

Technique of a Young Lion: Oshima Nagisa and Iconoclastic Style

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Abstract: At the same time as Jean Luc Godard led the French New Wave, Japan also experienced a cinematic new wave, led by Oshima Nagisa. Godard was famous for breaking the rules of accepted cinema with unusual editing, framing, and story ideas, as well as inserting progressive political ideas into his films. However, at the same time as Godard, the young Japanese filmmaker Oshima Nagisa was doing the exact same thing, but both his politics and his technical experiments were even more extreme. This essay will demonstrate this by providing close analyses of scenes from various Oshima films, and examining the unusual narrative choices he made to realize his alternative vision of cinematic form. Of especial interest is how, unlike the older Japanese filmmaker, Ozu Yasujiro, Godard did not create a single new approach to film making, but used radically different approaches in different films, especially early in his career.

Keyword: Nagisa Oshima, Japanese New Wave, subversive style

Like his contemporaneous French New-Wave peers Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, before Nagisa Oshima wrote and directed his own movies he penned numerous film reviews and critiques in which he made clear what he believed movies should be and do. In hindsight, his comments in a 1956 review of a film by Nakahiro Ko “Is it a Breakthrough? (The Modernists of Japanese Film)” read like a personal manifesto: “Quick speeches, dynamic action. Violent changes of scene, extreme ellipses. Active heroes, ultramodern settings, the establishment of events. Dispassionate depictions sustained by a richly modern spirit that unites all of these elements” (Oshima 27). In addition to these formal elements, Oshima praises Ko’s ability to convey ideas and messages rather than merely tell stories. “In filming ‘things’ in particular, [he] was at his best, using his most powerful weapon, the sharply critical spirit that views people as objects” (Oshima 27). In other words, the characters were not there to enact stories for the viewer’s pleasure, but to be used as tools to generate thoughts in their minds. Noel Burch puts this bluntly, asserting that for Oshima, there is simply a “refusal to appeal to the collective consciousness of the audience; refusal to echo the established forms in any way; [and] insistence upon establishing the subjective individuality of the author.” As Oshima himself puts it, movies are not for escapism or pleasure, and it is wrong to think “‘the picture exists to tell a story’ and ‘must reject ...traditional methods... naturalism, melodrama, etc.’”(Oshima qtd. in Burch 327). And in all Oshima’s films, he ruthlessly subordinates standard cinematic forms and technique to the theme and pitch of each project.

This makes it particularly challenging to write about Oshima, because his style changes radically from film to film. As the West’s leading Japanese film scholar, Donald Richie, puts it in a British documentary on Oshima, *Nagisa Oshima: The Man Who Left His Soul on Film*:

Kurosawa has a reputation that is all of a piece...Oshima is different...he is an auteur, obviously, but you can’t say what he’s an auteur *of*, and one of the reasons is that he keeps changing his vantage point all the time. I can’t think of another director where we have this protean number of approaches. Each film looks

rather different...critics who write about him have their job cut out for them. It's a problem.

This paper will focus on Oshima's cinematic technique, and is a companion piece to another paper I published which focused on Oshima's style. Because of the limits of space, we will only look at a few of his films, two early ones and one from two decades later. The central goal is to show how he regularly, and as a matter of course, synthesized and subjugated his technical approach to the needs of each film, for, "Oshima had discovered the possibility of a multiple technique, and the appropriateness of one form for each subject, a form born of the context of the film. He therefore refused to impose a single style on all of his films as most great Japanese directors did" (Tessier 75). First, we must briefly look at *why* he would do this.

Having come to adulthood in the radically altered post-war environment, Oshima chafed miserably under the studio system, as had the other directors in Japan's New Wave. The young Oshima wrote an article praising the Japanese New Wave pioneer Imamura, with whom he shares many views. Imamura had worked as a production assistant to the great Yasujiro Ozu, yet had said, "I wouldn't just say I wasn't influenced by Ozu. I would say I didn't want to be influenced by him." As Desser points out, "This anxiety of influence has clearly Oedipal overtones as the younger poets seek to rebel-kill the older poets"(44).

That Oshima shared a "kill and replace" orientation is manifest in his writings in which he explicitly expressed a determination to reject the traditions of the established studio directors. Writing in 1960 he says, "The only way to change the film is to crush the established stereotyped images contained in each shot," and eschew merely "explain[ing] the story" (Oshima 51). For Oshima this, was the ultimate goal, to challenge and subvert the system and violently reinvent cinema, and, simultaneously, its social purpose:

The modernists are at a crossroads. One road would lead to gradual degeneration of their innovations to mere entertainments, bringing about their surrender to the pre-modern elements that are subconsciously included in the content of their films...another road requires them to exert all of their critical spirit and powers of expression in a struggle...against the pre-modern elements of Japanese society. (Oshima 35)

As a soldier bent on exterminating the old hegemonic patterns, it was necessary for one to remain constantly vigilant against allowing what Burch called the "Institutional Modes of Representation" from taking over one's own work, or, through repeated use, allowing one's own technical devices to become standardized and co-opted by the Institution. To combat this, Oshima did not just push the envelope, but was constantly reinventing his own approach and breaking the expected paradigms of commercial filmmaking, or, as playwright Roger Pulvers puts it, Oshima insisted on remaining "Dogmatically ahead of his time" (Joyce).

The degree to which Oshima was successful in his constant refiguring of the medium, even while working within the studio system, has generally been recognized in film criticism and by the academic community. To quote one example, as Peter Lehman points out, "if one were to show *Burial of the Sun* and *Night and Fog in Japan* without credits, it is almost inconceivable that the viewer would guess that the same filmmaker made both films, much less in direct succession in the same year [1960]" (qtd. in Turim 14).

During that time Oshima and much of Japan were profoundly shaken by Japan's refusal/inability to set its own course after the ending of the American occupation. To the leftist Oshima, it seemed that society could have no future left to it other than to continue to fragment and disintegrate under the inevitable forces of a capitalist

economic system. The liberating potential of public action had been revealed as a phantom.

As a result, the characters in Oshima's films are adrift in the meaningless new post-modern environment which he exposes to us through his strikingly original montage and mis-en-scene, which, as Godard tells us, should not be thought of separately: "What one seeks to foresee in space the other seeks in time" (Godard 1972). All that is left for Oshima's characters to do is reject the existing system at every level: moral, sexual, and economic. As a result, in Oshima's films we see the unmoored and disconnected younger generation floating through dystopian urban milieu, unable to find legitimate traditional values with which to anchor themselves into meaningful social roles; they merely survive day to day by satisfying their basic physical desires and cravings in a complete rejection of social mores, a trend concurrently seen in the USA and parts of Europe. As the sociologist Kenneth Burke explained years earlier, "A compensatory increase in sensuality generally accompanies a loss of faith in the reasonableness of a society's purposes. People try to combat alienation by *immediacy*, such as the senses alone provide" (218). This, in a nutshell, is what motivates much of the action in Oshima's films.

In the following analysis of three of Oshima's films we will see how these various factors and philosophies play out in actual practice. The first two, *Cruel Story of Youth and Burial of the Sun* were made in the 1960s, and the intensifying of both the thematic and technical elements can be seen to progress in a linear, almost exponential, fashion. The third film we will examine, *Realm of the Senses*, was made in 1976, and although stylistically removed from his experimental cinema, continues on the same trajectory of radical filmmaking, breaking the accepted paradigms of the art to force the audience to re-think social reality by being forced to "re-see" it on the screen.

1960: Oshima's Watershed Year

The first film Oshima wrote and directed, *A City of Love and Hope*, had little of either, nor did it have much support from the studio. Although a box office flop, since, "The critics liked Oshima's first film...eventually Shochiku [his studio] had to give him another chance" (Buehrer 152). He was given a very limited budget to film his second screenplay, *Cruel Story of Youth*, and although it is technically more conservative than his later works would be, it was still innovative in a number of ways, and to the surprise of the studio, was a box-office hit. As the story is still the main organizing principle of this film, I will summarize it at some length.

The film opens with our Female protagonist (coded as a more or less "good girl" high school student) Makoto asking men in a Tokyo street for a ride home. She gets a ride, but when she gets out the driver attempts to assault her. The male lead, Kiyoshi, an older student, appears from nowhere, viciously slaps the man around, threatens to take him to the police, and then lets him go—but not before the would-be attacker, cowed and embarrassed, gives him some hush-money. Naturally Makoto is grateful for being rescued, and the two decide to meet later for a date. On this date they sneak into a closed coastal lumber mill and go out onto a huge floating log raft where Kiyoshi gets fresh, is rebuffed, and then becomes violent. Eventually he pushes Makoto, who can't swim, into the water and refuses to let her hold onto the edge until she is exhausted. He rapes her and then takes a swim as she lays, covered, on the logs. When he comes back, *she* apologizes, and eventually they become a couple. Here, under the guise of teen-romance, we see the dark side of sexual norms explicitly played out: gender politics based on exploitation, violence, and subjugation, a tendency not only in Oshima's films, but

as part of a general movement popular in Japanese cinema at this time: “Seen in the *Taiyo-zoku* (‘sun-tribe’) films...misogynistic themes and anxieties were allayed through physical violence, rape, coerced abortion, and violent death (Standish 221).

Makoto soon leaves her family and moves in with Kiyoshi, and for money to live on they re-enact the events of their first meeting: she gets rides with older men, encourages them to get aggressive, and then Kiyoshi appears, beats them up, and takes their money. Eventually she becomes pregnant, and although she would like to keep his baby, Kiyoshi makes her get an abortion. After the abortion, Kiyoshi seems to soften towards Makoto. The future begins to hold some promise, but before they change their ways, they are finally arrested for their extortion game. Although soon released from jail, the entire situation embitters Kiyoshi, and he decides there is no chance for human happiness. Deciding people can only cause each other pain, the two break up. Lest this final note not be pessimistic enough for the film, the same day Kiyoshi is brutally beaten to death by some thugs. For her part, Makoto, in a daze after the breakup, accepts a ride from an apparently helpful stranger. When she realizes he has dark intentions towards her, she tries to leap from the car but catches her high-heel on the door and is dragged to her death on the city street. The final shot shows their corpses juxtaposed in split-screen.

The cinematic technique used in the film is somewhat non-standard. Oshima favors long-takes with a hand-held camera with a wide-angle lens rather than typical shot-reverse-shot editing. The effect could be disorienting.

The combination of the use of Cinemascope and a telephoto lens in cramped interior scenes isolates the characters physically from their surroundings. This claustrophobic feeling is further accentuated by the collapse of distance between foreground and background, the frequent absence of establishing shots, and Oshima’s apparent lack of interest in constructing a coherent cinematic space or environment which would give a historical depth to fictional characters on screen. (Yoshimoto 172)

As an example of this, in one extended shot, Makoto is having second thoughts about going home with an older man after having a fight with Kiyoshi. She calls him, but the line is busy. The fragmented image, sustained in close-up, consists of her chin in the right side of the frame, and in the far left side a portion of the earpiece of the receiver (which, in a drunken daze, she is holding in front of her) from which we hear an endlessly droning busy signal. (Kiyoshi, by the way, is simultaneously performing “stud service” for an older woman to get the money to finance Makoto’s abortion.)

In perhaps the boldest single shot of the movie (almost five-minutes long) we see only the shadowed face of Kiyoshi sitting alone in a room beside the still unconscious Makoto following her abortion. He reflects over their situation and listens to the off-screen musings about the lost dreams of youth between the doctor and Makoto’s older sister, who turn out to be ex-lovers, coming from the next room.

In this monologue a major theme of Oshima’s work is explicated at some length. “We vented our rage against society by demonstrating, but what we did got as twisted as the world. We hurt each other, parted, and had to admit defeat. We had no choice. But your sister and her kind, by contrast, indulge every desire [in order to] express their rage against the world. Maybe they’ll win!” Overhearing this, Kiyoshi’s angry response, perhaps the crystallized attitude of alienated youth everywhere, is “We have no dreams! So we won’t ever end up like you.”

The doctor and sister leave, but the shot continues, silent, for another one-minute forty-seconds, as Kiyoshi takes out and eats an apple. Both the telephone-shot mentioned earlier and especially this one are “stasis shots” of the type that Paul Schraeder describes in the films of Ozu—images intentionally frozen to empty out their own meaning and allow the weight of the previous information to settle and register. However, whereas Ozu’s long, static shots are to allow the viewer to achieve a Zen-like acceptance of the difficult periods in a normal life (the natural fragmentation of the nuclear family when a child marries, for example), Oshima wants us to acknowledge the shallowness, fraud, and hypocrisy that has become normative in contemporary social interaction—stripping away typical cinematic subterfuge to force us to come to grips with the world as it really is. As Buehrer points out, “Many of these techniques, while ruining that perfectly realized technical film image viewers had come to expect of a polished theatrical release, instead heightened the emotional realism of the story” (153).

To the surprise of the studio, *Cruel Story of Youth* made a lot of money and was praised by critics. This gave Oshima more power, and he immediately began a new film which was more disturbing in content, less traditional in story form, and far more radical in technical execution. Also shot and released in 1960, *The Burial of the Sun* is shot completely on location in a Tokyo slum, where “men bare their fangs and fight like wolves,” and “the story unfolds like a scroll painting of hell” (Sato 217). The characters and their roles are over-determined symbols marking “the community,” to the extent that it can be called one, as a microcosm of a shattered and disintegrating Post-War Japanese society. (The sun alluded to in the title is Japan’s national symbol.) In this atmosphere, where all the characters go by a code in which only self-interest is respected, any act of charity is a threat to the reigning social order.

In addition to numerous minor figures, there are three main figures around which the action revolves as the characters vie with each other and the environment for survival. The first, Taihei, is a stylish pimp and gang leader, whose follower’s main job is to watch over his harem of slave/prostitutes. The second main character is his sometimes girlfriend, Hanako. By night she is a prostitute, but by day is an independent entrepreneur who uses the homeless to round up dockworkers from whom she buys blood which she then sells to a cosmetics company. The third, Takachi, is one of three teens who joins Taihei’s gang at the beginning of the film, and is the closest thing to a decent character in the movie, and thus serves as something like a protagonist.

Regarding technical execution, the film is shot by a strange, roving camera that wanders restlessly through the cramped, confining rooms and landscape. There are few long-shots, or even basic establishing shots: “The wide-screen framing maintains an aesthetic distance. Not only does no rapid editing excite the pacing, but the emphasis on composition becomes in itself a signifier...the imagery is visually lush without being romantic or participatory”(Turim 51).

Hanako, the only central female character, works as a sort of organizing principle, connecting the kaleidoscopic activities of the various constellations of characters. As a sort of gutter femme-fatale, she is perhaps meant to be luridly emblematic of the moral bankruptcy of this post-modern, post-apocalyptic hell-hole microcosm of capitalism. “As representation, she is both an image to be exploited by the film and a self-conscious critique of female positioning in Japanese society; profligate, her complete lack of ethics is contextualized not simply as a “fault” of her gender but as a rebellion against her treatment” (Turim 48). In the ultimate move of rebellion

against traditional roles, she marks all of her alliances with sexual favors. Yet instead of forming a bond, this frequently marks her partners for death.

Takachi, the new young member of the gang, is her opposite. Meekly following his friend into the Taihei “syndicate,” he soon tries to escape his new life of crime, is caught, brought back, and beaten. Having feelings of guilt, generosity, and sympathy, as well as being marked as a bearer of Japanese heritage through his knowledge of traditional songs, Takachi is a misfit and transgressor of codes in this chaotic world where the normal moral order is reversed. When he attempts to do good or help others in this wasteland/slum, the recipients of his kind impulses generally die violently.

For example, when Takachi tries to help another gang member, Yasu, escape the rest of the gang before he is punished for various transgressions, Yasu winds up with a knife in his back. When he falls, the camera height is reduced to near ground level so that his prostrated body is perfectly framed within the widescreen rectangle. Shirtless and face down, he spasms and shakes for a prolonged period. A single light hits him and sets off his gleaming, muscled body which ripples and undulates against the dark earth in death throes which are clearly marked as erotic, as though to point out the inevitable uselessness of the sexual act. Sex and violence, like splashes of color can in a barren environment, bring a flash of relief or a moment of respite, but in the end the characters cannot escape the empty rounds of useless and arbitrary activity that make up their lives.

There are two points in the movie where the mild-mannered new gang member, Takachi, seems on the verge of making some kind of escape. Both are cued through a moment of visual poetry in which the film’s style seems to hold out some promise of release or a solution, although inevitably both prove illusory. In the first Takachi and another gang member are cutting across a huge desolate field in the middle of the slum. Takachi suggests that they run away together, but the other boy refuses, pushes Takachi down, pulls a knife, and then continues on alone. Takachi jumps to his feet and attacks him.

Rather surprisingly, considering the style of the film to this point, the camera cuts *back* to an extreme long shot of the action, so far back that we can barely determine which boy is which. Then the camera begins slowly moving laterally, circumscribing the perimeter of a great circle in which the struggling figures are the epicenter. Although it does not help us to discern the distant action, the effect is that the distant buildings on the far side of the field necessarily begin sliding across the screen, imbuing the mis-en-scene with a graceful distant movement against the constant fore and mid grounds—exactly opposite of the claustrophobic style employed up until this point. The sudden presentation of motionless expanses of open space is an odd relief from the constant tension of closeness that has comprised the film’s mis-en-scene up until now, seeming to offer the possibility of peace, change, and an escape from the chaos in which the characters live. However, in this film the moment cannot last long, and when Takachi kills the other boy, he has no choice but to return to the moral wasteland of his gang’s hangout.

The second such instance occurs soon after this one. Not knowing where to turn, Takachi goes and tells the cynical prostitute Hanako what has happened. Walking as they talk, the two of them stumble upon a high school girl standing vacant-eyed in a cemetery. She is standing at the spot where Takachi had much earlier beaten and robbed her boyfriend, after which another boy had raped her while Takachi, shocked, waited in the distance. They learned later that the boyfriend had committed suicide out of shame over the incident. In one of the only

acts of unselfish kindness in the movie, the two attempt to comfort her, and together they go to a city-scape overlook where the three stand on a high ledge and meditatively look out over the desolate landscape at the sinking sun.

In this scene we start from a position looking at them from behind, and then the camera cranes gracefully towards the back of each one in turn (three times), sweeping past the character like a bird taking flight, with the camera executing a perfectly timed pan towards the character as it passes, almost caressingly, converting the back-of-the-head-shot into a momentary profile. The moment achieves an unwonted poignancy and seems to briefly suggest enlightenment, solidarity, and the possibility of escape.

The mood is almost instantly shattered, however, as the girl suddenly snaps out of her lethargy, and turns on Takachi apparently just then recalling he is the root of all her misfortune. She comes at him with a knife, and is peremptorily shoved over the high ledge upon which they were standing, presumably to her death, by Hanako, who then runs off with Takachi to have sex by a burned-out building, starting the train of actions that will destroy him and lead to the incendiary (literally and politically) chaos that constitutes the final portions of the film.

Throughout *The Burial of the Sun*, the connection of Oshima's style, themes, and content are readily apparent. The dismemberment, decay, and degradation of society is manifested through characters' piggish disregard for common good, values or even simple humanity as they engage in animalistic sexuality and violence. The narrative line of the story reinforces this through its fragmentation, discontinuity and aimlessness; and finally, the filmic technique is characterized by jumbled mis-en-scene and camera movements, startling, often incongruous cuts, and garish, rioting colors. In the end, the complete absence of both civic virtue and libidinal-constraints devours the characters, just, apparently, as it will eventually devour the morally bankrupt society they seem to represent.

Into New Realms

Following these two films, Oshima's style and reputation continued to morph and grow. *Violence at Noon* reversed his "long take" approach with Eisensteinian rapid-fire, discontinuous editing, combined with highly disturbing content (focused on a serial rapist and his victims) and a semi-opaque story line. With *Shinjuku Thief* and *Death by Hanging* (both 1968), it seemed that he had exhausted the directions he had mapped out in his explorations of the limits of cinema, and with the scathing *Boy* (1969) perhaps Oshima agreed with many of his critics that he had chastised the degeneracy of Japan enough. Certainly, he seemed to have lost steam and his output fell sharply as he chose to spend more and more of his time on his popular television talk-shows, which continued sporadically nearly until his death in 2013.

In 1976, however, the French producer Anatole Dauman offered to finance the production of a film in which Oshima would have absolute free rein over content, including graphic sexual displays, leading to several firsts in Japanese film, in both financing and content.

In terms of the film industry, Oshima also saw the method of making

In the Realm as ushering in a new system of filmmaking. By seeking foreign

backing, importing film stock, shooting the film in Japan using Japanese actors and technicians and

sending the undeveloped film abroad for processing and editing, Oshima...freed directors from the rigidities of the studio system and the constraints of censorship laws at one stroke. (Isolde 222)

The result is the stunning and unprecedented *In the Realm of the Senses*. That this movie was, and is, wildly controversial in Japan may surprise those with some knowledge of the Japanese film industry. Ironically, although Japan has a huge pornography industry, with whole genres devoted to various kinds of misogyny and sadism, showing even pubic hair, much less the sexual organs themselves, was and is illegal. Oshima broke these rules. As a result,

In the Realm should be considered on two levels; first, as a direct challenge to the censorship laws in Japan; and second, as a film in its own right. In the legal sense Oshima challenged not only the infamous Japanese ‘obscenity’ law No.175, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the symbolic structures of Japanese patriarchal authority. By depicting the male organ, Oshima risked disrupting the correlation between the penis and its symbolic meaning as phallus. (Standish 222)

Western pornography is, in essence, a celebration of the phallus, which should be as large as possible, and *must* be erect and ready to perform. The erect Japanese penis is also a surprisingly common traditional symbol in Japanese art and folk-culture, and is similarly regarded—there is even a popular public festival built around it (Kawasaki’s Kanamara Matsuri, held the first Sunday of April each year). Japanese pornography, however, is extremely big business, but is very different from Western porn, and has much stricter rules on what can be shown. Oshima broke these rules, however, and also made what must rank as one of the darkest, most un-erotic porn movies ever made.

In filming *Realm of the Senses*, Oshima abandoned his trend of exploring technical innovations along with the widescreen format most of his films had been shot in. He would not need stylistic devices to be radical, because the un-augmented images on the screen would be more radical, disturbing, and revolutionary than anything he could have done with technique alone. The editing approach to the material, far from being fragmented, remains unflinchingly focused on spectacle. If his previous experiments had been inspired by exhortations against stylistic beauty such as “whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog, has got to be given up”(Brecht, 38), the material that he was now filming would make such concerns unnecessary. Although the spectacle early in *Realm of the Senses* could give pleasure, as the film progresses, tensions are slowly introduced which not only replace the pleasure with anxiety, but culminate in a scene which is perhaps the single most graphically un-pleasurable in the entire canon of cinema. Interestingly, this anxiety and un-pleasure would not be increased by non-traditional techniques, but *reduced* by anything other than “transparent” representation.

The history of screen eroticism is, in some ways, the history of cinematic experimentation. For as long as sex could not be shown on-screen, a whole host of creative methods has been employed to suggest or imply it, with varying degrees of subtlety. The dissolve, slow fade, cut away, the symbolic substitutions of an Ernst Lubitsch, or the fake gimcrackery of soft-core pornography (“pinku” in Japan), trick or flash editing, canted angles, off-screen suggestion, mirrors, metonymy, expressive facial expressions, or wild combinations of these and other techniques have been used since the earliest films to suggest, with varying degrees of forcefulness, what could not be shown. By contrast, hard-core pornography is unquestionably the least experimental of all film genres. As

Linda Williams has explained at great length, the single most important thing in pornographic film technique is to convince your audience—*prove* to your audience—you are not faking anything.

The narrative trajectory of *Realm of the Senses* is simple. A girl is working as a servant in a brothel in order to pay off her lover's debts. She begins a passionate affair with the "master" that becomes so sexually obsessive that it devours them both. Although seemingly thematically and temporally removed from the issues of post-war anomie that animates Oshima's previous films (this movie is a period piece), the story is political in the same manner as the three already discussed. Significantly, the movie takes place in the year 1936, and the aborted "ni-ni-roku" coup d'état serves as a backdrop to the action. Ni-ni-roku consisted of 1,400 officers taking over Tokyo, bloodlessly except for the assassination of a number of key left-wing government figures. It is universally agreed to be the key event in Japan's extreme rightward turn, eventually leading up to the Pacific War.

The male lead of the film, Kichizo, wears the mustache and Side-burns emblematic of a military officer, but like Yoko Ono and John Lennon some thirty years later, he chooses to "make love, not war." In the beginning of the film he is the active figure, clearly powerful, sexual, running the family business and easily controlling the women around him, including Sada (the female lead). Throughout the course of the film, however, Sada takes complete control of him and his phallic power, first metaphorically, and, finally, literally.

As in *The Burial of the Sun*, where the moral order is both polarized and inverted, in *Realm* the process of the couple's total immersion (and eventual immolation) into the world of their own sexuality reverses the very fundamentals of civilized life and even survival. The couple soon stops eating, complaining that "food makes us feel heavy and tired," and loses track of day and night. They stop wearing clothes, have sex regardless of who is watching, even outside. This does not so much break the barrier between themselves and animals, but flaunts their rejection of the human needs of food, clothing, and shelter as they completely surrender to their sexual desire. Eventually, to even have an appetite, Kichizo's food must touch Sada's sex, and finally, in a symbol of his growing dependence, must literally come out of her.

Her growing dominance reflects a reversal of Japan's recognized patriarchal sexual roles. "At different moments, Sada threatens Kichi with a pair of scissors, makes love with a knife in her mouth, and tells him she would like to cut off his penis to hold it always inside her. The constant demand for sexual arousal has become hers, the woman's, and coupled with images of women's aggression and men's passivity, it becomes the driving force of the narrative"(Turim135). Finally, she takes complete control of the phallus by commanding Kichi to have sex with an elderly geisha. This old woman is the last of the brothel's staff, the rest having already been repulsed by the couple's eschewal of both scruples and hygiene. When Sada leaves the room, Kichizo must "stay at home" and, perversely, see that it isn't cleaned. When he goes out and the staff cleans the room, she is furious and threatens him with a knife. He placates her by explaining he went to have his hair cut: "You told me your desire was greater when I shaved my neck." In yet another reversal of the perceived natural order, he is beautifying himself to be more attractive for her.

Finally, when there is no other way for either her dominance over him or their subversion/inversion/perversion to continue to expand, she takes the drama to the ultimate conceivable step. She kills him, both as the final possible act of control, and also in order to give him the chance to perform for her the final and greatest

expression of his love and submission: granting her wish for complete mastery over him and his manhood, as represented by the phallus. After she strangles him, we watch, in grisly unbroken close-up, as she saws off his penis.

Although Oshima would continue to make films—even daringly subversive ones like *Merry Christmas*, *Mr. Lawrence* and *Taboo—In the Realm of the Senses* marks the end of his trajectory as an angry young man determined to politicize the national audience by challenging every conception of cinema they held while simultaneously violating cherished cultural and social principles—not merely to grab headlines and be outrageous for his own aggrandizement, but to force Japanese society to confront its facile complacency and failure to meet its own liberal and intellectual promise.

These examples are only taken from a sampling of Oshima’s films, but they are representational, and through them we can see that he, Used cinema as a tool, a weapon in a cultural struggle... [which] while it did not necessarily define its concrete ends, may be said to have been concerned with creating a film content and form capable of revealing the contradictions within Japanese society and with isolating the culture’s increasingly materialist values and its imperialist alliances. (Desser 3-4)

Mavericks are best judged by their own standards, and according to the achievement (or lack thereof) of their own goals. At the beginning of this article, we looked at something Oshima wrote before he started making films to see what qualities he praised in others and would himself pursue. From this, too, we can fashion a yardstick to judge to what degree he himself was successful in his own career. The directors he lauds “rebelled against the traditional forms, injecting their films with the new forms that arose from their own commitment to their own perceptions. Moreover, to make their work easier, they dared to ignore the old, premodern side of their audience” (Oshima 29). Making such claims as a young man, a mere critic, is very easy. However, even in this relatively brief sampling of his work, we can see that he followed his own precepts without stint, pushing every principle to the limit and even shattering them to make new, original ones. There have been, and are today, iconoclastic Japanese film-makers who are rejecting norms and shocking audiences, but not with anything like Oshima’s deep knowledge, creativity, or political wherewithal. The Japanese studio system itself is moribund, making it unlikely it will ever again be able to harbor within itself such a rebellious, contrary, and iconoclastic force—to the great regret of cinephiles everywhere.

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若獅子のテクニック：大島渚とイコノクラスティック・スタイル

Allen Walzem

抄録：ジャン・リュック・ゴダールがフランスのヌーヴェルヴァーグを牽引したのと同じ頃、日本でも大島渚を筆頭に映画のヌーヴェルヴァーグが起こった。ゴダールは、一風変わった編集、フレーミング、ストーリーのアイデアで、一般的な映画のルールを破り、進歩的な政治的思想を映画に挿入したことで有名である。しかし、ゴダールと同じ頃、日本の若手映画監督、大島渚もまったく同じことをしていたが、彼の政治性と技術的実験はさらに過激だった。このエッセイでは、様々な大島映画のシーンを詳細に分析し、彼の映画形式に対するオルタナティブなヴィジョンを実現するために行った、一風変わった物語の選択を検証することで、このことを実証する。特に興味深いのは、日本の先輩である小津安二郎とは異なり、ゴダールが映画製作においてひとつの新しいアプローチを生み出したのではなく、特にキャリアの初期において、さまざまな映画で根本的に異なるアプローチを用いたことである。

キーワード：大島渚、日本のニューウェーブ、^{きせいがいねん}既成概念を壊すスタイル