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Dear Readers,

This special issue of *Silva Iaponicarum* 日林 contains articles received from Polish researchers focusing on Japanese film and cinema studies. We are delighted and honoured to present the most recent works of both the established representatives of Polish academics of the Japanese film studies together with contributions from younger generation of scholars, who are at the beginning of their academic careers.

The special film fascicle is very diverse in terms of topics. This is why in the process of the compilation we decided to introduce the alphabetical order of papers (by the authors' names) in the fascicle.

We would like to thank the contributors for their readiness to publish articles in this special fascicle of our quarterly and for their effective co-operation in the fascicle compilation process.

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読者のみなさまへ

私たちの季刊誌「*Silva laponicarum* 日林」の特別号にはポーランド人日本映画研究者の論文を集めました。長年日本映画研究の分野で活躍を続けている研究者、そしてより若い世代の映画専門家による最新の研究成果をご紹介できるのは、私たちにとって大きな喜びです。

日本映画の特別号とは申しましたが、いつもながら、私たちの季刊誌のテーマは多彩です。そこで、応募論文を整理して本号を編集する過程で、掲載の順番は、筆者の姓のアルファベット順にすることといたしました。それ以外に、適当な解決が見つからなかったからです。

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Generic Borderlands: Notes on the Intertextual Dialogue between Samurai Film and Western

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the flow of threads and motifs between two major epic genres of the American and Japanese cinema – western and jidai-geki. The early Japanese chambara films made in the silent era transposed the elements of plots of the American “horse operas” with Tom Mix or “Bronco Billy” Anderson. Impact of western on jidai-geki became even more significant after the World War II. Starting from 1960s the relation between the two genres turned into a mutual, intercultural dialogue. Akira Kurosawa's films were remade into successful and influential westerns (*Seven Samurai*, 1954 was adapted as John Sturges' *Magnificent Seven*, 1960; *Yojimbo*, 1961 as Sergio Leone's *Fistful of Dollars*, 1964). After presenting a brief historical overview of the bilateral exchange of inspiration between genres from the both sides of the Pacific Ocean, the author of the article focuses on structural analogies between *Seven Samurai* and John Ford's classic western *My Darling Clementine*. A comparative analysis leads to the conclusion that the artistic excellence as well as semantic abundance of Kurosawa's masterpiece arises from the director's creativity in adapting the Hollywood generic models and his ability to saturate them with profound philosophical meaning rooted in the Japanese tradition.

KEYWORDS: film genre, samurai film, American western, Akira Kurosawa, John Ford.

Introduction

Japanese cinema, alike the entire Japanese culture, remains exceedingly open to outside inspirations. American cinema, from the very beginning created largely by immigrants, intensively absorbed European, and later Asian influences. It does not change the fact that both Japanese and American cinema are unique phenomena reflecting the specifics of their cultural contexts in terms of world outlook as well as aesthetics. This dichotomy is especially distinct in genre cinema.

The disquisition conducted in the following article is based on a premise that the most vital and inventive cultural phenomena arise in the territory of borderlands or on the junction of disparate, even though in many

respects indigenously corresponding, cultural paradigms. Therefore the discussed film genres, western and *jidai-geki*, shall be considered frontier creations that merge and blend with each other, define and mutually condition one another, or – referring to Mikhail Bakhtin's favourite metaphor of mirrors – “look at one another, are reflected in one another, know and understand one another” (Bakhtin 1984: 176).

Film genre may be compared to Uroboros – an ancient symbol embracing the ambiguity of invariability and cycle within the image of a serpent or dragon devouring its tail. Genre remains essentially immutable, yet it is subjected to constant metamorphosis. As Bakhtin claims:

“A literary genre, by its very nature, reflects the most stable, <<eternal>> tendencies in literature's development. Always preserved in a genre are undying elements of the archaic. True, these archaic elements are preserved in it only thanks to their constant renewal, which is to say, their contemporization. A genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously. Genre is reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre. This constitutes the life of the genre.” (ibid: 106).

The essence of the genre is of mythological nature. Just like religious myth, which according to Joseph Cambell is biaspectual (universal and local), film genre has an unshaken narrative core and dynamic outer layer that contains elements of specific cultural contexts but also the ones that wander and exchange. Samurai film and western must be regarded as processual, historically conditioned and engaged in manifold chain of intertextual dialogue.

At certain point of its evolution each genre reaches the stage when, like Uroboros, it begins to feeds on itself. In its classical early days, genre remains realistic – style is in principle transparent, cinematic self-reflection is strictly prohibited. But narrative variants are soon worn out and overused; conventionality becomes visible and gradually undergoes protrusions, frequently making its way towards parody. While obtaining self-awareness, genre starts to process and deconstruct its own tradition. In some cases ensuing intergenerational polemics leads to absolute rejection of ideological and axiological content offered by prior models. Genre enters the stage of transformation, solstice and redefinition, when formulas

become flexible and borders limiting individual genres within autonomous territories are no longer clear.

The Globalization of Genre

In 2007 Miike Takashi made *Sukiyaki Western Django*, a “samurai western” set in a postmodern, virtual world – neither feudal Japan, nor the Wild West – rooted in no other reality than celluloid one. On the one hand it refers to films like Kurosawa Akira’s *Yojimbo* (*Yōjinbō*, 1961) or *Lady Snowblood* (*Shurayuki hime*, two part vengeance epic¹ directed by Fujita Toshiya inspired to equal extent by manggha, *chambara* and spaghetti-western), on the other hand it cites Sergio Leone’s *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un pugno di dollari*, 1964) and obviously *Django* (1966) – the most celebrated of Sergio Corbucci’s westerns. With particular delight Miike juxtaposes diverse Eastern and Western styles and aesthetics and blends them freely into fluid hotchpotch where *The Tale of the Heike* (*Heike Monogatari*) is read in English while Shakespeare is declaimed in theatrical Japanese. It is not enough to say that conventionality of presentation is being constantly underlined but it becomes a sovereign esthetical value. Actors speak English with ostentatious Japanese accent; painted Mount Fuji rises over “Arizona” desert. Frisky self-consciousness of Miike’s film justifies (or even forces) a meta-filmic interpretation – in fact the history of mutual interpenetration of *jidai-geki* and western genres is a major theme of *Sukiyaki Western Django*. Main character’s lineage contains autothematic joke: gunslinger Ringo had begotten a son by the name of Akira, father of a boy Heihachi, who changed his name to Django and moved do Italy. Famous for his perverse sense of humour, Miike gave the role of *Stagecoach* (1939, John Ford) protagonist’s namesake to Quentin Tarantino, who speaks his lines mixing southern and “Japanese” accents, attired in Clint Eastwood-like poncho. The appearance of the director of *Pulp Fiction* (1994) serves as yet another intertextual lead, since his *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* and *Kill Bill: Vol. 2* (2004) inspired Miike’s vision to at least same extent as films of Leone or Kurosawa. Tarantino’s diptych is distinguished by a masterful jugglery of genres, styles, paraphrases and borrowings referring to film noir, *yakuza-eiga*, gangster film, kung-fu, horror movie, anime, melodrama and, last but not least, *jidai-geki* and western (especially the Italian variant). Both *Kill Bill* and *Sukiyaki Western Django* elude all efforts of unambiguous categorization, as the stunning

¹ *Lady Snowblood* (*Shurayukihime*, 1973) and *Lady Snowblood: Love Song of Vengeance* (*Shurayukihime: Urami Renga*, 1974)

polyphony of quotes and travesties epitomizes the globalization of genre cinema.

Obviously, films by Quentin Tarantino or Miike Takashi do not function in void. They must be regarded as links in a long and ramified dialogical chain. Looking back, one may come across a number of films that function in the same chain. Let us move three decades back. In 1975 Tom Laughlin gave us one of the most extraordinary films in the history of cinema, titled *Master Gunfighter*. The piece passed unnoticed and till this day remains forgotten and yet, even though it strikes as poorly realized and artistically mediocre film, *Master Gunfighter* is worthy of some attention as probably the most audacious attempt of creating a synthesis of both discussed genres. Laughlin remade one of the most spectacular films of popular *jidai-geki*, Gosha Hideo's *Steel Edge of Revenge* (*Goyōkin*, 1969) but *Master Gunfighter* is more than just a typical Hollywood remake of samurai plot adapted to the realities of the Wild West – in this case the copy is almost perfect. Laughlin plagiarized (Gosha's name does not appear in the credits) virtually everything: the storyline, type of acting, music, editing devices, even framing and camera angles. The most interesting thing however is that, instead of usual US-Mexican frontier, the events presented on the screen take place in the cultural borderlands between America and Japan. Admittedly, the place is called "California" but is inhabited by gunslingers and landed proprietors who fight with samurai swords as well as Indians who play their drums in a distinctly oriental manner. Roots of this eccentric, truly Tarantinian idea can be traced back in earlier tendency of interweaving samurai film with western. Let us recall four of the most seminal examples of this inter-generic dialogue.

1969 – Gosha Hideo makes *Steel Edge of Revenge*, a typical for the director – mannerist and overdrawn genre pastiche. Gosha's samurai films have been compared to spaghetti-westerns and indeed, the author was under visible influence of Italian as well as American model. In *Goyōkin* he even introduced a character of a wandering quack merchandising a wonder cure-all.

1964 – Sergio Leone released *A Fistfull of Dollars*, not only one of the most significant spaghetti-westerns and a signpost indicating further course for the sub-genre explorations, but also a remake of *Yojimbo*. Leone tells the story borrowed from *jidai-geki* with a use of Hollywood modes of expression submitted to almost grotesque hyperbolization.

1961 – *Yojimbo*, one of the most outstanding films of Kurosawa Akira, together with Kobayashi Masaki's *Harakiri* (*Seppuku*, 1962) constitute new model of *jidai-geki* which would remain obligatory for at least a decade. Kurosawa did not hide American inspirations; he often admitted that, alike most of his historical epics, *Yojimbo* is kind of a “Japanese western”, created under big influence of John Ford.

1960 – John Sturges' *Magnificent Seven*, first western remake of a samurai film, marks an important step in development of the genre and proves that the American model can find it beneficial to assimilate patterns developed by Japanese filmmakers. Kurosawa was satisfied with the Hollywood version of his *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*, 1954). As a token of appreciation, he sent Sturges a samurai sword from his private collection.

Master Gunfighter, *Kill Bill* and *Sukiyaki Western Django* are chained to long-standing, inter-generic progression. Suppositions arise that it is possible for the dialogue to occur due to existence of certain cultural “tangential points”; that both genres must fulfil similar roles in their countries; and that they derive from comparable *Weltanschauung* features. However, it also proves that genre cinema behaves like a system of mutually conditioning communicating tubes. Following overview aims to investigate the moment in the history of cinema when the bilateral exchange of substance between the two vessels fastened rapidly.

1954: the Turning Point

For the entire first half of the 20th century the direction of influence was one-sided – from the West to the East. The pioneers and first masters of Japanese cinema drew on experiences of western filmmakers. They were impressed by Soviet school of montage and German expressionism but also American achievements of David W. Griffith, Charles Chaplin, Erich von Stroheim or Thomas Ince. Stars of “horse operas”, such as Gilbert “Broncho Billy” Anderson, Tom Mix, William S. Hart, or Harry Carey were held in high esteem by Japanese audience. Westerns of those times were simple adventure stories with lively action, full of galloping horse chases, fistfights and shoot-outs. As a direct continuation of American folklore they were produced according to the principles of attractiveness and clarity. At this stage of its evolution, the genre was rather primitive, produced for mass undiscerning audience. Films about noble cowboys and

despicable bandits served as smooth entertainment, thus they used psychological euphemisms and ethical simplifications, fitting to the frames of Manichean world outlook.

First stages of evolution of *jidai-geki* were moulded under considerable influence of American western. Although the earliest samurai dramas, epitomized by the work of actor-director duo Onoe Matsunosuke and Makino Shōzō, derived directly from popular *kabuki* theatre, the genre soon incorporated models and patterns known from Hollywood horse operas. The samurai film understood as a formula with a set of specific means of expression and types of plot was codified in 1920s. Quite often the stories were based on a blueprint similar to western's model of "town-tamer". Lonely wandering ronin, "a kind of kimonoed cowboy" (Richie 2001: 65), arrives in a settlement tormented by injustice; he restores peace and order within decent, yet weak and helpless community and sets off on another journey. Like early westerns, samurai films of the silent era formed series (this tendency is also typical for later *jidai-geki*). Subsequent episodes were linked by the main character, usually performed by the same actor. The most popular heroes of the pre-war era were one-eyed, one-handed ronin Tange Sazen and a gambler Kunisada Chūji. Memorable portraits of both characters were delivered by Ōkochi Denjirō in films made by the first great master of *jidai-geki*, Itō Daisuke – Kunisada Chūji trilogy consisting of *Kunisada Chūji tabi nikki Kōshū tate hen*, (1927), *Kunisada Chūji tabi nikki Shinshū kesshō hen* (1927) and *Kunisada Chūji tabi nikki goyō hen* (1927); Tange Sazen dylogy consisting of *Tange Sazen dai ichi-hen* (1933) and *Tange Sazen Aizō Maken-hen*, 1937). Majority of early samurai films, just like horse operas, are characterized by schematicism of plots, lack of deeper psychological motivation and black and white division of heroes and villains. Even though protagonists were usually outlaws, their social status seldom evoked moral ambivalence. Despite notable exceptions of films directed by Futagawa Buntarō and starred by Bandō Tsumasaburō, especially the revisionist *Serpent (Orochi)*, (1925) and, above all, Yamanaka Sadao's explorations from 1930s, the general model of pre-war *jidai-geki* did not accept ethical dilemmas that go beyond clear dichotomies. This trend strengthened after 1936. The propaganda machine of Japanese totalitarianism exploited the feudal-rooted mystique of the sword as well as the cult of loyalty, obedience and annihilation of individuality. Heroic *jidai-geki* films – such as first Inagaki Hiroshi's trilogy on Yoshikawa Eiji's novel *Musashi (Miyamoto Musashi)* – were produced in grandiose style described by Darrell William Davis as "monumental" (Davis 1996). Samurai film became a medium for

dissemination of respect for the bushido code heritage and national megalomania. Naturally, militarist variant of the samurai film remained as clean from foreign influences as possible.

In the first post war decade the *chambara* genre suffered from top-down imposed stagnation. Strict censorship established under American occupation virtually banned production of classically understood samurai films, since any reference to national symbolism was rigorously prohibited. New chapter in the history of the genre was initiated in 1954 by the Tōhō Studio which produced two important samurai films of the new era – *Seven Samurai* and the first part of the second Inagaki's trilogy about Miyamoto Musashi – *Samurai I: Musashi Miyamoto* (*Miyamoto Musashi*, 1954) *Samurai II: Duel at Ichijoji Temple* (*Zoku Miyamoto Musashi: Ichijōji no kettō*, 1955) and *Samurai III: Duel at Ganryu Island* (*Miyamoto Musashi kanketsuhen: Kettō Ganryūjima*, 1956).

In their own way, both films created mythologized vision of the Japanese history, attempting to rehabilitate the bushido code and to adjust it to the ideas of democracy and open society. The prime motive in producing both films was restoration of disgraced samurai legacy in the “new” Japan. Their creators wanted to reach the origins of bushido philosophy and ethics from before it had been twisted and appropriated by the totalitarian ideology. They also yearned to prove that those two ideological systems should not be considered as tantamount even if the samurai tradition had been used by the nationalist discourse. Strong bond of kinship ties the two protagonists played by Mifune Toshirō. A peasant-samurai Kikuchiyo and outlaw Takezō (who later assumes the name of Miyamoto Musashi) initially belong to social and spiritual lowlands. Both characters meet enlightened elder men and begin the *bushi* training under their guidance. The two stories emphasize notions of equality and social mobility but the right to climb the ladder of success is merely a secondary matter. Social advance is understood as something more than just capitalist freedom defined in terms of prestige and property expansion. The crucial element of both stories is a process of moral and spiritual education which the characters undergo. In accordance with revitalized version of the samurai ethos, warriors ought to be governed by the sense of solidarity and humanitarianism, as they form the elite of eminent individuals emanating wisdom. Their relations with people from lower classes are intrinsically vertical; however they should fall within the scope of Zen master-pupil model – the union based on mutual respect that spontaneously drives towards impartiality of sides. It is not that Kurosawa's and Inagaki's films distort the original principles of bushido; they rather reinterpret the code,

omitting its certain extreme tendencies, such as anti-individualistic law of retainer's absolute obedience, which could not be reconciled with the axiological context that ensued as a result of political transformation.

New approach demanded new style. Aesthetically *Seven Samurai* and *Miyamoto Musashi* are diametrically different films – the former is a black and white, realistic motion picture employing modern forms of cinematic expression like telephoto lenses or slow motion in order to achieve social and psychological authenticity, while the latter strikes as over-aestheticized in its use of colour and artificial lightening that contributes to construction of a hieratic style equally rooted in monumental *jidai-geki* of the previous period and Hollywood melodramaticism. The stylistic “common denominator” of both films is the influence of contemporary American western, that is more explicit than in any other samurai film made up until then. Kurosawa not only introduced new type of Japanese film epic, but also adapted several plot devices from American films, in particular John Ford's *My Darling Clementine* (1946). On the other hand, Inagaki created a synthesis of traditional Japanese traits, present in film's visual references to classic landscape painting and *ukiyo-e* woodcut, and narrative patterns of heroic tales and tragic love stories. It strikes as symptomatic that the trilogy's screenplay modified the romantic thread of Yoshikawa's novel in order to comply with western archetypical love-triangle engaging the protagonist, innocent maiden and a dove-hearted prostitute who finds her redemption in heroic death. Equally symptomatic is a warm reception of Inagaki's work on the other side of the Pacific Ocean: in 1956 *Samurai I: Miyamoto Musashi* won the Academy Award as the best foreign language film released in the United States in 1955.

The eyes of the western world opened for the Japanese cinema after the international success of Kurosawa Akira's *Rashomon* (*Rashōmon*, 1950, Golden Lion in Venice). Soon other masters of Japanese cinema were recognized and won several prestigious awards: Kinugasa Teinosuke (*Gates of Hell/ Jigokumon*, 1953, Cannes Grand Prix, Oscar) and Mizoguchi Kenji (*The Life of Oharu/ Saikaku ichidai onna*, 1952, Venice International Award; *Tales of Ugetsu/ Ugetsu monogatari*, 1953, Venice Silver Lion; *Sansho the Bailiff/ Sanshō dayū*, 1954, Venice Silver Lion). Even though none of these period dramas is a generically pure samurai film, their success is worth mentioning. Japanese historical cinema fascinated the sophisticated European viewers with Far East aesthetics and profound philosophy, but, at the same time it, turned out to be commercially successful. This of course could not escape the attention of Hollywood producers, always glad to assimilate popular novelties.

John Ford and Kurosawa Akira: Masters of Film Epic

The Japanese filmmaker whose work made the most significant impact on the next generation of western directors was undoubtedly Kurosawa Akira, who in turn was deeply inspired by John Ford. Asked about his masters Kurosawa frequently mentioned names of Frank Capra and William Wyler, however, when it comes to his samurai films, Ford's influence was obviously the greatest. There is a strong intertextual connection between the work of "Shakespeare of cinema" and "American Homer". Both directors were masters of epic, historical frescos, yet remained insightful in depicting intimate human dramas. Ford's westerns and Kurosawa's samurai films were full of fight and adventure, but also profoundly humanitarian, concerned with issues of social and moral nature. The two great filmmakers underlined didactic function of their cinema, which sometimes had an adverse effect on its artistic quality. John Ford and Kurosawa Akira not only established a set of narrative rules obligatory for western and samurai films, but also gave both genres their recognizable faces. Iconic actors such as Henry Fonda, James Stewart, Andy Devine, and Harry Carey Jr. or Nakadai Tatsuya, Shimura Takashi, Katō Daisuke, and Kimura Isao gave their most memorable performances in Ford's and Kurosawa's pictures. Furthermore, actors discovered and promoted by the two filmmakers, John Wayne and Mifune Toshirō were by far the most popular stars of discussed genres. It was Ford and Kurosawa, who created their recursively imitated screen-image of strong men of stable moral fibre and a sense of justice but at the same time somewhat rough and ambiguous. An important analogy between Ford and Kurosawa concerns response on their films within their native cinematographies, especially the evaluation of their work by younger generations of filmmakers. The name John Ford became almost a synonymous with western. It is no surprise since his films, just to mention *The Iron Horse* (1924), *Stagecoach* or *My Darling Clementine*, were milestones in the evolution of the genre. Even toward the end of his career he seemed to be ahead of his time. Directors from the 1960s found his films highly conservative, glorifying values of the Old West and mythologizing the American history. Therefore, the model represented by the old classic became a negative point of reference. In fact, the ideological dimension of Ford's films is far more complex than it might seem. Although he contributed to dissemination of national mythology among his countrymen to larger extent than any other film director, Ford's vision of the Wild West does not commit a sin of uncritical idealization. It is worth pointing out that his 1948's *Fort Apache* belongs to the group of

first revisionist westerns as one of the earliest attempts to demystify the history of the Indian Wars. Ford continued this account-settling trend that may be considered an anticipation of anti-western of the counterculture era in *The Searchers* (1956), *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) and, above all, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). Similarly, Kurosawa's output was fiercely criticized by younger artists, most of all Ōshima Nagisa who regarded the older colleague a reactionary traditionalist and a credulous advocate of the bushido ethics. Even if such judgment is not completely groundless, it remains unjust in its one-sidedness. The director was strongly attached to the samurai legacy and highly praised certain virtues rooted in bushido code such as fortitude or honour. Moreover, as a full-hearted humanist, he celebrated Confucian ideal of altruistic self-sacrifice and self-denial. Most definitely however, Kurosawa did not cherish bushido understood as an ideological backbone of Japanese feudalism. Being a democrat and egalitarian, he castigated inequitable social hierarchies exemplified in his samurai films set both in Sengoku and Edo periods. Neither did Kurosawa idealize the ruling class of ancient Japan. *The Throne of Blood* (*Kumonosu-jō*, 1957) as well as his late masterpieces *Kagemusha*, *The Shadow Warrior* (*Kagemusha*, 1980) and *Ran* (1985) prove that psychological and social mechanisms accompanying struggle for political power frightened him or simply disgusted.

Despite all controversies, the significance of Ford's and Kurosawa's achievements for the development of western and *jidai-geki* remains indisputable. Polemics stimulated the artistic ferment that energized the cinema of younger filmmakers. Regardless of political affiliation, American, Japanese and Italian directors learned from both masters the rules of storytelling, dramaturgy-building and even framing, as well as the ability to control viewers' emotions. Filmmakers such as Sergio Leone, Sam Peckinpah or Arthur Penn rejected the ideology of a classical western but, at the same time, they used generic conventions codified by Ford and other directors of his generation. The fact that the existing code became a subject of innovative modification and rebellious deconstruction increased the dynamics of genre transformation. Similar polemics were carried out within *jidai-geki*. Kurosawa's work from 1950s and early 1960s played the key role in constituting the style further developed by the implacable condemner of Japanese feudalism, Kobayashi Masaki, with whom younger artists sympathized, despite the generation gap. Explorations of Kurosawa and Kobayashi were of crucial importance in constituting new formula of the samurai film continued by authors who debuted in 1960s such as Gosha Hideo (Kurosawa's cynical ronin Sanjūrō became a prototype for all "lone

wolfs” inhabiting films of this director), Okamoto Kihachi and Shinoda Masahiro. All these filmmakers followed their individual artistic paths and yet they all headed in a direction set by Kurosawa under significant influence of Ford.

Close-up: *My Darling Clementine* and *Seven Samurai*

The influence of John Ford’s interpretation of the legendary gunfight at the O.K. Corral on Kurosawa Akira’s samurai masterpiece seems indisputable. Both films fulfil the epic narrative archetype of a tale about defence of a city, upon which all westerns that fall within the model of a “town-tamer” are based. Bandits harass a helpless community who seek help from a noble protector (or a group of protectors), usually a stranger in town. The hero imposes justice using legitimized violence, restores order and wanders off. John Ford’s film is a deeply mythologized version of a famous episode from the Wild West history. The Earp brothers, running a cattle drive, arrive to Tombstone. Eighteen-year-old James is murdered after a treacherous attack of the Clanton gang and the herd is stolen. Wyatt, Virgil and Morgan accept the nomination for sheriff and deputies in order to avenge their youngest brother in the name of the law. Kurosawa’s work faithfully mirrors the general outline: farmers terrorized by a bunch of outlaws find help from the title samurai squad under the leadership of Kambei.

The fundamental difference between *My Darling Clementine* and *Seven Samurai* is a divergence between homophonic and polyphonic work. In comparison with films like *Fort Apache*, *The Searchers* and *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *My Darling Clementine* appears as a far less semantically plural film that “prints a legend” i.e. consciously idealizes the image of the history displayed within the Manichean outlook. It does not change the fact that the film is a masterpiece of the genre rated by Ford’s cinema connoisseurs among the greatest achievements of this author (Anderson 1999: 13-14). The author perfectly fulfilled classical genre principles and established an archetype for future “town-tamers”. Kurosawa employed genre conventions of a western with stupendous creativity that allowed him to saturate the generic model with semantic surplus.

Crucial dissimilarity between the two films concerns the protagonists’ motivation. Kambei and his fellow warriors defend the villagers out of pure empathy while the Earp brothers, at least at the beginning, act upon personal reasons. Ford was not troubled by doubts regarding rightness of his heroes’ behaviours. In a mythical Wild West good and evil is separated

by a clear border prevents the theme of moral ambiguity from being explored. The Earp's violent actions are legitimized by the supreme instance of the natural law. The epic Manichaeism of a classical western demands a fortifying closure that heralds the triumph of good over evil. Unlike Ford, Kurosawa did not disregard the problem of moral justification of violence. He applied the solution based on bushido tradition, which implies that when acting in accordance with the principle of unity of Zen and the sword, a man of pure mind who is free from individual desires has a right to apply brutal measures. And yet, disturbing and equivocal ending of *Seven Samurai* leaves the fundamental dilemma unsettled.

The finale sequences of both films may seem quite similar. After the elimination of bandits the two communities quickly regain their natural everyday rhythm. Both epilogues contain motifs of work and organization as the villagers start to till the soil; Clementine accepts a teaching job in the newly built school. Both romantic threads end unhappily – young samurai Katsushiro parts with framer's daughter Shino; Wyatt splits with Clementine and abandons the town, though he leaves her some hope that one day he might return. After the fight is over, the defenders wander off. Kambei's bitter reflection, "So, again we are defeated. The farmers have won, not us", summarizes the fate of warriors who have fulfilled their duty and are no longer needed. The battlefield has had great bearing on their destiny causing inability of creating social ties. In comparison to Ford's finale, Kurosawa's finale appears to be stronger in emphasizing tragic aspect of the protagonists' departure that goes far beyond the simplicity of melodrama cliché. After leaving Tombstone, Wyatt may feel disappointed but does not consider himself defeated or excluded from society. In this respect, heroes of Ford's later westerns Ethan Edwards from *The Searchers* and Tom Doniphon from *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* are akin to Kambei. All these characters are doomed to isolation from society because they cannot adjust to life that has flourished thanks to their self-sacrifice.

Black and white symmetry of moral stands presented in *My Darling Clementine* is somewhat disturbed by the character of Doc Holliday, a former surgeon who has become a reckless gambler, a dangerous gunfighter and a drunkard. Oscillating between nobleness and unlawfulness, Doc Holliday epitomizes the generic icon of "the good bad guy". Kikuchiyo from *Seven Samurai* may be regarded as a variant of this model. Similarly to Victor Mature's desperado, Mifune Toshiro's wild pseudo-samurai, who initially shares more features with the bandits than with the rest of defenders, vacillates between different groups and classes. Both characters eventually find redemption and moral victory in heroic

deaths that ultimately prove their affiliation to groups of guardians. In terms of culture and education, the gentleman from Ford's film is an opposite of Kurosawa's illiterate plebeian but they both belong to the territory of cultural borderlands. Doc Holliday functions at an intersection of civilized East and the Wild West, while Kikuchiyo is located between the warriors' elite to which he aspires and common farmers among whom he was born. His social situation is expressed graphically on the banner of the settlement defenders, showing six circles at the top, the ideogram of the word "village" at the bottom and a triangle in the centre. The oval shapes that represent the samurai implicate balance and perfection. The "angular" barbarian-knight lacks refinement and inner harmonization. On the other hand, Kikuchiyo visibly stands out from the inhabitants of the village who treat him with fear and wariness. He is defined by borders; situated at the intersection of three groups depicted by Kurosawa. Constantly examining his own reflection mirrored in members of all these groups, Kikuchiyo remains unsettled and disjointed; torn by inner tension that generates the dynamic oscillation between extremes. In one word, Kikuchiyo exemplifies a protagonist of a polyphonic work.

Seven Samurai went down in the history of cinema thanks to Kurosawa's authorial unorthodoxy in absorbing borrowings and models. The director used generic conventions but he did not let them limit his vision. The sequence that introduces Kambei that distinctly refers to one of the early scenes of *My Darling Clementine* is an excellent example of Kurosawa's creativity in reinterpreting foreign influences and saturating them with new meanings and contexts. The sequence of Wyatt's first visit in Tombstone begins with a scene in a barber shop. The protagonist's shave is interrupted by a sound of gunfire in a saloon. A drunken Indian who chased other customers away shots blindly in a frantic frenzy. Only Wyatt has enough courage to walk into the saloon and face the hazard. With a simple ruse he sidetracks the aggressor and renders him harmless. Equivalent scene in *Seven Samurai* also starts with the act of shaving. Kambei cuts off his own topknot, sits above the stream and wets his head. Subsequently a Buddhist priest shaves his hair. The samurai attires monk clothes and walks toward a hut where a thief holds a child captive. Kambei's costume lulls the assailant into a false sense of security. Taking advantage of moment's inattention, the *bushi* strikes unexpectedly; kills the kidnaper without mercy and saves the child. The key moments of both sequences are constructed upon similar narrative device – in both cases the very confrontation of protagonists with bandits is not presented on the screen. The cameras do not look inside the saloon or the hut but remain outside

among the crowd of bystanders observing both events. The two sequences end in almost identical way. The citizens of Tombstone offer Wyatt a position of sheriff and the farmers ask Kambei for help in a fight with the bandits. Initially both protagonists reject requests of the representatives of helpless communities but eventually accept them driven by a sense of justice.

It might seem that Kurosawa's step-by-step recreation of Ford's model ought to belittle his achievement. And yet it does not. The discussed sequence may be considered an epitome of specifically Japanese ability to embrace foreign influences and incorporate them into native cultural patterns. Let us examine how the individual elements of the prototype have been filled with extra significance.

The prosaic act of shaving, which in Ford's film serves as a pretext for a comical situation, in *Seven Samurai* assumes the proportions of a religious ritual celebrated with solemn dignity. Cutting of the topknot bears substantial symbolic connotations. In feudal Japan types of hairstyle were attributed to particular social classes, thus Kambei's act metaphorically suggest his rejection of social rank (Richie 1996: 99). Neo-confucian teachings demanded from individuals to equate themselves with their social status. From this viewpoint Kambei's act of divesting himself of his state attribute symbolizes the character's renunciation of his own identity and personality. Kambei becomes the "true man of no position", as master Rinzai (Lin Chi) described it. Also the act of rinsing samurai's head contains symbolic significance. Due to ablation, the protagonist purifies himself from lustful desires of the false "self". Devoid of social position and individual needs, he gets his head shaved and puts on monk's robe. And yet he is still a warrior – he embodies the ideal unity of Zen and the sword.

The meaning of the next scene, where Kambei ferociously kills the kidnaper does not contradict the previous one but complements it. The protagonist's motivation is impeccable and his mind is as clean as a spotless mirror. As the executor of the will of destiny, he is wide enough to embrace the ambivalence of empathy and violence (Suzuki 1994: 89, 98).

One may find it symptomatic that the discussed sequence of *Seven Samurai*, which reinterprets the generic model of John Ford's western, at the same time recreates a classic tale from the samurai tradition. D. T. Suzuki recounts a story of a certain wandering samurai known as Ise no Kami who shaved his head and dressed as monk in order to liberate a child abducted by a bandit (ibid: 128). The fact that the sequence is deeply rooted in the Japanese tradition does not contravene the thesis that it was

created under the influence of *My Darling Clementine*. One should not be surprised that Kurosawa, an artist who have been so actively engaged in the international trans-generic dialogue, employed narrative conventions of a western to tell the classic Japanese legend. It would be hard to find a better example illustrating the cultural polyphony of Kurosawa Akira's cinema as well as the entire *jidai-geki* genre after *Seven Samurai*.

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Monsters without Shape and People without Substance – *Tokusatsu* Horrors by Honda Ishirō

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ABSTRACT

This analysis concerns tokusatsu horrors by Japanese director Honda Ishirō: *Beauty and the Liquidman* (Bijo to Ekitainingen 1958), *The First Gas Human* (Gasu Ningen dai Ichigo 1960) and *Matango: Attack of the Mushroom People* (Matango 1963), especially the nature of monsters in those movies. Monsters are treated as beings that exist on the edge of culture and oppose its values and assumptions on what is considered normal. Described movies are much less known than other Honda's works, yet still – as many horror movies, when analyzed from certain perspective – can inform us about the state of society that created them and the system of its values (tension between collectiveness and individuality could be a good example).

KEYWORDS: Japanese cinema, Honda Ishirō, kaijū eiga, tokusatsu films, monster movies.

In Honda Ishirō's rich cinematic output, films that can be classified as fantasy – on occasion closer to the convention of a fairy tale or science fiction and at times, to a horror film – amount to a little over half a whole. Nevertheless, arithmetic in this case is misleading. By realizing his fantasy films, Honda influenced the production profile of the Tōhō film company, where he worked, and partly also the contemporary Japanese film industry as a whole; he gave rise to the icon of Japanese pop culture, recognisable all over the world – Godzilla, as well as the whole film genre – giant monster movies (*daikaijū eiga*). As the director's biographer states: “Such legacies last through the ages” (Brothers 2009: 273).

Brothers' words are, all the same, not only a bit pompous, but also rather an example of wishful thinking. Honda is undoubtedly remembered among ardent fans of *daikaijū eiga*, which are numerous, as the “father of the genre” and the most talented director – film author – ever working with it. Yet, only one of his films received larger attention beyond those closed circles. This film is the original *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, 1954) which has been deemed one of the first, next to Kurosawa Akira's *I Live in Fear* (*Ikimono no kiroku*, 1955), cinematic attempts at referring to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – a terrifying finale of Imperial Japan's long-lasting war agony. Honda's remaining films are usually passed over in

silence – which is particularly evident in case of his horror movies – or put on the same level as Hollywood production of that period. This second strategy – that can be justified only in a very broad perspective – is used, among others, by Susan Sontag in her renowned essay *The Imagination of Disaster* (Sontag 2012: 279–301), where Japanese films (mainly Honda's works – presumably in versions reedited for USA market¹) and American ones serve almost on equal footing as examples in analysis of science fiction film from the first period of the Cold War. However, such approach neutralizes firstly the idiosyncratic style of the director – clearly visible especially at the onset of his career as a creator of *tokusatsu*², and secondly the specificity of realizing genre schemes within post-war Japan – which is capable of conveying fundamental meaning when attempting to understand the specifics of the culture and society of this country during such a turbulent and difficult moment in history.

Honda's films appear also in another, possibly even more renowned, essay by Sontag entitled *Notes on "Camp"*, where she writes:

“There is Camp in such bad movies as *The Prodigal* and *Samson and Delilah*, the series of Italian color spectacles featuring the super-hero Maciste, numerous Japanese science fiction films (*Rodan*, *The Mysterians*, *The H-Man*) because, in their relative unpretentiousness and vulgarity, they are more extreme and irresponsible in their fantasy – and therefore touching and quite enjoyable.” (Sontag 1964)

Even today, this fashion of thinking characterises most reflections of the western film studies on the genre of Japanese fantasy cinema of this era. Vivacious cult surrounding *kaijū eiga*, in Japan as well as beyond its borders, has been met for a long time with unfavourable opinions of critics, who often assessed Japanese high culture and its pop culture in a diametrically opposite way. Donald Richie describes the second one as “a plethora of nudity, teenage heroes, science-fiction monsters, animated cartoons, and pictures about cute animals” (Richie 1990: 80).

¹ After the success of *Godzilla, King of the Monsters*, brought on screens in 1956 by the small company Jewell Enterprises Inc., preparing *kaiju eiga* films for American market – dubbed, with new dialogues and additional scenes – became quite common practice.

² Japanese term for fantasy films, theatrical films as well as TV films, which have special effects as their main attraction. *Tokusatsu*, with its conceptual roots reaching all the way to *bunraku* puppet theatre, stabilised thanks to the popularity of *Godzilla* and its continuations, produced by Tōhō in large amount, and are today one of the most significant regions of Japanese pop culture.

Godzilla is majorly an exception – eagerly treated as an artefact denoting contemporary Japanese mentality. This notion of Honda’s film appears, however, only after the 50th anniversary of its opening night and the article by Terrence Rafferty entitled *The Monster that Morphed into a Metaphor* and published in “New York Times”. Since that moment, the radioactive saurian attained rather abundant bibliography, which cannot be said about other *tokusatsu* films directed by Honda, especially those not pertaining to *kaiju eiga*.

We are observing Honda’s *tokusatsu* films from a specific perspective of cultural studies oriented on cognition of axiosemiotic landscapes of historic societies. Hence, the analysis of these film discourses is to serve the reflection on the subject of the system of values, its changes, and internal tensions of the post-war Japanese culture. This perspective – father and the most prominent representative of which remains to this day Siegfried Kracauer – is based on the fundamental belief that “the films of a nation reflect its mentality in a more direct way than other artistic media” (Kracauer 1958: 9). Although there have been significant changes in cultural sciences since the times of this German theorist – it is challenging nowadays to pass over the formulation “nation’s mentality” lightly – such perspective, though difficult and allowing for misuses connected to e.g. phenomenon of Orientalism, still finds its realizations in the fields of anthropology and sociology of culture. It is possible because:

“Popular cinema can only exist if it maintains active contact with society, intertwines with its fabric, and circulates in its bloodstream. Therefore, it has to describe the world of the audience, refer to its experiences and problems, even if it does it in an indirect way, filtered through creators’ imagination and genres convention.” (Głównia 2013: 165).

Horror films – the portion of Honda’s body of work that is of interest in this article pertains, at least partly, to this genre – seem to be, on the one hand, a particularly rewarding subject of analysis in such perspective, and, on the other hand, a particularly difficult one – also by virtue that the key notions (such as identification) were analysed mostly with the use of rather hermetic and in fact hardly contributing psychoanalytic methods. Perspective adopted here should not be mistaken with a widespread beyond measure and convincingly criticised by Noël Carroll (2004: 327-341) perspective associating horror with social repressions, retaining *status quo*. We are rather aiming at reading intentions of authorial filmmakers, who are

“distributing” values and anti-values among positive characters and monsters to create an up-to-date production, stimulating the spectator’s imagination and problematizing conflicts that are familiar to him/her. In such envisioned reflections, it is worthwhile to devote special attention to movie monsters, for which Honda had an immutable affection, as suggested by Marek Haltof:

“Analysis of changes, to which monsters populating movie screens are subjected, is, therefore, an attempt at observing changes occurring in the society, an attempt at social analysis. From this, we can conclude that horror film should become, above all, a domain of sociology of cinema as a discipline studying mutual relations of screen life and real one”. (Haltof 1992: 56)

In those “analysis of relations between screen life and real one”, it is impossible to be overly sensitive to misinterpretation and misuse. William Tsutsui, searching for and striking the golden mean, while writing about the phenomenon of Godzilla, formulates his position in the following manner:

“A cinematic series of such length and such global popularity surely reveals something of significance about the time in which it was made, the people and organizations that created it, and the audiences who watched and embraced it. Godzilla films are not some magical oracle on Japanese culture, late-twentieth-century global society, or the abnormal psychology of prepubescent moviegoers; they are, however, a collection of maidiosyncratic – and oddly compelling – cultural artifacts fully worthy of close scrutiny, sympathetic analysis, and lighthearted celebration.” (Tsutsui 2004: 44–45)

Mutant Trilogy – Monsters without Shape and People without Substance

Obscured by “Godzilla’s father” fame, horror films created by Honda Ishirō at the turn of ’50s and ’60s disappeared from the history of cinema. Lack of delineation of those in publications devoted to Japanese cinema as a whole may not be surprising – after all, they cannot be counted among the greatest achievements of Japanese cinematography – but omission of

such films as *Beauty and the Liquidman* (*Bijo to Ekitainingen*, 1958)³, *The First Gas Human* (*Gasu Ningen dai Ichigō*, 1960)⁴ and *Matango: Attack of the Mushroom People* (*Matango*, 1963) in a monographic work *Introduction to Japanese Horror Film* (Balmain 2008) is quite surprising. Peculiar is the fact that, among all available sources, the most information about two out of three enumerated films can be found in Andrzej Kołodzyński's *Dziedzictwo wyobraźni*. Unfortunately, the author does not introduce any distinction between those and *daikaijū eiga* films, treating the first ones as marginal examples of the genre. Kołodzyński writes:

“In the year 1958 they [Honda Ishirō and Tsuburaya Eiji] introduced an amazing monster in the form of gelatinous, crawling mass in the film *Beauty and the Liquidman*. This greenish substance literally sucks people in, leaving behind only (apparently indigestible) their clothes. [...] Despite this, failures also occurred. Bloodthirsty plants from the film *Matango: Attack of the Mushroom People* were not received well, outer space jellyfish absorbing Earth's coil with its tentacles appears just once”. (Kołodzyński 1989: 49)

Part of the problem with distinguishing for separate analysis Honda's horrors of interest to us is specifically identifying Japanese genre *kaijū eiga* (monster films) with its dominating variant – *daikaijū eiga*, to which pertain commonly known and discussed films with Godzilla, Rodan, and Mothra. *Daikaijū* films draw attention with its specific formula and are viewed as specifically Japanese phenomenon⁵ – unjustifiably, from the historical point of view – *tokusatsu* films, in turn, never had much resonance outside Japan. For so-called *kaidan eiga* met with much better reception.

Beauty and the Liquidman and *The First Gas Human* are merged with a third film, also produced by Tōhō in 1960, *The Secret of the Telegian* (*Densō Ningen*, Fukuda Jun) into a so-called Mutant Trilogy. This happens for justified reasons: all three films are *tokusatsu* productions and, as such, they have as one of their main attractions special effects realised with bravado by Tsuburaya Eiji and used in this case to create original monsters.

³ Originally distributed in the US under the title *The Human Vapor*.

⁴ Originally distributed in the US under the title *The H-Man*.

⁵ Examples of adaptation of this formula beyond Japan can be found in cinematographies of the Far East: Hong Kong – *The Mighty Peking Man* (*Xing xing wang*, 1977, Ho Meng-hua), South Korea – *Yongary, Monster from the Deep* (Taekoesu Yonggary, 1967, Kim Ki-duk), and even North Korea – *Pulgasari* (1985, Shin Sang-ok, Chong Gon Jo).

All three are also strongly inspired by the police thriller formula and maintained in the style reminiscent of classic film noir.

Fukuda Jun, the director of *The Secret of the Telegian*, in this period, was clearly under the influence of Honda's style. Besides, he was his protégé – learning his craft, among others, as an assistant director on the set of *Rodan! The Flying Monster* (*Sora no daikaijū Radon* 1956, Honda Ishirō). Later, when he took over directing of Godzilla series, compatibility of his vision with the one of Honda became strongly debatable. However, *The Secret of the Telegian* is almost a hardcopy of *The First Gas Human*. For those reasons, it is worthwhile to analyse the Mutant Trilogy as a specific whole.

There seem to be at least two reasons for the application of noir staffage in the Trilogy – action taking place in a dark city, suspicious bars and alleys, overcrowded sets (particularly visible in the scenes taking place at police stations). On the one hand, this style was definitely recognisable by Japanese audiences of that time – during American occupation that lasted until 1952 many films shown in Japanese cinemas were of an USA origin. When the Japanese film industry started to stand on its own two feet, television started to play a similar role because Japanese film companies refused to cooperate with it, treating it as competition. For this reason, the television industry reached for easily accessible American productions (Clements, Tamamuro 2003: X–XXIX)

On the other hand, classic American film noir is usually regarded as the mirror of its age – it is supposed to reflect the trauma of war and social change that followed: rebuilding of family relationships, lasting industrialisation and urbanisation of America.

“It quickly turned out that film noir matches moods dominant after war – far from triumphalism, saturated with pessimism and marked with experienced cruelty of the ending war. Character of created in this period crime stories, detective films, gangster films, and police films corresponded with the climate of times but, most of all, it metaphorized more or less conscious fears shared by most of the American society.” (Syska 2010: 37)

Many of those fears were shared by Japanese society at the turn of fifth and sixth decade of the 20th century. War damage instigated the urbanisation and industrialisation processes that had commenced prior to the war to practically a state of zero. Of course, Japanese society had no reasons for

triumphalism – quite the opposite, it became marked with war failure and tragedy of atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for a lengthy period. Moreover, censorship during the occupation of Japan required any official narration to present war failure, economic difficulties, and social unrest as “result[s] of years of faulty politics” (Loska 2009: 378).

In accordance with noir staffage, all three mutant films have a formula of investigation conducted by police detectives in mysterious criminal cases. Practically from the very opening of each plot, the main investigative question is not “Who commits the crime?”, but rather “How was committing it possible?”. The audience is tormented by similar curiosity as is the detective – when in *Beauty and the Liquidman* people consecutively disappear leaving only clothes behind, in *The First Gas Human* impossible break-in into the bank safe is committed, and in *The Secret of the Telegian* the murderer disappears in an incomprehensible way right in front of the eyes of a crowd of witnesses at the funfair.

As the erotetic narration progresses, those questions finally find answers and are replaced by a question dealing with the means of eradicating the threat, the nature of which is explained in a (quasi)scientific way. Characteristically, none of the questions can be answered by the detectives themselves during investigations – seeking alliance with scientists, usually young ones, is necessary. Only such group of “experts” (see Pitrus 1994: 52) can understand the nature of the monster and subsequently eliminate it. Only in *The First Gas Human*, the role of scientists is marginalised – they work on a plan of elimination, not on the investigation itself – however, the group of “experts” is reinforced by a young and beautiful journalist.

More interesting than the positive characters in Mutant Trilogy are the monsters, from which all three movies take their titles. Existence of all three is explained in the language of (quasi)science, differently than in the dominating on Japanese screens *kaidan eiga*. In the case of the radioactive goo, that people are turned into in *Beauty and the Liquidman*, we are dealing with recollection of not only atomic bomb trauma, but also the episode at Bikini Atoll. In 1954, during a American hydrogen bomb test, the Japanese fishing boat Daigo Fukuryū Maru (Lucky Dragon No. 5) sailed into the area of the nuclear fallout. Its crew was hospitalised after they returned to the port, being diagnosed with acute radiation syndrome. Few months later one member of the crew – chief radio operator Kuboyama Aikichi – died of liver failure allegedly caused by irradiation. This tragedy reverberated in mass media and became the first, since the occupation, reason for tensions in USA–Japan relations. It also inspired, apart from Honda’s *Godzilla*, a film by the creator of *Children of*

Hiroshima (Genbaku no ko, 1952) – Shindō Kanetas *Lucky Dragon No. 5 (Daigo Fukuryū Maru, 1959)*. Liquidmen from Honda's film were created in identical circumstances, however, the contaminated fisherman turn into peculiar, endowed with life and partial memories, green ooze. The same fate awaits anyone who comes in contact with this radioactive substance.

The nature of the liquidman remains a mystery to the audience; it is unclear e.g. if we are dealing with a single entity or many merged into one. On the one hand, the shapeless monster is reminiscent of a living substance from space from a movie that had been released the same year *The Blob* (1958, Irvin S. Yeaworth). In the opinion of Andrew Tudor – who, in spite of various theories on psychoanalytic genesis, considers identification with the monster secondary – monsters from both those films can be an example of a monster impossible to identify with, an absolute alien. On the other hand, audience is aware that the liquidman was born from people, including those representative for the tragedy of the *Lucky Dragon*. Additionally, from time to time there are scenes, in which the goo emits strange, featureless, fluorescent, ethereal silhouettes. Liquidman is a hybrid of war technology, its side-effect. It also symbolises specific tension between collectiveness and individuality – of high importance in post-war Japanese culture, which went through two periods in time when both those inherently contradictory attitudes were proclaimed as obligatory ideologies with all the force of propaganda of, firstly, militaristic regime and, secondly, occupants.

Different, but only to some degree, is the construction of film antagonists in *The First Gas Human* and *The Secret of the Telegian* – in those cases, tension between an individual and mass disappears. They are individuals who, with help of advanced technologies, acquire amazing abilities of penetrating solid matter and teleportation. Liquidmen do not possess shape, they do not have substance, coherence, stability – in the scenes with use of special effects, they are portrayed as transparent, unstable. Sudō (Nakamaru Tadao) from Fukuda's film resembles a blurred television image, Mizuno (Tsuchiya Yoshio) – the first gas human – can assume a form of luminous fog. Both of them, of the whole pantheon of movie monsters, bear the greatest resemblance to Griffin – the invisible man from the film adaptation of Herbert George Wells' book (*The Invisible Man* 1933, James Whale)⁶. Though, whereas the formula of invisibility was an

⁶ The invisible man appeared [sic] on screens repeatedly. However, what is most important is that he was not unknown in Japanese cinema before films created by Honda and Fukuda, see: *The Invisible Man Appears (Tomei Ningen Arawaru* 1949, Shinsei Adachi), *The Invisible Man (Tomei Ningen* 1954, Motoyoshi Oda), *The Invisible Man vs. The Human Fly (Tōmei ningen to hae otoko*

invention of Griffin himself, both Sudō and Mizuno use somebody else's discoveries against their intentions.

Both are also clearly connected to the past. Sudō exacts his revenge by killing war companions, whom he wanted to stop from committing treason a few days after capitulation. Wounded and left for dead, he comes back like a dark spectre, right next to military "traitors" killed by a bayonet – they were involved in criminal activities during the film – he leaves military dog tags. Mizuno's character has a past even more distant than a war one. He harbours unfulfilled feelings towards Fujichiyo (Yachigusa Kaoru) – mistress of Nichibu, a form of traditional Japanese dance deriving from Edo period, one of the sources of Kabuki theatre. In the final confrontation, Fujichiyo sacrifices her life – realising the imperative of traditional Japanese culture, which she represents – to stop Mizuno in a burning theatre. The theatre, in which the only spectator interested in her act was a man that evaporated into gas, others only counted on the appearance of the monster, deemed a sensation by the press.

Between this finale and the fact that doomed characters in both films are connected to areas outside of cities – Sudō was hiding on a farm since the war, Fujichiyo was perfecting her dancing skills in a suburban house, giving up performing and taking part in social life – we can put forward a thesis that both Fukuda and Honda interconnect their monsters with Nietzschean resentment, a sort of spiritual poisoning with the past, mix of resentment, helplessness, harm, and attachment to inadequate ideals. This feeling must be eliminated if society is to function further.

“Mushroom People” – Infected with Monstrosity

In Ishirō Honda's cinematic output, film *Matango* seems to be a very individual piece – surpassing the *tokusatsu* formula, deprived of optimistic ending, with fatalistic atmosphere and tone; it visibly differs from its predecessor *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (*Kingu Kongu tai Gojira* 1962). To some degree, source of both films can be traced to contemporary socio-political situation. Since 1960, Japan had been fraught with conflict around ratification of the treaty that put country in a situation of an open-ended “subordinated independence” (Gordon 2010), threatened with, among others, the possibility of using Japanese islands as a military base during conflicts in Asia (during the Vietnam War those fears proved to be justified). Dramatic mass demonstrations, during which USA diplomatic officials were attacked, ceased once the treaty had been forced through but

1957, Mitsuo Murayama).

moods remained inflamed to such a degree that the government of Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke had to resign.

“Matango was interpreted, however, not only as an allegory of political dependency – besides it certainly is more than that – but mostly, quite literally, as an oration against the plague of drug addiction, connecting the film to similar, if marginal, plot threads in *Beauty and the Liquidman*.” (Weisser, Weisser 1998: 27).

This film came into a rather unfortunate circulation of cult reception, inspired undoubtedly by the atmosphere of hallucinations and strange international title *Attack of the Mushroom People*.

Told in retrospect, history of seven people shipwrecked on a mysterious foggy island is an adaptation of a story by William H. Hodgson *The Voice in the Night*. Inspiration with latter works of Howard Phillips Lovecraft is, however, more clearly visible in the screenplay of *Matango*. Motifs of isolation, degeneration of body and mind, and reversed evolution penetrating the film seem to emanate exactly from it. Lovecraft himself expressed a positive opinion about Hodgson’s works:

“Few can equal him in adumbrating the nearness of nameless forces and monstrous besieging entities through casual hints and insignificant details, or in conveying feelings of the spectral and the abnormal in connexion with regions or buildings”. (Lovecraft 1927).

Authors of *Lurker in the Lobby. A Guide to Cinema of H.P. Lovecraft* rightly point out that *Matango* – one of few movies referred to in this book that is not a direct adaptation of Lovecraft’s works – borrows from him exactly the frame narrative of retrospect spun by a person locked in an asylum and on the edge of a mental breakdown (Migliore, Stryzik 2006: 77–78).

Through the majority of the movie, the history of starving people appears as a “laboratory of human nature” similar to William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, with an accent put on two contrasting social types represented by film characters. Hence, we are dealing with a writer, a student, a TV star etc. and observing their behaviour in an extreme situation. It seems, however, that Honda in the last act largely invalidates such interpretation – everyone finally succumbs to the “infection” with mysterious mushrooms.

The metaphor of an island as a figure of the whole modern Japan remains unnegated and is even emphasised by the last survivor. “Tokyo is no different than an island” – those are one of the last words of the protagonist. Monsters from the mysterious islands – mushroom people – are one of the most interesting of creations in Honda’s filmography, not only from a visual perspective. The physical threat from their side is clearly negated, as they turn out to be slow – their walk is a one of a somnambulist – and, literally, soft. Confrontations with them bear no dramatic tension. Simultaneously, audience and protagonists are informed that the mushroom people are crewmembers of a research ship (here echoes *Beauty and the Liquidman*), who out of starvation started to eat local mushrooms and turned into monsters. The real threat lies then in raising temptation to risk irreversible transformation and eat wretched mushrooms. Visualisation of this transformation is much more repulsive than its outcome – the body is being covered by strange mycelium, enormous russet-green blisters and mind visibly breaks down.

Monstrosity shown in *Matango* is considerably ahead of its time, bringing to mind body horror, beginnings of which are dated at about fifteen years later. In films of this genre, a great example of which is contemporary work of David Cronenberg, there is a recurring motif of alien, lamellar organism of unclear origin and nature, penetrating human body to transform and possess it. “[M]onster-evil exists >inside” not “outside<” (Haltorf 1992: 63-64) and is, precisely as in *Matango*, unbeatable.

Renaissance of popularity of Japanese cinema, including horror, persists for a longer time now and it brought, among others, interest in local representatives of body horror, often crossed with cyberpunk cinema and uncompromising variety of gore. Some representatives of such cinema – e.g. Shin’ya Tsukamoto – received much attention in Poland (see Świech, Tkaczyk 2003: 185-190; Kamrowska 2005: 138-153; Klejsa, Biskupski 2007: 59-74), others – e.g. Kei Fujiwara, creator of a film *Organ* (1996), classified as “biopunk”, in which body modifications are done with use of biotechnology – much less. Their works, to which western roots are often attributed, gain new local context when juxtaposed with forgotten horrors of Ishirō Honda, especially *Matango*.

The mushroom people, liquidman, and the first gas human should certainly have their rightful place in any attempt to describe monsters from the Land of the Rising Sun.

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Sport in Japanese Cinema from the End of 19th Century to the End of the Pacific War. An Exploration

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the interrelations between sport, cinema and socio-political transformation of Japan between 1868 and 1945. Cinema is identified as a mass medium able to serve as a socio-cultural document and a historical source. Article's starting point is a brief discussion of the Meiji era authorities' policy toward Western influences, cinema, and sport, both modern and traditional. This is followed by the discussion of early non-fiction films depicting sport, mainly sumo matches. Next section is devoted to the inclusion of sport motifs in feature film in the context of socio-cultural transformations of Japan. Main section of the article discusses three strategies of employing sport in Japanese cinema of the late 1920s and 1930s: 1) neutral observation in which modern sports are presented as one of the aspects of socio-cultural transformations of Japan, 2) introduction of more or less elaborate sport motifs into the narratives of films in which sport does not play a dominant role but which attempt to comment on the social reality, 3) utilisation of sport motifs as purely symbolical devices. Last section of the article briefly indicates on two options available for Japanese filmmakers during the Pacific War – inclusion of the themes they were interested in into films conforming with the national policy and subversive filmmaking.

KEYWORDS: Japanese cinema, sports in Japan, sports in cinema, *gendai-geki*, Ozu Yasujirō, Mizoguchi Kenji.

Cinema is a mass art *par excellence* – its essence lies in mechanical reproduction and broad accessibility, understood both as wide availability of cinematic products for potential audiences and their comprehensibility. As a vital, inclusive social phenomenon it cannot be confined in art galleries and limit its consumers to a narrow, elitist group of “connoisseurs”. Cinema realizes its potential only if it maintains a close relationship with society – if it blends in with its tissue, flows in its veins, and sends impulses to its muscles. To achieve this, it has to reflect the world of the audiences, relate to their experiences and problems, even if it does that indirectly, by filtering them through the filmmakers' imagination and sensitivity. Among all forms of human artistic activity cinema is probably the most sensitive to the slightest vibrations in its social environment and capable of providing instant responses to them. What is

more, it quite often tended to address issues that in more esteemed yet less egalitarian discourses – be it publicistic, academic or political – were articulated with noticeable delay.

Because of these properties cinematographic works can serve as valuable social documents, cultural artefacts that reflect certain phenomena, trends, moods, anxieties, and ideologies of their times, as well as convenient illustrations of knowledge acquired in a formal way. The history of every national cinema is in fact a history of the nation and the society in which this particular national cinema it is rooted. Complex relations between cinema and its socio-cultural, political, and economic environment are most visible when we turn our attention to the countries which at some point of their history went through sudden, rapid, and fundamental transformations. Such is the case of Japan, which in the mid-19th century abandoned its over 200 year-long restrictive isolationist policy and opened itself to Western influences, and in the span of the next 100 years went through phases of modernization, democratization and militarization.

Socio-political entanglement is by no means exclusive to cinema. It characterizes – to greater or lesser extent – all aspects of culture. In the case of mid-19th- to mid-20th-century Japan once can easily provide a substantial number of examples of such entanglement in the fields of theatre, literature, science, philosophy *etc.* (e.g. authorities' attempts to reevaluate *kabuki* as a theatre of moral education; political roots of the *shinpa* theatre; influence of Western anthropology, evolutionist theories and social Darwinism on Japanese racial discourse and colonial policy; emergence, development, and suppression of proletarian literature). The vicissitudes of sports were also part – and can serve as an illustration – of diverse and not always convergent social, political, and cultural transformations of Japan from its “opening to the world” until its defeat in the Pacific War. During all of that period sport was not a neutral activity, as it was deeply embroiled in the ideological discourse(s) which favoured certain of its disciplines and attributed them with specific roles, and was one of the components of broader social processes which directly affected the life-styles, habits, aspirations and values of Japanese citizens.

My aim in this article it to present synthetic, introductory overview of the interrelations between cinema, sport, and the broad socio-political transformations in Japan until the end of the Pacific War. This overview is by no means exhaustive – due to its exploratory purpose certain films were omitted, while some others were mentioned only briefly, and, of course, there is a possibility that at this point I am not aware of certain facts and films. Nonetheless, I hope to provide the reader with basic factual

information on the subject, intuitions concerning functions of employing sport motives in selected cinematographic works, and proposition – in the form of exemplification – of the analytical framework for further research. I argue that the discussion of the relations between sport and early Japanese cinema should not be limited to providing a quasi-encyclopaedic descriptive list of films with sport motifs. We should rather focus on issues such as how cinematographic manifestations of sport related to everyday experiences of contemporary audiences, how they were influenced by internal transformations of the Japanese film industry, how they reflected broader social, cultural, political, and ideological processes that swept through Japan, and how certain filmmakers employed sport motifs to provide additional meanings to their works. Such an approach allows me to narrow down the corpus of films discussed in the article. These were selected primarily on the basis of their diversity in employing sport motives. The second criterion was their accessibility – I focus, with a few exceptions – on the films that not only survived, but are also commercially available.

In the article I focus – with a few exceptions – on the films that not only survived, but are also commercially available.

Historical Context of the Development of the Cinema and Sport in Japan

The discussion of the relationship between sport and early Japanese cinema requires prior consideration of historical context in which modern sport and cinema emerged and developed on Japanese soil.

As I mentioned elsewhere (Głownia 2012: 19) one of the most crucial problems faced by the Japanese authorities at the beginning of Meiji era (1868-1912) was the issue of relationship between desirable transformations in the spheres of politics, economy, and technology and socio-cultural change. The question was whether becoming a modern state and obtaining a strong position in the international arena required the ubiquitous acceptance of Western customs. Eventually the authorities rejected the idea of an unconditional following the Western model advocated by the most radical progressivists and sympathizers of Civilization and Enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*) movement. Instead, they chose an approach of acceptance of modernization and rejection of overly Westernization best characterized by the slogan of *wakon-yōsai* (“Japanese spirit and Western technology”). One of the consequences of adopting this ideology was an attempt to create a new Japanese citizen – one that would be able to assimilate Western knowledge, efficiently operate Western

technology, and actively contribute to the processes of modernization, yet who would remain faithful to the “Japanese spirit”, tradition, morals and established social hierarchies and structures of power. At the same time Japanese intellectuals gradually developed concepts of race (*jinshu*), unique qualities of Japanese people (*minzoku*), and national essence (*kokutai*) (Weiner 1997), which were all employed in the formulation of national policy and ideology, and later found their full embodiment in the nationalistic and militaristic tendencies of the 1930s and 1940s. From Japan’s “opening to the world” to the attack on Pearl Harbour, a peculiar kind of “game” was played on Japanese soil – that between “indigenous” and “foreign” elements. Generally, the former – if they were not identified as an indication of backwardness or obstacle for the rise of Japan as a modern nation – were positively valorised, while the latter were accepted only after they were subjected to the procedures of adaptation and nativization. It was a game that both cinema and sport had to participate in. When cinema was introduced to Japan its social functions transcended merely providing entertainment. Not only did the technological aspect of cinematographic apparatus serve as an illustration of the might of Western scientific thought, but the movies themselves were an important source of knowledge about the distant, unknown world. This attitude toward the possibilities of new medium is best summarized by words of Inabata Katsutarō, the first importer of French cinematograph, who wrote: “I believed that this would be the most appropriate device for introducing contemporary Western culture to our country” (Toki, Mizuguchi 1996). In the 1910s the educational aspect of the new medium was further developed by the introduction of the idea of “popular education” (*tsūzoku kyōiku*) and the identification of cinema as one of the means of moral education (for discussion of the subject in relation to such issues as movie attendance by children and youth, youth delinquency, and film censorship see: Makino 2001, Salomon 2002, Glownia 2012). Subsequent film regulations of 1917, 1925 and 1939 gradually extended the authorities’ control over cinema and presented them with a new opportunities of employing it in achieving their political goals.

Sport – both modern and traditional – was also utilized in the processes of moulding the new Japan. Western modern sport was brought to Japan at the beginning of the Meiji era by foreign advisors (known as *oyatoi gaikokujin*, “hired foreigners”) and soon its various disciplines were introduced into Japanese schools as extra-curricular activities (for discussion of the development of Japanese school sport see: Kusaka 2006). The government encouraged adoption of modern sport disciplines in order to enhance the

moral education of the citizens, increase their military efficacy, promote modern lifestyles, and offset the presumed physical inferiority of the Japanese (Atkins 2007: 469). On the other hand, processes of modernization contested the practical value of *bujutsu*, traditional martial arts such as *kenjutsu* (swordsmanship), *kyūjutsu* (archery) and *jūjutsu* (unarmed combat), which led to drastic decrease in their popularity. Their revival in the form of *budō* (as they were called from 1919) was based on redefinition of their philosophical assumptions and concentration on moral education connected with training. In 1926 the term *budō* was introduced to the school physical education curriculum to differentiate traditional martial arts from team sports, and in 1931 *budō* disciplines were adopted in schools as a compulsory subject (Hamaguchi 2006: 6 and 19).

Early Non-Fictional Sport Films

In Japan recording of sports activities on film have a history as long as cinema itself. The first film depicting Japanese sportsmen was created by François-Constant Girel, who was sent to Japan by the Lumière brothers in order to help Inabata Katsutarō establish his film enterprise. Apart from serving as a serviceman and instructor for Inabata's projection teams, Girel made, for his French employers, a series of short "filmic postcards" depicting sceneries, customs, and daily life in Japan, which were later distributed in a Europe eager to see new views of exotic lands and its people. One of these films was about one-minute long *Japanese sword fencing* (*Escrime au sabre japonais*, 1897), shot in Kyoto during a *kenjutsu* training warm-up. When the first Japanese cameramen engaged in the filmmaking, the subjects they pursued – urban landscapes, geisha dances, theatrical performances – differed little from these chosen by their Western counterparts. Abé Mark Nornes observes that the films from the Lumière brothers catalogue tended to fit certain moulds, such as the family scene, the performer, the beautiful woman *etc.*, and the earliest films shot in Japan – by both foreign and local cameramen – constituted local variations of such formulas in which different culture filled the same general slot in the catalogue (Nornes 2003: 3). Soon Japanese film culture developed its own "general slot" in the form of films depicting sumo matches, which were shot *inter alia* by Tsuchiya Tsuneji and Konishi Ryō (Komatsu 1992: 237, McDonald 1994: 40).

Early Japanese film screening were often enriched by the application of extra-filmic elements. For example: when *Two People at Dōjō Temple* (*Ninjin Dōjōji*, 1899, Shibata Tsunekichi) was exhibited at one of the *kabuki* theatres in August 1900, an impressive scenography – consisting of an

artificial valley and pond filled with fishes – was constructed in front of the screen, and while the film was projected an electric fan generated a cool breeze directed at the audience (Komatsu 1997: 177). Sumo films were often screened in accordance with this mode of presentation as exhibitors decorated their facilities, *benshi* – film narrators who accompanied projections – presented contestants and commented on the fight, while the members of the audience cheered for their favourites. Contemporary account on one of such screening from “Kyōto Shinbun” from February 1902 describes it as follows:

“We see the figure of Umegaya the wrestler blown up to the size of the stage. The whole theatre is decked out like a real sumo tournament with colourful banners everywhere, and the *benshi* uses a megaphone to call out the announcements as if he were in a real stadium.” (High 1984: 34)

Films depicting sumo matches were so popular that in 1910 a facility called Sumō-katsudō-kan – which sole purpose was to screen sumo films – was constructed in a Luna Park (*Runa pāku*), located in Asakusa, Tokyo’s entertainment district. Popularity of sumo films may be attributed to sumo’s revival after the period of crisis and – from the broader perspective – renewal of the interest in traditional martial arts under the influence of Japanese military successes in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) (Starecki 2006). Additionally there was also a more trivial reason: sumo tournaments were held twice a year, while films were screened all year round, on daily basis.

In contrast to sumo, neither traditional *kenjutsu* nor its modern incarnations were popular subjects of non-fiction films. Nonetheless, there was at least one attempt at recording swordsmanship on film and making its screening more appealing to the audience. At the premiere of *The Art of Shintō-style Sword Drama* (*Shintō-ryū kenbujutsu sugekimi*, 1908) – a film depicting the sword dance performed by Hibino Raifu, the founder of the Shintō-ryū school of swordsmanship – while the film was projected Hibino himself stood in front of the screen and recited Chinese poems (Komatsu 1992: 246). That, however, does not mean that Japanese cinema-goers were reluctant to see sword fight. On the contrary – fictional films with that kind of content were highly popular. It seems that the audiences were simply more interested in fanciful duels in *kyūha* films (literally: “old school”, period films derived initially from *kabuki* and later from *kōdan*), than in realistic depictions of swordsmanship techniques in non-fiction films.

Cinema, sport and socio-political transformations of Japan

Despite the tremendous popularity of non-fiction sumo films in the early 20th century, sport was absent from Japanese fictional films until well into the 1920s. One may argue that inclusion of sport elements into fictional films was not compatible with idiosyncrasies and production policy of the nascent Japanese movie industry oriented toward production of generic period dramas and *shinpa* melodramas. Only after a new breed of Japanese filmmakers turned their attention to everyday life, experiences, aspirations, and problems of the audiences did sport gradually become more visible in films and started to play a more important in their narratives. One of the main factors of this change of approach toward filmmaking was the influence of Kido Shirō, head of Shōchiku's Kamata studios, who – after he was appointed to this position in 1924 – insisted on making films “directly connected to the actual lives of contemporary people” (Miyao 2013: 55) or, as he phrased it, “[about] people just like you and me” (Richie 2005:47). Shōchiku was a cradle of *shomin-geki* (“common people drama”), a broad genre that focused on a daily lives of average citizens, usually members of the lower-middle class, and frequently employed a slice-of-life technique. Because of this approach *shomin-geki* films, as well as films belonging to its derivative (sub)genres – quite often depicted sport activities or featured sport-related elements (equipment, facilities, photos *etc.*). Shortly after Kido was appointed as head of Kamata studios Ushihara Kiyohiko laid the foundations for the development of so-called *supotsu-mono* (sport films) in which he later specialized (Anderson, Richie 1982: 51, Wada-Marciano 2003: 63).

It is important to emphasize the sport was seldom – if ever – the key component of Japanese films of the period discussed in this article, at least not in the way of Western sport films which tend to focus on sporting competitions, rivalry between two contestants or teams, and their training. Depending on the filmmaker's preferences sport could serve – among other things – as an additional attraction to the film, as a way to establish the social environment in which a film's action took place or to enrich the characterization of a protagonist, and as a means for providing the film with additional meaning. However, regardless of its particular function(s) in a narrative, as well as whether it was positioned in the foreground, in the background or only had “cameo role”, sport was above all a clear indicator of the cultural transformation of Japan.

After they turned their attention to the lives of their contemporaries, Japanese filmmakers were relatively quickly to realize – and testify – that

the postulate of separation of modernization from Westernization might have worked in theory, but was hard – if at all possible – to achieve in the real world. Films produced in the late 1920s and 1930s depicted an urban Japan that was largely Occidentalized: people dressed in Western fashion, streets and cafes full of *modan gāru* (modern, independent, and supposedly sexually liberated women), imported consumer goods piling up in shop windows, jazz music coming from apartments and clubs, crowded cinema theatres, and modern sport disciplines. Some filmmakers greeted these changes benevolently, while others approached them with a greater degree of reflection, and pointed out their possible negative aspects, such as deepening of generational differences, dissolution of family structures, and lack of compatibility between traditional and modern values. In doing so they frequently employed the expressive rhetorical-stylistic figure of juxtaposing two contrastive models of femininity: overtly westernized and “traditional”. Of course, the latter – hence the quotation marks – was a modern intellectual construct, an “invented tradition”, based on the qualities attributed to “traditional woman” by the dominant discourse of that period. Thus “traditional” women depicted on screens were in fact quite modern, at least in comparison to the women of the Edo and early Meiji periods.

Even though the authorities had a fairly clear vision of which Western elements should be eliminated from Japan, and acted against them legally, especially after Japan embarked on the path of war – for example: in 1939 cosmetics were banned as unnecessary luxury, in 1940 university teachers were forbidden to use the Bible in classroom as it was perceived as harmful to the moral education of the Japanese, in 1941 movie theatres were forbidden to screen American and British movies, and in 1942 broadcasting of “enemy music” was prohibited – their attitude toward sport was somewhat schizophrenic. On the one hand, modern western sport disciplines were considered somewhat undesirable, as discordant with the Japanese tradition, on the other hand, through, there was a strong tendency to “Japanize” them, by including them into the discourse of a “national essence” and filling them with the “spirit of *budō*”. It was concluded that they may serve Japan if the competitive aspect and individualism were eliminated and replaced with collectivism and a self-cultivation ethos. At the same time traditional *budō* was promoted as the best way of fostering the spirit of self-abandonment and devotion to the nation-state (Inoue 1998: 89-90). The 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam proved that the Western sport disciplines have a huge potential in the development of imagined “Japaneseness”. Japanese representation had its first big success

in the international sport arena by winning five medals, including two gold, and setting a new world record in the 200-meter breaststroke. At the end of the Olympic Games Japan occupied 15th position in the medal classification, being better than countries such as Austria, Norway, Poland, New Zealand and Spain. “Tōkyō Asahi Shimbun”, one of the leading Japanese newspapers, wrote:

“People were yelling <<Banzai!>> from the spectator stands when the two runners stood together for photographers. The other countries’ reporters rushed toward us and asked to shake our hands. These Japanese runners embodied the Japanese spirit, demonstrating that Japanese resilience and power can win over the world, even though their bodies are small.” (Wada-Marciano 2008: 62)

Strategies of Employing Sport Motives in Japanese Cinema of the Late 1920s and Early to Mid-1930s

In my opinion it is possible to distinguish at least three strategies of employing sport motives in Japanese cinema of the late 1920s and 1930s: 1) neutral observation in which modern sports are presented as one of the aspects of socio-cultural transformations of Japan, 2) introduction of more or less elaborate sport motives into the narratives of films in which sport does not play a dominant role but which attempt to comment on social reality, 3) utilisation of sport motives as purely symbolical devices. Of course this is not a classification but a typology, as there are films which employ strategies that could be identified as intermediate forms of those mentioned above.

The first strategy is best exemplified by two early works of Ozu Yasujirō – *Days of Youth* (*Gakusei romansu: Wakaki hi*, 1929) and *I Flunked, But...* (*Rakudai wa shita keredo*, 1930), both student comedies inspired by the films of Ernst Lubitsch and Harold Lloyd. Refraining from valorising socio-cultural changes that took place in Japan, Ozu simply shows how important a part of the lives of contemporary youth Western popular culture and leisure activities were. Among its indicators are foreign movie magazines read by the characters, and the walls covered with photos of Western movie stars and film posters – in *Days of Youth* it is a poster for the *7th Heaven* (1927, Frank Borzage), while in *I Flunked, But...* one for the *Charming Sinners* (1929, Robert Milton). Another element of everyday experiences of Japanese youth depicted in these films is modern sport.

Day of Youth and *I Flunked, But...* differ drastically in terms of importance of sport elements – while in the latter they are relegated to the background, in the former they are showcased. In the opening panning shot of Tokyo University the viewer is able to see a sports stadium in which the match is played. In the later part of the film the protagonist gazes at the shop window where various sports equipment is displayed, which clearly demonstrates the popularity of Western sport disciplines in contemporary Japanese society. A large part of the movie takes place on the slopes of Akakura, where the protagonists enjoy skiing, which was popular activity among the young intelligentsia. Besides signaling certain social trends, the employment of skiing in the film's narrative was also functional, as it allowed Ozu to experiment with certain film techniques (dynamic editing, panoramic shots, point of view shots) and to construct a series of slapstick gags, based on the pranks between the two main characters that resulted from their rivalry – not in sport but in love. As the humour in *I Flunked, But...* has a different basis, sport is not featured extensively and its rare appearances are brief, yet they still indicate that sport was an integral part of student's lives.

Both films demonstrate that interest in sport of Japanese youth was not limited to engaging in it at an amateur level as a leisure activity. Various elements of these films suggest that the characters are sports fans, engaged in supporting both their school teams and professional athletes. The images of sportsmen in photos and on posters and shot where one of the students is reading a sport magazine suggest the rise of new heroes of mass imagination. It is also worth noting that the discipline presented in *I Flunked, But...* is baseball. This is quite important as baseball was at that time – and still is – tremendously popular in Japan, and as such was frequently depicted in films. Baseball established its popularity in the late 19th century. One of the factors that certainly contributed to this was its egalitarian character. Another one – which flattered Japanese national pride – was the series of victories of Tokyo's First Higher School's (*Daiichi Kōtō Gakkō*, a.k.a. *Ichikō*) baseball team over the Yokohama Athletic Club that accepted only white members (Klein 1997: 79-80).

The second of the aforementioned strategies of employing sport motifs into films was successfully adapted by Shimazu Yasujirō, one of the pioneers of *shomin-geki*. He utilised a sport motif as early as 1923 when he directed *Father* (*Otosan*, a.k.a. *Chichi*), a light-hearted comedy about a baseball champion and a country girl, which allowed him to contrast the mentalities of urban and rural Japan, and – as some film scholars argue – expose class

differences characteristic of that period (Richie 2005: 46). However, it is a film he made over a decade later that is of particular interest here.

Our Neighbour, miss Yae (*Tonari no Yae-chan*, 1934) focuses on a few days in the lives of two middle-class families living in the Tokyo suburbs. Although the film features a quite elaborate sport motif – as one of the film premises is Seiji’s preparation for a baseball competition under the guidance of his older brother – it does not dominate the narrative. Due to the adoption of the slice-of-life technique four scenes depicting baseball-related activities – two of training, one of a match, and one of what appears to be purely recreational play – comfortably blend in with other scenes to present a holistic view on the daily life of “average” Japanese citizens (quotation mark due to the fact that they are representatives of certain social strata). The images appearing on the screen could be characterized as “the New Japan in a nutshell” – young protagonists wear western clothes, study foreign languages, visit commerce districts and cinemas (in one scene they watch one of the Betty Boop animation shorts), and do sports, and the *Red River Valley* song can be heard in the background.

What differentiates *Our Neighbour, miss Yae* from previously discussed films by Ozu – apart from the social environment in which the action takes place and general tone – is that Shimazu does not limit himself to chronicling the social transformations of Japan, but also comments on them. Yet even though he points out such issues as generational differences, especially in the approach toward gender roles and the institution of marriage, he remains an optimist – although the parents may find it hard to understand their daughter, they take it with a smile. In terms of the subject of this article the match scene which appears near the end of the film is of particular interest, as it shows that the authorities were unable to fully realise their ambitions concerning important sports – although they certainly developed the habit of self-cultivation they were still marked by a competitive spirit and, above all, they were perceived by youth not as a form of physical and spiritual development but as entertainment.

One may argue that the constation of failure of national sport policy is also present in the *Children in the Wind* (*Kaze no naka no kodomo*, 1937, Shimizu Hiroshi), the first part of a dylogy of children’s films based on the novels of Tsubota Jōji. In one of the scenes the young protagonists – Zenta and Senpai – play with their father, pretending that they are participating in a sumo match. Yet this “match” is nothing like the spiritual ceremony as the authorities would like to see it, but a chaotic scramble. Moreover, their father does not treat sumo as an element of a moral education, but as a way to create and maintain a close relationship with his children and to

entertain them. While discussing this film it is worth mentioning another scene in which the brothers play, pretending that they are taking part in the Olympic Games and acting the out the swimming competition with Zenta acting as a speaker, who first presents the contestants and later commentates on the race. Besides being humorous and providing audiences with a few laughs, this scene clearly illustrates the broad diffusion of interest in water sports after the Japanese success at the Amsterdam Summer Olympics.

Films belonging to the *supotsu-mono* genre did not limit themselves – as in a case of numerous Western sport films – to the depiction of training and competition, but often openly referred to social issues. This approach is best exemplified by *Why do the Youth Cry?* (*Wakamono yo naze naku ka*, 1930, Ushihara Kiyohiko), which focus on the events of lives of two friends coming from radically different social backgrounds. The first – Shigeru – is a young sport stars who leaves his rich family along with his “traditional” sister, as the cannot stand their overly westernized, hedonistic stepmother. The second is a left-wing journalist and political activist born into a working class family, who accuses Shigeru’s father – who is a cabinet minister – of accepting a bribe. Although some critics accused the film of being conformists – as it features a happy ending in which Shigeru’s family is reconciled and his father clears himself of bribery charge, which suggests that the internal contradictions and social problems of modern Japan can be resolved without carrying out systematic changes – it clearly illustrates the tendency of sport genre films to address socio-political issues (for extensive discussion of this film and its social-political context see Wada-Marciano 2008: 62-75).

As I mentioned before certain films employ sport motives in a way that situates them somewhere in between two of the three strategies I have distinguished. Such is the case of Ozu’s exceptional *The Lady and the Beard* (*Shukujo to hige*, 1931). On the one hand, sport motif is utilised symbolically, yet, on the other, it constitutes an integral part of a narrative that helps to complement the character of the protagonist and to maintain the casual relationship between certain scenes. What differentiates this film from *Days of Youth* and *I Flunked, but...* is that this time Ozu went beyond the role of chronicler and commented on the changes that had occurred in Japan. *The Lady and the Beard* is a humorous discussion on Japanese modernity from the perspective of – as Krzysztof Loska aptly characterizes him – “a modern conservative” (Loska 2009: 193).

The plot focuses on the adventures of a hard-headed traditionalist and martial arts practitioner, who finds it hard to adjust to modern Japan and

whose lush beard – which serves as a one of the symbols of his yearning for the good old times – makes it impossible for him to find a job. By applying the popular device of contrastive visions of femininity – a modest, “traditional” girl vs. modern, demonic, yet somehow appealing *femme fatale* – Ozu presents highly stereotyped alternatives for future Japan, depending on which path it would embarked on. However, unlike the radical conservatives he does not advocate an unconditional return to “tradition” as a remedy for problems posed by modernity. Firstly, he treats the *femme fatale* with a certain degree of sympathy and allows her to change her ways, which does not necessarily mean that she has to stop wearing Western fashion or visiting to cafes. Secondly, his depiction of a conservative protagonist is satirical. Ozu reveals his intentions as early as the opening scene, where, by presenting a *kendō* competition in a slapstick manner, he strips this marital art from the splendour and philosophical depth with which it was associated with in the nationalistic discourse. What is more, in one of later scenes he depicts another derivative of traditional Japanese swordsmanship – the sword dance – in an equally satirical manner. It is also worth noting that the protagonist is, in fact, quite modern, as in many respects his traditionalism and conservatism draws from attitudes of late-19th century Japan. His vision of ideal femininity is close to the idea of “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*) and among his “role models” presented on various photographs are Abraham Lincoln, Karl Marx, and Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy. This clearly shows that clear-cut binary opposition of “traditional” vs. “modern” is not sufficient to properly describe social attitudes and discursive practices of that period.

Ozu was by no means the only Japanese filmmaker of that period who associated the psychological traits of characters with the sports they practiced. A similar approach can be found in Shimizu’s sequel to *Children in the Wind* – *Four Seasons of Children* (*Kodomo no shiki*, 1939). The association of the young brother’s grandfather with *kyūjutsū*, though brief, as he is seen with a bow for about two minutes, is of great significance. It perfectly complements the image of a man of a bygone era, a proponent of a traditional family model based on rigid hierarchy, but also one of high moral standards, especially when compared to his Westernized associate who embodies brutal capitalism at its worst.

The strategy of employing sport motif as a purely symbolical device was brilliantly applied by Mizoguchi’s Kenji’s in *Tokyo March* (*Tōkyō kōshinkyoku*, 1929). Mizoguchi used the melodramatic formula as a pretext to expose profound social-economic disproportions that characterized modern urban Japan. A combination of effective cuts, *benshi* narration, intertitles,

and a melancholic song sung by Satō Chikayo, creates a striking contrast between the entertainment and commerce districts, such as Ginza or Asakusa, and the industrial parts of the capital “covered in smoke and dust”, whose inhabitants, instead of indulging in carefree consumption struggle to survive. This explicit thesis is complemented by an extremely intense tennis scene. At the beginning of this scene the camera follows a tennis match played by four friends, which seems like another neutral observation of the one of the popular leisure activities devoid of any ethical connotations. At one point the tennis ball lands outside the court on a lower level. At the players’ request a young girl living there tries to throw the ball back over the fence – a symbolic social barrier between the urban underclass and the upper class. Despite her efforts she is unable to do so. Fascinated by the girl’s beauty one of the friends takes her photo with a camera – yet another symbol of wealth and social status. This brief contact between two social worlds comes to an end and the friends return to their joyful activities.

Although both Ozu in *The Lady and the Beard* and Mizoguchi in *Tokyō March* added a certain “surplus of meaning” to sport-related scenes, there are important differences between their approaches. In the case of Ozu’s film the sport theme was used to highlight certain psychological traits of the main character and to introduce a number of scenes related to his interest in martial arts, which, in turn, led to other scenes – hence the sport motif is functional for the narrative. Mizoguchi, on the other hand, utilised the sport motif solely as a platform for social commentary. The choice of a tennis match as a way to contrast modern Japanese haves and have-nots was arbitrary as the analogical though could have been expressed in many other ways, by depicting one of many other –non-sport-related – aspects of big city life.

Sport in War-Time Cinema: Conformity and Contestation

With the gradual extension of state control over the Japanese movie industry – which culminated in the promulgation of the 1939 Film Law (*Eiga-hō*) and the articulation of the idea of so-called “national cinema” (*kokumin eiga*) and “national policy films” (*kokusaku eiga*) that expressed the “Japanese spirit” unspoiled by Western influences (*ibid.* 283-300) – Japanese authorities obtained the means to present on the screens their vision of the world. During the war, Japanese filmmakers, regardless of the subject of their films, were left with two options. They could adapt to the requirements imposed on them and at best – if they were not characterized by a total indifference – introduce into the films, consistent with national

policy, themes in which they were particularly interested (as in the case of Ozu's war-time films), or engage in a dangerous game with the authorities by infusing their works with subversive elements.

Kursawa Akira chose the first option. His *Judo saga* dylogy (*Sugata Sanshirō*, 1943; *Zoku Sugata Sanshirō*, 1945) – although its first part was strongly criticized by the Imperial Army's Media Section for its too Western style and content, and was released only after Ozu's intercession (Richie 1990: 39) – can be perceived as a panegyric to the values attributed to the martial arts, and – at least to some extent – as a symbolic lecture on Japan's foreign policy. Hiroshi Shimizu – though he later made his share of *kokusaku eiga* with *Sayon's Bell* (*Sayon no kane*, 1943) – took the opposite approach. His *A Star Athlete* (*Haganata senshu*, 1937), which premiered only three months after the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, focuses on a student's two-day march in the rural countryside which constitutes a part of their military exercise. On a surface level Shimizu's film contains all the elements that the authorities wished to see in such type of film, as it associates sport with military drill, depicts the joy of being conscripted and popular support for the institution of military, and the its moral could be summarized in words: "No matter how good you are individually, it is the group that comes first" (Burch 1979, 249). Despite all these elements – or maybe thanks to them – *A Star Athlete* is a charmingly subversive film. Although students sing militaristic songs – from which one can learn that even though the enemies outnumber them they are like sheep without a shepherd – they do it in an ironic way. Moreover, they seem to be more interested in girls and individual sport competition than in enhancing military skills. Last but not least – they argue which one of them more resembles Gary Cooper in his role in *Morocco* (1930, Josef von Sternberg).

A Star Athlete was made before the promulgation of the 1939 Film Law which introduced pre-production censorship in addition to pre-existing post-production censorship – from now on all scripts had to be approved by Home Ministry's censors before the shooting even began. Thus its creators were in much better position in terms of creative freedom than filmmakers working under the constraints of restrictive law. Until the end of the war sports and physical exercises were depicted – in both dramatic and documentary films – almost exclusively as a tool for physical and spiritual development and in the context of their benefits for military and industry. Yamamoto Kajirō's *The War at Sea from Hawaii to Malaya* (*Hawai Mare oki kaisen*, 1942) Watanabe Kunio's *Toward the Decisive Battle in the Sky* (*Kessen no Ozora e*, 1943) are the best examples of films that stress the

importance of physical education in military training. The former contains elaborate scenes of physical exercises, sumo training and rugby match. Watanabe's film goes one step further – one of its main plot points concerns a sickly boy who overcomes his weakness under the influence of a group of fit, strong, and dedicated cadets. *The Most Beautiful (Ichiban utsukushiku, 1944)*, second Kurosawa's film, presents sport as a means of building up strength, stamina, and morale of young members of the Women's Labor Volunteer Corps working at the lens factory in Hiratsuka by juxtaposing scenes of volleyball matches with girls' other activities, and – most notably – charts depicting constant rise in production. Yet, film's approach toward sports is not completely utilitarian as – apart from a sequence of temporary crisis – girls are depicted as if they were genuinely enjoying the game.

Post Scriptum

From their introduction into Japanese sport and cinema were entangled in the socio-political discourse(s) related to the processes of modernization, westernization, and militarization. Japan's defeat in the Pacific War and its subsequent occupation by Allied Forces led to yet another series of fundamental socio-political transformations. Post-war Japan did not release cinema or sports from their service to state and society – it just assigned them a new set of tasks. This, however, is a subject for a separate article.

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Nastasya: Wajda, Dostoyevsky and kabuki Theatre

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ABSTRACT

Nastasya (1994) is the least known and the most original film by Andrzej Wajda. To adapt Dostoyevsky's novel for a film, the director chose one of the elements of Japanese *kabuki* theatre: the acting style and technique of *onnagata* – male actors impersonating female characters on stage. In Wajda's film male and female protagonist are played by the same actor – Bando Tamasaburo – the most famous present-day *onnagata*. In both roles Tamasaburo is neither feminine nor masculine, he is subverting binary oppositions, just like the characters in Dostoyevsky's novel. In *Nastasya* Tamasaburo's acting builds a bridge between European and Japanese art and makes Wajda's reading of *The Idiot* unorthodox and unique.

KEYWORDS: kabuki, *onnagata*, Polish film, Bando Tamasaburo, Dostoyevsky, Andrzej Wajda.

The film *Nastasya* (*Nastazja*, 1994) is one of the least known films directed by Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda and probably one of his most original and daring artistic ventures, the director himself called this film 'strange' or 'bizarre'. The screenplay is based on the last scene of *The Idiot* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky and there is nothing surprising about the fact that this acclaimed Polish film director brought to the screen the Russian classic writer, whose works he had previously directed on stage. But the strongly theatrical setting of this film and its unusual casting definitely is the surprising part of this endeavor.

Polish literary critic Stanisław Mackiewicz wrote on *The Idiot* that:

“The night that Prince Myshkin spends beside the body of the murdered *Nastasya* with her murderer are the best pages of all Dostoyevski's writings and that this is possibly the most scary scene in world literature. It has a kind of diabolical power.” (Mackiewicz 1992: 145).

This small fragment of *The Idiot* had inspired Wajda to stage only this last scene of the novel with only two actors as Myshkin and Rogozhyn. Yet the need for the stage presence of *Nastasya* was very strong so the director was searching for the perfect casting for this role and he found it in the person

of the Japanese actor Bandō Tamasaburō V, the most famous present-day *onnagata* – an actor impersonating female roles on stage in *kabuki* theatre. Tamasaburō is the key to Wajda's artistic experiment in *Nastasya*. The actor is known for playing female roles in *kabuki* plays, but he also acts as female characters in European style performances, such as Lady Macbeth, Desdemona, Medea, Juliet, The Lady of Camellias, as well as female roles in the plays of Yukio Mishima.

After seeing Tamasaburō on stage in the title role in *The Lady of Camellias* in 1981 Wajda described his acting as the creative mode of expressing beauty. For his *Nastasya*, the director wanted to create “a kind of artistic shock, a tension between the element of creativity and stylization” (Scott 1994). About Tamasaburō's acting Wajda wrote that “it is beautiful because it is artificial, and without artificiality art loses its greatness” (Wajda 1994: 12). When one sees Tamasaburō on stage playing woman, a real woman on stage seems unnatural. Femininity presented by a man is no longer imitation but creation. As Wajda said: “Tamasaburō as Myshkin was becoming *Nastasya* yet all transformation was internal and this resulted in duality, a split which any of European actors isn't able to achieve” (Buszewicz 1996: 271). When in 1951 *The Idiot* directed by Akira Kurosawa was screened for the first time, French film critic Farroth Gaffany wrote in his review that “the last scene of the film [the same one that Wajda filmed in *Nastasya*] could be played only by Russians or Japanese – the people who are not afraid of excess and grand gestures” (Helman 1994: 12). His words sound oddly accurate regarding Tamasaburō's role in the film.

Wajda claimed that he was “constantly searching for the mystery of Dostoyevsky and Bandō Tamasaburō seems to touch this mystery deeper than others” (Wajda 1994: 12). For the director:

“The female parts created by Bandō Tamasaburō are especially dear because of the idealization of women, also present in Polish tradition. This is exactly how he views *Nastasya* (...) The creation of this amazing artist is an image of eternal femininity born out of masculine admiration, never an act of imitation or mimicry. It is this creative form which for us, as Europeans, is the most striking feature of Japanese art.” (Buszewicz 1996: 274)

In Wajda's interpretation, the film *Nastasya* is the theatrical reading of the Dostoyevsky's novel, yet the theatre tradition the director is referring to is

not only European but it reaches out to Japanese art which has always been Wajda's great fascination¹. In the film the culture of Japan is the origin of *onnagata*, the acting style of Bandō Tamasaburō that combines the symbolic and the real. This harmony of opposites is the essence and the genius of Japanese theatre.

To understand the phenomenon of *onnagata* acting we need to look at the beginnings of Japanese *kabuki* theatre. At first *kabuki* was a commercial song and dance show in which only women performed (Tubielewicz 1996: 128). In 1629, 23 years after the first *kabuki* show, the government forbade women to play on stage regarding their performances as a source of depravity (Tubielewicz 1996: 128). After women were banned from performing, cross-dressing male actors, known as *onnagata* took over. Along with the change in the performers' gender, came a change in the emphasis of the performance: increased stress was placed on drama rather than dance. When male actors appeared on stage in female roles, the unreal element in *kabuki* has been introduced. The presence of *onnagata* was at first regarded as an obstacle, yet later it has become the most crucial element and *kabuki* has transformed into the theatre of actors-virtuosos. Owing to the costume, stage make-up and the formalized gesture, *onnagata* actors allure the audience with their creation of the illusion of beauty and femininity.

The genius of *onnagata* acting is paradoxical: a talented female imitator onstage resembles a woman much more than a real woman herself. According to Donald Keene, the famous 17th and 18th century *onnagata* Yoshizawa Ayame said that:

“A woman on stage cannot express perfect feminine beauty because she is relying only on her physical features and gestures, and therefore she is far from being perfect. An actress can be more realistic in female roles than male actor, but she cannot present the most crucial elements of femininity as aptly as an *onnagata* who has studied women's behavior. *Onnagata's* aim is to create rather an abstraction of womanhood than a real-life woman, they reject reality for an unreal stylized beauty and formalized grace” (Keene 2010: 98).

¹ As Wajda recalls: “During the German occupation, which I spent in Krakow, I had to hide because my papers were very unsatisfactory. I went to town just once, when I found out that at the Sukiennice (Cloth Hall) there was an exhibition of Japanese art. (...) I took a risk and slipped into the Sukiennice and I must say it was an incredible adventure. I remember every detail to this day”. (<http://www.wajda.pl/en/japonia.html>)

Onnagata actors are a kind of simulacrum, a copy without an original, because as men they watch women's behavior and they model their acting on them, yet they add an emotional factor reserved for men because in Japanese culture women are supposed to hide their emotions. Therefore female characters in *kabuki* theatre are not realistic portraits of women but highly stylized ones because the mode of expression is the fundamental aspect of this theatre. *Onnagata* actors are neither men nor women, on the *kabuki* stage they bring to life a new gender, the artistic one, that is the synthesis of idealized female features and male's observation and emotions. As opposed to Hollywood or mainstream film made by men for men, in *kabuki* theatre *onnagata* acting is not the result of male desires but the result of thorough observation of women and refined femininity.

In the interview Bandō Tamasaburō said that he used to think that he could behave like a woman but he never looked at the world through a woman's eyes. He understood that his vision of a woman is the vision made by man. He plays a woman yet he keeps his masculine regard and masculine emotions, he is like a painter who is painting a female portrait. When creating an *onnagata* role on stage he is trying to present an ideal picture of a woman, just like a writer who describes a woman's feelings from a male perspective². Tamasaburō's words sound like an accurate description of the final part of *The Idiot*, which is composed of descriptions and observations of Nastasya made by two men: Myshkin and Rogozhin. These descriptions were also written by another man – Dostoyevsky, so Wajda's artistic choice to cast an *onnagata* actor to play Nastasya seems very accurate and proves the director's extensive understanding of Japanese culture.

Strangely, Wajda also had the idea that Bandō Tamasaburō would be an excellent choice for the role of Prince Myshkin. Therefore, the audience is able to witness the miraculous transformation of a man into a woman, and to experience the deeply mysterious mental connection between Myshkin and Nastasya. Strictly speaking, Bandō Tamasaburō does not play Nastasya Filippovna, except for the small scenes at the beginning and at the end of the film. The part he plays is that of Prince Myshkin. He appears on stage with Rogozhin to keep vigil over the dead woman's body. But when both men recall her, Prince Myshkin – transformed by the art of the Japanese actor – changes into Nastasya before the viewers' very eyes. Tamasaburō doesn't create Nastasya through stage make-up or costume. Dressed up only in a white shawl he creates a woman strictly through his acting. Myshkin's transformation into Nastasya discloses two incarnations of this

² Interview with the actor in the film *Das Geschriebene Gesicht (The Written Face)*, 1996, Daniel Schmid).

woman: she's Rogozhin's Nastasya – the object of destructive passion, and she is also Myshkin's Nastasya – the one who suffers and can be saved by his kindness. The mysterious connection between Nastasya and Myshkin is emphasized in the last scene, where Myshkin sleeps on the bench and twists in pain the second Nastasya is killed by Rogozhin.

In both incarnations, as Myshkin, as well as Nastasya, Tamasaburō is neither feminine nor masculine; he breaks binary oppositions, just like both characters in Dostoyevsky's novel. Especially actor's interpretation of Myshkin is concurrent with Dostoyevsky's intentions. In *The Idiot* the Russian writer aimed to create a representation of an absolutely perfect human being. *The Idiot* was an ironic title, yet it resembled perfectly the social reactions for a man who is pure and untouched by evil. In Wajda's film Tamasaburō's role of Myshkin emphasizes the idealistic dimension of Myshkin's character.

The film *Nastasya* is the movie of two actors: Bandō Tamasaburō and Toshiyuki Nagashima, who plays Rogozhin. Each of them is the opposite of the other and Nagashima's role creates the background for Tamasaburō's performance. The opposition of these two actors is indicated even in the colours of their costumes: Bandō Tamasaburō as Myshkin, and as Nastasya, is dressed in white, while Nagashima as Rogozhin is wearing black. The ambivalent and subdued roles of Myshkin and Nastasya are created in opposition to Rogozhin, who is sullen, hot-tempered, unbalanced and masculine.

In Wajda's film Bandō Tamasaburō as Nastasya is not trying to be feminine just as he is not masculine as Myshkin. Each of these roles contains a small part of the other. Myshkin turning into Nastasya is first and foremost *androgynous*. Such an aspect of Myshkin's character brings another important feature of Wajda's film, which is breaking down dichotomies. In Dostoyevsky's novel Myshkin was written as a character that does not follow social norms, he is the Other, and that is why he is regarded as an idiot. In Tamasaburō's role Myshkin does not belong to the gender dichotomy because he is the perfect human being, and as such he is above all dichotomies. Owing to his skills as an *onnagata* Tamasaburō plays Myshkin with great ambivalence. His acting places the character of Myshkin outside social divisions and other categorizations.

Another fundamental element of Tamasaburō's performance as Myshkin is idealization. This character is a perfect human being, but he is also standing apart, separated by an invisible barrier from other people, who are unable to understand him. Another barrier that deepens his separation him from society is his illness, epilepsy. Myshkin's seclusion was perfectly

played by Tamasaburō, who said: “the film *Nastasya* allowed him to create his own world. Working with Wajda enabled him to approach the *onnagata* tradition and to create something completely new out of it.” (Scott 1994) This new creation is the character of Myshkin that overthrows all orders, including the gender dichotomy and social order – the two restrictions that define conventional perception of the world, society, art etc.

Nastasya is an interesting film compared to Wajda’s other works. In this film one cannot find the director’s usual themes and motives: such as Polish heritage or individuals entangled in history. But this film is living proof of his own artistic passions: Dostoyevsky, theatre and Japanese art. *Nastasya* is probably the only film where these passions meet and this makes it artistically more personal than Wajda’s other films. In *Nastasya* theatre and film art combine but both these arts are equally represented. The film relies heavily on theatrical aspects, namely three unities are respected, but film art also includes some of its elements to create something more than a filmed theatre spectacle.

When Myshkin visits Rogozhin to ask about *Nastasya*, any other film director would have begun a retrospection yet Wajda started a theatrical drama, a metamorphosis of Myshkin into *Nastasya*. But he applied the means of film narrative to this spectacle. Myshkin asks his question three times in the film, the plot returns three times to the same starting point. These repetitions of the question about *Nastasya* increase and express Myshkin’s anxiety and create the atmosphere that climaxes gradually until the end. The filmmakers are not trying to convince the viewers that there is something more in *Nastasya* than conventionality of a spectacle that does not imitate life in a filmic way, but creates its own convention. In this convention Wajda includes a strange rhythm so that the quasi-flashbacks resemble nightmare visions of a tormented mind. The dreamlike aspect of this film is also emphasized by cinematography of Paweł Edelman composed from blue-tinted shots filled with mist and diffused light. Staginess is filtered through suggestive, surreal images which can be seen only in films.

In *Nastasya* Andrzej Wajda proved his unconventional approach to Dostoyevsky. The Polish director combined the traditions of European and Japanese theatre. In the past *kabuki* was the place where townspeople went to enjoy life and to feel free from the rigors imposed on them by samurai and officials. *Kabuki* theaters used to be isolated oases of freedom, where people felt liberated and independent. This spirit of old-time *kabuki* lives on in Wajda’s film, in which the director favors unlimited freedom of artistic creation. Japanese film critic Satsumi Hagiwara wrote in his review

of *Nastasya* that “it seems like the history of relations between the Far East and the West is enclosed in this particular film” (Buszewicz 1996: 275). In the film the director’s reading of *The Idiot* is an unorthodox one, it breaks barriers between East and West, namely between European and Japanese culture, the two main inspirations in Wajda’s entire body of work.

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Kobayashi Masaki and the Legacy of the World War II

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ABSTRACT

In the 1950s there appeared numerous films which showed the futility of war and critically evaluated the past, their weakness, however, lay in a tendency to sentimentalize history and in the use of melodrama conventions which allowed for the elevation of suffering. The few exceptions are the films by Kobayashi Masaki, who managed to avoid these temptations, thus becoming the most distinguished director of the films that analysed Japan's responsibility for war. In my paper I focus on three works: *The Thick-Walled Room* (*Kabe atsuki heya*, 1953) - the story of prisoners accused of war crimes and imprisoned in Sugamo Prison, who cannot cope with the guilt and are persecuted by the nightmares of the past; monumental trilogy *The Human Condition* (*Ningen no jōken*, 1959-1961) based on a novel by Gomikawa Junpei, which "breaks new ground with its grim descriptions of Japanese atrocities perpetrated on Asians and on fellow Japanese" (Orr 2001: 107); and five-hour documentary Tokyo Trial (Tōkyō saiban, 1983), which provides a fascinating account of the work of the International Military Tribunal. Thanks to Kobayashi's works, the problem of war crimes, of the responsibility for one's own actions and inability to effectively resist the system, gained a totally new dimension.

KEYWORDS: Japanese film, Second World War in Cinema, war crimes, Kobayashi Masaki.

The end of World War II and the announcement of the surrender by Emperor Hirohito began the process of reconstruction of Japanese society which was trying to cope with the awareness of defeat, but at the same time wanted to forget the infamous past. The novels and films that were created in the late 1940s and early 1950s often encouraged coming to terms with the era of nationalism and militarism. The suggested message of many works implied not so much a critical look at war, but releasing the Japanese of responsibility and seeking justification for a certain intellectual turn (*tenkō*), which was based on a rejection of past ideology and the adoption of the democratic order, imposed by the U.S. occupation authorities.

"Post-war authors who have been repeatedly rewriting the recent past do not pretend to present an objective and unified vision of history, but rather, in seeking the 'most acute manifestations' of experience, emphasize the subjective and selective nature of any record" (Tachibana 1998: 1-2). In the

films of this period one can notice the praise for the values that were condemned in the previous era, especially for individualism and egalitarianism, which is evidenced by the works of Kurosawa Akira, Kinoshita Keisuke, Imai Tadashi and others¹. In all cases, the directors show a strong inclination toward the conventions of melodrama, with its penchant for sublime suffering and pathos.

Condemnation of war usually takes on a personal dimension, as the authors talk about the romantic feeling and fatalism of destiny, thus avoiding a serious historical discussion². On the one hand, individual experiences are incorporated in the social context, on the other, visual images influence our perceptions of the past. “On an individual level, media representations provide those schemata and scripts which allow us to create in our minds certain images of the past and which may even shape our own experience and autobiographical memories” (Erl1 2008: 396).

In the early 1950s, there appeared a number of films with a humanist message, showing the futility of war and presenting a negative view of the past, but - as noted by Michael H. Gibbs in his book *Film and Political Culture in Postwar Japan* – in many of them the message boiled down to an attempt to convince the Japanese cinema-goers that they all were innocent victims, they experienced family tragedies and suffered from the loss of their loved ones. Such an approach may not only be found in the *genbaku eiga* – the stories of the people who survived the atomic bomb over Hiroshima and Nagasaki (*hibakusha*), but also in the films about kamikaze pilots, such as *It's the End of the Clouds* (*Kumo nagaruru hateni*, 1953, Ieki Miyoji) which “focuses on the cruelty of a strategy that wasted so many young lives in a futile effort to prolong the war” (Gibbs 2012: 27). This was the way media influenced public opinion and shaped collective memory of the past so that it could be used for ideological purposes.

Film production in those times was strongly influenced by the occupation authorities which after the war issued instructions specifying the desired content, modes of expression and taboo topics (See Hirano 1992: 37-40). Criticizing the command of U.S. forces was forbidden, and so was

¹ These include such examples as: *No Regrets for Our Youth* (*Waga seishun ni kui nashi*, 1946, Kurosawa Akira), *Morning for the Ōsone Family* (*Ōsone ke no asa*, 1946, Kinoshita Keisuke), *Until We Meet Again* (*Mata au hi made*, 1950, Imai Tadashi) and *Twenty-Four Eyes* (*Nijūshi no hitomi*, 1954, Kinoshita Keisuke).

² A sentimental tone combined with a critical view of militarism is particularly evident in Kinoshita's films. *The Girl I Loved* (*Waga koi seshi otome*, 1946) is a lyrical story of a young soldier's unrequited love for his half-sister who falls for another war veteran. A similar “love triangle”, with two soldiers who return from the war and love the same woman appears in the film *War and Peace* (*Sensō to heiwa*, 1947) by Yamamoto Satsuo and Kamei Fumio.

stressing the presence of foreign armed forces on Japanese soil. It was impossible to make any allusions to the enormity of the devastations of war, or to show the debris as the remains of bombings. The occupation became a taboo subject that could be evoked only indirectly. It was only after the signing of the peace treaty in September 1951 that directors could make films that related to the complicated US-Japanese relations, or referred to the victims of the atomic bomb³.

Among numerous directors that addressed the issues of the war past and the post-war present, one should distinguish Kobayashi Masaki, who in the 1940s was an assistant to Kinoshita Keisuke, and later became the author of the works that critically analyzed the heritage of feudalism. In his films Kobayashi did not avoid raising controversial topics, and clearly made his position, expressing his leftist views. At times, however, he could not resist the temptation of combining the political involvement with a highly sentimental plot (which is especially true of his works of the early 1940s).

The most important and most original film of the early period in Kobayashi's work is undoubtedly *The Thick-Walled Room* (*Kabe atsuki heya*, 1953) - the story of prisoners accused of war crimes and imprisoned in Sugamo Prison. Kobayashi would return to the subject after many years in his five-hour documentary *Tokyo Trial* (*Tōkyō saiban*, 1983), which provides a fascinating account of the work of the International Military Tribunal. His youthful work, however, made a year after his debut feature film, is "a reflection on the responsibility and the meaning of life; the question how to live with the awareness of your own deeds, and whether you can forget them" (Blouin 1982: 179).

The film is based on the confessions of prisoners, and such an undertaking just a few months after the end of American occupation seemed to be, mildly speaking, a risky idea, which proved to be true, as showed the decision taken by Shiro Kidō, a longtime president of Shōchiku studios, who did not approve the distribution of the film (its premiere took place much later, namely, in October 1956). The script of *The Thick - Walled Room* was written together with Abe Kōbō, a young writer associated with the group "Yoru no kai" (The Night Association), the winner of the prestigious Akutagawa Prize for his story entitled *The Crime of S. Karma*

³ In 1950 the occupation authorities allowed the Shōchiku film studio to release *The Bells of Nagasaki* (*Nagasaki no kane*, Oba Hideo), it was, however, after the script had been rewritten in such a way that might justify the necessity of using the bomb and at the same time put the blame on the Japanese militarists and nationalists. The first film made after the end of occupation was *Children of Hiroshima* (*Genbaku no ko*, 1952) directed by Shindō Kaneto who wrote the script on the basis of primary schoolchildren's recollections.

(*Kuruma-shi no hanzai*) from *The Wall (Kabe)* collection of short stories. In the film one can see the influence of Abe's literary and philosophical fascinations, for instance when raw realism clashes with surreal inserts depicting hallucinations and nightmares of prisoners and the title metaphor of the wall that "here can be seen as the barrier, or boundary, between the conscious and unconscious minds" (Gibeau 1999: 162).

The plot of the film begins in 1949, soon after the dissolution of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East by whose authority the country leaders responsible for instigating the armed conflict were sentenced to death or life imprisonment. General Douglas McArthur, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Japan, announced the establishment of the Tribunal on January 19, 1946, but the trials began on May 3, and lasted for almost two years. In the first scenes, one can see the cell in which Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki was hanged on December 23, 1948. The close-ups show a gallows and a trapdoor. However, the protagonists of the film are neither leading politicians nor military commanders, but the soldiers accused of complicity in the crime and serving long-term sentences. They all belong to the lower class of prisoners (Class B and C) who were convicted for conventional war crimes or common murders, together with those who ordered atrocities, allowed them to happen, or actually committed them. Their trials were conducted independently of the proceedings of the International Military Tribunal. The accused "were held in the countries where they had been stationed. In all 1,068 men were executed" (Jansen 2000: 673), while more than two hundred thousand were removed from their positions previously held in such areas as civil service, industry, media and education.

The action of *The Thick-Walled Room* is set in the notorious Sugamo Prison, situated on the outskirts of Tokyo, where the former spies used to be held, including Richard Sorge. After 1945 about two thousand war criminals were put here. In the first shots Kobayashi emphasizes the authenticity of the scenery by showing the prison building, locked cells, corridors and American guards. At the same time he formulates the opening thesis: "Japan's past has been entombed within these thick walls. Terrifying truths have been buried in here for the past eight years". This does not mean however that Kobayashi refrains from aestheticizing the images, on the contrary, he favors a diagonal frame composition and films the events from the high or low angle, sometimes tilting the camera from its vertical perspective.

Although Kobayashi portrays the community of prisoners by capturing the monotony of everyday life, he also focuses on the tragic fates of several

characters. Kawanishi (Shin Kinzō) cannot find a place for himself in prison reality, falls into depression and attempts to commit suicide. Yamashita (Hamada Torahiko), a humble private, was convicted of crimes he did not commit, accused by the former commander, who wanted to avoid responsibility for the death of civilians. Yokota (Kō Mishima), a military translator, clings to life, hoping that everything will change after his release – he counts on a meeting with a former lover, Yoshiko (Kishi Keiko). Both, Yamashita and Yokota, did not lose contact with the outside world, they were not condemned by loved ones who believe in their innocence. Yamashita gets letters from his sister (Kobayashi Toshiko), while Yokota enjoys regular visits from his younger brother (Uchida Ryōhei).

Their conversations allow the director to express his own views on the past and the present. Yokota condemns war as morally reprehensible and unjustified, but he also argues that prison is not a place where one can re-discover one's humanity, while his brother believes that those who are really guilty, namely, politicians and generals, managed to avoid responsibility. "At first I thought by staying in here," Yamashita says, "we'd become more pure and spiritual. As it turns out, the opposite is true.... We've become cruel. We've become liars. No, we've lost all distinction between lies and the truth. Prison isn't a place to drive the sins out of humanity. It drives the humanity out of the sins".

However, the director is far from clearing his characters of guilt; nor does he try to convince the audience of their innocence, on the contrary. The structure of the film storyline is based on flashback scenes - the images of the war emerge from the prisoners' memories of their crimes or nightmares as they are tormented by remorse. In contrast to the storyline that is set in the present and follows quasi-documentary conventions, the events of the past are depicted in such a way as to bring out their subjective nature, or sometimes to emphasize their phantasmatic dimension. A perfect example may be provided by a hallucinatory scene, shown in surreal poetics, in which Kawanishi is haunted by his memories of the war, visualized in front of his eyes as he is peeping through imaginary holes in the wall of his cell. Disorders of perception are suggested by the setting of the camera - tilted from the vertical position and unstable - and the manipulation of the soundtrack. Horrific scenes are shown in short inserts, where defenseless victims are dying and cry out in unison: "Murderer! War criminal!"

The inability to deal with the past affects the mental health of prisoners, as evidenced by the Yamashita case. In his memories, or rather nightmarish visions caused by loss of consciousness, emerges a realistic picture of the

last days of the war, when the remnants of the imperial army fled from the enemy, trying to find shelter in nearby villages. Yamashita cannot forget the day when Hamada (Ozawa Eitarō), the commander of his unit, executed a defenseless peasant who had put them up before. Many months later, during the trial of war criminals, it is Yamashita who gets accused of committing the murder and sentenced to long imprisonment based on false evidence. Not only did his superior escape the responsibility, but he also took advantage of his subordinate's family situation and took over his farm. The only thing Yamashita is thinking of now is revenge. He cannot accept such injustice of the system and wickedness of human nature. An opportunity to take revenge arises when he receives a one-day pass on occasion of his mother's death. Yamashita sneaks into traitor's house, but once he notices a man sleeping with a small child in his arms, he cannot take his life. "You do not deserve to die", he says. Human feelings turn out to be stronger than his urge for revenge.

Although Kobayashi does not absolve the guilty ones, he wants to diversify responsibility for war crimes and avoids the temptation to equate victims (*higaisha*) with perpetrators (*kagaisha*). The speech given by one of the prison officers, in which he addresses the inmates: "But the fact remains that we are all victims of the war. In that sense, we're not at all different from you", is received with a unanimous objection from his fellow prisoners. Privates do not intend to avoid responsibility, or to put the blame on their superiors, they know that they must atone for their actions, so as to return to society, as claims Kimura (Shimomoto Tsutomu), a voice of conscience of the majority: "Peace is born out of reflection on our own sins. Only if all of us, all of the people could love each other".

Despite the use of the point of view shots and voice-over narration in some scenes, Kobayashi manages to maintain objectivity. It seems that the historical context is crucial for him, as well as a socio-political analysis, and therefore he introduces fragments of documentaries and newsreels. The conversations between prisoners and their relatives during the visits reveal the truth about the situation in post-war Japan, first struggling with the economic crisis and the lack of food, then with the necessity to respond to an armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula and, finally, with the inevitable acceptance of the Peace Treaty with the United States. It was article 11 of the Treaty that aroused a particularly strong opposition at first, as it made the Japanese government unconditionally accept the verdicts of the International Military Tribunal⁴. During this time, however, public

⁴ Article 11 of the treaty reads as follows: „Japan accepts the judgments of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East and of other Allied War Crimes Courts both within and outside

attention was focused not on the major war criminals convicted in 1948, but on the other prisoners held in Sugamo. The occupation authorities agreed to the commutation of their sentences under the influence of social pressures and campaigns organized by the National Alliance for Promoting the Release of War Criminals.

Kobayashi also showed a change that occurred at the end of the U.S. occupation, especially after the transfer of control into the hands of Japanese prison staff. By 1950, after the outbreak of the Korean War, the number of troops stationed was reduced. By late 1951 there were 1,349 war criminals remaining at Sugamo. Previously some of them had been released for lack of evidence, some committed suicide, others died of disease. Prisoners also accepted a proposal to organize their own services, which accounted for order in the cells; also, availability of medical services improved, rehabilitation and educational programs were introduced, even the library was opened up (See Ginn 2011: 10-11).

Kobayashi's boldest film, which dealt with the war past, was the monumental trilogy *The Human Condition* (*Ningen no jōken*, 1959-1961), which contained an absolute accusation of a system that deprives individuals of their humanity, turning them into passive killing machines that are capable only of executing orders. "Questions of war crimes and individual complicity, personal responsibility and self-sacrifice, national loyalty and international solidarity - all were explored at great length in this most high-minded of films" (Gibbs 2012: 51).

The script was based on a multi-volume novel by Gomikawa Junpei (1916-1995), Kobayashi's peer, with whom he shared similar political and life experiences. Both served in the Kwantung Army that was stationed in Manchuria and both were taken prisoners at the end of the war. The writer, like the main character of his novel, was arrested by the Soviet troops, while the director spent some time in the U.S. POW camp in Okinawa. The six-volume work by Gomikawa represents the literary movement of "sentimental humanism" (to a greater extent than its film adaptation) which included popular novels telling of the experience of war, such as *Twenty-*

Japan, and will carry out the sentences imposed thereby upon Japanese nationals imprisoned in Japan. The power to grant clemency, reduce sentences and parole with respect to such prisoners may not be exercised except on the decision of the government or governments which imposed the sentence in each instance, and on the recommendation of Japan. In the case of persons sentenced by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, such power may not be exercised except on the decision of a majority of the governments represented on the Tribunal, and on the recommendation of Japan" (See *Documents on the Tokyo International Military Tribunal: Charter, Indictment and Judgments*, Robert Cryer, Neil Boister (eds.), New York: Oxford University Press 2008).

Four Eyes (Nijūshi no hitomi) by Tsuboi Sakae and *Black Rain (Kuroi ame)* by Ibuse Masuji (See Orr, 107-108).

Kobayashi tells the story of Kaji (Nakadai Tatsuya), a young engineer and an idealist, who in 1943 leaves with his wife Michiko (Aratama Michiyo) for Manchuria to work in one of the local mines. His superiors, interested in his report on the impact of working conditions on the performance of colonial workers, offer him a chance to test the theoretical assumptions in practice. In the first section, entitled *No Greater Love*, the director interweaves two aspects of the character's life - the professional one and the private one. We see him first in the role of supervisor of a labor camp, trying to implement liberal principles arising from his conviction of the universal equality of all people and their right to dignity and justice, as well as a loving husband, who dreams of family happiness and creating intimate space into which an external cruelty of the world would not have access (See Standish 2000: 121).

Kobayashi does not offer a romantic story with the war as the background – the impression one could get from the opening sequence when the couple are having a conversation near a sculpture by Rodin. Kaji's love for his wife is his ultimate refuge and the final rampart that will help him defend his views and his own humanity. Their relationship is presented as the embodiment of an unattainable ideal, the realization of the spiritual community which to no avail may be found in typical relations between men and women. Unlike other films set during the war, *The Human Condition* does not portray male friendship, strong group bonds between soldiers, instead focusing on a progressive isolation and alienation.

From the first scenes in Manchuria, we are witnessing a clash of ideals and reality. The character discovers that the rules of the colony are based on violence, ruthlessness and slavery, while any attempt at changing this state of affairs means overturning the entire existing order. In fact, the point is not a conflict with an external enemy, but a struggle with his own people, with superstitions of his fellow-workers and brothers-in-arms, and finally, the fight against racism and intolerance. Kobayashi emphasizes the opposition between individualistic and collective ethics, humanism and nationalism, justice and exploitation, respect for others and contempt for human life.

In every situation, Kaji tries to defend the values he believe in; however, he feels a bitter disappointment, as he learns he cannot change human mentality, nor suppress aggressive tendencies inherent in human nature. It is, however, just a prelude to great brutality and cruelty that he experiences in the second section of the movie, *Road to Eternity*, which is set in a

training center for recruits, and in the third one, *A Soldier's Prayer*, when he is sent to a Soviet prison camp, accused of fascism and war crimes. In the latter part, the roles are reversed, the Japanese soldiers are prisoners, regarded by the Soviets not as humans, but merely as enemies, whereas the living conditions resemble those in a labor camp in Manchuria.

“Kaji rejects his place in the social order and so does not accept personal identity imposed on him by the community. (...) As a result, in the public world he occupies an isolated position. (...) In the first section, he intervenes between the kenpeitai (gendarmarie units) and the Chinese labourers; in the second section, between the senior soldiers and the new recruits; and in the final section between the Russian authorities, Japanese collaborators and the exhausted Japanese labourers in the prison camp. In each incident, Kaji attempts to negotiate a more liberal humanitarian way of operating within the hegemonic institutions, but, as ‘the nail that sticks out’, he is beaten for representing a different and more humane masculinity that challenges brutality” (Standish, 127).

The basic problem Kobayashi had to deal with resulted from the need to present complex relationships between the individual and the system, i.e. the situations in which the subject was determined solely by the relations of power, designating a person with a place and assigning the role of executioner or victim, thereby making one's individual beliefs and values redundant and useless. A man caught in the gears of a war machine was the object of fancy drill, which involved a series of disciplinary practices that turned him into an efficient miner, a fearless soldier or an obedient prisoner. For this purpose, he was subjected to constant control and coercion, he could not think or act independently. To produce socially useful individuals, the authorities closed the people in special areas: in labor camps, schools, camps or prisons, thus allowing for the creation of an artificial order, in which everyone had a specific task to perform.

Masaki Kobayashi in *The Human Condition* destroys any illusions one might have about the possibility of complete independence from the relations of power; he also rejects the vision of death as something sublime - suicides committed by Japanese soldiers or the execution of Chinese workers are shown as senseless and cruel acts. The war – he seems to be saying - is a denial of life, it destroys humanity and human reflexes; and it does not comprise any heroic element, while its only symbols are fear and suffering. “Of all the postwar artistic treatment of war responsibility, this is the most soul-searching investigation of personal responsibility for Japanese wartime aggression” (Orr, 108).

In 1978, Kobayashi returned to the topic of responsibility for the war and began working on the five-hour documentary *Tokyo Trial* (*Tōkyō saiban*, 1983) - an account of the trial of war criminals indicted by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East whose proceedings lasted for more than two years. The moment for making such a documentary was not a coincidence, as it was then that a serious historical debate began in Japan over the positive and negative effects of this trial; besides, the majority of the population did not have any knowledge on the subject (See Futamura 2007: 79-81). Kobayashi gained access to an extensive audiovisual material recorded for the needs of the U.S. authorities, and he also included parts of Japanese newsreels of World War II. Documentary material is accompanied by a voice-over commentary read by Satō Kei, one of Kobayashi's favorite actors, known for his most famous films: *Harakiri* (*Seppuku*, 1962) and *Kwaidan* (*Kaidan*, 1964).

The first half hour of the film outlined the historical background, starting with the surrender of Germany and the signing of the Potsdam Agreement, then it went on to the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and ended with the setting up of two international tribunals: in Nuremberg and in Tokyo. As in the case of German war criminals, here too they were divided into three categories: "Class A" were the leaders who participated in a conspiracy to start and wage war, "Class B" - the soldiers who committed conventional war crimes, and "Class C" - those who committed crimes against humanity. This last accusation was later changed to specify it was about "murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, inhumane acts and other committed before or during the war" (Dower 1999: 456). It should be noted, however, that the Tokyo Tribunal held only criminals belonging to the first category, among which were former prime ministers (Tōjō Hideki, Hirota Kōki, Hiranuma Kiichirō), the ministers of war (Itagaki Seishirō, Araki Sadao, Umezū Yoshijirō, Hata Shunroku) and commanders in chief of the armies (Kimura Heitarō, Shimada Shigetarō, Osami Nagano, Yoshijirō Umezū).

Kobayashi devoted a lot of attention to the first days of the process, which began on May 3, 1946; also, he also explained in detail the technicalities and the organization of work of the tribunal and introduced the key participants in these events: the Chief Justice, Sir William Webb and the Chief Prosecutor, Joseph B. Keenan. He also showed the defendants - sometimes in long shots, sometimes in close-ups - when one by one they pleaded: "Not guilty". Within two and a half years 818 court sessions were held, 419 witnesses were heard, thousands of pieces of evidence were presented, including the records of the preparations for the invasion and

occupation of China, as well as the documents regarding conventional war crimes - rapes, torture, massacres, inhuman treatment, neglect of prisoners, excessive and unlawful punishment (See Cryer, Boister 1999: 531-593).

It may seem that Kobayashi wants to show dry facts and dispassionately present the events, but the statements made by war criminals are juxtaposed with images which aim to arouse in the viewers if not sympathy, then at least reasonable doubt. The accounts of the acts of aggression committed by the Japanese army during the conquest of the countries in Southeast Asia are accompanied by frames showing the nuclear tests at Bikini Atoll, which were carried out by U.S. troops from 1946. In addition, an eyewitness account of the massacre of Chinese civilians in Nanjing, which was the greatest act of genocide committed by Japanese troops, gets juxtaposed with images of the ruins of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the cities destroyed by atomic bombs in August 1945.

One should point out the role of the historical context in Kobayashi's film, regarding the preparations for war in the Far East, but also in Europe, hence the presence of archive material from the 1930s, showing Adolf Hitler's rise to power, his alliance with Mussolini, the annexation of Austria, and finally, the invasion by German troops of Poland and France. Kobayashi mentions the signing in Berlin of an agreement by the governments of Germany, Italy and Japan (called the Tripartite Pact); in the end, he recalls the attack on Pearl Harbor, which gave rise to the Pacific War. Kobayashi "shows Japan's path to war in the 1930s but also the hypocrisy of the victors in the war crimes trials, particularly in ruling out of order attempts (by American lawyers) to raise United States Army Air Forces bombing as a war crime." (Gibbs 2012: 104)

The last part of the film contains the interrogations of suspects, which lasted several months and ended in February 1948. Here, the leading role was taken by the most important person out of the 28 defendants, namely, Tōjō Hideki, General of the Imperial Army, the Minister of War and Prime Minister of the Japanese government between 1941 and 1944, who was directly responsible for the preparation of the attack on Pearl Harbor. "All defendants were found guilty, sixteen were sentenced to life imprisonment, one to twenty, and one to seven years" (Jansen, 673), one committed suicide, one died during the trial. The death sentences were passed on December 23, 1948, in Sugamo Prison, out of those sentenced to life imprisonment three died and thirteen were released conditionally between 1954 and 1958. "Many others were listed as 'Class A' suspects but never brought to trial. Among them were prominent right-wing leaders who amassed great wealth and influence in postwar Japan" (Jansen 2000: 673).

Some historians believed that the Tokyo trials had a much lesser impact on society than the verdicts passed by the Nuremberg Tribunal, which were the only ones to be published in several dozens of volumes and available to readers (Dower, 453). That does not mean, however, that the debate about Japanese responsibility for war crimes was eliminated from the public discourse. From the first days of the trial, newspapers recounted its course; the newsreels, which were compulsorily displayed before each cinema show, included reports of the sessions of the international tribunal. Nevertheless, the issue of collective guilt for the atrocities of war was hardly ever raised. If at all analysis of past events boiled down to blaming political leaders, so it was the state institutions that supported the ideology of militarism and nationalism which were strongly criticized. “No one was supposed to admit individual guilt. (...) Postwar Japanese culture preferred to regard itself as enacting primarily the role of victim” (Tachibana 1998: 11).

In the 1950s there appeared numerous films which showed the futility of war and critically evaluated the past, their weakness, however, lay in a tendency to sentimentalize history and in the use of melodrama conventions which allowed for the elevation of suffering. To a large extent, Kobayashi Masaki managed to avoid these temptations, thus becoming the most distinguished maker of the films that analyzed Japan’s responsibility for war. In *The Thick-Walled Room* he shows soldiers accused of war crimes, who cannot cope with the guilt and are persecuted by the nightmares of the past. Then in *The Human Condition* he “breaks new ground with its grim descriptions of Japanese atrocities perpetrated on Asians and on fellow Japanese” (Orr 2001: 107). Thanks to his works, the problem of war crimes, of the responsibility for one’s own actions and inability to effectively resist the system, gained a totally new dimension.

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Andrzej Pitrus

Takahiko Iimura – Early Conceptual Film and Video

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ABSTRACT

Andrzej Pitrus discusses works by Takahiko Iimura - one of the most important Japanese conceptual artist, author of numerous performances, films, and videos. The artist was influenced by Western tradition of avant-garde. Yet, in his early works many Japanese elements are present. Takahiko Iimura was always fascinated with communication, and possibilities of translations between languages and visual cultures. The author proposes several interpretations of selected works to expose the most innovative strategies used by Japanese pioneer of media art.

KEYWORDS: Japanese experimental film, conceptual art, media literacy, identity.

„From the beginning I liked writing about my filmmaking. My earliest writing goes back to the 1960s when I started filmmaking” (...) The reason of writing in those days was that no film critic had ever written about my films, and I had to write about the films I was going to show. It was a very practical reason to explain to an audience why (and how) those films were made. Also, I was sure that there was nobody who knew about my film work better than myself” (Iimura¹ 2007: 7)

With this statement Japanese experimental filmmaker and video artist Takahiko Iimura opens his long awaited English language collection of commentaries, screenplays, notes, and other writings. Strangely, Iimura's words remind me of Andy Warhol's opinion about his own works. He used to say that it was much more interesting to discuss his films than to actually watch them, no doubt especially if we consider extremely long works showing us the Empire State Building or a sleeping man. But Warhol was not only talking about boredom. His commentary also applied to a certain tendency of avant-garde cinema: conceptual film.

¹ The non-capital initial letter is going to be used throughout this paper in the artist's surname, according to the orthography he himself has introduced and used in the English versions of his name.

Conceptual art, and this includes its film version, can be defined in many ways. Yet, the Polish author Ryszard Kluszczyński offers a simple and precise way to understand this tendency. Kluszczyński (1999: 80) sees conceptual art as a construct which includes two basic elements: a concept and an artifact. If we are able to replace the artifact leaving the concept intact, then the work can be described as conceptual. Thus, artifacts are in some way not important: they only transmit concepts and ideas which hold the true meaning of a work.

Many conceptual artists also adopted strategies of minimalism. To express their ideas they reduced unimportant elements of the work to confront viewers with precisely formulated statements. This strategy was very often used in structural cinema, which can be defined as a movement focusing on the very basics of cinema. It explored the ontology of a film, the notions of space, time, movement and the viewer's position. P. Adams Sitney writes:

The structural film insists on its shape, and what content it has is minimal and subsidiary to the outline. Four characteristics of the structural film are its fixed camera position (fixed frame from the viewer's perspective), the flicker effect, loop printing, and rephotography of the screen. (Sitney 2002: 348)

He also confronts structural film with so called lyrical cinema:

The four techniques are the more obvious among many subtle changes from the lyrical film in an attempt to divorce the cinematic metaphor of consciousness from that of eyesight and body movement, or at least to diminish these categories from the predominance they have in Brakhage's films and theory. In Brakhage's art, perception is a special condition of vision, most often represented as an interruption of the retinal continuity (e.g., the white flashes of the early lyric films, the conclusion of *Dog Star Man*). In the structural cinema, however, apperceptive strategies come to the fore. It is cinema of the mind rather than the eye. (Sitney 2002: 348)

Some of the works by conceptual artists were quite radical. Yet, the most uncompromising is *Zen for Film* by Nam June Paik (1962). The Korean artist removed all unnecessary elements from his film leaving only the two that are crucial for a film as such to exist: time and space. His work is

a single reel (9 minutes running time) of an exposed film stock: the audience watches an “empty” frame with occasional aleatoric artifacts of dust and scratches.

Takahiko iimura is very often considered a part of the tradition of structural cinema (see: Linder 1976: 248), however we have to remember that his films cross the boundaries of individual creative strategies and include elements of lyrical cinema, and expanded cinema. Yet, early films and videos of this Japanese artist do reveal similarities to some works by American and European structuralists.

Takahiko iimura is no doubt one of the most important and influential experimental filmmakers in the World. His approach to filmmaking was certainly influenced by the masters of American avant-garde, but the Japanese director explores similar issues in a highly individual style, which has its roots in a different cultural tradition. The director explains it in one of his essays:

In Japan, “movie” is called *eiga* which literally means “reflected picture”. This indicates how the man who adapted the word into Japanese regarded movie originally. In English we say “motion picture” which literally means picture in motion. I prefer the word “*eiga*: reflected picture” to “motion picture”. It is because I am concerned in my films with “reflected cinema” rather than “motion pictures”.

“Reflected picture” emphasizes a state – not a motion – a state where a picture is reflected through light – not a picture which moves. In such a state, motion could be involved since it covers all situations including motion and non-motion: still. (iimura 2007: 39)

The idea of reflectiveness of the cinema relates not only to its ontology, but also – in the case of Takahiko imura – to its specific relationship with the works of Western artists. The Japanese filmmaker “reflects” their strategies and ideas in his own way. Sometimes he employs certain popular techniques (eg. so called “flicker film”) and gives them new meaning, sometimes he explores similar problems, but with his own techniques. In one of his works he literally names artists who influenced him the most. His *Filmmakers* (1968) is both an *hommage* to his American masters and an exercise in experimental filmmaking. In six parts of the work he portrays Stan Brakhage, Stan Vanderbeek, Jack

Smith, Jonas Mekas, Andy Warhol, and... Takahiko Iimura himself, and tries to borrow their visual style and techniques.

Takahiko Iimura is also aware that the “language” of a film depends heavily on the natural language of its maker. Hence he was very much interested in the theoretical explorations of Sergei Eisenstein who formulated his ideas about film editing inspired by the process of making meaning in Chinese characters.

The Japanese artist uses Chinese writing in a specific way. In *Kanji*, the visual elements are the same, but the structure of the language is different. Thus, the “language” of a filmmaker relies both on visuality and the specific position of a subject. The filmmaker explains this with a simple example:

“We say in Japanese *I You see* as far as the order of the word is concerned; in English we say *I see You*. The difference in the position of the object indicates the priority in communication: in Japanese, the object *you*; in English, the verb *see*. In Japanese the subject is linked to the object directly, whereas in English it is necessary to have a predicate in advance of the object. If we take the subject as *I*, as in the above sentence, it is in English that the ego must be set up at a distance from the object. This is in opposition to Japanese, where the syntagmatic contiguity of subject and object (unmediated as it were by the predicate) makes for the assumption of a pre-established ego. In English it is the subject that is most strongly emphasized, this is not so in Japanese.” (Iimura 2007: 121)

Takahiko Iimura is certainly an artist with roots in his own culture and language, yet he is also aware that his cinema borrows even more from American avant-garde, and contributes to it. We have to remember that many of his experiments were made in English. Yet the artist never emphasises simplified oppositions between East and West, trying to understand the ways in which linguistic and cultural competence influences his explorations of the deepest structures of cinema. This is why the problem of subjectivity in a context of structural features of film seems to be one of the most important topics of his works. It also explains why the artist is so interested in the process of transformation during which someone else's techniques and strategies are used in a new way. Consequently, he also explores the problem of understanding visual data.

Takahiko iimura is a very prolific artist. In the 1960s he started making his experimental films, and in the next decade became interested in a new medium: video. Later he created numerous installations, and even... video games: in 1993 he worked with Sony's texture mapping game technology in a project exploring differences between Eastern and Western concepts of space and time. (see: Cannon 2007: 38). Although his recent projects are also very interesting, it seems that it is the early works that explain his ideas in the most challenging way.

Takahiko iimura was “discovered” by Jonas Mekas – the artist who is not only one of the greatest experimental filmmakers of all time, but who also is considered to be the most important authority on avant-garde cinema. In 1963 he watched Takahiko iimura's *Love (Ai, 1962)* during the third edition of a festival of art house cinema in Knokke-le-Zoute in Belgium. In 1966 he commented on this work in an article for *Film Culture*:

“I have seen a number of Japanese avant-garde films at the Brussels International Experimental Film Festival, at Cannes, and at other places. Of all those films, iimura's *Love* stands out in its beauty and originality, a film poem, with no usual pseudo-surrealist imagery. Closest comparison would be Brakhage's *Loving* or Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*. *Love* is a poetic and sensuous exploration of the body... fluid, direct, beautiful.”

(after: <http://www.takaiimura.com/work/Love.html>)

The film was also often compared to Willard Mass' *Geography of the Body*, as both of them used images of the human body in a series of extreme close-ups. Yet, the strategy of the Japanese artist is slightly different. Takahiko iimura shows an actual lovemaking scene to relate to Japanese censorship regulations which prohibit representations of sexual organs and functions. Images he created are both explicit and abstract, and they show two different yet corresponding structures: of a filmic image (grain of the film stock), and a sexual act. Although Jonas Mekas saw this film as an example of poetic cinema, it is at the same time an exploration of the problem of representation. The artist is interested in its two levels relating both to the ontology of the image itself, and its relationship with reality. Extreme close-ups were also used in *Face* (1963) – another film exploring “geographies” of a human body. The artist tries to discover a fine line between figurative representation and almost abstract signs. The process he visualizes directly relates to the

system of Japanese language and writing. Their meanings are created both on the level of visuality (originally many of the characters were “inspired” by the appearance of the objects they represented, eg. 男 which means “man”) and their structure (eg. 男 which means “male” and consists of two individual characters meaning “man” and “sex” or “character” respectively).

Writing is also considered a form of art in Japan. Calligraphers are not only expected to communicate meaning, but also create beauty.² The Japanese director explores this feature of *Kanji* too. His *White Calligraphy* (1967) is a film composed entirely of representations of Japanese characters. Yet, in this case they are not painted but scratched directly into frames of a black film leader. The characters were taken from *Kojiki* – the first history of Japan compiled in the VIII century by Yasumaro no 5. The way they are presented to the audience makes them illegible. To “read” them, we have to slow the film down and risk its destruction by the heat of a projector bulb. Furthermore – even if the film was paused, and this can be easily done with today's technology, the viewer would not be able to understand their meanings properly, as their original form is different from contemporary *Kanji*.

There are several possible interpretations of this film. It certainly relates to the strategies of Stan Brakhage who not only reinvented non-camera filmmaking, but also “signed” his works by scratching his name into the final frames of his films. Takahiko Iimura also deconstructs the way Japanese writing is produced. Traditionally characters are tiny paintings made with special soft brushes; the director uses a more “violent” technique to create them. Finally, the characters appear on the screen only for a fraction of a second, and thus cannot be read. The director not only deprives them of their meaning, but also reformulates one of the most important creative strategies of Dada and Neo-Dada movements. Artists who belonged to them were very much interested in the degree to which everyday objects could be transformed into artworks. For example, their ready-mades demonstrated how commodities could lose their original function and instead gain meaning: an urinal became Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, and an iron with brass tacks attached to its soleplate became Man Ray's *Gift*. Here characters (objects and meanings at the same time) give up their initial features and become abstract lines and shapes. It is also important to note that *Kojiki* is one of the first examples of the use of

² While this problem cannot be examined here in detail, relationships between calligraphy and art were discussed by many authors. See for example Taylor and Taylor, 2014.

Chinese characters in Japan. Thus Takahiko iimura's piece also relates to the origins of Japanese language.

Takahiko iimura criticized Japanese censorship also in another film. *On Eye Rape* (1962) combines two strategies of an avant-garde film: flickering and found footage. In this short the artist used an educational film rescued from a rubbish bin. This animated production explained the process of procreation with the example of plants and animals. Takahiko iimura punched numerous holes in the stock, which both obscure “obscene” fragments of the original film and create a “flicker effect” inspired by Paul Sharits' experiments. *On Eye Rape* comments on specific censorship procedures only to be found in the artist's home country. Instead of removing entire inappropriate scenes, Japanese censors obscure the genital areas of the actors and actresses. Takahiko iimura amplifies this abusive practice: we can hardly see the original images. Instead our eyes are being “raped” by flickering light reflected on the screen.

Many early films by Takahiko iimura reveal his fascination with Russian avant-garde classic director Sergei Eisenstein. Both artists were very much interested in relationships between language and cinema. Eisenstein studied Chinese and Japanese writings and found lots of inspiration in them. The process of creating meaning in those languages inspired him to formulate his own ideas, including the concept of “vertical montage”, which produces meanings between various elements of the filmic structure. The concept was used to some extent by Takahiko iimura in his *Junk* (*Kuzu*, 1962). This short can be seen as an ecological film criticizing human exploration of a natural environment. The director filmed all kinds of junk he found on the beach in Tokyo Bay – heavily polluted in the early 1960s. Yet the intention of the artist was different: by filming trash and bodies of dead animals he wanted to revitalize them and transform them into objects of art. This strategy was directly inspired by the Dada and Neo Dada practice of assemblage. Yet, in this case, the objects are not directly incorporated into a work of art, but only represented on film. Instead, the director combines the images he collected with a noisy “junk” soundtrack, thus creating vertical correspondences between particular elements of the structure.

Takahiko iimura wanted to explore all possible structures of film. In *A Dance Party in the Kingdom of Lilliput* (1964) he filmed the absurdist activities of his friend – performer Sho Kazakura. Individual scenes labelled with letters A, B and C, were edited in two different orders.

Then the two films were screened side by side to show how “horizontal” structure could be manipulated.

The filmmaker was also excited by projection itself. For him, each screening was different, and was somewhat of a live act. He explored this aspect of cinema in his installations. Most of them were very minimalistic and usually employed more than one projecting device. The most famous was *Projection Piece* (1968-72) which was based on performative alternating structures created by three projectors: one with no film at all, the other with exposed “blank” film in it, and the third one running unexposed, black stock. Takahiko Iimura's installations utilized procedures close to minimalism: the artist wanted to explore the experience of projection itself, and hence rejected any form of figurative representation.

Many experimental artists of the 1960s were interested in performance and incorporated performative elements in their works. Takahiko Iimura was no exception. He not only collaborated with performers, but also organized live presentations of his cinematic installation, for example the *Talking Picture (The Structure of Film Viewing)* (1981) series in which audio commentary was performed live by the artist himself. The majority of these works were created in the 1980s, and for this reason they are not discussed here.

Like many other conceptualists, Takahiko Iimura was excited by technology. Thus, it was not a surprise that he started using video as soon as it became available. There are some thought-provoking pieces among his early works made in the new format. The earliest were also the simplest. This was because the Sony Portapak device, enthusiastically adopted by numerous artists all over the world, offered relatively low quality image (black and white, with resolution inferior to 16 mm film) and no editing tools, which became available to independent artists in the second part of the 1970s.

Many Americans explored features of the new medium in close connection to the question of perception. Electronic images were only seemingly successors of cinema and many of the artists noticed that there was a closer relationship between video and sound recording than between video and film. Bill Viola, who was one of the first to explore those affinities, writes:

Technologically, video has evolved out of sound (the electromagnetics) and its close association with cinema is

misleading since film and its grandparent, the photographic process, are members of a completely different branch of the genealogical tree (the mechanical/chemical). The video camera, as an electronic transducer of physical energy into electrical impulses, bears a closer original relation to the microphone than to the film camera (Viola 1995: 158-159)

Takahiko iimura's observations are similar. His first works explore not only images and sounds, but also deal with the electrical signal, and its transformation into visuals and audio. Minimalistic *Chair* (1970) is a "portrait" of a piece of furniture modulated by light and electronic sounds. *Blinking* (1970) can be described as a video "translation" of flicker film. The artist generates numerous interferences and distortions, which corrupt the image and produce effects similar to those of Sharits' filmic experiments.

Time Tunnel (1971) also seems quite important as it deals with possible overlapping of film and video. The director evokes the strategy of "refilming" often used in structural cinema. Yet, instead of a film camera, a video camera is used: we see numbers 10 to 1 from a film leader illuminated by the light of a monitor and distorted by an electronic camera all hooked up in a closed circuit television system.

Video was a breakthrough technology for many reasons and ease of operation was certainly one of them. The artists could also record sounds and images simultaneously. Yet, Takahiko iimura is aware of the complex relationships between audio and video. In his *Double Portrait* (1973) he reworks the idea of Rene Magritte expressed in his famous drawing *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1926). The artist himself and his wife Akiko identify themselves positively and negatively (eg. *I am Taka iimura, I am not Akiko iimura*), while the camera shows them from different angles asserting the representational nature of their screen presence.

The most interesting work of the 1970s is perhaps *Visual Logic (and Illogic)* (1977) in which the artist goes back to his explorations regarding understanding of film. The video consists of four parts: Identity Piece, Location Piece, Formula Piece and Picture Piece. Each of them discusses possible relationships between three simple elements: two plates with letters A and B, and one blank plate. The camera pans between them and the voiceover explains what happens on the screen. Sometimes identical actions can be described in a completely different form, when "translated" from "visual language" into English.

It is very likely that this short video in a way recapitulates all early guises of Takahiko Iimura: a poet, an intellectualist, a performer, a Japanese in New York. His works are above all about translations. The artist returns to this problem also in more recent works, which obviously demand to be discussed in a separate study.

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Family Picture: The Contemporary Dysfunctional Japanese Family in Sono Shion's Films

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ABSTRACT

This article concerns the image of Japanese family, that emerges from director Sono Shion's films. Such works as e.g. *Noriko's Dinner Table* or *Strange Circus* show family embroiled in chaos, violent and crippled, broadly speaking: a dysfunctional one. Films' characters tend to replace handicapped family with some other communities, yet they cannot succeed in finding love nor devotion, nor other affirmative values. According to tendency ascendant in contemporary Japanese Cinema, parents are mostly to blame for family crisis, and mothers show the most reprehensible behaviours. The author sees this pessimistic view as a result of various changes that Japanese society underwent during the post-war period, concerning gender, cohabitation patterns, ageing of society, shifting boundaries of term 'family' and many others.

KEYWORDS: Japanese cinema, Sono Shion, Japanese family, crisis, Japanese society in film.

The second half of the 20th century brought years of an economic bubble for Japan (which burst at the end of the century) as well as a galloping urbanisation and westernisation of the country. Japanese society underwent a number of significant changes that became a burning issue not only for sociologists and politicians but also for film-makers. They influenced the shape of the typical Japanese family, the image of this institution and its role in the life of society as well as individuals. The changes concern marriages, models of cohabitation, demography, typical gender roles and shifting the boundaries of what is understood as a family. A more detailed look into a "large dysfunctional family", portrayed by Sono Shion in his artistic work, enables us to see that it is the symbol of the contemporary Japanese family in crisis. The main reasons for this crisis are sudden modernisation, turning away from tradition and a conflict between an individual and the community.

Statistics presented by sociologists give an idea of the scale of the problem. In 1997 in Japan people aged 65 and older made up 15% of society, which was more than the amount of children below the age of 15 (Rebick, Takenaka 2006: 5). Moreover, the Japanese are characterised by having the greatest longevity in the world. In 2003 the average life expectancy for

men was 78 years, and 85 years for women (Ogawa et.al. 2006: 21). The ageing population is a menace from the demographic and economic point of view. Older people requiring care can count less and less on the help of their children and other family members, as they choose to live in major urban centres, creating nuclear families. In this case the duty falls on the state. The traditional multigenerational family model starts disappearing. In 1975 about 18% of all Japanese households were three-generational; however, by 2002 it had decreased to 10%, while the percentage of single-person households increased from 18% to 23% in the same period of time. The percentage of homesteads inhabited exclusively by elderly people (65 years and more) increased to 15.8%, whereas the average number of family members decreased by half between 1950 and 2004 – from 5 to 2.5 (Rebick, Takenaka 2006: 6). The above data indicates the tendency of breaking multigenerational families into smaller social units, consisting usually of three to four people.

The ageing of society is of course not the only problem influencing the institution of the family. In the last half-century a number of issues concerning the functioning of nuclear families appeared in public and scientific debates and almost each of them finds a gloomy reflection in Sono's creative output. Observations and findings of sociologists can often seem soulless, paradoxically detached from the reality which they are supposed to describe. In this context the director in some way helps the social researchers by reflecting the image of the dysfunctional family in his films. This reflection is in fact exaggerated because Sono emphasises and points out the defects and also presents inconvenient truths in his own, ruthless and direct way, which enables him to create the grotesque, symbolic film representation of the Japanese family of the 21st century engrossed in crisis.

Timothy Iles, who tries to explore the complicated identity of the Japanese, both in an individual, as well as in a cultural or national sense, clearly emphasises the key part of the family in its formation process:

“Beyond the issue of gender, one of the first places a person will receive an idea of his or her identity is of course the home—the family is the first exposure to social life and values and the first formative influence on the development of an individual in every country. As such, the central importance of the family in creating the individuated selfhood of its members cannot be overstated. This is true when the family structure and

situation are stable, supportive and nurturing (...) but it is also true when the family is in chaos.” (Iles 2008: 79)

In his films Sono Shion describes a family embroiled in chaos. This subject is probably most common and thoroughly reflected in his creative output. It provides us with various examples of dysfunctional families characterised by loss or lack of parental care, bond, love and support, and instead the presence of violence, deviation, incomprehension and hate. The dysfunction of these families is often a result of the irresponsible attitude of parents or their absence in their children’s lives. This motif, pushed to the extreme in the *Strange Circus* (*Kimyō na sākasu*, 2005)¹, is present in almost every film by the Japanese director. The characters of the mothers deserve a special critique. Although the characters of the fathers, such as Gōzō from the film mentioned above, disgust the audience, in other works of the director these are men who are active and are trying in different ways – and with the different effects – to repair their mistakes. The incompetence of characters in performing parental duties has its explanation also in the rules of functioning of the Japanese society, where mothers are being taught how to perform their role by taking part in special classes. The aim of the classes is adapting to a so-called “one on one” contact with their own children and forcing them to take an active part in their school life. All this is to encourage Japanese women to give birth and raise children. In Sono’s films marriages also fail and any attempts to replace “broken” families with a substitute such as a sect are unsuccessful. The film *Noriko’s Dinner Table* (*Noriko no shokutaku*, 2005) provides us with the richest amount of sociological statements on the Japanese family and it is also the central element of the image of the family in crisis created by Sono.

The action of *Noriko’s Dinner Table* takes place before, during and after the events of the *Suicide Club* (*Jisatsu Sākuru*, 2002). This film is an explanation and a lengthy comment of the plot of the *Suicide Club* but simultaneously functions as an independent story about the family Shimabara from Toyokawa. It consists of a father, Tetsuzō (Mitsuishi Ken), a busy worker at a local newspaper, an apathetic and distant mother Taeko (Miyata Sanae) and two teenage daughters: the elder, Noriko (Fukishi Kazue), and the younger, Yuka (Yoshitaka Yuriko). The narrative voice in

¹ In my article I’m focusing on *Strange Circus* the best example of my thesis, although it’s not the only film I refer to. I’d like to point out, that I intentionally avoid analysing the *Suicide Club*, as it is best-known of Sono Shion’s films, therefore has largest representation in literature. I’m also not interested in Japanese suicide problem, and issues I concentrate on are better shown in some other Sono’s works.

the film informs us about the fact that Noriko is dissatisfied with her life. In her opinion her father is a boring and unambitious man, her biggest dream is to study in Tokyo but Tetsuzō will not allow it. The girl is trying to convince the headteacher to grant her permission for unlimited access to the Internet for students. Her favourite website is *haikyo.com* (*haikyo* means “ruin” or “uninhabited building”), well-known from the *Suicide Club*. Here, as Mitsuko, “she is meeting” with her soulmates. Ueno eki 54 is a founder of the website and her nickname means “Station Ueno 54”. This pseudonym refers to the earlier film by Sono, in which fifty-four secondary-school female students commit suicide in the subway station Shinjuku. The full meaning of this pseudonym is, however, explained in the later chapters of the film. Noriko, who is in a conflict with her father, uses the first occasion to escape. She meets a girl called Kumiko whom she earlier met online as Ueno eki 54, by the post office box number 54 at the Ueno subway station in Tokyo. After the disappearance of the older sister, Yuki logs onto the website *haikyo.com* as Yōko and just like Noriko, also leaves her parents. The father starts a private investigation to find his daughters.

Kumiko introduces Noriko to her family. Both of them visit the girl’s grandmothers and they spend all day in an idyllic, family atmosphere. Thanks to another visit, this time to the allegedly dying grandfather, it turns out that Kumiko runs a so-called “family to hire” organisation which provides services on family life. Kumiko and Noriko become friends and the main character learns how to control emotions necessary in her new occupation. After a few months Tetsu finds Kumiko with the help of his friend and he is arranging a “family to hire” session. They meet at a house arranged precisely like Shimabaras’ flat in Toyokawa, and he is hoping that he can get his daughters back.

Noriko’s family story seems incredible, however, it experiences conflicts well known to contemporary Japanese, and among them also a problem with which Japan has already been struggling for more than a century. It is a conflict of values represented by the tradition of the strongly collectivised society with individuals counting on self-realisation. Shimabara family members are presenting attitudes illustrating social transformations, which took place within the last few decades in Japan, as well as their influence on the life of a typical family in *The Land of the Rising Sun*.

The main reason for Noriko to blame the father is his insensibility to his daughter’s individual needs. Only as a result of dramatic events does the man realise that the smiling faces of his daughters in the family portrait by

Taeko do not reflect the image of the girls in a photo which was used to accomplish the painting. A seventeen-year-old Noriko already thinks of herself as a woman and wants to go to the capital city to experience city life and see the world². She considers her house in Toyokawa to be a prison from which she wants to break free at the first possible opportunity. The reason why Tetsuzō does not let his daughter leave is also very significant. According to her father, boys in Tokyo are aggressive and worthless. As Noriko says, “my father thought that the main reason for girls to go to Tokyo is to get pregnant” and this was because of two of her cousins, who did exactly what Tetsuzō was afraid of. His attitude is a result of lack of trust towards his daughter (which is rather groundless) but also reflects an attitude of contemporary Japanese society towards their offspring and starting a family. In the nineties of the last century the average age of getting married in Japan reached the highest anywhere in the world – 29.6 for men, 27.8 for women (Rebick, Takenaka 2006: 8). Simultaneously the number of births drastically fell – in 2006 the birth rate was a negative number (ibid.: 3) – as the percentage of births in non-marital relationships is extremely low in the Land of the Rising Sun and it is only 1.9% of all births on the islands (as comparison, in Sweden it is 56%) (ibid.: 8). The negativity towards parenthood and the lack of skills in performing the roles of parents are extremely popular subjects in contemporary Japanese cinema. Irresponsible and sometimes even degenerate parents are often the main characters in Sono’s films. Tetsuzō from *Noriko's Dinner Table* is undergoing a transformation, giving up his work in the editorial office and devoting all the time to investigating his daughters’ disappearance, finding them and turning to violence or even homicide (in self-defence) in order to get them back. A character in *Cold Fish (Tsumetai nettaigyō, 2010)* undergoes a different but finally also destructive transformation, given the surroundings. He is being brutally woken up from the sluggishness and boredom of daily existence. The violence becomes a means to his healing. Shamoto (Fukikoshi Mitsuru) is running a small shop selling aquarium fish. There is no intimacy between him and his wife Taeko (Kagurazaka Megumi), his daughter Mitsuko (Kajiwara Hikari) despises him, family meals consist of ready-made or instant dishes only. The main character seems to be a loser, particularly after contrasting him with Yukio Murata (Denden), the owner of a huge, modern pet shop with rare specimens of tropical fish, whose sense of humour and red Ferrari helps him to win the warm attention of Shamoto’s daughter and wife. The father, who is losing

² It is worth noting that Sono Shion, just as Noriko did, left his hometown Toyokawa and headed for Tokyo at the age of 17.

control over his own life, gets to know a new business partner and at the same time a serial killer³, who helps him discover his tendency towards brutal violence. In the dynamic ending of the film the main character beats his daughter to unconsciousness, rapes his wife, murders Murata and his wife, in the end he also kills Taeko and commits suicide, leaving Mitsuko alive. Shamoto saves the daughter in a very twisted and sophisticated way: from Murata's corrupting influence, as she used to work for him, and also frees her from the misfortune of living in an unloving family.

Shamoto's violence towards the daughter was a one-time act caused by an outburst of rage but Yuichi Sumida's father (Sometani Shōta), played by Mitsuishi Ken, in the film *Himizu* (2011) uses violence towards his son on a regular basis. He is a compulsive gambler and this exposes his son to dangerous meetings with the Yakuza's debt collectors. He leaves the boy and his mother, and when he occasionally appears at home, it is only to get some money and vent his anger on the son. The truly degenerate parent is however the rapist and sadist Gōzō from the *Strange Circus*. He embodies the nightmare of the Mitsuko's childhood. His presence poses an even greater threat than the permanent absence of parents that Yuichi is struggling with in *Himizu*.

A serious discussion about the problem of violence in families began relatively recently in Japan as late as the 1990s. Roger Goodman reminds us what Ann Buchanan said about a sinusoidal model in touching on ("discovering") and forgetting about such issues in political and public debates. He states that as in the case of many other countries, it is possible to notice this model also in Japan, however the country is in a way exceptional, since "(...) in the Japanese case there developed in the 1980s a literature which sought to explain why it was that Japan was immune to child abuse and why it was a problem in western societies" (Goodman 2006: 149). When the economic crisis started in the nineties the search for the guilty of the economic downturn began. In the end the criticism fell on the strongest and the highest of the Japanese values – the family. As Iles writes, this almost desperate search for a scapegoat became the obsession of a disappointed and frustrated nation. Parents started being perceived as careless and excessively forgiving, fathers too devoted to their work and disengaged from family life, the educational system did not fulfil its role in vaccinating socially appropriate values. At the same time children and teenagers remained strongly influenced by fashion, television and video

³ The real-life killer, who served as an inspiration for the film character, bred dogs, which he fed with his victims' remains. Sono chose fish instead of dogs, because he "kind of liked the fact that those tropical fish can be surprisingly dangerous in spite of their visual beauty" (Sono 2011).

games as well as the stress associated with entrance exams to schools (Iles 2008: 80). Society also started paying attention to violence in families. This problem became important and widely commented upon. Few authorities that raised these issues earlier in the eighties, gained the attention of the media and society, some non-profit organisations supporting victims were founded together with special helplines, and what is more a special terminology was created on the subject and statistics were being published (Goodman 2006: 150-151).

When the heavy swell of fear of the violence in families slowly passed, the problem of child abuse returned to the political agenda and to the front pages of newspapers in 2004 because of the so-called Kishiwada Child Abuse Incident (*Kishiwada Jidō Gyakutai Jiken*). Throughout February and March the story of a fifteen-year-old boy was the main subject in the Japanese media. He was almost starved to death by his father and his cohabitee. The boy, weighing only 24 kilograms, fell into a coma after eighteen months of exhausting, compulsory fasting. The details of the incident and socio-legal circumstances shocked public opinion. Based on the existing regulations as well as customs – at that time alleged – abuse of the boy could not have been prevented by teachers nor social welfare, nor by the biological mother, not even by the police. At the same time the family, the neighbours and the local community lacked the determination to prevent the violence they knew about (ibid.: 147-148). Roger Goodman highlights that the reason why the Kishiwada Child Abuse Incident remained a hot topic for so long and did not become just short-term hype, was its convergence at the time in enforcing two laws: The Child Abuse Prevention Law (*Jidō Gyakutai Bōshihō*) and the Child Welfare Law (*Jidō Fukushihō*) (ibid.: 149). And so the debate on the problem of child abuse that began in the 1990s was moved to the next century. In a economically difficult period of budget cuts between 2000 and 2004 the budget for the fight against violence towards children was increased over thirty-five times, from about 470 million yen up to 16.6 billion yen (ibid.: 151).

In 2005 Sono Shion produced two films touching on the subject of the crisis of family values and child abuse – the *Strange Circus* and *Noriko's Dinner Table*. Although the main character of the first one, Mitsuko, is lacking nothing at first glance, her family house is hiding a dark secret, which leaves marks on her psyche. The impressive villa, in which Gōzō is subjecting his wife and daughter to psychological and physical torture, is a place from which the girl either cannot or does not want to escape, which was probably also the case for the teenager from Kishiwada. In his social-critical flair Sono seems to say that the problem of violence in families also

concerns Japan in its entirety and can take the shape of real horror, which can only be grasped and accepted when represented in a grotesque way in a fictional world.

Noriko and Yoko from *Noriko's Dinner Table* were not battered by parents. The director is describing subtler problems such as trouble with communication between family members or the lack of intergenerational dialogue. These topics appeared in classic works of the Japanese cinema, often becoming the main focus of the films. In *Tokyo Story* (*Tōkyō monogatari*, 1953) Ozu Yasujirō pictures an elderly married couple that cannot count on the interest of their children, who are busy with careers and with accumulating wealth. Also Kurosawa Akira brings up the problem of lack of understanding between parents and the offspring in *Ikiru* (1952), in which a lonely father (Shimura Takashi) is struggling with workaholicism, a fatal illness and disrespect of his son and wife. Although the main character could be accused of insensibility, absence and not being a good father in general, Kurosawa allows his redemption after all by his taking up an impressive fight against bureaucracy in the community and also highlights the dedication he shows for his son. The negligence of the main character should be perceived as the result of the industrialisation and urbanisation of the country that are at least partly guilty for the lack of social cohesion, as well as for creating certain tensions in the family sphere. The father, working all the time for his son, is not devoting due attention to him because of work. “Urbanisation here, as in Ozu’s *Tokyo monogatari*, is a detriment to the family and a source of decay in the social fabric” (Iles 2008: 84). The main characters in Kurosawa's film are admittedly not as one-dimensional as they in Ozu's work, however, even from *Ikiru* it is possible to read quite a clear message that the traditional values – understood here as community, family bonds, rural life – are being driven out by the egoism of the younger generation and the rush towards economic gains. The father, even if a little bit lost, is an anchor of these values, and the son is their opponent. Timothy Iles writes:

“And yet despite the acknowledgement in *Ikiru* of Watanabe’s distance from his son as a (partial) result of his having buried himself in his work, ultimately the discourse of social decline in *Ikiru* and *Tokyo Monogatari* places responsibility clearly at the feet of the younger generation, the children who (...) neglect or (willfully) misunderstand their parents. For both Ozu and Kurosawa, the parents represent a warmth of personal relations,

dedication, drive, and an obligation to their fellow countrymen which their children either do not or can not feel.” (ibid.)

Iles further notices that contemporary cinema in the Land of the Rising Sun has the opposite tendency, where parents are carrying the prevailing responsibility for the disappearance of healthy relations and family bonds, “they are no longer a paragon or source of moral education but are instead absent, incompetent, over-indulgent or completely unknown” (ibid.: 86). It is also true for the characters from Sono Shion's films, particularly mothers who are traditionally required to be caring and protective. In the works of the director they are demonstrating indolence or are absolutely passive. Sayuri from the *Strange Circus* demonstrates a fatal passivity towards her daughter. Although emotions displayed towards Mitsuko are visible, the lack of firmness and her egoism do not let her intervene on the harassment of the girl by Gōzō. Mitsuko is not able to take revenge on her father, so she decides to change sex. As soon as she becomes a man and has got a chance of active opposition, it is already too late. Eventually the main characters of the *Strange Circus* make attempts to deal with the cruel reality surrounding them, as Sayuri's escape from her own identity and acceptance of her daughter's personality should be treated as signs of those efforts.

Noriko's and Yoko's mother from *Noriko's Dinner Table* does not have the courage to escape. Although in the portrait she has painted her husband resembles Chairman Mao, the woman has nothing to say at home, not because of the husband's domineering personality but due to her own mediocrity and incompetence. The director admittedly does not devote too much attention to this character, however, when Taeko is on-screen she is silent and she not capable of expressing her own opinion, no reaction at all – true for her relation with the husband, as well as with her daughters. When Noriko introduces her family, she does not devote more than a few words to her mother. The only statement about the mother is the girl mentioning that she has one. Except for Taeko each of the members of Shimbara family had one chapter of the movie devoted just to them – entitled “Noriko”, “Yōko” and “Tetsuzō”. After Yōko's escape it seems that the mother of the teenagers will play a certain role in the family drama as the father, consumed with the mission of finding his daughters, is deciding to take advantage of her help. However, the main character of this part of the film is a man – according to the title of chapter, Tetsuzō is the only one who takes an active participation in the private investigation. He also gets information, which with time he stops sharing with his wife and keeps only

for himself. The first and last and finally pointless activity of the woman was to commit suicide.

The helplessness of mothers in Sono Shion's films turns many times into aggression directed towards children. The initial astonishment of Sayuri in *Strange Circus*, evolves into jealousy and then the next form of violence towards Mitsuko, who is pushed down the stairs by her mother and this incident is somehow erased from her memory. The increase in the number of cases of child abuse in the 1990s is being justified by the lack of commitment to parenthood and as already mentioned – mainly mothers are responsible for child care. Women constituted 60% of the parents guilty of violence and abuse towards children and 90% were the biological mothers of victims (Goodman 2006: 150). This phenomenon also finds a certain reflection in Sono's work. The director puts the degenerate Gōzō against the row of mothers neglecting or even hating their children. One of them is the main character of the horror film *Exte: Hair Extensions* (*Ekusute*, 2007) – Kiyomi Mizushima (Tsugumi), who frankly just cannot stand her daughter, Mami. The aunt, Yūko Mizushima (Kuriyama Chiaki), is acting as the girl's mother. The girl finds shelter at the protective woman and her roommate's place, however she is scared of the aggressive Kiyomi who is coming to her sister's place in search for money, vandalising the flat and intimidating the daughter. Although she is still threatened by the biological mother, she is given protection and shelter by the aunt.

Mothers in Sono's films are unimportant or completely absent in the life of their children. This is the case in particular regarding the three young main characters of *Love Exposure* (*Ai no mukidashi*, 2008). The mother of Yū, an ardent practicing Catholic, dies when her boy is still a child. She manages, however, to equip him with certain values, and even manages to send him on a specific mission to find a wife resembling the Mother of God. In this way the director grants Yū's mother the strongest influence on the child's psychology among all of the characters of mothers in the film. As we know absolutely nothing about Aya's mothers (a high-level sect member, who wants to recruit Yū to Church Zero) and Yōko (stepsister of the main character, in whom he then finds an incarnation of the Mother of God). The degenerate fathers of the girls that recall their terrible childhood stay in the centre of their and the camera's attention.

The most literal and horrifying example of the lack of a mother concerns Kumiko from *Noriko's Dinner Table*. The girl was found as a baby in locker 54 in the train station. Kumiko, who was left by her parents, considers herself to be a child born to a metal box which becomes a mother to her and at the same time, a family house and her name – Ueno Station

54. The main character invents and collects her “memories” in the same locker and creates stories of objects left and found in the train station. The organisation established by Kumiko replaces the real family not only to the customers paying for her services, but also to herself. Forgetting blood ties as the single condition and guarantee of understanding, help and care is visible even in *Tokyo Story*, produced more than sixty years ago. After all, it is the daughter-in-law, a widow of a soldier killed during the war, who turns out to be the only representative of the younger generation that understands the needs of in-laws, respects them and devotes enough time and attention to them. Commenting on this element of Ozu’s work, Timothy Iles writes:

“Human compassion and social obligation therefore, while still possible, no longer rest upon the undeniable foundations of kinship and the family but now assume the individual as their basis in a construction which the viewer cannot help but feel is remarkably weaker than that which it is poised to replace.” (Iles 2008: 82)

Sono Shion is observing his main characters attempting to replace dysfunctional families with other institutions and communities, many times more destructive for their identity as the environments from which they were escaping. He develops this motif successfully in his movie *Love Exposure*, where a sect called Church Zero, funded with money from drug trafficking and fake artwork, uses the crisis of faith and other weaknesses of the main characters in order to recruit them into their community. The director also criticises Catholicism which he does not see as opposition of the sect. Sono emphasises the value of interpersonal relations and mutual understanding in creating a happy family and society, diminishing the value of spirituality and showing the danger carried by religious fanaticism. In *Himizu*, the atmosphere of catastrophe associated with natural disaster changes thanks to a flicker of hope, which the community turns out to be. Yuichi, left by both parents, is not completely lonely. The boy lets earthquake victims, whose houses and belongings were destroyed, settle in the area of the boats rental company run by himself. They are populating a patch of land filled with tents. They are grateful and kind to him and he knows that he can count on them any time. However, he does not want any help.

In contrast to Yuichi Sumida, the main characters of *Guilty of Romance* (*Koi no tsumi*, 2011) and *Noriko’s Dinner Table* desperately want and seek

help. Both Mitsuko (Togashi Makoto), the university academic teacher harassed in childhood by her father, as well as Izumi (Kagurazaka Megumi), a housewife frightened by her husband and discovering her attractiveness, searching for understanding and the closeness of another person, are reaching the very bottom of human existence. Search for happiness, unattainable for them, like Kafka's castle, led the main characters to corruption because they betrayed not only their bodies but also their souls. Particularly naive is Izumi, suffering a defeat in the film, falling into a trap of a grotesque *femme fatale* and finding out the truth about the pitiful substitute of her family – marriage, which so far was devoid of emotion and intimacy.

Noriko and Yuka (or Mitsuko and Yōko) have a desire to create a new family, one that is sensitive to the needs of a unit and free from the arbitrary decisions of parents. However, they end up in a “family”, in which the hierarchy plays a much greater role than before and individualism is being sacrificed for the “greater good”, which is illustrated by the easiness with which fifty-four girls take their own lives at the underground station at Kumiko's order. The organisation created by her is something in the shape of a sect, in which members have the illusion of being able to create a new family. When Tetsuzō is fighting for his life with members of the circle attacking him, Noriko is going back to her childhood (“I drooled and I felt like I wanted to pee”) to the moment, in which she was defenceless and completely dependent on her parents and the entire life and all difficult choices were yet to come. Mistakes made by her and her parents led the family to destruction but Noriko's rebirth gave her hope for a new beginning. Indeed, Tetsuzō, Kumiko (playing his dead wife), Noriko and Yuka make an attempt to form a new family, however, it is already crippled and doomed to die from the wounds, which is symbolised by the youngest family member, Yuka, escaping.

The films, *Be sure to share (Chanto tsutaeru, 2009)* and *The Land of hope (Kibō no kuni, 2012)* are exceptions in Sono's work, as he usually depicts malfunctioning families. The first of them tells the story of a relationship between a son and his father, living in a quiet Japanese province. Kita Tetsuji (Okuda Eiji), a PE teacher at a local school, is at the same time a father, a teacher and a football coach for Shiro (Akira). The boy finds out about his parent's fatal illness, which causes a change in the relationship between them. In a series of flashbacks we see the difficult co-existence of the characters, lost in attempts to adapt to various roles: son and pupil, father and coach. The mutual agreement, as is usually the case in Sono's movies, comes a bit too late but quickly enough for the character to

understand the importance of confiding in the individual in life and families. Soon after Tetsuji's diagnosis, Shiro finds out that he is suffering from an illness similar to his father's. The main character has just got engaged and struggles with a huge dilemma. Using the metaphor of the carapace of a cicada and the transitoriness of this insect's life, the director conveys that the expression and sharing of problems and emotions with family and friends are crucial in life.

The Land of Hope is a story about a happy family of four. The Onos run the dairy farm and produce organic food far away from the city tumult. The son Yoichi (Murakami Jun) helps them with the household along with his wife Izumi (Kagurazaka Megumi). In spite of the mother's illness (suffering from Alzheimer or something similar) the entire family is filled with happiness, mutual respect and warm feelings. Their life resembles an idyllic country life, which is suddenly shattered by a disaster. The family becomes divided due to reasons beyond their power – the force of the explosion in the area of a nuclear power station. Despite certain elements known from the director's previous works, like the mother being incapable of fulfilling her role, there is a belief in humanity and a particularly strong bond between the four characters pictured in *The Land of Hope*. This is actually without precedence in Sono's filmography – the family constitutes the maximum value, giving meaning to the human life and the characters of the film know it very well. It seems, as Izumi says in the end, that “thanks to love everything becomes possible”. However, at the end of the film Sono's pessimism comes to the fore. In spite of sincere willingness and their devotion, the family cannot be together – the oldest members die, and the youngest and still unborn members of the family are in danger of living in fear and suffer due to the spreading radiation.

Although Sono Shion's works are full of images of families damaged, destroyed, replaced by other institutions and communities, full of rape and cruelty, lacking warmth and support, the Japanese director does not negate the idea of the family. On the contrary, he laments on its current position and according to his artistic *credo*, using the grotesque and hyperbole, he has taken on the mission of repairing the notion of family through his art.

It is necessary, however, to confront the traditional idea of family with the new reality and Sono Shion seems to be doing just this. In *Noriko's Dinner Table* Tetsuzō says that Toyokawa was supposed to be a safe place for his family and was meant to cut them off from the problems of this world. It is worthwhile pointing out that the main characters are frustrated because of this division into safe province and city jungle. They gather courage to protest against putting them into this opposition thanks to technology – the

Internet. Sono left Toyokawa for the first time in the age of seventeen – similarly to Noriko. The father of the director, just like Shiro’s father, was a teacher at a provincial school in Toyokawa. It would be interesting to know just how many images of the family presented in the filmography of this Japanese director have their origin in his real experiences.

Translated by Natalia Przybyło.

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The Swordless Samurai.

***Jidai-geki* Films in the Early Period of the Allied Occupation of Japan**

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ABSTRACT

The allied occupation had brought about numerous revolutionary changes in all spheres of life in Japan. From the outset particular attention had been paid to motion pictures as the most important tool of democratic re-education of the society. Among the most affected were the Kyoto-based studios producing the ever popular period dramas (*jidai-geki*) accused of nurturing the ideology of feudalism. The paper is an attempt to analyse how the famous “swordfight ban” in movies affected the Japanese film industry. The first part is devoted to the new film policy – its formation and introduction in the Autumn of 1945. The next part gives an overview of the situation of *jidai-geki* producers in the first year of the occupation.

KEYWORDS: Japanese cinema, film censorship, *jidai-geki*, Japanese period film, allied occupation of Japan.

Among the numerous restrictions imposed on the Japanese film industry during the allied occupation of the country (1945-1952), none are more famous than the constraints set on *jidai-geki* period dramas, especially the ban on *chambara*, or depictions of swordfights. The aim of this article is to examine these restrictions and consider how they influenced the Japanese film industry in the first year of the occupation. A particular attention is going to be paid to the situation of the production company Daiei as it had been the major producer of *jidai-geki* in the last years of the war and, as a consequence, the influence of the new guidelines is believed to have been the greatest on this particular company.

Preparing the Media Policy

Since the earliest stages of preparations of the plans for an allied occupation of Japan, the re-education of society in the spirit of democracy had been regarded as the occupation’s main goal and film was to play an important part in reaching it. The first draft of a proposed media policy prepared by the Inter-Divisional Area Committee for the Far East dates back to June 30, 1944. Two members of the Japanese section of the committee: Beppo Rolff Johansen and Earl R. Dickover seem to have had the greatest influence on shaping the media policy for Japan. Johansen’s

area of expertise is unknown, but the fact is that in 1935 he was deployed to Tokyo as a translator, and then worked in Yokohama, Harbin, Beijing and Tianjin, which suggests his knowledge of Sino-Japanese relations. His ability to speak Japanese and the fact that it was him who prepared the first draft of the media policy, suggest first-hand knowledge of the subject. However, it is Dickover who seems to have been even more knowledgeable of the two. In 1928 he prepared an analysis of the Japanese film industry “Exhibition of Motion Pictures in Japan” for the Department of Commerce. This leads to the assumption that most probably he played a vital part in drawing up the plans of the policy for the Japanese film industry during the impending occupation. The first draft contained fairly general guidelines, such as the elimination of nationalist propaganda films or the concept of producing solely entertainment films in the first period of occupation, and moving on to educational pictures with a pro-democratic message in the next stage. The second draft, however, dated July 6 contains an interesting fragment. It mentions that “while many Japanese movies currently in distribution are full of nationalistic rhetoric and therefore strict inspection will be required before the release of any film, it seems that pictures depicting daily life in the past two or three centuries do not pose such a problem, which means that their control should proceed quickly.” Tanikawa (2002: 31) notes that this statement suggests that although “pictures depicting daily life in the past two or three centuries do not pose such a problem”, the *jidai-geki*, which depict feudal times, do.

***Jidai-geki* Restrictions during the War**

Before moving on to the actual policy towards *jidai-geki*, it is worth remembering that it was not the Americans, but the Japanese themselves who first imposed restrictions on the genre. According to Kamiyama (2009: 42), although wartime censorship encouraged production of samurai films, praising the stoicism and restraint of the warriors following *bushidō*, the *matatabimono* genre, which depicted wandering gamblers, yakuza and other “lone wolves”, was all but banned. Furthermore, Kamiyama quotes the critic Ōi Hirosuke, who recalls that amongst wartime chaos and oppression, sometimes even samurai films were attacked. It may seem strange at first, given how the traditional values of the samurai were praised in the propaganda narrative of the time. However, as the war situation grew more and more serious, it was thought inadvisable to shock citizens remaining on the “home front” (*jūgo*) with depictions of violence, so restrictions such as time limits on the final standoffs, or *tachimawari*, have been imposed.

This attitude can be seen in the 1941 “Standards for approval of films appropriate for general public” (*Ippan'yō eiga nintei no hyōjun*), a Ministry of Education regulation specifying what kind of films were deemed improper for young audiences.

- “1. Productions disturbing the youths’ assessment of historical facts;
2. Productions with storylines contradictory to the content of government approved schoolbooks;
3. Productions which may cause the loss of youths’ respect towards their parents, teachers and other superiors;
4. Productions which may bring about the urge to commit acts of crime or hooliganism, also those which may lead to behaviour imitative of or evoking fascination with criminals and hooligans;
5. Productions which may trigger cruelty and violence in youths;
6. Productions which may cause significant feelings of fear or hatred;
7. Productions which are overly sentimental;
8. Productions dealing with themes of love as well as other productions which may provoke the youths’ emotions;
9. Productions which overly stimulate youths’ imagination and curiosity;
10. All other productions which may have a negative effect on youths’ education.” (Makino 2003: 482)

Entries four and five, especially, seem to be directed against the *matatabimono* type *jidai-geki*, regarded as devoid of any educational value. This clearly shows that although not as wide-ranging as occupational rulings, there had been some efforts by the Japanese government to control the period dramas and their effect on the public.

Kamiyama (42) goes on to quote Satō who refers to the case of *matatabimono* author Shin Hasegawa. Before the war he had been the most adapted author of historical novels. From 1929, which marks the start of a Hasegawa boom, until 1940, as much as seventy six films based on his writings had been produced, but only one in the following decade: Arai Ryōhei’s *The Sea Clan. A Story of Expansion of the South* (*Nanpō hatten shi. Umi no gōzoku*) in 1942. Interestingly, the *matatabimono* genre,

including the works of Hasegawa, was frowned upon not only during the war but also after the start of the occupation.

The New Film Policy

The representatives of the Japanese film industry were informed of the guidelines prepared for them by the Americans on September 22, 1945 at a meeting organized by the Information Dissemination Section (IDS) of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP). According to Tanikawa (201), about 40 people, including producers from all film companies, took part. At the meeting they were given a pamphlet outlining what stood in the way of democratization of Japan.

“In the modern world there is no place for <<kabuki-type period works>> which are based on feudalistic doctrine of loyalty and revenge. As long as rape, killing and treachery will be openly justified before the public; as long as there is consent for personal revenge without respect for the law, the Japanese society will not be able to understand the standards of behaviour in modern international relations” (*Rengōgun saikō sireikan eiga seisaku e no shiji*: 5)

These "kabuki-type period works" refer, of course, to the *jidai-geki* films and plays. Period dramas including the extremely popular *kengeki* or *chambara* swordfight pictures constituted a separate branch of the entire film industry. They have traditionally been produced in the Kyōto film studios shot by specialized crews. The biggest stars associated with the genre would go on to become not less revered than the national heroes they played. During the meeting on September 22, however, it became clear that there would be no place for such films in the mass media policy of occupied Japan.

Soon after the meeting IDS changed its name to Civil Information and Education Section (CIE), its main goal being the re-education of Japanese society in the spirit of democracy. Canadian-born David Conde was appointed as the head of CIE's film division. During his relatively short time in office (October 1945–July 1946) he had an overwhelming influence on the whole motion picture industry. His first action was to devise a list of “unwelcome” themes that were not to be taken up by the filmmakers. These were:

1. Promotion of militarism.

2. Revenge;
3. Nationalism;
4. Patriotism and xenophobia;
5. Distortion of historical facts;
6. Racial and religious discrimination;
7. Feudal loyalty and honoring the lack of respect towards human life;
8. Direct and indirect approval of suicide;
9. Oppression of women and depiction of fallen women;
10. Glorification of violence and cruelty;
11. Anti-democracy;
12. Oppression of children
13. All other themes contradictory to the Potsdam Declaration or SCAP instructions. (Satō: 166)

The Trouble with *jidai-geki*

Of course, most of these, either directly or indirectly, concern *jidai-geki*. Points two, seven and eight, for example, made it impossible to produce film adaptations of *Chūshingura*, the ever popular tale of the 47 loyal rōnin who take revenge on lord Kira for driving their master Asano to committing seppuku. Although there has never been an outright ban on the *jidai-geki* films, with their most representative themes being prohibited in the new regulations their production would face enormous obstacles. That exactly had been the aim of the CIE. It was the opinion of SCAP that such films promoted feudalistic ideology which, despite having seemingly been renounced with the beginning of the Meiji Era (1868-1912), had its roots firmly planted in the mindset of the Japanese.

A spectacular *tachimawari*, or the final swordfight in which the hero stands off against numerous enemies, had always been an indispensable element of *kengeki* films. However, it was these scenes in particular that, according to the American censors, exhibited the spirit of feudalism with its most powerful symbol, the samurai's katana, in full glory. In the name of loyalty to their masters the warriors shed the blood of their enemies. This feudal loyalty was regarded as the cornerstone of wartime militarism, with the god-emperor Shōwa at the top. It was for him that the Japanese soldiers fought and died, therefore it was important for SCAP that loyalty to the ruler understood in this way be eradicated.

Hirano (1998: 112) notes that the first two shots of the anti-Japanese propaganda film *Know Your Enemy: Japan* (1945) exemplify the peculiar mix of fascination and fear that Americans felt towards the Japanese sword.

First, a photograph appears showing an officer of the Imperial Army about to execute an American prisoner with a sword. This moves into the next shot which shows a close-up of a *katana* blade. An unnamed Japanese man in a military uniform with a grave expression on his face carries out a demonstration of his sword prowess. A caption reading: *The iron sword is our bible. General Araki*" is shown. The choice of the quote is very much in line with the anti-Japanese propaganda narrative in which the Japanese were depicted as a nation without morality, guided in their decisions by loyalty to a higher authority and not by distinction between good and evil, as was the case with the Western civilization and its Christian principles. This notion was also touched upon on the September 22 meeting in the following words (of the aforementioned occupational policy outline distributed among the producers):

“The West is also guilty of committing sinful acts, but at least our moral standards have always been based on the distinction between good and evil, and not on loyalty to any *hanbatsu* or clans.” (“Rengōgun saikō sireikan eiga seisaku e no shiji”: 5)

The Industry’s Reaction

What was the film industry’s reaction to the proposed changes? If one looks, for instance, at the writings of Iwao Mori, who represented Tōhō on the September 22 meeting, there is nothing to suggest that he considered the restrictions imposed on *jidai-geki* as a serious obstacle. His article on the meeting published in the October-November issue of “Eiga Hyōron” mentions them only in passing, attaching more importance to the economic problems looming over the motion picture industry, associated with the rapid growth of unemployment and the sudden loss of important markets in the colonies. Mori then wonders whether films made according to the new guidelines would have any chance of competing against the Hollywood blockbusters, soon to be making their comeback to Japanese movie theatres.

“We shall rebuild Japanese cinema. Even though there is a technical gap [between Japanese and American cinema] I am not a pessimist, because we have the Japanese language, the moviegoers’ attachment, all the other components. If the people rush to see *Gone with the Wind*, they will also rush to see *Sugata Sanshirō*. If the people are impressed with *The Grapes of Wrath*, they will also be impressed with *Uma*. It is our duty

do everything we can to produce films even more impressive than the American ones. “ (Mori 6)

It is interesting to note that the first example given by Mori is Kurosawa's *Sugata Sanshirō* (1943). Although not a *jidai-geki* in the strict meaning of the term, because of the atypical theme and the fact that the action takes place well into the Meiji era, it is hardly a modern drama. It would seem then that for Mori the greatest asset of Japanese cinema was its grasp of the country's traditions. This can be read as a sign of disagreement with the CIE policy.

On the other hand, the Tōhō producer's certain lack of interest in the fate of the period drama can hardly be surprising in view of the fact that it was his company that had produced the greatest number of war propaganda films (e.g. Yamamoto Kajirō's *War at Sea from Hawaii to Malay* [*Hawai Mare oki kaisen*, 1942], Watanabe Kunio's *Towards the Skies of Victory* [*Kessen no ōzora e*, 1943], Abe Yutaka's *Shoot that Flag* [*Ano hata wo ute*, 1944] etc.), so he must have been relieved that the Americans didn't seem interested in taking any punitive action. This was not the case with Kikuchi Kan, the famous novelist and the president of Daiei. As head of the film company which produced the most number of *jidai-geki* he had to protest. He knew that without *kengeki* films the company would find itself in dire straits. Mori Iwao mentions in his autobiography, as quoted by Satō (166), that Kikuchi delivered a speech in English defending the genre. He argued that these films were nothing more than absurd fairy tales for adults with no influence whatsoever on the Japanese way of life, so banning them was not necessary. The American officials, however, refused any discussion of the matter.

The Demand for New Films

With the State's control of the motion picture industry lifted, each of the studios once again had to deal with its films' distribution and face competition from one another. In spite of, or rather due to the hardships of postwar life, people craved cinema. Insignificant, quickly produced commercial movies, like Sasaki Yasushi's *Soyokaze* (*The Breeze*) from Shōchiku, which was released in October 1945, enjoyed enormous popularity. In fact, October and November of 1945 saw some the largest turnouts ever. Although about one-third of the cinemas had been destroyed in the air raids, new ones, often taking the form of makeshift barracks, were being constructed all the time. The pre-war number of two new films from each company every week was, needless to say, impossible to reach,

but new films had to be produced. As the demand for films was so great, the companies had to resort to re-releasing those pre-war productions not infested with nationalistic propaganda. Even then, these films had to undergo strict examination by the officials of the Civil Censorship Division, a branch of SCAP operating independently from the CIE. Often a film already heavily cut by the Japanese censors would be further trimmed by the CCD.

A good example of this is Inagaki Hiroshi's 1943 masterpiece *The Life of Matsu the Untamed* (*Muhōmatsu no isshō*), one of the few wartime films allowed a re-release. A scene showing Matsugorō, a rickshaw man, parting with the woman he secretly loves, an Imperial Army officer's widow, had been cut on the first release of the film. The honor of wearing an officer's uniform was so great that his wife had to maintain the highest moral standards too, even after his death. Any suggestion of mutual attachment between her and a lowly rickshaw man was deemed highly improper. (Makino: 500) CCD on the other hand, removed a scene in which a few boys who are about to have a fight cheer themselves up with some military songs. Goshō Hideo's 1935 *Jinsei no onimotsu* (*The Burden of Life*) was subject to cuts, because one of the characters was marrying an army officer. Other examples of CCD censorship include a scene in Shumazu Yasujirō's *Lights of Asakusa* (*Asakusa no hi*, 1937) in which the usually gentle Uehara Ken beats up a band of hoodlums; the final spectacular *tachimawari* in Yamanaka Sadao's *Sazen Tange and The Pot Worth a Million Ryo* (*Tange Sazen yowa: Hyaku man ryō no tsubo*, 1935) or the tragic ending of Mizoguchi Kenji's *The Water Magician* (*Taki no shiraito* 1933), which praised the self-sacrifice of women. All of these fragments are now considered lost. (Satō: 169)

Meanwhile, on November 17, 1945 a memorandum "On the removal of anti-democratic movies" was announced. It imposed a total ban on the distribution of films inconsistent with CIE directives. It covered almost all the films produced after April 1942, when film distribution was unified under the banner of state-owned Eiga Haikyūsha (Film Distribution Company). Also included were older propaganda films, e.g. Tasaka Tomotaka's *Earth and Soldiers* (*Tsuchi to heitai*, 1939), as well as films that were produced at the tail-end of the war and have ever since been in limbo waiting for release, such as Kurosawa's *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* (*Tora no o wo fumu otokotachi*), Matsuda Sadatsugu's *Kojiki taishō* (*The Beggar General*) or Yamamoto Kajirō's *Koi no fūunji* (*Love's Adventurer*) aka *Jolly Fellow* (*Kaidanishi*). In total, the list consists of 227

titles¹, the negatives of which were later confiscated by the occupying forces and exported to the United States, although Tanaka (174) writes that many of the copies were simply burned over the course of a few days in Tamagawara, west of Tokyo. The vast majority of titles in the list are war propaganda films and *jidai-geki*. The ban was a blow especially for Daiei. 57 of the company's films have been blacklisted, most of them, 31 titles, being period dramas. Out of Daiei's entire output only the following movies were spared: *Rainbow Way* (*Niji no Michi*, 1942, Igayama Masamitsu), *Singing Tanuki Palace* (*Utau tanuki goden*, 1942, Kimura Keigo), *Blue Sky Symphony* (*Aozora kōkyōgaku*, 1943, Chiba Yasuki), *The Women's Fight* (*Onna no Tatakai*, 1943, Ozaki Masafusa, Mishō Kingo), *Spring of Hardship* (*Fūsetsu no haru*, 1943, OchiaiYoshito), *The Life of Matsu the Untamed*, *Sumo Festival* (*Dohyō Matsuri*, 1944, Marune Santarō) and *The Living Chair* (*Ikeru isu*, 1945, Nobuchi Akira). Formed in 1942 as a result of government ordained merger of Shinkō Kinema, Daito Eiga and the production branch of Nikkatsu, Daiei did not boast an extensive library of older films like Shōchiku and Tōhō did. The inability to re-release older films meant that immediate production of new movies became all the more necessary.

Another problem which Daiei faced in the autumn of 1945 was the lack of proper distribution network. The company had been created with production as its main goal, so the return of free competition in the distribution market meant that it had to quickly look for new ways to show its films. In an effort to do this, Kikuchi Kan travelled to Kyūshū in October, to take part in a cinema owners' convention. There, the president of Daiei spent many hours creating calligraphy for everyone who asked (of course such a gift coming from a writer as popular as himself was very much in demand), in turn appealing to everyone to sign distribution contracts with his company. In a system where the theatres would show movies from one company only, signing new contracts with the cinemas was a matter of life and death for Daiei. In addition to the efforts of Kikuchi, five regional distribution offices, whose task was to encourage cinema owners to show Daiei films, were created on December 1, 1945. The company also signed a short partnership deal with Tōhō, although that did not last long. (Tanaka: 262)

¹ The number varies depending on the source. Tanaka (174) writes about 225 films, while Tanikawa (204) mentions as many as 236. The number 227 is taken from a reprint of the list published in Tōkyō Kokuritsu Kindai Bijitsukan Firumu Sentaa, ed. *Senjika eiga shiryō: Eiga nenkan Shōwa jūhachi jūku nijūnen. Daiikkan: 346-357*.

As far as production of new films was concerned, Daiei's greatest point of concern was that all of its biggest stars: Bando Tsumasaburō, Kataoka Chiezō, Ichikawa Utaemon and Arashi Kanjūrō were *jidai-geki* actors. How would they attract audience to the cinemas now that *chambara* had been ruled out? The obvious idea seemed to change their oeuvre to *gendai-geki*, or contemporary films, but for such prominent figures of the *kengeki* world this would be a revolution comparable to the transition from silent film performers to talkies. It was not clear whether they could do it and, what's more important, whether the audience would accept the change. Meanwhile, there was no time to lose.

First postwar productions. Swordless *jidai-geki*, *meijimono*, *gendai-geki*

Daiei's first postwar production (released in November 1945) was Marune Santarō's *The Boy left by the Foxes* (*Kitsune no kureta akanbō*). This very interesting but forgotten film is definitely worth a closer look. It is an example of a completely "swordless" *jidai-geki*. The film, which takes place in the Edo period, is a story of Torahachi (Bandō Tsumasaburō) a rough but kindhearted labourer who finds a baby in a part of the forest said to be inhabited by shapeshifting foxes. He assumes that the child is one of those foxes pretending to be a human and trying to cause mischief, but his conscience doesn't allow him to leave the baby in the cold. When the baby turns out to be a real human being, Torahachi, much to the surprise of his drinking buddies, decides to raise the boy and names him Zenta. The film does not feature any swordfights. There is, however, a significant scene in which Zenta, having learned that he is the child of a feudal lord, takes his small sword from the wall and throws it away in anger as far as he can. A sight unheard of in Japanese cinema until then. At its core it is a film about a man from the lower classes taking upon himself a great responsibility – the CIE had no problems in accepting a movie with this theme, even if it was a *jidai-geki*. Needless to say the film was popular with the public. What is more, the reviews were quite favourable, which was rarely the case with a period film.

Marune Santarō's next picture, *The Punched Lord* (*Nagurareta otonosama*, 1946), was another period comedy, or rather a period satire, with the plot inspired by Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. It ridiculed the greedy feudal lords (and in turn also the wartime officials).

In spite of the commercial success of these films it was clear that the CIE would not allow the production of too many *jidai-geki*, no matter how closely they followed the guidelines. That is why, with varying degrees of luck, Daiei tried to persuade the audience to accept their *jidai-geki* stars in

contemporary roles. Tanaka Shigeo's *Who is the criminal?* (*Hanzaisha wa dare ka?*), released in December 1945 and starring Bandō as a pacifist-leaning politician oppressed by the state during the war, was the first of such efforts. Unfortunately, it has to be considered a failure. It was an early example of a pro-democratic film made according to CIE's rulings, but the clichéd plot and total lack of nuance in depicting wartime Japan meant that the film inadvertently called to mind the war propaganda films of years past. In fact, Tanaka's filmography includes such titles as *The Capture of Hong Kong: The Day When Britain Falls* (*Honkon kōryaku: Eikoku kuzururu no hi* 1942), or *Volunteer Human Bullets* (*Nikudan teishintai*, 1944). The lack of success of Daiei's new film with the public proved that merely dressing up a *jidai-geki* actor in contemporary clothes would not automatically create a box-office hit. That is why a more sophisticated strategy was employed in case of the 1946 mystery film. Directed by *chambara* specialist Matsuda Sadatsugu and produced by Daiei's Kyoto studio, *The Man with the Seven Faces* (*Nanatsu no kao*) stars Kataoka Chiezō as the detective Tarao Bannai, a master of disguise. This allowed the actor to appear in seven different roles in a manner reminiscent of *hayagawari*, a quick change of character performed in the *kabuki* theatre. Although all of Tarao's seven faces were very much the same and Kataoka's acting clearly showed that he was someone from a completely different film world, the movie was a success and led to the production of a series of Tarao Bannai mysteries with further three films made by Daiei in 1947 and 1948.

In spite of this success, the Kyoto studios could not survive on *gendai-geki* alone. Apart from the lack of experience of crew members and actors in this area, financial issues played an important role. The studio had all the facilities suitable for the production of period dramas, including sets, costumes and props, and wanted to use them in some way or other. To achieve this goal all three motion picture companies started making the so-called *meijimono*, or *ishinmono* (Meiji tales, or restoration tales), depicting the period during or right after the Meiji Restoration. These films usually told the stories of individuals' fight with the crumbling feudal system at a time when Japan was standing at the threshold of modernity. All in accordance with the CIE policies urging the studios to produce films about "those historical figures whose actions are an example of the struggle for civil liberties and parliamentary Japan". This way the company could kill two birds with one stone: follow CIE guidelines while keeping close to *jidai-geki* at the same time. An early example of such film was Matsuda's *The Meiji Brothers* (*Meiji no kyōdai*) from 1946. The film was based on

Kikuchi's novel telling the story of two brothers on opposing sides of the turmoil concerning Japan's modernization.

The *meijimono*, which allowed for easy comparisons between post-feudal and postwar Japan, have been looked upon more fondly by the CIE than the typical *jidai-geki*. The reviews, however, were usually less than favourable. The critics were accusing the filmmakers of repeating all the mistakes of pre-war *jidai-geki* with no modern insight added. For example in his review of *Kunisada Chūji* (1946), a new film based on the life of the famous *kyōkaku* (a sort of a forerunner to the *yakuza*), Hata Ippei writes that even though older films about Chūji, such as Itō Daisuke's *Diary of Chūji's Travels* (*Chūji tabi nikki*, 1927), lacked psychological insight, they at least depicted a real full-blooded character, something which this film lacks, replacing realism with childish heroism. The reviewer then goes on to say that Japanese cinema should forget about old *jidai-geki* actors and concentrate on achieving historical realism (Hata: 38). *Gendai-geki* films of *jidai-geki* stars usually received similarly scathing reviews. Writing about the aforementioned *The Man with the Seven Faces* Noborikawa Naoki accuses such films of superficially removing characters from bad *chambara* films, with all simplistic heroics included, and putting them into a contemporary picture (Noborikawa: 38). In an essay published in 1946, the film critic Hazumi Tsuneo writes about the situation of postwar *jidai-geki*:

“Disposing of feudalistic themes from the cinemas is the most important task given to us by MacArthur. The feudal spirit has been a hidden part of the Japanese mentality ever since the Meiji Era and has resulted in militarism. In the film industry it has brought about servility and sycophantism towards government officials. The state of *jidai-geki* is an example of this. Personally, I cannot say I am not saddened that from now on these films will become a rare sight. As a child I loved kabuki and grew up under its influence. I do not feel satisfaction at the banning of *Chūshingura*, *Terakoya*, *Kanjinchō*. Moreover, in my youth I used to dream about Kunisada Chūji or Tange Sazen. To say that these plays and characters are like the hometown to which our hearts nostalgically yearn is not enough. Despite this, I support the eradication of feudalism by withholding the production of *jidai-geki*(...).

Of course, not everything has been prohibited. If they adopt a proper historical perspective, if they show empathy to ordinary people, the *jidai-geki* are more than welcome. However, one cannot deny that the genre is undergoing a crisis.

The division of the Japanese film industry between studios specializing in *jidai-geki* and *gendai-geki* seems to me a sign of the inherent feudalism. Even without the SCAP guidelines, we have always felt that the separate *jidai-geki* studios of Kyoto are far from progressive. With the new policies they simply decide to move up a period or two and make films taking place in Meiji or Taishō, but this does not remove the feudal atmosphere created by their tradition. It is as if a kabuki actor appeared in the contemporary theatre: the result will be unnatural. It is not necessary for me to ponder on whether the *jidai-geki* studios should or should not exist. However, if they do not establish cooperation with the Tokyo studios, their staff will surely find themselves left behind.” (Hazumi: 9)

Although CIE’s control over the motion picture industry became more relaxed with time, the restrictions imposed on *jidai-geki* remained very much unchanged throughout the whole Allied Occupation. It is worth noting that the *kabuki* theatre, also regarded as a relic of feudal times by the Americans, was released from strict control much earlier than *jidai-geki* films (Dower 1999: 527). This was mainly due to the fact that *kabuki* had its champion in the person of Faubion Bowers, general MacArthur’s interpreter who had lived in Japan before the war and had fallen in love with Japanese theatre back then. (Hirano: 111) Thanks to his efforts, the ban on such plays as *Chūshingura* or *Terakoya* was lifted as early as 1947. On the other hand, the first postwar version of *Chūshingura* couldn’t be made until 1952 (a Tōei production of Hagiwara Ryō’s *Akō Castle [Akōjō]*) and even then it lacked the scene of the raid on Kira’s mansion and the depiction of the rōnins’ revenge. Obviously cinema’s greater impact meant that it had to be controlled more strictly than the rather exclusive theatre. However, as soon as the occupation had come to an end, the *jidai-geki* made a triumphant comeback to the cinemas. The Japanese accepted democracy but, evidently, had no intention of losing their “feudalistic” mindset.

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