Japanese Cinema: Visual Style and the Dialectics of Home

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Introduction: "Home" as an ethical configuration in cinema

A. Rationale and interpretative exigencies

This essay deals with Japanese cinema from a normative perspective. Many Japanese directors preoccupied serious Anglophone film criticism[1] and various scholars have contributed studies of considerable historical and critical value. Kenji Mizoguchi, Yasujiro Ozu and Akira Kurosawa have been systematically explored and the insights gained reflect deeply layered films where visual narrative is skillfully tied to social commentary of universal relevance. Unearthing Japanese cinema requires, however, broader analogies and linkages.

Japanese cinema does not rely only on its obvious and exceptional stylistic qualities. It derives its special attractions also from the fact that these remarkable visual narratives tell great ethical stories. Films represent human agents interacting-in various individual, collective and institutional configurations-and thus, are already embedded in the ethical narratives and relations which define and frame social tensions and reconciliations. The ethical 'materiality' of the social world forms the defining feature of cinema representation of reality and can be discerned systematically among the finest specimens of Japanese filmmaking. Perhaps no other cinematic tradition, with the exception of the Italian cinema, was defined so critically by the ethical struggles, dilemmas, tensions, antinomies and reconciliations that characterized post-war societies.

The thematic narrative of politics in Japanese cinema has been effectively followed by Joan Mellen[2] and while it has the advantage of parceling Japanese films into coherent socio-political categories, it often eschews issues of style, and how these affect decisively the

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[1] I belong to those interpreters who are looking at Japanese film being at a disadvantage due to wide language and culture barriers. However, for reasons that Yoshimoto explains aptly, the language competency may not abstract from the interpretive innovation that a critical eye is engaged at, when looking at an 'object' through the required distance. In my case the distance is great indeed but I hope that at the level of abstraction in which I approach film interpretation, subtitled viewings suffice. To understand, if one follows Hans-Georg Gadamer here as I do, is not tantamount to closure, cultural presumptuousness or even worse to an apology for cultural illiteracy. Rather, it aims at redeeming the object from 'stasis' 'throwing' it in fluid and novel historical and hermeneutic currents. On the language issue, see Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa. Film Studies and Japanese Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, p. 43.

[2] Joan Mellen, *The Waves at Genji's Door. Japan Through its Cinema*. New York: Pantheon Books. 1976. In a middle chapter of this highly informative treatise on the political discourse of Japanese film, titled 'The Devastated Homeland', Mellen tackles key films by Kurosawa, Imamura, Shindo and Kinoshita among others and thus calibrates a significant theme connected with post-war pitfalls in Japan along the tracks of a 'home'.

political and ethical positions endorsed. Mellen's approach and political orientation is certainly close to my reading of Japanese cinema and to her work I owe much of my engagement with the demanding task of 'universalizing' Japanese cinema.

Adepts of Japanese film criticism have often resorted to the use of sociological and philosophical concepts as a fruitful and, in fact, inevitable adjunct in reading filmic texts. Even scholars committed to formal analysis like Noel Burch feel compelled to transgress the much cherished artificial boundary between form and content.[3] Concepts borrowed from humanities, social and cultural studies appear as safety valves at those junctures when film criticism demands an interpretative decision, in order to build an exemplary model around this principal decision. This, I feel, is, indeed, the correct methodological move, for films tell stories-largely in visual terms-about individuals in society and are necessarily rooted in the philosophical or sociological matrix that emerges from film as an objective text of meaning. The predicate 'objective' does not preclude social constructionist or contextualist analyses. Rather, it includes these too through the configuration of filmic text as a determinate, yet, semantically open aesthetic, intellectual and ethical experience. Objectivity refers to the claim that film reflects a reality and therefore it is bound hermeneutically by the tradition within which it is voiced and by the productive hermeneutic ground from which the interpretative gesture is attempted, disclosing thus, film's ontological possibilities. However, and this is crucial, following Hegel, the interpretation of a filmic text is bound by shapes of conscious-ness and configurations of social reality, which cannot, and indeed as the best of these films testify, do not lead to a semantic infinity. The problem with the recourse to philosophy or sociology stems from the sketchy and often schematic excavation of conceptual discourses that are part and parcel with the visual codes that define film. What is required, therefore, is not the strategy of excising concepts from film but, rather, the opposite gesture of refining and clarifying fecund theoretical tools which open film to philosophical and sociological interpretation, and simultaneously bind filmic texts politically and ethically. Either as critical moral theory[4] or as filmosophy[5], philosophy raises substantive claims for film criticism; indeed film's visual thinking can and should open up to ethical discourses. Rousseau, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Bataille and Benjamin among others have marched as theoretical 'addenda' to Japanese cinema studies. Yet, no systematic treatment of how a European perspective can contribute to a better appreciation and understanding of Japanese cinema has thus far emerged. Japanese modernity, in spite of culturally sealed features, which may require genea-logical trajectories of hermeneutic discourse, can be confronted fruitfully, but not exhaustively, with social theoretical aids (ranging from Marx and Parsons to Touraine and Luhmann), as,

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[3] Noel Burch, *To the Distant Observer. Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press,1979.
[4] Hector Rodriguez, 'Ideology and Film Culture', pp. 260-281 in *Film Theory and Philosophy* (ed. Richard Allen and Murray Smith). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
[5] Daniel Frampton, *Filmosophy*. London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2006.

for example, attempted by Arnason.[6] My theoretical contribution, therefore, forges an axis among major social theorists and philosophers converging on the idea of looking at the social world as a 'home' and seeks, moreover, to assess humanist and New Wave cinema in Japan through this paradigm.

Hence, to rectify this interpretative limitation, I have chosen to use the idea of a 'home (land)' as this has been developed in Hegel, Bloch and Kracauer.[7] This decision, which reflects what I see as the 'object's' summons (i.e. Japanese reality represented in Japanese cinema as a homeland that is inhabited, invaded and reinvented), enables me to systematically explore and develop the humanistic paradigm as this has been defended by Donald Richie and Tadao Satō. I will argue that the chief merits of Japanese films derive from convergent, yet stylistically unique and elaborate attempts to visualize (and within film's capacities for signi-fication, to theorize) the human condition normatively, albeit at different levels of abstraction.

Offering vignettes from classical masters like Mizoguchi, Ozu, Kurosawa and Naruse, my argument here addresses the confrontation of Japanese filmmakers like Kinoshita, Kobayashi and Ichikawa with Marxism, the WWII aftermath, feminism and existentialism. The latter's legacy coupled to radical politics in the 1960s Japan leads us to urgent challenges of the humanist discourse in directors like Oshima, Shinoda and Yoshida. However, as I intend to argue, the critique of humanism does not necessarily emanate from anti-humanist or post-humanist origins. Rather, it points to deep seated antinomies in how humanism was posited and (partially) realized in Japan and elsewhere and adopts fragmentary formal tech-niques, in order, ultimately, to defend ideas that could be enveloped in humanist discourses. A case in point is Teshigahara, whose work serves well both disjunctive neo-modern aesthet-ics and humanist concerns.

B. Home in Ethics and Film Theory

The body of Japanese films that deserves extensive critical commentary is enormous. The films omitted are by no means insignificant texts for analysis. A short essay, like the one presented here, can simply hint at an overall thread from each filmmaker's oeuvre. Given the elusiveness inherent in film, and especially the type of film discussed here, an interpretation,

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[6] Johann P. Arnason, *Social Theory and Japanese Experience. The Dual Civilization*. London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997.

[7] The problematic of a home has a long history in sociology and philosophy, not to mention literature. For example, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, New York: New York University Press, 1997; Bryan S. Turner and Chris Rojek, *Society & Culture. Principles of Scarcity and Solidarity*. London: Sage, 2001. The most systematic and impressive exposition that I know of, is offered by Ernst Bloch who defends the idea of a home, homeland, solidarity, orthopedia, dignity and freedom in philosophy, psychology, social science, economics, political science, theology, music, architecture, film among many achievements of the human spirit, in his monumental, *The Principle of Hope* (*in Three Volumes*). Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, [1938-1947, rev. 1953 and 1959] 1995.

although always subject to criticism by rival discourses, must argue its case *as if* it offered a superior explanatory perspective.

Compared to the cross-cultural or the formalist approach, the humanist paradigm, although coherent and cogent, suffers in both Richie and Satō from a rather schematic and indeterminate notion of humanism. To opt for a humanist reading of Japanese film, the enumeration of humanist themes does not suffice; a theoretical paradigm needs to be enunciated in order to justify stylistic decisions that place this humanist content in sharper aesthetic focus. To achieve this end, I have selected Hegel in the sense that, unlike other major philosophers, he inspired greatly film theory from Sergei Eisenstein[8] to Maurice Caveing[9] and Siegrfied Kracauer. This affinity does not address always an explicit heritage, but often implicit resemblances through the impact of dialectics on film theory. On an ethical plane, Hegel's ideas are essential to a cinema of humanism. While Hegel would strongly oppose a direct and immediate artistic representation of ethical ideas, the ideals of humanism figure strongly in his political and moral philosophy. Consequently, my attempt to reappraise Hegel's contribution to film theory and more specifically to Japanese cinema draws from his ethical arsenal. Hegel's ethical position can be distilled into the idea of a 'home'. Michael Hardimon, for example, maintains that, for Hegel, modern agents feel at home in the social world, if they subjectively grasp and feel it as a 'home' and if, objectively, the social world contains structural and institutional relationships, which vouchsafe, rather than erode, the idea and feeling of being at 'home'.[10] These institutional (and ethical) spheres include the family and gender relations, civil society (with its corporations), the state and international relations. As I will argue, the shape of 'home' and of 'reconciliation' can be applied to Japanese film, evidently with Ozu (family, civil society), Mizoguchi (gender), Kurosawa (state, international relations, civil society), but also in an alternative and more critical vision of home as remoteness and isolation (e.g. in Shindo's and Imamura's films). The idea of a 'home' expresses an ethics grounded on intersubjective recognition (that the other 'counts' as an autonomous being). Teshigahara, for example, openly confesses that the idea of a 'home' forms the ethical backdrop of *Sunna no Onna*.[11]

Furthermore, the idea of a home(land) is systematically pursued by Ernst Bloch in *The Principle of Hope*. Bloch's brief section on film and utopia, but primarily his treatise on human dignity (as the value of *orthopedia*) serves as a tool for expanding the framework

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[8] Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form. Essays in Film Theory /The Film Sense*. Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1957. Eisenstein attempts a powerful linkage between Hegelian-Marxian dialectics and Japanese art (*haiku* poetry and Kabuki theatre).

[9] Maurice Caveing, 'Dialectique du concept du cinema', *Revue international de filmologie*, 1(1): 71-78, 1947; 1(3-4): 343-350, 1948.

[10] Michael Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy. The Project of Reconciliation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.95.

[11] Joan Mellen, *Voices from the Japanese Cinema*. New York: Liveright, 1975, p. 176.

within which the ethical goal of a home can be successfully identified in cinema. In film theory, such a pursuit is best represented in Kracauer's redeeming function of film. Following Gabriel Marcel, Kracauer understands cinema as inextricably linked to the value-ideal of concretizing "our relation to this Earth which is our habitat".[12] I choose Bloch not because I find his Marxism unproblematic; quite to the contrary: precisely because Marxism negated historically the Utopia of home and dignity, which Bloch meticulously retrieves from the annals of the human spirit and heart, Marxism (not only Soviet or Chinese, but also as Critical Theory or Structural Marxism) can no longer defend what along with bourgeois natural law and certain Christian theological strands, lies at the acme of any Utopia: global solidarity. Bloch along with Hegel and Kracauer in line with primitive Christianity keep in memory "those who die for good-the Indians and forgotten indigenous tribes, the witches, the peasants slaughtered after uprisings not even recorded in the history books, the torture and lynching of potential troublemakers from the very beginning of time [...]". [13] From Mizoguichi's and Kurosawa's humiliated peasants, or Imamura's anonymously resilient females in history, or as in *Eijanaika* the collective subject's struggle against oppression to Kobayashi's countless oppressed Chinese prisoners in war labour camps, can be theorized, transcending cultural discourse, through the *humanum* defended by Blochean criticism.

C. Humanism in Japanese Cinema Studies

I therefore draw on several scholars of Japanese cinema, in order to refine previous arguments, which defined it as overtly humanist. Tucker, for example, in his short but revealing study of Japanese cinema constructs an ethical spectrum spanning from the ethical right to the ethical left. However, his definition of humanism remains incomplete. Tucker, although conscious of dualistic pitfalls, argues like a dualist. For example, as he claims, Kurosawa's humanism is of "Japanese origin"[14] embedded in the cultural traditions of Japan and the particular experience of alienation and anxiety marked by capitalist development and the Atomic Age experience. But by reifying Japanesesness, Tucker ousts relevant European discourses which would enrich his humanist reading. Placing directors like Ozu, Mizoguchi, Kurosawa, Ichikawa and Kobayashi within an ethical spectrum that represents 'right' 'centre' and 'left' ethico-political positions respectively, Tucker oversimplifies the story around Japanese cinema, although he tells us, eventually, something important about the systematic ethical backdrop of the cream of Japanese cinema.

I must agree with him, however, when, while conscious of the dangers in generalizations, he concludes that: "It is no accident that those directors who have produced work that

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[12] Gabriel Marcel in Siegrfied Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, [1960] 1997, p. 304.

[13] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form. Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 134.

[14] Richard N. Tucker, *Japan: Film Image,* London: Studio Vista, 1973,   p.75.

is most obviously characteristic of a position within this ethical spectrum are also those who have produced a work of the highest aesthetic virtue. It may be a dangerous generalization but it seems fair to suggest that those artists with the greatest expressive skill within the cinema are also those with clearly defined attitudes both towards the society in which they live and to their fellow men"[15]. Almost a decade earlier, Richie hinted at a similar ethical matrix where "Ozu would represent the extreme right, and Kurosawa the extreme left. [⋯] Mizoguchi would probably fall directly in the middle [⋯]".[16] This scale is built on the possibility of mediating two extremes: the tendency to applaud self-imposed limitations (Ozu) and the turbulent eruption of limit-transcending action (Kurosawa).

Stephen Prince[17] offers a masterful dialectical exposition of Kurosawa's filmic universe. Prince's meticulous and very insightful study confronts Kurosawa's work through interpretative lenses developed by Kolker[18] and from the latter's debt to the Brechtean blending of aesthetics and politics. The dialectical standpoint that Prince directly engages as a compass capturing the enormous complexity of Kurosawa's work pertains largely to the methodical exposition of stylistic devices as dialectical steps that bring into sharper focus a socio-political content, often at odds with facile humanitarian reconciliation. Systematically exegetical and laboriously conscious of the ethical issues involved, Prince's study stands as a model analysis for the goals pursued in my critical treatment of Japanese filmmakers. Where I differ from Prince and wish to develop further is the normative arsenal implied by a dialectical approach. I intend therefore to show that no matter how important the ethical goal of reconciliation is for a humanitarian reading, films which do endorse it need not be seen as hostile to a dialectical style and content; nor do dialectics and humanitarian hermeneutics constitute mutually exclusive theses. Reopening the humanitarian paradigm in Japanese cinema serves the task of showing how a confluence with critical Marxist and dialectical theory can elucidate the complex wedlock of style and politics in major Japanese filmmakers.

Even Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, while not particularly enthusiastic about the humanist discourse, resorts, perhaps unwittingly, to Hegelian phraseology, in order to convey the humanistic standpoint on Japanese cinema, when he writes that the "gap between universality and particularity was believed to be filled by 'humanity', which was posited as the most common denominator among diverse groups of people transcending national and cultural differences"[19].

The conflation of the West with bourgeois ideology and Japan with a recalcitrant and

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[15] Richard N. Tucker, *Japan: Film Image*, London: Studio Vista, 1973, p.104.
[16] Donald Richie, *Japanese Cinema. Film Style and National Character*. London: Secker & Warburg. [1961] 1971, p.114.
[17] Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera. The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1991.
[18] Robert Phillip Kolker, *The Altering Eye. Contemporary International Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.

non-bourgeois film syntax and theatricality commits Noel Burch to dualism and thus risks introducing ideology through the back door. Notwithstanding his masterful and methodical exposition, Burch fails to notice that Japan's traditionalism in its presentational aesthetic (i.e. Kabuki narrative) has its parallel in content-analysis of a 'home'. Burch reads the Japanese home through Barthes' decentering clause. Like Barthes[20], he severs the exposition from dwelling with the ethical materiality (i.e. values) of a home no matter how de-centered this is held to be. Burch's analysis is tacitly founded on a 'bourgeois' eclectic preoccupation with form despite his assurance to the contrary. Following Barthes again, Burch constructs Japan and its early cinema in the antipodes of what he regards as Western homogenization, human-ism, subject-centered discourses, grand narratives, all of which are seen as politically suspect. The lens of what constitutes the West and its influence on Japan as circulating ideological currency fashionably taken on through the sheer force of capitalist modernization by most Japanese filmmakers since the 1930s, obscures alternative moments of resistance to the Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR), many of which are explained away through stern formal analysis. Thus, Japan's uniqueness, non-hierarchical semantics and the de-centering of the subject emerge as an unadulterated alternative discourse in contrast to the cultural monop-oly of the West.[21]

Finally, David Desser[22] in his seminal exposition of Japanese New Wave offers a classification that captures the phases of Japanese narratives as these evolved from the

[19] Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa. Film Studies and Japanese Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000, p. 10. Elsewhere, the universal aura of Japanese film is regarded as a crucial component of its overall merits, without abstracting-but, rather, presupposing-ethnicized conceptions of the body in cases like Teshigahara, Oshima and Imamura. See Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, 'Ethnicizing the Body and Film. Teshigahara Hiroshi's *Woman in the Dunes* (1964), pp. 180-192 in Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer (eds), *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007.

[20] Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*. New York: Hill and Wang, [1970] 1982. I guess that Barthes' decentering paradigm of what constitutes the Japaneseness of the Japanese sign constitutes an insur-mountable barrier for my humanist reading. However, Barthes' thoughtful presentation of Japan's fragmentary logic has its analogue in European discourses too-most notably Simmel and Benjamin-and it does not account for Japan's search for alternative or similar narratives from Europe, USA and China. In fact, against Barthes and Burch, the filmic tradition in Japan refutes Barthes' allegation that the Japanese face is without 'moral hierarchy'. The Japanese styles and stories that I briefly touch upon here, affirm, by and large, the opposite: the (Japanese) face can function, just like the Western or any other face, as a palpable index of moral struggles, victories and tragedies. The 'syncope' that Barthes alludes to is never so forceful as to efface moral hierarchy. In face of catastrophe (and Japan painfully experienced this, along with inflicting it on others through its militarist past), all faces are on a par with one another: anguish, disfigurement, horror and fear eschew physiognomic particularities. From this then, and contra Barthes and Burch, one can reconstruct the face as a moral index with a moral hierarchy.

[21] For a critique of a humanist reading from a post-structuralist perspective that reconstructs 'Japan' as a network of 'Japanese' and 'non-Japanese' discourses, see Scott Nygren, *Time Frames. Japanese Cinema and the Unfolding of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

[22] David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre. An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.

classical (Ozu) to the modern (Kurosawa) and to what Desser dissects further, namely, the modernist phase (Japanese New Wave). Typologies have great heuristic value and Japanese cinema studies certainly need them. However, Desser's paradigms are fed and sustained by a self-referential logic: each functions as a formal and closed system and all are held to be mutually exclusive, if one adheres to their salient features. Complications arise not only through the selection criteria that Desser resorts to, like for example, the perpetuation of Schrader's misguided use of the term 'transcendental' (instead of transcendent), but from the fact that these are structured as inverted projections of the *auteur* style they seek to explain. The category of 'nature', which Desser raises to an index of the mythic and of the Zen worldview, survives in non-transcendent directors like Shinoda and Yoshida, both of which qualify as modernist filmmakers and certainly forms the backdrop of the humanist Kinoshita. Nor does Kurosawa's emblematic individual who struggles against the world's miseries, fits always into Desser's modern paradigm, unobtrusively. *Rashomon*, for example, pollutes Desser's categorical purity, rendering disjunction within idyllic nature a powerful epistemological and moral gesture, the openness of which has rarely been matched by modernist narratives. And I am not sure that dialectics is used correctly here. Dialectics is not an open and infinitely reciprocal struggle between 'past' and 'present'. Properly used it must convey some sort of development both in style -which Desser expertly discusses for New Wave directors- but also an enrichment of content. In this sense, *Rashomon* entails a determinate negation framed within a seemingly relativist epistemology. Moreover, within modernism Desser reinforces the distancing of Japanese New Wave from humanism and leftist idealism. But, as I have argued, pessimism, disillusionment, acausal chronologies need not be seen as ultimate blows to humanism, but as refutations of humanism's impatience and often abstract scope. The nihilist diagnosis need not qualify as nihilism. Following the dialectical approach, I opt for a critical defense of humanism within the seemingly hostile territory of nihilism, alienation, cruelty and instinct. Justifiably, Japanese New Wave directors cannot proclaim allegiance to an ideal amidst the crumbling post-war Japan. However, their visual narratives do sustain the pursuit, in depicting masterfully the fall from the human condition; the practical idealism and resilience of their characters confirm further that these moments of negative dialectics still cling to the humanist goal.

Studies of Japanese cinema have been reticent regarding the possibility of a European interpretation of Japanese cinema. This interpretive closure needs to be rectified. Interpretations couched on European discourses of film criticism need not be taken as hermeneutic enthnocentrism or as exercises in cultural partitionism. Mobilizing a European standpoint does not imply a defence of a fixed cultural identity understood self-referentially, but, as I see it, contributes to a transcendence of cultural dualism. Moreover, it adds an important resource of film criticism to a filmic tradition the visual and thematic richness of which, demands a shift to wider critical discourses. Siegfried Kracauer[23], Jean Mitry[24], Yvette Biro[25],

[23] Siegrfied Kracauer, *Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, [1960] 1997.
[24] Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, [1990] 1997.

Gilles Deleuze[26], John Orr[27] among others offer promising pathways in that they enable us to establish broader affinities between Europe and Japan and, more, fundamentally, to question anew the cross-cultural dualism.

Deleuze, in particular, elicits viable, although, questionable, in terms of a systematic ethical discourse, configurations that capture the transition from the classical to the modern. My thesis vindicates Deleuze's political gesture to render directors like Kurosawa and Mizoguchi martyrs of creativity within the commercialist torrent of contemporary cinema. This admission by Deleuze vitiates, however, his retreatism from a committed ethical standpoint as he abstains from endorsing value-judgments or normative classifications. My argument on the contrary, defends value-judgments in film analysis and traces them in Deleuze's conceptual terrain of the filmic voyage. The link between man and the world pursued by Deleuze's cinematic Bergsonism, reflects modern cinema's restoration of faith in modernity (a goal shared by Kracauer too). Ernst Bloch's similar calling to religion's rational and radical core is not incommensurate to Deleuze's defense of film's time-movement matrix. Deleuze views cinema as bridging the gulf between man and world. Cinema captures, therefore, not the world "but belief in this world"[28]. The invocations of "*reasons to believe in this world*" (ibid. [original emphasis]) by Deleuze must be somewhere entangled with the notion of a home defended here.[29] I read this outcome of filmic language, therefore, in a teleological fashion. Cinema entangles itself in a material world and raises it to a conceptual or even spiritual object. As Biro claims, "human action is teleological; hence the goal is necessarily included even in the simplest, most practical motion".[30] This surplus content allows us to reconstruct film and release its meaning-structures from the strictures imposed by a fixed cultural *ur*-identity.

Film studies' recourse to theory has yielded ambivalent hermeneutic exegeses. Critics of theory's resourcefulness for cinema argue that theoretical systems enter film at the expense of

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[25] Yvette Biro, *Profane Mythology. The Savage Mind of the Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.

[26] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986; Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

[27] John Orr, *Cinema and Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993.

[28] Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 2: The Time-Image. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p. 172.

[29] This can be further deduced from Deleuze's programmatic statement that the "history of cinema is a long martyrology". See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. xiv. Ozu, Kurosawa, Shinoda, Imamura figuring as 'martyrs' need not be seen necessarily as generating a conservative critique on my part against contemporary Japanese cinema (Takeshi Kitano included), but, rather, as an emblematic statement enhancing awareness as to the visual economy and semantic richness of those filmmakers, whose stylistic 'modernisms' are never raised to the status of a fetish, by reifying technique and sacrificing rhythm to crisp, but semantically uninteresting, editing techniques within the Hollywood canon. In this sense, martyrdom is meaningful only in relation to an ideal. I argue that this idea can be no other than the complex project of reconciliation that binds the local to the global, in the various natural, biological, psychological, socio-political, cultural and religious formations of a 'home'.

[30] Yvette Biro, *Profane Mythology. The Savage Mind of the Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 31.

recalcitrant empirical evidence, as they aim for conceptual purity. Theory-driven interpretation jettisons empirical richness and complexity and hence embraces artificially constructed theoretical parsimony. Such pitfalls within film criticism have been persuasively pointed at, passionately by Noel Carroll and more soberly by David Bordwell. I am aware of the empirical elision that theoretical arrogance may elicit. This danger is indeed pertinent for my project, since I borrow hermeneutic tools from Hegel, whom Carroll identifies as the paragon of Absolute narratives. But against Carroll, I argue that Hegel is not the uncritical philosopher of the Absolute as mistakenly and conveniently he is held to be. Nor a humanist reading of (Japanese) film need be taken as theory's penchant for political correctness, rendering film criticism a bad service. The ethical shape of a 'home' forms the backdrop of several ethical theories and in Hegel, I believe, finds its most formidable defender. Now, coupled to Hegelian dialectics, which has been part and parcel of cinema's early steps and has persistently recurred under alternative formulations, my methodological decision acquires both a sound and a factual groundwork. In fact, it is not incompatible with Carroll's praise for "piecemeal theorizing" and "dialectical pragmatism"[31]. These renditions qualify as Hegelian and are rightly far removed from Hegel's (and for that matter Carroll's) recourse to any Absolutes. Eventually, both Hegel and Carroll defend engagement with history and both argue against any moral a priori, which explains away film's visual complexity of content.

Against Bordwell's reservations[32], this article suggests that continental theory need not be taken as hermeneutic narrowness abstracting thus from the empirical richness and contingency of film. On the contrary, it views theory through the opposite lens, namely, as a resourceful but revisable model that illuminates, rather than obscures, local and contingent identities. The middle-level research advocated by Bordwell's Mertonian inner voice, presupposes the extremes Bordwell denies: grand theory and empirical research. My contribution reflects the need to refine the often unclarified theoretical tool that Richie and others have systematically associated with Japanese cinema. I do not wish to devour either empirical sites of praxis that resist explanation or to obliterate any middle level endeavors. Rather, the configuration of a 'home' within humanist discourses enables me to preserve the 'ladder' between micro and macro analysis that Bordwell's middle-level path wishes to consolidate. 'Home' does not pre-empt analysis in order to eschew contingency when it magnifies micro spaces of a 'home', as for example, in Ozu's spatial freezing of time. It wishes, rather, to point at the dialectical steps that bind macro and micro levels in film, a goal that any middle-level theory (including Bordwell's) implicitly or explicitly is engaged with.

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[31] Noel Carroll, 'Prospects for Film Theory: A Personal Assessment', pp. 37-68 in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (eds. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll). Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

[32] David Bordwell, 'Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory', pp. 3-36 in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (eds. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll). Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

D. Disjunctive Aesthetic and Humanism

To include in the humanist discourse filmmakers whose disjunctive film style and fragmented visuals signified a break with humanism, is to risk theoretical elision for the sake of categorial purity. I am aware of the danger here, but I feel that, often, humanism is at its best when it confronts its critical demons. Therefore, recalcitrant cases include Imamura, Oshima, Shinoda and Teshigahara. Their anti-humanist discourses need not be taken at face value. Humanism does not enter reality as affirmation only. In terms of their NewWave heritage these directors endorse disjunction, which has become now an integral element of the cinematic aesthetic. The issue, according to a Hegelian hermeneutic, is not disjunction, elusiveness, tension or indeterminacy in style and narrative. The very modernity that Hegel cherishes entails these stylistic and narrative crevices. Like film though, modernity frames them alongside with the requisite functional and normative groundwork for containing their indeterminacy. Applied to film, even a highly disjunctive form, if properly developed may rescue a content, which might seem initially to embrace nihilism. Teshigahara, Shinoda and Oshima to name a few, offer disjunctive syntaxes within a film style structured to convey modernist nihilism and pessimism. Yet, the formal execution of these films betrays carefully composed 'unities', deeply layered with iconic, indexical, metonymic and synecdohic significations. These do not constitute some instrumental calculus leading to hermeneutic closure. Rather, in allowing alternative interpretations these masterful visual styles inform us as to which trail interpretation should avoid. Since films 'cohere' in how they render reality open to indeterminacy, they cannot be seen as simply indeterminate. As a condition of rendering possible the creative, unobtrusive play with 'difference' and 'indeterminacy', auteur films retain something of the aesthetic and the ethical function that precludes a postmodernist, relativist and commercialist discourse of justification. Moreover, a committed disjunctive style must take seriously the narrative and formal unities against which it battles. Hence, the camera-eye of New Wave Japanese filmmakers illuminates humanism's failures but also its latent possibilities. Bearing in mind Kurosawa's confession that "[···] without the establishment of the self as a positive value there could be no freedom and no democracy"[33], Hegel's project of recognizing this self through rational and humane institutions (family, civil society, corporations, state) can be pursued in cinematic terms, within the geopolitical, psychological, social and cultural contours of visualizing Japan as a 'home'.[34]

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[33] Akira Kurosawa in Stephen Prince, *The Warrior's Camera. The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1991, p. 29.

[34] Amartya Sen who is a major inspiration regarding a viable humanist discourse today, offers always ample evidence against relativism and cultural partitionism. The ability of nations to learn from their past mistakes is exemplified best in his citation of Kenzaburo Ōe and his call for a new understanding of democracy in Japan. See Amartya Sen (2009), *The Idea of Justice.* Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, p. 47. Japan's educational orientation is set up as an exemplar of the creative denial of cultural incarceration by Amartya Sen in his *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny.* London: Penguin Books, 2006, pp. 109-112. For an account of post-war social criticism in various arts -including film- in Japan, see H. Paul Varley, 'Culture in the Present Age', pp. 295-340 in *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture, A Reader* (ed. Nancy G. Hume). New York: State University of New York Press, 1995.

E. Why Japan? Why dialectics? Why home? Theoretical Presuppositions

Much of what defines Japanese film (and accounts also for its world-wide acclaim) is its critical dissection of feudalistic values and practices. If Japanese filmmakers show a penchant for period film (*jidai-geki*) and for a deep-seated distrust for Japan's encounter with modernity, and, therefore, risk to be labeled 'anti-modern' or even 'reactionary', then this tells us only half of the story. This view boxes Japanese cinema into a terrain that seeks to recover some form of unadulterated community and reconsider from that newly founded vantage point Japan's fractured cultural and moral identity. However, many Japanese period films have simply masked contemporary ideas under the *jidai-geki* genre. These films function well in disclosing the transition from feudal definitions of a 'home' to modernity as a 'home'.

While the feudal context provides a powerful linkage to Japan's historical legacy, it seems to serve deeper ethical goals that transcend historically contextual boundaries. For example, Kurosawa (*Ran, Rashomon, Shichinin no Samurai etc*), Mizoguchi (*Saikaku Ichidai Onna, Sancho Dayu*), Shinoda (*Ansatsu, Buraikan*), Shindo (*Onibaba, Kuroneko*), Kobayashi (*Harakiri*), Yamanaka (*Ninjo kami fusen*), engage with feudalism's coercive social structure and confront head on moral issues in any but a didactic way. Notwithstanding the force of the humanist message in those films, the bulk of tradition is such that the dialectical transitions on the level of content cannot sustain always ethical reconciliations. Thus, human worth is affirmed as resistance to Hobbesian state-of-nature strife, demeaning customs and cruel practices of feudal Japan.

Japanese film scholars[35] have offered us many insights into the ambiguous and, often adverse, presentation of modernity's antinomies during an era that gave birth to remarkable accomplishments in Japanese film. These important studies provide a discourse that allows us, perhaps, to rethink Japanese cinema through the lens of neo-modern cinema. But why is such reconstruction necessary? My claim is that all the aforementioned accounts do not enter a discussion with the philosophical debates that marked similar cinematic achievements in Europe. What appears to be missing is an appreciation of how the diverse and authentic styles that earned these films their deserved reputation, engage with ideas that enable us to reconsider them outside their particular Japanese context. Although such a context is indispensable for the semantic richness and visual force of these films, it needs to be 'moderately disembedded', in order to seek affinities to similar strands in Europe and, moreover, to provide an even stronger platform for establishing film as a political and ethical art-form. My analysis is partly fueled here by Yoshimoto's critical acumen on film studies, his useful typology of interpretative approaches towards Japanese cinema and his emphasis on the

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[35] Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie (with a foreword by Akira Kurosawa), *The Japanese Film. Art and Industry*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982, Joan Mellen, *The Waves at Genji's Door. Japan Through its Cinema*. New York: Pantheon Books. 1976, Tadao Satō, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982.

latter's political dimension. Moreover, it relies on John Orr's theses on 'neo-modern' cinema. While Orr omits Japanese cinema in his triptych on contemporary cinema, modernity and politics, as we shall see, the interpretative vicinity of neo-modern cinema that he delineates, invites fruitful analogies with much of Japanese cinema between the 1960s and the 1980s.

F. 'Home' in European and American Cinema

A normative reading of film, like the one pursued here, must look at the nature and scope of intersubjective relations as these are posited, broken, reassembled, affirmed, negated and reconciled within film's narratives. Following Hegel, the idea of a 'home' conveys better this ethical goal and my encouragement to pursue a reading of Japanese cinema through this configuration stems from a clearly identified concern of European and American *auteurs* with the idea of a 'home'. The following short excursus allows us therefore, to establish the ethical approach of a 'home' as apposite normative weapon that reinforces the humanitarian paradigm of interpreting Japanese cinema. It is not designed as a master-key category that unlocks cinema in its entirety. Such categorial narcissism is far from being a purpose of the argument I develop here. If, though, the idea of a 'home' can enable us, as I believe, to read Japanese cinema in these terms, it also serves a wider function of registering film as an ethical text. Powerful indices emerge among major filmmakers whose works reflect in one way or another, an ethical and political approach to reality configured in stylistically novel visual narratives.

Exemplars of styles and narratives of a home can be traced systematically in Italian cinema. The entire neo-realist genre from Luchino Visconti's Marxist defense of a home in *La Terra Trema*, and Vittorio De Sica's *Umberto* D dealing with the expulsion from a 'home' of the aged and the elderly, to Roberto Rossellini's derelict urban landscapes in bombed Berlin in *Germany Year Zero*, testify to the maturity of film style in convergence with the turbulent and traumatic (re)definition of a home in post-war Italy. The Marxist Francesco Rosi offers with *Hands Over the City* a stunning exposition of the vilification of land and urban landscapes by big shot speculators in a snowball escalation of Byzantine machinations between real estate firms, political parties, the Catholic church, the police and other pillars of bourgeois Italy. In stark contrast to, but with equal force, Paolo and Vittorio Taviani tackle, like Kaneto Shindo, for example, primitive constructions of a home discerning in bourgeois politics, fascism and Americanization an acrid portrayal of the oncoming cultural rootedness. Similar motifs preoccupy the cinematic renaissance in Germany with the representatives of New German Cinema. The ironic but melancholic gaze on *Heimat* (Edgar Reitz) in light of the post-war refurbishing of the German identity with Americanization and disillusioned Marxism knocking on the door, surfaces in directors like Wim Wenders in *Alice in the Cities* and *Kings of the Road* among others raise the road movie genre to a filmic emblem of the road to a 'home'. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's impressive explorations of physical interiors transfers this journey into the psychological domain tinged with overt socio-political themes ranging from sexuality, race, ethnicity, gender, class related interpolations on the

modern theme of fractured identity. Werner Herzog, for his part, looks for a sense of home that can still inspire awe and wonder resisting thus instrumental discourses. In Scandinavian Cinema, Carl Theodor Dreyer first with the chamber drama and Ingmar Bergman then with existentially charged psychodramas, lament home in an ethically impoverished world marked by a conspicuously absent God. French cinema abounds with directors and cinematic styles which rework stunningly the ethics and politics of a home, especially within closed discourses on physical dimensions of a home. Such is, for example, Jean Renoir's moral and radical treatise on the closures of bourgeois 'home', Eric Rohmer's theological and moral readings of space boundaries and the dialectic of movement and stasis that defines them (e.g. *Full Moon in Paris*) and Walerian Borowczyk's eroticization of physical space through a politics of confinement (themes, which surface powerfully in Shohei Imamura, Hiroshi Teshigahara and Nagisa Oshima). The anti-modernism that shapes a considerable part of a generation of Soviet directors poeticizes home through a lyrical portrayal of nature and couples it to quasi-mystical Christian Orthodox motifs. Embedded in a traumatic historical past and present, the films of Andrei Tarkovsky, Elem Klimov and Tenghiz Abuladze far from being esoteric utilize the richly textured tradition of Russia, Georgia and Armenia, in order to convey with aesthetically sumptuous imagery and powerful visuals the tragedies that shape any collective attempt to forge a 'home'. Eastern European and Balkan cinema adds to the brutality of historical conflicts that define the chaotic territorial and cultural struggles over a home in Eastern Europe. Miklos Jancso's *The Round Up* conveys even today, 40 years after its release, the De Sadean horrors to which arbitrary and violent definitions of a 'home' unleash, as, for example, in Abu Ghraib, visually and thematically anticipated by this particular film. In Greece, Theo Angelopoulos explicitly invokes the legacy of Kenji Mizoguchi in his cinema of poetry, and focuses his melancholic gaze upon a fractured Balkans and the homelessness caused by narrow definitions of ethnic and cultural identity. British Cinema has also been especially sensitive to the theme of a home and directors like Terence Davies in *Distant Voices, Still Lives* portray vividly the closure of a puritan and conservative milieu, yet, without abstracting from the oneiric qualities which home as a utopian project elicits for those agents struggling to render it real. The post-Thatcherite dislocations of a home are portrayed graphically and with marked realism by Ken Loach in, for example, *My Name is Joe* and by Mike Leigh's bitter, humanly generous but often demonic (as in *Naked*, for example) explorations of a 'home', especially within family tensions and reconciliations. New American Cinema offers through John Cassavetes and Martin Scorsese in particular, erratic and often schizoid narratives of an alienated urban 'home'. Francis Ford Coppola in *The Conversation* exemplifies best what for America can be considered homelessness, especially as he renders the lives of the characters visible and vulnerable to Panopticon surveillance technology and manages thus to convey visually not only Marshall McLuhan's thesis on the narcissistically narcotized gadget-lover[36], but to render this discourse a powerful device for an existential filmic essay on urban alienation and on man's self-expulsion from 'home'. Even negatively, as for example, in Bunuel's profane attacks on the bourgeois and Christian notions of a 'home', much of what defined film as a genuine art, entailed a systematic convergence of

stylistically unique and culturally particular narratives towards an understanding and aesthetic appreciation of a 'home'. Currently, the critique of 'home' like, for instance, in *Dogville* (von Trier), *The White Ribbon* (Heineke) and *Dogtooth* (Lanthimos), confirms the moral weight the problematic of a 'home' still has for filmmakers and audiences.

G. Japan as a 'home': Tensions Between Feudalism and Modernity: Discerning the Moral Hero(ine).

What follows is only a cursory look, in light of what requires a systematic and lengthy theoretical exposition, of how the stylistics and ethico-politics of a home can potentially apply to a considerable body of directors and films in Japan. My approach does not reside in the perspective of a Japanologist, which clearly I am not, but, rather, from tendencies in film studies, cultural studies and Japanese studies, which feel compelled to cut across intellectual and cultural barriers in order to understand a culture by exploring also its trans-cultural surplus.[37] Kenji Mizoguchi's ethical narratives largely seen through the lens of the 'master-slave' dialectic epitomize a humanist discourse grounded on the struggle for recognition[38]. The

[36] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, [1964] 1994, pp. 41-47.

[37] For instance, Hamashita resorts to Aristotelian notions of technē, in order to convey the Japanese aesthetic in relation to the self, in ways, which preclude a strictly Eurocentric perception of Japan's modernization. See Masahiro Hamashita, 'After/Beyond the Trauma of Modernization: The Japanese Dilemma in Terms of Modern Aesthetics', pp. 146-153 in Robert Wilkinson (ed.), *New Essays in Comparative Aesthetics*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. His observations are not incompatible with Martin Heidegger's appropriation of Greek *techne* and *poiesis*-in the sense of a (care)ful drawing-forth of form and content-as opposed to instrumental reason in art or to religious and modernist conceptions of 'beauty'. In fact, notions of continuity which define materiality in the Japanese aesthetic ethos, eventually 'spiritualizing' it in the magnificent achievements of Japanese art, can qualify as Heideggerian and can resolve perhaps, the riddle of what he visualized as the release of productionist metaphysics. Japan's technologized culture refutes Heidegger not through the lens of a *Kulturkritik*, which sees the Japanese ethos obliterated by a hyper-technological *Gestell*, but, rather, from the reconciliation/mediation of the two realms (i.e. aesthetic ethos and technology). The relevance of Heidegger's ideas for the Japanese aesthetic ethos is indeed considerable. See, for example, John C. Maraldo, 'Between Individual and Communal, Subject and Object, Self and Other. Mediating Watsuji Tetsurō's Hermeneutics", pp. 76-86 in Michael Marra (ed.), *Japanese Hermeneutics. Current Debates on Aesthetics and Interpretation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 2002. However, Heidegger's aesthetic paradigm is not incompatible with the aesthetic of Japanese film (especially in Ozu and Mizoguchi); it becomes a problem though if it functions as a vehicle of excluding the 'modern', hence opening the door to reactionary ideas, like the ones that emerge from many of Heidegger's categories. Contrary to the spirit of Watsuji's hermeneutics, much of Japanese film places considerable ethical value on significant others, although the idea of the 'between' raises issues compatible with Hegelian dialectics (as the epitome of a logic of transitions/mediations). As Berque corroborates, Watsuji , unlike Heidegger, places the individual within the "collective identity of the we (*wareware*)". See Augustin Berque 'The question of space. From Heidegger to Watsuji', pp. 57-67 in *Interpreting Japanese Society. Anthropological Approaches* (ed. Joy Hendry). London and New York: Routledge. 1998, p. 63.

[38] Georg W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1807] 1977. See also Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995.

feudalist context in many a Mizoguchi film enables us to examine the shapes of conscious-
ness entailed in this dialectical struggle and, moreover, to discern the mediations which lead
to its gradual, yet painful, demise. Part of the exposition here involves the critique of patri-
archy as it charts women's tactical struggles in subverting an inherently unequal form of
intersubjectivity. Mizoguchi's discourses of geisha suffering and prostitution offer a focused
sociopolitical space to record the adverse and hopeful moments in women's struggle for
recognition. The Hegelian perspective endorsed here should not appear as an external herme-
neutic intervention once, for example, we look even in early Mizoguchi, where in minor
works like *Waga Koi wa Moenu* (1949), he places his female characters reflecting on the
ideal's struggle to become reality! Tragic confrontations like the ones portrayed in *Sansho
Dayu* involve not merely the conflict of irreconcilable moral standpoints, but ground these
into the fundamentally unequal social relations, feudal and modern. Here is where Mizoguchi
differs from Shinoda; for Mizoguchi reality can be confronted through the resilience of human
(and feminized) spirit. Shinoda on the other hand opts for a post-humanist discourse, subsum-
ing eventually idealism to the irrational and self-referential continuity between the natural, the
social and the cultural domains.

The Japaneseness of Japanese cinema is largely corroborated in the crowning achieve-
ments of Yasujiro Ozu. The identification of Ozu's aesthetic ethos with Zen Buddhism offers
a cultural formalist exegesis and obscures the fact that Ozu's stasis and affirmation of life's
movement has parallels in Western philosophy. Aside from Schrader's contribution[39], an
obvious reference here is Heidegger, since the openness of being and the encounter of reality
as disclosure against the technicity of Enlightenment can be identified as a systematic pattern
in Ozu. The wedlock of techne and poiesis functions predominantly as the reconciling glue
between tradition and modernity, a pair of concepts that mark an uneasy tension in Japanese
society. Ozu blends industrialization and tradition with terms borrowed by the latter. The
magnificent interior settings, the brief glimpses of Japanese countryside, the railway station
shots, testify to a measured and proportional synthesis of the traditional and the modern. If
Ozu is seen, according to many commentators, as the director of stasis, then this interpretative
trail omits the richness and subtlety of Ozu's art, namely, that containment underlines often
better action and motility, rather than reifying the emptying of sociality through Zen transcen-
dence. In this sense Ozu's fixed gaze on the 'home' allows us to use physical boundaries
through Ozu's elaborate style as moral boundaries within a *milieu* that unambiguously is
staged as a 'home'. Both the medium of children (the most relevant of all agents to the idea
of a home) and the "yearning of security"[40] highlight Ozu's political substratum and rescue
him from the limitations of class-analysis of a Marxist sort.[41] Of course, home can be seen

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[39] Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. New York: Da Capo Press.
[40] Donald Richie, *Ozu*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974, p. 69.
[41] Noel Burch rightly criticizes Taihei Imamura's militant criticism of Ozu in *To the Distant Observer.
Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California
Press,1979, pp. 279-280.

as Tucker[42] thinks as a facile haven against an external milieu reigned by chaos and aliena-
tion. But Ozu's visual logic as style can invite different readings. For example, subtle dialec-
tical issues highlight also *Higanbana*. The patriarch caught in the contradiction between a
traditionally sanctioned arranged marriage and modernist autonomy (marriage founded on
love), is used by Ozu in a manner which stresses the Hegelian idea that contradictions (or
inconsistencies) although defining features of human motility are there to be resolved and
overcome. A routine conversation of Mr. Hirayama with his wife during a family outing
indicates the shift in perspective behind value-conflicts (she recalls the past with nostalgia
because, despite war, family was closely tied, while he negates the past precisely because of
the overall social and political hardships). Ozu's subtle mise-en-scene uses various signifiers
for loneliness and places obliquely contradictions in a wider professional ethic and structure.
The recurrent images of workers, customers and employees, or Hirayama's momentary lack
of reserve after his speech in the opening sequence, underline a social context, contradictory
enough to be transformed into a wealthy source of visual metonymies on man's existential
identity. These existentialist dimensions are explicitly echoed in Hirayama's philosophical
verdict that: "the sum of the inconsistencies is called life". Here Ozu approaches both ver-
bally and visually Kracauer's film theory with its praise for camera-reality and its potential
to grasp the indeterminacy of 'life'. However, the conflict of values (a Weberian and
Nietzschean theme) that besets Hirayama is eventually resolved! Although Hirayama cannot
fully unfold a rational foundation for the choice between love and tradition he eventually
proclaims a marriage founded on love as 'better'! This ethical turn in his dual identity needs
mediation. Hence both the encounter with Mikami's daughter at the sleazy bar 'La Luna' (a
picture of Jesus on a wall raises interesting hermeneutic possibilities) and the ruse by Yukiko,
function as dialectical steps towards his (not unpainful) redemption. Ozu is not naive to
uphold an unproblematic disengagement from the past, hence the song of lament by the group
of men. In another telling analogy, Hirayama having softened towards Setsuko's choices is
seen in a relaxing pose, smoking and drinking in a fine moment of parallelism to his favorite
employee who turns out to be a La Luna regular. It is also juxtaposed to his earlier stiff
posture throughout the film. The final shot of Hirayama in the train to Hiroshima suggests
both an existential loneliness but also a boldness towards social change. The image is am-
biguous, yet simple, unobtrusive and economical.

To speak of ethical victories and affirmative dialectics for a director who repeatedly
attempted suicide sounds surely as a paradox. Laden with pessimism, most Kurosawa films
affirm the hellish aspects of human society. Kurosawa's work captures, in a visually powerful
way, the tensions between egoism and humanism. It seems that Kurosawa's belief in human
resilience and ethical resourcefulness stems from the opposite of what some critics have
identified as didactic and moralistic conclusions in his films. Kurosawa's power lies in the

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[42] Richard N. Tucker, *Japan: Film Image*, London: Studio Vista, 1973,   p. 40.

fact that he takes seriously the significance of the 'content'. For him the 'content' (i.e. human reality) is ethical and, therefore, whether as affirmation or as negation, it is to be approached through a dramatic, turbulent and ethically charged style. The reproach of moralizing would stand, had Kurosawa neglected the rifts, tensions, conflicts and setbacks which define every-day struggles to preserve one's humanity (*Rashomon* is a case in point)[43]. In fact, he portrays hardship and tragedy, without embracing, as he confesses, a timely cynicism or a regress into hedonism as emblematically portrayed in *Ikiru*. One should not forget here that the reading of Watanabe's (Takashi Shimura) confrontation with untimely death, can qualify as a Hegelian resolution, where 'eternity' and meaning in life derive from what sort of 'fruits' one's labor bequeathes to the coming generations (in this case Watanabe's bureaucratic power yields a playground for children, in an otherwise derelict urban neighborhood).[44] Kurosawa's radical move is precisely the one that many of his less generous sympathizers have identified as a shortcoming: the affirmation of reason and human dignity. Kurosawa's films constitute exemplary moral treatises of timely relevance. His exploration of physical space as a moral, but unstable milieu, allows us to sustain an analogy between the ethical home and its (rela-tive) demarcation from a contingent and risk-laden environment (as, for example, displayed in the crowning film *Akahige*).

Further means to discuss the identification of form and content lie in the motif of the 'ascent'. The ladder (in Naruse, a staircase) captures in Hegel's imagery the laborious dialec-tical development of consciousness to self-reflection and conditional affirmation of the ethical shape of the world. That Naruse's ethical struggles do not embrace facile reconciliations is not tantamount to negating reconciliation. Rather, Naruse tilts the focus from the goal to the way, which, as I have indicated, involves an ascent, where the effort to conquer a step involves often painful but also emancipating moments of self-awareness. Naruse's confronta-tion with Japan as a 'home' transcends genre limitations, more specifically the home-drama (*homu dorama*).[45] As Naruse claims: "My films deal exclusively with the home. So do most Japanese films. It is this fact that we find a major fault of Japanese pictures -the home is

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[43] A volume on Rashomon contains essays which applaud the film for its modernist reflections on relativism, while others recognize its ethical merits in its humanist negation of cognitive and moral relativism. For the latter appraisal to which I also subscribe, see Donald Richie (ed.), *Focus on Rashomon*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972. In this volume Tadao Satō rightly chides relativist interpretations, suggesting that "[···] *Rashomon* is a work that states a strong belief in the worth of human beings, as well as an equally strong belief in objective truth". See Tadao Satō, "Rashomon", pp. 95-102 in Donald Richie (ed.), *Focus on Rashomon*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972, p. 98.

[44] The renowned psychotherapist Yalom reaches this Hegelian verdict without, though, quoting Hegel, on Ikiru: "The film emphasized, too, that it is the park, not the transmission of his identity, that is par amount". See Irvin D. Yalom, *Staring at the Sun. Overcoming the Terror of Death*. San Francisco: Wiley, 2008, p. 89.

[45] For a comprehensive exposition of Naruse's work with some emphasis on the home-drama genre, see Catherine Russell, *The Cinema of Naruse Mikio. Women and Japanese Modernity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

simply too narrow a place in which to set everything [⋯] Only if Japanese films can succeed in breaking beyond the limits of the family will they have truly a universal meaning".[46] Given Naruse's depiction of family hardships and companionship tensions against the backdrop of post-war Japanese modernity, it is worth examining the conspicuous absence of a Zen worldview from his films. Home for Naruse entails the tensions and mediations between private and public spaces in Japanese modernity and is offered to audiences as a critique of nominal versions a 'home' (i.e. the corporate milieu). With the economy in crisis, family home is both criticized and upheld in Naruse's overarching dialectic between order and contingency.

Keisuke Kinoshita, for his part, frames his melodrama within a tight context of socio-economic constraints identifying eventually the destruction of the family with the gradual disintegration of Japanese society. Kinoshita explores themes familiar to melodrama; indeed he seems to revere the genre, especially in *Nijushi no Hitomi*, a film essential to both Japanese humanism in cinema and to the pronounced and often multi-layered exposition of a 'home'. Following Hegel's pursuit to identify Reason in Religion, my argument will read Kinoshita's work through theological motifs as these are deciphered by ethical narratives and emerge through the signified surplus of Kinoshita's austere yet richly-textured imagery, notably, in the archetypal and idyllic dance of the teacher with her twelve pupils under cherry blossoms. Kinoshita offers also insightful accounts of Japanese *Gemeinschaft*, when, for example in *Narayamabushi-ko*, he mediates what at first glance appears as a mythology of the rural community, with its cruel cultural and social foundations. This bucolic milieu is, furthermore, challenged-albeit subtly-in the comedy *Karumen Kokyo ni Kaeru*. The problem of poverty persists in the narrative but in the background of a village whose inhabitants include buffoons ready to gape at a silly but sensationalist spectacle, hard-working agriculturalists, pawnbrokers, school principals who uphold Japanese culture and blind teachers who suffer from debt but still cling through art and through their pedagogic values to the community. What is notable, though, is the subtle attitude towards modernity raised by Kinoshita. While, for some critics[47] Carmen's world is cacophonous, yet-in a dialectical fashion-it generates some progress. The sensationalist and clumsy nude dance performed by Carmen and her friend-exquisitely staged by Kinoshita- generates funds which can be put to good use by the principal (Chishu Ryu)

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[46] Mikio Naruse in Donald Richie, *Japanese Cinema. Film Style and National Character*. London: Secker & Warburg. [1961] 1971, p. 71.

[47] For example, Kinoshita satirizes modern Japan and "affords little sympathy for his central character". See Richard N. Tucker, *Japan: Film Image*, London: Studio Vista, 1973, p. 66. This verdict tells us half of the story. Carmen may be kitsch, but she is also the vehicle of movement (i.e. dance, train) that stimulates villagers to potentially emerge from their pastoral immobility. I fully agree instead with Isolde Standish's additional observation that Carmen subverts "the signifiers of patriarchal authority" and that the "dichotomy of the city and country, as two alien and incompatible worlds, isolates traditional Japanese men within the world of the idealized 'hometown' (*furusato*) [...]". See Isolde Standish, *A New History of Japanese Cinema. A Century of Narrative Film*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

and indirectly alleviate the teacher from his debt, since the spectacle of these two naked women brought unexpected joy to the pawnbroker who in a feat of generosity cancels the debt! During the last shots Carmen and her friend depart in an open air wagon and dance merrily. This softening of modernity (represented by the two girls) with its clumsy, comical, yet rejuvenating in lightness and colorful richness performance, brings obliquely progress in this remote village. In the words of the father "if Carmen's dance is all right in Tokyo it's all right here too!" Even the conservative figure of the father transcends, eventually, parochialism.

Kaneto Shindo, whose visual decisions to set his stories in isolated pastoral communities, enables us to see through this abstraction not a return to primitivism, but a disguised attempt to chart Japan as a home, purified though from an explicit political texture or from a modernist experimentation with style. *Onibaba, Chikuzan hitori tabi* but, in particular, *Hadaka no Shima* utilize barren landscapes as bucolic milieux, not in order to reconfigure home in romantic or escapist terms, but, rather to point to the essentials of what a home can be in the sense pursued here. This strategy enables us to confront violence and solidarity as they co-emerge in the forms of these simple shapes of consciousness in isolated, closed communities, a filmic device that sets up Japan both as a closed (oppressive) home but also as an authentic and resilient home vis-a-vis foreign influences or invasions.

The motif of a home figures obliquely but consistently in Kon Ichikawa's oeuvre. The lonely adventurer in *Taiheyio Hitoribotchi*, the disillusioned Buddhist acolyte in *Enjo*, the ex-soldier turning Buddhist monk in *Biruma no Tategoto*, the brutalized soldier in the field in *Nobi*, reflect levels of consciousness on the way to or away from 'home'. Ichikawa's 'loner' stands for a self-exiled and often self-mortified consciousness in search of a 'home'. The wandering of many Ichikawa heroes captures the necessity of 'movement' in how an active consciousness while confronting natural and human resistance, war terror or crass modernity, experiences loss but also extends the Front of Possibility, a notion crucial to the development of the spirit as Hegel theorized it.

On another plane Masaki Kobayashi's nine-hour marathon film *The Human Condition* (*Ningen No Joken*), demonstrates better, not so much in terms of style, but, through the enormity of its ethical content, the Hegelian relevance I wish to defend here. Kagi's (Tatsyua Nakadai) ordeal is punctuated by overt dialectical confrontations, which affirm, albeit negatively, the core value of *orthopedia* (to stand upright)[48] as the epitome of human dignity. As

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[48] Ernst Bloch, *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press [1961] 1996. Kobayashi's film offers an opportunity to rethink portrayals of the body in overtly political terms in relation to the war, and, of course, pave the way for New Wave treatments of the traumatized body (i.e. Teshigahara) in post-war Japan. These filmic narratives are curiously omitted in Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory. Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture*, 1945-1970. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

a seminal film on the exploration of the cinematic expression of ethical dialectics, Kobayashi's fresco chronicles Kagi's gradual descent into humiliation and barbarity, presented and explored meticulously as a series of long and largely dialogue-based episodes. In spite of flaws, where certain set pieces contain melodramatic excesses and languid moralizing, Kobayashi's hugely ambitious project deserves to be rescued from what harsh critics like Burch diagnose as the flaws associated with the ideologically dominant Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR) in film. The film's psychological identification of the audience with the idealist protagonist, Kagi, can be sidestepped if one abstracts towards the primacy of the content without though ignoring Burch's insightful comments, but, rather, using these as an index of an overall inconsistency in his work. Kagi questions exploitative labor and sets himself the task of "reconciling this contradiction" and to restore labor to its expressive aspects. Moreover, he seeks to reconcile theory and practice. As if arguing from the perspective of the mutual-benefit between exploiters and exploited in Marx's chapter on the working day in the first volume of *Capital*, Kagi's idealist zest is ignited by the intense inequalities as these form the everyday-life of Chinese POWs in the Manchurian slave-labor camps. Therefore, Kagi stands, among humanist heroes in Japanese cinema, as the living embodiment in how a Hegelian, humanist Marxist and Christian ideal of reconciliation can converge, rendering, thus, human dignity the real a priori of theory and practice.

H. Humanism Negated? Fragmented Modernity

John Orr has launched the tag "neo-modern cinema" to describe both an approach to filmmaking and to classify in terms of themes and stylistic developments an entire cinematic era, possibly the one where the medium reached its artistic peak. For Orr, neo-modern cinema is driven by the reflexivity of modernity (self-reflection, irony, criticism) and unlike modernism or post-modernism marks a critical return to the modern. This return to the modern involves a challenge of the complacent world of Western bourgeoisie, by the very agents of that complacency, namely, the bourgeois themselves. Permeated by a love/hate relationship to romantic love, being closer to the city rather than nature, to technology rather than tradition, and emphasizing, among others, a new concept of woman caught in the antinomies of emancipation within a bourgeois world, neo-modern cinema transfers action from the narrative to the camera itself. As a result, directors like Resnais, Godard, Rohmer, Antonioni, Bertolucci, Fellini, Bunuel, Bergman, Fassbinder and Wenders among others, firmly consolidate *auteur* styles. As Orr argues, their visual revolutions cannot cure the void that accompanies Western modernity through motifs like the absence of God, the crisis of Marxist utopia, and even the sterilized welfare democracies in Northern Europe; they can, though, enable us to question these ideals, not simply to deconstruct them, but, rather, to reflect on their impossibility, and in this reflection to salvage something of what was worthy in these projects. I believe that similar concerns can be traced systematically in Japanese cinema. Orr's plausible and powerfully argued thesis is developed further in two other works[49], but Japanese cinema is unfortunately omitted. I wish to claim that the category of 'neo-modern cinema' can be enhanced without losing its purity and explanatory power if it is used to describe

certain strands in Japanese cinema. This reclassification can help us to establish bolder and broader analogies between Japanese and European cinema, especially between the early 1950s and the early 1980s. *Auteurs* like Shinoda, Imamura, Hani, Teshigahara, Oshima and Yoshida enable us, I think, to develop the category of 'neo-modern' cinema and to assess its radical breach (or, better, its critical-reflexive rapport) with humanism.

Masahiro Shinoda's nihilism can be seen as a form of reactionary modernism. Historical themes about Japan's opening to the West and its resilient primitivism are mediated by exquisitely aestheticized violence and eroticism. One issue about Shinoda pertains to his nihilistic and amoral standpoint on violence. However, the brilliant formal innovations (owing to Brecht and to the New Wave) complicate the overall assessment on Shinoda's work. The reactionary politics which he affirms target the danger of a vulgarized Westernization of Japan. However, Shinoda's modernism and his remarkable affinity to Western *auteur* cinema act as a counterbalancing element that perhaps rescues Shinoda's films from the charge of nihilism. Shinoda's cold and claustrophobic socio-political universe can certainly qualify as a nihilist canon. But both in terms of content and form there is evidence to the contrary. Pockets of warmth and humanity surface in both the treatment of erotic scenes and implicitly in the empty and cold deaths of commoners, women and *ronin*. This interpretative trail is already taken by Tucker, who in a fine dialectical shift discloses radical aspects in Shinoda's conservative universe. He claims[50] that the basis for the historical incidents treated in Shinoda's films "is the conflict between duty and the dictates of the heart, and whilst this remains the motivation for the plot Shinoda shifts the attention to the pattern of life that is being worked out for, or by, the main characters. In this way he makes the characters relevant to modern society by using what was originally an ethically right wing situation as a means of studying an individual's problems, which is the approach of the ethical left". Shinoda's point of view seems to be that of Junger's *anarch* (rather than the anarchist)[51],

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[49] John Orr, *Contemporary Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998; John Orr, *The Art and Politics of Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

[50] Richard N. Tucker, *Japan: Film Image*, London: Studio Vista, 1973, p. 135.

[51] Ernst Junger ([1932] 1989: 159-60) writes that through "the aspect of the mask which provokes a metallic impression in men and a cosmetic in women, we can deduce that it succeeds in softening the features which render the sexual character physiognomically visible". Later ([1932] 1989: 160), he adds to the cult of the mask, "the gas-masks of entire populations, the protecting masks for sports and high speed races, such which wear all automobile drivers, or protecting masks which allows people to work in zones rendered dangerous by radiation, explosions or narcotic emissions". See Ernst Junger, *Le Travailleur*, Paris: Christian Bourgois, [1932] 1989. For the metaphysics of pain and its Japanese backdrop that Junger turns towards an aestheticized but cruel and emotionally barren technological dystopia, citing Inazo Notibe's reflections on the steely code of persevering pain in hara-kiri, see Ernst Junger, *On Pain*. New York: Telos Press Publishing, p. 1. Even a reactionary modernist like Junger, therefore, conceives the steely and war-like planetary dystopia as a fatherland versus a 'homeland' (*Heimat*). See Ernst Junger, *Maxima-Minima*. Paris: Christian Bourgois, [1981] 1992, p. 91. Teshiga hara's film *Tanin no Kao* is the most competent filmic essay on the modernist (and very Japanese as it seems) motif of the mask with its hiding/revealing dialectic.

observing from a detached and politically neutral perspective the complex and violent inter-play between Eros and Thanatos. Formally, Shinoda maintained tightly coherent, albeit very complex, narratives by resorting to modernist freeze frames, formalist pans and medium shots, flashbacks without editing, bumpy camera, all unobtrusively. Within these modernist set of techniques, the idea of a 'home' will be pursued as an attempt to recapture Japan's aesthetic ethos. A striking example of this nihilistic vista, which illuminates the brutal confrontation of reason/universality with unreason/relativism along with other dualisms, is *Chinmoku*, where, again, but lacking the sophistication of a *Rashomon*, the film chronicles the slow and painful demise of rationalism (if we can count the Jesuits as vehicles of Reason) by a devouring and chthonic Japan. Again, this indictment on Christianity and universal truth is ambiguous as it is couched in abstract and historically dogmatic grand narratives, against a backdrop of cruelty and demeanor, which seems to undermine both Japan and Europe.

Stephen Prince contributes to bridging the gulf between Kurosawa's affirmative ethics and the typical negations of Japanese New Wave directors. The 'self', which Kurosawa cherishes, is presupposed as a condition of possibility during the radical aesthetic and critique of Japanese society during the turbulent 1960s. It feeds, as a positive value, albeit in stunted form, the scope of the new critique. Hence, it cannot be discarded without qualification on the premise that it stands or falls along with the humanistic context that enveloped it in a Kurosawa or a Kinoshita. Rather than dissolving hastily within the dislocations and voids of modernity, humanism proves remarkably persistent, precisely because humanism's pejorative connotations capture only its external and sentimental surface. The crucial point is whether the individual as a transcendental (in Kant's sense) condition of critique can still be defended as a product of ethical institutional arrangements conducive to the enhancement and the nourishment of the ethical self. Susumu Hani offers such neo-modernist reflections on the fractured, yet human(ist) self. The discourse of a homeland as a ruined and skeletal cityscape under reconstruction (a theme in Francesco Rosi and John Sayles) is tied in *Kanojo to kare*, for example, to the modernist eclipse of a home as this was vouchsafed in pre-war Japan (sexual violence and incarceration figure also as means for social criticism). Hani represents neo-modern cinema, with a visual style and narrative that converges with that of his contem-poraries in French and Italian cinema.

Shohei Imamura stands perhaps in the middle of a spectrum with filmmakers like Shindo and Teshigahara in the extreme. The emphasis on ordinary people and isolated milieux relates him to both, but the visual technique brings him closer to Teshigahara. An exemplary of neo-modernist style, Imamura's achievement lies mainly in the attempt to mediate moder-nity with instincts and passions. Instead of a regress to a pure container of primitive instincts and practices, Imamura's perspective abstracts towards the seemingly irrational or animal-like, in order to rethink possibilities of rescuing humanism, rather than conflating it with instru-mental rationality, militarism, imperialism, profiteering, and bourgeois complacency. If Ima mura's anthropological (or even entomological) depiction of society is read as a reactionary

or an irrational critique, then Imamura emerges simply as a great artist but a poor social theorist. Although the latter possibility cannot be precluded, the very depiction of human society and the use of impressive visual style to punctuate and poeticize social process may testify to the contrary, especially in gestures like the one in *Akai Satsui*, where Imamura makes explicit reference to Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*.[52] The coupling of modernism therefore to instincts and powerful drives may, illustrate a defense of reason rather than signaling its expulsion from a primordially authentic (Japanese) self. For Imamura himself the focus of his films lies "in people who have broken off from their families, their 'furusato' (country, place of birth) [⋯]".[53]

The standard-and not at all implausible-sense that one derives from Hiroshi Teshigahara's work, is that he is conveying alienation, especially as this was depicted and theorized in existentialism. While this sense of alienation caused by modernity's pitfalls (instrumental reason, capitalism, aggrandizement of *amour propre*, power, technological will-to-power), is developed by remarkable modernist[54] visual devices, Teshigahara's cinematic achievement lies in the fact that he reworks the ethical issue of 'home' and 'reconciliation' in very claustrophobic and 'closed' environments. From the rural landscapes of *Otoshiana* and *Sunna no Onna* to the cityscape of *Tanin no kao* and *Moetsukita chizu*, Teshigahara's visual orbits contain more than mere theories of modernist/existential/Marxist alienation. Teshigahara's visual narratives are so elaborate that allow us to follow a humanist thread and to search for the ideal of recognition and reconciliation even within highly contingent, risk-laden, masked (Nietzsche's and Junger's motif)[55] and alienating socio-ethical and psychological contexts. A telling example of Teshigahara's modernism can be drawn from the discourse on self and appearance. A key statement recurring in the film *Tanin no Kao* by Mrs. Okuyama (Machiko Kyo) that "we should respect appearances", although at first glance an expression of her bourgeois background, invites, within the moral universe of the film, to challenging reconstructions. For how can an appearance claim respect as mere appearance? Appearances are worthy of respect, both cognitively and morally, to the extent that we develop our essential selves in appearance. In terms of Hegel's phenomenological ladder appearance is a moment of the essence's self-manifestation. It is not something 'less'. Translated into the visual style and content of the film, the freedom visualized by the psychiatrist (Mikijiro Hira)

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[52] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization. A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud.* New York: Vintage Books, 1962.

[53] Shohei Imamura, 'Interview with Max Tessier', pp. 57-67 in James Quandt (ed.), *Shohei Imamura*. Toronto: Toronto International Film Festival Group, 1997, p.61.

[54] For Japanese modernism until the 1930s, see Elise K. Tipton and John Clark (eds.), *Being Modern in Japan. Culture and Society from the 1910s to the 1930s.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000.

[55] Helmuth Plessner, *The Limits of Community. A Critique of Social Radicalism.* New York: Humanity Books, [1924] 1999. What he writes on the double aspect of unrealizing (*Irrealisieren*) oneself through the mask of social roles can easily, I feel, function as a paradigm, which deciphers Teshigahara's politics of the face/mask dialectic as a complex interplay between artificiality and protection of one's dignity and identity.

and hypnotically followed by Mr. Okuyama (Tatsuya Nakadai) degenerates to arbitrary will, namely to mere 'appearance'. That this is a negation of freedom is evident from the unleashed libidinal and aggressive drives of Mr. Okuyama: he attempts to rape a female passer-by and when, eventually, he murders the doctor. While the Freudian 'slaying of the father' or the Nietzschean 'death of God' motif may be apposite, it seems more appropriate to read this in Hegelian lenses. For Hegel, as for most sociologists- Erving Goffman is perhaps more pertinent here-freedom appears and fulfils itself through appearances. The presentation of self in everyday-life is mediated by family, peer group, schooling and education, vocational role and citizenship. While the doctor sees these roles as sources of repression fetishizing thus the transition to some unformed, primitive and norm-free 'other', Hegel and his female ally (Mrs. Okuyama) see them as vital and enabling resources of the self. She puts make-up on but as she sees it this is mediated (hence moderated) by the knowledge that this is a playful mask. The make-up contributes to the competent play of the social game and thus it occupies its proper position even within an uncertain, alienated and dark urban landscape. In 'love' as she adds, 'we unmask one another'. Love as the window to our 'backstage' self releases us from our self-centred self and binds us to a sort of other-centred self, as we are 'free' to be 'backstage' with the other. It is in this sense, that 'backstage performance' signifies no return to an unmediated other, but rather an affirmation of the trust towards the other and as summons to him, to witness us 'backstage'. It is thus morally mediated and hence ethically binding and enabling. It presupposes the freedom which the doctor wishes to abort aided by the mask. This socially mediated ethical freedom of knowing is precisely the one which fractures the doctor's epiphany as he hallucinates on the dystopia during which "Loneliness and friendship will be one". Realized the equation vindicates in cynical manner the X-Ray skeletal image of Mr. Okuyama in the first shots of the film. But, now the doctor is reduced to a skeletal figure as he suffers an empty, aimless death at the hands of his newly created homunculus. Hence, the last bond with humanity has been severed. Like the brilliant sequence in the police department, Mr. Okuyama's release without shame or remorse, since he is unregistered and unidentified, but conscious enough to counter the madness label, is punctuated dialectically by the entry of an arrested suspect who as he enters the police headquarters hides his face. The gesture is metonymic, signifying the need to shield oneself from the outside world, which, however, as the scene is staged eschews realistic expectations: the outside world in the scene is the 'inside' world of the police officers whose job is to identify the arrested man. We, as viewers and voyeurs simultaneously, consume faces, and the almost unspotted gesture-as it presented in fractions of a second-stands as an index of freedom against the modern urbanite's bulimic labelling urges. Treated here heuristically as if he were a tabloid paparazzo, the viewer is engaged reflexively through Teshigahara's subtle but impressive moral gesture. Eventually, the moral face matches the close ups of the singer (Bibari "Beverly" Maeda) during the sequences in the German pub. Since her face discloses mixed racial features, it conveys, within the context of the film, the Hegelian culmination of moral concepts in the logical level of 'unity-in-difference'. This, therefore, is a typical illustration of how neo-modern visual narratives, interpreted initially as essays on alienation,

conceal refined moral discourses, which philosophy and social theory can bring into focus, if we assume, as I do here following film theorists like Pasolini, Kracauer, Mitry and Biro, that visual style unfolds a poetic network of concepts.

Of all the attacks on modernity via neo-modern visuals and themes, Oshima and Teshigahara stand out. Nagisa Oshima's work bears affinities to Angelopoulos explicit identification of cinema driven by the search of a 'home'. In *Shonen*, for example, Oshima through the themes of child-labor, abortion, traumatic childhood (for the parents too!), women battering, violence against children, launches an uncompromising attack on the Japanese family. The image of the step-mother and the two boys in a barren wintry landscape bears affinities to a similar odyssey towards a 'home' in Angelopoulos' *Landscape in the Mist*. Furthermore, Oshima reworks effectively the idea of a 'home' in *Ai to Kibo no Machi* and in *Koshikei*. The theme of the eclipse of nature and 'light' forms also part of Oshima's critical and pessimistic reflections on home in, for example, *Taiyo no Hakaba*.

Having approached Shinoda through the motif of the *anarch*, this hermeneutic path can potentially be extended to the late work of Yoshihige Yoshida. Yoshida in his late work politicizes the idea of a 'home' blending often anarchist and reactionary motifs. Powerful visuals are orchestrated within a charged political discourse with visual and verbal referents to Max Stirner's anarchism, feminism and Brechtean theatre. These late films contrast also with his early nihilistic vistas and socio-political melodramas shot in sumptuous b/w like *Rokudenashi* and as Desser points out, are highly influenced by Antonioni's modernism and formal reflections on alienation.[56] Yoshida's blending of idealism with history can be discussed, I feel, with some risk to be sure, from a Hegelian perspective, reflecting on his neo-modern construction of women (notably in *Akitsu Onsen* or *Onna no Mizuumi*) and explore further his style (often Brechtean), in terms of how it contributes to seeing Japan as a home.

In this essay I have tried to argue that a powerful space for reading film ethically can be delineated among filmmakers in Japan who felt obliged to explore the possibilities of film as medium and art-form, in order to tackle the tensions and reconciliations that followed Japan's confrontation with modernity. I have argued in favor of a model that can enhance dialogic channels with European filmmaking in particular, hinting for several directors how the recurring topography of a 'home' can be visualized (and theorized) creatively within a specific culture, which in our case is Japan. To be sure, if the model works, then it needs to be taken up in a larger project. But against the fashionable and indeed fine attempt to exhaust Japanese film by its Japaneseness (often identified as the *mono no aware, mu*, or as

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[56] David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre. An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988.

the Japanese aesthetic ethos that oscillates between *Shibui, Miyabi, Hade* and *Iki*), this essay preferred to follow the opposite and perhaps 'shunned' trail, namely, that of exploring the cultural (and ethical) surplus-content of Japanese cinema. This strategy need not be seen as a Eurocentric bias, but, rather, as means to disclose the universality of the human condition, depicted so impressively by Japanese directors. Japan through its cinema then emerges, as a potentially cosmopolitan, yet culturally unique, socio-ethical space deriving its strengths precisely by those trans-Japanese themes, set in particularly Japanese contexts, which Japanese *auteurs* saw as genuine artistic and political need, but many critics preferred to obscure under a hermetically sealed 'Japanese' cultural identity; ironically, these critics practice the very thing that film as a universal art negates !⁵⁷

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⁵⁷ Repeatedly, Akira Kurosawa among many others (Takeshi Kitano, for instance, during the 2008 awards in Thessaloniki International Film Festival), has underlined the universality of film as an art, denying most emphatically artistic parochialism. Dialectically, this would mean that particular issues tackled in genuinely filmic style and language echo universality. This is not mere platitude. Rather, film as an art is steeped with a visual style, the valence of which transcends cultural boundaries, if one is, of course, prepared to learn to read the filmic image, in order to discern through its multiple visual mediations, this surplus content, for which auteurs have been lauded. To remember again Gabriel Marcel according to Siegfried Kracauer: this surplus-content redeems reality and salvages remembrance of the future with Earth as our common natural and moral habitat. See Akira Kurosawa, *My Life in Cinema*, a two-hour video conversation between Akira Kurosawa and Nagisa Oshima from 1993, produced by the Directors Guild of Japan, available in *Seven Samurai*, The Criterion Collections, Disc 3.

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