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DILEMMAS OF WESTERN SCHOLARS OF JAPANESE FILM

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THE MYSTERIOUS ORIENT, THE CRYSTAL CLEAR ORIENT, THE NON-EXISTENT ORIENT: DILEMMAS OF WESTERN SCHOLARS OF JAPANESE FILM

PETER LEHMAN

Japan raises unique problems for Western film scholars. The situation can be summarized, perhaps a little too cynically, as follows: Western film scholars are accusing each other of being Western film scholars. Or to put it a bit more accurately, Western film scholars are accusing each other of being Western in their approach to Japanese film. Is this a genuine dilemma with possible solutions or is it a pseudo-issue which obscures the real issues? Is it productive for us as modern Western film scholars to pursue this quest for the proper Japanese response?

Behind all this, of course, lurk legitimate concerns. When studying Western European, or even Russian or Latin American films, American film scholars are less prone to revert to deeply hidden cultural differences which they feel block a proper understanding of the films produced in those widely differing nations and cultures. They trust their research to lead them somehow to an accurate grasp of the films. History and language are legitimate but not insurmountable problems. If one is puzzled, for example, about films produced in Castro's Cuba, one feels that some understanding of internal politics at the time or some knowledge of who made the film for whom and for what purposes will clarify the problem. We do not fear

that there is something about Cuba which we, as English speaking capitalists, can never know or understand. But Japanese film scholarship seems to get quickly mired in Orientalism. This is not just some other culture, some other history, some other language, or some other customs. This is the mystery of the *Other*.

Before specifically looking at Western Japanese film criticism, it may be useful to consider a few of Edward Said's observations about Orientalism:

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories, landscapes, and remarkable experiences.

Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with “our” world (1,12).

Applied to Western scholarship of Japanese film, we may wonder whether that scholarship is a similar invention of the romantic, the exotic, and the remarkable. We may also wonder whether it has less to do with Japanese cinema than it does with “our” world of Western film theory and criticism. Although without reference to Said's work, David Bordwell has suggested as much. In “Our Dream-Cinema: Western Historiography and the Japanese Film,” Bordwell characterizes much re-

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cent work on Japanese cinema as resulting from imposing our dreams upon the impassive “otherness” of Japanese cinema (45-62). Bordwell’s own work, however, has not been free of similar charges and the whole situation points to how difficult the dilemma is.

In their work on Ozu, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson repeatedly attack the work of their predecessors from the perspective that it is mired in Orientalism, though, curiously, they never use that term (41-73). They argue basically that Ozu, in his use of space, color, and objects, is a modernist filmmaker who has freed and opened up elements of cinema which, in the dominant Hollywood classical paradigm, are subordinated to the narrative. Simply stated, this means that Ozu will play with space, color, and objects in ways which are not thematized.

Beer bottles, for example, may have a dominance in the compositions in a scene which cannot in any way be explained with reference to, say, alcoholism. Similarly, the bottles will never be incorporated into the action as they typically would in a Hollywood film when a character picks up the bottle, smashes it, and uses it as a weapon to attack another character. A film might use color in the same way. Red, for example, might be carefully placed compositionally in scenes by having characters dressed in red or by using a red teapot. According to the argument, red does not mean anything specific such as anger, but rather is a free-floating formal element. In a film like *Marnie*, on the other hand, you have the classic instance of red signifying a complex set of connotations which include blood, death, and sex.

The playfully formal aspect of Ozu’s work, according to Bordwell and Thompson, has been ignored by critics, who force traditional thematic interpretations upon everything they notice in Ozu’s films. Donald Richie, for example, tends to see

everything as part of characterization. Thus, a shot of a vase which for Bordwell and Thompson results from Ozu’s free play with space and objects, gets misread as a POV shot by Richie, who then goes on to make the object meaningful in relationship to that character’s psychological and emotional state. Paul Schrader, on the other hand, derives meaning with constant reference to transcendental religious feelings which he uses to characterize the Japanese Orient. We have in Richie and Schrader the mysterious Orient; everything is made meaningful with reference to the Oriental character and religion. This kind of criticism proceeds with constant implicit reference to the Occidental/Oriental opposition. We are reminded here of another observation of Said’s: “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’” Elsewhere, Said goes on to remark: “The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony. . .” (2,6).

From Said’s perspective, in other words, the West had to create the Orient in opposition to itself in order to then proceed to treat its creation in a certain way. Those with knowledge of the Orient (that is, with knowledge of what they have created) have a great power—a power, it might be added, not just over the Orientals but also over the Westerners who rely upon them to understand this mysterious place. Translated to film theory and criticism, it runs something like this: We (the ordinary viewer) are puzzled by Japanese films. They look different from Hollywood films. They look different, we are told by those who know, because Japan is radically different from the West. But Richie and Schrader understand the difference. They will enlighten us about the Japanese char-

acter and Japanese religion, and then we will understand these films. It is our lack of knowledge about Japanese culture which blocks our comprehension of the films.

We have something of a paradox. Initially, our grasp of Japanese films is hindered by their "otherness." Some critics have penetrated (Said would say "created") this otherness, and they will explicate for us. Thus, the mysterious world of Japanese films is knowable, but only with a specialized knowledge which penetrates the initial mystery. It is no coincidence that much is made of the fact that Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie spent a great deal of time in Japan before writing their seminal work on the Japanese cinema. They, it is implied, are now in a position to understand. This "having been there" aspect plays a critical role in the Orientalist literary tradition.

Bordwell and Thompson's work stands in curious relationship to the work of Richie and Schrader. If the latter posit a mysterious otherness to Japan, for Bordwell and Thompson it all seems crystal clear. They will study Ozu exactly the same way they study Jacques Tati. The films will be carefully analyzed and scrutinized, their organizational systems will be laid bare, and they will be fully comprehended without any mysterious references to Japanese states of mind and religion. Before pursuing my critique of this position, I want to briefly indicate its critical reception.

Bordwell and Thompson's work on Ozu has been most specifically and directly criticized by Joseph Anderson and Paul Willemen. In "The Spaces Between: American Criticism of Japanese Films," Anderson charges that certain traditional techniques of Japanese art look like techniques used by modern Western artists, although the aesthetic positions should not be confused. Thus, he cautions (with Bordwell and Thompson in mind, though

not specifically named), "... a Western critic who is accustomed to the theories of Brecht and the films of Godard would view Ozu as a modernist; whereas a Japanese critic could conclude that Ozu was a traditionalist" (4). Anderson goes on to claim that the features of Ozu's spatial system outlined by Bordwell and Thompson are not unique to Ozu. They were, he asserts, used by Shimazu, a contemporary of Ozu's who also worked at Shochiku studios. Furthermore, the types of spaces outside the narrative which Bordwell and Thompson point to in Ozu play an important role in Kabuki theater and Japanese scroll paintings. For Anderson, Ozu's use of spaces is quite within Japanese tradition.

Paul Willemen agrees with and extends Anderson's argument. To claim Ozu as a modernist is, he asserts, reminiscent of the way in which the cubists and surrealists viewed African tribal sculpture. He concludes that to see Ozu as a modernist against the standard of the Hollywood classical style is a form of "cultural imperialism" (57).

David Bordwell has not been silent on these charges. He has not seen enough films by Shimazu to fully address Anderson's claim and finds that since Anderson cites no specific examples, it is difficult to respond. He denies that Anderson's claim applies to Shimazu's *Brother and His Younger Sister* (1939). Bordwell dismisses Willemen's case by pointing to a central weakness in his analogy: "African sculptors never saw cubist work, but Japanese filmmakers knew Western cinema very well" (54).

Bordwell has here performed something of a sleight-of-hand trick that makes the arguments disappear too easily. The fact that African sculptors never saw Western art does not demolish much of Willemen's argument, and the fact that Anderson cites

no examples from Shimazu's work does not disqualify all of his argument. First of all, Willemen quotes Anderson's point about the use of non-narrative space in Kabuki, scroll paintings, and music. Bordwell is silent on Anderson's claim that traditional Japanese art relies on juxtaposition of separate units and spaces. Any formal individuality that Ozu's style may have (and Bordwell and Thompson emphatically insist that Ozu's use of 360 degree space is different from any other Japanese filmmaker's) is not really the point. Such space clearly could have significance within traditions of Japanese art which could be entirely different from the concept of "playful use of non-narrative space." But Willemen's next point is even more incisive: "Ozu's films cannot be claimed as modernist, since the point about modernism is precisely that it is a *critique* of, not a neutral alternative to, dominant aesthetic practices" (56).

What is the point of calling a style "modernist" if nearly everyone who has been watching it in every country for fifty years has been calling it traditional? This is not a quarrel over mere terminology. I am in some sense baffled as to why Bordwell and Thompson ever characterized Ozu as a modernist in the first place (a point to which I shall return). A label such as that only makes sense if the work in question is fundamentally *perceived* as being nontraditional. This perception is made by people in social, cultural, historical, and ideological positions. Modern art movements of the early twentieth century in the West, for example, clearly presented viewers with a perceived difference. Cubism and various abstract movements did not seem traditional to the contemporary viewers. Whether they hated it or loved it, whatever they labeled it, they knew they were dealing with something fundamentally different from traditional art. What kind of modernism masks itself so well that the Japanese critics and public both immerse themselves in it as a beautiful tra-

ditionalism? Indeed, why did it take Western scholars to uncover this modernism? We in the West didn't need anyone from Japan or Africa to tell us that cubism *was* something new.

In discussing Edward Branigan's comparative study of Fellini's *8 1/2* and Oshima's *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, Willemen observes:

By locating Oshima on the same terrain as Fellini and referencing this difference to the same set of criteria, of concepts, Branigan is indeed, although indirectly, highlighting a specific and crucial problem of the social practice of the cinema: films are read unpredictably, they can be pulled into more or less any ideological space, they can be mobilized for diverse and even contradictory critical projects (55).

Earlier I claimed to be baffled at why Bordwell and Thompson would want to call Ozu a modernist. There is, in fact, a fairly obvious and simple answer, and it has to do precisely with this concept of ideological spaces into which texts can be pulled.

Around the time that Bordwell and Thompson published their work on Ozu in their other critical studies, with few or no exceptions, every film and filmmaker they praise (Tati, Dreyer, Eisenstein, Godard) falls outside of what they term the "classical paradigm." An implicit (and at times explicit) aspect of their work is the equation of aesthetic worth with stylistic departure from and alternatives to the Hollywood classical cinema. Such stylistic strategies, they imply, "open up" the traditional "closed" text and, thus, this opening up, this playing, this freedom, are always equated with aesthetic value. Kristin Thompson's work on Jacques Tati, for example uses the exact same procedures and

arrives at the same conclusion as her work with Bordwell on Ozu: Tati is hailed as a modernist and linked specifically, among others, to Ozu (18-19).

We can trace a relationship between this epidemic of modernism and the impact of Roland Barthes's highly influential *S/Z*. Barthes critical method made much of the distinction between the traditional text which tends towards closure and attempts (but fails) to give fixed, unifying meaning to all its elements and the modern text which "opens up" textual space to the free and contradictory play of meaning. The point remains, however, that this somewhat strange linking of Ozu, Tati, Godard, and Bresson seems to result directly from the space the critics pull Ozu's films into, and in this case it is a space defined and developed by Western scholarship—be it the French work of Roland Barthes or the American university film studies work.

Bordwell and Thompson go so far as to give the following account of their work:

Clearly these readings, especially Richie's, are excessively conservative in that they naturalize and thus foreclose the multiplicity of Ozu's spacial structures. True, to see Ozu's films as 'open' modernist works is to discard the clichés about their 'static,' 'traditional' qualities and to yield oneself to a dangerous freedom; the old Ozu is far more comforting (71).

The passage has a somewhat self-congratulatory tone which borders on the absurd; you do not need Roland Barthes to figure out the connotations of the "dangerous freedom" the authors evoke. To put it simply, *why* is "the old Ozu far more comforting"? The Bordwell-Thompson account of Ozu's films seems very comfortable to me. Watching colors move around, watching graphic matches, watching spaces not used by characters in the narrative, even watching vases which are not

point-of-view shots—none of these things seem dangerous to me. Indeed, Bordwell and Thompson leave themselves wide open to the charge that they themselves are offering a "conservative" reading of Ozu. Nothing necessarily radical or dangerous is involved in watching non-thematized, non-narrativized patterns in films. It can (and may very well be) a comforting and conservative critical activity.

Writing of Joseph Von Sternberg, Bill Nichols observes:

"He threatens to unveil a scandal before our very eyes; he invites us to play in the gap, the wedgelike opening, his style unveils. The threat of deconstruction hovers alongside a widened space for play. Like Yasujiro Ozu, Sternberg can be read as a modernist but, like Ozu, that decisive step toward political modernism is only threatened, never taken (125-126).

The ideological space that Nichols pulls Ozu into here violently misconstrues Ozu [and for that matter Sternberg (Studlar)] and places him on a trajectory which is purely the construct of the Western theorist. Now Ozu, the heretofore traditionalist, is seen as threatening political modernism, but that threat is purely a figment of Nichols's imagination. No trace of internal evidence suggests that Ozu was moving in a particular leftist political direction and that he could not take the decisive step. This failed step is entirely the result of the imaginary path constructed by the Western theorist. Nichols's remark here clearly owes a great deal to the work of Bordwell and Thompson. He invokes Ozu based upon their work which he discusses elsewhere in his book (109). But he is not comfortable with the nonpolitical, formalist position held by Bordwell and Thompson. If they triumphantly claim Ozu for the space of modernism, Nichols goes a step further and characterizes that mod-

ernism in negative terms for its political failures. So for Bordwell and Thompson, Ozu ends up in the happy company of Jacques Tati, and for Bill Nichols, Ozu ends up in the not-so-happy company of Sternberg. We can easily see from this that these ideological spaces have little or nothing to do with anything Japanese and a great deal to do with the favored projects of the Western analysts.

Finally, I want to turn from the commonly viewed traditionalist Ozu to the commonly viewed radical Oshima, for it is in Oshima that many Western film scholars feel they have found the truly avant-garde, political Japanese filmmaker. Oshima, it seems, did not just threaten to take the step—he took it and threatened us as a result. Such Oshima films as *The Man Who Left His Will on Film* and *In the Realm of the Senses* have received wide attention in Western scholarly film circles for their supposedly radical features. Stephen Heath begins his analysis of *In the Realm of the Senses* as follows:

Reactions and commentaries so far have made it only symptomatically clear that the force of *In the Realm of the Senses* . . . is that of a question decisively posed to cinema (and thus to any 'new' European or American cinema); a film which today remains untouched by that force will not be contemporary, but ideologically reactionary (48).

Elsewhere Heath comments, "Consider a film such as *Letter From an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophuls 1948), a film which from one perspective—that of the question to cinema—*In the Realm of the Senses* is the direct and ruinous remake" (49).

Heath's opening remark about the force of *In the Realm of the Senses* neatly bysteps any questions about the otherness of Japan. Here we have the truly nonexistent

Orient. Heath's ideological space knows no national boundaries. Thus we should not be surprised that *In the Realm of the Senses* is the "direct and ruinous remake" of *Letter From an Unknown Woman*. The way in which Heath relates this particular Japanese film to this particular classic Hollywood film is for him unproblematic. If a Japanese film can address all of the future of world cinema, why should it not be able to also directly address a 1948 Hollywood classic? The force fields that Heath constructs are not unique in his work to the way in which he sees Japanese cinema affecting the West. In fact, Heath resolves the Japanese problem the same way he resolves the avant-garde problem: he wrenches the films out of all specific social, cultural, and historical circumstances of reception and exhibition, thereby endowing them with qualities and forces which directly assert themselves. Indeed, the question Oshima becomes a little bit like the question Gidal (4-11). Certainly there is no unique aspect to Oshima's being Japanese.

Several problems immediately arise with Heath's approach to Oshima. At the simplest level, one might be puzzled by Oshima's next film, *Empire of Passion*, which seems to ignore the force of his own previous film. Has he retreated? Has he ignored the very question which he previously posed to all cinema? Heath is performing a particular violence on Oshima's work by pulling it into this type of construct. In an interview I did with Oshima in 1980, he firmly rejected the type of construct that Heath uses for *In the Realm of the Senses*. When I asked Oshima whether he thought certain avant-garde styles had more political importance than traditional styles, he replied, "I don't think there is such a thing as that kind of style. In other words, I don't believe that there is a style that is more important than any other" (59). Elsewhere in the interview, he comments that he feels the

subject matter and themes of each film dictate the style and that he wanted the style of each of his films to be different.

Oshima's views on films other than his own have nothing in common with Heath's views. During the same interview, Oshima said of the Western pornographic films *Behind the Green Door*, *Deep Throat*, and *Pussy Talk*: "I found all of these to be wonderful movies, but they were not films that I could have made . . ." (58). In terms of current Hollywood filmmaking, Oshima admires Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Martin Scorsese. His defense of classic American Cinema is almost startling and worth quoting here at length:

PL: As a young man were you exposed to classical Hollywood films such as those of John Ford, Howard Hawks, and Alfred Hitchcock, and if so, do you admire, or did you learn anything from the classical, the older, American movies?

ON: When I was a student, I especially liked the films of John Ford, George Stevens, and Frank Capra. In that sense, I feel this tradition in America of directors who show faith in humanity is a very healthy, good tradition. I also feel that the fact that those films are that way is an expression of the overall feeling in American society. In American movies there is the faith expressed that those who work hard will get ahead, and right will triumph, and I think that's an expression of American social beliefs that may not be possible in other countries, so their films don't show it.

PL: Do you feel there's any political danger in that feeling, since many political critics would say that, in fact, America doesn't provide the kind of social context which rewards hard work appropriately, and that it's a

myth about America rather than a good description of the American social system?

ON: Of course I understand how certain, probably very intelligent, people would feel that way about American movies, but I don't think they speak for the majority. I think the majority who see those films feel that they do express their own feelings (61).

Is this the radical Oshima we have been hearing so much about? Is this man who respects what he considers to be the healthy optimism of American movies, the same man who, in a single film, threatened to blow that whole tradition off the face of the earth? In fact, is this man who enjoys and respects films as diverse as current Western pornography, new Hollywood, and Classical Hollywood, the same man who posed one single question to all of world cinema—the right answer to which would presumably send us all down the same progressive road? Nor should we quickly dismiss Oshima by dragging out the old intentional fallacy. The intentionally fallacy was once a useful corrective in Western criticism at a time when critics were prone to dwell too much and too uncritically on the conscious intentions of artists. Now, unfortunately, we are tending toward the opposite pole of ignoring everything all artists say about anything. Clearly, the Oshima constructed by Stephen Heath bears little relationship to the Oshima speaking in this interview just as the Oshima who made *Empire of Passion* directly after *In the Realm of the Senses* bears little relationship to the Oshima constructed by Stephen Heath.¹

In his critique of Edward Branigan's analysis of the relationship between Fellini's *8½* and Oshima's *The Man Who Left His Will on Film*, Paul Willemsen critically declares: "The two films have nothing in common other than that both are part of the cinema as an institution" (55). Inter-

estingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, precisely here, Willemen favorably footnotes Heath's work in *Screen* on Oshima's *Death by Hanging*. The situation by now is probably becoming crystal clear. Heath's pairing of *Letter From an Unknown Woman* and *In the Realm of the Senses* is somewhat equivalent to Branigan's pairing of Fellini's *8½* and *The Man Who Left His Will On Film*, and Bordwell-Thompson's pairing of the modernist Ozu with the modernist Tati. Willemen sees Branigan's failure as resulting from pulling Oshima squarely within the *Screen* project of the seventies. Oshima is, in fact, much more of a pluralist than either Heath, in particular, or *Screen*, in general. Oshima is not committed to the "progressive" notion of a single style, and he does not see classical cinema from the position of ideological critique put forward by Heath and *Screen*. In fact, it is only by understanding *Screen's* limited and obsessive project of heralding certain avant-garde styles in opposition to classical Hollywood that we can even understand Heath's reading of *In the Realm of the Senses*.

All important work currently being done in the West on Japanese cinema, then, seems to be caught up in the Western ideological space of its practitioners. We have to be very careful about accusing each other's work of being Western. The dangers of this can be seen easily in the Ozu controversy. Bordwell and Thompson had no sooner dismissed Schrader and Richie on these grounds than Willemen came along and critiqued them for the same thing. The charge of cultural imperialism that Bordwell so neatly sidesteps is that he is looking at and evaluating Ozu from a Western perspective. The strength of Bordwell and Thompson's work lies in their refusal to fall into the first kind of Orientalist mentality which I analyzed. They do not posit a mystery at the heart of Japan which can, by reference to Oriental religion and character, explain for us all that we see in

Japanese films. As such, they have foregrounded features of the works which cannot and should not be easily glossed over by reference to things "Japanese."

Methodologically, there is, however, a serious blind spot to their approach.² How do they know at what point they may be misreading or misperceiving precisely because they consider the systems they analyze to be solely properties of the films which they can uncover through detailed, minute analysis? No cultural reference is employed. With a knowledge of Japanese culture, we might see a significance in Ozu's empty spaces which, though different from the Western concept of meaning, is also different from the Western modernist concept of spatial play.

If Schrader and Richie risk obscuring things by running everything through references to Japanese culture and character which are vague and generally untestable to the reader who relies upon the authors' "knowledge" for the reading, Bordwell and Thompson risk reducing the text to a clear system of easily observable and knowable patterns which require no special knowledge of Japanese culture. It is all there, clear as could be. Just look carefully and you will see everything you need to know about systems of meaning in an Ozu film. Certainly, this cannot only be seen as a methodological limitation (which it is), but also as a form of Western perspective (which it is). Aside from dropping the name-calling and labeling, what can be done about this difficult and frustrating situation?

Western film scholars might do well to foreground their Western perspective rather than to deny it. Ozu is Bordwell's formalist dream, even though he can only see every other Western scholar's Japanese dream. The merit of these various critical enterprises ultimately lies elsewhere than in being a pure and Western-free perception of Japanese films. Presum-

ably we can leave the Japanese to have a Japanese perspective on Japanese films.

Curiously, however, Western film critics have tended to be dismissive of the Japanese criticism which is available to them. Logic would seem to dictate that Western scholars who are constantly attacking each other for their Western perspectives would be particularly interested in the work of Japanese film scholars. Writing of Ozu's departure from standard shot-reverse shot editing, Noël Burch observes:

Various explications of this development have been proposed by Japanese critics. Most of them are postulated upon the idea that it is a device meant to express "incommunicability" or some such neo-Western cliché. Sato Tadao offers, somewhat guardedly, a slightly more sober version, suggesting that Ozu's characters speak to themselves rather than to their partners (160).³

Here we have one of the leading Western film scholars calling one of the leading Japanese film critics a slightly more sober version of a neo-Western cliché. Similarly, Bordwell and Thompson have little or no interest in Sato's work on Ozu, but they cannot attribute this to the problems they have with Joan Mellen, Donald Richie, and Paul Schrader. What underlies this dismissiveness is the fact that Sato's work does not fit in at all with the current interests of Western academic film scholarship. This does not mean that we can not learn anything from him about Japanese perceptions of Ozu's films.

In fact, Sato's work on Ozu adds several insights which cannot be gleaned from either Bordwell and Thompson or Burch. Many of his observations are not so patently absurd that we need dismiss them without serious consideration. Sato's ap-

proach, however, is rooted in character, theme, and mood, precisely the "meanings" which Bordwell and Thompson are eager to evict from the Ozu text. Similarly, Burch's dream Japan is somehow untouched by the Western world and his reaction is based upon near outrage that some Japanese seem to have allowed themselves to be touched and dirtied by the West, thus losing his dream of their pure Japanese essence. But Sato's concepts that Ozu's characters exist as if they were guests, Sato's emphasis on the specifically Japanese concern with shaming themselves, and his emphasis on feelings of harmony and stillness in Ozu's films, all may point to legitimate Japanese perceptions of Ozu's work which are being ignored or downplayed exactly because they are at odds with Western perspectives.⁴

The value of these Western critical projects which I have been reviewing results from how productive the space is into which the Japanese films are pulled.⁵ I have learned a great deal from Bordwell and Thompson's work on Ozu, although I do not feel it is free of the dream cinema. Similarly, it is the Western scholar Stephen Heath who has posed a question to Western cinema, and not the Japanese director Oshima. Still, there is much to learn from Heath's analysis of *In the Realm of the Senses*. I would like to conclude with a reference to that film which might show how complex and precarious the situation is.

It is almost impossible for Western scholars to watch *In the Realm of the Senses* without reference to Freudian and Lacanian concepts of the phallus and castration—these concepts have played such a dominant role in our critical tradition for the past decade. But Oshima has no interest in Lacan. Furthermore, he argues for a uniquely Japanese significance to the castration that occurs in that film:

I feel as a Japanese man, speaking probably for all Japanese men, that what we would like, what we would want, is to be able to meet a woman who would be that intense about us in love. I would like for that film and that incident not to be viewed in terms of a general kind of symbolism about castration, because the importance of it is that the incident actually took place and entered the popular consciousness. But once again, I think that is how men would want a woman to feel, and they don't think of that act in terms of pain or something like that (58).

Not surprisingly, Oshima's next remark was, "I found in Europe that many men had misconceptions about *In the Realm of the Senses* . . ." (58). This unique and specific Japanese reading of the event which he invokes is as far as possible from almost all dominant Western notions of castration where in fact the castrating woman is the object of intense fear and anxiety, the "castrating bitch." No wonder Oshima was disturbed by the way Western men were responding to the film, since it is almost unimaginable for Western men to conjure up the image of the woman with a knife who will castrate them as the ultimate image of what they desire in a woman. Clearly Western formal criticism, however perceptive, cannot get at such a reading for it cannot emerge from what seem to be systems of organization within the text. Similarly, a current Lacanian-based reading of the film will catch castration up in an entirely different system of significance than that Oshima attributes to it.

We should respect what we can learn from our perspectives as witnessed in such excellent works as Bordwell and Thompson's, Branigan's, and Heath's. We should, however, strongly recognize the limitations inherent in those perspectives. We need to not only continue reading Japa-

nese films in ways that are interesting to us within our various ideological spaces, but also to be aware of how far we still are from a reading of Japanese films which neither reduces and trivializes the role of the culture in understanding the films, nor obscures through Orientalizing the role of the culture until everything is turned into stereotyped "essences" of Japanese character and religion.

Notes

¹ The way in which Oshima spoke in one particular interview should not, of course, be accepted uncritically as the "true" Oshima. Artists change their minds between interviews, contradict themselves, make errors, and on occasion even put the interviewer on with their answers. However, even a contradictory, playful Oshima would be far removed from the Oshima constructed by Heath.

² Recent conversations I have had with David Bordwell, as well as a paper which he read at the 1985 Society for Cinema Studies Conference, indicate that his continuing work on Ozu will address these problems.

³ My paper originally dealt with Burch's book in some detail. I have, however, eliminated most of that section for several reasons. Don Kirihaara examines Burch's book elsewhere in this issue. It has also received a great deal of criticism. See for example, Scott L. Malcomson, "The Pure Land Beyond the Sea: Barthes, Burch and the Uses of Japan," *Screen* 26.3-4 (1985):23-33. Kirihaara's analysis of Burch's excessive polarization of Japan and the West can be related to Roland Barthes *Empire of Signs*, a book whose influence Burch openly acknowledges. Each chapter of Barthes book finds an opposition between Japan and the West. The West is continually characterized as almost nauseatingly centered and heavy with meaning. Japan is described as airy, decentered and empty of meaning.

⁴ Surprisingly, no one has criticized Bordwell and Thompson for not pushing their formal analysis of Ozu's style into current areas of debate about the relationship of the spatial and cutting patterns in the classical cinema to the objectification and eroticization of women. Does Ozu's 360 degree space with its abandonment of eyeline matches and attendant spatial confusion destroy the stable erotic space of the Hollywood cinema wherein the woman's body

is frequently presented as spectacle relayed through the look of a man? With a few notable exceptions (e.g. *Floating Weeds*, which interestingly lacks much of the spatial and editing complexity Bordwell and Thompson describe as characteristic of Ozu), Ozu's work seems to me refreshingly free of traditional eroticism. Bordwell and Thompson, who stop short of any cultural or ideological concerns in their analysis, never touch on this issue. If Ozu's films are not erotic in ways common to classical cinema, how does his representation of women relate to his spatial system? Many claims made about the nature of the erotic space of the classical cinema could be tested in this way. Such a foregrounding of a contemporary, Western perspective would illustrate well that productive work can emerge from a precise engagement between Western and Japanese perspectives, rather than from just attempting to escape Western perspectives to arrive at a pure Japanese reading of the films.

⁵ We should be careful not to oversimplify the notion of a Japanese response to Ozu. As with any artist in any culture, there is likely to be a variety of responses. Quite probably Japanese critics and viewers respond to Ozu's films in differing and conflicting ways. Any attempts to find the pure Japanese response falls into the danger described by Bordwell of creating a dream Japan uncontaminated by the West. Burch's contemptuous dismissal of Japanese critics who use "neo-Western Cliche(s)" reveals his desire to seal-off and define something purely Japanese.

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