Perspectives on Oshima Nagisa

edited by M. Downing ROBERTS

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Preface

Variously described as a leader of the new wave, a traditionalist, or a political modernist, on closer scrutiny Ōshima Nagisa seems to defy all of these categories. "An artist," he once observed, "does not build his work on one single theme, any more than a man lives his life according to only one idea." In this cautionary remark, Ōshima speaks to the multifarious style of his own works, to their restless wealth of themes and concerns, from the conflicts of youth, to criminality, oppositional politics, violence, and sexuality. This wealth of concerns accounts in part for how it is that today, fifty-five years after his début as a director, there is only a nebulous sense of agreement about the significance of his project. Ōshima is of course widely regarded as one of the most important directors of his generation, but if his films have remained some of the most unusual and discussable productions of the postwar Japanese cinema, it is not only due to their daring themes and unusual approach to formal experimentation, but equally because they remain deeply ambiguous works that compel us to think beyond their limits as individual films.

If our approach to thinking about Ōshima has changed in the decades since critics and theorists first engaged with his films, in an important sense this is also due to broader changes in the discipline of film and media studies. Here, it is difficult if not impossible to propose a global account, so I will confine my remarks to the trajectory of the discipline in North America and Europe. Viewed in retrospect, it is fair to say that one of the consequences of the formalist/realist debate of the mid-twentieth century was a shift in the locus of hermeneutic activity from the sphere of production to that of film consumption. Between the mid-1960s and late 1970s, as film studies took disciplinary form, the processes of spectatorship tended to attract greater critical attention than the logics of production, either industrial or independent. By the early 1990s, though, the limitations of "screen theory" were apparent. In place of the universalizing and monolithic accounts of the power of the cinematic apparatus, the articulation of the spectator's experience needed to become more nuanced, more historically contingent.

Regardless of whether theories of spectatorship were founded upon the cinematic apparatus, high-modernist aesthetic experience, sexual difference, or Bordwellian cognitivism, there was a sense that the then-prevailing emphasis on "grand theory" failed to account for important distinctions of class, nation, and racial identity. Drawing on work done in the fields of area and cultural studies, media studies and media histories, new approaches emerged that were driven by the need for a more nuanced socio-historical understanding of our experience of cinema, thereby accounting for audience practices and pleasures. Since the 1990s, then, there has been a renewed emphasis on locating film in the sphere of popular culture, which finds expression in histories of reception, fandom, new explorations of the cultural or transnational function of specific film genres, and materialist approaches to film history, as opposed to those that privilege canons or pantheons of directors and stars. Broadly, there has been a diversification of theoretical approaches and critical methods.

In view of these disciplinary shifts, then, our approach to the films of a director such as Ōshima has changed. While he has been frequently characterized as a member of the postwar avant-garde whose works might be best understood through an optic of modernist or Brechtian aesthetics, this interpretation has equally tended to simplify our understanding of his multifarious interests and their complex engagement with Japanese cinema, society, and history. It seems fair to say that the experience of viewing Ōshima's films prompts us not only to question the specific historical and social forms that they depict, but to similarly question the received image of Ōshima himself. Tracing his career from the studio system to a quasi-independent and finally independent director, we find ourselves asking: how might we think about Ōshima's relationship to Japanese cinema outside of an auteurist frame? How can we characterize his engagement with history? What are the limits or possibilities of a production system, of a mode of film production as a horizon of meaning? Extant writing on Ōshima's works in English has left much of this terrain under-explored, and there remains today a discrepancy between it and a significant body of criticism in Japanese.

The essays in this booklet explore some of these questions concerning

Ōshima's relationship with Japanese cinema in the 1960s and 70s. The contributors offer a broad spectrum of conceptual approaches, drawing on historical and theoretical modes of analysis. We propose to both reconsider familiar problems, and to explore new ones. The following essays examine, among other topics, Ōshima's significance for the culture of film retrospectives, his critique of the nation-state vis-à-vis some of the key theories of ideology, his visualization of state power, his relationship with and perspectives on both political and popular cinema. Through this exploration, we seek to gain a richer understanding of these singular films, of new interpretive approaches, and of some of the critical possibilities of cinema itself. More broadly, the aim is not so much to circumscribe a discourse around Ōshima, but rather to draw on some of his cinematic explorations as a way to open spaces for thought and discussion.

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Oshima in Retrospect(ives):
The Question of Corporeality in **Daitōa Sensō** *(1968)*

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An icon of the Shochiku Nouvelle Vague and the independent film movement that developed around ATG (Art Theatre Guild) in the 1960s, Oshima Nagisa is a director whose works are often discussed in a synchronic framework; that is to say, in relation to contemporaneous socio-political events of the political season of the 1960s. But when we consider the longevity of his films which has allowed them to accrue new meanings with every generation of viewers, it is imperative that we extend the discussion to Oshima's legacy that would require a diachronic perspective. What happens when his films made in the long 1960s outlive the political season and continue to be seen after the death of the author? Of course, in Roland Barthes' famous essay, "The Death of the Author," the important death is not that of the biological body of the author, but that of the "Author," a "modern figure" that is seen as the key to decoding the text's meaning. Even in a realist novel such as in Balzac's "Sarrasine," Barthes demonstrated that the meaning of the text is defined in an intertextual economy of signs that exists autonomously from the author's biography.[1] In the following, however, I will go against Barthes' edict and study the biographical episodes surrounding Oshima, namely those regarding his conflicted views on the longevity of films. I will focus on examining retrospectives and compilation films as two productive sites where the tension between Oshima's corporeal presence as an author and the competing corporeality of his corpus played out.

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1. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-143.

The name "Oshima Nagisa" is not usually associated with the notion of a "retrospective." Rather than the durable and universal artistic value that a retrospective screening honors, Oshima's works have been appreciated for a quality of immediacy and spontaneity. Since debuting in 1959 as a twenty-seven year-old director who represented a new generation of filmmakers that the media dubbed the "Shochiku Nouvelle Vague" (paring the Japanese studio "Shochiku" with the French for New Wave), Oshima worked at a furious pace throughout the politically turbulent 1960s, and established a reputation as a director of "premonition" (*yokan*) for his uncanny ability to respond to political issues and cultural phenomena while they are still latent.[2] Expressions such as "journalistic" and "contemporaneous" (*dōjidaisē*) have frequently accompanied writings on Oshima's films that highlight their privileged relationship to contemporary events.[3] In his fiction films, experimental films, and TV documentaries made in this period, Oshima offered explicit critiques of concurrent events — the anti-Anpo (US-Japan Security Treaty) protests in *Night and Fog in Japan* (1960), the Japan-South Korea Normalization Treaty in *The Forgotten Army*, and the revived National Foundation Day (*Kigensetsu*) in *A Treatise of Japanese Bawdy Songs* (1967) — and captured the emergent youth cultures with subversive potentials — the loafers in *Cruel Story of Youth* (1960) and the "Teamers" (*Fūtenzoku*) in *Diary of Shinjuku Thief* (1968).

The immediacy of his works notwithstanding, it is also a fact that some of his crucial works had to be seen retroactively. For critics and

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2. The notion of "premonition" is first articulated in his film *Violence at Noon* (1966). In an oft-cited article, "The Concept of Demons and the Concept of a Movement," published following the film, Oshima draws an analogy between filmmaking and a conspired act of crime. If a criminal of a premeditated crime can be compared to a proto-Marxist historically conscious political subject, he was interested in the kind of a criminal who would act without a clear understanding of one's motive which through his/her act provides an eerie premonition of social change. Oshima Nagisa, "The Concept of Demons and the Concept of a Movement," in Oshima Nagisa, and Annette Michelson, *Cinema, Censorship, and the State: Writings of Nagisa Oshima*, trans. Dawn Lawson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 107-113.

3. Murayama Shōhō, "Oshima Nagisa eno jerashī," in *Sekai no eiga sakka Oshima Nagisa*, Kinemajunpōsha, Tokyo, pp. 66-68.

cinephiles in the West, these works were viewed only after the late 1960s, in repertory cinemas and retrospectives. Even for viewers in Japan, real-time appreciation of Oshima's films was made difficult by the limited distribution of his films made for the independent distributor-cum-exhibitor Art Theatre Guild not to mention the inaccessibility of his masterpiece *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) in an uncensored form.[4] Retrospectives are essential for Oshima's reception history, and yet this poses a problem given the inevitable effect of severing the films from their original contexts and reorganizing them in relation to a particular director, studio, generation, or country.

What is at stake in discussing Oshima's relationship to retrospectives is a set of questions that have broad implications extending beyond Oshima scholarship: the aging of film and its migration from the market to the archives, the discourse of film heritage, and the ethics of film preservation. Oshima presents an especially fecund case study since he was both deeply entrenched in the culture of retrospective and paradoxically critical of the premise that films can be reorganized outside their original context in archives, museums, and television reruns. Oshima identified television as the locus where the tension between the two bodies — the author's own and that of his corpus — manifested. Television was, above all, a lifeline for Oshima who relied on commissions from television stations while his film career stalled following his fallout with Shochiku in 1960 — take the period between 1959 and 1976 in which he made a total of thirty-two titles for television (eighteen documentaries and fourteen dramas) compared to seventeen feature-length motion picture films. But perhaps as an unintended byproduct, television gave Oshima an ideal platform from which he could objectively reflect on the history and the medium-specificity of film. In this study, I will focus on his unorthodox compilation documentary *Greater East Asian War / Daitōa Sensō* (NTV 1968) which treated WWII-era newsreel footage as at once historical documents (the "corpus" of military Japan's image archive) and relics (the excess corporeality) of the disastrous era.

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4. Higuchi Naofumi, *Oshima Nagisa no subete* (Tokyo: Kinemajunpōsha, 2002), 5.

The Corpus and the Excess Corporeality of the Director

In a 2008 article, the film critic and programmer Tony Rayns recounts an anecdote from an Oshima retrospective held at Rome International Film Festival in June, 1984. During the screening of his film *Night and Fog in Japan* on the opening night, Oshima voiced a protest at the screening of his own film;

> Thirty-some minutes into the 107-minute film, there was a commotion in the cinema. Oshima himself was protesting that the reels were in the wrong order, that the projection had to be stopped. [...] I have to admit that although the particular form of the film made it hard to be sure, I didn't think the reels were in the wrong order at all. Donald Richie, also present, wasn't convinced either. My impression was that Oshima had sensed that the audience was becoming restive and had perhaps unconsciously created an excuse for cutting the screening short.[5]

Commonly called a "discussion drama" that exposed the split between the "old" and the "new" left, *Night and Fog in Japan* was a particularly time-specific film that resonated with the millions of students and their sympathizers whose anti-Anpo protest movement had suffered a bitter defeat when the treaty was automatically renewed on June 9, 1960. Completed within two months, Shochiku promptly released the film on October 9th only to withdraw it from circulation three days later without offering a convincing explanation. The anecdote Rayns provides appears to emblematize the fissure between a text embedded in *dōjidaisei* (contemporaneity) and the framework of retrospectives. "[The] Left's failures and hypocrisies in the Fifties," Rayns summarizes, "must have seemed as remote to Oshima as they did to the audience in Rome".[6]

Interruption of screenings in film festivals is itself not unusual, and

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5. Tony Rayns, "A Samurai among Farmers: Nagisa Oshima," *Film Comment* 9-10 (2008), http://www.filmcomment.com/article/a-samurai-among-farmers-nagisa-oshima (accessed June 3, 2014).

6. Tony Rayns, "A Samurai among Farmers".

it is probable that Oshima was merely acting out his part to spice the festival up in the good tradition of European Film Festivals which often became ad-hoc sites for protests, manifestos, and commotions.[7] By interrupting a retrospective organized for his own oeuvre, Oshima highlighted the excess presence of his authorial body that could not be readily assimilated into the smooth surface of the corpus; the body of work that was on display. While Rayns' reading of the remoteness of the Anpo protests, both to Oshima and the audience in 1984, cannot be denied, Oshima's intervention was also driven by something other than the fear of confusing or boring the audience. We should note that Oshima was used to, and even found pleasure in, witnessing confused audience given his already extensive experience in attending international screenings of his films from the 1960s since he first travelled across Russia, Poland, and France with the print of *Death by Hanging* in 1968.[8] More than irrelevance, perhaps the source of Oshima's outburst was his weariness of retrospective's power to give a semblance of order and meaning to his films. In other words, it was perhaps more unbearable for Oshima to see a moderately interested crowd that consume the film as a relic of a distant political season, than to witness the viewers confused, bored, or frustrated by the film.

   Oshima's skepticism about retrospectives was already evident when Art Theatre Guild (ATG) organized the first-ever Oshima retrospective

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7. We should note that Oshima's first exposure to international film festival came from Cannes 1968, the festival that was closed down by Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, and Louis Malle among others who sought to show solidarity with the Paris protestors. Oshima attended the festival as the final stop in his trans-continental journey across Russia, Poland, and France ostensibly to show his film *Death by Hanging* (1968). The film was exhibited in the out-of-competition section *Le Marché du Film* at Cannes which led to the screenings of a handful of Oshima's films in theatres in European cities the following year.

8. Reporting on the screening of *Death by Hanging* (1968) in Bergamo in 1969, the veteran leftist critic-producer Iwasaki Akira observed that while the film appeared to have resonated with the experiences of Italians at the time, a large number of people walked out as soon as the main focus shifted from the State's violence and the question of justice to the topic of the convict's relationship with a young female character which is difficult to follow without the knowledge of the film's source, the real-life event of the Korean Yi Chin-u. Iwasaki Akira, "Berugamo no 'Koshikei'," in *Sekai no eiga sakka Oshima Nagisa* (Tokyo: Kinemajunpōsha, 1970), 60.

in 1967, which was billed as "*Oshima Nagisa: Sakuhin kenkyū* / Oshima Nagisa: *Film Analysis*" and coincided with the opening of *Band of Ninja* (1967), a milestone in ATG-Oshima collaboration as the first of the seven feature-length Oshima films to be screened at ATG's Shinjuku Bunka. In a speech he gave to the audience, he bluntly stated that retrospectives did a disservice to "professional directors" (*shokugyō-eigakantoku*), and that his audience that night — who were intent on studying his corpus — was a kind that he disliked.[9] Referring to his own experience of attending a Jean-Luc Godard retrospective, Oshima suggests that there is a sinister structure at work in retrospectives that motivates the viewers to arrive at conclusions such as "Godard is no good after xxx" or "Oshima's works are all worthless except xxx." These are judgments that are passed from a detached vantage point where the works are abstracted from their immediate contexts (35-36). Consciously or not, Oshima used his authorial presence as a talisman against the cinephilic desire of the retrospective audience to gain a synoptic view of his corpus in its entirety. His objections called attention to the oddly redundant presence of the director in a retrospective, which in turn revealed the fissure between the finite, historically specific body of the author and the infinite, open, and tempo-spatially unbound corpus of his/her works.

Notwithstanding his skepticism about retrospectives, it would be a mistake to simply characterize his position as a wholesale rejection of the practice. Rather, his insistence on recognizing the agonistic relation between the author's body and the corpus recuperates the humanist tradition within the history of retrospective screenings in which directors have been constructed as artists with authorial intent. Historically speaking, film retrospectives were modeled on art retrospectives, and both forms of retrospectives were predicated on a modern humanistic understanding of the arts that privileges originality and individual expressions. The key person in the history of retrospective screenings is Iris Barry, the founding director of the Film Library at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. In 1940, MoMA hosted two major retrospectives: "The Career of the Late

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9. Oshima Nagisa, "Konnanna jida ni okeru wareware no sagyō," in *Kaitai to funshutsu* (Tokyo: Hōgashoten, 1970), 35.

Douglas Fairbanks" and "D. W. Griffith: American Film Master," which emblematized Barry's efforts to reinvent directors as "artists" whose works demand a systematic analysis. The Fairbanks exhibition was "the first major retrospective of a film artist," to borrow the expression used in MoMA's publication, which was made possible by the donation of Fairbanks' own collection of his films to the Film Library the previous year.[10] The timing of the two retrospectives was crucial not only because of Fairbanks' donation and the untimely death of D. W. Griffith just months before the retrospective, but also because it trailed behind the highly publicized series of artist retrospectives that were organized by Alfred Barr, the first director of the museum. Since the museum's founding in 1929, retrospectives of famous artists such as Max Weber (1930), Henri Matisse (1931), and Edward Hopper (1933), played an important role in promoting the museum. These retrospectives were accompanied by catalogues that defined the progressive development of the artists' styles from early, through middle, and finally late phases.[11] Barry too published an elaborate catalog for the Griffith retrospective which emphasized the director as a pioneer of "the art of moving image," who singlehandedly "discovered and laid down all the basic principles of the multi form 20th century medium [of film]." To hold a retrospective for a director is, thus, a powerful means by which art institutions have consolidated the status of directors as Authors and asserted the historical value of films that have retired from commercial circulation.

   MoMA's Film Library marked an intersection of the intertwining histories of retrospectives and that of compilation film, namely the sub-genre of documentary film in which a historical narrative is told by reediting readily-existing films. Retrospective and compilation films are both products of a pivotal moment in the history of film when the Western world was confronted with an ever-growing body of obsolete films and a robust black market for stock footage films as a result of the full conversion to talkies, the end of WWI, and technological

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10. Steven Higgins, *Still Moving: The Film and Media Collection of Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 9.

11. Alfred Barr, *Henri-Matisse Retrospective Exhibition: November 3-December 6, 1931* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1931).

improvements made to duplicate film.[12] In July 1939, the popular newsreel series *The March of Time* devoted one of its episodes to the Film Library's activities and collection which it lauded as "the only complete record of the movie industry's spectacular growth."[13] After contemporary footage of Barry and her staff at work in MoMA's film vault, screening room, and in the library, the film showcased a compilation sequence of silent and early sound-era footage duplicated from MoMA's collection. The compilation sequence extended the Film Library's educational mission to treat films made in motion picture's forty-year history from the confinement of MoMA's auditorium to the expanded fields of cinemas across the U.S. that screened *The March of Time.*

Oshima's belief in the directors' status as Authors inherited the movement to recognize artistic and historical value of films that have retired from commercial circulation. It is not surprising, then, that his compilation project, *100 Years of Japanese Cinema* (1995), was surprisingly orthodox in its organization, especially in light of the multi-layered experiments in semantics that Jean-Luc Godard achieved in his televised video work *Histore(s) du Cinéma* (1988-1998). A television project produced by the British Film Institute as part of its series that celebrated cinema's centenary, *100 Years of Japanese Cinema* charted a teleological history that was driven by the speculative goal of what he called "author's films," from Itō Daisuke's *Chuji's Travel Diary* (1927) to Sai Yoichi's *All Under the Moon* (1993). One strikingly unorthodox aspect of the work was in the narration which vacillated between an objective third-person and a subjective first-person, thus highlighting the gap between, on the one hand, the voice of an author-director who has a particular history and intent, and on the other hand, the voice of a historian who traces the contour of the corpus of Japanese cinema. Oshima's interest in giving a body to the history of film followed the tradition of compilation films on motion picture that is represented by the above mentioned episode of *The March of Time*. This was in contrast

12. Jay Leyda, *Films Beget Films: A Study of the Compilation Film* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), 32.

13. The episode (vol. 5, no. 12 of *The March of Time*) was titled "The Movies March On!" but is occasionally referred to under an alternate title "The March of the Movies."

with Godard's metonymic approach to giving a partial, fragmentary, and meandering look at a history of cinema which hints at the infinite archive of images that lie outside his eight-part history: "it's eight chapters of a film that could have had hundreds of others, and even more appendices".[14] While the strict boundary imposed on Oshima's compilation project was to an extent a product of the limitation that comes with summarizing a history of "Japanese" cinema, his refusal to meander in the infinite archive of images speaks to his belief in the corporeality of film footage.

In order to further investigate the question of corporeality and film footage, we need to turn our attention to an understudied area of his oeuvre, namely, the series of television documentaries that re-edited existing film footage. With the producer Ushiyama Jun-ichi, a visionary of NTV, Japan's first commercial network, Oshima made three compilation documentaries: *Daitōa Sensō / Greater East Asian War* (1968), *Mō Takutō to Bunka Daikakumei / Mao Zedong and Cultural Revolution* (1972), and *Denki Mō Takutō / Mao Zedong, Biography* (1976).[15] Television provided Oshima an ideal platform from where he could reflect on the characteristics of film as a medium of recording and organizing history. In an essay written for *100 Years of Japanese Cinema*, Oshima summarized his relationship to cinema by noting the coincidence of his career as a film director with the development of television as "the second motion picture media" (*daini no eizō media*).[16] Joining Shochiku in 1954, just a year after the beginning of public television broadcasting, and debuting as a director in 1959, the peak year of Japanese film production and attendance, Oshima saw himself as a film director at a time when motion picture was no longer the exclusive property of cinema.

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14. Jean-Luc Godard, and Youssef Ishaghpour, *Cinema: The Archeology of Film and the Memory of a Century*. (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 5.

15. *Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution* is considered lost.

16. Oshima Nagisa, *Sengo 50 nen, eiga 100 nen* (Tokyo: Fubosha, 1995), 16.

Daitōa Sensō: Remediation of War Films on Post-War Television

Already in 1968, at the height of Oshima's most prolific decade, we find a work that offers a poignant reflection on the temporal journey of film as it moves from the realm of mass media to that of art and artifact. After returning from his overseas expedition through Russia, Poland, and France in May 1968, he used the time between his film projects (the shooting of *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* started in June, and the location hunting for *Boy* in October) for his collaboration with the television producer Ushiyama Jun'ichi on the ambitious compilation film *Daitōa Sensō*. Unusual for a television documentary, *Daitōa Sensō* was a conceptual work that opened with title cards that declared its principle:

> This film is composed entirely of words, sound, and music recorded by the Japanese at the time of the war. Even though there are films purchased from abroad, they are shown with words spoken or written by the Japanese at the time. This is a record of the Greater East Asian War as we, the Japanese, experienced it. (*kono eiga wa subete daitōasensō-ji ni satsuei sareta monodearu / kotoba, oto, ongaku subete tōji nihonjin niyotte rokuonsareta monodearu / gaikokukara kōnyūshita firumu mo subete tōji nihonjin no kotoba de tsuzutta / kore wa watashitachi nihonjin no taiken toshiteno daitōa sensō no kiroku dearu*).

The conceptual thrust of the documentary was the refusal of an enlightened commentary made from a detached vantage point of the present. Such a commentary typically sought to anxiously preempt the possibility that wartime images would evoke nostalgic sentiments. As much as contextualizing, the narration played a pivotal role to swiftly turn the propaganda images into obsolete artifacts. As if to resist this museumification of the wartime media images, Oshima's documentary presented the newsreel footage of *Nihon News* without a postwar narration, opting instead to animate it with a sound montage consisting of the original soundtrack and recordings of military and popular songs. Broadcasted twenty-three years after Japan's defeat —

and four years after Japan found its televisual self-image as an economic powerhouse through the Tokyo Olympic Games — *Daitōa Sensō* probed the potential of television to remediate the film footage of the Pacific War and to inquire the status of film heritage in postwar Japan.[17]

As the archivist-scholar Caroline Frick noted in her study of American film heritage movement, the arrival of network television was never merely a threat to the film industry, but a productive event that provided the catalyst for studios such as Warner Bros. to recognize "older vault material as a powerful, lucrative form of corporate branding" and to contribute to the emergent film preservation movement by "retaining film copies in their libraries" for television reruns.[18] Ushiyama was conscious of television's role in remediating film as media contents, as evident from the pivotal role he played in founding *Nihon Eizo Culture Center* (Nippon Audio-Visual Library) in November 1979 alongside Kawakita Kashiko of the Film Library, Adachi Kenji of Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art (the predecessor of National Film Center), and Kobayashi Yosoji of NTV, Japan's first commercial network television where Ushiyama had worked until 1972. *Daitōa Sensō* attests to his earlier efforts to facilitate critical use of film footage for television by collecting catalogs of film libraries and archives from around the world.

Given the collaborative nature of *Daitōa Sensō* that was informed by Ushiyama's vision as well as Oshima's, we cannot analyze the work in the same auteur-centric framework in which some of his earlier documentaries have been discussed. Take *Wasurerareta kōgun / The Forgotten Army* (1963), for instance, which has enjoyed a privileged position as the only television work that Oshima saw as an integral part of his oeuvre.[19] Aired on August 16, 1963 — a day after the eighteenth

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17. I use "remediation" in the sense that Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin explains as an appropriation of "techniques, forms, and social significance" by the new media of their predecessors (1999, pp. 55-65).

18. Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71.

19. For instance, in an interview with Hayashi Tamaki entitled "Oshima Nagisa: Jiden to jisaku o kataru / Oshima Nagisa speaks of his life and his works," the conversation moves from his upbringing and early training as Assistant Director to his first four works made at Shochiku, before turning to the independent era in which *Forgotten Army* figures prominently as a turning point in which Oshima starts to develop his interest

anniversary of Hirohito's *Gyokuon-hōsō*, the radio broadcast of his speech announcing Japan's unconditional surrender — the documentary reminded the public of the fact that the war had not ended for a group of Korean veterans who were severely injured during the war which they fought as Japanese conscripts, but received none of the social benefits given to Japanese veterans. As Oshima has repeatedly emphasized, the crux of the documentary was the fraught relationship of the subject and the object mediated by the camera; it was not by erasing the presence of the camera, but by heightening the veterans' self-awareness of the camera that Oshima captured the striking close-up shot of the tears falling out of a blind veteran's empty eye-sockets.[20] *The Forgotten Army* was a milestone achievement for Ushiyama who aimed to set a new standard for television documentaries by employing film directors with strong authorial voices. This was congruent with NTV's imperative to compete with the better funded NHK. Ushiyama's documentary series *Non-fiction Gekijō / Non-fiction Theater*, for which Oshima directed six episodes, encouraged directors to engage with issues that were personal and familiar in a self-conscious negation of the objective and rationalist approach favored in NHK's *Nihon no Sugao*.

In contrast to *The Forgotten Army*, in which Oshima's authorial presence was felt in the narration as well as in the framing of the subjects, *Daitōa Sensō* centered on the programmatic elimination of an overarching interpretation made from the vantage point of the present. The historicist desire to recuperate the mass-mediated experience of the Pacific War informed the title of the documentary which used the archaic name of the war, *Daitōa Sensō* / Greater East Asian War, a name that was more intimately associated with the memory of the war for the majority of the Japanese; the name "Pacific War" is, by contrast, inseparably linked to the postwar, retroactive understanding of the war

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in Korea and Koreans. There is no reference to the dozen other TV documentaries in the interview. See: *Sekai no eiga sakka Oshima Nagisa* (Tokyo: Kinemajunpōsha, 1970), 71-102.

20. For instance, see his essay based on a speech he gave at the international symposium on television documentary that Ushiyama organized in 1971. Oshima Nagisa, "Watashi ni totte kiroku eiga towa nanika," in *Dōjidaisakka no hakken* (Tokyo: San-ichishobō, 1978), 219-236.

given its origin in the US Occupation's press code that banned the use of "*Daitōa Sensō*" and sought to standardize the use of "Pacific War" in the media. Lacking an informed commentary that historicized the war, *Daitōa Sensō* was not a typical documentary *about* the war, but rather a time capsule that treated the audio-visual artifacts as something that carried the aura of the past. Evoking a ceremonial excavation of time capsules that often takes place on anniversaries, *Daitōa Sensō* was aired on December 8, 1968, on the twenty-seventh anniversary of Pearl Harbor (owing to time difference, Pearl Harbor is commemorated on the 7th in the US). Thanks to the instantaneity and the transient nature of broadcast culture, television offered an ideal platform for commemorating historical events, not necessarily by providing a rigorous interpretation of past events, but by marking the passage of time through the presentation of audio-visual records of the events. 1968 was an anniversary-sensitive year for Japanese television with NHK's ambitious fifteen-part documentary series *Meiji hyakunen / 100 Years since the Meiji Restoration*. *Daitōa Sensō* was the first installment of NTV's series *20-seiki awā / 20th Century Hour* which was NTV's response to NHK's well-received series. The NHK series summarized the emergence of modern Japan with episodes that emphasized dialectical encounters between Western and Japanese traditions. With a focus on the average Japanese's ground-level experiences of the war — which in Oshima's mind cannot be separated from propaganda newsreels — *Daitōa Sensō* countered the rationalist bird's-eye view of history represented by *100 Years since the Meiji Restoration*.

The self-imposed ban on adding a commentary made from the viewpoint of the present did not mean a wholesale identification with the past or a naïve belief in the historical footage as a document of the past as it really was. Even without the ability to speak through the narrator, Oshima still made his authorial presence felt through the effects of montage. A striking example of this was the dynamic cutting between the Japanese newsreel series, *Nippon News*, and the U.S. military footage that offered the most unusual visual homage to the fate of Kamikaze pilots. First, we see *Nippon News*'s carefully composed shots of the last rites and the take-offs, showing the Kamikaze pilots in a solemn light. The touching images of the young pilots that are

shot in the last moments of their lives are sublated by the subsequent shots: the grainy, high-contrast images of Zero fighters that are taken from American battleships, showing them catching fire in mid-air, and nose-diving into the ocean. The violent fissure between the images seen from two opposing sides is abated with a sound bridge offered by the military song Umiyukaba, a melody that was reserved for news regarding honorable losses, especially the news about the Kamikaze suicide missions. Above the song is a monotonous narration that reads out the dates, the squadron, and the number of pilots that have departed in the final months of the Pacific War. The indexing of the details of their last missions makes the newsreel a virtual epitaph. It is as if there was a tacit understanding among the makers and receivers of the ceremonial newsreel footage that an important function of the Kamikaze missions was to produce the names, dates, and the places of heroic deaths that can be inscribed on commemorative epitaphs.

On the one hand, there is an austere style to Oshima's montage that juxtaposes the images of the Kamikaze pilots filmed by the Japanese and the U.S., effectively stripping them of the symbolism and connotations they accrued in the postwar years. The montage was, in a sense, the skeletal remains of the mythical narrative of Kamikaze that has been amplified in postwar Japanese cinema as it is symbolized by the independent production *Kumo nagaruru hateni / Beyond the Clouds* (dir. Ieki Miyoji, 1953), made soon after the end of the U.S. Occupation, in which nonfiction footage flanked the melodramatic narrative that depicted the struggles of the young, bright, and sensitive pilots to come to terms with their fate. On the other hand, the austere montage is not devoid of lyricism and gives the viewers a sense of a distance, in other words, the recognition of their postwar vantage point. *Daitoā Sensō* was, in a sense, a typical compilation project, since the convention of using ready-existing films in order to narrate history has always relied on the ambivalent effect of repetition which made the past appear both familiar and unfamiliar. To put it another way, compilation film is a genre that requires historical ruptures that render certain film records obsolete and hence meaningful. In 1927, the Russian editor-turned-director Esfir Shub made *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, a genre-defining "compilation film" that re-used film documents from Tsarist

Russia in order to retell the Revolutionary history from the feudal past through the turbulence of WWI and the Revolution.[21] Shub's work was dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution alongside her protégé Sergei Eisenstein's better known film *October*. Shub's film was predicated on the historical discontinuity brought about by WWI and the Russian Revolution. Notwithstanding the fact that the makers and the viewers of *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* were presumably expected to see the films of pre-Revolutionary Russia as records of the corrupt imperial past that is discontinuous from the present, there was no guarantee in the form of compilation film to stop them from indulging in nostalgia as they watched the films of Russia's past. The centrality of nostalgia in compilation film is apparent when we turn to the slew of films that mockingly or fondly summarized the yesteryears of cinema: *Screen Souvenirs* (Paramount), *Starts of Yesterday* (Vitaphone), and *Movie Memories* (Chesterfield Cigarettes), to name a few examples from the film historian Jay Leyda's extensive study of compilation films (36-37). Compilation film was, in short, a genre that articulated the nearness as well as the remoteness of the past.

Closer to home, *Daitōa Sensō* worked on the precedent of Kamei Fumio's *Tragedy of Japan* (1946), the best known Japanese postwar compilation film in which footage from *Nippon News* were used with critical narration that exposed the deception initially perpetuated by the newsreels' producers. Kamei made *Tragedy of Japan* with the assumption that Japan's defeat and the Allies' Occupation brought about a historical break, but the film attests to the difficulty of declaring the obsolescence of certain films with finality. In 1946, just a year after the war, the newsreel footage of the Pacific War was still an integral part of the living memory of the viewers. It was too early for the newsreel images to acquire an entirely new set of significations. To the image of the wandering Zero fighter plane at Midway, Kamei added a combination of subtitles and voice-over narration to forcefully negate the messages conveyed in *Nippon News*: refuting the wartime explanation that the lone Japanese plane captured on film was observing the damage inflicted on the enemies, Kamei offered a corrective to

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21. Leyda, *Films Beget Films*, 24-25.

remind the viewers that Japan suffered a heavy defeat in Midway and that the plane was gliding aimlessly until the fuel ran out since it had lost its carrier (Figure 1). Kamei's documentary was confiscated by the US Occupation, thus, symbolizing the incomplete nature of the historical break he counted on in making the compilation film.

Made over two decades after Kamei's compilation film, *Daitōa Sensō* used television as a platform on which *Nippon News* footage was presented as obsolete materials not only on an ideological level, but also as a medium. But the images of the war were made disturbingly familiar through the distinct soundscape of war. As a compilation documentary, *Daitōa Sensō* relied on the durability of film and sound recording, but Oshima used the convention of compilation film in order to highlight the lingering residue of the tempo-spatial specificity of historical footage that cannot be washed away in the remediating platforms of the archive, the museum, and television. Emblematic of this was the title card: the broad calligraphic inscription of the proper noun *Daitōa Sensō* written by Kishi Nobusuke, and bearing his signature. Given the ostensible goal of the documentary to reconstruct the Japanese mass-mediated experience of the war, it was apt to preface it with a metonymy of the wartime regime. Kishi was, after all, the only wartime cabinet member to not only escape indictment in the war trials, but also become a postwar prime minister. Kishi's calligraphy, like the word *Daitōa Sensō* that is tainted with the ideological wartime narrative of the war which saw Japan as the legitimate protector of East Asia from Western imperial powers, symbolized the materiality of the past that cannot be bleached out. Rather than a simplistic idea of recuperating the view of the past as it really was, the use of original image and sound sources in *Daitōa Sensō* was underpinned by the idea that audio-visual conventions that characterized wartime mass media have the power to heighten the viewers' senses and to facilitate a reflection on the process by which the emperor's children became modern citizens and the newsreel footage became part of television's vast archive.

Daitōa Sensō prompted Oshima to write the article, "Haisha wa eizō o motanai / The Defeated Possess No Images," in which he elaborated on his ideas concerning broadcast media and his reflections on his own mass-mediated experience of WWII. The title of the article summarized

the realization that he attained during the making of *Daitōa Sensō*; namely, that it was only while Japan was winning that its newsreels depicted scenes of the war. As a consequence of the asymmetrical power of documentation, the project whose conceptual goal was to recreate the mass-mediated experience of the Greater East Asian War nevertheless relied on "enemy" materials; not just the U.S. footage of Kamikaze, but also the British film footage depicting the Battle of Imphal. But despite the simplicity and the apparent transparency of the aphorism, "the defeated possess no images," we should note that this was not a simple rehashing of the maxim, *history is written by the victor*. The meat of the article, instead, was the recognition that absence was constitutive to the notion of an archive; namely, that inadequacy of documents can empower historians to interpret the past and give credence to the work of film archivists. The aphorism, "the defeated possess no images," must be paired with a counter-thesis, "the defeated still possess an archive despite the lack of images." Or as Oshima writes in the same article, "for the Japanese," the shape of an image archive of the war "has less to do with what kind of film documents were made than with what kind of film documents failed to materialize".[22] It is significant that he prefaced his observation of the decreasing output of war footage in *Nihon News* with an anecdote of his own experience of listening to *Gyokuon-hōsō*, or the radio broadcast of Hirohito's speech announcing Japan's unconditional surrender on August 15, 1945. The broadcasted speech left a strong impact on the thirteen-year old would-be-director, not because of the content of the speech, but because of the extraordinary accent and intonation that sounded eerily deprived of human emotion. The defining moment of the Japanese experience of the war was not only extra-visual, but also extra-verbal: the impact of the speech could not be conveyed through transcription.

While the emperor's speech itself does not appear until the closing sequence of *Daitōa Sensō*, the oration of the narrator of *Nippon News* stands in as a distinct vocal signifier of the Greater East Asian War with its characteristically elongated vowels and stylized syntax. Moreover, many of the voice-over narrations were added by the actors Komatsu

22. Oshima Nagisa, "Haisha wa eizō o matazu," in *Oshima Nagisa chosakushū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Gendaishichōshinsha, 2008), 167.

Hōsei and Toura Rokkō, both members of Oshima's production company Sōzōsha. Again, the use of the voice of contemporary actors appears to like a breach of the film's stated principle. Komatsu's skillful mimicry of the characteristic announcements issued by Daihon-ei (The Imperial Headquarters) marks the hair-splitting line between an active interpretation of history and revisionism. But the slippage is crucial in highlighting the corporeality of film footages as they are seen through the prism of broadcast culture. What is emphasized in both the re-enacted announcements and the cutback of the Kamikaze footage is the fallacy of the post-war belief in the absolute break that separated the prewar from the postwar. Rather than re-educating the masses of the lies of war-time propaganda, the aim in *Daitōa Sensō* was to resist the post-war illusion of a definite historical discontinuity and the convenient idea of a formalized procedural resolution of the legacy of the war as it was evinced by the rhetoric of *Ichioku sōzange*, or the mass repentance of a hundred million.

Conclusion

The tension between "Oshima" and "retrospective" is a productive one. The framework of a retrospective contributes to our understanding of Oshima's career which was as much characterized by his efforts to position himself in relation to an intellectual or artistic tradition as it was by his famous ability to promptly respond to contemporary events. Oshima's critique of retrospectives was motivated by his reservation about the ability of films to transcend their concrete historical time-space. Foreshadowing the digital-age debate among archive theorists regarding the constitutive function of loss in the practice and ideal of film preservation — "[to] preserve everything is a curse to posterity" — Oshima stressed the importance of recognizing the productive aspects of the absence or the scarcity of film for the sake of a meaningful encounter with the work.[23] By looking at the film *Daitōa Sensō*, this study demonstrated the centrality of the emperor's *Gyokuon* radio

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23. Paolo Usai, "The Lindgren Manifesto: The Film Curator of the Future," *Journal of Film Preservation* 84 (2011): 4-5.

speech in Oshima's ideas about film heritage. The ground zero for Oshima was the strong impact the emperor's extraordinary accent and intonation that could not be readily transcribed and which interpellated the Japanese through the modern medium of the radio. Oshima's observation regarding the absence of Japan's film documents of its losing the war should not be interpreted merely as a rehashing of the axiom that history is written by the victors. Instead, the key in Oshima's observation was the recognition that archival footage must be used inventively in order to compensate for the missing films, but also to reinvent the significance of the films without forcing an entirely new reading on them. Thanks to the incomplete archive of Japanese war films, Oshima was compelled to inventively use the U.S. and the U.K. footage with the reenacted narration based on newspaper announcements. Through these inventive measures, *Daitōa Sensō* fulfilled its promise as a recreation of the Japanese experience of the war *albeit* with a critical difference that recognized the gulf that separated the present of 1968 from the past of 1941-1945.

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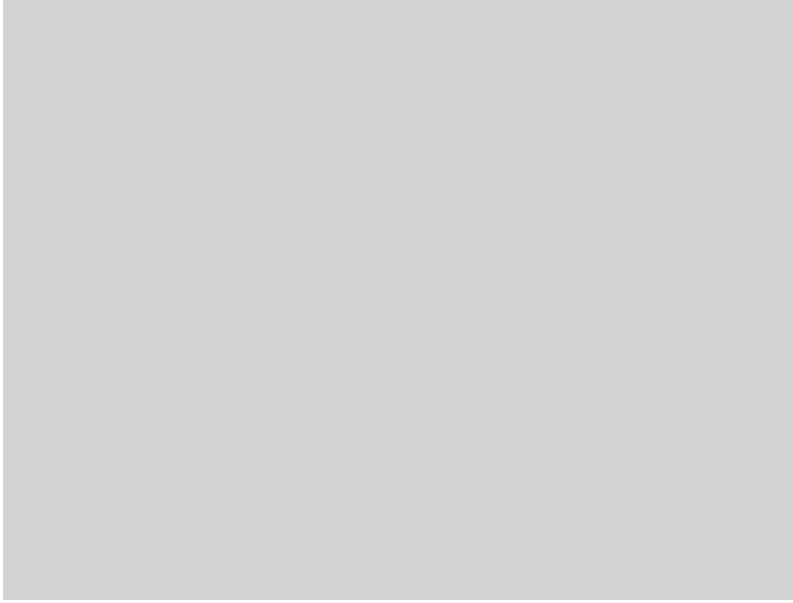
Figure 1.
The juxtaposition of corrective comments and the image of *Nihon News* footage in Kamei Fumio's *Tragedy of Japan* (Nippon Eiga-sha, 1946).

2

Ideology and Subjection in Ōshima Nagisa's Kōshikei *(1968)*

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It may be too late to make clinical experiments in film, but, as I have nothing else to do, I can only make my films in silence, dreaming of the distant day when the State will perish.

— Ōshima Nagisa[1]

A Cinematic 'Exposition' of the State

Death by Hanging (Kōshikei, 1968) was made in the historical conjuncture of 1968, and is considered to be one of Ōshima Nagisa's most complex films, both for its innovative experiments with film form, as well as how it addresses a variety of socio-political issues, including capital punishment, national identity, crime, and colonial legacies in postwar Japan. At the center of this constellation of issues is the problem of ideological subjection by the state and its inherent connection to the violence that grounds state power more generally. In this essay, I will interpret *Death by Hanging* as a cinematic exposition of state power and ideology, and will read it along with Louis Althusser's contemporaneous notes from 1969-1970 outlining what he called Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs; *Appareils Idéologiques d'État*) and ideological *interpellation*.[2] Althusser's theory marked an important

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1. Ōshima Nagisa, *Tokyo Shimbun,* January 18, 1971, quoted in Joan Mellen, *The Waves at Genji's Door: Japan Through Its Cinema* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), 396.

2. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)" (1969/1970), in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays,* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85-126.

shift in the objective of ideology critique; namely, a shift from pursuing a descriptive explication of ideological content — and thus presuming an exterior position from which such content could be revealed as deceptive — to an exposition of ideology as such, i.e., to its presence in all social formations, its particular form, functions and effects.[3] Thus Althusser's theory was a radical departure from conventional approaches which relied on idealist dualities of mind/body, ideas/reality — wherein ideology was conceived as a mystification of the mind which distorted an objective social reality — to the material practices of ideology in institutional apparatuses and how these apparatuses work to interpellate individuals as subjects and thus reproduce the relations of any given social formation. Although Althusser has had a major influence in theories of cinema as an ideological apparatus,[4] in this essay I will utilize Althusser in order to read Ōshima's *Death by Hanging* as a critique of the state.

I will argue that, similar to Althusser's theoretical exposition, *Death by Hanging* can be read as a cinematic exposition of the state and ideology, one in which Ōshima deploys his cinematic innovations — for instance, experiments with montage, narrative repetition, and other devices to produce Brechtian distanciation[5] — to develop an explicit critique of the state. Consequently, what critics have identified as Ōshima's unique combination of narrative modes and cinematic styles in the film will be read as the levels through which Ōshima is developing a theory of the state. And while Althusser and subsequent

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3. Althusser used the terms *exposer/avouer* ("to expose / to confess") in his notes, but to signal the tentative nature of analysis. See: Pierre Macherey 2013, "Judith Butler and the Althusserian Theory of Subjection," trans. Stephanie Bundy, *Décalages* 1, no. 2 (2013): 1-22.

4. See: Phil Rosen, "The Concept of Ideology and Contemporary Film Criticism: A Study of the Position of the Journal 'Screen' in the Context of the Marxist Theoretical Tradition (Volumes I and II)" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1978); and David N. Rodowick, *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory*, 2nd Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

5. See: Dana Polan, "Politics as Process in Three Films by Nagisa Oshima," *Film Criticism* 8, no 1 (1983): 33-41, and Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 332-333.

readings of Althusser will guide my analysis, the specifically cinematic form of Ōshima's critique will allow us to reflect on key aspects of Althusser's theory. Ultimately, this is an exercise in reading Althusser and Ōshima alongside each other, in order to see what their respective — and contemporaneous — analyses allow us to ask about ideology, state power, and political possibility.

Towards an Althusserian Reading of Ōshima's Death by Hanging

Death by Hanging is ostensibly about a failed execution and how the state responds to such an unexpected contingency. Ōshima based the film on the Komatsugawa Incident of 1958, in which a young resident (*zainichi*) Korean man was arrested, tried and executed for killing two women in Tokyo.[6] However, rather than focusing on the events of the Komatsugawa Incident, Ōshima uses this familiar event to interrogate the internal logic of state violence and subjection. The formal narrative of *Death by Hanging* begins when a resident Korean youth named "R" fails to die after being hung. With R unconscious but alive, the prison officials worry that they cannot legally re-execute R if he is not conscious, or once awake, not cognizant of why he is being executed. When R is revived the officials attempt to restore his consciousness "as R" by repeatedly reenacting his crimes as well as staging his upbringing as an impoverished *zainichi* Korean. The film descends further into absurdity, with the appearance of imaginary characters in the execution chamber, a trip to the "scene of the crime," and a drunken banquet with

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6. The young man had called the *Yomiuri* newspaper, boasting of killing a woman and taunting the police to catch him. The authorities broadcasted these conversations in hopes of identifying his voice, inadvertently making this crime a media sensation. A young resident Korean named Ri Chin'u was eventually arrested, and after a sensational trial, was executed in November 1962. Many intellectuals saw this Incident as revealing the underlying oppression, racism and continuing colonial legacies of postwar Japanese society, and a host of fictional works and critical reflections on the Incident were published. Yuriko Furuhata argues that Ōshima was drawn to the highly theatrical and mediated nature of the Komatsugawa Incident. See: Yuriko Furuhata, *Cinema of Actuality: Avant-garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 77.

R as the symbolic centerpiece. In the end, R concedes to "being R" but ultimately rejects that he is guilty. However, he agrees to die "in the name of all R's" and the film concludes with a second hanging, only to have R's body disappear from the noose in the famous last shot of the film.

Many analyses of *Death by Hanging* have focused on how the film shifts between multiple "realities" and narrative codes, from pseudo-documentary, to theatre and absurd slapstick.[7] In one particularly useful interpretive schema, Keiko McDonald has outlined three different realities at work in *Death by Hanging*: (1) a "tangible reality" taking place in the "real" space and time of an execution chamber at the film's beginning (and conclusion); (2) a "fictional reality" in the middle of the film as state officials absurdly reenact the crimes of the condemned man to restore his sense of guilt, and; (3) finally, the "visionary world" of the condemned man's imagination which is interspersed throughout the other two levels.[8] In this essay, I will refashion McDonald's interpretive schema and read it as the stages through which Ōshima is constructing a cinematic theory of state power and ideology. In order to develop this interpretation, it is first necessary to summarize key points of Althusser's theory of ISAs.

First Level: The Tangible Reality of the State Apparatus

In Althusser's terms, ideology is always operating (i.e., always "present") in a social formation, thus ideology "has no history," it is only particular ideolog*ies* that have histor*ies*.[9] Althusser believed that Marxist theory had yet to fully elaborate the form, function and effects of ideology in any given social formation. We see indications of this emphasis on ideology in his earlier writings, where Althusser had attributed a "relative autonomy" to the superstructures of the social formation

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7. For instance see: Burch, *To the Distant Observer,* 336; and Yomota Inuhiko, *Ōshima Nagisa to nihon* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2010), 157, 171.

8. Keiko McDonald, *Cinema East: A Critical Study of Major Japanese Films* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 127-128.

9. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 107.

— i.e., law, politics, etc. — and their materialization within specific apparatuses — i.e., the judicial apparatus, political parties, etc.[10] However, following the May-June events in 1968, Althusser began to attribute a much more pronounced determination to ideology in regards to the reproduction of the social formation as a whole.[11] It is here that Althusser hints towards a new theory of the state, one that both complements and qualifies the classic Weberian definition that the state is, in its essence, that which has the "monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a certain territory."[12]

 For Althusser, it is not *only* the maintenance of state power by a ruling class through the legitimate exercise of violence, but at the same time, how the state effectively functions to reproduce the relations of production through ideology. [13] Here Althusser distinguishes between

10. Althusser argued that, even with the "relative autonomy" of the various moments in the structure, it is the economy that is determinant in "the last instance." And yet, the "lonely hour of the last instance never arrives." Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" (1962) in *For Marx,* trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Random House, 1969), 115.

11. Althusser turned to the question of ideology in the same moment as Ōshima, admitting that, after the events of May-June 1968, Marxist theory needed to contend with the "effective presence" of ideology, which he believed had been under-theorized theretofore. See: Althusser "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 89. In his attempt to fill this lacuna, Althusser produced a series of notes in 1969 and 1970, portions of which were published in the famous ISA article in *La Pensée* in 1970. Balibar has called these notes a "partial montage" of a more systematic theory that Balibar admitted was, by its very nature, "unfinishable." Étienne Balibar, 2014, "Althusser and the 'Ideological State Apparatuses'" in Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London: Verso, 2014), ix.

12. Max Weber argued that: "a state is that human community which (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a certain territory... For the specific feature of the present is that the right to use physical violence is attributed to any and all other associations or individuals only to the extent that the *state* for its part permits this to happen. The state is held to be the sole source of the 'right' to use violence." Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation" (*Politik als beruf*, 1919) in *Political Writings: Weber*, ed. and trans. Peter Lassman and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 310-311.

13. In a 1970 postscript to the ISA essay, Althusser attempted to distinguish between the function of ideology in reproduction, and the constitutive exploitation of capitalist social relations more generally. See: Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 124. Slavoj Žižek addresses this issue by bringing Georg Lukacs' discussion

a (single) state apparatus — the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) which *primarily* functions "by violence"[14] — and the plural apparatuses that function *primarily* "by ideology," including schools, family, law, etc., which Althusser calls the (plural) "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs). Althusser contends that all "State Apparatuses function both by repression and by ideology," with one element predominating over the other in the last instance.[15] It is ideology, however, that secures the internal coherence between the apparatuses, and thus presumably the state apparatus itself. And while the repressive function of the RSA may serve as the ultimate horizon of state power, repression alone cannot explain how the relations of the social formation are reproduced, or the coherence between the multiple state apparatuses.

This dual relationship between repression and ideology frames the various issues that are explored in *Death by Hanging*, and it is through this duality that the film's infamous narrative complexity unfolds. The formal narrative of the film begins and concludes in the "tangible reality" (McDonald) of the execution chamber, where a variety of officials are assembled to carry out an execution. The opening scene assembles the institutions through which the state exercises its power. In addition to the prison guards whose primary function is repression — i.e., it is they who carry out the hanging — there are also a host of seemingly innocuous institutions present to watch and thus legitimize the execution, including the religious ISA (the Prison Chaplain), medical ISA (Prison Doctor), legal ISA (Prosecutor) and educational ISA (the Education Officer).[16] This important scene cinematically stages the functional relationship between the RSA and ISAs: on one

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of commodity fetishism into dialogue with Althusser's theory of ideology. Here, the practices of individuals in the market — ideology "from below" — is distinguished from the "apparatuses which give body to ideology," i.e., the state. See Slavoj Žižek, 1994, "Introduction: The Spectre of Ideology," in *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), 18-19.

14. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 96, 97.

15. Althusser, 100. This duality is often forgotten in subsequent readings of Althusser. See, for instance: Mladen Dolar, "Beyond Interpellation," *Qui Parle* 6, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 1993), 75-96.

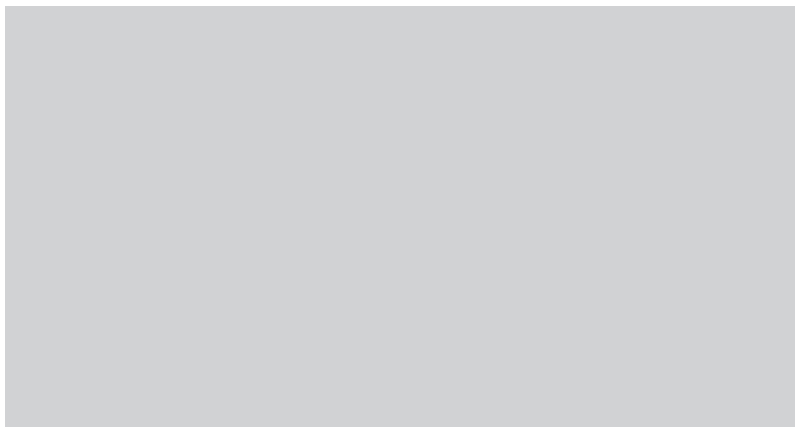16. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 96-97.

Figure 1.
Kōshikei (Ōshima Productions, 1968).

side of a window the security officers bind and put the noose around the condemned man's neck, while on the other side the various ISAs act as legal witnesses to the execution (Figure 1).

However, the condemned man — who is identified simply as "R" — fails to die after being hung, rendering him unconscious (note that it is only with the botched execution that the film moves from narrated voice-over to character dialogue, shifting from pseudo-documentary to dramatic narrative). The beginning of *Death by Hanging* thus appears to be questioning the logic of capital punishment, leading some critics to see this as the penultimate question that Ōshima wants to address.[17] However, this is the first of many subversions at work in the film, wherein the initial question of capital punishment serves two functions: firstly, it induces us to (mis)identify with a basic humanist critique of capital punishment at the beginning of the film, only to have this subverted soon after; and secondly, to connect a variety of seemingly innocuous institutions to a foundational exercise of state violence.

It is important to recognize that the initial question of capital punishment is displaced once we "enter" into the story. With the botched execution, the various state officials begin to debate how to execute R "again," determining that they cannot legally do so if R

17. McDonald, *Cinema East*, 127.

remains unconscious, or once awoken, if he does not have a sense of guilt and recognize the state's right to adjudicate this guilt. This then generates the film's second level of reality, what McDonald calls a "World of Events Reenacted (fictional reality)" which is a consequence of R's unexpected survival.

Second Level: Fictional Reality and the Impossibility of the "Non-Subject"

This second "fictional reality" is constituted through what Noël Burch calls a theatrics of an "absurd, legal logic," in which the officials repeatedly re-enact R's crime in order to restore R's identity and sense of guilt, while unconsciously revealing their own criminal desires in the process.[18] It is important to recognize who is performing the "absurd, legal logic" following the botched execution. Recalling Althusser's distribution of the ideological function to a variety of apparatuses, we see all of these ISAs *assembled within* the execution chamber and functioning to restore R as a subject. (Figure 2) This assemblage, I contend, resonates with Althusser's duality that it is ideology that
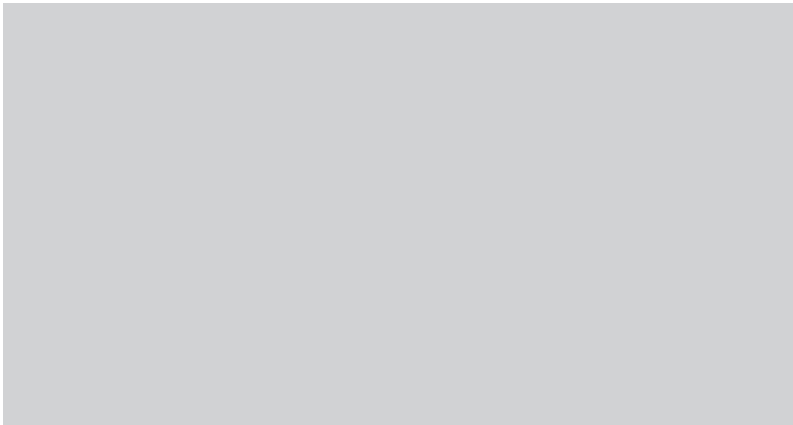

Figure 2.
Kōshikei (Ōshima Productions, 1968).

18. Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, 338.

comprises the internal coherence between the state's apparatuses, while repression is the ultimate expression of state power. For instance, here we find: the Prison Doctor (medical ISA) considering his medical training in order to revive R and restore his memory if only for (re) execution; the Prison Chaplain (religious ISA) confronting the morality of trying to revive someone who has already received the last rites only to kill him again (this quickly becomes a "crisis of faith"); the Education Officer (educational ISA) directing the other officers in multiple reenactments of R's crimes; the prosecutor's assistance (legal ISA) offering legal validation to the absurd activities taking place; and finally the Prosecutor — as the "law" itself — bearing witness to the theatrics.[19] Each "plays" their role in an attempt to re-subjectify R so that the predetermined logic of execution can be completed.

Many analyses of the film have focused on the "impossibility" of R surviving an execution, and how this impossibility generates the narrative for the film.[20] However, the "impossibility" at work in the film is more fundamental than merely R's survival. What Ōshima is revealing in this film is that for the execution to take place, it is necessary that the condemned is always-already a "subject" within the logic of state power. Here, I contend that what has been considered as a *narrative* device — i.e., the "impossibility" of R's survival which would require us to critically reflect on capital punishment — serves as a *theoretical* necessity for Ōshima to unfold his exposition of ideological subjection: namely, the very impossibility of a "non-subject" to exist in relation to the state. It is not only that R's body survived the execution, but more importantly, that he became a *non*-subject. It is R's loss of subjectivity that then induces the various ISAs to work to re-subjectify him for the execution to be legally carried out.

Allow me to elaborate on this by drawing upon Althusser's theory

19. Žižek's analysis of Kafka, Pascal, Althusser and Lacan in relation to law points to the seemingly tautological operation of law: that we "obey" the law because it is the "law." See: Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* New ed. (London: Verso, 2008), 33-42.

20. For two different interpretations of "impossibility" at work in this film, see: Satō Tadao, *Gendai nihon eiga* (Tokyo: Hyōronsha, 1976), and Paul Coates, "Repetition and Contradiction in the Films of Oshima," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 11 (1990), 65-71.

of ideological subjection. As noted above, Althusser's intervention in the theory of ideology is with his emphasis on the *materiality* of ideology: "an ideology always exists in an apparatus and its practice, or practices."[21] In Althusser's theory, the conventional emphasis on distorted or mystified "ideas" has been replaced by a specific set of practices guided by the rituals inscribed within a particular material apparatus, whether juridical, educational and so on.[22] These collectively constitute the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).

In order to explicate the material practice of ideology, Althusser refers to Pascal's formula "Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe" which inverts our common assumption that our actions are based on predetermined ideas. Rather, ideas (or for Pascal, faith) is produced *in ritualized practices*: "ideology exist[s] in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his [or her] belief."[23] We act *as if* our actions are predetermined by our ideas, when in fact our "ideas" are materially inscribed in the practices themselves. This is the necessary *mis*recognition (*méconnaissance*) at work in ideology — not a mystification, but in the "obviousness" that we all, "of course," act upon our own volition.[24] This then shifts the emphasis on the ideological effect from a subject being mystified by ideology to the formation of *the subject* through ideological interpellation. Althusser argues that there is no ideological operation which is not already "for subjects" — i.e., the subject is the "destination" of ideology, and thus importantly "there are no subjects except by and for their subjection" through/in ideology.[25] Ultimately, the subject *is* itself the primary ideological effect.

For this to be theorized Althusser relies on a subtle but necessary

21. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 112.

22. Many have critiqued Althusser for extending the state beyond its conventional parameters. See, for instance: Perry Anderson, "The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci," *New Left Review,* I/100 (Nov-Dec 1976), particularly 35-36.

23. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 115.

24. Althusser, 116-117. On this point, see: Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 112.

25. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 115, 123.

theoretical impossibility: the notion of a "concrete individual" which is "always-already" interpellated by ideology, and thus is already subjected. Althusser begins by explaining that "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all)," a recruitment that is analogous to being "hailed" on the street by a police officer: "Hey, you there!" which, we respond to since we recognize that the hail was meant for us. However, Althusser recognizes the necessary impossibility of this sequence for his theoretical exposition:

> Naturally for the convenience and clarity of my little theoretical theatre I have had to present things in the form of a sequence, with a before and an after, and thus in the form of a temporal succession. But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.[26]

This then is not an empirical sequence but rather an internal logic of ideology; it does not happen "out there" but is simultaneous and constitutive of ideology. But in order to contemplate this simultaneity Althusser proposes that "concrete subjects only exist insofar as they are supported by concrete individuals."[27] This strategic but impossible distinction between "concrete individuals" and always-already interpellated subjects thus allows for Althusser to outline his theory of ideology.

In her reading of Althusser's ISA essay, Judith Butler understands his use of the term "concrete individual" as a necessary "place-holder to satisfy provisionally [a] grammatical requirement" when attempting to outline "*who* undergoes" ideological subjection.[28] For Butler, this grammatical fiction is required due to the non-narrativizability of ideological interpellation:

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26. Althusser, 118.

27. Althusser, 118.

28. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power,* 117.

The narrative that seeks to account for how the subject comes into being presumes the grammatical 'subject' prior to the account of its genesis. Yet the founding submission that has not yet resolved into the subject would be precisely the non-narrativizable prehistory of the subject, a paradox that calls the very narrative of subject formation into question. If there is no subject except as a consequence of this subjection, the narrative that would explain this requires that the temporality not be true, for the grammar of that narrative presupposes that there is no subjection without a subject who undergoes it.[29]

I contend that what Butler identifies as a *grammatical* fiction in Althusser's theory of ideological subjection becomes a *cinematic* fiction staged in Ōshima's *Death by Hanging*, where R serves the same strategic purpose for a critical reflection. By situating the non-subject R at the center of the narrative space of the film, Ōshima is able to reflect on the process of ideological subjection, which, by its very nature, is not narrativizable.[30] Again, the functional "impossibility" that initiates *Death by Hanging* is not that R survives his execution, as has been conventionally argued, but that R emerges *un*-subjected; i.e., an impossible *tabula rasa* which initiates the theatrical reenactments for the rest of the film. While many critics have excessively focused on the vexed process of R's identity formation, what *Death by Hanging* is theatricalizing is actually the material processes through which the multiple state apparatuses converge to re-interpellate R as a subject. (Figure 3)

In the film each official "plays" his particular role to re-subjectify R so that the predetermined logic of execution can be completed. After watching the officials repeatedly reenact "R's" alleged crimes, R innocently asks "what does R mean?" This innocent question shifts *Death by Hanging* to a deeper level of critical reflection, for here

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29. Butler, 111-112.

30. Ōshima himself explained that R appears not as a subject (*shutai*) in the film, but as an "other" (*tasha*). Ōshima Nagisa, *Ōshima Nagisa 1968* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2004), 162. Following Ōshima, Yomota argues that R functions as an "objective other." Yomota, *Ōshima Nagisa to nihon,* 170-171.

Figure 3.
Kōshikei (Ōshima Productions, 1968).

problems of imperialism, history and national identity come to the fore, opening into a postcolonial critique of the postwar Japanese state. To answer the question of "what does R mean?" the Education Officer responds that "R" is a "Korean name," inspiring further questions about what is "Korean?" The Education Officer stumbles through explanations of ethnicity, territory ("you were born here, too, but of Korean parents; therefore, you are Korean"), national citizenship ("you are registered in the new state of South Korea"), etc. Before giving up in failure, the Education Officer declares that even with the geo-political division on the peninsula, to the Japanese, R remains simply "Korean" (*chōsenjin*). Giving up, the Education Officer returns to the basic explanation that "This Korean raped and killed two girls," to which R again innocently asks, "what is rape?" This question not only solicits the criminal desires of the officials, who happily explain their shared desire to commit rape. It also opens into an important discussion about the distinction between carnal desire, which all males in the execution chamber share, and the criminal act in which a person gives into such desire. And it is here that one of the most-discussed scenes of the film takes place, for in order to explain why some give in to this "basic" male desire and others practice restraint, the officials set out to explain R's predestination to crime by performing his upbringing as a poor resident Korean in

postwar Japan. Here Ōshima is cinematically staging most explicitly the process of subjective interpellation, as R begins to "perform" the role of R within the theatre of "his" family.

Althusser argued that the two primary ISAs at work in the capitalist social formation are the educational ISA and the family ISA, and although he elaborated on the former, he does not discuss the family apart from a few passing observations.[31] More problematically, Althusser does not discuss the nation in relation to the reproduction of the relations of production nor how the family functions as the reproductive locus for the nation-state. At a time when French radicals were forced to consider decolonization and postcolonial formations, it is quite curious that Althusser has little to say about the nation and its inherent relationship to the state apparatus.[32] This is where *Death by Hanging* answers a major lacuna in Althusser's state theory. For although on one level Ōshima is continuing his exploration of the traces of Japan's prewar empire in the postwar, as seen in many other of his filmic and television work,[33] *Death by Hanging* utilizes this to foreground the ideological functions of the family ISA to produce specifically *national* subjects, even those excluded from political and legal rights, such as is the case of resident Koreans in postwar Japan.

In this scene — still in the realm of "fictional reality" (McDonald) — the officials "play" R's family and R eventually begins to play "himself" in staged family situations. What Ōshima is doing here is theatricalizing the conventional explanation of why Ri Chin'u of the 1958 Komatsugawa Incident had turned to crime; namely, that Ri was a poor, resident Korean who was both *denied* his Korean identity and also discriminated against *because* he was Korean.[34] Many have read

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31. For instance, in a footnote Althusser writes: "The family obviously has other 'functions' than of an ISA. It intervenes in the reproduction of labor power." Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 96n8.

32. The problem of the nation-state form was pursued by one of Althusser's students, Étienne Balibar. See Balibar's important essays in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991).

33. See for instance, Ōshima's films such as *Yunbogi no nikki* (1965), *Kaette kita yopparai* (1968) and his television documentaries such as *Wasureta kōgun* (1963).

34. This was the narrative presented by Ri's legal defense at trial. See: David Desser, *Eros*

this scene as revealing the central target of Ōshima's critique: namely the racial discrimination against resident Koreans in Japan and the continuing traces of Japan's prewar imperialism. While this is clearly one of the primary political questions of the film, I contend that ultimately the significance of the officials' — and as will be discussed later, the character sister's — attempt to restore R's Korean identity is to illuminate how subjects are always interpellated as "national" subjects. In this particular case, it is not as a Japanese national subject, but as a resident Korean who is specifically *excluded* from the legal and political rights that come with citizenship. This exclusion reveals how the state polices the boundary between inclusion and exclusion, both through ideological subjection and violence.

In this famous scene, the officials theatrically stage R's upbringing as a resident Korean in Japan. After a few attempts to stage the purported dysfunctionality of R's family, the walls of the execution chamber are lined with newspaper,[35] and the Education Officer calls upon R to play "himself," the first time in which R responds to the performative "hail" of the state (announced literally in the fourth inter-title "R tries to be R" that introduces this chapter of the film). In this scene R is seated against a wall as the officials perform the supposed discord of R's broken home. As the Education Officer narrates, R turns to face the conflict being performed behind him, shown twice from two different angles. (Figure 4) This is the first time that R responds to the hail to be "R," if only partially. It is interesting that both Althusser and Ōshima depict interpellation as a "turn" towards the hail of the state. Althusser explains interpellation this way:

> Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really'

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plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 155-156.

35. On the significance of the newspaper in this scene, see: Furuhata, *Cinema of Actuality,* 77.
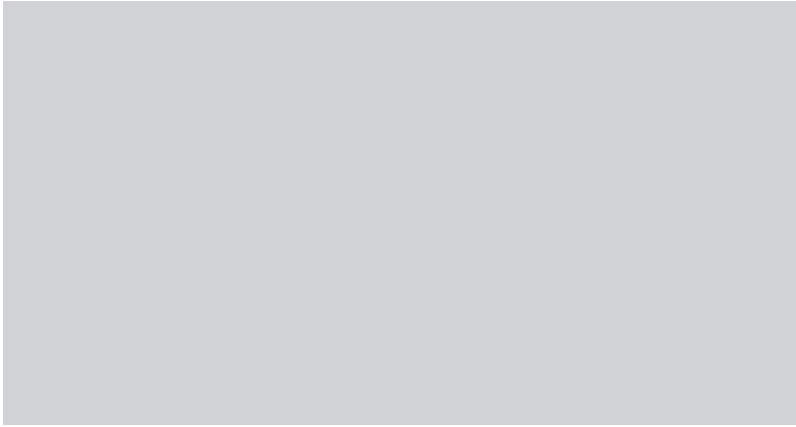
Figure 4.
Kōshikei (Ōshima Productions, 1968).

addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed.'[36]

Reflecting on this passage, Judith Butler has noted that although "there would be no turning around without first having been hailed, neither would there be a turning around without some readiness to turn."[37] Butler answers this problem by reflecting on the double movement in subjection, comprised of a simultaneous "turn toward the law" (indicating a "vulnerability to the law," what she later deems a "desire" or "passionate attachment" involved in subjection) but also a turn "against oneself," a doubled-turn which folds back on the self to constitute a consciousness.[38] Provocatively, Butler conjectures that:

> social existence, existence as a subject, can be purchased only through a guilty embrace of the law, where guilt guarantees the intervention of the law and, hence, the continuation of the subject's existence. If the subject can only assure his/her existence in terms of the law, and the law requires subjection for subjectivation, then, perversely, one may (always already) yield to

36. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 118.
37. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 107.
38. Butler, 107, 128, 108.

the law in order to continue to assure one's own existence. (112)

Butler faults Althusser for utilizing religious metaphors to develop his theory of ideological interpellation, but she expands upon the role of guilt (whether before God, or before the Law) that Althusser's religious metaphors imply.[39] In these terms, it is interesting to consider the function of guilt in *Death by Hanging*. It is exactly R's *lost* sense of guilt that set the ISAs to work to re-subjectify him. And it is only towards the end of the film that R begins to have a sense of guilt for his actions. This guilt brings R back to the hangman's noose, but for reasons that diverge from the state's narrative (as I will discuss further below).

Once R assumes the position of R within the theatrics of his family, he quickly recovers an earlier penchant for imagination, which produces reenactments that do not follow the narrative provided by the court transcripts. Attempting to play the role of "R," he takes his "brother and sisters" (security officers) on an imaginary trip into a world where nothing costs money, they live in a big house with a balcony and filled with the latest appliances. As he introduces his "siblings" to this imaginary world, he asks one of them "Isn't this fun?" to which the Education Officer steps in to stop the performance — declaring "this is not interesting at all" — and commands R to step out of the "house" into "reality." In a gesture that is repeated later in the film, R timidly walks away from the ISAs, turning back with trepidation as he prepares to "exit" the house/execution chamber. (Figure 5) We can interpret these two gestures through Butler's theory of the doubled turn in subjection outlined above: whereas R's earlier turn to watch the theatre of his family was in response to the state's hail to be "R" (a turn away from "himself" as a non-subject) the later gesture may be read as expressing a partial attachment to subjection (and thus a turn towards the state), where R is reluctant to leave the execution chamber.

At this moment, the film jarringly shifts from a *mise-en-scène* enframed by the execution chamber, to a roving camera that follows R into the "outer world" (*genkai*) — namely, into the Arakawa section of Tokyo with the state officials in pursuit. Here the theatricality

39. On this point, see Macherey, "Judith Butler and the Althusserian Theory of Subjection," 8-13.
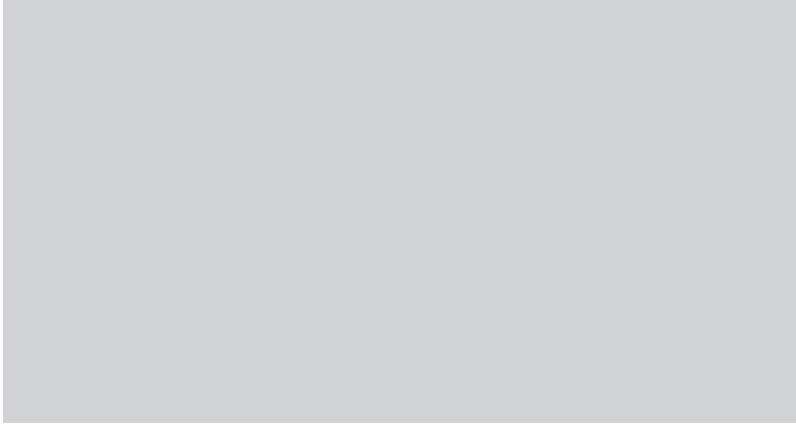
Figure 5.
Kōshikei (Ōshima Productions, 1968).

of the film inverts both spatially and temporally, moving from the interior execution chamber to the exterior world — with the characters emerging into a poor neighborhood, and proceeding along the banks of the Arakawa river, to Shinkoiwa Station, across Arakawa Ohashi and finally to Komatsugawa High School where one of the original murders in 1958 took place. This move out into the world is complimented by a temporal inversion; whereas the reenactments inside the execution chamber were recalling R's purported "past," now the theatrics are simultaneous with the crime itself (in the film's "present" so to speak). And yet, we are still in the realm of "fictional reality" as the ideological operations of interpellation are literally chasing after its target R (e.g., the officials running after R across Arakawa Ohashi). (Figure 6) At the scene of the crime (Komatsugawa High School), another important inversion takes place, as the Education Officer, in his excitement to narrate R's crime, strangles to death the young schoolgirl who was (supposed to be) R's victim. Returning to his senses, the Education Officer urges his colleagues to help him discard her body, and with this, we return to the execution chamber.
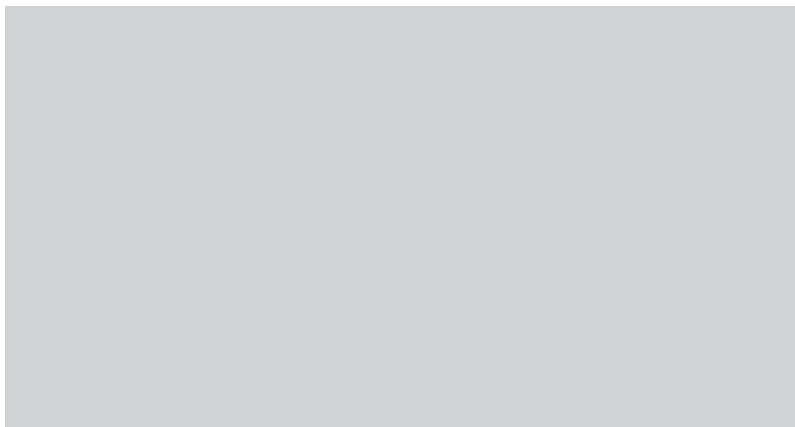
Figure 6.
Kōshikei (Ōshima Productions, 1968).

Third Level: The Utopic Escape into Imagination

The officials have brought the body of the schoolgirl back to the chamber, but interestingly only R and the Education Officer can see her. This is where the world of R's imagination takes precedent, comprising what McDonald calls the "visionary world" of "R's Imagination."[40] While R's imagination had been active before (for instance, in the imaginary trip with his "siblings"), it is only with the appearance of the character "sister" that R's imagination constitutes a new stage of "reality." As more and more officials are able to "see" the body of the strangled schoolgirl, she emerges from the coffin and transforms into the character of "sister" who, wearing a white *chogori*, attempts to restore R's identity as an oppressed *zainichi* Korean.

　Initially, the officials welcome sister since her emphasis on R's Korean identity accords with their own efforts.[41] However, sister departs from

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40.　See McDonald, *Cinema East*, 128, 135-147.

41.　"Sister" is loosely based on the resident Korean journalist Bok Junan who corresponded with Ri before his execution. See: Furuhata, *Cinema of Actuality*, 76, and Maureen Turim, *The Films of Oshima Nagisa: Images of a Japanese Iconoclast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 77-79.

the officials' objectives when she tries to convince R that his crimes were ultimately acts of revenge against Japanese imperialism in the name of oppressed Koreans, past and present. In this way, the first incarnation of sister is as a propagandist, who attempts to represent R's situation with an anti-colonial, political significance. Importantly, R rejects this nationalist narrative.[42] As sister lies crying, lamenting that R does not accept the anti-colonial significance of his crimes, the Prosecutor (interestingly, the only official who still cannot see sister) decides that she has entered the execution chamber illegally, and orders her to be executed. Thus we are presented with another important absurdity in the film: the first successful execution in the film is of an imaginary character.

Or was it successful? For sister reappears — but transformed — to join R, draped underneath a Japanese flag, as the centerpiece of what Yomota Inuhiko calls a "canivalesque" banquet.[43] In this scene, the officials, oblivious to the discussion R and sister are having, become increasingly inebriated and ponder their past war crimes and the morality of capital punishment. They conclude that all of the traumatic violence they have witnessed, both at war and during state executions, was done "for the country" (*okuni no tame datta*). The camera moves back and forth between their inebriated discussion and that between R and sister. Here, sister's function has changed, for she no longer agitates for an explicitly anti-colonial meaning in R's crimes, but rather serves as a patient interlocutor for R to elaborate the relationship between his imagination and reality.

R describes that as he tried to manifest his imagination in reality, the two levels often blurred and became undistinguishable.[44] In a subtle but important development in the film, R begins to discuss his love for sister, as we are shown a series of still photographs of her. Describing his affection, R imagines a time when sister was late to meet him in his

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42. R's rejection may indicate Ōshima's skepticism about the conventional positions of both the communist and nationalist *zainichi* Korean movements. See: Ōshima, *Ōshima Nagisa 1968,* 164-168.

43. Yomota, *Ōshima Nagisa to nihon*, 166.

44. This exchange is drawn from the correspondence between Ri and the journalist Bok Junan. See: Turim, *The Films of Oshima Nagisa,* 77-78.

neighborhood, and fearing for her safety, he begins to equate his fears with the violence he had done to his two female victims. In this way, R begins to construct a sense of guilt. It is important to recognize that he does not do so by adopting the narrative of the state (i.e., as a poor *zainichi* Korean predisposed towards criminal behavior), nor that of the first incarnation of sister-as-propagandist (i.e., as a *zainichi* Korean reacting against Japanese imperialism). Rather, his guilt-consciousness was configured through a basic, human sentiment of love for sister and, by extension, an emerging empathy for his victims.

However, we must be careful not to ascribe a liberatory possibility to R's sentimental humanism, for this arrival to empathy does not equal R's transcendence of state power, but, ironically, is an important step towards him consenting to be executed. Following R's empathetic concern for sister and the guilt that this produces, we are shown R and sister frolicking on a riverbank and embracing underneath a setting sun — a scene that Yomota interprets as a "reflection of the utopic dream of the individual's liberation from the nation-state."[45] The operative term here is "utopic" since R quickly returns to the execution chamber (without sister), and an inter-title for this last chapter of the film informs us that now "R will be R in the name of all R's."

Re-Execution and the Reality of State Violence

With R's return to the execution chamber, we have returned to the first level of "tangible reality" in which the various ISAs are assembled and surround their ideological target. Importantly, R's inquiries have advanced beyond the meaning of "R," "Korean" and/or "rape" to what I contend is the penultimate question of the film: what is the "state" (*kokka*), and why does it have the right to execute him.[46] Here, R is flanked by all the state apparatuses (both RSA and ISAs), with the Japanese flag prominently behind him. As the debate between R and

45. Yomota, *Ōshima Nagisa to nihon*, 168.

46. In some subtitled versions of *Death by Hanging* the term *kokka* (国家) has been translated as "nation," which has led some Euro-American critics to argue that Ōshima's primary target of critique was postwar Japanese *nationalism*.

the officials becomes more intense, Ōshima uses a series of close-ups, with each character responding by looking directly into the camera.

Although R admits to his crime, he questions the right of the state to judge and execute him. He turns to the officials and asks: if murder is wrong, is not execution also murder, and thus a crime? This inquiry opens into an interrogation of the state itself:

Warden:	We aren't killing you. It is the state [*kokka*] that cannot allow you to live.
R:	I don't accept that. What is a state? If it exists, show it to me. I refuse to be killed by an abstraction [*mienai mono*].
Officer:	The prosecutor and all of us are the state.
R:	(*Turning towards the officer/camera*) Then you are my murderer?
Officer:	No, as a security officer I only play a small part to uphold the law. I am not the totality of the state [*zentai ja nai da*].
R:	Then who is? Warden, are you the totality?
Warden:	No, my position is just slightly above the others here.
R:	Mr. Prosecutor?
	(*shot of the Prosecutor, silent, framed by the Japanese flag*)
R:	If we say that you were the totality, then you would be guilty for killing me. The next prosecutor would then execute you, and he will be executed in turn…until no one would be left in Japan.

The Prosecutor then asks R if he believes he is not guilty even though he recognizes that he has killed two women, to which R responds that he is not ("*muzai*"). The Prosecutor surprisingly declares: "Very well. As long as you believe you are not guilty, you are not. The sentence is vacated," and orders R to leave the execution chamber as a "free" man. (Figure 7) Once again the state has ordered R to leave. And once again, R, with downcast eyes, hesitates, recalling Butler's theory of the subject's guilty attachment to subjection. R walks past a prominent Japanese flag on the wall, and opens the door, only to be blinded by a light emanating from the outside. As R turns back to the execution chamber, the Prosecutor triumphantly explains:
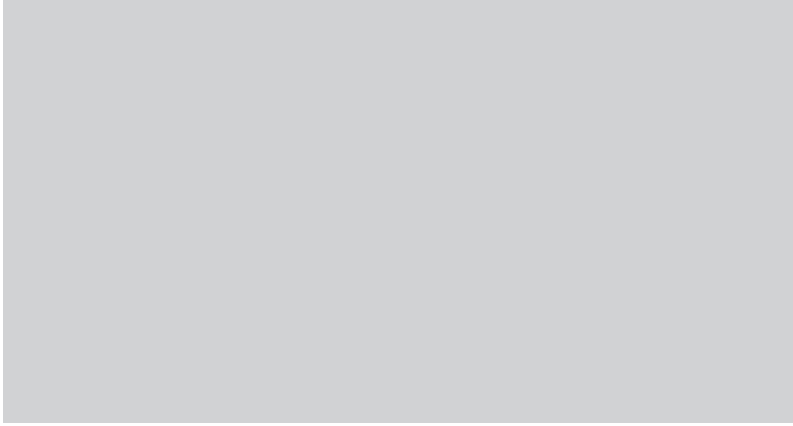
Figure 7.
Kōshikei (Ōshima Productions, 1968).

> Do you understand why you stopped? You were about to step out
> into the state [*kokka*]. Where you are standing is also the state.
> You said the state was something invisible. But now you see it, you
> know it. The state is in your mind [*kokoro no naka*], and as long it
> is there, you will feel guilt. Just now, you have realized you should
> be executed.

How should we interpret this complex and nuanced scene? Yomota
Inuhiko has interpreted R's recoil from the blinding light and the
Prosecutor's subsequent explanation through Foucault's theory of
power, arguing that:

> The state is not something visible, it exists as something that is
> internalized, through both obedience and resistance, into the
> subject's consciousness [*shutai no ishiki*]. Or, rather than saying
> it is internalized, the subject is constituted as a subject…. Thus
> rather than the submission of the subject [*shutai no fukujū*], it is
> the subject's very formation as a subject.[47]

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47. Yomota, *Ōshima Nagisa to nihon*, 169.

However, we must ask: in both Yomota's Foucauldian reading of this exchange and the Althusserian interpretation I am proposing here, where can we locate a position from which to conduct a critique of the state and ideology?[48] What kind of political possibility does Ōshima's film point to, if any? This brings us to the final exchange between R and the Prosecutor:

R: Up until now, I thought maybe, somehow I was guilty. But I remain innocent. As long as an entity exists that tries to make me guilty... that is, as long as the state exists... I am innocent.

Prosecutor: That's right. You understand now, don't you? We cannot allow you to live with such ideas.

R: I know. That's why I accept my fate. For the sake of all R's, including all of you, I will consent to being R... and will die now.

In other words, R may recognize that "R" had committed crimes, but he does not recognize the state's right to judge, assign or punish such crimes, thus disrupting the process of subjective interpellation. This final exchange nullifies all prior explanations for R's re-execution — in other words, it nullifies everything we have been shown throughout the film. At this point, R is being executed not because of his recognition of guilt, but for not recognizing state power. To complicate matters, R ultimately *accepts* execution as a kind of political martyrdom ("for the sake of all R's"). His martyrdom is thus constituted through a paradoxical combination of: (1) a *rejection* of the state's attempt to re-subjectify him through a narrative of guilt, but: (2) which still *requires* the state to execute him for his rejection to have any political significance (i.e., martyrdom).

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48. For a comparative reading of Foucault and Althusser, see: Warren Montag, "'The Soul is the Prison of the Body': Althusser and Foucault, 1970-1975," *Yale French Studies* 88 (1995): 53-77.

Conclusion: Ideology and the Limits of Political Cinema

How are we to interpret this final chapter of *Death by Hanging*, and how might we consider it in relation to Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses? What is often forgotten in later psychoanalytical readings of Althusser is that he maintained that it was "above all, the State apparatus [which] secures by repression… the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses."[49] In other words, for Althusser, violence was the ultimate horizon of the state's function to reproduce the conditions for the reproduction of the social formation. In *Death by Hanging*, state violence initiates and concludes the narrative, as the assemblage of ISAs trying to re-subjectify R are ultimately working to fulfill state violence (re-execution). However, *even when* re-subjection failed, execution was still carried out, since the state could not allow R to continue to exist as a non-subject.

   How should we understand the politics of R's martyrdom as a non-subject? Recalling Butler's suggestion that "guilt guarantees the intervention of the law and, hence, the continuation of the subject's existence" through subjection,[50] R's consent to be executed is also at the same time a rejection of the primary guilt which would inform a full turn towards the law — a turn that R had only tangentially performed at certain points in the film. However, since the law is the only means through which a subject can exist, his rejection to fully embrace the law is also a rejection of his existence as such. R is rejecting the existence of the state and thus any sense of guilt that it would ascribe. But we must ask, on what standpoint can such a rejection be articulated? R's only choice is to accept execution, even as this means fulfilling the logic of state violence. What Butler initially called a "perverse" yielding *to the law*, is here, inversely, the perverse recognition that one cannot exist *outside of the law* (and thus outside of subjection). There is no substantive ground from which R can declare his rejection of the state. Rather, R merely functions as a fictional presumption from which Ōshima is able to elaborate the mechanisms of state subjection.

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49. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," 101.

50. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power,* 112.

Ultimately, R's rejection does not undermine the state, but rather allows for its reconstitution through (re)execution.

The final scene of *Death of Hanging* is an overhead shot of an empty noose framed by the trapdoor, implying that R's body has vanished at the moment of execution. (Figure 8) The meaning of this concluding shot has vexed many critics. For example, Keiko McDonald, expressing the frustrations of a conventional humanism, admits defeat (not political, but interpretive): "we feel that nothing has been solved at the end of the film. We are just as confused and unconvinced as we were at the beginning."[51] In contrast, Yomota locates a liberatory possibility predicated on the "imagination." Yomota argues that R has departed to the domain constructed from the imagination (*kūsō kara*), one that is "beyond the conceptual limits of the state."[52] This is the domain from which sister emerged and one "that is not in the jurisdiction of the Japanese state," thus rendering *Death by Hanging* a "film that explores cinema and power [as] critical domains of symbolic acts [*hyōshō kōi no rinkai ryōiki*]."[53] However, we have to ask: are these two symbolic domains equal in their influence and effects, whether inside
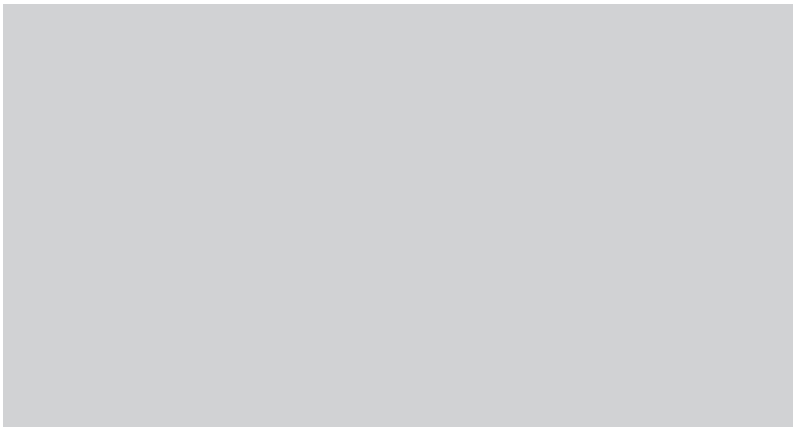
Figure 8.
Kōshikei (Ōshima Productions, 1968).

51. McDonald, *Cinema East,* 149.

52. Yomota, *Ōshima Nagisa to nihon*, 173.

53. Yomota, 173-174.

the narrative space of *Death by Hanging* — e.g., R's imagination vs. the state — or, outside of the film — e.g., the critical possibilities of cinema vs. state power?

Other interpretations have focused on the last enunciation in the film, when the voice of the Prosecutor — and thus of the Law — declares over the image of the empty noose: "Warden, I thank you very much. You have done a good job. Education Officer, you as well. Security Officer, you as well, and you as well, and you as well. [*anata mo, anata mo*]" The voice suddenly switches to Ōshima who declares: "And you as well, those of you have watched this film, you as well!" With Ōshima's final address, we as spectators are aligned with the other ISAs. We bore witness to the attempt to interpellate R as a subject, and when that failed, witnessed his execution for not recognizing state power. While Stephen Heath, Dana Polan and others have argued that the critical possibility of cinema in general can be found in this disrupting address of "*anata mo,*"[54] which purportedly brings our attention to the space between the screen and spectator, one wonders where a similar interruption would occur between the always-already interpellated subject and the operations of state power? In contrast to Heath, I believe we can hear in this address echoes of Ōshima's increasing pessimism about the possibilities of political cinema. Recalling the epigraph that begins this essay, while we may all dream for the distant day when the state may perish, it is ironic that our celebrated experiments in political cinema repeatedly stage the reconstitution of state power through endless scenes of violence. In the end, the significance of Ōshima's political cinema is that it does not shy away from this paradox, but rather forces us to recognize cinema's limits and to confront the political challenges that reside beyond cinema itself.

Acknowledgements

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54. Stephen Heath, "Anata mo," *Screen* 17, no. 4 (1976): 49-66.

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3

Oshima is Dead:
Proxy Wars, Security, and Cinematic Love

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In a manner of speaking, I see and hear the voice of a phantom. I can say for certain, however, that I am an artist only by virtue of seeing these phantoms and hearing their voices. And the people who see my phantoms and hear their voices with me are my crew and my audience.

— Oshima Nagisa, "How to Die in the 1970s"[1]

Double-Suicide

In a recent conversation following the death of Oshima Nagisa, Adachi Masao, a filmmaker, activist, and close friend of Oshima, expresses to the critic Yomota Inuhiko that Oshima's films after *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) are less significant "for us" than his earlier works.[2] Adachi does not offer an explanation or reason for this judgment and Yomota neither endorses nor refutes it. To be sure, Oshima is frequently associated more with "the 1960s" and "iconoclasm" than he is with the subsequent years of bubble economies and lost decades. Nonetheless, we can surmise that Adachi's reference is not solely to Oshima's films, but is likely tinged by a broader sense of political disillusionment — "for us" — one that in Japan, went hand in hand with the fading of

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1. Oshima Nagisa, *Cinema, Censorship, and the State: The Writings of Nagisa Oshima, 1956-1978*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Dawn Lawson (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991), 187.

2. Yomota Inuhiko and Adachi Masao, "'Nihon' to taiketsu shitsuzuketa zen'ei," in *Ōshima Nagisa: Nihon o toitsuzuketa sekaiteki kyoshō sōtokushū*, ed. Hirasawa Gō (Tōkyō: Kawade shobōshinsha, 2013), 93-106.

cinema as the premier political art of agitation. Indeed, many film and cultural historians repeat a narrative of double-suicide — the end of politics and the end of cinema — around this time.

In 1975, Oshima wrote a critique of the *jitsuroku* (true fact) yakuza film series *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* (Jingi naki tatakai) for the journal *Kinema Junpō*. Perched at this crucial moment in the history of Japanese and cinematic cultural politics, few films better capture this coterminous narrative of death and disillusionment than the *Battles* series. Directed by Fukasaku Kinji between 1973 and 1974, these almost universally lauded films became famous for their purported refusal of idealism filtered through a critique of previous "*ninkyōmono*" (chivalrous yakuza films), and the resultant claim, bound both to the aesthetics and the narrative of the series, that the truth of this world, or at least postwar Japan, is violence. Registering this cynicism with great force, the series engendered an extraordinary critical consensus, one that is arguably implicated in the double-suicide narrative. Oshima's analysis of the series, one of the few to interrogate it, questions this narrative by illustrating the ways that the deceptive technology of cinema's narrative order provides a form of security for civil society to "enjoy violence." This form of security cannot be separated from the cynicism at the heart of the critical consensus.

Within Japan, where writings on cinema tend to be marginalized in broader intellectual history, it may be easy to overlook Oshima's broader role as a social critic. At the same time, outside Japan, Oshima largely exists solely as a "political" filmmaker. His essay on *Battles*, however, demonstrates his agile thought as someone profoundly attentive to the ways cinema helps us question what the political *is*. It is through this attentiveness that he raises a serious question: how might our approach to cinema enable us to disentangle ourselves from this system of security? The question takes on increasing importance for his work after the mid-1970s. With this question in mind, my essay will proceed in three stages. Beginning by examining yakuza film more broadly and Oshima's engagements with it, I will move on to a closer focus on his essay on *Battles*, particularly as it illuminates world cinema as an apparatus of security. I will conclude by taking up two of Oshima's later films — *Phantom Love* and *Gohatto*, which demonstrate that it is

only by pushing love beyond the cinematic frame that we can begin to rebuild politics in a dark age of security.

The Coveted Margins

Oshima's essay — entitled "The Sadness of Yakuza Films," — begins by recounting its own origins. At a retrospective of his works at the Athené Francçais cultural center in Tokyo, Oshima had been asked by a young man whether he would make a yakuza film. Because yakuza films were extremely popular at the time, the suggestion seems harmless enough. Yet, it provoked a wholly incommensurate sense of outrage in Oshima. Flustered, Oshima berated the man, prattling on about the costs and resources required to make such a film, shocking not only him, but the entire standing-room audience. Though Oshima knew his reaction was unreasonable, he simply could not help himself. When asked by the editor of the venerable film journal *Kinema Junpō* if he might write up a critique of *Battles Without Honor and Humanity*, he chose to use it as an opportunity to offer a (belated) response.

What prompted such outrage? Certainly, it was not the first time Oshima had been confronted with that question. In 1970, the critic Sugaya Kikuo began an interview with the film-maker by noting, "There are two kinds of film in Japan right now — yours, and yakuza film."[3] Oshima refused the premise of the question, telling a story of how one spectator yelled during a recent screening of *Night and Fog in Japan*, "Ken-san, cut this guy down!" The reference is to Takakura Ken, one of the iconic stars of yakuza film. He would tell the same story a few years later, before an audience at the Pesaro Film Festival, when his films *Night and Fog in Japan* (1960) and *Sing a Song of Sex* (1967) were screened outside Japan for the first time in a retrospective on Japanese film.[4] Reflecting on shifts in movie-going, especially among students,

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3. Oshima Nagisa and Sugaya Kikuo, "Jūnen o zenhitei suru eiga zōhan wa?", *Cinema 70*, no. 4 (1970): 6-11.

4. He gave the talk an amusing title: "My Postwar History from the Broadcast of Defeat to a Theory of Yakuza Film in the Form of a Public Talk," (*Gyokuon kara yakuza eigaron ni itaru waga sengoshi danjō enzetsuteki ni*). The title of the book it appeared in *My Plan for*

Oshima notes that when the films were screened earlier in the 1960s, students watched the screen "as if they were glaring at it," with serious determined looks on their faces; now, however, the same scenes and dialogue are met with laughter. For Oshima, it is a good thing that "students have the freedom to laugh off leftist jargon and clichès." It is in this context that a student shouts at the screen during the long rambling speech of the Stalinist, a kind of verbal engagement then common in yakuza films.[5] Thus, while some point to a discrepancy between an elite intellectual and lowbrow yakuza films,[6] this outburst, which Oshima calls a "masterpiece of heckling," shows the overlap of audiences between them.

At the festival, Oshima provides a lengthy discussion of yakuza and yakuza films, focusing on their aesthetics in relationship to modernization, and his conflicted feelings about the enthusiasm for yakuza film among the new left. He says that if one wants to talk about Japanese cinema at all, one must talk about yakuza film. But to do so is to address a broader range of topics, not all of which Oshima covers. Yakuza film is not simply a genre, but a kind of historical experience. Tied to a certain way of movie-going, only partly connected with what is on screen, the films provide a site of cheap relief, community, and leisure for middle aged men in working class districts. They engaged the past — of wartime memories and institutions, as well as an alienating present of cold war and high economic growth. They also functioned as a carefully honed business strategy for survival in a competitive industry and shifting media environment, since by the time yakuza film

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the *Reorganization of the Japanese Spirit* (*Waga nihon seishin kaizō keikaku*) references the famous book published earlier that year by the Minister of Trade and Industry (and later prime minister) Tanaka Kakuei, *A Plan for Remodeling the Japanese Archipelago* (*Nippon ketto kaizōron*). Tanaka's book itself borrows the title from fascist/anarchist Kita Ikki's *Plan for the Reorganization of Japan* written in Shanghai in 1919.

5. Students in particular frequently yelled, *Nansensu!* (Bullshit!) at the screen when figures of authority tried to speak; or *Igi nashi!* (Hell yeah!) when a righteous figure speaks.

6. Imamura Shohei amusingly referred to Oshima as a "samurai" (i.e. the top political class) while designating himself a farmer. The critic Ueno Kōshi has read Oshima's essay as exemplary of its age, registering the polarizing split between "the masses and intellectuals, or between feeling and reason, or between flesh and the word." See: Ueno Kōshi, *Eiga: han eiyūtachi no yume* (Tōkyō: Hanashi no tokushū, 1983), 64-77.

was consciously promoted as a "genre" in 1963, viewership of program pictures was already down by half what it had been at its peak only a few years earlier. But with the rise of the new left and increasing cinephilia, elements of a postwar generation with no experience of war,[7] yakuza films became the center of vibrant debates in postwar film criticism.

Proxy Wars

The debates revolved around *ninkyō* yakuza film, those films that featured stoic, morally-righteous, protagonists caught between a sense of duty and personal passions, and without a real place in the contemporary world. Generally set in the first three decades of the twentieth century, the apparent nostalgia of the films seems of a piece with what the critic Asada Akira identifies as a more widespread tendency towards anti-modernism at the time.[8] Yet, in some ways, this reading can be misleading. The debates were largely inspired by a Mishima Yukio essay on the film *Bakuchi uchi sochō tobaku* (Yamashita,
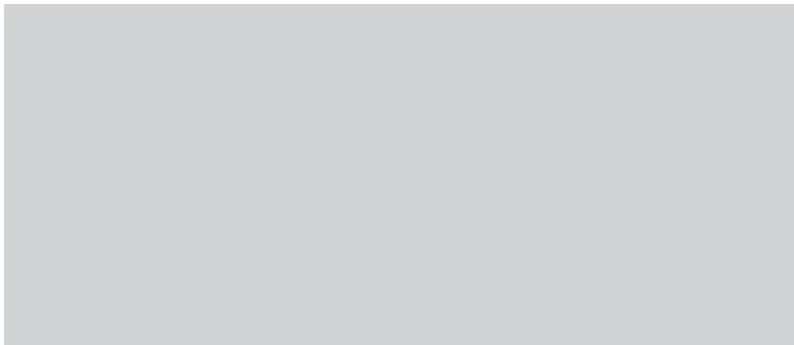
Figure 1.
Bakuchi uchi sochō tobaku (Tōei, 1968).

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7. For recent research on economic, social, and demographic shifts during this period, see: Hashimoto Kenji, *Kazoku to kakusa no sengoshi: 1960nen nihon no riariti,* (Tōkyō: Seikyusha, 2010).

8. Asada Akira, "Gendai hihyōshi nōto," in *Kindai nihon no hihyō, Vol. 2*, ed. Karatani Kōjin (Tōkyō: Kodansha, 1997), 135-150.

68), often considered a "masterpiece" of yakuza film.[9] Mishima, who wanted to preserve the violence of beauty in culture against any effort to codify it within a deadening liberal democratic postwar order, saw the film as a contemporary Greek tragedy, an intricately constructed narrative driven by the relentless force of fate. He praised the beautiful face of the hero, Sakai (Tsuruta Koji) in the moment of violence, contrasting it with the ugly faces of pacifist college professors (Figure 1). In this, he turned Tsuruta's face into "battleground" in a way that resonated beyond the screen.[10]

In the film's final scene, the corrupt boss Senba (Kaneko Nobuo) pleads with Sakai to remember his sense of honor (*ninkyōdō*). Sakai's famous retort, "I wouldn't know anything about that, I'm just a two-bit killer," just before plunging his dagger into Senba's belly, crystallizes a sense of contradiction and pathos, the critique — rather than idealization — of nostalgia and morality. This critique was visualized a year later in the film *Sengo saidai no toba*, which ends with Tsuruta (now in a suit, i.e. in the present) once more stabbing Kaneko Nobuo (against a giant Japanese flag) before throwing a dagger in disgust at his own image in a mirror. The sound of gunshots follows and Tsuruta collapses as blood pours symbolically down the cracked glass, his body reduced to a dark lump beneath it. Ultimately, the films suggest that the representation of morality is not a living morality. This holds true not only for *ninkyō*, but as Watanabe Takenobu put it, any system of morality: "Art? Fatherland? Democracy? I wouldn't know anything about these. I'm just a two-bit killer!"

In the "proxy wars" of criticism that followed, gang bosses could be college administrators, corporate elite, other activist factions, war criminals, or the state more generally. That Tōei, the studio most associated with yakuza film (though all studios made them), was an

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9. E.g., Watanabe Takenobu, "Kyōkakutachi no yume" in *Gensō to seiji no aida: Gendai nihon eigaron taikei, Vol. 5,* ed. Ogawa Tōru (Tōkyō: Tōkisha, 1970-1972), 39-45. By Watanabe's definition, "yakuza film masterpiece" does not mean a work that is superior to the rest in craft and creative vision, but rather, one that touches most deeply on the essence of yakuza film as experience.

10. Sudō Hisashi, for example, later wrote a piece called, "The Left Must Seize Tsuruta Koji from the Hands of Mishima Yukio!" (Tsuruta koji wa mishima yukio no te kara torikaesaneba naranai), *Gendai no me* (November, 1970).

outgrowth of Manchurian Film Production has not been ignored by critics, who point to the films as expressions of the inexpressible experience of war itself.[11] What is clear is that in spite of their reputation as nostalgic paeans, or their institutional links to the colonial legacy, the response to the films was anything but unified; to the contrary, they offered radically different things for different viewers. Oshima's speech at the film festival, then, was doubtless inspired by these debates in which a range of critics and writers from Yamada Kazuo, Saitō Ryūhō, and Iwasaki Akira, to Yamane Sadao, Ueno Kōshi, Karatani Kojin, and Nakagami Kenji, participated in journals like *Cinema 69*, *Eiga geijutsu*, and *Eiga hihyō*, just as a generation of earlier critics such as Satō Tadao, Tsurumi Shunsuke, and Hanada Kiyoteru engaged *jidaigeki* morality and aesthetics along similar lines. The debates were not simply about which allegorical meaning is correct, but the ways that yakuza films provoked questions about what cinema is, its status as art, entertainment, or politics.

Battles must be understood also within the context of these debates over the very place and status of cinema, as suggested by the title of the third film in the series, "Proxy Wars" (*Dairi sensō*). Abe Cassio had seen the series as marking the first unhinging of "narratives everyone knew" from the bodies of familiar stars in which they had been corporealized[12] Yomota Inuhiko saw the series as the "deconstruction of the code [clothing, ways of speaking, gestures, etc]" of program pictures in which action spectacles played such a huge role in the 1960s at Nikkatsu and Tōei. The result, according to Yomota, was the emergence of increased self-consciousness and the ironic exposure of the films' own performativity, pointing to the misdirection that characterized Japanese film and criticism in the following decades as they "lost touch with reality."[13] In his write-up on *jitsuroku* yakuza film and the role of violence, Richard Torrance argues that the series is unique insofar as it portrays the "political rather than moral significance of violence," tapping into the ways that violence is institutionalized

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11. Yamaguchi Takeshi, *Maboroshi no kinema man'ei* (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 2006).

12. "As the speed of the narratives in these films increased, they opened a rift between body and narrative." Abe Cassio, *Nihon eiga ga sonzai suru* (Tōkyō: Seidosha, 2000), 8-9.

13. Yomota Inuhiko, *Nihon eiga no radikaru na ishi* (Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten, 1999), 28.

"from the top of the international order to the local neighborhood."[14] "There is no honor in violence in Fukasaku's films," he remarks, "but there is the voyeuristic and intellectual satisfaction that we are watching something real and serious." (7) The question of a shift from a moral to a political valence of violence is a provocative one. What enables this understanding is the view that Fukasaku's films were largely critiques of the earlier, "idealized" images. They were, in this sense, involved in a proxy war against the idealism of Japanese cinema and the codes that ensured its health and "morality."

Once these idealized images, either as "codes of program pictures" or "corporealized narratives," or as representations of morality, were destroyed, what remains is violence pure and simple. *Battles* marks this point of collapse. Once violence is institutionalized in this way, it is no longer tied to gangsters, but informs the very structure of the contemporary order and the status of cinema within it. That the films were based on the memoirs of Iiboshi Kōichi, an actual yakuza, rather than a screenwriter's invention, is key to this claim. What gives the series its "seriousness" and critical cachet is not only violence, but the ways violence is linked to claims to truth.

Quite obviously, this orientation is hardly new. The style of *jitsuroku* film at the time — one which hews closely to the tradition of reportage by incorporating news fragments from contemporary media, providing authoritative male voice-over, and identifying characters by writing their names and associations on the screen — is one Fukasaku himself had been working in for at least a decade, while the critique of *ninkyō* stretches back to the prewar period when it emerged as tales of wandering gamblers in mass literature.[15] Oshima goes so far as to suggest it is only in the interest of dressing up tired narratives of gangsters that *actually existed* that cinema came to have recourse to iconic stars and supersaturated beauty. *Ninkyō* films were an effect of *jitsuroku* films, not the other way around. The larger historical question

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14. Richard Torrance, "The Nature of Violence in Fukasaku Kinji's *Jingi naki tatakai* [War Without A Code of Honor]" *Japan Forum*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2007), 389-406.

15. For a good account of the emergence and resonance of *matatabimono* (tales of wandering gamblers), see: Satō Tadao, *Hasegawa Shin ron* (Tōkyō: Chūō kōronsha, 1975).

is why *jitsuroku* films moved from the margins to the mainstream during this period.

At least in part, *Battles* garnered its strong reputation by presenting a seemingly perfect match of form and content. In the opening of the first film in the series, from the optical printer's slide up a grainy photograph of the bomb, accompanied by the stabbing brass refrains of Tsushima Toshiaki's score, the mesh of newspaper headlines, the chaos of the black market, the red, splattered style of lettering for the titles, the brutality of American soldiers (who had been systematically erased from contemporaneous scenes in cinema), the tumble of crowds and ramshackle structures, to the subsequent, seemingly relentless, harsh clashing of gunfire, the films stampeded through postwar Hiroshima with wildly swinging camera movements, canted angles, freeze frames, gaudy colors, and occasional dips into grainy 16mm film stock. The rush of images stands so far in contrast to the comparatively staid images of the past that even the scenarist Kasahara Kazuo felt exasperated.[16] As the voice-over informs us, this is the "new violence."

What does one do in the face of such violence? Where is it all coming from? These seem important questions to ask, but many critics treat the new violence *as* the statement the films want to make. To be sure, the war in Vietnam, different forms of idealized and revolutionary terrorism and factional infighting, some high-profile crimes, and ongoing fighting in other parts of the world cannot be dismissed; but examined in retrospect, such violence must have seemed quite at odds with the experience of the average movie-goer in Japan at the time. After two decades of economic growth and with the emergence of new leisure activities (many of which the ailing studios were investing in as mainstream film sales dropped precipitously), everyday urban life in the early 70s was likely not so violent. Rather, its increasing presence

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16. Kasahara wrote his impressions when he watched the film for the first time: "What the hell is this! There is no order to the story. The camera just bumps around this way and that, and people's *heads are cut out* of the frame entirely! I mean, my script was already poorly organized, but the director has just jumbled the damn thing up even more, to the point where the story is totally unclear. The pathos of youth in the scorched aftermath of the war, and the group drama I worked so hard on have been *blown away* so that all we have left is the sensation of dizziness... This is why I was against hiring Fukasaku!" Kasahara Kazuo, *Eiga wa yakuza nari* (Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 2003), 7.

in films in Japan and elsewhere seems tied to the ways that violence in cinema had developed as a means of political critique, to display, for example, the invisible, structural violence of society in a time of apparent peace.

Oshima knew it was important to confront the "violence of the world," and had dedicated himself to it for many years, largely through his critiques of the state and sovereignty. Where he differed from the majority of critics is by showing that the truth claims of *jitsuroku* require the same degree of critical scrutiny as the idealized beauty of *ninkyō* films. He certainly understood the importance of questioning any immediate link between violence and truth. It is telling, then, that Oshima wrote his response to the young man he berated not by going back to the "idealized" images, but by confronting the violence in *Battles*. It is also important to note that Oshima wasn't writing a criticism of the film so much as a critique with it, one that takes seriously the question posed explicitly in voice-over throughout the series: what lay beyond violence?

Oshima engaged violence in relation to other factors at work in the series. For example, he devotes a section of his essay to the extraordinary performance of Kaneko Nobuo. While he imagines that when the crew first saw Kaneko's highly exaggerated and humorous performance as the weaselly boss Yamamori, they must have initially hesitated or at least felt its incongruity. Though he had played more serious roles at Nikkatsu when he was younger, by this point, Kaneko often played a buffoonish boss, including in the films mentioned above with his absurd calls for honor and humanity. His highly animated gestures, ridiculous bawling, whimpering tone, hitler-style mustache, and so forth, ultimately worked to ensure that all the other performances in *Battles* appeared "natural" in comparison.

Furthermore, Oshima draws attention to the fact that Kaneko is like a father to Hirono suggesting that the series is ultimately a *bildungsroman*, in which Hirono learns to accommodate himself even as he enriches himself. While Hirono becomes a slightly more marginal presence from the fourth film in the series, when he spends much of his time in prison, we can also surmise that he has risen up the ranks, no longer one of those at the bottom who will die like a dog. For Oshima,

this is part of a contradiction that the series must address, one reflected in the actor Bunta's own increasing fame as a result of this series. No longer a body that "nobody knows," he re-corporealizes Japanese cinema within an increasingly familiar body, style of dress, way of speaking, and set of expressions. Oshima's attention to this cross-over between the characters and stars demonstrates the importance of rethinking the frame of cinema when iconoclasm itself becomes iconic.

Cinema as Security: Framing Civil Society

Where Oshima confronts the frame most profoundly is in his analysis of what he calls the films' "narrative order" (*katarikuchi*). Rather than immediately focusing on the narrative or the violence, Oshima started by asking about the first title card, which appears before we even see the famous image of the atom bomb. This card states that we will be watching a work of "fiction" and that all the names of individuals and groups in the film are creations and not factual. Such a statement serves, in Oshima's estimation, both to secure, paradoxically, the 'factual status' of the films and to introduce the pre-eminence of the film's narrative order. While critics do not at all neglect the presence of this order, they tend to see it as reinforcing the images on screen, rarely calling into question any discrepancy. Yet, Oshima points out, the use of so much on-screen writing — when a new character is introduced or killed, the extensive use of voice-over narration, frequent recourse to newspaper headlines — constitute an "invisible" system of neutral information that serves to contain the violence and even reinforce the desire for narrative order:

> Make it as crazy as you want. The narration and titles act as punctuation marks. Fukasaku is certainly rambunctious. Then the next moment, his movements are recouped as they seek these marks. The reason that the amount of narration and titles increases so sharply from the second film, *Battle in Hiroshima*, is from this reverse effect. Music plays the same role as this punctuation. In this way, a style is developed. That is to say, a certain 'explication'

is born. And in this way, *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* broke through the path to success.[17]

The force of violence encourages us to view the information on screen and in voiceover as a means of reorganizing our relationship to the image, cementing the relationship between word and image, information and violence, into a coherent, familiar, non-threatening narrative.

For Oshima, the "narrative order" is linked to deception and responsibility, though he nuances his argument by pointing out that the deception is not in terms of the message or content, but the technology of cinema itself. What is at stake in the "truth" claims of the series is not reducible to a naturalistic portrait of postwar society. The film series is far from such an orientation, and the use of exaggerated characters serves as a kind of principle in this regard. Thus, it is not that the films present themselves as something they are not. Deception is equated not with false appearances, but participation in a system in which no one questions the presumed relationship between images and words so central to film. To address the ways this form of deception implicates the "responsibility" of viewers, Oshima cites Itami Mansaku's famous postwar essay on the responsibility of the deceived.[18] In his essay, Itami confronted those who claimed they were not responsible for the war on account of being deceived by the authorities. Being deceived, he wrote, implicates us in even greater responsibility. Those who do not understand this will simply be deceived over and over again. For Oshima, in the context of *Battles*, the consequence is the reproduction of alienation within a state of security: "As long as we live separated from 'yakuza society,'" a process made possible by the narrative ordering of the films, Oshima suggests, "yakuza films will continue to be made."

Oshima's analysis of narrative order is instructive with regard to yakuza film in a way that goes beyond the familiar cliches of its generic conventions. Perhaps the most iconic scene of the entire series takes place at the end of the first film, when Hirono raids a funeral. His friend

17. Oshima Nagisa, "*Jingi naki tatakai* ron: yakuza eiga wa kanashii de aru," in *Kinema Junpō*, no. 1735 (1975): 131.

18. Itami Mansaku, "Sensō sekininsha no mondai," in *Eiga shunju* (August, 1946): 32-36.

has just been killed by the gang, who now falsely display their sense of mourning at his funeral. When Hirono appears, in a conspicuous lavender suit, he approaches the coffin and asks, "Is all of this pomp and circumstance okay with you?" Answering his own question, "Me either," he pulls out a pistol and fires at the placards and adornments on the dais (Figure 2). The violence of the scene is edited into separate shots, so that the separate shots ricochet off one another: the signs, a hand holding a gun from the side, Hirono firing in the direction of the camera, the wooden placards splintering, the scrambling crowd. The violence is directed at the false signs as the film itself seems to shatter into pieces.
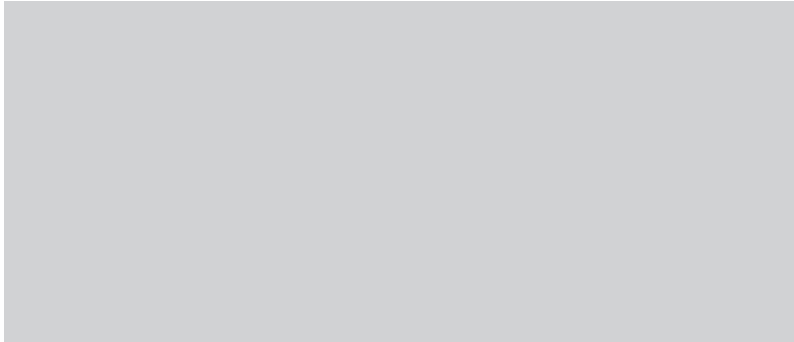

Figure 2.
Jingi naki tatakai (Tōei, 1973).

And yet, this suspicion — if not violence — towards *logos* as a false image, this iconoclasm, has a longer history, one in which yakuza films were implicated in broader cultural debates.[19] While *Bakuchi uchi sochō tobaku* and *Sengo saidai no toba* are often taken as reflexive turning points, even in the first *ninkyō* film, *Jinsei gekijō: Hishakaku* (Sawashima, 63), violence is cast at a representation of morality when

19. Takeuchi Yoshirō remarks on the "immoderate" fascination of leftists for yakuza film heroes insofar as they presented "emotion as inner truth." Takeuchi Yoshirō 1972, *Gengo: sono kaitai to sōzō* (Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 1972), 147, quoted in Kamei Hideo, "Theories of Language in the Academic Field of Philosophy: Japan in the 1970s," trans. Jennifer Cullen, in *The Linguistic Turn in Contemporary Japanese Literary Studies: Politics, Language, Textuality,* ed. Michael Bourdaghs (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, 2010), 133-159. I thank Michael Bourdaghs for this reference.
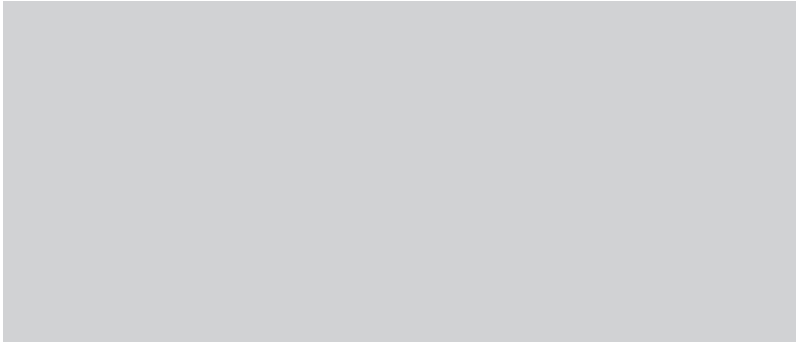
Figure 3.
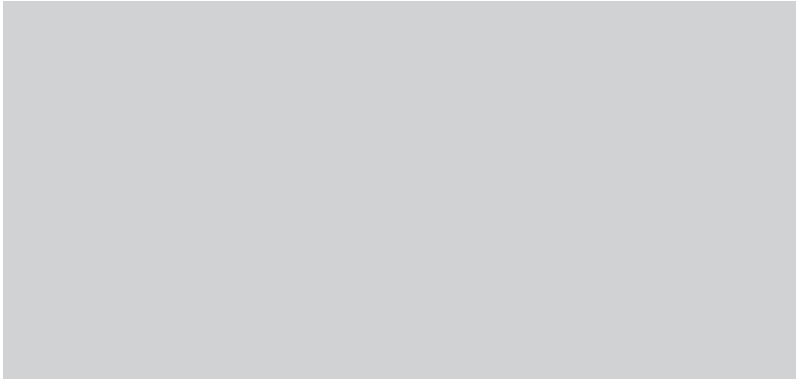*Jinsei gekijō: Hishakaku* (Tōei, 1963).

Figure 4.
Shafu yukyōden: kenka tatsu (Tōei, 1964).

the good gangster (Tsuruta Koji) throws his dagger at a group of thugs and it misses and sticks into a sign that reads "*ninkyō*." (Figure 3) When yakuza boss Soganoya Meichō reads his proclamation to the town before going to prison in Katō Tai's *Shafu yukyōden: kenka tatsu* (1964), it appears upside down, though he does not notice until this is pointed out. (Figure 4). Takakura Ken cannot read the highly formalized language of opening remarks when all the yakuza gangs gather in Makino Masahiro's *Kyōkaku retsuden* (1968). In Nakajima Sadao's "jitsuroku" film, *Nihon ansatsu hiroku* (1969), the leader of the officers' uprising in February of 1936 (the 2/26 incident), Isobe

Asaichi (Tsuruta Kōji), is confronted with the written orders of the emperor himself to disband the young officers. The fliers appear onscreen exactly as they were written at the time and dropped on the troops. Isobe refuses to yield, bellowing, "The proclamation is false!" (*inchiki*). The truth of the imperial order cannot be captured even by the emperor's own words. This suspicion extends to narrative: Suzuki Hitoshi refers to the raids that end typical yakuza films in which a lone hero fights an army of thugs as an act that "overcomes the melodrama of narrative itself."[20]

While each of these examples offers a distinct inflection, Hirono's shooting of "signs" carries on this broad tradition. When the camera assumes Hirono's point of view and the gangsters scramble to hide, they seem to cling to the edges of the frame as if trapped by it, with no place else to go because all of the other false frames they could hide behind have been destroyed. The truth is coming for them in the shape of a bullet. We also see from their perspective. When Hirono turns and fires directly at the camera, it is an effort to direct the violence outward. One cannot hide on the other side of the screen. At the same time, the effort to direct action beyond the frame touches on an orientation Aaron Gerow has claimed is at work more broadly in Fukasaku's films:

> If Fukasaku's history is not the words frozen onto the records or the still shots of the news photographer, it is because he emphasizes the movement that escapes those means, a historical action expressed through a kinetic style defined by hand-held cameras, canting frames, speedy pans and zooms, and fast editing. One can say such cinematic action itself is Fukasaku's historiographic calligraphy.[21]

I am sympathetic with Gerow's gesture to emphasize "the movement that escapes," in Fukasaku's work, but would find it more convincing in

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20. Suzuki Hitoshi, "Kirikomi ichi de sasaeru muimisei" *Cinema 71*, no. 8 (June, 1971): 24-30.

21. Aaron Gerow, "Fukasaku Kinji, Underworld Historiographer," Tangemania, entry posted October 4, 2010, http://www.aarongerow.com/news/fukasaku-kinji-underworld-h.html (accessed August 14, 2014).

this case if the series stopped at the first film. Oshima's point, however, is that the apparatus of narrative order becomes increasingly unwieldy from the second film, *Battles in Hiroshima*. The introductions to later films in the series entail an ever greater amount of narrative and explanation, both to recap the previous films and to frame the current political scene.

Further, Oshima's argument extends beyond a familiar conflict between words and images. His target rather is the relationship of cinema to security and "civil society," or *shimin shakai*. The term appears, Oshima notes, in the opening prologue to the fourth film in the series for the first time. The narrative order of *jitsuroku* provides security by containing violence from civil society, explicitly interpellating them. Since "civil society," was not a part of the journalistic criticism at the time, one could argue that the series not only interpellates but even helps constitute civil society. Civil society could enjoy violence without threat even as they claimed that the films demonstrated the role of violence in constituting the postwar order. This is how the films became successful.

If *Battles* is not solely about gangsters, but about the postwar order in Japan, Oshima's critique of narrative order is not solely about yakuza film or even Japanese film, but turned rather towards "cinema itself." While the tendency towards narrative order was also present in works like *Otoko wa tsurai yo*, or the films of Kumashiro Tatsumi, it seemed to be a world-wide phenomenon. Through his critique of the series, Oshima posits a theory of cinema as a constellation of forces — technology, information, violence, narrative, civil society, and cynicism — that had congealed into a form of security no longer bound exclusively to the state form. Given that by this date, Oshima was increasingly appearing at international film festivals, he may have been in a good position to make such a claim, though he frustratingly offers no examples. What is unique about the narrative order of *Battles* is that it is foregrounded through *jitsuroku* aesthetics because, unlike Hollywood, the struggling Japanese film industry did not have the resources to create large-scale spectacles to obscure its presence.

Thus *Battles,* which, in spite of its critical and commercial success in

Japan, saw little recognition abroad until recently,[22] appears uniquely positioned to offer a cogent critique of tendencies in contemporary world cinema. But the implications do not stop with film. Indeed, Michel Foucault was lecturing at the same time on how "Society Must be Defended."[23] According to recent research, in Japan, the development of cylinder locks in public housing complexes (*danchi*), established the kind of quiet, ubiquitous form of security closely associated with Americanization and endorsed by the imperial family that remains outside a postwar history largely written according to violent events.[24] Oshima has thus not been the only one to call attention to the ways by which the spectacle of violence might obscure a more insidious development of security at the time, though he does open up a space for cinema to engage this in unique terms.

By focusing on the formal qualities of yakuza films, and the ways the narrative order would stabilize our relationship to the beautiful violence of the cinematic image, Oshima also touched on an emergent strand of cinephilia in film criticism. *Ninkyō* yakuza film were also at the heart of a rising cinephilia in Japan, the site at which a "fascination" [*omoshirosa*] for the cinematic image reached an apotheosis in the

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22. Apart from in France, where the first film was released in March of 1975, the films saw no official release outside Japan until the 21st century. Of course, many people found ways to watch the films long before that.

23. Foucault's lectures began by tackling the writings of Hobbes and Von Clausewitz, specifically the notion that "war" is still going on just under the peace. This in turn leads to his discussion of race war, security, and ultimately, biopower and neo-liberalism. See: Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended* trans. David Macey (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).

24. See: Hara Takeshi's *Danchi no kūkan seijigaku* (Tōkyō: NHK Books, 2012), 16. "There is no shortage of reflections and research that takes up the history of political thought in the postwar. Among these, many focus on such front page struggles and incidents as the 1960 Anpo Protests or the university struggles, the Haneda Airport incidents, the Yodogo Hijacking incident, the Mishima incident, the incident of the Red Army at Asama mountain lodge, and so on, or on the discourses of contemporary opinion leaders, to depict the 'season of politics.' From this perspective, danchi, which appear utterly calm on the surface, completely slip away, as if the visible assemblage of 'private homes' were cordoned off in some fortress called 'personal-life.'" Hara's focus is on privacy, but the notion of locks lends itself equally to forms of personal security.

works of Makino Masahiro, or Katō Tai.[25] That Oshima's essay ended with this discussion of the relationship of civil society to yakuza society provoked Ueno Kōshi to critique the absence of "cinema" in Oshima's otherwise perceptive critique:

> Insofar as it grasps precisely the discriminatory, complementary, relationship between "civil society" and "yakuza society," Oshima's writing is sharply critical. At the same time, insofar as Oshima also reduces "yakuza film" to "yakuza society," it is also one-sided. Something fundamental is missing: cinema itself.[26]

Where cinematic representations of yakuza changed, which is to say, a process of change "interior" to cinema itself, yakuza society did not. In his leap to social critique, what Oshima has forgotten is that yakuza films *are films*. Unable to confront such facts, "social critics" tend to subject them to "consciousness." This critique largely fueled the rise of cinephilia in Japan, often appearing as a battle between the pure beauty of images and the corrupting spirit of *logos*.[27] Thus, in a certain sense, some cinephiles internalized the basic orientation of *ninkyō* yakuza film as a mode of film criticism and values. What had been a site for the inexpressible experience of war became a reading of the cinematic image itself as beyond words, what I call "image romanticism."

But has "consciousness replaced seeing," for Oshima? As one of the few to take seriously the function of the series' reportage-aesthetic orientation, Oshima to the contrary is more sensitive to what is on screen than most. Ueno might argue that this extra-diegetic order is

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25. See: Tsuneishi Fumiko's master's thesis: *Rupture/Salient Edges of Ninkyō Movies: Birth and Prolonged Demise of a Genre or Transformation of Critical Discourses* [Ninkyō eiga no setsudan bamen: janru no keisei: enmei to hihyō gengo no tenkan]. Tōdai hyōsho bunka, shushi ronbun, 1997. See also the dialogue between Ueno Kōshi, Hasumi Shigehiko, and Suga Hidemi, "1968 to wa nan datta/nan de aru no ka," in *1968 Nen,* ed. Suga Hidemi (Tōkyō: Sakuhinsha, 2005), 21-57. I would like to thank Junko Yamazaki for this reference.

26. Ueno Kōshi, "Oshima Nagisaron," *Eiga: han eiyūtachi no yume* (Tōkyō: Hanashi no Tokushū, 1983), 64-78. Quote appears on page 70.

27. See for example, the collection of essays on film critique in *Cinema 71*, no. 8 (June, 1971).

not "cinema," but cinema is unthinkable without recourse to the extra-diegetic. Oshima's argument suggests that the words *on screen* that inscribe, address, and protect civil society from the underlying violence of this world are hinged on the boundary between represented images and public discourse, between what is and what is not cinema. The "fascination" the cinephiles felt for cinema tended to keep their love for movies very much within the frame. In contrast, Oshima himself has admitted, he never "loved cinema." Nonetheless, he remained with it. While the cinephiles may have valued the pure beauty of images, in other ways, they were adhering to a frame of security. Love must extend beyond the boundaries of the screen and to do this, cinema must not be an object of love but the medium of its expression.

The Ghost of Oshima: Love Beyond the Frame

If love for cinema as an object is not enough, and cinema cannot be innocent in the Borromean knot of security, violence, technology, and cynicism, how does one confront this situation? In a discussion from 1981, Oshima reflected on his own recent history:

> The "establishing of the subject" we had thought about was obviously collapsing, and it was necessary to make a connection to the world through some other form. So then, after a few years of difficulty, I made *Love of a Matador* and *Phantom Love*, and so there was a turning point in my thinking at that point, but whether I had come to "get in bed with the age," I would say no. In terms of my relationship with the times, it got even more suffocating, and I didn't know what to do with myself as usual.[28]

When Oshima says that he did not know what to do with himself "as usual," we might interpret this as indicating that he was incessantly

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28. Matsumoto Toshio, Oshima Nagisa, and Matsuda Masao, "Dai ichi no nami kara tsugi no name e," in *Image Forum*, vol. 2, no. 8 (1981). These two titles refer to *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) and *Empire of Passion* (1978), respectively. "Love" has been completely removed from the English titles.

seeking new connections to the world. This may explain why every single one of Oshima's films looks different, why he famously never established a fixed style that would be recognizable. This is true even within any given film. Doesn't the film *Death by Hanging* (1968) demonstrate the joy and political radicalism of repeatedly establishing a connection to the world by other means through the shifting figure of R?

Still, we cannot neglect the overdetermined 'turning point' of this time period and to engage this, we must return here to the dialogue with which this article opened, between Adachi Masao and Yomota Inuhiko. In response to Adachi's inquiry, Yomota notes that while "Japan" was a major part of Oshima's films up to that point,[29] henceforth it was replaced with "love", citing the examples of *Love of a Matador* (Ai no korīda, 1976); *Phantom Love* (Ai no bōrei, 1978); and *Max mon amour* (1986). When the director Lou Ye was filming *Summer Palace* (Yi he yuan, 2006) on the revolutionary energy emanating around the 1989 uprising in Tiananmen Square, he showed his crew *Love of a Matador* "to spotlight love as central to the human itself."[30] In an interview in *Positif* after his film *Phantom Love* opened, Oshima stated, "Nowadays, nothing interests me quite as much as approaching the various forms that love can take with people who can only be saved by that love." Indeed, the genesis for the film project came from a personal note specifically for Oshima: "I'm certain that the director of *In the Realm of the Senses* will understand: even in this dark period of Japanese history...love did exist."[31]

Is it possible that love was the new connection to the world he sought,

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29. These titles include: *Night and Fog in Japan* (1960); *Sing a Song of Sex* (1967; the Japanese title is Japanese Sex Songs); *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide* (1967).

30. Lou Ye, "Oshima Nagisa ni tsuite," in *Oshima Nagisa* (Tōkyō: Kawada shobōshinsha, 2013), 125-126.

31. The note was from Itoko Nakamura, who sent it along with a book she had written about the writer Nagatsuka Takashi, whose novel, *Tsuchi* [The Soil], Oshima declared a masterpiece. Oshima Nagisa and Michael Henry, "*Empire of Passion:* Interview with Nagisa Oshima," The Criterion Collection, trans. Alexandre Mabilon, entry posted April 23, 2009, http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/1107-empire-of-passion-interview-with-nagisa-oshima (accessed August 14, 2014). The interview was initially published in *Positif* (May, 1978).

as something other than establishing a subject? While admittedly speculative, perhaps we could see the problems *Battles* brought to the fore with its spectacle of violence and narrative order as posing limits to a critique focused exclusively through the logic of sovereignty — as a relation of subjects mediated by the state/violence — that had defined politics for Oshima and many others. While these problems do not disappear, it is also clear here, if not before, that the critique of the state and its violence does not allow us to overlook the position from which we speak when we make that critique, which would implicate a "mass" art like cinema. At a time in which cinema appears as the continuation of violence by other means, with Oshima, it becomes something else: the incessant creation of connections to the world through other forms.

If love does not establish a subject, what kind of connection does it create? What role does cinema play in this process? To explore this, I will offer a brief reading of two of Oshima's more neglected "love" films: *Phantom Love* and *Gohatto*. Set in 1895, the middle of the Meiji period, *Phantom Love* is the story of a young man, Toyoji (Fuji Tatsuya) and woman, Seki (Yoshiyuki Kazuko) in rural Japan who conspire to murder the woman's husband, Gisaburō (Tamura Takahirō) and live happily together. They drop Gisaburō's body in a deep well in the woods while they carry on their relationship; but soon, Seki is haunted by Gisaburō's ghost and, in the end, the couple find themselves in the very well into which they had dropped the body. They are rescued by the townspeople who then proceed to torture them until they confess, and then kill them.

Phantom Love is, on the surface, among Oshima's most beautiful films, exploring in its exteriors the ravishing tones of the seasons, while capturing the rich hues of its humble interiors with equal aplomb. Marching or frolicking through both are the shadowy, enigmatic figures of death, alongside the erotic, but non-explicit, intertwinings of the naked couple. While the film does not have a specific political referent in the way its predecessor did, setting a ghost story explicitly within the context of "civilization and enlightenment," makes clear the ways that Oshima had expanded his vision to encompass the role of love within this broader configuration of modernity itself, and the contradictions it tries to keep buried. "Security" is maintained by a bumbling police

captain played by yakuza film regular, Kawatani Takuzō. As Ueno Kōshi has rightly pointed out, Kawatani's primary function in yakuza films is to be humiliated and beaten, often for comic effect, something Ueno links to his marginal but ubiquitous presence in Tōei's yakuza films in contrast to his reigning co-stars, including Sugawara Bunta.[32] There is little doubt that Oshima's attention to the personal side of filmmaking and the politics of program pictures is at work here, even while highlighting a burgeoning "state" whose clumsiness does not diminish its capacity for lethal violence.

But the more important character is likely the murdered husband, or rather, his ghost, one whose most visually striking image is as a white egg-like face that weeps blood, another face as battleground (Figure 5). This face must be grasped in relationship to the well as its *double*, or inverse, the frame through which we see from the perspective of the dead (Figure 6). In an interview about the film, Oshima stated that "we're all there" in the bottom of the well, but points out that he had been enamored of that image since his first screenplay, for the television
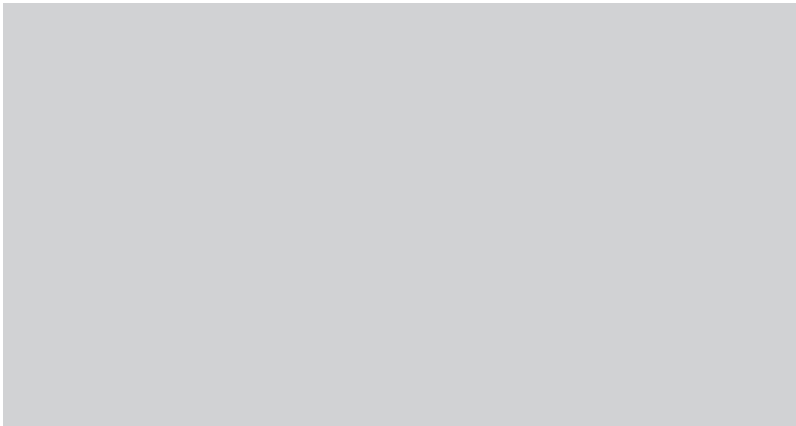

Figure 5.
Ai no bōrei (Argos Films, 1978).

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32. Ueno, *Eiga: Han eiyūtachi no yume.*

Figure 6.
Ai no bōrei (Argos Films, 1978).

show *Seishun no fukachi fuki yori*.[33] Would it not then be appropriate to see the iconic perspective from the bottom of the well as that of Oshima's own, which is to say, that he finally learned how to die in the 70s, and become the very phantom whose voice he had heard? The apparently close relationship thematically, institutionally, and formally with his previous film, *Love of the Matador* (a kind of diptych) obscures an important event that took place in between: that "Oshima" died, and here, with *Phantom Love*, began to leave his will on film.

What is this will? One possibility is the will to escape the well, or the frame, but this will must be read in relation to the problem of love. The title of the film suggests that the love of the movie is not really that between the two people, but rather, is another word for the phantom of the murdered husband, or rather, love is not contained by either, but a general haunting force. Both the husband and the couple are placed in the position of having to get out of the well. Or in other words, there is a repetition of the movement by which love could be pushed beyond the frame and the image it contains. And yet, this does not lead to any kind of escape. That the rescue of the couple (saved by love) is only

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33. "From the Bottom of the Abyss of Youth." This is curiously mistranslated in the essay in Criterion's liner notes for the film as "From the Bottom of the Abyss of Love." It is translated correctly in the original interview in French.

provisional and ends with their own deaths, what Oshima called a "beautiful hell," suggests that while the movement beyond the frame is necessary, it is not a liberation from struggle, but rather, its deepening, while the use of torture refuses any sacrificial ideal. But to extend this will beyond the allegorical was a remaining task.

This would be left for Oshima's final film, *Gohatto,* which introduces a different — perhaps queer — kind of phantom love. A narrative of the Shinsengumi — the army hired to protect the Shogunate just prior to its collapse in the mid-nineteenth century —, *Gohatto* mixes into this historical portrait tales of *tanuki*, foxes, and *kappa* (all quasi-mythical creatures associated with trickery, possession, or metamorphosis), alongside references to the eighteenth-century ghost story, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* (Ugetsu monogatari) by Ueda Akinari. At the same time, *Gohatto* may be the closest Oshima came to making a "yakuza film," albeit financed by and targeted to an international art-house audience.[34] By making the film almost entirely about the exchange of gazes of desire between men amidst suggestive scenes of swordplay, Oshima provides a reduction of yakuza film to its barest elements. Its sumptuous, cloistered interiors and beautifully fake studio sets, confusions of order and desire, intimacy between men, and all-star cast suggest *ninkyō* films, while the use of on-screen lettering and voice-over narrative, as well as incorporation of actual historical figures, are reminiscent of *jitsuroku* films. His casting of Kitano Takeshi, who emerged internationally as both icon and auteur of yakuza films, and whose own shape-shifting propensities across media are legendary, is also not without significance in this regard.

While there are dozens of *jidaigeki* based on the Shinsengumi that voice political claims depending on the stance they take with regard to various factions, Oshima places a queer force of love into the film and into the apparatus of security. This, in the figure of Kano Sozaburō

34. Indeed, one could say that "yakuza films" are also dead. By that point, apart from a few remaining "showa-era" theaters, and the celebrated works of a handful of auteurs, "mass" media yakuza stories in the form of low-budget serials had gravitated to video, in which Tōei, whose appellation of "v-cinema" became the industry standard, was king again. While Oshima never made a yakuza film, he did of course appear in one, a brief, ironic turn playing a police captain in Fukasaku's *Jingi no hakaba: kuchinashi no hana* (1976).

(Matsuda Ryūhei), a man who seduces nearly anyone who sees him with his astonishing beauty. And beginning with the first man who falls in love with him, Tashirō (Asano Tadanobu), every man to do so perishes, unravelling the Shinsengumi itself man by man. As the character of Hijikata (Kitano) declares: a samurai can be undone (*mi o horobosu*) by the love of man. Nonetheless, there is nothing heroic in the tone of Hijikata's statement. The collapse of security under the force of love and desire, cannot be understood in fully celebratory terms insofar as it ushers in the modern world of empire and warfare. In this, it echoes the "salvation" of the couple in *Phantom Love*. But if there is no escape neither can this be understood in solely destructive terms. The manifold ambiguities throughout the film open up to something other than cynicism.

Towards the end of the film, Hijikata (a fictional character) and Okita Sōji (Takeda Shinji) — an actual historical member of the Shinsengumi — send Kano to assassinate his erstwhile lover Tashirō. As they watch, we enter the world of Hijikata's fantasies. Characters shift places within his fantasies, disrupting the narrative he thought he knew. When Hijikata asks, "Were we mistaken?" we should hear in his question not simply the doubt that stems from a man questioning his own desires, but also, the echo of the famous 1968 debate between Oshima and the filmmaker and critic Matsumoto Toshio, "Were we mistaken?" Such intensive self-questioning, more than any particular subject position, defined Oshima's "politics."[35] More, when Hijikata asks the question, Oshima isolates the actor's face within the frame, establishing a mode of direct address, posing the question to us. This is key because Kitano is the first actor in Japan since Tsuruta to possess such a "face as battlefield." Oshima had already exploited this at the end of *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence,* even before the accident that permanently scarred Kitano's face, and now returns to the site of battle. (Figure 7).

A final enigma remains, however. Kano says something to Tashirō just before killing him. Though we see his lips move, we cannot hear what he says. Neither can Hijikata or Okita. The words remain an

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35. The Japanese expression varies slightly. Kitano says, "Chigatte ita ka," where the title of the debate was "Warera wa machigatteitarō ka" in *Eiga hyōron*, October, 1968.
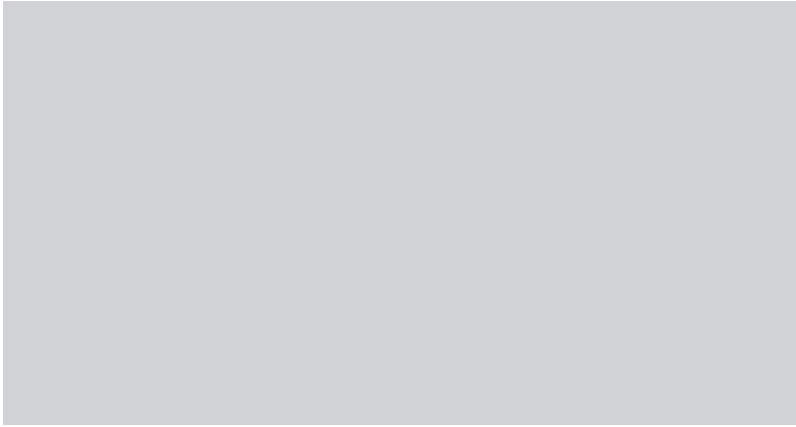
Figure 7.
Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence (Recorded Picture Company, 1983).
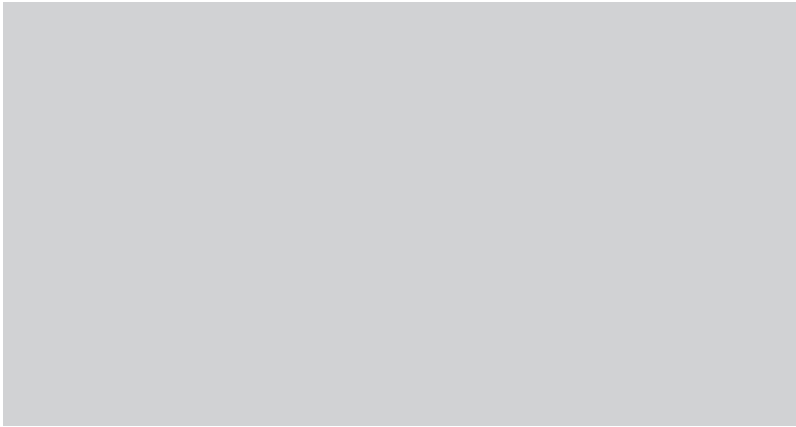

Figure 8.
Gohatto (Oshima Productions, 1999).

enigma at the border of image and language, a phantom voice. In the final scene, Hijikata, finding himself alone, fells a cherry-blossom tree with his sword (Figure 8). Whether this is a symbol of nationalism, whether elegy or critique, is less important than that it is a "Kitano" image, one possessed by "Oshima." A phantom love thus transcends the frame in a different way by possessing Kitano, making him both interlocutor and medium for Oshima. In many ways, we see in this

doubling how Kitano occupies a position quite close to Oshima. Both are troublemakers — controversial, outspoken television personalities who make beautiful, violent, critically adored art-house films for film festivals. Perhaps the missing words that we see but never hear were intended by Oshima for Kitano? If so, we may hear an even more distant phantom voice from out of the darkness amidst the blue, moonlit shimmer of the fallen blossoms. While the whispered words remain a mystery, I like to think we hear in them the refrain from the famous words at the end of Baudelaire's introduction to his poetry collection *Les Fleurs du Mal* (written during the same dark period in which the film is set): *my double! my brother!* Could there be any doubt that those words are also, then, for us?

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4

Ōshima Nagisa on Responsibility and Premonition:
Shiiku *(1961) and* Amakusa Shirō Tokisada *(1962)*

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If we consider Japanese cinema of the 1960s, Ōshima Nagisa has generally been understood as one of its preeminent, politically-engaged filmmakers. Outside of Japan, this understanding was articulated first and most forcefully in the late 1970s, through the discourse of political modernism. Critics such as Stephen Heath, Noël Burch, and Dana Polan variously argued that Ōshima's films marked out a problematic of the cinematic apparatus (i.e., the apparatus of look and identification).[1] Ōshima's films were said to compel spectators to find themselves in a process that enacted politics not as a story told through images, or an ideological position, but rather as a coming-to-awareness of the relationship between screen and spectator.[2] In effect, this discourse presupposed a hermeneutic that used an emergent post-structuralist theory of the text to establish a new theory of the spectator, which remains one of the horizons within which Ōshima's films have been understood outside of Japan.

Yet, what strikes me about this discourse, is the way in which it summoned Ōshima's films to participate in the formation of a Euro-American project of film studies, whose mission and problematic were quite distinct from Ōshima's own. For, paradoxically, in lieu of any deeper engagement with his ideas and concerns, a kind of reified "Ōshima function" appeared, in which the dazzling and putatively apparatus-imploding effects of these films were ascribed to the authorial

1. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 148.

2. Dana Polan, "Politics as Process in Three Films by Nagisa Oshima," *Film Criticism* 8 (1983): 34.

signifier "Ōshima". Yet, as we know, Ōshima's work took shape not only through close collaboration with his peers at Shōchiku and later Sōzōsha, but equally through public debates with film-makers and critics such as Matsumoto Toshio, Adachi Masao, Hanada Kiyoteru, and others. Writing for specialist magazines such as *Eiga geijutsu*, *Eiga hyōron*, and *Kinema junpō*, Ōshima also produced remarkable, highly-introspective criticism, which cannot be excluded from his *oeuvre*. In this essay, then, I would like to take a slightly different approach, namely, to consider the dialogue between Ōshima the director and Ōshima the essayist. More specifically, I would like to take up his concern with the problem of political engagement in cinema, and to suggest that sometime between July 1963 and December 1965, Ōshima reached an impasse in his thinking about politics and cinema, at which point he largely abandoned an inquiry into the problems of responsibility and sovereignty — which found expression in concepts such as "situation" [*jōkyō*] and "subject" [*shutai*] — and began to explore different forms of political relationality. One such form would be the notion of "premonition" [*yokan*], which Ōshima took up for several years in the middle of the 1960s. This is especially evident if, as I propose, we consider the dialog between Ōshima's films and his written essays. While a premonition is evidently an anticipatory understanding of future events, a close reading of Ōshima's work in the early 1960s will suggest that this notion emerges rather through his reflection on how cinema represents the past. What is at stake in this movement away from an understanding of politics as a quest for sovereignty, then, is a broader question concerning how audiences are brought into contact with historical struggles, and the forms of agency or historical consciousness this contact might grant. To concretize the impasse of a politics of sovereignty, and to attempt to give shape to Ōshima's turn towards "premonitory films," I will try to show how his concern with political engagement finds expression in two films: *Shiiku* (1961) and *Amakusa Shirō Tokisada* (1962).

The Road to Freedom

Rather than approaching Ōshima's impasse from the beginning, I'd like to start with a retrospective view. In December, 1965, Ōshima published an expansive, reflective article in *Eiga geijutsu*, entitled "The Road to Freedom" [*Jiyū e no michi*].[3] Looking back at the beginning of his career as a director at Shōchiku, he describes a change in his engagement from "symbolic" to "direct" confrontation. During the period in which he directed *A Town of Love and Hope*, *Cruel Story of Youth*, and *The Sun's Burial*, (mid-1959 to mid-1960), Ōshima's confrontation with the social order was "symbolic" in the sense that these films depict, in his words, "a search for the subjective will of a given victim of oppression".[4] On his account of the next film, *Night and Fog in Japan*, the scope of investigation became broader, but also more direct. Here, he begins to thematize the problem of the pursuit of active responsibility [*shutai-tekina sekinin no tsuikyū*]; that is, "the real responsibility of the oppressed in general and of that on the part of student movements" (97). The historical context for this transformation was of course the ANPO-tōsō in May and June, 1960, and especially the role of the student movement in the struggle. When *Night and Fog in Japan* was suspended by Shōchiku in November, 1960, and even some members of the anti-system movement affirmed the studio's decision, Ōshima believed that he suddenly had to take a side. Either he was going to be in the movement, he thought, or he was going to be critical of it. Looking back on this juncture from 1965, though, Ōshima added: "Or so I was forced to think, at least" (97).

Following his departure from Shōchiku, Ōshima directed *Shiiku* in 1961, and *Amakusa Shirō Tokisada* in 1962. In terms of setting and subject matter, these films are outwardly very different: one takes place at the end of the Pacific War, the other in the early seventeenth century. While Ōshima is visibly concerned with how the past should

3. Reprinted in Ōshima Nagisa, *Ma to zankoku no hassō* (Tōkyō: Haga Shoten, 1966), 226-236.

4. Ōshima Nagisa, "The Road to Freedom," in *Cinema, censorship, and the state: the writings of Nagisa Ōshima*, 1956-1978. Ed. Annette Michelson (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992), 97.

be represented in these films, it is noteworthy that his essays from this period are much more preoccupied with the situation of the filmmaker in the present day. More significantly, he describes both of these films in continuity with the problematic of *Night and Fog in Japan*. On his account, *Shiiku* could be understood as "a search for active responsibility by the oppressed themselves," while *Amakusa Shirō Tokisada* was "a search for active responsibility on the part of the oppressed from the point of view of an oppressed activist (who, in a sense, had achieved independence from the oppressed) and on the part of the movement of the oppressed" (97-98). That is, both films are concerned with a similar problem, though *Shiiku* depicts an oppressed group, putatively engaged in a collective search, while *Amakusa Shirō Tokisada* depicts an individual activist who undertakes this search on behalf of others. Taking Ōshima's statement into account, I would like to consider these two seemingly different films together, looking at each one more closely, to reach a clearer understanding of how, exactly, they express the problem of 'active responsibility'.

Shiiku

Shiiku was Ōshima's first literary adaptation, in this case from Ōe Kenzaburō's 1958 story of the same name. Set in a remote village in the last months of the Pacific War, the story describes the capture of an African-American soldier from a downed plane, and the consequences for this tiny community. Literary critics have generally focused on the village and the prisoner as a microcosm of wartime Japan in relation to an enemy 'other', where the muteness of the soldier renders him an abstract, exterior focal point for the latent social and political conflicts within rural Japan. For Susan Napier, Ōe's *Shiiku* may be read as a reworking of the pastoral tradition, a celebration of nature and primitivism seen through adolescent eyes, whose setting may be viewed as "a fantasy version" of the village in Shikoku where Ōe grew up during the Pacific War.[5] In her reading of Ōshima's film, Maureen

5. Susan Napier, *The fantastic in modern Japanese literature: the subversion of modernity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 156.

Turim argues that while he places greater emphasis on "xenophobia and the mass psychology of fascist tendencies in village culture," he nevertheless shares with Ōe a certain fauvist tendency to embrace the wild or primal "other".[6] While none of the canonical interpretations entirely miss the mark, I'd like to explore the possibility that Ōshima is more interested in the political stance of the villagers than the elements of racism and xenophobia apparent in their relationship with the POW. For, Ōshima's film articulates at least three interrelated social conflicts: first, an intergenerational conflict between the children and adolescents, on one side, and the adults on the other; second, the class conflict between the members of the village; and third, the external conflict between the village, prefecture, and the nation-state.

The theme of intergenerational conflict is closest to what we find in Ōe's original story. There, the point of view is that of a young boy in the village, who has been described by some critics as a proxy for Ōe himself. Ōshima does not deviate from the general structure of the story, but rather than reproducing this point of view by tying his camera to the young boys, he instead allows it to roam freely, using numerous unusual and expansive views of the action to give a more omniscient perspective. It is only in the final shot of the film that the point of view is clearly attached to the boy named Hachirō, as he watches the village from a distance. In Ōe's story, the children as a group display an overt, eroticized fascination with the black soldier, and in this way develop an empathetic attachment to him. Ōshima, too, includes many shots of the children of the village, but more often as they bear witness to the cruel spectacle of the adult world. This detachment from a character-centered perspective allows the camera to take in a broader set of conflicts between the adults, and to clearly delinate the split between the children — especially the boys Hachirō and Osamu, who side with the prisoner —, and the adult world.

A second dimension of conflict finds expression in the class-bound relationships between the landlord Takano (Mikuni Rentarō), Ishii-san (Koyama Akiko), the refugee from Tokyo, the poor farmers Tsukada (Sazanka Kyū), Kadoya, Kokubo and, at the very bottom, Aki, the

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6. Maureen Turim, *The films of Oshima Nagisa: images of a Japanese iconoclast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 168.

house servant. This conflict is manifest in the resentment harbored by the poorer farmers, and the numerous evocations of theft, such as when Tsukada sends his children to steal potatoes from Takano — and then denies his misdeeds — while simultaneously depending on Takano for *nihonshu*. Class conflict also surfaces when the middle-class refugee Ishii seeks to sell her kimono for food to give to the prisoner. Takano openly resents this modest display of wealth, but he nevertheless buys the kimono at a knock-down price. The children are likewise enmeshed in this conflict. The boy Osamu, for example, is the illegitimate child of the landlord Takano and the sister of Tsukada, one of poor farmers. Ōshima shows Takano abusing his position of authority to take advantage of the women in the poorer families, such that the family structure of the village has collapsed into a set of confused incestuous relations.

A third dimension of conflict lies between the village, the prefecture, and the state. The film depicts a stark split between the concerns of the villagers and those of the crippled town clerk (Rokko Toura), who serves as a representative of the state. The villagers expect a reward for the prisoner, but the clerk informs them that none will be forthcoming. If they fail in their duty to look after the prisoner, they will be punished as a group. A deep resentment of this obligation, and evident lack of national consciousness is expressed in their unwillingness to look after the prisoner. Ōshima underscores that their interest in him hinges upon hopes for financial gain, and as soon as this is thwarted, they begin to argue about killing him. In this way, the prisoner's murder is shown as a displacement of their collective resentment vis-à-vis the state.

At the level of mise-en-scène, this film is remarkable for its large number of lengthy sequence shots. While the film as a whole is composed of 201 shots, whose average duration is around thirty seconds, there are fourteen takes which are longer than two minutes, including one that's almost eleven minutes in length. While there are a great number of emotion-laden close ups in this film, it is Ōshima's use of a significant number of long shots that is more striking. Rather than moving closer to focus on individual characters, the camera often maintains its distance to view the villagers as an entire group. We see this, for example, in the initial night scene as the villagers circle the
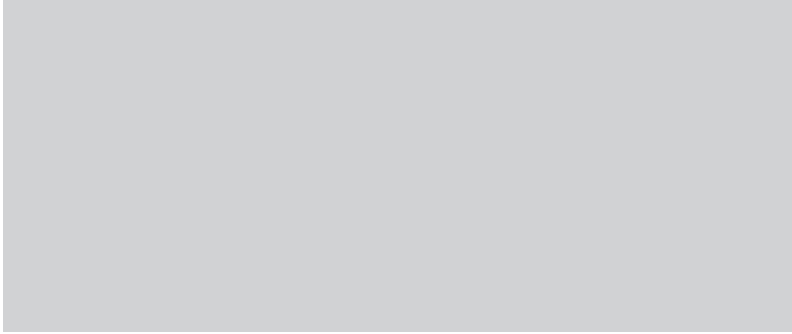
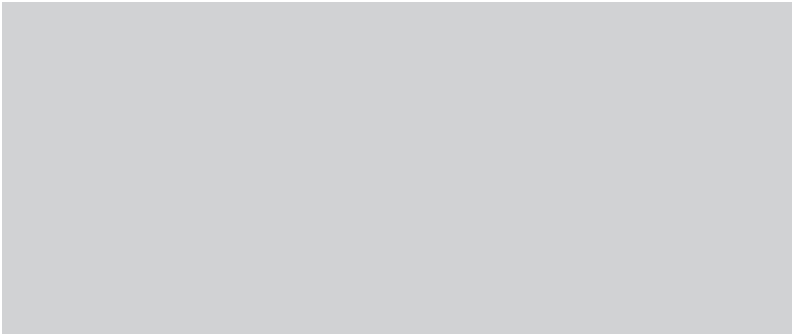**Figure 1.**
Shiiku (Palace Productions, 1961).

Figure 2.
Shiiku (Palace Productions, 1961).

newly-captured soldier (Figure 1), or again when they deliberate with the clerk about looking after their prisoner. The rice-planting scene is filmed entirely at this distance, as is Jiro's nighttime interlude with Mikiko, as well as the extended take after one of Ms. Ishii's children dies in a fall (Figure 2). In each instance, Ōshima doesn't move the camera closer to rising emotion or outbursts of violence (e.g., one villager striking the soldier's head), or only does so after the action proper.

Here, it is worth asking: what is the effect or significance of these many long shots? Certainly, they work to emotionally distance the audience from the action. Where the close-up offers us a view of the psychological state of a character, the long shot denies it. Sean Cubitt suggests that while the close-up may be understood as an

"anthropomorphism of the camera," the long shot gives us a sense of "divine abstraction" from the human drama.[7] André Bazin famously argued that the long-take, deep-focus style is more realistic, as it tends to convey a greater sense of spatio-temporal continuity. Yet, Bazin was concerned primarily with the representation of space though time, and proposed the use of sequence shots instead of montage; that is, long takes rather than long shots. For Noël Burch, of course, Ōshima's film style is marked by its blatant theatricality, but he reads the découpage of *Shiiku* as more classicist, insofar as it espouses "the anti-montage, anti-close-up tendencies of the classical Japanese cinema" and Burch suggests that Ōshima's "pastiche of late Mizoguchi is very convincing."[8] As an alternative to some variety of the political modernist interpretation, I would like to consider Ōshima's own theory of mise-en-scène.

In his 1960 essay "What is a shot?," Ōshima summarizes two rules for filming *Night and Fog in Japan*: first, a shot should continue "as long as possible with the camera moving freely"; second, a shot should not be stable.[9] That is, the movement of the camera during the shot may be accentuated. The effect of these two rules, Ōshima believes, is to allow the filmmaker's subjectivity to flow through the shot. "The field of each shot," he declares, "must incorporate the filmmaker's critique of the subject and the situation and at the same time serve as a critique of the filmmaker" (50). His overarching goal is to forge a new relationship with the audience by crushing "the established stereotyped images contained in each shot" (50). While Ōshima is known for having tried to re-invent his film style in nearly every production, we can also see continuity in the use of lengthy sequence shots between *Night and Fog in Japan* and *Shiiku*, especially in the manner by which the camera overtly pans back and forth to follow the action within a single shot. Although this technique can be quite challenging to spectators accustomed to the codes of studio cinema, it underscores the social fissures within groups of people. The use of numerous long-shots in *Shiiku* also works to encourage a critical view on the situation of the

7. Sean Cubitt, *The cinema effect* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2004), 134.

8. Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 329.

9. Ōshima Nagisa, "What is a Shot?," in *Cinema, censorship, and the state*, 49-51.

villagers.

At the thematic level, Ōshima's adaptation proposes several "resolutions" to the social conflict. First, the village chief Takano suggests that the villagers simply blame the prisoner for their problems. The villagers understand this is not true, but soon they begin to act and believe this is really the truth of the situation, blaming the disappearance and even the death of their children on the hapless prisoner. Here, Ōshima departs from the logic of Ōe's story, to heighten the absurdity of the villagers' attempt to shift blame. News of the defeat arrives shortly after they kill the prisoner. Fearing that they will be punished by the authorities, the villagers plan to deny any responsibility for the murder (Figure 3). The denial is conscious and collective, but they fail to reach agreement about a fake alibi, and in turn kill Jirō, who refuses to be the backup fall guy. His murder is also blamed on the dead soldier. The film ends with a long tracking shot from the perspective of the children as they silently bear witness to this grotesque spectacle (Figure 4), and a separate shot of Hachirō, Jirō's younger brother, watching the funeral pyre from a distance. Here, the point of view rejoins that of Ōe's story, though Ōshima makes it clear that Hachirō is thoroughly estranged from the adult world of the village.

Viewed from this distance, Ōshima presents the problem of active, political responsibility via an absurdist depiction of collective irresponsibility. In a 1969 interview with Ian Cameron, Ōshima said: "In this case, the responsibility for the war was not the responsibility of
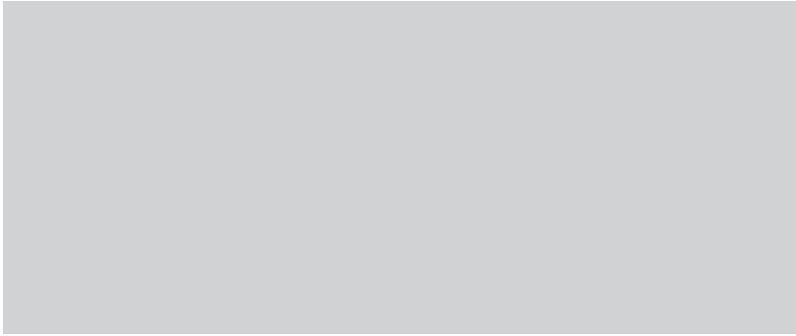
Figure 3.
Shiiku (Palace Productions, 1961).

Figure 4.
Shiiku (Palace Productions, 1961).

the generals or the military men but of the people in general."[10] This is
not to say that Ōshima means the militarists didn't bear responsibility,
but that his interest is rather with the oppressed "in general" and what
the problem of responsibility might be for them. Although Ōshima
describes his concern in this film as "the pursuit of active responsibility,"
at the level of expression we are presented with a group of people near
the bottom of the social hierarchy who, conscious of their oppressed
status in society, seek to deny their collective responsibility. Is this sense,
the depiction of irresponsibility in *Shiiku* also recalls the "transfer of
oppression" and "system of irresponsibilities" described by Maruyama
Masao.[11] If we consider the depiction of violence in *Shiiku* in light of
this analysis, the "victim's consciousness" may be understood as playing
an important role in the transfer of oppression through a set of vertical
power relations. The poorest villagers feel they are victims of richer
ones, and all of them feel they are victims of the state. This sanctions
a "transfer" of violence against their social inferiors, and especially the
prisoner. Although Ōshima depicts this violence as hypocrtical cruelty,
he gradually amplifies it to a point of absurdity. Here, it is not a stretch
to mention Ueki Hitoshi's *Irresponsible Japan* series, for Ōshima once
remarked in a different context: "People must wonder why I, who have

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10. Ōshima Nagisa, and Ian Cameron, "Nagisa Oshima Interview," *Movie* 17 (Winter
     1969-70): 10.

11. Maruyama Masao, *Thought and behaviour in modern Japanese politics*. Ed. Ivan Morris
     (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 18, 128.

earnestly pursued the issue of human responsibility [*ningen no sekinin*], like irresponsible Ueki Hitoshi a lot. However, while acting completely irresponsibly and making people laugh, Ueki Hitoshi in fact seeks out human responsibility. He told me that there's such a reverse approach [*uragaeshi no yarikata*]."[12] Of course, Ōshima's treatment of his characters' irresponsibility is much darker and more serious, but its force trades equally on the incongruous qualities of absurdist comedy. Finally, the only characters in *Shiiku* who might be said to actually seek responsibility are the non-adults Hachirō and Osamu.

Amakusa Shirō Tokisada

Traditionally one of the strongest genres in the Japanese cinema, *jidaigeki* saw a significant change of fortune in the 1950s. Following the end of the ban on period films imposed by SCAP, production increased throughout the industry, to reach an average of around 170 titles per year in 1954.[13] This level was maintained until declining sharply in 1958, as Nikkatsu decided to focus exclusively on *gendaigeki* and discontinued all *jidaigeki* production. During the late 1950s, there were two peak periods — the so-called "mass-production competitions" [*ryōsan kyōsō*] in 1956 and autumn 1958 — during which the six major studios dramatically ramped up production in order to capture market share. As a consequence, the market became saturated, and the major studios had to consolidate their "lines" of production and branding, with Nikkatsu essentially conceding *jidaigeki* to the other majors in 1958. As another consequence, Toei became the studio most closely associated with *jidaigeki*. The top-grossing films of 1958 and 1959 were both productions of *Chūshingura*, from Daiei and Toei, respectively.[14] By the early 1960s, though, the genre was in decline, with Kurosawa's *Yōjinbō* (1961) and *Tsubaki sanjūrō* (1962) counting among its last

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12. Ōshima Nagisa, "Giji shutai ishiki o norikoeru mono," in *Ma to zankoku no hassō*, 71.

13. Jiji Tsūshinsha, *Eiga nenkan* (Tōkyō: Jijitsūshinsha, 1961), 43.

14. Daiei's *Chūshingura* (1958) was directed by Watanabe Kunio, while Toei's was directed by Matsuda Sadatsugu. Shōchiku also released *Chūshingura: Akatsuki no jindaiko* in December 1958.

major sucesses. While the overall decline at the box office is generally attributed to the rise of television in Japan, the shift in consumption patterns of genre films during the late 1950s and early 1960s points to other significant factors as well. For, even as the majors were locked in fierce competition over the highest-grossing *Chūshingura*, the overall production of *jidaigeki* in the late 1950s averaged less than half that of *gendaigeki* titles. As Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro has argued, the generic distinctions of *jidaigeki* and *gendaigeki* are not merely "neutral categories," but reflect a specific disjunction in the popular imagination concerning the collective consciousness of the past and the present, and participate in the maintenance of a sharp separation between them.[15] As a genre, *jidaigeki* offers an imaginary and idealized image of Edo Japan, by which contemporary audiences could confront broader processes of historical transformation:

> Not a simple continuation of traditional popular culture, *jidaigeki* has less to do with a revival of tradition than with an emerging society of the masses and various strains of modernization. (223)

On Yoshimoto's account, *jidaigeki* provides not only a space of reflection in the popular imagination, opened around a shared consciousness of history, but also, and more significantly, serves as a pivot point in an ideological system. As we shall see, these strains are similarly legible in Ōshima's *Amakusa Shirō Tokisada,* despite its being a highly idiosyncratic work that deviates from many conventions of the genre.

Amakusa Shirō Tokisada shows the seventeenth-century Christian uprising at Shimabara, in which over thirty thousand peasants revolted against the Tokugawa authorities. This was an unusual project for Ōshima, in that it is the only production that he directed for a major studio after leaving Shōchiku, and the only live action *jidaigeki* he directed in the 1960s. It may also have been one of the largest-budget films he ever directed. Apparently, Ōshima was offered this project at the request of the actor Ōkawa Hashizō, who was then attached to Toei. It is worth noting that there was a broad resurgence of popular

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15. Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro, *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 209.

interest in the figure of Amakusa Shirō in the early postwar. During the 1950s, several films were produced that included the Shimabara rebellion either directly or indirectly. Only one film narrates the experience of Shirō directly: *Amakusa Hibun Nanban Zukin*, directed by Marune Santarō in 1952. In the sphere of popular music, there is singer Miwa Akihiro's claim to be the reincarnation of Amakusa Shirō, and in May 1961, Hashi Yukio's enka "Nankai no Bishōnen (Amakusa Shirō no uta)" hit the charts. Apparently, this song was popular with members of the student movement. As I will argue shortly, this historical identification with the Shimabara rebellion was present for Ōshima as well.

Ōshima's film begins in 1637, when the Christian farmers of Amakusa had been reduced to poverty through excessive taxation and religious persecution. Shirō lives in hiding. On screen, he is depicted as a 'chivalrous rōnin', carrying two swords [*daishō*], like a samurai. He is shown to be a skilled fighter, but mostly he councils restraint. This is the traditional image of Shirō, not a concession to the conventions of the *jidaigeki*. The film's plot is organized around three axes of conflict: first, there is the collision between the Christians, represented by Shirō, and the feudal authorities, represented by the magistrate Tanaka and the samurai Mondo. The historical figure Lord Matsukura, to whom Tanaka and Mondo answer, appears only briefly. A second axis of conflict unfolds between Shirō and the nameless rōnin, as they clash over how to stage the rebellion. A third line of conflict appears amongst the Christians of Amakusa, between those who, under extreme persecution, have maintained their faith, and those who believe God has forsaken them. The extremes of this conflict are represented by Yozaemon, the devout leader of the Christian farmers, Kakuzo, one of the younger farmers who feels forsaken and wishes to fight the Shogunate; and Emosaku, the painter who has seemingly renounced his faith. Shirō is directly involved in each of these three axes of conflict.

Regarding the first axis of conflict — i.e., between Christians and the feudal authorities —, Shirō hopes the peasants will rise up against the authorities, but the farmers of Amakusa are not yet behind this idea. For their part, the local authorities are caught between their orders from Edo to eradicate the Christian faith, and the logistical

problem of actually doing so. For this, they resort to increasingly brutal methods. Ōshima emphasizes this, with numerous close-up shots of flogging. At the middle of this axis of conflict is the conflicted samurai Shinbei. He cannot bear the extreme cruelty of his fellow samurai, but feigns allegiance to daimyo while secretly supporting Shirō's plan for rebellion (in fact, enabling it). After the failed attack on Shimabara castle (which, in fact, he did not lead), Shirō concludes that the rebellion cannot succeed, and appeals to his followers to recluse themselves at Hara castle. They remain committed to their ideal world while accepting failure and death. This, in trade for transmitting hope and courage to the future. It is significant that Ōshima and his co-scenarist Ishidō Toshirō chose to end the film before the brutal defeat of the uprising at Hara castle. Themes of self-sacrifice and the "doomed cause" are familiar from *jidaigeki*, but Ōshima here emphasizes Shirō's self-awareness as an actor in history (Figure 5).

The second axis of conflict — that is, between Shirō and the nameless rōnin — is evidently Ōshima's solution to a puzzling historical problem, viz., how was it possible for a young sixteen-year-old to become the leader of the largest popular rebellion in Tokugawa Japan? How was leadership shared with the many rōnin who were involved in the rebellion? When the peasants launch their attacks against the authorities, it is this nameless rōnin who leads them, not Shirō. The rōnin manipulates the Christian farmers to achieve his own vengeance against the local daimyo, for having refused him a
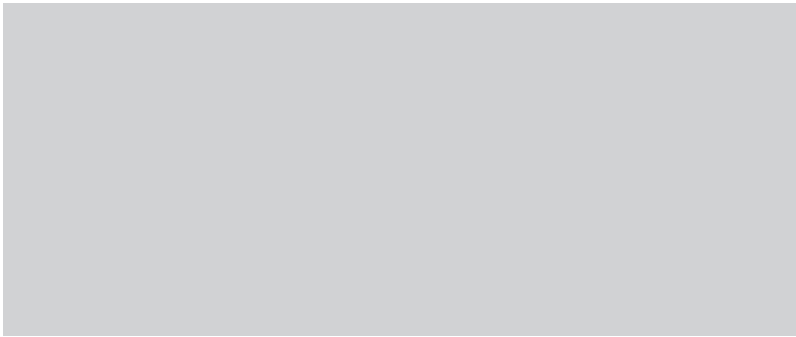

Figure 5.
Amakusa Shirō Tokisada (Tōei, 1962).

position. In this fashion, Ōshima depicts Shirō not as a lone tactician of the rebellion, but more as a young man grappling with history. The rōnin taunts Shirō repeatedly, but the scene in which Shirō finally kills him is remarkably anti-climatic. This takes place in the penultimate, highly-theatrical sequence of the film. After repeated provocations, Shirō finally draws his sword, but there is no *chanbara*. Rather than increasing the dramatic tension as one might find in more generic *jidaigeki*, the rōnin is felled abruptly and the scene fades to black. Overall, the lighting of this film is unusual, in that whereas the Toei *jidaigeki* are often brightly illuminated, Ōshima has opted for uniform darkness. These artistic choices were evidently a deliberate denial of the style of the Toei *jidaigeki*.

The third axis of conflict is between the Christians who have maintained their faith, and those who, under extreme persecution, believe God has forsaken them. At first approximation, the point at issue here is a crisis of faith. Two moments in this conflict are particularly significant. First, when Shirō resolves to fight with the farmers against the authorities — and against his earlier judgment —, his mother asks why he chooses violence. He replies that their attempt to suffer in silence has been futile. He will fight not because of his Christian beliefs, but as a resident of Shimabara and Amakusa. Nevertheless, he swears that he hasn't abandoned the values of Christianity. Here, Ōshima shows us the resolution to a collision between Shirō's belief in the truth of God's world and his earthly sense of fraternity with the farmers of Amakusa. A second noteworthy moment in this conflict involves the *nanbanga* painter Emosaku. His character is based upon the historical Yamada Emosaku, who created the flag for the Shimabara rebellion, and is considered the only survivor of the siege at Hara castle. In the film, the authorities seek to use his art as a means to suppress the Christians through fearful images of persecution. When Emosaku refuses this project, he is in turn tortured. As Shinbei remarks: "Art can only save one's soul in times of peace." After ratting out the others, Emosaku is released, and by the end of the film he has painted an apocalyptic scene — basically what the authorities had demanded of him. Ōshima shows us the canvas in two separate shots (Figure 6), without giving an explanation for Emosaku's "revelation". His canvas may prompt
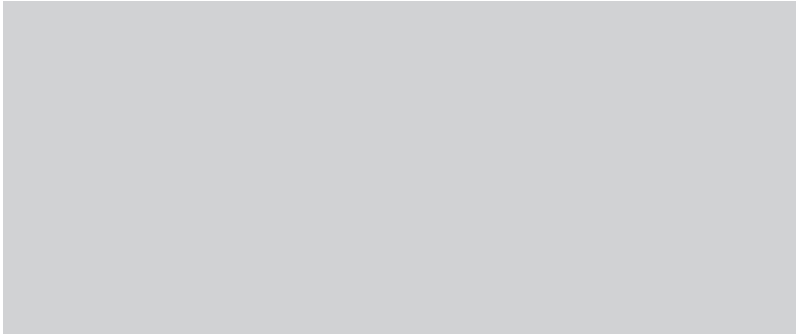
Figure 6.
Amakusa Shirō Tokisada (Tōei, 1962).

us to reflect on the sublimation of violence through art. But, more concretely, what does it represent? Is this Emosaku's premonition of the future, that is, of the ultimate failure of the rebellion? Rather than following the narrative of historical record, in which Emosaku was the only survivor of the rebellion, Ōshima elects to have him killed by one of the other apostates.

As in *Shiiku*, Ōshima again constructs this film using a large number of long takes. Some of these are sequence shots with elaborate camera movement, but mostly they are slow tracking shots. Where the average shot duration in *Shiiku* was 30.8 seconds, in this film it is 38.4 seconds — almost twenty percent slower. The opening scene of the film, in which the feudal authorities raid a farmhouse for non-payment of taxes, is captured in a single shot that lasts over seven-and-a-half minutes. Although Ōshima often uses ellipsis to abruptly jump forward in time, the slow, almost contemplative pace of this film is unexpected for a Toei *jidaigeki*. Fewer long shots are used than in *Shiiku*, but the camera still tends to maintain its distance to frame large groups of people. This is especially visible in the battle scenes, which are not constructed around "heroic" kill shots. Rather, the emphasis is on crowds or chaos, conveyed using slow tracking shots (Figure 7). To show the final disagreements between the Christians, the death of Emosaku, the close-up of his last painting, and the death of the nameless rōnin, Ōshima uses overt theatricality, with conspicuous fades to black between each moment in the sequence.
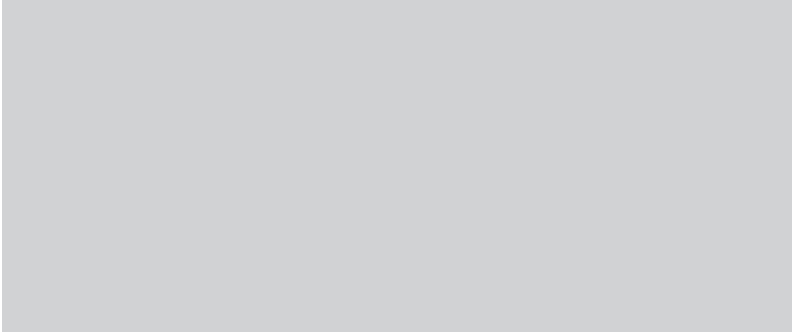
Figure 7.
Amakusa Shirō Tokisada (Tōei, 1962).

To reiterate, Ōshima describes this film as the depiction of "a search for active responsibility on the part of the oppressed from the point of view of an oppressed activist". That is, Shirō's search for active responsibility on the part of the Shimabara Christians, but independent of them. From his point of view, it is a question of the conditions under which active, collective responsibility can materialize. He concludes that it is not yet possible. This is anticipated during the very first scene that includes Shirō. He speaks to Yozaemon of an uprising to come, but there is no response. We see that his expression softens into a profound dismay at this "not yet". Ultimately, though, this is transformed into a self-awareness of the meaning of his own action in history.

As he reflects on *Amakusa Shirō Tokisada* in 1965, Ōshima adds several interesting and revealing remarks to his account of the film:

> I — an oppressed activist forced to become independent and to attempt to criticize the oppressed themselves and the movement itself — project my shadow all too pitifully. Frankly, I had no sense of where to go from there. Believing only in the correctness of what I had done up to that point, and taking strength only from the fact that it would be communicated again to later generations, I had no alternative but to ensconce myself in my castle and make pronouncements from there.[16]

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16. Ōshima Nagisa, "The Road to Freedom," in *Cinema, censorship, and the state*, 98.

Reading this passage, I would submit that we are permitted to at least entertain an allegorical interpretation. In place of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Ōshima evokes the postwar 1955 System. In place of the Shimabara rebellion and the Christians of Amakusa, we have the ANPO-tōsō and the student movement. In place of Amakusa Shirō, we have Ōshima Nagisa. Like Shirō in his cave with the fog of history outside, Ōshima grapples with the distance between himself and the political movements of the present day. He admits to projecting his own shadow "too pitifully". Viewing this crossroads retrospectively, from the vantage point of 1965, Ōshima was evidently unsure of how a film director could channel or galvanize a mass audience to take on a sense of active responsibility vis-à-vis the social structure. His only recourse, he says, was to metaphorically ensconce himself in his castle. All of this is an overt allusion to Amakusa Shirō's decision to lead his followers into reclusion at Hara castle. Ōshima underscores that the break in his narration of the rebellion, interrupted as it was before the Shirō's defeat, even foreshadows his own destiny. "[W]as I hoping that Shirō would reappear somewhere else, totally transformed?" (98). Ōshima suggests that his decision was a way to leave open a space of future historical possibility. Finally, there is something unsatisfactory about this kind of allegorical reading, but perhaps it helps us to get closer to Ōshima's notion of "films of premonition".

The Dilemma of Political Responsibility

The conflict embodied in Ōshima's rendering of Amakusa Shirō may be described, then, as a dilemma of political responsibility. To bring this into relief, I would like to consider two different statements by Ōshima. The first is articulated in his 1963 essay "Situation and Subject in Postwar Japanese Cinema" [*Sengo nihon eiga no jōkyō to shutai*],[17] published the year after the release of *Amakusa Shirō Tokisada*. It condenses many of his early ideas about the relationship between cinema and political movements.

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17. Ōshima Nagisa, "Sengo nihon eiga no jōkyō to shutai," in *Sengo eiga: hakai to sōzō* (Tōkyō: San'ichi Shobō, 1963), 185-212.

This essay is framed around two questions: "What was the ANPO-tōsō?" and "How should filmmakers make films?" Ōshima gives a provisional sketch of the postwar Japanese cinema, in which he elaborates the claim that films thematizing political conflict or social injustice typically did so by appealing to the consciousness of a victim [*higaisha-ishiki*]. Moreover, he argues that both studio productions, and those of the independent film movement of the 1950s, used this form of appeal. This appeal was able to move the mass audience which had experienced the war, but not the younger generation of film goers who became the majority around the year Shōwa 30 (roughly 1954 or 1955). That is, Ōshima describes a point of historical discontinuity in film audiences, and the emergence of a new form of mass consciousness. Yet, he argues that it appears first as a pseudo or virtual form of mass subjectivity [*giji shutaisei*].[18] The studio system quickly produced films that represented this virtual subjectivity — e.g. the films of Masumura Yasuzō, and the Nikkatsu action films of Ishihara Yujirō and Kobayashi Akira — while the independent film movement failed to respond.

Interestingly, this account parallels Ōshima's reading of the student movements of the same period. The ANPO-tōsō, he argues, was led on the basis of a collective form of virtual subjectivity. It was a movement of resistance that appeared to fill a sense of void in postwar history, but it was nonetheless virtual. Here, Ōshima distinguishes a movement of resistance from a movement of reconstruction. Reconstruction appeals not to victims, but to collective desire, to the desire to do something different. This would be the beginning of a movement rooted in the true subjective will of the people [*minshū no shutai-tekina ishi*].

Ōshima's challenge to the independent film movement follows this reading of mass political movements, viz., to elevate this virtual subjectivity into a true, active subjectivity [*shin no shutaisei*]. For this to happen, though, Ōshima believes that cinema must establish a deeper

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18. Although the first translation of this term (into French) rendered *giji* as "pseudo," I will follow Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro's use of the term "virtual". See: Ōshima Nagisa, "Situation et sujet du cinéma japonais," *Positif* 143 (Oct 1972): 29-47; and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "Questions of the New: Ōshima Nagisa's *Cruel Story of Youth* (1960)," in Phillips, Alastair, and Julian Stringer, eds. *Japanese cinema: texts and contexts* (London: Routledge, 2007), 168-179.

rapport between film creators and the audience that views their works. The aim of *Cruel Story of Youth*, he tells us, was to reach the audience through the shock of unmasking this virtual subjectivity, in order to thereby reveal the possibility of a true, active consciousness. Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro has explored this interpretation of the film, especially in the character of Kiyoshi (Kawazu Yūsuke), to underscore some of the deeper questions that it poses.[19]

If we contrast the argument of "Situation and Subject in Postwar Japanese Cinema" with Ōshima's position in "The Road to Freedom," published two years later, the difference in tone is striking. The assertive confidence of the 1963 article has vanished. What has happened during this time? For one thing, Ōshima has not directed another feature film. As he interrogates this hiatus, he again expresses it as a dilemma of active responsibility. This finds expression in two conflicting ideas. On the one hand, he says: "I have to tell the people that we have to do something. I don't know what that something is, but we have to do it."[20] On the other hand, during 1964 and 1965, he finds himself assailed by the idea that he cannot ask others to take responsibility. These are the horns of the dilemma. The second idea took form during his travels to South Korea in 1964, and Vietnam in April, 1965, during a significant escalation of the war. On his account, the trip to Vietnam was especially heartbreaking. Ōshima doesn't note that he saw the effects of imperialism in South East Asia. He doesn't question Japan's role as a staging ground in the Vietnam conflict (i.e., use of Okinawa by the U.S. military). Instead, he says he is assailed by doubt. Perhaps, he thinks, it is futile to believe he ought to do something. Perhaps, contrary to what he believed, people are the perpetual victims of politics. If so, would it be better to not support the illusion that political engagement might bring happiness? Returning to Japan, he finds himself stymied by the impasse of the first idea. Yet, does he really believe this second idea, that people are the perpetual victims of politics? He observes that these two ideas coexist within him, though not peacefully. This, then, is the

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19. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "Questions of the New: Ōshima Nagisa's *Cruel Story of Youth* (1960)," in Phillips, Alastair, and Julian Stringer, eds. *Japanese cinema: texts and contexts* (London: Routledge, 2007), 168-179.

20. Ōshima Nagisa, "The Road to Freedom," 97.

dilemma of political responsibility. Finally, Ōshima does not offer an answer to it, but we find a palpable change of course in his subsequent films.

Premonitions

With the production of *Violence at Noon* (1966), Ōshima becomes interested in criminal characters who act not merely out of poverty (e.g., Masao, in *A Town of Love and Hope*), but rather out of an inexplicable passion to transgress, driven to commit "crimes of conviction".[21] He refers to them as "demons" [*akuma*], and seems especially interested in the logic of premeditation that drives them to transgress, a logic which they themselves do not understand. There is, moreover, a self-reflexive dimension to this interest, in that Ōshima sees himself as a demon of sorts, driven to make films that transgress for reasons he does not fully understand. "In the first place, to make films is a criminal act in this world." (109) From this germ of interest in premeditation, perhaps, Ōshima begins to speak about "premonition" and "films of premonition" [*yokan no eiga*] in April 1967, during the filming of *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide*.[22] In place of the premeditated crime of conviction, carried out by a lone demon, Ōshima proposes a "premonition" as a vision that belongs to a group engaged in making a film. It finds expression at a thematic level in *Japanese Summer*, as the character named Otoko is gripped by a "demonic" premonition of his own death. He senses that somebody seeks to kill him, though he does not understand why. His character moves passively through the story, as if haunted by a looming appointment with destiny. This plays out at an excruciating pace, as Otoko and Nejiko are taken captive by a shadowy terrorist group, who repeatedly threaten to kill Otoko, but are interrupted by the appearance of a *gaijin* sniper — another demon, at large in the city — whose motives are equally unclear. The

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21. Ōshima Nagisa, "The Concept of Demons and the Concept of a Movement," in *Cinema, censorship, and the state*, 108.

22. Ōshima Nagisa, "To the Friends and Collaborators on *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide*," in *Cinema, censorship, and the state*, 128.
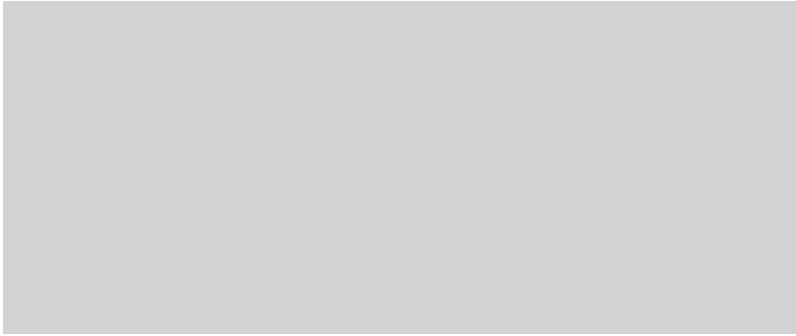
Figure 8.
Japanese Summer: Double Suicide (Sōzōsha, 1967).

promised double suicide is staged in a final shoot-out between police, the sniper, and the would-be terrorists, with Otoko gently ceding to Nejiko's wishes amidst a shower of gunfire. In the last image of the film, his gaze ultimately dissolves to connect with a silhouette of the distant Kokkai-gijidō, seen through clouds of smog beyond the Kōkyo-gaien; that is, an emblem of the postwar state framed by the landscape of imperial power (Figure 8).[23] The implication of these deeply enigmatic closing images would seem to reveal Otoko's premonition as double suicide at the hands of the state. This image is, simultaneously, an echo of historical memory, for the Kōkyo-gaien became an important site of pubulic protest in the early postwar period, and was also known as "People's Plaza" [*Jinmin hiroba*] until the infamous Bloody May Day Incident of 1952. Ōshima describes *Japanese Summer* as a work "far beyond naturalism," which tests the possibility of expressing the logic of premonition in a narrative film.[24] In this sense, premonition appears as an experimental concept. For Ōshima, it begins as a mutual understanding of the past and present, shared by a small group engaged in making a film. In this respect, it is akin to his thinking about cultural movements and independent film productions, operating on the

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23. In pro-filmic space, the point of view appears to be situated in Marunouchi 2-chōme, looking across the south-east corner of the Kōkyo-gaien plaza, towards the front façade of the Kokkai-gijidō.

24. Ōshima Nagisa, "To the Friends and Collaborators on *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide*," 132.

margins of the industrial logic of studio cinema. As he acknowledges, the challenge he and his colleagues must face revolves around not only the expression of their premonition (which is internal to their group), but also how it takes up the audience's concerns.

Ōshima does not indicate directly how premonitions are to find expression in cinematic form, or whether they concern more the logic of production itself. Nevertheless, in his startling critique of Gillo Pontecorvo's film, *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), also published in April of 1967, Ōshima admits ignorance of the circumstances of its production, yet argues as a final objection to the film that it contains no premonitions of the future. Again, later that year in November, *Eiga geijutsu* held a *zadankai* on films of transformation and premonition [*henkaku no eiga to yokan no eiga*]. For his part, Ōshima explains the concept as follows:

> We take a lot of our material from the past and present; however, we don't use it to explain the past or present. We take material from the past and present only when it gives rise to our images of the future. At such times, the material already transcends its significance as material, becoming our images and projecting certain premonitions about the future to those who see the film. Thus, we are now trying to make exclusively premonitory films, and we consider all other films meaningless.[25]

Here, Ōshima proposes a cinema devoted to premonitions, though evidently not science fiction. Images of the past and present are to be treated exclusively as raw material for creating new images that are premonitions of the future. These images are not of the future, but rather anticipate it through films set in an ambiguous present. At the same time, Ōshima indicates that it is a question of taking possession of images of the past and present, to transcend [*koeru*] their original context and become "our images" [*wareware no imēji jitai*]. In contemporary parlance, we might speak of a gesture of appropriation. Ōshima's statement on premonitory films also recalls another, earlier

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25. Ōshima Nagisa, "To the Friends and Collaborators on *Japanese Summer: Double Suicide,*" 128-29.

statement, in his epigraph to the screenplay for *Amakusa Shirō Tokisada*.[26] There, he invokes the relationship between fiction and history, summoning Mori Ōgai's distinction between "History as it is" [*rekishi sono mama*] and "History ignored" [*rekishi banare*]. Whereas Mori apparently expressed a preference for the former, Ōshima coyly invites the reader to decipher the choice animating his screenplay. Arguably, the film is simultaneously faithful to history, an allegory of postwar Japan, and a wish-image or premonition of the future (i.e., that Amakusa Shirō would re-appear, "totally transformed"). In this fashion, Ōshima ultimately sides with "history ignored."

To conclude, I have suggested that Ōshima reached an impasse in his approach to depicting the problems of responsibility and sovereignty. Between 1960 and 1962, his films explored the depiction of these problems, that is, the problem of depicting something that does not yet exist, either by unmasking its virtual form, or by showing the conflicts around its emergence. By 1965, though, he had let go of the argument and terms of "Situation and Subject," and ceased to explore the dynamics of mass movements in his films. From there, it was perhaps one step to the notion of "films of premonition." Somewhat paradoxically, taking this step implies a greater emphasis in his films on the depiction of interior, individual experience, coupled with a shift from mass to group-centered movements. Yet, how should we speak of the temporality of such images of premonition, located somewhere between past and future? And finally, what of politics?

Acknowledgements

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26. Ōshima Nagisa, and Ishidō Toshirō, "Shinario — *Amakusa Shirō Tokisada*," *Eiga Hyōron* (March, 1962): 129.

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5

The Voice of the Dead:
The Image of the State and Postwar Democracy in Oshima Nagisa's The Ceremony (*1971*)

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It was the night of the funeral ceremony of Sakurada Kazuomi, grandfather of protagonist Masuo and patriarch of the Sakurada family, crowned like a monarch throughout pre- and postwar Japanese modern history. At the center of the grand funeral floor, emptied of the crowd of attendees, Masuo lies alone, crouching like a baby sleeping in its mother's womb. Ritsuko, his beloved cousin and sister, enters, clad in a white kimono despite the conventions of the funeral ceremony. She sits beside Masuo and caresses him warmly and affectionately. "Masuo-san, you are so sorry…" She sleeps with Masuo with a deep gentleness she had never shown him before (Figure 1). It is clear that this is a ceremony representing a transition from one generation to another. It is a ceremony disguised as an Imperial succession to the throne that was necessary for the rebirth of the Sakurada family, which

Figure 1.
The Ceremony (Sōzōsha, 1971).

was once manifested in the body of Kazuomi. Even so, was it possible for Masuo and Ritsuko, the children of Japanese postwar democracy, to accomplish this ceremony of the patriarchal system that governed prewar Japanese Imperialism? One question arises: Where was the real body of the king that would symbolize the body politic of the Empire?

The Ceremony (1971) is generally considered a film that tried to encapsulate the history of postwar Japan through the depiction of the wedding and funeral ceremonies of an upper-class traditional family on the southern edge of the Japanese territory. Oshima himself admitted that it was a summation of the vestige of postwar history that was a significant part of his personal life.[1] Five familial ceremonies appear on the timeline of postwar Japanese history, each of which is held around a milestone of the reconfiguration of the Japanese nation-state as a democratic society.

The surname "Sakurada" is derived from the word for cherry blossom, "Sakura," the flower that symbolizes the Japanese nation. The origin of the name clearly demonstrates that the "Sakurada" family represents a miniature model of the modern Japanese nation-state. The Chinese character "Omi 臣," used for the last name of Kazoumi, the protagonist's grandfather and a suzerain of the traditional family, announces that he was a dignified bureaucrat of the state department of the prewar Emperor system. He was accused as a war criminal after World War II but is now given amnesty and returns to his homeland. The protagonist, Masuo 満州男, is an heir of the Sakurada family, and his name also represents his character, in that he was born during the Manchurian Incident, and the colonial state of Manchuria is his second imaginary homeland. The story begins from the moment Masuo and his mother return from Manchuria as residents of the defeated Empire.

The mother and her son attend the funeral ceremony of Masuo's father, who died on the date of the defeat of the Japanese Empire, one year earlier. They sit on the floor of the vast and bleak reception hall of the Sakurada family. On both sides of the floor, the relatives of Sakurada are lined up, all in complicated relations with each other. As if to emphasize the vertical perspective of the composition,

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1. Oshima Nagisa, "Watashi no naka no Nihon to Nihonjin," *Tokyo Shinbun*, January 18, 1971.
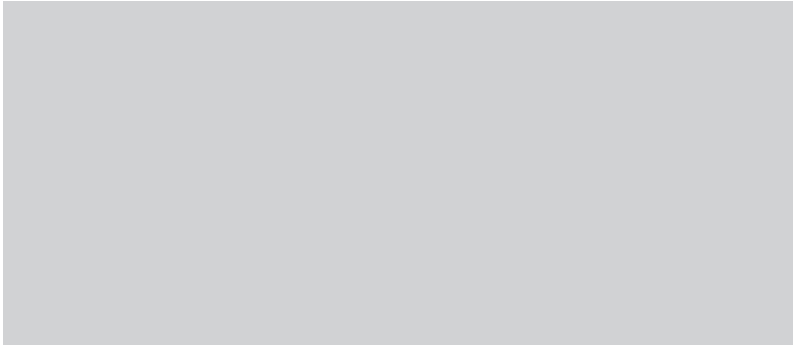
Figure 2.
The Ceremony (Sōzōsha, 1971).

a portrait of Masuo's father is situated at the vanishing point, with Kazuomi and Masuo sitting in front of it (Figure 2). The camera moves toward the portrait deliberately. This triangular image, composed of three generations of the family, the grandfather, the father, and the son, demonstrates clearly that this ceremony is not only a one-year remembrance of the father but also a ceremony of inheritance of suzerainty over the community of the Sakurada family as an allegory for the Imperial state. After the father, who was to take over that position, died, the grandfather Kazuomi revisits the site of the throne as he returns from prison as an accused war criminal. Masuo, sitting besides Kazuomi, is destined to be the successor of the family as a son and grandson of the king. This long, vast reception hall, which appears repeatedly when the wedding and funeral ceremonies are held by the Sakurada family, appears as the body of the community on which Kazuomi resides as a king of the royal family. If the allegorical reading that considers the Sakurada family as a representation of the Japanese Imperial state is correct, the body of King Kazuomi is nothing other than the body of the polity, while the relatives are his arms and legs, constituting organs in several ways.

The symbolic system that represents a state as consisting of a unified community as a dignified image, a king's body that governs a society, developed in the Middle Ages in Europe. It has its roots in the conceptualization of sovereignty in the context of theology and political philosophy. As Claude Lefort explains in discussing Ernst

Kantrovitch's canonical "King's Two Bodies," in this medieval system of representation, the king's body appears as a double, one the mortal, individual body of the king and the other the immortal symbolic body of society.[2] This type of representational model was subverted by the emergence of the modern concepts of individualism and egalitarianism in the eighteenth century.

This transitional movement was what Tocqueville considered as the national administration, the basis of the Democratic Revolution, and it was considered a more vegetative and communal model of the state compared to the medieval state model. Indeed, the tradition that assumes the state as an organic and metaphysical totality did not diminish at all, and we should not forget that as social mobility and corporeal and disciplinary standardization progresses, the traditional system of symbols is reinforced, paradoxically. The historian Victor Koschmann, who specializes in the history of Japanese thought, argues that even though the prewar Japanese Imperial system was constructed according to the model of European monarchy and even though the concept of absolutism was exploited for Marxist social analysis, we cannot easily identify the prewar Japanese Imperial state with the ancient regime in France.[3] However, he proposes that Lefort's analysis of European monarchies is useful for understanding what happened in Japan between the 1940s and the 1960s in the name of a revolution of postwar democracy (戦後民主主義革命). There are several opinions about whether the innovative political upheaval in postwar Japan and the transformation of political institutions by GHQ can be called the Modern Democratic Revolution in the broad sense of political philosophy. It would be more appropriate to research the social and political movement in Japan after World War II as a historically original event that occurred in a specific time and space. However, many intellectuals and the general public both welcomed and recognized the series of social and political reorganizations in the postwar era as a

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2. Claude Lefort, John B. Thompson, *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1986), 302-303.

3. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

postwar democratic revolution.

Nevertheless, we have to ask whether the imaginary process of the national polity (国体), which considers the state to be the king's body crowned by the Emperor, disappeared in postwar Japan. In reality, the GHQ did not decapitate the Showa Emperor in either a symbolic or a historical sense. On the contrary, they endowed upon the Emperor the symbolic position of national unifier. Moreover, the recent study of postwar Japanese history reveals that the Emperor continued to hold political influence as a symbol of national unity even after the postwar reformation.[4] Did the Imperial system that governed the nation throughout modern Japanese history really lose its power after the defeat of World War II?

Compared to the European system of monarchy, the uniqueness of the Japanese Imperial system is that it unified the concept of the Japanese household — *ie* (家) — as a unity of blood relation with the image of king's body as an organic institution. For example, the prominent political philosopher Fujita Shōzō analyzes the structure of the pre-war Japanese emperor system as follows:

> Although Japanese emperor system does not have a unique policy, the ideology which establishes the authenticity of its power, has a systematic mechanism as a dimension of national philosophical structure. It is the 'Theory of the familial State', as it is commonly called. This is a theory which summons people to understand the State as an expansion of the "*ie* = family 家," and in this course, the Emperor is a great householder while the constituents of the State are the emperor's children. There is no need to say that this State theory depends on the patriarchal structure of Japanese society, and it tends to integrate the feudal concept of a patriarchal system into the whole proportion of the State.[5]

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4. Kenneth J. Ruoff, *The People's Emperor: Democracy and the Japanese Monarchy, 1945-1995* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001).

5. Fujita Shōzō, *Fujita Shōzō Chosakushū 1 Tennōsei Kokka no Shihai Genri* (Tōkyō: Misuszu Shobō, 1998). 8-9. (藤田省三、『藤田省三著作集 1 天皇制国家の支配原理』、1998年、みすず書房、8－9頁).

The "theory of the familial State" recognizes the State as a life-form in which one generation is succeeded by another one, and such a historical transition was recognized as the authentic history of the pre-war Imperial system in which one finds a specific metabolism. In this general post-war history, did the post-war Japanese State deprive 'the householder' (i.e., the emperor) of its authority and decapitate the 'king's body' imagined as a model of organism based on "*ie* = family 家"? In *The Ceremony*, some members of the Sakurada family as the "king's body" affiliates with another family, while the other members age and pass away. In this way, does Oshima's film try to demonstrate that 'king's body' as the State survives even after the death of the mortal body of the secular kings? From this point of view, where can we situate the pre-war Imperial system in the post-war Japanese history?

Indeed, most of the reviews of Oshima's *The Ceremony* agreed that the Sakurada family was an allegory for the prewar patriarchal nation-state, as the householder Kazuomi represented the bureaucratic system of the Japanese Imperial state.[6] It is a kind of a hieroglyph that is written to be read, showing its meaning obviously. Even so, there remain several questions about the imagery. If the Sakurada family in *The Ceremony*

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6 .岩崎昶、「作品研究『儀式』」、田久保英夫、「『儀式』の中の〈青春〉」、佐藤忠男、「『儀式』と〈死〉」、長谷部日出雄、「〈世代〉「父を見失ったオイディプスの」世代」、佐藤重臣、「〈女〉おんなは男の斗かいに参加し得る」か」、松田政男、「〈引揚派〉の思想と体験」（すべて『アートシアター　87号』初出）、後藤総一郎、「戦後精神の暗部との対決　・大島渚の新作『儀式』をめぐって〈連続企画①〉」（『映画批評』、1971年4月号、63-71頁）、原正孝「方法的自覚と方法論的無自覚　・大島渚の新作『儀式』をめぐって〈その2〉」（『映画批評』、1971年5月号、24-31頁）、菅孝行「戦後幻想史への総括と挑戦　・大島渚の新作『儀式』をめぐって〈その1〉」（『映画批評』1971年6月号、15-23頁）、田原克拓「批評の根源的立場とは何か　・〈運動〉と思想についての指標―その二・菅孝行批判」（『映画批評』、1971年11月号、37-47頁）、片岡啓治「還るべき家郷との断絶」（『映画芸術』「特集　満州育ちによるニッポン国廃絶の可能性はあったか　大島渚〈儀式〉の提起」、1971年6月号、62-64頁）、中上健次「なぜ党派の会合のように描くか」（『映画芸術』同特集、65-66頁）、別役実「引揚者の視線」『映画芸術』同特集、67-68頁）、市川雅「うしろめたい情念を描き得たか」（『映画評論』「『儀式』特集Ⅰ　大島渚の苦渋と総括」1971年6月号、23-26頁）、馬場一郎「死者を死せりと思うなかれ」（『映画評論』同特集、26-29頁）、斉藤正治「破産してゆく儀式」（『映画評論』同特集、29-32頁）.
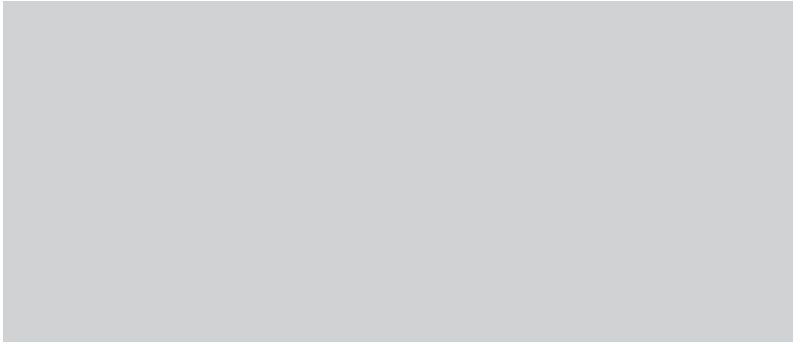
Figure 3.
The Ceremony (Sōzōsha, 1971).

can be identified with the Japanese Imperial system, this suggests that the film hypothesizes that the image of the Imperial system, the king's body, survived even after Showa Tennō's Declaration of Humanity, living a life after death. If we accept this historical perspective, we must reconsider the relationship between the Imperial system and the postwar democracy, two mutually exclusive ideologies.

As the Sakurada family's long and vast reception room is an allegorical image of Kazuomi's body, the counter-image of the generation of postwar democracy might be the white baseball with which Masuo and his cousins Terumichi, Ritsuko, and Tadashi played in their childhood (Figure 3). The image of the baseball appears frequently in *The Ceremony* as a symbol of hope and the ideal of democracy. It also reflects the cheerful memories of Masuo's childhood and those of his father, who was a leading player on his high school baseball team. Sankaku base, a simplified version of baseball, encompasses the younger generation of the Sakurada family in a triangular composition, producing an image of solidarity among them.

In fact, they are already tied firmly by a secret bond in another way. One day, Masuo wakes up early and walks around the large Sakurada residence. He suddenly stops and crouches down to press his ear to the ground. He smiles slightly and closes his eyes as though listening to the voice of a beloved one. After several seconds, he realizes Ritsuko and Tadashi are beside him, crouching and pressing their ears to the ground like him (Figure 4). Terumichi is also there, standing by them.
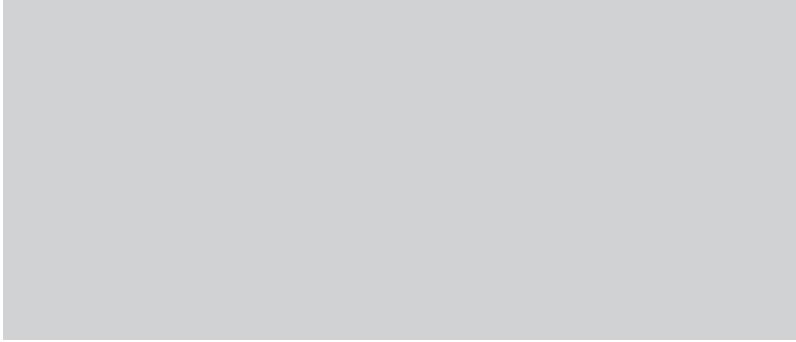
Figure 4.
The Ceremony (Sōzōsha, 1971).

> "What? What?"
> "Masuo, step aside. I'd like to hear, too," Ritsuko says. Masuo makes room for her and she presses her ear to the ground.
> "No, I can hear nothing," Ritsuko says. "I can hear," Masuo replies.
> "Then, what can you hear from the ground?"

Awkwardly, Masuo confesses to them that he and his mother buried his baby brother alive. That is Masuo's original sin, which he took on himself in exchange for his life. The brother buried in a foreign land — his crying voice might not only be his own but also the voice of the people who lost their lives in the previous war, the memory of the nation that has to be shared with all of those who were condemned in the Fifteen Years War. The Japanese postwar democratic state was constructed on a ground of sinful memory. Murder lies at the core of Japanese postwar democracy. If the baseball is a positive image of postwar democracy in this film, the memory of murder buried in the ground is its negative image. Masuo's generation (Oshima's generation) is destined to live in postwar Japan, embracing these two antithetical images.

The bond of the postwar generation, which has to organize the democratic revolution after the defeat of World War II — the baseball as the beautiful and positive image, and the voice of a buried child as the

negative image — might have been shared by many Japanese who lived through postwar history. It is the conscious guilt that they survived in exchange for the sacrifice of many who lost their lives inside and outside of the nation-state. How does Oshima think of the problem of war responsibility and how does it enter into the imagery of *The Ceremony*?

In the beginning of the film, Masuo surveys the members of the Sakurada family sitting in the vast reception hall. As young Masuo says in his monologue, each member of the Sakurada family gathered in this hall appears as an emblematic figure in postwar society, yet in a caricatured way. For young Masuo, every man in the reception hall seems like a war criminal. In his eyes, it seems that every man in this symbolic space that typifies Japanese postwar society and, in other words, the entire Japanese nation who lived through the Fifteen Years War, has to assume the burden of war responsibility. This might have been Oshima's own opinion. According to this logic, the person who has the most profound war responsibility must be the Emperor, who commanded the nation to battle in World War II. However, if the Sakurada family represents the prewar Imperial system, why is Kazuomi (as the Emperor) still able to sit at the top of the hierarchical structure of the symbolic reception hall after the postwar democratic revolution? In medieval Europe, the King's body was decapitated after the democratic revolution. Alternatively, by depicting the survival of the King's body after the revolution, does Oshima display his perspective on postwar history, that the prewar Imperial system had not been removed even after the postwar democratic revolution? Where is the substance of Kazuomi/the Emperor's body still present on the king's throne that must be vacant after the revolution?

There may be no argument that one of the most important theorists to acutely criticize the Imperial system after the defeat in World War II was Maruyama Masao. "Theory and Psychology of Ultra-Nationalism," one of his most famous early works, which he published in *Sekai* (*世界*) in 1946,[7] the critical magazine central to the political and

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7. Maruyama Masao, "Cho-Kokkashugi no Ronri to Shinri," in *[Shinsōban] Gendai Seiji no Shisō to Kodō* (Tōkyō: Mirai-sha, 1964). (丸山眞男 「超国家主義の論理と心理」、『[新装版]現代政治の思想と行動』、未来社、1964年).

theoretical discourse in Japanese mass media, had a great impact not only in academia but also among the broad public. He argued that in the prewar Japanese bureaucracy, the modern subjectivity with "free subjective awareness" was not yet established, and its system of power was a system of indifference structured by degree of proximity to the Emperor as the ultimate value or entity. Presenting a view on Imperialism different from the traditional dogmatic analysis by Marxian theorists, Maruyama's critique of "Ultra-Nationalism" subverted the formula that situated the Emperor as the unique holder of sovereignty in the monarchy.

> In the psychology of ultra-nationalism what, then, is the real status of the Emperor? Inasmuch as he is the center of all authority and the fountainhead of all virtue, occupying the apical position in a hierarchy where each element from bottom to top relies progressively on the values belonging to a superior rung, would we be correct to conclude that he alone enjoyed subjective freedom? A comparison with absolute monarchs in the West will provide our answer.
>
> In the early stages of modern European history, the absolute monarch was freed from the limitations of medieval natural law. No longer subject to the control of any contract, he was able to raise himself from being a mere protector of order (Defensor Pacis) to being its creator (Creator Pacis), and thereby he emerged as the first "free" individual in the modern period.
>
> What happened at the beginning of modern Japanese history (that is, in the Meiji Restoration) was very different indeed. The amalgamation of spiritual authority with political power was regarded not as a return to "the ancient days of the Jimmu Foundation." Although the Emperor was regarded as the embodiment of ultimate value, he was infinitely removed from the possibility of creating values out of nothing. His majesty was heir to the Imperial line unbroken for ages eternal, and he ruled by virtue of the final injunctions of his ancestors. The Imperial Constitution, granted to the people in 1889, was not regarded as having been created by the Emperor himself; rather, it was a

document that "transmitted the immutable law according to which the land has been governed."[8]

The structure of the Imperial Institution that Maruyama analyzes using the neologism "Ultra-Nationalism," even if different in its main statement (negation of "the Emperor" as the sovereign in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, who creates norms *ex nihilo*), resembles basically the tradition of the medieval European monarchy as Koschmann suggests.[9] If Maruyama regards "the emperor's majesty as heir to the Imperial line unbroken for ages" as the source of the Emperor's power, the "immortal body of the King as the base of the State's eternity," the "mortal body" of the Emperor as a king who lives his secular life has only the value of appearance. If that is so, in the postwar history represented by *The Ceremony*, Kazuomi, lord of the Sakurada family, is nothing but an image that transiently embodies the king as an appearance, while "the Imperial Institution as the infinite axis of ordinates = Sakurada family" persists to exist eternally even after severely attacked by the postwar Democratic Revolution. The interpretation of postwar history that presupposes that the Imperial State as a monarchy and the order of postwar democracy coexisted, even though the monarch was a fictitious one, is controversial, although it is not an unprecedented argument. In this sense, *The Ceremony*, seems to demand that the responsibility for the war crimes committed by the Japanese Empire during World War II must be attributed either to the Emperor as a sovereign or to the people who battled for the National Empire. It might be the determinative statement of Oshima and his colleagues in Sōzōsha that they situated at the core of the narrative of *The Ceremony* the suspense following the death of Terumichi, who considered himself a legitimate successor of the Sakurada family, as an allegory for the Imperial Institution.

However, here we find a second problem, a question concerning the subject of postwar democracy: Who wanted to follow this ideology and lead the postwar Japanese nation-state? What hope did the postwar generation receive in exchange for the memories of the dead

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8. Maruyama, *[Shinsōban] Gendai Seiji no Shiso to Kodo*, 26-27.

9. Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan,* 28-29.

who lost their lives in World War II? It seems logically inconsistent, but the voice that Masuo wanted to hear by pressing his ear to the ground is not only the negative symbol of the collective memories of the wartime dead but also the positive signal of the hope of democracy, the nation-state reconstructed on the sacrifice of the lost lives: the mourning for the sacrifice of the ambitions of the Japanese Empire, and the dream of constructing a postwar democratic state. Separated between these two directions, we find the postwar generation that included Masuo, Terumichi, Ritsuko, Tadashi, and Oshima himself. Where were they going in Japanese postwar history? Were they headed toward a democratic revolution after World War II, and the Imperial system that survived after the defeat? Does this antinomy find its resolution in the suicide of Terumichi, the legitimate successor of the Sakurada Family? In other words, was this the means by which Masuo's generation, the children of postwar democracy could attain the hope and ideal of democratic revolution?

Considering the historical perspective of Oshima in 1971, the year *The Ceremony* was made, the answer to these questions would be that they could not attain their hopes and ideals. His perspective is far from the postwar historical view that stood for the democratic revolution. It is demonstrated most clearly in the last shot of the film, in the antithetical meaning of the image of a white baseball that Masuo grasps tightly. It is undeniable that the white baseball is an ideal figure representing the hope of postwar democracy, and Masuo's generation could achieve this ideal through the formation of a triangular base. However, it represents only the positive dimension of their bond. There is another image of the secret bond between them, the memory of a brother buried while still breathing. The ideal image of postwar democracy always accompanies the image of murder. These two images are two sides of the same coin. Is *The Ceremony* itself made as a ceremony to mourn the dead from throughout modern Japanese history? The answer cannot be answered, but the film is attentive at least to the historical fact that there lie innumerable dead bodies underneath the ideology of the postwar structure. It also demonstrates that postwar democracy performed its ideology as a fiction, while it maintained the Imperial system by not accusing the Emperor of war crimes. From this viewpoint, the Japanese

postwar democratic revolution appears as nothing but a farce destined to fail.

Struggles against established power occurred many times in postwar history; whether it was the history of a defeat after another defeat or the unsuccessful project of the popular front. This question defined not only postwar history but also half of Oshima's life. Oshima's answer is the film *The Ceremony*. He displays clearly that postwar democracy survived by making itself complicit with the Imperial system, with the King's body at the top, and thus declared the end of a revolution for the people, by the people.

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