The Global Auteur

The Politics of Authorship in 21st Century Cinema

Edited by Seung-hoon Jeong and Jeremi Szaniawski

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Kurosawa Kiyoshi, dis/continuity, and the ghostly ethics of meaning and auteurship

Aaron Gerow

The auteur and trickster

Kurosawa Kiyoshi's work, particularly films such as *Pulse* (*Kairo*, 2001) and *Retribution* (*Sakebi*, 2007), has largely been discussed through the horror genre (White 2007; McRoy 2008; Kinoshita 2009; Posadas 2014), but many of his films revolve around detective-like figures. The lead characters in *Cure* (*Kyua*, 1997), *Charisma* (*Karisuma*, 2000), and *Retribution* are actual police detectives, but other works like *Guard from the Underground* (*Jigoku no keibiin*, 1990), *The Revenge: A Visit from Fate* (*Fukushū: Unmei no hōmonsha*, 1996), *Serpent's Path* (*Hebi no michi*, 1997), *Pulse*, *Loft* (2006), *Penance* (*Shokuzai*, 2012), and *Real* (*Riaru*, 2013) feature characters investigating a problem to determine its truth and thus its solution, often attempting to achieve justice or revenge. The detective theme traverses a number of genres—horror, thrillers, gangster movies, mysteries—and need not appear in every film. Yet the fact that detective fiction has been described as inherently self-reflexive, in which the detective, like any reader, must successfully interpret texts and signs in order to construct a narrative and solve the crime (Hühn 1987; Sweeney 1990; Pyrhönen 1999), implies that the recurrence of the detective in

Kurosawa's cinema may indicate its own concern with the problem of interpretation.

The figure of the detective may also relate to the status of the auteur, but in a different way, one that might follow S. E. Sweeney's suggestion that at "the metadiegetic level ... the criminal is the author of a crime that the detective must interpret" (Sweeney 1990, 8). What if we take the model of the detective story to consider Kurosawa's cinema as less the product of a conscious thematics or worldview than as an incident, a crime—against meaning? against cinema?—that calls for a solution, but one that involves the problem of detecting, of looking itself. Perhaps the auteur here is like the murderer in many classic detective stories: to use Robert Champigny's term, the "trickster" (1977, 45), who plays with the detective/reader even as the crime is committed. Mamiya in *Cure*, the descendant of the man beside the camera in the Meiji film, could after all resemble the director, using flickering lights to direct his audience.

There is a context in Japan for considering the film auteur in this fashion. The concept of the auteur is currently in crisis, even though one can find from the late 1920s examples of auteurist studies in Japanese criticism (e.g. Kishi Matsuo) and of directors declaring artistic independence from the studios (Kinugasa Teinosuke). However, there is the perception that a new media ecology, signified by a post-Fordist mode of horizontal integration wherein Japanese television networks dominate major film production and film becomes merely another content in the media mix (Lukacs 2010; Steinberg 2012), has inflicted its version of auteurism (or lack thereof) on cinema. It is not unusual to hear complaints that the director's name is being downplayed, if not eliminated, from advertising.[1] Coupled with the decline of art house venues and the critical infrastructure that supports such films, the long tradition of Japanese film auteurs can be thought to be suffering a slow death.

The attack on auteurism, however, is also evident on the conceptual front. Working in the line of Barthes's "Death of the Author," critics such as Hasumi Shigehiko have complicated existing notions of authorial identity. While publishing one of the most influential books on Ozu Yasujirō in 1983, Hasumi began by critiquing those who believed they could identify the "Ozuesque" precisely "because no one is looking at Ozu Yasujirō's films. The 'Ozuesque' is nothing but a game unrelated to cinema that is only possible after our eyes kill the image on screen" (Hasumi 1992, 11). This was not a complete rejection of auteurism, but it criticized traditional auteurism for placing logocentric language over a cinematic image that was thought to undermine identity and categorization.

> In order to free Ozu Yasujirō from the tacit arrangement of being "Ozuesque," we must continue looking at his films ... The instant that interpretation starts, people will no longer be able to cease disposing of their eyes. We must place our bodies on the focal point of these images mutually reflecting each other, and there experience the vanishing of our selves. "Nothingness" is not something depicted in a single film; it is the experience of being able to live within looking.
>
> (Hasumi 1992, 258)

Hasumi was arguably the most influential thinker on cinema in Japan from the 1970s to the 1990s, and one of Kurosawa's teachers at Rikkyō University. The new model of the auteur was Hasumi's version of Ozu, the auteur who was not "Ozu," but who could still be discussed as uniquely foregrounding the impossibility of describing cinema. Kitano Takeshi became the contemporary version of this postmodern auteur. As I discussed in my book on him, Kitano was certainly placed under traditional auteurist rubrics, but he himself often collaborated with post-Hasumi criticism by performing auteurship that could not be captured by auteurist criticism, undermining each iteration of the Kitanoesque by doing the opposite in his next film. Kitano, in effect, became a super auteur, one who surpassed all other auteurs to the degree he alone could transcend the confines of auteurist definition (Gerow 2007).

Kurosawa works within these industrial and critical conditions. Beginning in pink films, he initially participated in Director's Company, an ill-fated attempt by ten directors to take control of production, but then ended up suing Itami Jūzō and Tōhō over the director's share of video revenue for *Sweet Home* (*Suwīto Hōmu*, 1989), a court case he lost. As if being punished for that, Kurosawa was mostly confined to making films for video release until *Cure*. Subsequently marked as an auteur, he moved between art and genre film, but with domestic investment in art films drying up Kurosawa did not release any theatrical films between 2008 and 2013. Since 2012, he has had to work in a complicated terrain, shooting for television (*Penance*) and making a major studio genre film (*Real*), an idol movie (*Seventh Code*, 2014), a ghost romance (*Journey to the Shore* [*Kishibe no tabi*, 2015]), and a French production (*Woman in the Silver Plate*, 2015).

At the same time, Kurosawa has also been aligned with post-auteurist discourse. One of the early accounts of his work was penned by Shinozaki Makoto, a younger Rikkyō graduate who became a director in his own right (*Okaeri* [1995]) and a professor at Rikkyō. In 1992, he wrote a piece on Kurosawa for *Cahiers du Cinéma Japon* that began with the declaration: "Kurosawa Kiyoshi is in no way a valuable film auteur that continues to shoot individualistic films" (Makoto 1992, 168). Far from rejecting Kurosawa as a film artist, Shinozaki in Hasumian fashion criticizes all for attempting to describe Kurosawa's cinema and thus forgetting that "people can only be absolutely powerless in the face of cinema" (1992, 170). Kurosawa himself, in interviews, has also professed an aversion to

auteurist discourse, trying to avoid reading it (Kurosawa 2015). Actually working as Kitano's colleague when the latter served as a professor at the Tokyo University of the Arts between 2005 and 2008, Kurosawa has in some ways followed the example of Kitano's auteurism by announcing a continuing desire to move away from his own established territories and break new ground (Kurosawa 2003).

Shinozaki prefers to term Kurosawa a "trickster" or "swindler" (*petenshi*) (Shinozaki 1992, 171), but he also calls Kurosawa a "*dendōshi*" or missionary, the term that is also used by Sakuma to describe Mamiya in *Cure*. If Mamiya is a form of a director, what could Kurosawa be proselytizing, particularly about cinema, meaning, and authorship? Given Mamiya's own emptiness—dare I say, with Kurosawa's own preoccupation with ghosts, his form of ghostliness—can viewing Kurosawa as a ghostly auteur, a different trickster behind the cinema playing the doubleness of ambiguity against the singularity of meaning, provide us with insight in how to negotiate media ecology during the supposed end of cinema and the birth of the digital age in Japan, especially against the background of Japan's place as a nation in a globalized world? Kurosawa, I will argue, uses the ghostliness of cinema to explore an ethics of looking, a reparative gaze that negotiates a space in the current geography of media and nations.

Interpretation and dis/continuity

First, let us investigate the issue of meaning, in particular the hypothesis that Kurosawa, like Mamiya the missionary, is spreading a message. Consider a scene toward the start of Kurosawa's *Barren Illusion* (*Ōinaru gen'ei*, 1999). Returning home, the lead character Haru sits down and just suddenly begins to fade out, only to return a few seconds later. This is not a ghost movie like *Séance* (*Kōrei*, 1999) or *Retribution*. At best, one could say it is an art film that, imagining an apocalypse like *Charisma*, *Pulse*, or *Retribution*, allegorically explores the precariousness of existence and identity, visually depicting the uncertainty of being what the hero of *License to Live* (*Ningen gōkaku*, 1998) just talks about. But the question is what such a reading involves. It may describe a character and his uncertain ontology but its very words treat this character as continuous—the Haru before he fades out and the Haru after he fades back in are the same character (note the cut in that occurs when he fades out adds further discontinuity to the scene).

This may seem obvious, but the scene itself pursues the issue of performing interpretation. Previous to this, Haru had twice encountered the phrase "Kiero," a slang term that, while generally meaning "Get lost!," literally means "Disappear!" The first time was when he is in the bar and overhears a man use the word to his girlfriend; the second is just before

he returns home, when a group of punks yell "Kiero" when it seems he had witnessed them stealing a safe. Haru is therefore not simply disappearing because of his lightness of being, he is acting on an understanding of a word, though one that forgets its multiple meanings. Perhaps it is a mistaken interpretation, but it foregrounds the act of reading and questions any interpretation we have.

Reading his act as an interpretation of the previous scene, however, implies some continuity between them. That seems like a logical assumption, but such continuity is not always a given in Kurosawa's work. Recall the character of Mamiya in *Cure*, who is defined by discontinuity. The first time he appears in the film, in a long take on Shirasato Beach, the continuity of the shot underlines his inability to hold an idea from moment to moment. This is later explained by another continuity—the condition of amnesia—but that continuity is itself discontinuous, given the multiple times in the film (such as when he remembers "Fujiwara of Headquarters") when he clearly has a memory. That may also be explained by his "power" to enter into others, which he suggests in his conversation with the doctor, but that interpretation may not serve as an "answer" if one turns Mamiya's oft-repeated question "Who are you?" on Mamiya himself. That question not only queries being and identity, but is itself a manifestation of discontinuity through its incessant repetition, through its insistence that there is no continuity that obviates the need to repeat the question. How then to declare who Mamiya is? To state such singular knowledge is to ignore the complexity of the question "Who are you?"—addressed as much to the audience as to those in the diegesis—in the same way "Fujiwara of Headquarters" does (the man who is most forcefully critiqued through that question).

Kurosawa's films, however, have tempted many to answer such questions. Their abstractness has invited allegorical interpretations in particular: one scholar, for instance, insists that "the density of cultural memory of Hiroshima in *Pulse* is the essential highway into reading the film" (Petrovic 2013, 144); another views Kurosawa's films as "ecological critique" grounded "in banal images of the everyday, with pervasive images of nature corrupted, technologically dominated, organically tainted or circumvented" (Palmer 2010, 221–2). One need not cite directorial intention (though Kurosawa has said, for instance, that he never thought of Hiroshima when making *Pulse* [Kurosawa 2015]) to see such interpretations as presuming a continuity of meaning inside and outside the borders of the text. Dilapidated buildings, for instance, are presumed in an ecocritical account to be signs of human degradation, without considering how at times they may operate in Kurosawa as an object of desire or aesthetic fascination. Some read the poisonous jellyfish on the narrative level in *Bright Future* as "a gathering plague" (Palmer 2010, 222), even though on the figurative level their color renders them the most vibrant existence in this nearly monochrome film. The problem is not simply that such reasoning may beg the question, but

that it ignores other valences lurking in the text, making singular connections between levels of discourse or between sign and meaning both unjustified and contradictory to textual practices that may oppose them.

Kurosawa's works in fact make an issue of such connections on the level of narrative and cinematic form. In Fujisaki Kō's words, they "suspend the answer," leaving the transitions up in the air or "sliding them to the side" (2001, 40, 42). Consider how *Cure* offers basic narrative information about Mamiya. Consider his name. That is initially provided by the name sewn into his coat. He is only named, therefore, through association, through an interpretation that connects coat, name, and person through a metonymic relation. Other associations—such as the name on the dissertation—may add to this interpretation, but the fact he never answers to the name inserts a gap, a persistent doubt over naming (as well as, in this case, over authorship).

What about his "crimes"? The film gradually, from case to case, reveals more of his conversation with each "victim," but even in the doctor's case—the only instance when something that could possibly be called hypnosis is visible—there is no hint of commands or *satsujin kyōsa*, the crime Takabe wants to charge him with. Again, it is mere association that links him to the murders these people commit. The common interpretation is that Mamiya extracts the repressed feelings within his subjects through hypnosis, who then act upon their hatreds. The schoolteacher hated his wife, the doctor truly resented the male gender. Yet neither says that—the teacher vehemently denies it and it is Mamiya who says that of the doctor. Such narratives are projections by others within the diegesis. It is true that the police patrolman speaks about killing the other officer because he disliked him, but the word he uses in the end is *deshō*, a sentence ending expression that asserts uncertainty or probability (as in, "I probably disliked him"), and thus the possibility of another interpretation. His is not necessarily a statement of fact, but a speculation, an attempt, like the viewer's, to retrospectively make a connection and construct a continuous narrative of cause and effect between two seemingly contiguous moments. Even Baryon Posadas's very good article on Kurosawa and *Retribution,* which resonates with some of my arguments here and elsewhere (Gerow 2002, 2012), makes questionable leaps in this regard. Rightly arguing that "their crimes remain illegible precisely because they are unable to ascribe exceptional motives to their actions," he nevertheless concludes that therefore "Kurosawa locates the problem of crime not in the individual killings but elsewhere, in the larger social relations constitutive of them" (Posadas 2014, 440). The lack of clear internal motivations, however, does not necessarily mean that external conditions are the sole remaining explanation. Offering such a symptomatic reading may be a problem if the prime symptom being spotlighted may be the compulsion to pursue such singular readings.

This is particularly conspicuous in Kurosawa's ways of connecting shots. In general, Kurosawa is known for paring down his narratives via editing,

eliminating much that comes between events and using editing to suggest narrative trajectories. In an interview, he stressed the strength of editing, its ability to establish connections even over significant gaps, but he also registered concern over its power (Kurosawa 2015). His editing pursues a dual strategy of experimenting with what juxtapositions of shots can produce while simultaneously challenging those connections. One series of shots in *Cure* poses this question. Takabe, angry that his mentally-ill wife Fumie has forgotten to cook the steak she has served him, throws it against the wall. There is then a cut to a close-up of Takabe, his face in shadow; a medium close-up of Fumie asleep with a camera movement to the travel pamphlets and the bags she has packed; then a long shot of Takabe at the bedroom door with Fumie asleep in the foreground. Suddenly there is a shot of a hand reaching for a knife and then a cut to Takabe and Fumie riding in the back of an old bus with clouds visible through the windows. The cut to the knife is jarring, not only because one wonders whether Takabe is going to kill his wife, but also because it is boldly self-referential, the cutting instrument itself emphasizing the violent discontinuity of editing. The next shot reveals Fumie safe on the bus. During a talk at Yale in 2006, Kurosawa explained that here he was experimenting with the possibility of the cinematic image enunciating a negative: "Takabe did *not* kill his wife." But with the unreality of the bus's background (clouds passing as if the bus is in flight) and the mystery of Fumie's subsequent death, this cut is also a rupture in the film's ontology, asking how much of what happens subsequently "really" happened. Even the run-down hospital at the end, which is first established through montage as part of Sakuma's reflection or hallucination, only to, again through editing, be the space Takabe moves to after learning of Sakuma's death—transitioned through another unreal bus shot—is impossible to establish as real or illusory within the diegesis. Adding the Meiji film with the off-screen figure making an X, *Cure* emphasizes cutting in cinema, the space not only outside the frame but also between shots. It is as if montage is a ghostly presence, suggesting connections and knowledge, while disrupting them at the same time. They are like those transitional shots in Kurosawa's films of characters moving between spaces, often in vehicles, that, like the bus in *Cure*, are rendered absurd through "unrealistic" rear-screen projection. Moving from scene to scene, from shot to shot, is ontologically ambiguous; Kurosawa uses the powers of montage to render it problematic. Shot A next to Shot B is not just "A ∴ B" but also "A ⊥ B" at the same time.

Kurosawa has repeatedly used a certain technique to play with and complicate editing. One example of this is in *Retribution*, when Yoshioka hugs Harue after finding out she is dead, the editing cutting back and forth between close-ups of their faces as they hug, only to then cut several times to a medium shot of Yoshioka hugging empty space. The discontinuity here can be jarring, as the editing emphasizes co-presence, while the detached

shot undermines it.[2] Another example is when Harue meets her Reaper in *Pulse*. Starting with the equivalent of shot-reverse-shots, presenting Harue looking at a computer screen and the image on screen showing her as viewed from the door behind her, it then switches to camera pans between the screen and her from behind heading toward the door reproducing the shot-reverse-shots structure. Eventually the film cuts between close-up, eye-level images of her looking at the camera and higher-angle medium shots of her confronting and embracing nothing. The film thus takes one of the basic editing structures and explores its permutations, using the two different media and their different ontologies to not only complicate continuity (the pretense, explored in suture theory [Dayan 1974], that cutting between two angles can somehow constitute a singular narrating subject), but also to foreground the presence of what in classical editing is hidden in that structure: the camera. The high-angle shot at the end underlines that this is a present ghost that cannot be presented, in part because it is impossible for a camera to show itself as another gazes into its lens. Editing then creates and hides this gazing presence, this ghost, which the full shot then rejects, existing less through the leaps of editing than in the gaps between editing and the full shot.

Kurosawa is also a director of the long take, which can function through its Bazinian spatial and temporal integrity. Yet, as with Mamiya at the beach, that integrity can function to emphasize discontinuity. His long takes often exist to work with and against the editing. The long takes in *Charisma*, for instance, dizzingly moving between one camp and another, emphasize less spatial unity than disunity; they underline that the forest itself was from the start only established through Kurosawa's ambiguous cuts, making it impossible to determine, in this supposedly ecocritical film, whether there is even a forest here, or whether, in a story where debates about cutting down a tree are founded on tendentious assertions of cause and effect, cutting/editing is itself the only causality, juxtaposition the only forest.

Systems such as the forest, or in fact any of the larger systems in his films, from apocalyptic infections in *Barren Illusion*, *Pulse*, or *Retribution*, to reality itself in *Real*, are often undermined at the same time they are asserted, as if they exist in parentheses or under erasure. Even gravity, which is visualized through falling bodies in *Cure*, *Pulse*, or *Retribution*, is complicated by bodies that become black stains or dust that blows away in the wind. The jarring fall from the roof of the doctor in *Retribution* should be seen in tandem with the flight of the ghost from the balcony in the same film. When I saw *Retribution* at the Tokyo FilmEx festival in 2006, many laughed at the latter scene, and I do not think that was inappropriate. Genre in fact is one of the main systems Kurosawa both asserts and renders absurd, often through discontinuity between filmic elements, such as the excessive music appended at the end of *Loft*, which renders it unclear whether that film is a horror film or a comedy. The nonsensical

or the absurd (*kōtōmukei*, in Japanese) is one aspect of Kurosawa's work that he inherits in part from Godard—and is thus very visible in early Godard-influenced work like *Kandagawa Pervert Wars* (*Kandagawa inran sensō*, 1983) and *The Excitement of the Do-Re-Mi-Fa Girl* (*Do-re-mi-fa musume no chi ga sawagu*, 1985)—but it is also a primary means by which Kurosawa's cinema problematizes systematicity, categorization, and meaning without necessarily rejecting them.

On the one hand, he is likely following Hasumi's use of stupidity to critique systemic thought, one influenced by Deleuze. As Ryan Cook has explained it, to Hasumi "[t]hought both determines and is determined by systems of its own, and is thus in the absurd position of being able to say nothing about systems that is not systemic. However, rather than confronting this absurdity, systemic thought attempts to forget it" (2010, 135). Hasumi's solution is precisely for thought to confront this absurdity by realizing its own "stupidity": to Cook, "in acknowledging this impairment, and indeed in making disability the general condition of film experience, Hasumi finds a perverse strategy for actually empowering the eye against systemicity: to see in cinema nothing but impossibilities is to turn systems against themselves and to bring cinematic absurdity to the fore" (2010, 136).

Kurosawa, on the other hand, is not simply a deconstructionist filmmaker undermining meaning. Bodies are still shockingly governed by gravity; the spatial and temporal integrity of long takes co-exists with the warping of space-time through editing. Kurosawa is ultimately not a director of discontinuity or of continuity, but of the space between them, of what I would call dis/continuity. Chika Kinoshita has analyzed how *Loft*, for instance, does not fit easily within either the discovery plot of classic horror, in which attaining knowledge of the monster is key to defeating it, or even the failed discovery plots of J-horror films, which are based on the idea, expressed by the screenwriter Konaka Chiaki, that "horror stories with clear causal explanations are not scary after all ... After all, terror is absurd" (quoted in Kinoshita 2009, 112). Working in between showing and not showing, explaining and not explaining, Kurosawa's cinema is often engaged with dualities, embodied narratively in early works such as *Kandagawa Pervert Wars* about two forces in conflict and by films like *Séance* and *Doppelganger* (2003) featuring actual doppelgangers; or visualized by his experiments with multiple cameras (one attached to the other, producing cuts between slight changes in camera angle) in *Loft* or by split screens in *Bright Future* and *Doppelganger*. His films do not just shift or inhabit the space between these different perspectives, but, as with the split screens, can sometimes inhabit them simultaneously. As B. Kite puts it, "when confronted with a binary 'either/or' Kurosawa opts for an impossible both" (Kite 2008, 45–6). This is core to the ambivalence and ambiguity many sense in his work.

Paranoia and ghostly interpretation

Such pairs and dualities complicate not only identity, but also perspective, narrative, and subjectivity. Much of Kurosawa's cinema can be seen as self-reflexive (Tsuneishi 2001; Gerow 2012), and often features characters who attempt to impose singular systems, primarily through unambiguous interpretation and often with self-destructive results. *Cure* centralizes this issue by making its main character, Takabe, a detective whose job it is to make such interpretations. He tells Sakuma that his goal is to explain things in words, but Sakuma responds that crime often has no clear meaning—that it resists singular interpretation—and later warns him not to "get in too deep" (*fukairi suru na*). Takabe's instability is not unlike those of other characters who pursue solutions. Miyashita in *Serpent's Path* almost psychotically clings to Niijima's various interpretations of who killed his daughter. Yabuike in *Charisma* acts practically like the detective in *Red Harvest* by effectively creating a new Charisma purely through his act of labeling it Charisma, in part so that he can set the various forces in the story against each other once again.

In some cases, the problematic interpreter is a spectator. The question in *Pulse*, "Would you like to meet a ghost?," is essentially that posed by any horror film. That characters answer that question in the affirmative, even to the point of creating their own dark, closed space so as to see that ghost, underlines how much films such as *Pulse* interrogate spectatorship. Given that, like Mamiya, none of the ghosts in *Pulse* kill—individuals all kill themselves in a world where the continuity or discontinuity between death and life is in question—one can argue that the problem is precisely the desire to see a ghost, or even, more fundamentally to interpret, to project singular systems of genre, meaning, or theory. They, one could perhaps say, wish to impose a boundary between live and death instead of accepting both in dis/continuity. If death is a virus in *Pulse*, the virus is in part the desire to see and to generate certain meaning from that.

Posadas offers an intriguing interpretation of *Retribution* as a narrative of revenge against looking in the age of late capitalism. Following Jonathan Beller's *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, he describes how spectatorship can act "in the service of the social relations necessary for the reproduction of capitalist modernity." The ghost of the woman in the red dress, who seems to compel those who looked at her in the window of the old sanitarium to commit murder, seeks retribution for this "crime of looking ... the complicity of the film spectators the general logic of violence ... built into capitalist social relations through the very desire to see" (2014, 452). Posadas interestingly then relates this to strategies in Kurosawa's cinema for complicating looking, including the use of what I call "the detached style," in which long takes and sparse analytical editing work to avoid the imposition of meaning on the other (Gerow 2007).

Given the ambivalence of Kurosawa's cinema, however, we must consider another economy of looking that may exist alongside or under this interpretation. The woman in the sanatorium is less an object of specularization in capitalism, than a victim of an economy of sight that forgets and refuses to look at what is no longer useful. Those who look at her are less the spectators who, in Beller's conception, serve as the workforce producing the visual economy, than unruly workers who were looking where they were not supposed to. In a sense, they are the opposite of Posadas's spectators, ones who are already breaking through the habitual and systemic forms of sight that regulate meaning and othering.

They are closer to Hasumi's spectators, the ones who are actually looking at cinema, but this is perhaps where Kurosawa deviates from his teacher. As I have argued elsewhere, Hasumi's deconstruction of cinema can have the effect of recreating the critic—the critical viewer—as an entity divorced from politics and history who, in the true presence/present of cinema, can look at Ozu and Hou Hsiao-Hsien and ignore the neocolonial problems of a Japanese looking at films of a former colony.[3] In this, Hasumi is the critic version of Kitano the super auteur, but also product of a Japanese postmodernism that deconstructed identity as a means of declaring that only Japan was truly postmodern. Kurosawa's other economy of looking, however, questions not just violence and capitalist exploitation, but the ethics and responsibility even in cases of such oppositional looking. Spectators cannot be absolved easily even if they are supposedly looking correctly. In this regard, I think Kurosawa is closer to Jean-Luc Nancy's ethics of looking than Hasumi's celebration of nonsense via Deleuze. For Nancy, "Looking is regarding and consequently *respecting* ... . In the end, looking just amounts to thinking the real, to test oneself with regard to a meaning one is not mastering" (2001, 38). For Kurosawa, this constitutes not just taking responsibility for one's looking—for having a regard for those regarded—but also subjecting one's readings of the other to tests that complicate the ability to master meaning, that enable one to see that one is not seeing.

Another avenue for considering Kurosawa's regard is Eve Sedgwick's discussion of paranoia, which investigates the problems in the pursuit of theory evident even in allies such as Judith Butler (Sedgwick 2003, 123–51). If *Loft* is, as Kendall Heitzman has argued, about the anxiety of influence (Heitzman 2009), then perhaps Kurosawa films are also about the anxiety, or even the paranoia of interpretation. Characters such as Miyashita, Takabe, Hayasaki (in *Doppelganger*), and Harue (in *Pulse*) pursue accounts that resemble Sedgwick's definition of paranoia: their speculations are anticipatory, seeking explanations that will eliminate surprise (in this case, further crimes or deaths); they are reflexive, as the world they seek to know is modeled on the rationalism of the explanations they use; their theories are strong, expansive to the point of occasionally hypothesizing the end of the world (we are invited to do the same with Niijima's formulae, which

pretend to account for the universe itself); they are focused on negative effects (on crime, viruses, death, apocalypse); and they have faith in exposure, as if the simple revelation of Mamiya's technique, explaining it as cause and effect, is sufficient to control its affects. We can certainly see parallels in critical accounts of Kurosawa's cinema which are seemingly compelled to read it as genre, as allegory, or as social symptom, while at the same time often considering it as a self-reflexive project that purportedly combats the effects of genre, vision, or cinema by exposing their machinations (for example, Hughes 2012). Kurosawa's short film *2001 Cinema and Travel* (*2001 Eiga to tabi*, 2001) visually enacts this form of paranoid interpretation: a series of urban images he shot abroad before 9/11—including some of planes flying near buildings—were edited after 9/11 and offer spectators the possibility to pursue paranoid constructions of reality as ubiquitous disaster.

Kurosawa's films explore alternatives to this paranoia first in terms of interpretation, and second in terms of auteurship. Kurosawa does not reject explanation or interpretation *per se*, even announcing in the official pamphlet for *Bright Future*, for instance, his willingness to have characters make such statements (Kurosawa 2003). Interpretations offered by characters in his films are rarely completely false, they just co-exist in discontinuity with other meanings. Ghosts in Kurosawa are not continuity, but rather discontinuity or more precisely dis/continuity, being neither visible nor invisible but both or neither at the same time. Discontinuity of the image is often the sign of the ghostly, and not only as in *Pulse* when glitches in the digital image signify a ghostly presence: the mutated dots on Harue's computer are themselves a diagram of the ghostly. Working from Kurosawa's own statement that cinema itself is frightening (Kurosawa 2001), which others have taken up to argue that in films like *Cure* it is cinema not Mamiya or the ghosts that is terrifying (Abe 2000; Posadas 2014), one can conclude that the motion picture image itself is ghostly in his cinema (Gerow 2012). This does not merely refer to the many figures in mirrors or behind curtains that are there and not there. When Harue in *Pulse* points to the multiple computer screens showing the lonely souls on the internet, her statement, "What's the difference between them and ghosts?," does not merely point to the ghostliness of the referent (some are in fact now ghosts), but to the fact that images themselves, being both there and not there, the referent and not the referent, are inherently fantastic, in Todorov's sense of the term. As Kurosawa wrote, cinema is "what cannot possibly appear in images, but that said, it is also something that cannot be achieved if your eyes are closed" (Kurosawa 2001, 60). Kurosawa thus not only evokes the ghostliness of the simulacra, but also asserts a cinema that less depicts ghosts than is itself a ghost, requiring different forms of looking.

Opening up to a ghostly cinema is itself to become a ghost by looking/reading like a ghost. Instead of an interpretation of ghosts, Kurosawa provides a ghost of interpretation. This might be aligned with the "other mode of seeing" Akira Lippit describes in his masterful interpretation of *Cure* (2005, 155), but it also brings us close to the weak, reparative reading that Sedgwick proposes. Harue's original program in *Pulse*, where the dots cannot get too close but also not too far, is emblematic of a certain Kurosawa ethics—*fukairi suru na!*—that becomes multi-layered when the dots become discontinuous. Such a stance toward seeing, interpretation, even theory, accepts surprise, does not demand mimicry in the other, opposes the viral effects of strong theory, and, most importantly, argues the importance of not seeking, of non-exposure, or, more precisely, of a ghostly exposure. While Kurosawa's work is notorious for being gloomy, it takes pleasure in the absurd, and finds positive repair in discovering a bright future in the darkness before one (*Bright Future*) or in the unseen end of performance after a troubled tale of performing family, nation, and even Ozu (in *Tokyo Sonata* [2008]).

Certainly I myself could be charged with being paranoid about finding the meaning of Kurosawa's work and creating an auteur who, through cause and effect, creates these images. But perhaps Kurosawa resists that, not by rejecting the concept of the author, but by rendering it ghostly as well. In an interview, Kurosawa denied a specific auteurist project and claimed he simply shot films as the medium would require (Kurosawa 2015). This is close to Shinozaki's notion of Kurosawa as a missionary, a figure who does not create, but just transmits the cinema. This itself may sound somewhat passé, an expression of cinephilia and medium specificity in an age of the death of cinema and the reign of mixed media. His roots in Hasumi and thus Deleuze may also seem old fashioned, still pursuing deconstruction in the age of post-postmodernism.

The danger of such an impression is not only that it can reinforce orientalist accounts of Asia as always backward, especially theoretically, but that it ignores the problems of temporality and nation in Kurosawa's work. This pastness could be better aligned with Kurosawa's own repeated concern with signs of the past (ruins, old technologies, repressed histories) as well as with narratives centered on attempts to revive the past or take revenge on behalf of the past. When asked about these narratives in an interview, Kurosawa strongly objected to efforts to narrativize the past, especially the practice of explaining characters through past actions or events (Kurosawa 2015). His cinema has always been open to experiment and new technologies, from the use of digital in *Bright Future* to special effects monsters in *Real*. His conception of temporality, then, both in his narratives and as a filmmaker, refuses to align past and present in a cause and effect relationship. Posadas rightly utilizes Derrida to explain how the specter in Kurosawa marks "a radical alterity that resists easy temporalization, with the effect of calling into question the presumed stability of the present" (2014, 447). Utilizing this to discuss not only Kurosawa's

ghosts, but also his cinema and authorship, one can see his location both in cinema and the digital, in the position of a traditional auteur and outside it, as another form of dis/continuity, of an auteurship as spectership that avoids paranoia by having a regard for the regarded, rendering the time of paranoia (the anticipation, the mimicry, the repetition) out of joint and the enunciation of meaning weak and spectral, looking at one's look. Rather than declare the end of cinema, it envisions its ghostly dis/continuity in and alongside new media.

Yet this is not just "time out of joint" in Derrida's sense, but also time that is haunted by the national politics of the past. One can find in Kurosawa's films suggestions of repressed, alternative histories, such as of the phantasmagoric, mesmeristic aspects of early or even pre-cinematic culture in *Cure*, or of the urban modernity of seclusion and confinement in *Retribution*, both of which are more "present" than something else less present that haunts not only Kurosawa's work but, I would argue, that of many of his contemporaries. In *Barren Illusion*, a film where the lead characters reject the future by choosing infertility, Miki heads to the airport to leave the country, but after showing her documents at the counter is simply ignored and has to return home. This is but one of many images in recent Japanese film of Japanese unable to escape Japan (others are evident in Kitano, Miike Takashi, and Aoyama Shinji, to name a few); however here the border is invisible, unspoken. This scene is repeated in *Real*, when Koichi travels to a municipal office and asks questions of a clerk who, while acknowledging Koichi's presence, simply ignores him. As the traveling subject is seen but not seen, what becomes visible is an invisible operation of power that restricts both movement and knowledge, instituting borders. *Real* reminds us that this operation is that of the nation, of the state.

Yet surely, one might think, this non-present entity is also passé. In an age of globalism, of transnational flows of capital and labor, where the nation itself has been accused of being out of date, representations of such impregnable borders can seem more to reify the nation than critique it. Surely that must especially be the case in a Japan where, after many years of refusing to see the past, the nation has been re-envisioned and performed on the international stage. The ghost of the nation is now in plain sight, no longer a specter but a real threat.

Kurosawa's response to this contemporary conjuncture is to expose neither the truth of the nation (its artifice or emptiness) nor what is hidden behind its present performance (its real past crimes). It is to insist on its existence as doppelganger, as dis/continuous. Yabuike's intervention in *Charisma*'s narrative of struggles over property and territory is not to find the criminal or adjudicate justice (the right or just sovereign), but to move and regard, in Nancy's sense, refusing the either/or through a stance that sees and recognizes both. The resulting conflagration is inherently ambiguous, both recalling a nuclear past and evincing the critical power of

such dis/continuous vision, especially against a postwar nation based on the enforcement of choices, on a select way of looking at things.

Perhaps Kurosawa is, like Mamiya, a missionary, a *dendōshi* (伝道師) in Japanese, the characters of which emphasize transmission, movement, transfer, association, and connection. But as Shinozaki says, he is a *dendōshi* who professes he does not know the cinema that he transmits, and thus who remains a trickster who preaches cinema while never pretending to master it (1992, 172). In effect, he preaches the dis/continuity of transmission, the ghostliness of meaning. When *Charisma* asks us to restore the rules of the world, it is advocating neither the law of the sovereign nor the order of nature, but rather an ethics of looking that does not order one cinema or meaning but moves between two or more. The nation or even cinema, those supposed relics of the past, become neither past not present, neither present nor absent, visible or invisible, but impossibly both, in/visible, destroyed and mourned and returned to haunting by a mode of detection that itself is both trickster and well regarded because it regards well. The challenge in this cinema of and about theory and interpretation is how to become ghostly detectives. In Kurosawa's terms, this means not just treating him and his films as ghosts, but exploring forms of spectatorship and interpretation that are themselves ghostly. In *Charisma* as in *Retribution*, those ways of looking may only result in destruction or further haunting, since no one in a global, neoliberal regime of ubiquitous media knows all the rules. But in that lack of knowledge, in that inability to see, Kurosawa asks us to think how to "live within looking," an ethics that must involve both regard and reparation.

Notes

1 See, for instance, the conversation between the indie filmmakers Matsumura Hiroyuki, Funahashi Atsushi, and Izuchi Kishū, "Orutanatibu shinema sengen," *Eiga Geijutsu*. Available online: http://eigageijutsu.com/article/131787116.html (accessed July 15, 2015). Matsumura talks of a "situation in which films that might list the actors names but don't mention the director on the poster are flooding the market."

2 In my interview (Kurosawa 2015), Kurosawa related the resistance of a French actor to a similar scene he shot in *Woman in the Silver Plate*. Presuming continuity, the actor expected the full shot to still show the woman, who would then fade away on screen.

3 I discuss this in a forthcoming piece "Ozu to Asia via Hasumi" in the anthology, *The Ozuesque: Ozu and His Influence*, Jinhee Choi (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

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