, all contribute to a soft but powerful dynamism along the vertical axis. This is anchored by the sword that sits near the center of the frame on the

horizontal axis and accentuates the various shifts in Jinbo and Asari's relative positions, harmonizing with the dialectical shifts and struggles of the two complementary characters that Jinbo makes explicit through his speech:

Jinbo: I... killed someone for the first time. I wanted to unburden myself on someone like you... Now I have come to see that I have been fooling myself. Not about you... But about the world. "Don't bother anyone, and let no one bother you." Isn't that what you said? But do you know how much you bother others by your own inaction? Have you ever thought about that? People run into unexpected calamities because of politics. They lose their jobs for no reason... They lose their homes... They lose their wives and families. Such things are considered normal in this world. It's to be expected in a world where one man has absolute power. And the men who support this despotic world are samurai like me, who hold official positions, and samurai like you, who sulk over the world but do nothing about it. If this is the world that samurai have created, then a single samurai can change it. [After a long pause:] This sword is wasted on you. I'll put it to better use.

While Asari holds onto the way of life he has chosen, Jinbo comes to an understanding of the world he lives in and how his situation within it has changed. Remaining an innocent bystander is doubly impossible: impossible because there is no place to become a bystander beyond the all-encompassing space of political struggle, and because as a consequence, political apathy is a form of complicity, that regardless whether it is the passive and un-reflexive apathy of samurai who have settled into official positions like Jinbo, or samurai who, like Asari, sulk over a reality that they do understand but about which they are unwilling to do anything.

Within the film's narrative development, all the conditions for a heroic intervention seem in place; all the elements needed for the hero to restore justice through an act of violence seem to be neatly arranged. Jinbo, who walks away with the sword, now seems to have the will, the understanding and conviction, as well as the instrument required to restore justice. Asari, who is left speechless at the threshold of his run-down home cannot even bring himself to try to stop him. The sword that was wielded by Asari's ancestors will carve out the order and values that reigned in that past, and which they both long for, and restore them into the present.

And as the speech itself makes clear, if Jinbo has attained this position, it is in part because he heeded Asari's advice, to "think before you act," advice that is echoed by one of the leaders of the conspiracy, Miya, at a later stage in the film's dialectic of engagement: "If you only have one life to expend, then it would behoove you to think well before you act." The same words, the same advice, springing from the same assumption: one's political stance ought to issue from careful reflection and from an adequate understanding of the situation, but provided by people who are otherwise polar opposites. While Asari is actively and reflexively disengaged, Miya incarnates the ideal of revolutionary engagement pushed to its limits, and when she utters this advice, it is in order to prevent Jinbo from throwing his life away in a suicidal attempt to recover his wife's body from three officers that stand next to it, and to persuade him join the conspiracy instead. Thus Jinbo has moved, from disengaged and unreflexive collaboration to a semi-reflexive commitment to a personal vendetta, and finally to a reflexive commitment to restore the order of justice through his involvement in the conspiracy.

Visceral Engagement and the Driving Force of History

The intrigue unravels, and by the time of the plot to assassinate the Shōgun's successor Lord Tsunashige in order to thwart Sakai's plans to become the *de facto* ruler of the Shōgunate, the ranks of the conspirators have been reduced to a mere seven. The attempt is rendered in a thirteen-minute action sequence mostly shot in exteriors, and characterized, once again, by disorienting, wildly uneven movements of a heavy stationary camera used as a handheld, and by chaotically scrambled group actions that often make it impossible to distinguish conspirators from officials or to tell who is being wounded by whom. The conspirators fail and are slain. In one of the final segments of the sequence, Jinbo is fatally wounded and soon thereafter slain when Asari's sword breaks as he is trying to block an official's attack.

Although the conspirators fail, a few moments later their goal is achieved. Tsunashige is slain by none other than Asari. As Great Elder Lord Sakai and the Inspector General Hojo apologize to Lord Kofu for the unfortunate incident and persuade him to leave the area immediately—the Yoshiwahara pleasure district—Asari is seen amidst a crowd in the vicinity, scanning his surroundings next to a ditch. A group of officials dump two dead bodies a few steps away from him, piling one on top of the other. Asari comes closer, and his body jerks back as he recognizes the body on top as Jinbo’s corpse. “Jinbo,” he mutters in surprise.

There is a cut from Asari’s expression to a point-of-view shot as he scans the corpse. This is accompanied by a silence that would be perfect if not for the then technologically uneliminable dusty noise of analogue recording and playback. In other words, the distinctiveness of the silence in this scene consists of its minimum use of room tone. In order to understand the effect of this in spectatorial experience, it is helpful to recall the power of what Michel Chion calls *synchresis*: “the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time.”²⁶ The magic of *synchresis*—“[t]hat sound and image were heard and seen like a couple of perfectly matched dancers was a spectacle in itself”—is less appreciated today.²⁷ Indeed, what Chion tries to remind us of by speaking of the “audiovisual contract” is the fact that the audiovisual relationship in film is not natural, and that “visual and auditory perception are of much more disparate natures than one might think.”²⁸ Through the “audiovisual contract,” “the audio-viewer enters into [a symbolic contract], agreeing to think of sound and image as forming a single

²⁶ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 63.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

entity.”²⁹ Insofar as they meet certain conditions, sound and image let each other “contaminate and project” one another to form a single entity.³⁰ This is not less true of silence than of sound. Thus, as scholars have argued and demonstrated, silence is always relative in film. Lisa Coulthard notes that “mechanical sounds, visual images that construct a hearing with our eyes and even the noises of our own bodies all carry a certain acoustic presence even in so-called total silence.” Diegetic silence is an effect of signification, usually rendered through the selective reduction of certain background acoustic elements, or by the contrast with the sound previously heard or imagined, rather than by complete, extra-diegetic silence. Absolute silence is “a cinematic rarity.”³¹ Accordingly, when a moment of silence that approximates room tone is unexpected, when the transition to absolute, extra-diegetic silence is abrupt, or as brief as it is in the scene under consideration, rather than suggest diegetic silence, the moment generates a sense of disorientation, an experience akin to sensory deprivation.

In the moment of silence in *Great Killing*, that is, in the moment in which the audiovisual contract is momentarily suspended, the image starts flowing according to its own rhythm and starts vibrating as if it has recovered its temporal elasticity. A close-up of Jinbo’s head conveys his death as a visual impression rather than as a point in (narrative) time. Scanning over his body, the camera traces its fragmentary form-- a glittering streak of blood stain over his head or the

²⁹ Ibid., 216.

³⁰ Ibid., 9.

³¹ In her study of the ethics of listening in Michael Haneke’s films, Lisa Coulthard writes, “[Those] moments of silence (thematic or formal, relative or absolute) stress that one element of truly listening is to hear silence and to recognize that it is not silent at all” (Lisa Coulthard, “The Violence of Silence: The Provocation of Mutism in the Cinema of Michael Haneke,” *Studies in European Cinema* 9, no 2/3 (2013): 23). Following Michel Chion’s discussion of Dolby sound, Coulthard briefly considers the impact of total silence on the mode of listening and draws on its ethical implications. However, she does so without considering how it may affect the mode of viewing all together.

white leg of another corpse under his body. The camera stops over his right hand, which holds Asari's heirloom sword, its blade apparently broken off. A long shot shows Asari crouch down and wrench the sword out of Jinbo's hand. As Asari stands up, the camera jarringly moves towards him. He stares at the broken blade. A cut back to Jinbo's bare feet. Grey sand covering his body adds a grainy texture to the black-and-white image. The camera scans over the microrhythms on the surface of the image—a fly crawls over his feet, the tremor of a reflection on water.

The next shot shows Asari in profile, standing and looking down in the direction of Jinbo's body. As the camera moves slowly around his head to capture the expression on his face, a beam of light casts over his shoulder from behind. He closes his eyes.

The 95-second silence is broken by hysterical laughter exploding off-screen. No other sound is heard but that roaring laughter. Asari opens his eyes and lifts his gaze up and towards its source; Tsunashige and Sakai are seen passing through the gate, walking side by side and laughing hysterically. Tsunashige casts a glance over to the corpses by the river. The roar and screams of the earlier battle scene quickly fade in so that they loudly accompany the images that bring us back to Asari, looking at the two as he moves away from the bars. In an extreme close-up shot focused on his face, his bodily movement is visualized as a passage into the light. A quick cut back to Tsunashige and Sakai is followed by a quick montage of still images from the earlier battle scene, images of the fallen fighters, interspersed with still images of a laughing Tsunashige's face, and mouth. Taking place after the failure of the conspiracy, the scene reorganizes the sound and image of that failure into a different order.

Then we return to motion, a medium shot of Tsunashige passing by. Asari trembles now against the dark background. The shot gets closer and closer to his eyes, which are fixed on

Tsunashige. In the next shot, the sound drops out again. We see Asari's trembling hand holding the sword. He slowly moves forward, walks past the bars into the main street, and dashes into Tsunashige's party. Taken by surprise, Tsunashige's guards break formation and Asari chases Tsunashige into a back alley, where he stabs him to death before the guards reach him and slay him in turn.

The irony of the story is that the mission of the plot is accomplished by no one other than Asari, the apathetic libertine who just happens to be at the scene, possibly enjoying the Yoshiwara lifestyle. While Jinbo eventually comes to terms with the political reality into which he was—so he thought—violently thrown and engages with it, Asari refuses to commit himself to it. Both political stances issue from reflection about political life; both action and inaction issue from deliberation and a sense of having come to understand the type of engagement required by the situation: active engagement or active apathy. Yet in the end, Asari, too, is drawn into the political arena. Violence is omnipresent.

The difficulty of *Great Killing* has to do with Asari's final action. The film does not communicate his motives at the level of discourse. This initially strikes us as an anomaly. Despite its breathtaking raid and guerrilla attack scenes, *Great Killing* is also a dialogue-heavy film in which characters reflect on their political values in the presence of others who speak relatively little. Without reference to Asari's motives, the film's story risks seeming to come full circle: perhaps Asari was right and political engagement does not make sense.

It is tempting to think that Asari's motives are embedded "in" the scene. The camerawork over Jinbo's body intercut with close-ups of Asari, or the hand-held camera that follows Asari as he chases Sakai, accompanied by the close-miked heavy breathing of Asari, certainly encourages us to identify the camera with Asari's point of view, and the dead silence as a demarcation of his

psychic state. He is shocked into silence to find Jinbo, someone whom he has grown to like, dead and dumped like a piece of rubbish; the unseemly laughter of Sakai makes his blood boil; outraged, he impulsively attacks Sakai. Or again, perhaps he was moved by the thought that he conveyed to Jinbo in their first long exchange concerning the sword—“it is a family heirloom, has been for generations. If I lose this, I might as well slit my stomach.” We may even attempt to enrich this reading by invoking the allegorical function of the sword, so that it alludes to political injustice, broken lives, broken homes, broken friendships, and more than anything the breaking of the promise of the re-institution of an order and a way of life that he longed for. Thus, if one worries that choosing any single motive among these is insufficient to explain his action, then perhaps they jointly add up to a sufficiently strong motive for even an apathetic bystander to take part in an action at the cost of his own death. Thus, it might be tempting to suggest that the idea of a sufficient sum defeats the logic of apathy. It is indeed tempting to read the scene in psychological terms and flatten all its richness and depth to fit it into a single psychological dimension. But this temptation should be resisted.

In her defense of Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona* (1966), Susan Sontag contrasts two types of film, arguing that they require different modes of spectatorial and critical engagement.³² If the critical reception of *Persona* has misunderstood it or failed to do justice to the film, it is because critics have tried to engage with it as a traditional narrative film. According to Sontag, what is distinctive about the new narrative film is that it deliberately frustrates the viewer’s desire to know what happened and why. It evolves loosely around a theme or subject. Narrative indeterminacy – impossibility of reconstructing the plot – is an aspect of such films. Narrative indeterminacy surrenders to the saliency of form. Unlike *Persona*, but not unlike Kudō’s two

³² Susan Sontag, “*Persona*,” *Sight and Sound* 36, no.4 (Autumn 1967): 186-191.

other films, *Thirteen Assassins* (1963) and *Eleven Samurai* (1967), from the period, *Great Killing* is a film about the development and execution of a plot. But unlike *Thirteen Assassins* and *Eleven Samurai*, *Great Killing* takes a much more guerrilla approach to fighting (partly because the original plot fails at the very beginning of the film due to the extensive raid) and puts less emphasis on collective efforts and coordination among the fighters than on betrayals and class and gender differences among them. The concrete mission is presented to them by a committed but detached military strategist only the night before the attack. Even then, the plot remains indeterminate; too little is communicated because there is too little trust among them. The conspiracy is held together by their preexistent commitments. But throughout the film, the source of these commitments are increasingly problematized, the motives of many of the characters for fighting are rendered increasingly opaque, even to themselves. The film holds its plot together by focusing on Jinbo.

It seems that our access to Asari's motives is denied precisely when Asari emerges as the focal point of the experience of the film, at the very moment of its climax, when the camera brings us ever closer to Asari. The film charges the scene with a strong sense of agency and intentionality by tapping into what film scholar Daniel Morgan calls "epistemological fantasy, one of being at a place we cannot be, a place we are barred from inhabiting" through POV-like shots and camera movement.³³ In the absence of clearly articulated motives, Asari fails to claim his action, which can make his action seem, if not senseless, at least in dire need of an explanation, on pain of turning the climatic scene of assassination into an instance of senseless suicidal murder, and letting the overall narrative architecture of the film crumble.

³³ Daniel Morgan, "Where Are We?: Camera Movements and the Problem of Point of View," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14, no. 2 (2016): 241-242.

But if the temptation to look for determinate motives seems irresistible, it is because of an implicit assumption that action is only intelligible if it issues from determinate motives that can be articulated in discourse.

What I want to argue is that it is precisely the architecture of the film itself that requires that the indeterminacy of Asari's motives be preserved. As Vandamm tells his assistant Leon in *North by Northwest* (that other story about a character who sought to live the life of an apathetic libertine only to find himself drawn into the midst of political intrigue): "I've never trusted neatness. Neatness is always the result of deliberate planning." If neatness is always the result of deliberate planning, and history never is, then history cannot be neat, and a filmic rendering of the unfolding of history can only capture this trait by bringing the chaotic and accidental nature of historical events to the screen.

Histories are written by people, history is not. History takes place, and the force that drives it is the flow of time, indifferent to human designs, conspiracies, intentions, commitments, and values. As it unfolds, it blindly shapes the lives of lords and nobles, officials and peasants, innocents and criminals alike. To try to understand history before choosing to play a part in it is no less senseless than to try to stand aside and not partake in it at all.

This is not to say that we must remain silent about Asari's motives. Or that it only means that he was carried away by the moment, that he simply acted irrationally, and that the 'point' of the movie is that on the grand scheme of things, engagement and blind action are ultimately on a par.

Meleau-Ponty writes:

This is why movies can be so gripping in their presentation of man: they do not give us his thoughts, as novels have done for so long, but his conduct or behavior. They directly present us that special way of being in the world, of dealing with things and other people,

which we can see in the sign-language of gesture and gaze and which clearly defines each person we know.³⁴

One of the strengths of the assassination sequence is that Asari's conduct strikes us as perfectly intelligible even while his motives remain indeterminate. The kind of indeterminacy in question is not the kind generated by the fact that we do not really know what he is thinking, but the kind of indeterminacy of motivation that is not unnatural or atypical in human conduct. The sequence forcefully brings us to see that unless we are moved by the assumption that motives must be determinate and historical events explicable in terms of determinate intentions, successes and failures, the indeterminacy in question is not in the least perplexing.

Furthermore, that Asari's action lacks determinate motivation does not mean that it is not motivated. It means that it has a distinctive way of being motivated. It is not only the facts or desires or their additive conjunction that is motivating. It is not the result of a deliberative process, but the result of the experience of being there in that situation. What is compelling is the way situation strikes Asari, just as what is compelling for us is the way the film strikes us; it is an aesthetic ordeal, rather than the conclusion of a syllogism, that forces Asari into action.³⁵ We may not be able to identify in the sound of the roar the recorded sound of the ANPO protests which Kudō insisted on adding, but we hear the roar nonetheless, and it is a compelling one.³⁶

³⁴ Maurice Meleau-Ponty, "The Film and the New Psychology," in *Sense and Non-sense* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 58.

³⁵ Sontag's discussion of Elizabeth's muteness in *Persona* is relevant here. According to her, Bergman involves us more in "the sheer fact of it than its causes [...] Muteness is first of all a fact with a certain psychic and moral weight, a fact which initiates its own kind of causality upon an other." She further argues *Persona* is a meditation on the medium through an exploration of the kind of causality at work between Elizabeth and Alma as much as a representation of the causality between Elizabeth and Alma.

³⁶ Eiichi Kudō and Dāthi Kudō, *Hikari to kage [Light and Shadow]* (Tokyo: Wides Shuppan, 2002), 134.

CONCLUSION

And here we come full circle. The development and introduction of new communication technologies in Japan (television broadcasting since 1953, and satellite transmissions since 1963), and the coincidence of the first satellite transmission with the news of John F. Kennedy's assassination, mark the emergence of a new form of historical experience. History: not events temporally or geographically remote, but what we see and experience as it unfolds. History: not the execution of the plans of the powerful, but a force indifferent to human concerns. History: not what one reads about in history books, or what one can sometimes see depicted in neat studio productions which, to evoke Vandamm's wisdom once again, are the result of deliberate planning, but the accidental unravelling of events than can be delivered into the intimacy of domestic space, in a medium and genre—the newscast, and the satellite newscast—that requires the loosening of the aesthetic constraints that govern traditional studio productions, the urgency of the moment requiring, and thereby allowing for, a broader margin of stylistic improvisation, a more chaotic audiovisual style: less editing, fewer and less meticulously staged shots, less congruence between image and sound, less determinacy in the story told, since it is told as it unfolds, by someone who does not yet know what is happening, or how it will play out.

And the emergence of this new form of historical experience, might be seen, as I suggested, as an experience itself: the experience of the violent irruption of history into the here and now, and an increased sense that the history and grand historical events are events within which our lives take place, that involve us, and that may at any moment irrupt right where we stand, and where it is no longer possible to remain a bystander, bewildered by the spectacle, or idly indignant, but where action--not the deliberate action that issues from careful observations

and calculations, but the improvised reaction to a violence that irrupts at the very center of our lives—is unavoidable.

On a larger temporal scale, the stylistic shift in *jidaigeki*, in the fifties can be understood, in part, as *jidaigeki*'s own improvised reaction to the violent irruption of history into the present, a response that consisted in projecting the chaotic and disorienting character of that reconfigured historical consciousness and of the novel experience of history as it unfolds back into the histories that it brought to the screen. *Jidaigeki* then became, for a number of years, the art of writing neatness out of history by carefully carving chaos and indeterminacy into its rendering of the past.

Chapter 4

Reorienting *Jidaigeki* Matsumoto Toshio's *Shura* (1971)

Contrary to light space, it will have no 'besides' or distance, no surface or extension, properly speaking; but there will be nonetheless be something spatial about it; it will have depth—not the depth which is added to length and height but a single and unique dimension which immediately asserts itself as *depth*.

—Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time: Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies*¹

On the one hand, affects redistribute the order of language and give birth to a style. On the other, they display the unconscious through characters and actions that represent the most forbidden and transgressive drive motions.

—Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*²

When renowned leftist critic and essayist Hanada Kiyoteru started publishing in 1960 what would become his first fiction, *The Tale of Animal Caricatures* (*Chōjū giwa*),³ it was considered to be a compromise in terms of both politics—for its removed and abstract engagement with contemporary issues, and aesthetics—for its association with popular literature.⁴ In the words of novelist and poet Takami Jun, its failure to engage with the present corresponded to its failure to comply with the dictum: “Stay away from period drama.”⁵ While

¹ Eugène Minkowski, *Lived Time: Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies*, trans. Nancy Metzel (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 430.

² Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 179.

³ It consists of three parts. The first part “Picture of the Troop of Monkeys” (*Gun'en zu*) was initially published in the February issue of the literary journal *Gunzō* in 1960; the second part “A Fox Tale” in the June, 1961 issue of the same journal ; the third part “Eagle-Owl Daimyō” in the January, 1962 issue.

⁴ On its critical reception, see for instance, Tateno Masahiro, “Hibōryoku e no sōzōryoku—*Chōjū giwa*” [Imagination towards non-violence: On *The Tale of Animal Caricatures*], in *Seishin no tatakai—hibōryokushugi no shisō no bungaku* (Tokyo: Supēsu Kaya, 2007).

⁵ See Takami Jun, “Bungakuteki gendai kikō” [Literary journey into the present], *Gunzō* 15, no. 7 (July 1960): 212-217. For Hanada's response, see, for instance, his discussion of Takigawa Bakin's *Ken'i hyōden ki*. Hanada Kiyoteru, *Mouhitotsu no shura* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1961).

Takami's dismissive attitude towards Hanada can be understood in the context of factional disputes at the height of the 1960 Anpo⁶ protests and the ongoing vehement debates concerning war responsibility, subjectivity, and the state of Japanese literature, it is no less important to note that Hanada's choice of period drama (*jidai-mono*) is the focal point of Takami's criticism.⁷ Instead of tackling the challenge of the present, Takami writes, Hanada retreated into the fine shell left by history like a hermit crab.⁸ More recently, Yuriko Furuhata has offered a similar view of *jidaigeki* in her study of the political avant-garde filmmaking practices of the 1960s and 70s. In the conclusion of her book, *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics*, Matsumoto Toshio's *Shura* (*Pandemonium* or *The Demons*, 1971) figures, among others, as both an agent and symptom of the end of political avant-garde filmmaking. In her view, *Shura*—a film “set in the 1820s [...] an appropriation of a *kabuki* play by the nineteenth-century playwright Tsuruya Nanboku”—marks Matsumoto's retreat into the distant past and disengagement from journalistic actuality.⁹ Following the dominant view of Japanese independent filmmaking of the 1960s and 70s, according to which it is characterized by an “inward turn to the realm of private visions, away from the realm of collective struggle,” she understands the film's “intense narrative of private vengeance and betrayal” as part of that zeitgeist.¹⁰

⁶ Anpo refers to the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.

⁷ Hanada was expelled from The Japanese Communist Party in December 1961.

⁸ Takami, 217.

⁹ Yuriko Furuhata, *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics*, Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, and Society (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 197.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 197-198.

Furuhata does not use the term *jidaigeki* to describe *Shura*.¹¹ But this seems to be less the result of a considered decision to differentiate the film from the genre than it is the effect of her lack of interest in either. *Jidaigeki* or not, it fits one of the “two strands of escapism in ATG’s films” that Roland Domenig identifies: “an escape into the past.”¹² *Shura*’s efficacy in illustrating this strand of escapism seemingly does not require in-depth commentary or analysis, but seems to rely on the pre-existent conception of period films already at work in her readership. As a result, her description of *Shura* lacks the kind of analytical rigor and lexical richness that characterizes her treatment of Matsumoto’s earlier works among other political avant-garde filmmaking works discussed in the book.

For Takami and Furuhata, *jidaimono* and *jidaigeki* stand in for Hanada’s and Matsumoto’s “turn.” By Matsumoto’s “turn to the premodern past,” Furuhata does not mean his (new) interest in a historical period; the word “turn” connotes his *tenkō* (ideological conversion). She complicates the view of Matsumoto’s participation in Expo 70 as his “sell-out moment” by noting that it is more of “a continuation of his growing interest in the medium of video and the realm of private vision on the one hand, and his increasing distance from politics and the street on the other.”¹³ It is the relationship between Matsumoto’s increasing interest in the new medium

¹¹ Though the applicability of the term *jidaigeki* to *Shura* is arguable since it is based on a *kabuki* play and its contemporary theatrical adaptation, it is curious that it seems to have never been an issue for Matsumoto or others. For instance, in the publicity leaflet handed out at Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka, the film is advertised as “ishoku no jidaigeki” (a unusual *jidaigeki*), and Matsumoto himself writes that it’s his first attempt at *jidaigeki*. Many critics more or less focused Matsumoto’s interpretation of Nanboku’s work rather than his take on *jidaigeki*. See essays collected in the film pamphlet, “*Shura*,” *Āto shiatā* [Art Theatre], no. 84 (February 1971).

¹² Roland Domenig, “A Brief History of Independent Cinema in Japan and the Role of the Art Theatre Guild,” *Minikomi* 70 (2005): 14, quoted in Furuhata, 198. The other strand of escapism identified by Domenig is “an escape from urban to more rural settings.”

¹³ Furuhata, 199.

as a means to explore the realm of private vision *and* his decreasing interest in street politics that informs Furuhata's understanding of Matsumoto's "turn to premodern past" in *Shura* as his political disengagement. Takami, writing in 1960, is more explicit in his criticism of Hanada. He originally thought that the sharp-tongued communist critic who had—and ought to have had—a strong interest in the present and reality would meet the difficulty of writing about the present head-on, but to his surprise, Hanada did the "opposite."¹⁴ Matsumoto and Hanada's purportedly ideological turns were controversial and still remain the sites of historiographical contestation.¹⁵ In these discussions of the relationship between politics and aesthetics in and of the 1960s, the fictional worlds of *jidaimono* and *jidaigeki* were once again seen with suspicion.

Furuhata has given us an excellent framework for understanding 1960s political avant-garde filmmaking practices. My focus in this chapter is the hermeneutic challenge that the

¹⁴ Takami, 217.

¹⁵ Both turns are thought of in terms of media events. In Hanada's case, it is his "defeat" in a series of published debates that he had in the late 1950s with the most influential thinker of the Japanese New Left, Yoshimoto Takaaki, who labeled him both a fascist and Stalinist. The stigma that the debates incurred Hanada is said to have marginalized him in the postwar intellectual scene, and subsequently in the historical accounts of the period that tend to mirror the view. As Ken Yoshida in his recent article on Hanada writes, "Considered a literary critic by art historians, deemed important yet minor by literary scholars, and employed more or less as a foil or a prop to shore up the centrality of Yoshimoto Takaaki in postwar Japanese thought by intellectual historians, he has been relegated to interstices and margins of multiple humanistic disciplines without gaining much discursive traction." Ken Yoshida, "Interstitial Movements in the Works of Hanada Kiyoteru: A Preliminary Study," *positions: east asia critique*, 22 no. 4: 782. See, also, Suga Hidemi, *Hanada Kiyoteru—Suna no perusona* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1982) as well as his *Yoshimoto Takaaki no jidai* (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2008). In her analysis of the two media events, the World's Fair of 1970s and the Asama Sansō Incident, Furuhata contests the widely accepted view that corruption on both the political and artistic fronts that is often blamed on individual participants or organizations, led to the decline of politically-engaged avant-garde filmmaking. According to this view, artists like Matsumoto were said to be disillusioned by the political activism of the 1960s and coopted by corporate and state interests. By shifting the focus from individual to systemic change, Furuhata instead argues that the two media events are indicative of a radical reconfiguration of the relation between the spectacle and the streets, as well as a shift in the attraction of the media spectacles from actuality to monumentality. The enforced governmental control over urban space disrupted the contiguity between the screen, theater, and streets which she calls "a hallmark of Japanese avant-garde films from the 1960s and early 1970s." (189). This makes her description of *Shura* as Matsumoto's turn all the more interesting and worth interrogating.

anachronism of both Hanada's *jidaimono* writings and Matsumoto's *jidaigeki* poses. By taking up the hermeneutic challenge that *Shura* poses, I hope to problematize the dichotomy of modern present/political/collective/action and premodern past/private/personal/affect described towards the end of her book, which is also a widely accepted framework for understanding the change that occurred in Japanese cinema in the late 1960s. I do so by offering a different genealogy of the relationship between *jidaigeki* and avant-garde practices of the 1960s: 1) the discourse of actuality in Tosaka and Hanada's work, 2) Hanada, Tsurumi and Satō's discussions of *jidaigeki*'s relation to realism and the present, 3) the political-allegorical dimension of *Shura*'s narrative in its genealogy in kabuki, 4) Matsumoto's conception of *Shura* and his experimentation with fictional film form.

In the last section, I will highlight *Shura*'s engagement with the "modern present" through a discussion of Matsumoto's conception of spectatorship, and of his interpretation of the kabuki play on which the film is based: Nanboku's recently revived *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge). On the formal register, I will highlight Matsumoto's preference for destabilization over the rejection of narrative as an avant-garde filmmaking strategy, and analyze his deliberate play on spectatorship through the constant reconfiguration of the viewer's assigned position and orientation within the spatial coordinates of the image. This will enable us to see that *Shura* is a sophisticated effort to confront the spectator with her hermeneutical situation rather than a reactionary recoil into the "premodern past."

***Jidaigeki* and Actuality**

The objective of this section is two-fold. First, to bring *jidaigeki* back to the discourse of actuality by taking up Hanada's 1956 essay "The New Faces of Film Criticism in Japan." In this essay, Hanada considers the two recently published essays on *jidaigeki*, one written by Tsurumi

Shunsuke (discussed in Chapter 1) and the other by Satō Tadao, then an amateur film critic discovered by Tsurumi Shunsuke. In their discussion of *jidaigeki*, Hanada identifies a shared interest in discovering a new approach to reality in *jidaigeki*. Comparing and contrasting the perspectives offered by Tsurumi and Satō, Hanada explores this possibility on his own terms. Hanada's excitement and ultimate dissatisfaction with either position will allow me to turn to the second part of the objective, to examine the application of "actuality" as an analytical category for historical inquiry into artistic practices. I argue that *jidaigeki* should matter to those who are interested in the question of actuality in relation to the critical and artistic practices of the late 1950s and early 1960s because 1) it was part of the discourse of actuality, and 2) it reveals the limitations of the concept of actuality, or rather, a deeper problem than the one that the concept was originally meant to address when it was introduced by Tosaka Jun and like-minded intellectuals in the 1930s.

Furuhata's discussion of cinema of actuality is motivated by what she calls "peculiarly journalistic quality of avant-garde and experimental films produced in the 1960s."¹⁶ She argues that the problematic of actuality in fact emerged out of the changing media environment in the 1960s, marked by the rise of journalistic media, and of television in particular. In Furuhata's account, the discourse of actuality, and the film practices that evolved around it, are forms of critical and creative engagement with the reality of the rapidly changing media environment and the place of cinema within it as much as with the tense political and social situation of the period. The point, she argues, is that these 'realities' were inseparable from each other. As she presents it, the discourse of actuality was a fundamentally uplifting and productive discourse. She shows that the early 20th century Japanese Marxist philosopher Tosaka Jun, whose conception of

¹⁶ Furuhata, 58.

actuality is said to have influenced the main voice of the discourse of actuality in the late 1960s and early 70s, Hanada Kiyoteru, had in fact conceived journalism as an alternative mode of critique. Tosaka developed his conception of actuality as part of his critique of the institutionalized discipline of philosophy that had lost touch with the present political and social situation.¹⁷ Within this context, he provided a positive account of the mutuality of the “actuality” of the press and the “actuality” of everydayness, seeing in journalism the possibility of immanent critique. Such self-reflexivity made the discourse of actuality a generative one, by contrast to a discourse of “reality,” a term which, as Furuhata notes, “conjured the ghosts of philosophical idealism and social realism.”¹⁸ This rendered the discourse of actuality attractive to those who wanted to think, and bear impact on, the present through their work.

This shift to a discourse of actuality thus marked a shift towards the question of form. With respect to cinema, the question became: What is the cinema *of* actuality that addresses the actuality of everydayness and differentiates itself from journalistic actuality? And documentary became a privileged site for the discourse of actuality. It was thought to be a cinematic form whose relationship to reality could be productively interrogated through the discourse of actuality. Documentary was the dominant mode of film production alternative to the major studio production of the 1950s (among which is the famous Iwanami Productions), and was therefore strongly associated with innovative filmmaking practices. Less emphasized in Furuhata’s discussion is the fact that while not independent, the different institutional structure of Iwanami

¹⁷ For further discussion of Tosaka’s interest in journalism in relation to his conception of actuality, see, for instance, Fabian Schäfer, “The Actuality of Journalism and the Possibility of Everyday Critique,” in *Tosaka Jun: A Critical Reader*, ed. Ken Kawashima, Fabian Schäfer, and Robert Stolz (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press/Cornell East Asia Series, 2013)

¹⁸ Furuhata, 61.

and other documentary productions (e.g., smaller production units, early promotion, different equipment) alone often encouraged (unsolicited) experiments on the part of young ambitious filmmakers.¹⁹

In Furuhata's account, Hanada went further with the idea that documentary needs to interrogate its own relationship with reality, and advocated the dialectical synthesis of the avant-garde and the documentary which Furuhata cites as the main source of inspiration for Matsumoto's concept of avant-garde documentary. For both Hanada and Matsumoto, documentary and avant-garde share in their engagement with reality a revolutionary aspiration. Indeed, discussing the revolutionary imperative governing the avant-garde, Matsumoto quotes André Breton: "'Transform the world,' said Marx. 'Change life,' said Rimbaud. For us these two commands are one and the same."²⁰

Continuing with her investigation of the "peculiarly journalistic quality" of avant-garde and experimental films produced in the 1960s," Furuhata refocuses the question of actuality on the question of cinema's engagement with journalism and its production of an actuality effect. She considers Matsumoto Toshio's *Funeral Parade of Roses* and Oshima Nagisa's *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* to be exemplary cinematic explorations of the production of journalistic actuality, for they reveal its artifice. She identifies various ways in which they expose, re-appropriate and counter the actuality effect of journalism. One of the most striking methods of "countering" that she considers is their staging of their own filmmaking process as a theatrical spectacle, treating

¹⁹ For instance, major postwar avant-garde composers such as Ichianagi Toshi and Manabe Riichirō who were to collaborate with Japanese New Wave filmmakers such as Yoshida Kiju and Oshima Nagisa, started out their film music career by writing music for science/industry documentaries.

²⁰ Toshio Matsumoto, "Ranbō to Marukusu no tōitsu" [Synthesis of Rimbaud and Marx], in *Hyōgen no sekai* [The world of expression], rev. ed. (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1967; repr., Tokyo: Seiryū Shuppan, 2006), 260.

their films both as an agent and effect of theatrical production of actuality. The cinema of actuality is a cinema that produces itself as actuality—a singular (theatrical) event. She makes a strong case for cinema *of* actuality rather than cinema *about* actuality by defining cinema’s actuality not in terms of a film’s “content” but rather in terms of its rehabilitation of the ability to produce actuality effects through complex engagement with its contemporary journalistic media, television in particular.

It seems to me, however, that the significance of the problematic of actuality for cinema should not be limited to its engagement with its contemporary journalistic media.

Tosaka defined the actuality of journalism not in terms of the sensational actuality effect of journalism’s contemporary form (e.g., newspaper), but rather in terms of its basis in everyday life (relating to the “*jour*”) of the people. Tosaka writes:

This everyday life is, however, is already some kind of social life. In this sense the light of the sun is not something that strikes the top of one’s head, flickers, and fades; on the contrary, it is something that marks the opening and closing of one day in the social negotiation of people’s lives. It is through entering into communal societal life that the day begins; through departing from it, the day ends. [...] But because journalism has this connection with communal societal life, it already has some kind of *sociality* at its root. Therefore, and to that extent, journalism must be thought of as a sort of “external” [*gaibuteki*] phenomena, and indeed our private internal lives are of no great importance for it. Conversely, if it is supposed that there is value and meaning to be found in people’s internal lives and that the external life that opposes this is assumed to be little more than a fiction, then journalism, in this religious [*shūkyōteki*] sense as well, is again a mere *everydayness*. In such cases journalism must be thought of as something related to kinds of “familiar” and “trivial” everyday occurrences.²¹

According to Tosaka, this external characteristic of journalism is determinant for the kind of knowledge it produces. It produces a quotidian knowledge or common sense by levelling out

²¹ Jun Tosaka, “Academy and Journalism,” trans. Chris Kai-Jones, in *Tosaka Jun: A Critical Reader*, ed. ed. Ken Kawashima, Fabian Schäfer, and Robert Stolz (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press/Cornell East Asia Series, 2013), 40-41.

“matters that are extraordinary, personal, interior, and the high and lofty.”²² Insofar as it is external to private life, common sense can be “popular” both in the senses of “pop” [*tsūzoku-teki*] and “the widely-known.”²³ This leads Tosaka to conclude that journalism is a form of knowledge maintained by the *public*.²⁴ This, an important emphasis in Tosaka’s definition of journalism, seems to be neglected by Furuhata and Schäfer when they comment on an important distinction Tosaka consistently makes between journalism and journalistic media. Tosaka’s emphasis is not on the fact that “[t]he interest of the common public in journalism is thus directed by its interest in current, not persistent, matters,” but rather on the fact that the interest of the common public is what counts as current affairs [*jiji mondai*], and hence journalism’s actuality [*jijisei*].²⁵

Journalism’s basis in the everyday life of the people also explains its political character, according to Tosaka. Naturally, such a claim must be considered in terms of Tosaka’s broad view of politics. As Schäfer points out, Tosaka understands politics not only in terms of the frameworks of parliamentary democracy but also in Aristotelian terms. That the everyday organizes itself around practices and social activities makes it political. Indeed, the source of the critical potential of journalism as “one kind of direct expression of the worldview held by the

²² Ibid., 41.

²³ Ibid. Translation modified.

²⁴ Ibid., 42. Translator Kai-Jones notes that Tosaka adds the English word “public” after the Japanese term *kōshū*.

²⁵ Schäfer, 155. Tosaka writes, “whatever interests the general public always qualifies as “current affairs” [*jiji mondai*].” (「一般公衆が関心を持つものは、いつも時事問題としての資格を有ったものである。」), Tosaka Jun, “Akademī and jānarizumu,” *Gendai testsugaku kōwa*, in *Tosaka Jun zenshū* (1934; repr., Tokyo: Keisōsha, 1966), 148. Citations are to the 1966 edition. Chris Kai-Jones’s translation, “The general public is always interested in those things that qualify as the current topics of the day” also seems to miss Tosaka’s emphasis on journalism’s roots in people’s interests.

members of society”²⁶ that interested Tosaka lie in this practical, everyday basis of the two defining characteristics of journalism— orientation towards action [*genjitsu kōdōsei*] and actuality [*jijisei*]. And as I will argue below, Hanada’s endorsement of this view of the critical potential of journalism, in all its specificity, can be found in his discussion of Tsurumi and Satō.

Tosaka also draws a distinction between journalism and academia that is important in order to understand Hanada’s idiosyncratic reading of Tsurumi and Satō’s different views of *jidaigeki*. Accordingly, it will be useful to briefly consider the main points Tosaka makes regarding that distinction before turning to Hanada’s essay.

From the perspective of history, Tosaka states, journalism and academia represent two opposing but complementary attitudes. Journalism goes with the flow of time, following faithfully the form of development pertaining to sociohistorical existence. In doing so, journalism becomes—so it appears—external to the existence it follows so faithfully and loses its independent power to guide this existence at the fundamental level. As a result, “journalism comes to be seen as opportunistic and inconsistent.”²⁷ Academia, on the other hand, may independently undertake the task of guiding sociohistorical movements. But this has its own pitfalls. Unlike journalism, academia concerns itself with *traditional* problems that arose and are inherited within the framework of a specific discipline rather than with current affairs. It also treats the problems in *technical* terms rather than produce a more or less unified worldview. By protecting its own principle and integrity, academia can become an obstacle to the sociohistorical movements that it seeks to guide. As a result, the “academy comes to be seen as a conservative,

²⁶ Schäfer, 148.

²⁷ Tosaka, 44.

self-satisfied institution.”²⁸ Actuality and journalism have their differences but they can complement each other: “the academy provides *foundations* and *principles* while journalism gives the actual of the present.”²⁹

It is against the background of this analysis of the tension between journalism and the academy in relation to sociohistorical movements that we can best understand Hanada’s essay “The New Faces of Film Criticism in Japan.” The essay was written for the major film journal *Kinema Junpo* and published in May 1956, and as I mentioned earlier, it centers around two essays on *jidaigeki* that had been recently published, one by Tsurumi Shunsuke (discussed in Chapter 1) and the other by Satō Tadao, an amateur film critic that had just been discovered by Tsurumi Shunsuke. Like Hanada, Tsurumi and Satō were not professional film critics. Thus he recalls how delighted and impressed he was by “what those fanboys and fangirls were able to grow up to be” the first time when he read Tsurumi’s essay “A Certain Theory of Japanese Cinema: *The Mad Woman in Kimono*.”³⁰ He writes:

“Originally written by Kawaguchi Matsutaro, adapted by Yahiro Fuji, directed by Yasuda Kimiyoshi, and starring Hasegawa Kazuo—in reeling off a few names like this and having missed the opportunity to see this film, I am somewhat dubious if *The Mad Woman in Kimono* is “a Japanese film that reached a considerably high level”—but the more dubious it feels, the more Tsurumi’s writing that spells out fresh impressions touches my heart, just like Henri Rousseau’s paintings. Even if *The Mad Woman in Kimono* turns out to be a mediocre *jidaigeki*, we cannot wipe away the fact that Tsurumi recognizes the acute criticism that exists within the film concerning various issues such as the fate of heretics, male egoism, and how to carry on traditions. Professional film critics might assume from the essay that Tsurumi is a simpleton who has no understanding of film. Or they might draw the opposite conclusion and assume that he is a sly man who pretends not to understand even when he does, and who is making a

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. However, as Tosaka notes, things are not so simple: the conditions under which both manifest their current forms must be studied in order to understand their reality. He offers more detailed analyses elsewhere, but my current interest lies in the problem of journalism he identifies in relation to the academy and its implications for thinking about Hanada’s discussion of *jidaigeki*.

³⁰ Hanada, 56.

deliberately twisted argument. But that's just because they are measuring every film according to their own standards. Eisenstein, who expressed all-encompassing admiration for *Chushingura* [47 Ronin], for instance, might have uttered the same sort of lines as Tsurumi if he saw *The Mad Woman in Kimono*.³¹

I shall return to the content of Hanada's review of Tsurumi's analysis of *The Mad Woman in Kimono*, and consider his review of Satō's comparative reading of a newsreel and a *chanbara* (a subgenre of *jidaigeki*) film in due course, but let me first note that one of the striking features of the essay is Hanada's rather idiosyncratic approach to the two critics' positions. According to Hanada, Tsurumi and Satō share a dissatisfaction with bourgeois realism and love for *chanbara* film, but are polar opposite types of critics. Tsurumi and Satō represent respectively the West and Japan, bourgeois economy and feudalism, and analytic and synthetic. Tsurumi is an analytic critic who discusses positive aspects of the film in detail. Satō is a synthetic one who begins with a positive note on the homology between a newsreel film and a *chanbara* film, but instead of insisting only on this positive side, he also criticizes the *chanbara* film's escapism, yearning for a new type of realism in film. To borrow Tosaka's framework, Tsurumi is an academic critic, and Satō is a journalistic critic. According to Hanada, they are both struggling to grow out of these respective positions.

Reminiscent of Tosaka's view of journalism, Tsurumi defends the popular *jidaigeki* film, arguing that it is where the subaltern experience of the audience is embedded, and that this experience can be (re)embodied upon viewing such films. In his view, *jidaigeki* offers an immanent critique of the present. On the other hand, although watching the newsreel and *chanbara* film as a double bill made Satō realize their overlap, contrary to Tsurumi, he finds *chanbara* film's engagement with reality to be ultimately escapist because it speaks of reality in

³¹ Ibid. The *Chushingura* which was seen by Sergei Eisenstein and is being referred to by Hanada here is the theatrical version performed by the troupe led by Sadanji Ichikawa II in Moscow in 1928.

a language system totally different from reality. Consequently, he argues that we need to translate the language of *chanbara* into a contemporary form.

Hanada is opposed to the idea of regarding film that “speaks of reality in a language system totally different from reality” altogether as escapist in the way Satō does, but he agrees that we can create a new realism through the negation (*hiteiteki baikai*) of this type of film. For Hanada, “the question comes down to the concrete methods for this. Just what sort of dictionary does Satō intend to use to ‘translate’ the different system of language into that of reality?”³²

Hanada lists *jidaigeki* among animation (*manga eiga*) and avant-garde cinema. In fact, according to Hanada, there are several cases in the history of cinema where seemingly opposing genres of film have given rise to new forms of realism. One example is Buñuel’s *Los olvidados*, which he considers a socialist realism film made with avant-garde film in mind. The other example is Disney’s *True-Life Adventures* series (in Japan it was referred to as “*shizen no kyo!*” series, which literally means “Wonder of Nature” series), which in his view was a synthesis of animation and documentary. He tries to conceive *jidaigeki* in this dialectical framework where different and in principle antithetic genres synthesize to produce new forms of realism. In the particular case at issue for us, bourgeois realism would be overcome through the negation (*hiteiteki baikai*) of feudalism, thereby engendering the distinctive and new form of realism characteristic of *jidaigeki*. In this way, in “The New Faces of Film Criticism in Japan,” Hanada treats Tsurumi and Satō’s critical work as a paradigmatic instance of this dialectical movement.

But what does this new realism characteristic of *jidaigeki* look like? To Hanada’s mind, neither Tsurumi nor Satō go far enough in the dialectical movement that he describes. The very

³² Kiyoteru Hanada, “Eiga rondan no shinjintachi” [“The new faces of film criticism in Japan”], in *Gendai Nihon eiga-ron taikai 2: Kojin to chikara no kaifuku* [Contemporary Japanese film theory series 2: recovery of individual and power] (Tokyo: Tōjusha, 1970), 59.

face of this new realism, whose aesthetics and political significance Hanada hurriedly describes, ultimately remain somewhat hazy. If we were to attempt to bring it more sharply into view, we might consider Hanada's postwar fictional writings in the genre of historical novels as his own attempt to draw that face. Or we might consider Matsumoto's *Shura* as a *jidaigeki* film that incarnates that form of realism. However, for my purposes in this chapter, the significance of Hanada's discussion of Tsurumi and Satō's work on *jidaigeki* lies less on the details of his positive conception of the new form of realism, than in the fact that Hanada, who Furuhata identifies as one of the main voices of the late 1950s and early 60s avant-garde, was committed to the view that *jidaigeki* was a vehicle for the emergence of a new form of realism.

Revival of Tsuruya Nanboku

The film *Shura* was conceived as part of the revival of the works of the *kabuki* playwright Tsuruya Nanboku in the late 1960s. Some of Nanboku's works, including *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge) on which *Shura* was based, revived as part of the vibrant theatre culture in postwar Japan.³³ The reception culture surrounding the revival of Nanboku, especially the way his plays were reinterpreted and appropriated in both *Shingeki* (e.g., Haiyu-za, Seinen-za) and post-*Shingeki* theatres (e.g., Suzuki Tadashi, Hakken no kai), deserves to be studied in its own right.³⁴ I will limit my discussion to the reception of *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge).

³³ There was a period in his career where Matsumoto was not able/allowed to make films. During this period, he continued to be very active in critical circles, but he was also quite involved in the underground theatre scene, though this is much less discussed than his film-video art and his critical writings. For instance, he was a member of the theater group called *Hakken no Kai* (Discovery Circle) and the group of contemporary dramatists and theater critics called *Karasu no Kai* (Raven Circle).

³⁴ Post-*Shingeki* theatre refers to heterogeneous, experimental theatre practices that emerged in post-occupation Japan. Interchangeably called "little theatre" [shogekijō] or "*angura*" ("underground"), the prefix "post-" in the label "post-*Shingeki* theatre" emphasizes its difference from the theatre of an earlier era, whereas the other two terms define themselves in spatial terms. Though the term "*angura*" is said to

The genealogy of *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge) is rather complex. The Ur-play of *Shura, Godairiki koi no fūjime* (The love letter sealed with the five great guardians), was written by a kabuki playwright, Namiki Gohei I for *kyogōn*, the Japanese comedic theatre, and was premiered in Osaka in 1794. It was a tale of love triangle inspired by an actual serial murder incident that took place in 1737, as well as by the love-suicide of Gengobei and Koman that is said to have taken place around 1663. It had been previously adapted into a popular song, Ihara Saikaku's *Five Women Who Loved Love*, as well as Chikamatsu Monzaemon's *Satsuma uta* (The Satsuma song of Koman and Gengobei). Namiki modified it for its Edo premiere by changing the setting from Osaka to Edo and republished the modified version under a different title. Another famous kabuki playwright, Tsuruya Nanboku IV, who is better known for the famous ghost story, *Yotsuya kaidan* (*Yotsuya Ghost Story*), attempted a remake by incorporating the famous *Chūshingura* (*47 Ronin*) saga as well as his own successful play *Yotsuya Ghost Story* which had premiered at the same Nakamura-za theater just two months earlier.³⁵ The resulting

draw a comparison with underground theatre in the US, according to the theatre critic and journalist Senda Akihiko, it was mainly used pejoratively by mass media and not by those who led the movement. The following account of post-*Shingeki* theatre provided by film scholar David Desser captures its relationship with *Shingeki* and its anti-institutional, countercultural sentiment: “‘Post-*Shingeki*’ is to be understood in two connected ways: It is a theatrical movement which arose out of *Shingeki*, the Western-derived modern theatre meant to break away from *Shimpa* and Kabuki; and it is a movement which is a response to *Shingeki*. *Shingeki* attempted a movement away from the traditional past represented by Kabuki, the most popular of the institutionalized ‘official’ theatres of Japan. *Shingeki* was a product of modernization and modernism, but to the playwrights of the post-*Shingeki* movement, it had itself become institutionalized and thus incapable of launching a critique against the dominant culture.” David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 172.

³⁵ Not only did he write *Yotsuya Ghost Story* as a side story for *Chūshingura* (*47 Ronin*), Nanboku took an innovative approach to kabuki programming by alternating between the two plays *Yotsuya Ghost Story* and *Chūshingura saga* for two consecutive days when the common two-part programming practice during the Edo period was to show *jidaimono* (period drama) first and *sewamono* (domestic drama) second. See, for instance, Ishizawa Shūji, “Kabuki gendaigeki-ka no shiten: Nanboku no nijū kōzō nit suite,” *Kikan geijutsu* 3, no.3 (Summer 1969). Also see the entries “PROGRAMS: KABUKI” and “NAIMAZE” in Samuel L. Leiter, *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Traditional Theatre*, Historical Dictionaries of Literature and Arts 4 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006).

play *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge) premiered in 1825. Unlike *Yotsuya Ghost Story*, which has been popular throughout history, *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge) was never performed again in kabuki or any other form after its second performance in 1840 until the dramaturgist, theatre critic, and chief-editor of the famous theatre journal *Shingeki*, Ishizawa Shūji, adapted it in 1969 for Youth Theatre (*Seinen-za*)—one of the numerous *Shingeki* theatre groups that came into being in postwar Japan. I will come back to Ishizawa's production of *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge) when I discuss the climactic scene.

The World of *Shura*

In kabuki dramaturgy, “*sekai*” (world) refers to “a dramatic world, with a well-defined set of characters and actions, related to well-known historical events or legends.”³⁶ For every new production, a *sekai* (world) must be picked. The *sekai* (world) on which a new production is based does not have to be just one, however. It can be based on multiple *sekai* (worlds), and Nanboku was well-known for blending three or more *sekai* to create an intricately constructed drama dense in references and allusions as well as for his innovative rendering of the given world (*shukō* in kabuki dramaturgy).³⁷ Nanboku is also credited for introducing new genres such as the ghost story and “*kizewamono*” (“raw” or “true(r)” domestic plays). Usually focused on the dark, hideous side of the lives of lower-class commoners and outcasts, *kizewamono* is sometimes described as a more realistic version of *sewamono* (and hence *ki-sewamono*—true(r) *sewamono*).

³⁶ “Sekai,” Kabuki Glossary, accessed April 28, 2016, http://www.kabuki21.com/glossaire_7.php

³⁷ See, for instance, Leiter, 369, as well as Haruo Shirane, “Ghosts and Nineteenth-Century Kabuki,” in *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600-1900*, ed. Haruo Shirane (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 456.

Nanboku's *kizewamono* were unique in that he mixed together the two major types of kabuki plays, *sewamono*/domestic plays and *jidaimono*/historical plays.

Nanboku's kabuki productions involve no shortage of themes and stylistic experiments; we can easily see why they attracted critics and artists in the 1960s. Here I will focus on how Nanboku brought the two types of kabuki together in *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge) and draw on its historical significance as well as its implications for *Shura*. As I mentioned in the previous section, Ishizawa Shūji argues that by blending the two, Nanboku politicized the domestic drama (triangle love, murder, crime) and undermined the romanticized view of samurai and their loyal revenge in *Chushingura*.³⁸ But to what degree was the figure of the samurai idealized back in Edo to begin with? What was the popular culture's role in that idealization?

Japanese literary scholar Haruo Shirane suggests that the image of samurai in Nanboku's *Yotsuya Ghost Story* reflects the increasingly deteriorated circumstances of samurai life. Contrasting it with *Chushingura*, which was written in the mid-eighteenth century, Shirane writes that *Yotsuya Ghost Story* shows "immense difference in attitudes toward and of the samurai" that "the warrior values of loyalty, obligation, self-sacrifice, and patience, which are extolled and dramatized in *Chūshingura*, are replaced in *Ghost Story* by acts of betrayal and murder for the sake of sex and money."³⁹

Considering Edo popular culture as a locus of dialogical imagination that reveals the contradictory realities of Tokugawa society, Katsuya Hirano provides a more dynamic relationship between the ruling class of samurai and Edo popular culture. Hirano points out that

³⁸ See Ishizawa Shūji.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 457.

the Tokugawa authorities' condemnation of excessive desire and pleasure was rooted in the need to preserve the old economic and social hierarchies in the face of an emerging market economy. According to Hirano, that's only half of the story. Recognizing that popular culture was an important source of income for the poorest commoners and outcasts, the Tokugawa government hesitated to implement a draconian policy that would stifle their economic activities. However, the economy shifted rapidly to a market economy, resulting in destabilization or even reversal of the hierarchical relationship between samurai and commoners. In this process of the disintegration of the established order, Hirano describes "one of the most fundamental ironies of eighteenth-century Tokugawa society" as follows:

[I]t was sumptuous consumption by the ruling samurai class, not by townspeople or peasants, which marred the economic foundations of social order. Put differently, the regime built on the premise of a restrictive management of economy—enforcing minimum consumption and maximum production—was responsible, through its own exorbitant expenditures, for reshaping the economy into a consumption-led economy.⁴⁰

Samurai retainers were the immediate victims of the exorbitant expenditures of its own class and were increasingly vulnerable to the new economy.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss in detail Nanboku's work and its relation to the dialogical imagination of the Edo popular culture, this historical background suffices to bring into view the way in which *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge) stages the contradictory situation which samurai faced in late Tokugawa society. *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge) is not so much about the politicization of the domestic drama through the *Chūshingura* saga as it is a *reflexive* dramatization of the destabilization of the social hierarchy and the erosion of the samurai ethos caused by their own participation in the new

⁴⁰ Katsuya Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination: Power and Popular Culture in Early Modern Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 52.

economy and consumer cultures.⁴¹ While following the basic story line of *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge), *Shura* highlights this structural aporia by minimizing events and characters. (fig. 4.1.)

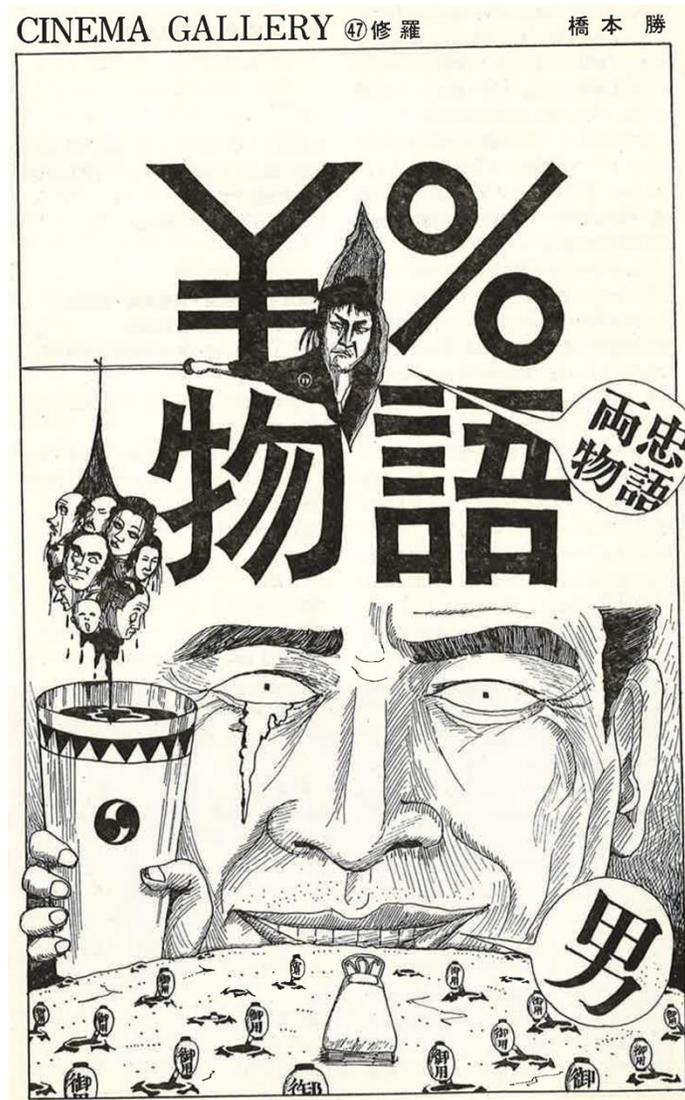


Fig. 4.1. *Shura*'s poster designed by satirical illustrator and critic Hashimoto Masaru published in *Āto shiatā* [Art theatre], no. 84. Gengobei appears to open a hole between the two characters 兩羊 (Japanese money) and 忠% (loyalty)

⁴¹ Nanboku modified Namiki's *The Love Letter Sealed with the Five Great Guardians* by changing the status of Sangobei from a samurai to a commoner, which Ishizawa perceptively relates to the two authors' different conceptions of loyalty. Ishizawa writes, "The relationship between Gengobei, Sangorō and Koman are closely knit by loyalty, money and romance in a modern way." Ishizawa Shūji, "Gohei to Nanboku no 'Godairiki'" [Gohei's and Nanboku's *The Lover's Pledge*], *Gakutō* (April 1969): 20.

Shura's story goes like this. The protagonist, Gengobei, is a former retainer of the En'ya family who lost his samurai status by losing his master's money while he was still in the master's service. Since his master has been killed, his most pressing mission has been to replace that money so that he can join the other former samurai retainers of the En'ya family in their mission to avenge the death and dishonor of their master. *Shura*'s drama unfolds around this famous, endlessly recounted historical drama of the loyal retainers' revenge. But the required sum is rather high, and Gengobei and his servant Hachiemon can barely make ends meet by making paper umbrellas. Strikingly, rather than as an honorable samurai-demoted-to-*ronin* striving to restore the honor of his defunct master, Gengobei is presented to us as a drunk, pathetically flirting with a geisha, Koman, early on in the film. At this point, Hachiemon returns from Gengobei's homeland to reveal that he has managed to obtain the money thanks to the collective efforts of his former retainers and sympathizers. Not too long after Koman is expelled from the house by Hachiemon, Gengobei's acquaintance Sangorō shows up to deliver a message from her: unless someone buys her freedom, she will be sold to a Kōno samurai. After some hesitation, Gengobei is led by Sangorō to the place where Koman is about to be sold. They arrive just in time to witness Koman refusing the samurai by pledging her fidelity to Gengobei, of whose presence she is purportedly unaware. Deeply touched (and 'encouraged' by Sangorō), he pays out the money that Hachiemon had gathered for the purpose of enabling him to join the loyal revenge. But just as Gengobei is about to leave the scene with Koman, Sangorō reveals that he is in fact her husband. The whole affair about the Kōno samurai was a plot staged by Sangorō and Koman to con Gengobei out of the money he needed in order to restore his and his master's honor.

The rest of the film traces the bloody vengeance that Gengobei wreaks on Koman and Sangorō, which in turn spins off a series of murders: nine out of twelve main characters are murdered—including Koman and Sangorō's baby, whom Gengobei forces Koman's hand to kill.

There is, however, another strand of the story that is gradually revealed. Sangorō's motivation for going after Gengobei's money is not wholly ignoble. Sangorō's father, Tokueemon, had disowned him ten years earlier. But he has recently promised to forgive him if he raises an important sum of money, which happens to coincide with the amount that Gengobei has just come by. For Sangorō, Tokueemon's forgiveness holds the promise of a better future for him, his wife Koman, and their baby. Tokueemon, in turn, needs this money in order to present it to his own master. In all, Sangorō's desire to be forgiven by his father and to offer a better life to his family, as well as his father's loyalty to his own master, are what ultimately move him to plot against Gengobei.

It is this double structure of the narrative, interweaving personal and political loyalties, that situates Gengobei's decision to give the money to Koman as something beyond a matter of simple romantic passion. By giving the money to Koman, Gengobei can finally act as if he hadn't already given up on everything—revenge, loyalty, and the samurai's code, the efforts of those that have put their faith in him, his own honor and status as well as those of his master. Thus his decision to use the money to buy Koman's freedom is not only a reckless, all-or-nothing gamble, but also a perverse means of self-realization. Here, political passion and romantic passion are entangled in a complex way. But that, too, is part of the structural aporia that *Shura* lays out. For at the very end of the film, it is revealed to Gengobei, Sangorō, Tokueemon (and the audience) that Gengobei is Tokueemon's master: Tokueemon presents Gengobei the very same coins that Koman and Sangorō had stripped him of, leaving them all

trapped in a circle of nothingness. Sangorō kills himself. Tokuemon begs Gengobei to forgive his son. The film ends with intertitles: “Several months later, the En’ya retainers carried out their vendetta. But Sōemon Funakura (Gengobei)’s name cannot be found among them.” This ending marks *Shura*’s major divergence from Nanboku’s *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover’s pledge) as well as from Ishizawa’s theatrical version.

In Nanboku’s *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu*, Gengobei joins the vendetta. In the spirit of *jidaimono*, Ishizawa, on his part, hoped to throw into question the theme of loyalty by ending the play with an overt political allegory.⁴² Matsumoto, on the other hand, presents his film as a document of Gengobei the nobody.

Matsumoto’s decision is interesting. It stresses the self-defeating structure of a hierarchical order that is undermined by the circularity that the incorporation of monetary relations brings to it. On the one hand, this ending throws the narrative’s drive into a void. On the other hand, Gengobei’s absence from the record works as a compelling allegory: a hierarchical structure and ideology prevail, but in a form that reduces the main actor to the role of an invisible outcast.

Matsumoto’s reinterpretation of *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* is not the only reason that the film cannot be understood as a retreat from an engaged avant-garde into the “premodern” past. This is also manifest if we consider *Shura*’s narrative and formal experimentation in relation to Matsumoto’s conception of spectatorship. In the following sections, I discuss two important aspects of his conception of spectatorship: his interpretation of Brecht’s approach to

⁴² He projected an image of the people whom Gengobei killed and played “Umi yukaba,” a famous Japanese patriotic song about sacrifice. See Ochi Haruo, “Igiaru kokorimi” [A meaningful attempt], review of *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* [The lover’s pledge], by Tsuruya Nanboku, directed by Ishizawa Shūji, *Seinenza, Teatoro*, no. 315 (September 1969): 35-36, 53-54.

spectatorship in *Mother Courage and Her Children* and his conception of rancor and its revelatory power in terms of Wolfgang Kayser's theory of the grotesque. I will then consider the prevalence of blackness/darkness in *Shura* as a formal device used to produce an aesthetic experience of destabilization that harnesses and reinforces the allegorical force of the narrative.

Matsumoto's Conception of Spectatorship

In self-analyzing his own interpretation of Nanboku in relation to, or against, Ishizawa Shūji's theatrical adaptation, Matsumoto returns to his earlier discussion of Brecht and develops his conception of spectatorship. Having been part of the vibrant theater world and of the reception culture of Brecht in postwar Japan, Matsumoto wrote quite extensively on Brecht. In the essay "Burehito-geki no hihyōsei" (Critical potential of Brecht), Matsumoto refers to Brecht's response to East-German playwright Friedrich Wolf's criticism of the ending of *Mother Courage*.⁴³ Wolf detects pessimism in that Courage, the main character of the play, seems to have learned nothing from her mistakes. Brecht offers a different way of thinking about the critical potential of the play by shifting the emphasis from character to audience. In his response, while agreeing with Wolf's reading that the character does not learn from the historical tragedy, thereby distancing his play from conventional tragedy, Brecht insists that the critical potential of the play lies elsewhere: the audience. He states, "even if Courage learns nothing else at least the audience can, in my view, learn something by observing her."⁴⁴ Matsumoto adds that the critical

⁴³ Matsumoto Toshio, "Burehito-geki no hihyōsei" [Critical potential of Brecht], in *Hyōgen no sekai* [The world of expression], rev. ed. (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1967; repr., Tokyo: Seiryū Shuppan, 2006), 124-125.

⁴⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "Formal Problems Arising from the Theatre's New Content (Dialogue with the playwright Friedrich Wolf)," in *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), 229. The dialogue took place in 1949 according to John Willett. The following is Brecht's reply in its entirety: "As you quite rightly say, the play in question shows that Courage has learnt nothing from the disasters that befall her. The play was written in 1938, when the

potential of the play lies in the ways in which it pushes the contradiction between the two logics that correspond to and inform each of Courage's ways of being: now as Mother, now as Merchant. Whether or not she herself is awakened by this tension is inconsequential. The critical vector of the play runs through Courage/Mother's oscillation between these two logics; its critical efficacy lies in what it induces in the audience rather than in Courage's consciousness, and what it induces is nothing beyond an awareness of this tension. There is no promise or discovery of a deeper meaning or solution. The contradiction is a historical one that shows that even the strongest human beings can be destroyed. If this historical contradiction is to be solved, it can be done "only by society itself in long and terrible struggles."⁴⁵

writer foresaw a great war; he was not convinced that humanity was necessarily going to learn anything from the tragedy which he expected to strike it. My dear Friedrich Wolf, you will surely be the first to admit that the playwright was being a realist about this. But even if Courage learns nothing else at least the audience can, in my view, learn something by observing her. I quite agree with you that the question of choice of artistic means can only be that of how we playwrights give a social stimulus to our audience (get the moving). To this end we should try out every conceivable artistic method which assists that end, whether it is old or new." Willett writes that Wolf's criticism of *Mother Courage* is "symptomatic of a quite widely-held view there that Brecht's plays were not 'positive' and optimistic enough; they were not relevant to current problems" (idem, 229). Willett provides further notes on Brecht's own engagement with the issue. Though it is beyond the scope of the current chapter, it seems worth noting that Brecht's work took on a different kind of actuality in the enthusiastic reception of Brecht in postwar Japan.

⁴⁵ Bertolt Brecht, "Two Ways of Playing *Mother Courage*," in *Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays*, vol. 5, ed. Ralph Mannheim and John Willett (New York: Random House, 1972), 388. The editors of *Collected Plays* note that Brecht made a few changes for the 1949 Berlin production of *Mother Courage and Her Children* after being warned by the reaction of the press to the very first production of the play in Zurich in 1941. The press characterized the production as "Niobe tragedy" and spoke of "the heart-rending vitality of this mother animal." Ralph Mannheim and John Willett, introductory notes to "Notes on *Mother Courage and Her Children*," in *Collected Plays* 5, by Bertolt Brecht (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 390. Brecht's notes for producers of the play state: "The revolutionary impetus of the Reformation had been destroyed by the Peasant Wars, the greatest disaster in German history. What remained was business and cynicism. Like her friends and customers and almost everyone else, *Mother Courage*—I say this as a help to producers of the play—is aware of the purely mercantile character of war, and that is precisely what attracts her. She believes in the war to the very end. It doesn't so much as dawn on her that only the powerful can hope to benefit by war. Those who suppose that the victims of catastrophes will learn a lesson from them are mistaken. As long as the masses are the *object* of politics, they cannot look upon what happens to them as an experiment, but only as a fate; they learn no more from a catastrophe than a guinea pig learns about biology. It is not the playwright's business to make *Mother Courage* see clearly in the end—she sees certain things toward the middle of the play, at the end of scene 6, and she loses sight of them—what matters to the playwright is that the audience should see." Bertolt Brecht,

In his published “Notes for *Shura*,” Matsumoto tries to apply this earlier reading of *Mother Courage* to film spectatorship in general. He writes:

The experience of being drawn into a play is not necessarily limited to the emotional identification or catharsis that deprives the audience of critical consciousness. On the contrary, the positive condition for one’s critical consciousness exists in the state in which he is simultaneously drawn into a play and is awakened. And this paradox is possible both in theory and experience.⁴⁶

In *Shura*, Matsumoto tries to induce this oscillation as an intense aesthetic experience. Though the lighting and color scheme of the film correspond to the dark and violent theme of the film, Matsumoto also intended lighting and color of the film to bring about an intense, violent perceptual and psychosomatic experience. He writes: “At the beginning of the film, the crimson sun sets, reminding us of a sea of blood. After that, make sure to maintain unfathomable darkness. This may impose unbearable pain on the viewer, but even such pain is necessary for this film. Whether outdoors or indoors, black sets the tone of space. Penetrate the darkness with low-key lighting and let characters glare in that light. Here, even light has to be cruel.”⁴⁷

Rancor and the Grotesque

Matsumoto conceived *Shura* as a film that explores depth and blurring of boundaries in a variety of its forms. It is not only an exploration of film, light, color, and field; it is also a film that delves deeply into the experience of rancor. In his “Notes for *Shura*,” he contrasts two ways of conceiving rancor. The first one is in fact closer to a grudge, an emotion that is directed at

“Notes on *Mother Courage and Her Children*,” in *Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays*, vol. 5, ed. Ralph Mannheim and John Willett (New York: Random House, 1972), 393-394.

⁴⁶ Toshio Matsumoto, “Shura no tame no nōto” [Notes for *Shura*], in *Eiga no henkaku: geijutsu teki rajikarizumu towa nani ka* [Transformation of cinema: what is artistic radicalism?] (Tokyo: San’ichi Shobō, 1972), 243.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

another that one can endorse or resist (or at least try to resist). What the person who holds a grudge decides to do (i.e., whether he acts on the grudge or not) depends on how he understands his emotion and the reasons for having that emotion, whether he sees it as justified or not, as rational or not. A grudge is an emotion that lies within the space of rationality, and before which one is free to adopt a rational stance. Matsumoto is very skeptical of this way of conceiving rancor and of its ramifications.

The second way of conceiving rancor, the one Matsumoto had in mind for *Shura*, is as something that one is haunted by, not merely an aspect of one's condition, but the very condition of one's existence. In rancor, the question of endorsement or resistance does not arise at all. For rancor lies beyond the space of understanding and rationality: it is itself the space within which one's existence unfolds, not an emotion within oneself, but the enveloping nothingness within which one moves. It is this enveloping pervasiveness of rancor that Matsumoto was interested in exploring in *Shura*.

In his discussion of the absurd nature of rancor, Matsumoto cites Wolfgang Kayser's conception of the grotesque. The grotesque, which he contrasts to the tragic, is the demonic force that remains incomprehensible, inexplicable, and impersonal. It intrudes upon us and fuses the "realms which we know to be separated."⁴⁸ All of a sudden the world appears strange and ominous to us. The grotesque is, Kayser writes, "the objectivation of the 'It,' the ghostly 'It'—rather than the psychological 'It' (*es freut mich*: it pleases me = I am glad) and the cosmic "It" (*es regnet*: it rains)" that makes up of "the third meaning of the impersonal pronoun."⁴⁹ The

⁴⁸ Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 185.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

experience of rancor that Matsumoto had in mind is an experience of this ghostly “It” that sets the world against Gengobei and destroys him. It is different from the feeling, corresponding to the psychological “It,” that Gengobei justifiably experiences after being betrayed by his lover Koman, a feeling that we are all familiar with, a feeling that, to some extent, allows us to identify with Gengobei. By contrast, rancor, as Matsumoto conceives it, pushes *us*—the audience—out of such an identificatory mode; we will be appalled at the sight of the grotesque, of our own alienation, of the world’s absurdity.

The distinction Kayser draws between the grotesque and the tragic is not only relevant to the overall narrative structure of *Shura* but is also significant for considering the film’s stylistic and formal mode of engagement with spectatorship, in particular with its use of the color black, of light, and of camerawork. “As an artistic genre,” Kayser writes, “tragedy opens precisely, within the sphere of the meaningless and the absurd, the possibility of a deeper meaning. [...] The creator of grotesques, however, must not and cannot suggest a meaning. Nor must he distract our attention from the absurd.”⁵⁰ But the grotesque has its own revelatory principle akin to (Matsumoto’s interpretation of) the role of the audience in Brecht’s conception of *Mother Courage*. Kayser writes:

In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal effects a secret liberation. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged. And thus we arrive at a final interpretation of the grotesque: AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid., 186.

⁵¹ Ibid., 188.

Black and Dark

The most visually striking aspect of the film is its literal darkness. The first and only image shot in color is that of the setting sun. The sky near the horizon glows in red. As the sun sets, night falls. After the sunset, the screen goes black, a black against which the title of the film appears in white. From here onwards, the film shifts to black-and-white. The drama begins at night *and* in black-and-white film.

Blackness in cinema, in black-and-white film in particular, oscillates between an embodied, color (black) and the absence of light (darkness). *Shura* is formally and diegetically set in the liminal space where this oscillation takes place. Commenting on one such instance of oscillation earlier in the film, Burch writes: “The long slow pans that unexpectedly articulate one reverse-field sequence, producing long, ‘optically motionless’ passages of black on the screen, border on ambiguity only – for at the first viewing they come too early in the film to be read for what they are, the acknowledgment of another fundamental ‘anomaly’: it is always night in this film, and in fact much of the architecture is simply slabs of darkness.”⁵² “In one level,” Burch adds, “‘night’ can be read as the darkness of the space around the proscenium of the Western stage.” Burch’s comment about the stage seems applicable to a scene in which characters carry out their plot to swindle Gengobei out of his money. It is ambiguously presented as “a play-within-a-play” with the passages of black being the “flower path” of the kabuki theater. The darkness in that case sets up the stage as a self-contained world or scene. But as Burch perceptively observes, it “border[s] on ambiguity only.”⁵³

⁵² Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Film*, reprinted with an introduction by Harry Harootunian (1979; repr., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, 2004), 357.

⁵³ *Ibid.*; Matsumoto also remarks in his notes that this scene should be shot as if the stage is seen from the audience and the black passage through which the protagonist walks through should imply the “flower

The ambiguity persists throughout the film in one way or another. It is sustained by the effusive black of the black-and-white film that blurs and evades the outline or edge of objects, rendering part of the image unrecognizable. Furthermore, the darkness of the theater that Burch refers to also evokes a double image of the condition of film projection to which, as film scholar Tom Gunning writes, black returns us by withholding both light and color. If darkness is the condition of film projection and produces black as the effect of the medium, black “renders darkness visible, the non-shape of nothingness.”⁵⁴ *Shura* harnesses the special materiality of black in the sensual experience of the film audience for its intense phenomenological effects. Matsumoto masterfully deploys the filmic ambiguity between the blackness of surface and the darkness of void to blur the boundaries between worlds: day and night, color and darkness, of real life and film, real action and play, of humans and demons... the list goes on.

Blackness and the Haptic Mode of Vision

Let’s consider the opening of the film. The sound of the temple bell that strikes at regular intervals is carried over from the sunset shot to the black title screen, then to the diegetic world of *Shura*, creating a metrical continuity between the two. It is also the temporal marker of the world we are entering. The deep, elongated sound of the bell adds volume to that world. Along with the title *Shura* it sets the religious undertone of the film, which further expands space into and beyond time. The visual narration of the film, however, brings us back to the image on screen. The tip of the beam suspended on ropes, swings into the dark space of the screen from

path” in kabuki; provided, however, that at the level of both structure and acting, the scene should not be presented as a plotting scene as such (Matsumoto, 242).

⁵⁴ Tom Gunning, “Where Do Colors Go at Night?” in *Color and the Moving Image: History, Theory, Aesthetics, Archive*, ed. Simon Brown, Sarah Street, and Liz Watkins (New York: Routledge, 2013), 88.

the right, and strikes the barely visible bell on the left. The metaphysical mood and message that the bell carries through the dark space is intercepted, as it were, when the beam, glaring in white low-key light, framed in such a way that it is abstracted from its physical support and institutional setting, is thrust into the black screen. Hard key light cast on the wooden beam burnishes its surface while the pendulum-like movement of the beam captivates our gaze. Dust sparkles in the air as the beam strikes the bell. The lyricism of the metallic quality of the image is reminiscent of avant-garde (industry) documentaries that Matsumoto made in the 1950s and early 1960s such as *Nishijin* (*The Weavers of Nishijin*, 1961) and *Ishi no uta* (*The Song of Stone*, 1963). In these films, Matsumoto uses film as a “medium” to bring life to still lifes (e.g., textile, stone). In *Shura*, Matsumoto brings us into contact with the darkness.

The above-mentioned shot of the beam attunes the viewer to a mode of vision that the Austrian art historian Alois Riegl calls “haptic.” The concept’s relevance for film has been explored extensively by film scholars most notably in the field of phenomenological film theory, but for the purpose of my discussion, I find Trond Lundemo’s account of Riegl’s concept of the haptic most useful. The haptic, according to Lundemo, “refers to a specific configuration of lines and sections of the image different from the distinctions between foreground and background of classical art.”⁵⁵ The latter, which Riegl refers to as the optic, “invites a subjective vision in linear perspective” whereas the haptic is nonperspectival and two-dimensional.⁵⁶ The haptic space is not inhabitable “since nobody can orient oneself and ‘live inside’ of them.”⁵⁷ This is why, even though it is a close mode of vision, it is a different mode of vision from the tactile; it does not

⁵⁵ Trond Lundemo, “The Colors of Haptic Space: Black, Blue and White in Moving Images,” in *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (New York: Routledge, 2006), 88.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

touch but rather investigates “the critical borders of the images.”⁵⁸ Lundemo argues that black images in cinema elicit the haptic mode of vision. Whether they are used to conceal montage processes (e.g., early trick cinema) or to increase the intelligibility of the chronophotographic analysis of movement (e.g., Etienne-Jules Marey’s chronophotography), black spaces serve these different functions by constituting the haptic space.

While in early cinema such as Georges Méliès’s trick cinema, the haptic mode of vision generated by black fields has limited implications, *Shura* foregrounds the haptic mode of vision as a primary mode of spectatorship and develops its worldview around it. The spectator is constantly confronted with black spaces that push him out of the optic space and the spectatorial position he is assigned within that space. Its disorienting effect is compensated by, or rather, provides the spectator with the very impulse towards what Christian Metz calls “diegetization.”⁵⁹ Christian Metz argues that the spectator of cinema is constantly encouraged to diegetize the optical processes which he is very aware actually belong to the act of narration rather than the story world. Like the dissolve, iris, wipes, and the swish pan, “[t]he totally black screen,” Metz writes, is a “cinematographic process[es] which entail[s] camera work or treatment of the celluloid” that does not in principle intervene in the filmed action.⁶⁰ And yet, Metz continues, “despite this principle, the real working of the film often brings them into play, at least in part,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁹ Christian Metz, “‘Trucage’ and the Film,” *Critical Inquiry* 3.4 (Summer 1977): 657-75. My reading of Metz’s essay is heavily influenced by Tom Gunning’s reading of the essay in his keynote speech “Tricks, Effects, and Attractions” at the conference “The Magic of Special Effects: Cinema-Technology-Reception,” Université de Montreal, Cinémathèque Québécoise, Montreal, November 10, 2013, accessed April 28, 2016, <https://vimeo.com/84549886>

⁶⁰ Metz, 663.

for the benefit of the diegesis.”⁶¹ The boundary between the two is rather fluid. *Shura* takes advantage of this fluid boundary with its use of the black screen most notably at the level of phenomenological description where “it loses its syntactic purity” as an editing device and absorbs the film’s worldview.⁶²

An early segment of the film illustrates the point. It will be useful to first consider how it is set up. In the sequence that introduces the film’s protagonist, Gengobei, he is seen running away from the police. The camera follows closely in parallel as he runs through narrow alleys, giving us a continuous side-shot. Here, lateral movement of the camera from right to left is established as a pattern. The low-key lighting and camera movement, as well as the proximity of the camera to the character, and that of the character to the houses and walls he passes by, render the images abstract. This aesthetic gesture towards abstraction, as well as the emphasis on composition, are pervasive throughout the film. That by way of preamble.

The first shot of the segment that I want to consider repeats this pattern of lateral movement inside the house that the protagonist flees into. But as he navigates this space with a more controlled pace, enhanced darkness, high contrast between black and white, and blinds partially obstructs the viewer’s regard on Gengobei; this side-shot evokes a strong sense of

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Metz, 669. The term “diegetization” captures Metz’s dynamic conceptualization of film language: “It is not because the cinema is language that it can tell such fine stories, but rather it has become language because it has told such fine stories.” Christian Metz, “The Cinema: Language or Language System?” in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 47. For Metz, it is not that new cinema—by which he refers to postwar European cinema such as *Il Grido*, *L’Avventura*, *8½*, *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Muriel*, *Jules and Jim*, and *Breathless*—abandoned narrative. In them, narratives have become “more diversified, more ramified, and more complex.” “It is astonishing,” he writes, “that not everyone can see—under the pretext that its forms have been renewed—the specific temper that characterizes the great tellers of tales.” (“The Modern Cinema and Narrativity,” in idem *Film Language*, 227). Peter Wollen’s distinction of two types of postwar avant-garde cinema is relevant here. Peter Wollen, “The Two Avant-Gardes,” *Studio International* (November-December 1975): 171-175.

suspicion at the level of perception. (fig. 4.2.) Following an abrupt shot of a severed arm lying on the floor (fig. 4.3.), the film continues with its lateral movement. But only deceptively so. Here the black screen is used as an editing device to create an impression of both spatial and temporal continuity for a surreal effect. (fig. 4.4.-5.) This enhanced, though false, sense of spatial-temporal continuity produced by the insertion of a black screen is used several times throughout this segment. It is particularly effective in a shot/reverse-shot in which the protagonist sees himself hung (fig. 4.6.-9.), or in the last shot of the segment, where he wakes up from his nightmare—the transition from the dream to reality is made seamless: he wakes up in the dark. In all cases, this ingenious approach to editing turns the flat image of the black screen into an access to indeterminate and expansive space of darkness, a liminal nowhere where dreams, film, reality and the screen coincide.



Fig. 4. 2. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)
Lateral movement from right to left.



Fig. 4. 3. A severed arm in *Shura*
(Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)



Fig. 4. 4. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)
Lateral movement from right to left.



Fig. 4. 5. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)
(Sensation of) lateral movement from right to
left continues.



Fig. 4. 6. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)
Lateral movement from right to left continued
from Fig. 4.5.



Fig. 4. 7. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)
Lateral movement from right to left continues.

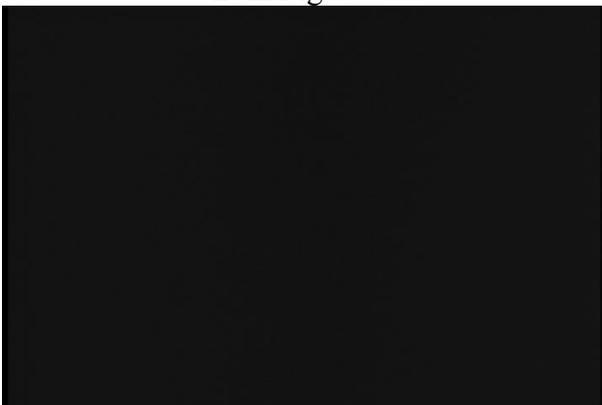


Fig. 4. 8. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)
(Sensation of) lateral movement from right to
left continues.



Fig. 4. 9. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)
Lateral movement from right to left continued
from Fig 4. 8. Gengobei looking up at himself
being hung.

Blackness as a Device of Spectatorial Double Consciousness in *Shura*

On the other hand, as Metz points out, the spectator of cinema, of fictional cinema, always maintains a double consciousness of the diegeticized and the fact of diegeticization, and its artifice even if he does not know exactly how it is done. Though the degree to which a given *trucage* is perceptible to the viewer varies from film to film, from genre to genre, Metz regards this dialectic process of concealment and display, the process of effecting *trucage* for the benefit of the diegesis and at the same time taking credit for astonishing the senses of the spectator, as one of the primary ways in which cinema affirms its power, and how it seizes the spectator's heart. It is no coincidence that Lundemo draws an example of the haptic black space from Méliès's trick cinema which emphatically flaunts its trick as part of its attraction. The haptic black fields in Méliès's trick films is a technological and technical space where cinema effects its *trucage* and displays its process [only as one] from which we are estranged in order to experience its effect. The black fields in Méliès's trick films which Lundemo calls "a blind spot for the spectator" is one that does not conceal its invisibility.⁶³ They hold the viewer's attention by suspending themselves from representation. *Shura* occasionally intensifies the 'display function' of the black space and turns it into a gag by rendering its syntactic function at odds with the stylistic conventions of mainstream fiction filmmaking. The best instance of such use of the black space is found in the two complementary scenes of reconciliation. In both cases, though one is concerned with the master-servant relationship (professional) and the other with the father-son relationship (familial), reconciliation involves the same money.

⁶³ Lundemo, 91.

The first scene occurs right after Hachimon, who just returned from his trip to their hometown, accuses Gengobei of forgetting his loyal duty and spending all his money on a *geisha*. He then forces the *geisha* Koman out of the house and hastily returns to the room where Gengobei sprawls across the tatami mat, resting his head on an empty bottle of sake. Hachimon sits tight by the sliding *shōji* door to the entrance, facing down towards Gengobei. The initial conversation between the two is captured in more or less conventional shot/reverse shots, cut closer with every new shot. At the height of their conversation, Gengobei slowly lifts himself up with his back turned to Hachimon. Absorbed into the dark shadow, his facial expression is barely visible to the eyes of the viewer. Then there is a cut to a medium close-up of Hachimon, framed against the white *shōji* paper panels on the sliding door and the dark doorway into the entrance. It is the longest shot in the scene in which Hachimon puts what Gengobei calls “an act.” Hachimon delivers a long speech and tries to remind Gengobei of their grand mission. He does so by telling a story about Gengobei’s former retainer Tokuemon, the significance of which I will return to shortly.

Before Hachimon finishes his speech, the camera starts panning to the right. The shot goes completely black/dark half-way through the pan. The pan opens up the architecturally ambiguous black space. The *shōji* door observed in the preceding shot is absent, or at least invisible. The geometric contours of the room give way to darkness. Neither the corner of the room nor the family altar by the wall are observable. Technically, too, this black space is ambiguous: the optical effects (e.g., process shot) are indistinguishable from the lighting effects.

What matters is not so much our uncertainty about how the visual effects are achieved as it is the uncertainty of our perception itself as the primary effect, the source of our enjoyment—broadly conceived—of the sequence. Is the black a trick spot? Or does it result from and refer

(back) to the darkness filling up the room? The binary of surface/depth or that of foreground/background collapse in the ambiguous black space in cinema. Equally important is that this expansive black space does not yield to a metaphysical or magical reading. At best it is ambiguous. One reason for this is that uninterrupted speech of Hachiemon accompanying the movement, which remains directed at Gengobei throughout. The camera returns to the dramatic space identifying Gengobei in it and then back to Hachiemon framed in a medium shot.

At the end of Hachiemon's plea, there is a cut. A medium shot shows Gengobei yawn in boredom. He mockingly praises Hachiemon's histrionic speech, but suddenly changing the tone of his voice—histrionic on his part—and he dispels Hachiemon's doubt by stating that his misconduct is deliberate: to conceal his true identity and scheme from his enemies. Relieved, Hachiemon takes out the money that he gathered during his trip. The coins bundled and wrapped in white paper glow in the dark.

Their exchange is momentarily interrupted by Koman, who abruptly enters the house to pick up the musical instrument that she left behind. A medium-long shot shows Hachiemon and Gengobei sitting in the reception room, the former closer to the foreground and the later to the background, but both facing the direction of the fourth wall. The *fusuma* (sliding doors) that appear to be open to the sides of the frame function as a frame-within-a-frame and draw the viewer's attention to the composition of the image. (fig. 4.10.)

What follows is a climactic moment of the reconciliation between Hachiemon and Gengobei. Gengobei acknowledges Hachiemon's hard work and thanks him for it. Hachiemon is glad to see his master happy and encourages him to bring the money to Ōboshi (the former chamberlain of the En'ya family and the leader of the vendetta) next morning so that Gengobei's

name will be listed among the rest of the former retainers of the En'ya family in time for the vendetta. Gengobei agrees and thanks Hachiemon once again.

But let's pay attention to the sequence's formal register. Following the frame-within-a-frame shot, there is a cut to a medium shot of Gengobei holding money while directly addressing the camera. (fig. 4.11.) He now appears against a completely dark background. The lamp and a little familiar altar observed in the previous shot can be detected. Then there is an odd "lateral" camera movement (fig. 4.12.) to Hachiemon who is now seated with his back against the *shōji* doors, indicating his 90-degree counterclockwise turn from the previous shot. When the camera stops, he appears directly addressing the camera. (fig. 4.13.) Hachiemon is brightly lit, partly because of the light reflected by the white paper panels of the now closed *shōji* doors. The camera makes a similar movement (fig. 4.14.) back to Gengobei who replies to Hachiemon's suggestion with enthusiasm, again directly addressing the camera. (fig. 4.15.)



Fig. 4.10. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971).
A frame-within-a-frame.



Fig. 4.11. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971).
Gengobei holding money while directly
addressing the camera.



Fig. 4.12. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971). An “odd” lateral camera movement from right to left.



Fig. 4.13. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971). Hachiemon directly addressing the camera.



Fig. 4.14. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971). An “odd” lateral camera movement from right to left.



Fig. 4.15. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971). Back to Gengobei directly addressing the camera.

There are several oddities about the camera movement in this brief segment. First, technically speaking, the camera movement in this segment seems to involve panning from right to left, yet without inducing a full sensation of rotation. In other words, it feels like a pan without a rotation axis. This lack in turn generates a sensation of lateral movement from right to left. This sensation is partly enhanced by the consistency of the camera’s orientation relative to Hachiemon, through which he maintains—compositionally speaking—his orientation in relation to Gengobei from the previous shot despite, it seems, Hachiemon’s unmotivated position change

(the 90-degree rotation mentioned above) and hence the changed spatial relationship with Gengobei. This is a cheat cut without actually cheating the audience. The black shadow that appears in-between the two characters during the camera movement is our suspect. Though my emphasis here is not on which technique is deployed but rather on what the scene feels like, it is worth pointing out the recurrence of the use of blackness as an editing device. This dark, black shadow, which looks like a spill-over from the extremely dark space in which Gengobei appears to the well-lit space in which Hachiemon appears—a contrast only possible with a major change in exposure—is a place to hide a cut.

The two characters' direct address to the camera is another oddity in the segment. Their explicit acknowledgement of one another in their gaze, gesture, and speech (“It makes me happy just to see you so happy,” “I cannot thank you enough”) encourages the viewer to treat their direct address to the camera as their direct address to one another. At the same time, their backgrounds and the geometric patterns of the *tatami* mats that they sit on suggest that these characters are sitting, implausibly, at a 90-degree angle relative to one another rather than face-to-face. The camera movement which we initially assume to be a pan generates a sensation of our turning around with the camera. When the movement falls short of a sensation of “turning around”—possibly due to editing, as I discussed above—the two characters are experienced as being side-by-side. The overall result is that the film generates three different configurations of their relative positions: face-to-face (speech), at a 90-degree angle (positions in the room), and side-by-side (a fake pan), without reconciling them. Each formal configuration corresponds to a perception of their orientation relative to each other, but none of them can be comfortably identified as or with an objective one *per se* insofar as the unity of the fictional world is assumed. Nor does one follow, or coexist with, the other logically. On the contrary, they are incompatible.

They each represent the narrative space differently and are seemingly independently from each other without clear motivation. The narration is plural, without given precedence to any configuration over any other. Furthermore, this is not perspectival pluralism, at least not in the common sense of the term perspective. Here the question is not one of perspective, but of expressive shots. The effect is more subtle, if not marginal; it is hardly an obstacle to our comprehension of the scene.

One way to interpret this jolt is to consider it as a formal subversion of the reconciliation between Hachiemon and Gengobei and their grand mission, foreshadowing its tragic outcome. But such an interpretative move fails to account for the formal rigor and specificity of the shot construction through which the film impacts how we experience it. We may experience this impact with or without its hermeneutic end. If anything, the uncertainty as to how and where these shots fit with each other, and how they fit into the diegetic world, intensify the viewer's experience of the fictional world, and the experience that defies both everyday logic of time and space and our experience of more conventional filmmaking—the magic of cinema.

There is, as I mentioned, another instance in which a similar technique is deployed in the context of a reconciliation. It occurs when Koman and Sangorō arrive with their baby at Aizen-ji (which literally means a temple dyed in love) to deliver the money to Sangorō's father Tokuemon. The scene begins with a close-up shot of the bundled coins being held out by Sangorō. (fig. 4.16.) Needless to say, this is the very money Koman and Sangorō stole from Gengobei. This is followed by a cut to a medium shot of Sangorō's father Tokuemon, directly addressing the camera. (fig. 4.17.) Tokuemon thanks his son for granting his request and gathering the money that he desperately needed for his master. The speech is reminiscent of Hachiemon's earlier appeal to Gengobei, not least because of its length. The irony of that also

becomes apparent as Sangorō's father reveals himself to be the servitor Tokuemmon that Hachiemon had mentioned in his speech as an example of a loyal retainer who had been trying to gather money for Gengobei to join the vendetta, a piece of information that completes the missing link for the audience: the money that Koman and Sangorō stole from Gengobei and that is now about to be handed over to Sangorō's father is ultimately intended for Gengobei to allow him to join the vendetta. But the link is still missing for Koman and Sangorō, who are not aware of Gengobei's disguise or of his real name, by which Hachiemon and Tokuemmon address him. And there is also a missing link for Gengobei, who does not know that Sangorō is his retainer Tokuemmon's long-disowned son. Their blindness to the whole, their inability to put the pieces together, is what leads them to a tragic ending.

As Tokuemmon delivers his speech, the camera moves towards the left in parallel to the wall behind him. (fig. 4.18.) It passes the money placed on the tatami mat (fig. 4.19.) and moves further left to reveal Sangorō and Koman with their baby seated still, gazing down and listening to Tokuemmon in silence. (fig. 4.20.) The camera hovers for a second, keeping them framed in the center, and retraces its path back to Tokuemmon. (fig. 4.21.) All the characters—including the money illuminated in a strong spot-light—appear to be aligned in parallel to the wall in the background as well as to the path of the camera movement. Tokuemmon and the couple face the same direction. (fig. 4.22.) Tokuemmon's acknowledgement of their hard work is followed by a cut to a medium shot—but closer than the previous shot—of the couple who reply to him with enthusiasm. (fig. 4.23.) This is followed by a cut to a close shot of Tokuemmon with a big smile on his face, once again congratulating them for their accomplishment. (fig. 4.24.) What's more, he forgives Tokuemmon and takes him back as his son. A reaction shot of the couple delighted by the news, thanking Tokuemmon effusively (fig. 4.25.), is cut to a medium-long shot of the three (and

the baby) seated face-to-face over the money. (fig. 4.26.) On the one hand, this shot can make sense to the extent that it finally conforms to our social *and* formal expectations: Isn't a direct address that is not addressed to someone odd? If not the social and formal conventions, what do we rely on in order to make sense of the scene? Isn't this shot more or less the establishing shot that we have been waiting for throughout the scene, that is, the shot that helps us orient ourselves in relation to the fictional world vis-à-vis figures that inhabit that world and their relation to one another? On the other hand, the shot catches us by surprise, and in doing so, it proves something to us. For one thing, the jolt is due to the shot's violation of the set-up, the odd alignment of Tokueemon, the money, and the couple. However odd, it is the set-up that we have come to accept partly because of its *familiarity* established in the first reconciliation scene. The film's play on perception also comes full circle: the unfamiliar becomes familiar in the first reconciliation scene, and here it becomes unfamiliar again. The heightened sense of the narration and the expressive act of the medium registers for the spectator the stakes of reconciliation differently from the stakes perceived by the characters that are political and domestic in nature.



Fig. 4.16. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971).
Money.



Fig. 4.17. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971).
Sangorō's father Tokueemon directly
addressing the camera.



Fig. 4.18. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971).
The camera moves laterally to the left.



Fig. 4.19. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971).
The lateral movement continued from fig.
4.18.



Fig. 4.20. Koman and Sangorō in *Shura*
(Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)



Fig. 4.21. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971).
The camera moves laterally back to
Tokuemon.



Fig. 4.22. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971).
Tokuemon acknowledges the couple's hard
work.



Fig. 4.23. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971).
Koman and Sangorō reply with enthusiasm.



Fig. 4.24. *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971). Tokueemon with a big smile on his face.



Fig. 4.25. The couple thanks Tokueemon in *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)



Fig. 4.26. Tokueemon and the couple speak face-to-face in *Shura* (Matsumoto Toshio, 1971)

Comparison with Ishizawa's theatrical production of *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu* (The lover's pledge) helps us understand the significance of the aforementioned difference in Matsumoto's conception of *Shura*. Ishizawa adapted Nanboku's play for his contemporary theatrical production in the spirit of *Shingeki*: to produce and perform new and innovative plays that reflect Japan's contemporary reality for the youth audience. In *Kamikakete Sango taisetsu*,

Ishizawa was particularly intrigued by the fact that Nanboku incorporated the political dimension into what was otherwise a domestically-oriented play. More specifically, in Nanboku's remake, Ishizawa detected a critical attitude towards the often romanticized revenge of the loyal 47 *rōnin* (masterless samurai). He has written extensively on this double structure of Nanboku's remake and pushed his own allegorical reading in his adaptation by replacing the critique of 47 *rōnin* with a critique of Japan's war efforts in WWII.⁶⁴ Since Ishizawa is also credited as the co-author of the screenplay for *Shura*, it was perhaps Ishizawa's theatrical production that Matsumoto directly engaged with in producing his adaptation. Matsumoto, on his end, saw the parallel between the period in which Nanboku wrote the play and his own, the dark period following the flourishing 1960s, which is often compared to the dynamic Genroku era of the early Edo period. Instead of allegorizing it by drawing an explicit parallel with his own period, Matsumoto explores the poetic dimension of the tale in relation to his conception of spectatorship.

An experimental documentary filmmaker by training, Matsumoto collaborated with a new generation of innovative filmmakers that merged out of postwar documentary filmmaking practices. Among them were *Shura*'s cinematographer Suzuki Tatsuo, who was a member of *Blue Group (ao no kai)*, the documentary filmmakers' study group of which Matsumoto was also a member, as well as lighting technician Unno Yoshio, who collaborated with Suzuki on several notable Japanese New Wave films shot in black-and-white. Matsumoto was particularly impressed by Suzuki's use of hand-held camera and telephoto lens combined with his sensitivity to motion, light, and composition.⁶⁵ In an article that he wrote in 1966, Matsumoto described

⁶⁴ Ochi Haruo, 36.

⁶⁵ At the Iwanami documentary studio, filmmakers had access to newer film equipment such as Arriflex camera than in major commercial studios.

Suzuki's camerawork as "the finest in its ability to navigate through pre-rational image."⁶⁶ He called Suzuki the first cameraman to break away from the classical realism of the cinematographers of the previous generation both in sensitivity and method. In his program note for Kuroki Kazuo's *Silence Has No Wings* (*Tobenai chinmoku*, 1966), in the words of Michael Raine, Suzuki "mobilized the controlled reframing of studio cinema, creating a loosened form of continuity."⁶⁷

Though Matsumoto asked Suzuki to take a more "stoic" approach in *Shura*, his signature camerawork is unmistakably present in the film.⁶⁸ The nine-minute murder sequence of Koman and her child is, however, the most emphatic mobilization of Suzuki's talent. Gengobei rushes into the house of Koman and Sangoro in the latter's absence. The hand-held camera follows his reckless movement. After learning that her pledge of love was part of the scheme from the very beginning, Gengobei hesitates no more and turns into a cruel murderer. As if the camera is haunted by the demonic force of rancor itself, it casts a sadistic gaze at the scene of the murder. He tells in his interview that this scene was originally shot in color.⁶⁹ In theory, it was supposed to echo the first shot of the film, the shot of the bleeding sun "reminding us of a sea of blood," perhaps to disrupt the dreamlike continuity of black madness.⁷⁰ The intended effect was not

⁶⁶ Matsumoto Toshio, "Gottani no bigaku" [The aesthetics of potpourri], in *Hyōgen no sekai* [The world of expression], rev. ed. (Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō, 1967; repr., Tokyo: Seiryū Shuppan, 2006), 82.

⁶⁷ Michael Raine, program note for *Silence Has No Wings*, accessed June 2, 2016, <http://www.japansociety.org/event/silence-has-no-wings>.

⁶⁸ Matsumoto Toshio, "Matsumoto Toshio, jiko o kataru" [Matsumoto Toshio speaks of himself], in the film pamphlet *Āto shiatā* [Art theatre], no. 84 (February 1971), 48; and his interview in *Shura*, DVD, directed by Matsumoto Toshio (Matsumoto Production, 1971; Tokyo: SPO Entertainment, 2004).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* You might be also able to guess from the lower contrast, grayer image.

⁷⁰ Matsumoto's description of the film indeed emphasizes the importance of red/blood for the theme of the film along with that of black (Matsumoto, "Shura no tame no nōto", 240-241).

achieved in practice, however. Matsumoto was particularly dissatisfied with the impurity of the image; red appeared among many other colors not as blood per se. Though he has kept the murder sequence in color for the trailer of the film, he produced a monochrome negative from the one shot in color. It would be a misunderstanding to see this as a decision to exclude color altogether. On the contrary, it is not surprising that the film that explores the depths of rancor as the space where liminalities overlap in the ambiguity of black and dark, surface and void, required not that color be excluded but that it be reduced to grayness.

Coda

In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Julia Kristeva offers an illuminating discussion of contemporary madness by exploring the intersections of personal and historical tragedies in the life and work of Marguerite Duras. In Duras's work, the drama of love and madness is seemingly independent of politics. The power of passion appears to reign over the political events. But for Kristeva, that is a too simplistic diagnosis of Dura's work. The melancholia that dictates Dura's sensitivity is "*also* like an explosion in history."⁷¹ What makes the aesthetic stake of *Hiroshima mon amour* remain simply that of love and death despite all is, if anything, madness that is unmistakably historical. There is no proof, but a sense of conviction. On the one hand, private suffering can depoliticize and dehistoricize public events by "absorb[ing] political horror into the subject's psychic microcosm."⁷² The modern political domain is such that it is "massively, in totalitarian fashion, social, leveling, exhausting" whereas

⁷¹ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 234.

⁷² *Ibid.*

madness paradoxically allows free individuation.⁷³ The political domain has been assimilated to the private domain and is now measured in terms of the suffering it causes. Madness has become the measurement. On the other hand, Kristeva means more than that we have become apolitical by turning to the private when she states, “Today’s milestone is human madness.”⁷⁴ Madness’s historicity takes a form of conviction, “an ethic and an aesthetic concerned with suffering,” that outcries over the public domain.⁷⁵ There is no proof but suffering: “The French woman in Hiroshima might have come out of Stendhal; perhaps she is even eternal and yet she nonetheless exists because of the war, the Nazis, the bomb...”⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid., 235.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 234.

CONCLUSION

For Edward Said, a beginning is a privileged method in modern criticism. The beginning is, he writes, “the first point in time, space or action of an accomplishment or process that has duration and meaning.”¹ Unlike origins, which one can only point to, to designate a beginning is always intentional. The beginning is “the first step in the intentional production of meaning.”² Any beginning, as Said emphasizes, can only take place in the interplay between the familiar and the new. Beginnings thus paradoxically turn us to the source of creativity, “the community of language and history—*from the beginning, despite any one beginning.*”³

This dissertation began as a search for a place of postwar *jidaigeki* in the history of cinema. Every chapter within it is in a way a beginning of its own kind. Not unlike Said’s study of masterpieces of high modernism, I intended this dissertation to be something other than the history of postwar *jidaigeki*, case studies of *jidaigeki*, or a historical study of *jidaigeki* as a genre. From one chapter to another, from one beginning to another, I aimed to present *jidaigeki* in its unfolding multiplicity, bringing into view a community of *jidaigeki* films. *Great Killing* (Chapter 3) and *Shura* (Chapter 4) are drastically different from the films analyzed in Chapter 2, and yet, part of my fascination has to do with what they share as well. To what extent, for instance, is *Great Killing* an inventive elaboration of the sensorial indulgence in the utopian feel characteristic of the popular Toei *jidaigeki* of the late 1950s that Kudō himself was making? What can we say about the importance of performance and affect in *jidaigeki* when Nakamura Katsuo plays both a romantic prince (Chapter 2) and the murderous Gengobei in *Shura* (Chapter

¹ Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975; New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 5.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

4)? How do we understand the anecdote that Matsumoto considered at some point casting Misora Hibari in the role of the beautiful and treacherous *geisha* Koman in *Shura*? What dramatic and transmedial effects did he have in mind? How do we understand the malleability and hybridity of the *jidaigeki* culture of the 1950s and 60s?

Cinema as a technologically based art form is always evolving and transforming our sensory relationship with the material world while assimilating and intersecting with other media and art forms.⁴ In that process, cinema is repeatedly invented. *Jidaigeki* is no exception. But to understand the specific malleability and hybridity of postwar *jidaigeki*, we must explore the process and its aesthetic nature from a more sociological and ethnographic perspective than articulating it in ontological terms. Michael Raine has used the concept of “transcultural mimesis” to describe the complex sensory experience that Japanese cinema offered during the studio era by playfully adapting Hollywood cinema “as a means of lightening the burden of standing on the global periphery.”⁵ Though *jidaigeki* has rarely been the locus of the study of transcultural adaptation, it is by no means oppositional to the film culture that mimetically engaged its relationship to its “powerful cultural other.”⁶ The ideals and worldviews presented in the films analyzed in this dissertation, let alone their formal and affective qualities, are neither

⁴ Cf. Andre Bazin, “For an Impure Cinema: In Defense of Adaptation,” in *What is Cinema?* trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose, 2009), 107-137; James Lastra, “What Cinema is (For the Moment...),” unpublished paper presented at the conference “Impact of Technological Innovations on the Theory and Historiography of Cinema,” Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal, November 1, 2011 as well as at the Chicago Film Seminar on September 23, 2010; Miriam Hansen, “*Artists and Models* (1955): Modernism, Medium-Specificity, and Mayhem,” lecture given at the Film Studies Center on May 8, 2009.

⁵ Michael Raine, “Adaptation as ‘Transcultural Mimesis’ in Japanese Cinema,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema*, ed. Daisuke Miyao (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 113.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

premodern nor feudal, and are hardly uniquely Japanese. On the contrary, often taking advantage of displacements, *jidaigeki* radicalizes the experience of alienation towards alterity itself.⁷

Given *jidaigeki*'s alterity, the analytical advantage of focusing on the audience's engagement with a film text, while drawing more broadly on contemporary cultural practices and critical discourse surrounding them, over text-based film analysis is manifest in the case of *jidaigeki*. In Chapter 1, I considered *A Mad Woman in Kimono* through the lens of the popular audience imagined by Tsurumi Shunsuke. The ingenuity of Tsurumi's defense of popular *jidaigeki* is his conception of the popular as the critical. Aligning himself with popular audience rather than professional film critics, he argues that popular *jidaigeki* derives its critical potential from its affinity with people's thought (*shisō*). I emphasized the historical, political, and intellectual context in which people's thought (*shisō*) gained importance, and popular media culture such as *jidaigeki* were thought as both a manifestation of, and a means to study, people's thought (*shisō*). Part of my ambition in the chapter was to consider Tsurumi's discussion of *jidaigeki* in relation to the question of culture, one of the central themes of postwar intellectual history, and to re-evaluate cinema's relevance to that question. It was with this chapter that I conceived *jidaigeki* as what Raymond Williams calls a "structure of feeling." A "structure of feeling" as a method is a hypothesis about the social that is not yet fully articulated in more explicit and recognizable social and semantic forms but is manifested as an ongoing lived process notably in the realm of culture such as art and literature. The elements of the social as an ongoing lived process are those of "impulse, restraint, and tone"; they are also "specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as

⁷ Michael Taussig calls for a study of the mimetic that focuses on its baselessness and dependence on alterity rather than the opposition of self and other.

felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity.”⁸ Culture is the realm in which these elements that are otherwise taken to be private and idiosyncratic are socially structured.

Tsurumi did not challenge the view that *jidaigeki* is a residual form of culture, on account of which *jidaigeki* was seen with suspicion by U.S. censorship.⁹ He defended it by pointing to the critical potential of such a residual form of culture. Chapter 2, however, directly challenges this rather persistent view that *jidaigeki* is a residual form of culture. By tracing the formation of a new audience group in the late 1950s, I showed that *jidaigeki* was part of the emergent culture.¹⁰ In particular, I offered a reading of romance in Toei *jidaigeki* through the lens of adolescent girls. I based this choice, and my reading on the well-documented production culture of Toei studio as well as the audience demographic research and fan studies conducted in the 1950s. It is in the gap between (the absence of) romance as a social convention and fascination with romance that I read these films a structure of feeling. I underscored the sensual and affective elements over the narrative discourse of the films. The first two chapters of my dissertation illustrate the political, economical, and social significance of audiences in the evolution of *jidaigeki* as a culture in postwar Japan. Thinking about *jidaigeki* in terms of its

⁸ Raymond Williams, “Structure of Feeling,” in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.

⁹ As for the definition of the residual, see Chapter 1, esp. pp. xx-xx.

¹⁰ The emergent refers to a continuous process in which “new meaning and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship” are being created. Its relationship to the dominant is, however, difficult to determine. The emergent in the strict sense of the term defined by Williams, is oppositional or alternative to the dominant culture, he acknowledges that it is hard to differentiate it from a mere new phase of the dominant culture. Regardless, the major point that he wishes to get across with the concepts of the residual and the emergent is that the dominant is never total: “*no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intension.*” (Raymond Williams, “Dominant, Residual and Emergent” in *Marxism and Literature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977], 125).

audience, and by extension, the experience of the audience, in turn allowed me to approach the question of *jidaigeki*'s aesthetics and its engagement with the present.

The theme of engagement with the present informed my reading of *Great Killing* as a formal and aesthetic exploration of political and ethical engagement grounded in urgency. Focusing on the film's formal methodology and spectatorial address, I downplayed—perhaps a bit too much—the broader historical context of the film such as the 1960 ANPO struggle within which the film's address to its present audience could be better understood. I did not, however, think that the film's intense formalism and its historical situatedness were mutually exclusive. That *Great Killing* indexes the historical present on a formal and affective level makes the question of audience more pertinent to the inner dynamics of the film. In my formal analysis, I drew a parallel to the film's discourse on political action around the principle of immediacy. The next step of this chapter will be to provide a more detailed account of the more historically and critically immediate contexts to which the film is addressed.

Shura poses an important question for my project: What counts as *jidaigeki*? Matsumoto himself rather casually calls *Shura* “my first attempt at *jidaigeki*,” then he qualifies it by saying, “But I made it in my own style by ignoring various conventions.”¹¹ He could have called it a filmic adaptation of a forgotten kabuki play. Why call it *jidaigeki*? While we can only speculate on the reason behind this, it is the magic word of *jidaigeki* that allows him to evoke, and us to appreciate, *Shura*'s radical departure from studio-made *jidaigeki* films. He did not make the film's departure to be a dead-end in itself, however. Despite the film's literal and figurative darkness, he did not make the film to say that the world is hopeless, either. On the contrary, in

¹¹ *Shura*'s publicity leaflet handed out at Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka.

making the film, he was guided by a search for an alternative way of being.¹² His intention was not always taken into consideration by those who saw pessimism or even sadism in the film. Matsumoto was frustrated enough to write a new essay titled “Ōshima Nagisa no me wa fushiana ka” (is Ōshima blind?) for the publication of the monograph *Eiga no henkaku: geijutsu teki rajikarizumu towa nani ka* [Transformation of cinema: what is artistic radicalism?], a collection of his essays that had previously appeared in varied publication formats.¹³ Four months prior to the publication of *Eiga to henkaku*, Ōshima published his harsh criticism of *Shura* in one of the leading alternative film magazines *Eiga hihyō* (Film critique). He criticized the film for its exclusive interest in method, its lukewarm treatment of subjectivity, its absent theme and sense of reality. In frustration, Matsumoto wrote his new essay as a response and included it in his collected essay. In my own treatment of *Shura*, I tried to bring my analysis closer to Matsumoto’s own way of thinking about the film. In doing so, I wanted to highlight that Matsumoto intended the film to be a catalyst for transformation.

This brings me back to Said’s discussion of beginnings. Said identifies two types of beginning: intransitive and transitive. He calls “a beginning with (or for) an anticipated end, or at least expected continuity” the transitive mode of beginning.¹⁴ He contrasts it with the intransitive and conceptual beginning that “retains for the beginning its identity as *radical* starting point.”¹⁵ Said illustrates the difference between the transitive mode of beginning and the intransitive mode

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Toshio Matsumoto, “Ōshima Nagisa no me wa fushiana ka” [is Ōshima blind?], in *Eiga no henkaku: geijutsu teki rajikarizumu towa nani ka* [Transformation of cinema: what is artistic radicalism?] (Tokyo: San’ichi Shobō, 1972), 258-263.

¹⁴ Said, 72.

¹⁵ Ibid., 73; emphasis in the original.

of beginning by way of analogy, discussing the different relationship to writing that the reader and the writer has:

When I read a page I must keep in mind that the page was written, or somehow produced in an act of writing. Writing is unknown, or the beginning from which reading imagines and from which it departs in what Sartre calls a method of guided invention. But that is the reader's transitive point of view, which is forced to imagine a prior unknown that the reader calls writing. From the point of view of the writer, however, his writing—as he does it—is perpetually at the beginning. [...] What he has already written will always have a power over him. But it, too, while he writes, in the presence of his act of writing, is an unknown. It is felt but not present. The writer is the widow of an insight.¹⁶

This felt presence of something at its own beginning is what I wanted to capture in this dissertation. Perhaps more importantly at the moment of writing to conclude my exploration of postwar *jidaigeki*, I can testify that it is only through the process of writing this dissertation that I have begun to feel *jidaigeki*'s beginnings.

If the choice of *jidaigeki* to engage the present is not obvious, it has to be intended, argued for, and defended. Writing about *jidaigeki* taught me this. It inspired me to write for a beginning of scholarship on *jidaigeki* in English.

¹⁶ Ibid, 74.

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