Documentary’s Theatricality and Theatricality’s Documentary: Japanese Filmmakers’ Counter-vision of Models and Exoticism

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ABSTRACT

Since its origins, cinema has had documentary value. Early film pioneers filmed the daily activities and then more distant and exotic cultures such as Japan. Over time, the Western gaze has influenced this culture and has gradually led it on the path of modernization. Cinema itself is a symbol of this modernization. In attempting to appropriate this filmic device, some Japanese filmmakers understood the artificiality of its process of reproducing a reality and considered films as an artificial representation. After the Second World War, there was an opposition between these two ways of thinking. On one hand, films such as Ichikawa Kon’s documentary about the 1964 Tokyo Olympiad were explicitly presented as icons of the socio-economic model of reconstruction. On the other hand, filmmakers concerned with the preservation of Japanese identity, threatened by the American occupier, heavily rejected an approach to propose a counter-vision. Ironically, Ozu Yasujirō, the “most Japanese” of Japanese filmmakers, embodies this counter-vision at the dawn of post-war propaganda discourses. He who gave films what Western eyes would see as testimonies of the traditions of Japan was actually the perfect example of the anti-Western sense of realism. More contemporary filmmakers are in the continuity of this idea that is to conceive cinema as a mean to question identity and the place of the modern Japanese individual. These concerns sound even more necessary at a means in his history when the Japanese model so much vaunted through propagandist pictures suffered a frightening decline.

INTRODUCTION

Since its origins, cinema has had a documentary component. Film pioneers recorded the daily activities of their immediate environment before turning their attention to more distant, more exotic cultures. Japan is one such culture which has fascinated the Western eye in terms of architecture and tradition. But over time, the Western gaze itself has influenced Japanese culture and has gradually led it to the path of modernization, of which cinema is a symbol. In attempting to appropriate this cinematographic device, some Japanese filmmakers have understood the artificiality of its process of capturing and reproducing reality. The postulate of these filmmakers is not to adopt a Western approach, like the documentary by filming scenes said to be representative of their culture for the sake of realism. On the contrary, it consists of posing reality as a representation for spectators.

After the Second World War, there was an opposition between these two ways of thinking at the time of the reconstruction of Japan. With this in mind, films such as Ichikawa Kon’s documentary Tokyo Olympiad (Tokyo Orinpikku 1965), about the 1964 Tokyo Olympiad, are posed as icons of the socio-economic model of reconstruction. On the other hand, some filmmakers are more concerned with the preservation of the Japanese identity.
threatened by an accelerated westernization of the country through the American directives embodied by General MacArthur, “the new sovereign, the blue-eyed shogun, the paternalistic military dictator, the grandiloquent but excruciatingly sincere Kabuki hero” (Dower 182).

One sign of oppression leveraged under occupation is CCD (Civil Censorship Detachment). This legislation listed 33 forbidden topics such as atomic bombs, occupation policy, or military forces in any kind of media or art (like cinema). Mention of censorship itself was prohibited. After the end of the occupation in 1951, and some of these taboos, Japanese authorities continue to follow occupier’s directives that were deeply implemented into bureaucracy (190-191). As a result, some filmmakers distanced themselves from an approach deemed propagandist in order to propose a counter-vision. In the same year, while authorities were busy praising Japan through the Olympics, a new Japanese film genre, pinku eiga (“pink movie”) was born and about to cause scandals. Through pinku eiga like Tombstone (Namari no bohyo, 1965), Wakamatsu Koji frames a young Japanese man who kills an American soldier to save his mother from rape. His depiction of sexuality and violence, considered as deprivation by the Japanese authorities, is an explicit criticism of American presence. However, sexuality and violence are not restrained to pinku eiga: other filmmakers like Oshima Nagisa or Kiju Yoshida use them to elaborate a political cinematographic wave.

Ironically, long before this ideological opposition to American occupation, it is Ozu Yasujiro, whose aesthetic and method make the Japanese consider him as the “most Japanese of all their filmmakers” (Richie xi), who seems to embody this counter-vision at the dawn of post-war propaganda discourses. With films like Late Spring (Banshu, 1949) or The Taste of Tea (Sanma no aji, 1962), Ozu’s works were mostly considered in Western eyes as documentaries, testimonies of the traditional mores of Japan. However, some of his peers, such as Kiju, support a different reading: Ozu was actually the perfect example of the anti-cinema, or in other words, the opposite vision to the Western vision of cinema.

More contemporary directors like Kurosawa Kiyoshi and Tsukamoto Shinya are illustrative figures of a new generation of filmmakers that emerged during the 1990s, which in turn heralded a new social crisis equally as resonant as that of the 1960s. Indeed, this contemporary period has been called the “lost decade” because of events that have symbolically and concretely shaken the roots of the Japanese social model. In Cure (Kyua, 1997), his first international success, Kurosawa depicts a detective investigating murders committed by apparently unconnected perpetrators. He eventually faces a mysterious amnesiac who may be the key to the case -- or not. In Tetsuo (1989), acclaimed at FantaFestival in Rome, Tsukamoto depicts a salaryman slowly turned into a being made of metal.

The story of perpetrators killing for no reason is reminiscent of the attack in the Tokyo subway by the Aum Sect. As well, the portrait of a man merging with the metal trash produced by modern society is potentially illustrative of the consequences of the Japanese asset price bubble’s collapse (1980s-1990s). However, such oversimplified readings of these works would be too restrictive and don’t consider them as pure cinematographic objects.

Thus, in the continuity of filmmakers like Ozu, the main concern is not to create works about the specific tragedies of Japan. They follow that idea of conceiving cinema as the possibility of a gaze, not documentary towards its culture. Via fictional aspects, their work questions the place of the modern Japanese individual within their environment, and thus probes the very notion of Japanese identity. This process is highlighted at a moment when the model so praised by propagandist discourses is subject to a frightening decline.

**DOCUMENTARY AND EXOTICISM**

The first image of the film Tokyo Olympiad is a poster of the Tokyo Olympiad of 1964. It shows the red disc of the Japanese flag on a white banner. Below it are the Olympic rings and the inscription “Tokyo 1964,” followed by “The Olympics are a symbol of human aspiration.” The first shot frames the sun. The next one follows a demolition ball striking a concrete structure. Another point of view shows

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1 His most famous example is In the Realm of the Senses (Ai no korida, 1975), relating the true story of Sada Abe, who had an affair with a man she eventually killed. The movie received special attention because of its very graphic sexual scenes.

2 Director of Eros + Massacre (Eros + Gyakusatsu, 1970)

3 On March 20, 1995, several members of the cult movement Aum Shinrikyo, led by Asahara Shoko, released sarin on three lines of the Tokyo subway. In this attack, 13 people were killed and about 6,000 others suffered long-term sequelae.
this demolition ball hitting a building. The violence of the impact is expressed by the transition from one point of view to another. The fifth shot shows a building wall heavily crumbling (Fig. 1). A sixth shot shows the same scene, but from an establishing shot that frames the surrounding buildings. A seventh image briefly shows Japanese workers, and an eighth shot shows an aerial view of Tokyo. With crossfades, the editing slips from the city to a sports stadium and then films it from the ground through a circular tracking shot, leading to the appearance of the opening with the English title (Fig. 2). Successive shots show the stadium from different angles. Next comes a series of shots filmed first from a car in a tunnel, then on sprawling roads that cross the city of Tokyo, and finally ends on the image of a modern Tokyo with crowds and cars. Finally, the Japanese title appears\(^4\).

After the Second World War, the reconstruction of Japan continued an intense wave of modernization, already initiated with the Restoration of Meiji (1868-1912) and touted as a socio-economic model in the eyes of the world. The illustration of this Japanese miracle was the Olympiads of 1964. Indeed, Ichikawa Kon, famous director of The Burmese Harp (Biruma no tategoto, 1965), was hired to make a film related to the event. In 1965, the documentary Tokyo Olympiad was released. The film depicts Japan’s newfound grandeur through athletes from all over the world on the occasion of this exceptional event. This image greatly contributes to Japan’s return to the international scene as well as to communicating its model to all nations of the world attending or participating in the Olympic Games. Thus, on the one hand, it paints a portrait of a distant objective reality destined to be exported and to fascinate foreign eyes. On the other hand, both by the purpose of the film and its export, it reinforces the legitimacy of the post-war model of the Japanese people.

From its origins, the genre of documentary has been associated with the idea of travel. In the continuity of photography, cinema gives the possibility to capture and reproduce distant realities and by extension, to breathe the feeling of travel through a screen. This notion was born in the West and from this window to the world, crystallized the idea of the documentary as objective testimony reported from distant horizons. The Lumière brothers and other cinema pioneers sent their collaborators around the world to bring back “exotic” scenes.

With time, this idea of travel associated with documentary is coupled with an ethnological dimension thanks to the capture of typical events. But this is where the limits of documentary objectivity become clear. Indeed, every filmmaker has a specific gaze for the object they want to show. Framing, speech, and editing expose the subjectivity of a gaze through the objectivity of what is shown on the screen. In some cases, the presence of the filmmaker and the mechanical eye of their camera is, voluntarily or not, a factor of manipulation -- an interference with the elements of the reproduced reality. As Roland Barthes states in his essay about photography,

> It can happen that I am observed without knowing it (...). But very often (...) I have been photographed and knew it. Now, once I feel myself observed by the lens, everything changes: I constitute myself in the process of “posing”, I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image. (Barthes 10)

In this sense, behind the intention of a director lies an ideology visible through a gaze instituted on the produced images. Between documentary and propaganda, the border becomes tenuous. In 1935, Leni Riefenstahl produced Triumph des Willens (Fig. 3), which concretizes the moment

\(^4\) Depending on the film version, the two titles may be switched.
when the documentary puts itself at the service of an ideology that a political power tries to institute to the masses of a country and even beyond its borders. Beyond its propagandist message, the film is praised for its mastery of the purest cinematographic language (Brockmann 150-165); that is to say, the power of images and not of speech\(^5\). This feeling is reinforced by *Olympia* (1936), a documentary about the 1936 Olympiad in Berlin. In this case, the purpose is to make viewers accept or even love a dominant ideology whose truth is induced by the objectivity of the images.

Ichikawa’s film is introduced by the title which is presented in both Japanese and English. On one hand, the Japanese title aims to promote the sporting event and to make the public accept the sacrifice of an ancient world for the benefit of a new modernity. On the other hand, the Western title promotes this new modernity in the eyes of foreign spectators and leads them to see a country more open to the world, as well as to westerners under the pretext of wanting to be closer to a westernized way of life. Indeed, following this double opening, the film traces a history of the ancient Olympic Games, going back to Ancient Greece through the ruins of sports fields. Through runners carrying the Olympic flame in Greece, a bridge is made across the different countries of the world until the flame reaches the Tokyo Olympiad.

Ironically, the same year, the French filmmaker Chris Marker produced *Le Mystère Koumiko* (1965), a sort of filmic wandering shot during the 1964 Olympics revolving around a Japanese woman, Muraoka Koumiko, born in Manchuria, speaking French, whom the filmmaker describes as neither “the Japanese model” nor “the model woman nor the modern woman.” In contrast with post-war Japan models, Marker – like Koumiko – shows no interest in the event, but rather in what is not shown in the images of its reconstruction. Conversely, the images he captures from this new Tokyo raise a vision of an invisible Japan still haunted by the specter of war, although erased by reconstruction and modernization. By associating a sample of Olympiad images with a French and non-Japanese commentary, Marker underlines how Japan’s viewpoint on itself follows and is articulated by Western perspectives. By adopting this distorted view of the “stereotypes” of the Japanese miracle, the filmmaker indirectly portrays them as simulacra.

Therefore, it sounds ironic that a French filmmaker delivers a documentary filmic essay in opposition to the usual objects of this genre while a Japanese filmmaker adopts an approach and an instituted point of view close to Western documentary productions. Ichikawa uses Westerners’ tools in order to better sell a vision of Japan to them while Marker breaks up with these processes by filming his vision of Japan. In his book *Le Dépays*, he emphasizes the artificiality of the filmic process by which he shapes “his” Japan. Because, to him, “imagining Japan is a way to know it”:

Such are the things of my country, my imagined country, my country which I have totally invented, totally invested, my country which is so exhausting me that I am no longer myself except in this change of scenery. (Marker)

**COUNTER-VISION**

Documentary demonstrates the sociological influence and role of cinema and how its limits reveal the flaws of a dominant discourse. The intention of the director determines the choice of the images shown; that is to say, the way in which a reproduced reality is a truncated reality, according to a subjective viewpoint.

In *Le Mystère Koumiko*, Chris Marker frames the least typical Japanese woman from a Western point of view. Consequently, he poses a critique of Western hegemonic

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5 Charles Chaplin, a burlesque specialist in American cinema and an icon of silent cinema, embodies the quintessence of a purely visual art. His final speech from *The Great Dictator* (1940), an open criticism against Nazism and Hitler, is the least interesting part of the film because it relies on the verbal to deliver a glimpse of hope while the entire film is based on burlesque situations ridiculing totalitarianism through visual humor.
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thought and in that way highlights the ideological conflicts of a Japan that takes this thought as a model. This contradictory issue is crystallized by the film's last sequence, showing Koumiko aboard a train while voice-over provides a verbal discussion between her and the filmmaker. She states:

Always, something happens. Anything. They will arrive one by one, on the line of human history. And for me, these are incidents of every morning thrown out the door. When I was a child, I lived only by sensations on the tongue or by the voluptuousness of cold smells. Just around the same time, the human was about to suffer. They went to war, they were prisoners. They were resisting. They cried. They wept and the human tanks were torn apart. And today, knowing it, I am astonished. I am more astonished that I did not know for a long time. I am astonished every morning. Every morning, I do not understand anything. I do not know how to comment. But soon, they will arrive, the results of the events. It's like the wave of the sea. Once it arrives, an earthquake, even if it's a distant accident, the wave comes little by little and it finally reaches me. (La Sofra, 1967)

The 1960s were punctuated by the emergence of divergent movements against the Japanese new social model. Writers (Mishima Yukio), avant-garde artists (Terayama Shuji, Kara Juro, Hijikata Tatsumi), and filmmakers (Wakamatsu Kôji, Oshima Nagisa) used their own means of expression to criticize an economic model based on consumerist culture exported from the United States, which has occupied and still occupies Japanese territory, notably through the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan, whose renewal in 1960 was source of violent riots. In 1968, Oshima made Diary of a Shinjuku Thief (Shinjuku dorobbi nikki), following a kleptomaniac who steals books. They are not just books, but works from authors such as George Bataille, Jean Genet or Jean-Paul Sartre -- books that inspired the avant-garde movements of the time, including Mishima.

Oshima’s film is thus representative of this opposition between a dominant culture inherited from the American occupation and the search for alternative cultures. In this context of intellectual effervescence, it seems logical for works such as Sartre, Genet or Antonin Artaud to emerge and resurface throughout Japanese history. Kara, who is involved in the film with his troupe, is an eloquent illustration: Sartre is the main subject of his graduation thesis at the University of Meiji; he calls his theatrical troupe, created in 1967, Jôkyô Gekijô ('situation theater') and his first theatrical production is a free adaptation of La Putain Respectueuse written in 1946 (Powell 178).

This movement reflects a search for new forms of expression that break with “the advent of a modernity focused on efficiency and profitability” (Thomas 272) that inspires a great delusion to Oshima:

When evening came, dwellings bathed in the setting sun, like matchboxes, gave, with their contours drawn too distinctly, an impression of artificial manufactory. When I thought of the life that people were leading in these little boxes, a cry denouncing the nonsense of existence rose from the bottom of my heart (...). The sensitivity of the Japanese has not changed: on the contrary, as if they wanted to make a mockery of the emotions that I, a naive young man, had felt then, people have filled their reinforced concrete house with synthetic standardized articles or chemical, and have made each piece of their apartment the scene of new home-drama quite mild. (Oshima 249)

6 Title of the film refers to Jean Genet’s work, Journal d’un voleur (1949).
The artificiality of the new ways of life that Oshima compares to the register of the *home drama* finds special meaning in filmmaker Ozu Yasujirō’s works. As we know, Ozu’s films are fictions, not documentaries. But to the Western eye, these fictions are coupled with a documentary or even ethnological interest, supported notably by moments of narrative suspension. Simple shots of gardens, temples, and clothes hanging from the wind are all fragments of the way of life of the Japanese of the period in which the films that reproduce a disappeared reality are found when discovered by the eyes of the spectators. In fact, Western critics have often depicted Ozu as a Zen filmmaker, a representative example of the Japanese tradition, particularly by the genre often associated with him: the *home drama*. Yet analysts such as Noël Burch or Donald Richie have tried to build more interesting aspects. We say “tried” because, to this day, although many people bring his stone to the building, Ozu has left no definitive interpretation to his images. Richie associates Ozu with the *home drama*, but this statement is half true because the *home drama* is particularly characteristic of the filmmaker’s post-war period. This may be one of the reasons why Burch, as he considers that post-war films offer very little renewal, is only interested in the pre-war period until *There was a father* (*Chichi ariki* 1942).

As for these suspended moments, Richie calls them “empty sceneries” or “empty shots” while Burch calls them “pillow shots” and defines them as a kind of “still life” whose function is to “suspend the diegetic flow” as well as to set “a decentering effect as the camera settles for a moment, sometimes a long time on some inanimate aspect of the human environment.” Burch’s interpretation resonates with that of a Japanese filmmaker, Kiju Yoshida, in that this type of shot illustrates the conscious expression of “dissent from the world view implied by the Western mode of representation” which is an “anthropocentric” world-view. “Empty and often long-lasting,” these shots “are fully built from a graphic view, and require to be explored like paintings” (Burch 175-177).

Indeed, Kiju is opposed to Western considerations that associate Ozu’s works with documentary and exoticism. He considers Ozu as much less concerned with *home drama* than the cinematic modern device as a medium. For example, Kiju sees in the stillness shots Ozu’s awareness of the cinematic artificial process aiming to replace human eyes with camera lenses. With this in mind, Ozu poses cinema as an art of imitation of the real, as “when we look at the actual conditions of this world through the camera’s lens, we must deny the random movements of the human eye and restrain the eye’s constant movements in order to focus on one point” (Kiju 55).

In *Tokyo Story* (*Tokyo Monogatari*, 1953), a retired couple, Hirayama Shukichi and Tomi, go to visit their children in Osaka and Tokyo. However, the children don’t have enough time to spend with their parents. Their daughter, Shige, asks Noriko, the widow of their son Shoji who died in the war, to take them to visit the capital. After a tour on a tourist bus, Noriko takes them to Ginza to contemplate the city. During this scene, Kiju emphasizes that the couple and Noriko look at the city but the camera does not frame what they are contemplating, leaving only an empty image (Fig. 4). This brings the filmmaker to state

> Although Tokyo undoubtedly lies in front of them, the city becomes a space of absence, and it becomes clear that it is not the elderly couple who looks at Tokyo, but Tokyo as a space of absence that is looking at the elderly couple. (Kiju 146)

This space of absence echoes the words of French filmmaker Jean Epstein and denies the idea of a Japanese picturesque. Epstein considers the picturesque cinema as “zero, nothing, nothingness,” as meaningless as talking “of colors

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to a blind man.” In his opinion, “film is only susceptible of photogeny” and “picturesque and photogeny coincide only by chance” (Epstein 95).

The French title of the film, *Voyage à Tokyo* (‘Trip’ or ‘Travel to Tokyo’) is explicitly an invitation to travel for French spectators imbued with this documentary culture. In fact, this title adapts the film in order to be seen as a pure object of exoticism, regardless Ozu’s true intentions. While the Western gaze would see a documentary-like picture of the Japanese way of life, Ozu is more concerned by a documentary gaze of the artificiality of the representation of the “Japanese way of life.”

In this sense, Ozu’s cinema is highlighted as a reproduced staged reality and does not show a high interest in depicting Japanese culture for foreign eyes. Further, those who read this artificiality as an authentic testimony of traditional Japan delight in the simulacrum of a model that artists such as Oshima or Kara denounce.

**NOWADAYS**

In his preface to the photographer Louis Guillain’s work on Noh theatre and contemporary arts, Michel Sicard links the modern view of the world with Japan’s view of otherness by reminding us of “a time when photography captured the real world.” Then, photography turned into the mind of an artist which “was a living and organizing eye behind his lens.” Guillain expresses that such a modus ended and that we now “have to indulge in the image by this anonymous sensor, without really framing or building, without choosing too much the flow of things.” This new way of watching, to project a gaze, aims “to travel endlessly in the streets, on the sidewalks, in crowds, places and non-places, surfaces and interstices.” However, this apparently contemporary new way to frame the world shares similarities with traditional Japan’s perception of “subject altered, carried away, in the light of fetishes and masks” (Guillain 14).

The filmmaker Kurosawa Kiyoshi approaches this modernity of the gaze in that it highlights not the objectivity of the camera’s gaze on reality, but rather the subjectivity of such a gaze:

Cinema is photography. So you have to be realistic enough. But the realism must be based on staging. If we really made the camera show everything we wanted to show, it would obviously look even more realistic. But there would be no idea, no invention. (Kurosawa 93)

Kurosawa considers the documentary-like view as a sterile capture of the real while the cinema allows filmmakers to invent a reality without hiding its artificial character, which is then revealing the subjectivity of its author. Which, in this sense, echoes Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of cinema: cinema is not just “merely a play photographed in motion,” but an original means of expression through the choice and grouping of the shots (Merleau-Ponty 70).

Thus, interaction with the world is followed by a questioning of perception of this world and its representations. *Barren Illusions* (*Ôinaru gen’ei*, 1999) focuses on two characters, Haru and Michi, in a (un)determined future – in 2005 – wandering without any purpose. The only particular detail is Haru volunteering as a test subject for an experimental vaccine against the effects of regular falls of pollen, although it may involve side effects such as a risk of sterility.

At the beginning of the film, while it’s dark, Haru steals a bicycle and rides a few meters in an anonymous street from right to left before colliding with a pile of garbage cans and falling down (Fig.5). In this scene, Kurosawa uses a tracking shot to follow the young man on a parallel movement. Starting from a static shot, and as the young man traverses the space, the camera follows a non-fluid path. Kurosawa pays attention to the use of travelling shots in his films in that this figure “deeply reveals the tension of a scene, and puts the viewer in tension.” Moreover, for Kurosawa, “this relationship between image and outside is also played out at the film set, between the image recorded and the effort made to film it. Whether for a landscape or characters, the image is imbued with what is happening behind the camera” (Tessé-Delorme 81-82).
The use of traveling disturbed by this unstable riding appears as an intentional sign that reminds viewers of the camera’s presence, as well as the interaction that arises between the camera and its object. Thus, through travelling, off-screen becomes in-screen as well as in-screen becomes off-screen. This movement erasing and creating the cinematographic space is articulated by the character’s subjectivity and perception of time while recalling the artificial nature of the capture of the scene. However, this same “movement” also confines the character in the frame and thus returns him introspectively to his own immobility, his inaction. Although wandering on this bike, Haru moves in the frame’s spatial emptiness.

Contemporary Japanese filmmakers have kept in mind an awareness of the artificiality of film media and how it influences them in that they do not seek to build an objective discourse, but rather, a way of expressing subjectivity. Therefore, the notion of identity is often at the heart of their works and will articulate the images of the story as well as these images will articulate the identity of its characters. In this sense, these filmmakers will portray the influence of the modern Japanese environment, particularly the urban environment, on subjectivity. In the same way, the film as a tool from modernity, a tool for capturing and reproducing a reality, will be an important source of influence on the expression of an author’s subjective reality through his characters.

This idea is similar to Deleuze’s analysis of Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini’s works in which he observes that “the distinction between what the character saw subjectively and what the camera saw objectively vanished, not in favour of one or the other, but because the camera assumed a subjective presence, acquired an internal vision, which entered into a relation of simulation (‘mimesis’) with the character’s way of seeing.” Through the contamination of these “objective” and “subjective” images, the filmmakers influence their stories in an impersonal perspective that sublimes their artificial dimension. In fact, the “story no longer refers to an ideal of the true which constitutes a character in the first person, but the other of which is present at his birth and brings him on to the scene.” Thus, this process induces “a correlation between a perception-image and a camera-consciousness which transforms it.” In brief, a correlation between a character’s point of view and the camera as another point of view that “thinks, reflects and transforms the viewpoint of the character.” To crystallize this way of perception, neurotic condition of character appears essential as it crystallizes “the difficult birth of a subject into the world.” That allows the camera to not just reflect such the character’s perception of his world, but to show “another vision in which the first is transformed and reflected” (Deleuze, Cinéma 1 106-108).

In this continuity, Tsukamoto Shinya operates an approach that is both similar and different from the relation to reality. Indeed, if his visual style – often rougher – differs considerably from filmmakers such as Ozu or Kurosawa, he also shares their question of perception and a certain state of contemplation.

*Tokyo Fist*(Tokyo Fisuto, 1995) follows Tsuda – played by Tsukamoto – a salaryman who works for an insurance company and is engaged to Hizuru. The first moments of the film show him walking from apartment to apartment to present the latest news in health insurance. His boss also asks him to visit a boxing club, which is a good business for acts of subjectivation simultaneously, one of which constitutes a character in the first person, but the other of which is present at his birth and brings him on to the scene.” Thus, this process induces “a correlation between a perception-image and a camera-consciousness which transforms it.” In brief, a correlation between a character’s point of view and the camera as another point of view that “thinks, reflects and transforms the viewpoint of the character.” To crystallize this way of perception, neurotic condition of character appears essential as it crystallizes “the difficult birth of a subject into the world.” That allows the camera to not just reflect such the character’s perception of his world, but to show “another vision in which the first is transformed and reflected” (Deleuze, Cinéma 1 106-108).

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the company. As he leaves the boxing club, one of the boxers notices him and catches him in the subway. His name is Kojima (Tsukamoto Koji) played by Tsukamoto Koji—the filmmaker’s brother and a boxer—and is Tsuda’s former classmate from high school. Tsuda appears uncomfortable in the presence of Kojima and tries, in vain, to avoid him.

Things get worse when Kojima goes back to the couple’s apartment and tries to seduce Hizuru. When Tsuda comes back from work, Hizuru tells him what happened. In the same time, Kojima phones and provokes Tsuda, telling him how sweet Hizuru is. After that, Tsuda unleashes his rage by smashing a wall with his fists. Then he goes directly to Kojima’s place, despite Hizuru’s attempts to stop him. There, the confrontation takes a hostile turn as Tsuda raises his fist to Kojima. But the boxer knocks him out without any difficulty in front of Hizuru. Following this incident, Tsuda becomes more oppressive towards Hizuru. The woman, no longer willing to endure this situation, leaves Tsuda to go to Kojima’s apartment for answers answers on the link between the two men. For his part, Tsuda shows up at the boxing gym and starts training (Fig. 6).

The city of Tokyo is a recurring place in the works of Japanese filmmakers such as Kurosawa or Tsukamoto. The latter devotes several of his films to this city and the title of this one is even more explicit. Emblem of the modernization of Japan, symbol of a post-Hiroshima society, a place of depersonalization and wandering... From the 1960s to the 1990s, the importance of this “urban space boom (...) grows in the lives of the Japanese people. The city of the anonymous crowd, the city as a cradle of modernity, the city as a space reproducing what the Japanese of the postwar period recognized as their ideal: the American way of life” (Yatabe 105).

Tsukamoto introduces his film both as a play and as a documentary. The first shots introducing the main character—that he plays himself—shows him standing on the platform of a train station (Fig. 7). Then he goes down the stairs in the middle of an anonymous crowd and walks to his office before starting to approach potential customers. Like in theatrical documentary, Tsukamoto puts himself on the stage of a typical modern Japanese scene by embodying the prosperity icon developed over the post-war years: the salaryman. However, from the Western viewpoint, which would be more fascinated by cultural monuments such as Imperial Palace or Golden Pavilion, this picture of the salaryman is more anti-typical as it carries the American occupier’s legacy. Like Ozu or Kurosawa, Tsukamoto frames a de-historicized Tokyo, dispossessed of its identity through reconstruction but also through the gaze turned upon it. This picture shares some documentary-like view on Japan’s modern way of life through social depiction of an icon of prosperity. However, Tsukamoto bypasses this point of view by physically interfering in these images through his character of Tsuda. As a result, his presence introduces the fictional element into an authentic-like reality. Tsukamoto moves away from his position as omniscient and omnipotent filmmaker to become the visual element of the artificial fiction in the real world.

This position finds a significant meaning towards the middle of the film, through an important personage even if it appears only in rare moments: Tsuda’s father. Hospitalized and dying, the father haunts the son through the image of a fallen patriarch who is no longer able to leave his hospital bed. Thus, after a training session, Tsuda goes to the hospital and learns of the death of his father. When he arrives at his father’s room, he only sees a nurse gently lifting the sheet in the air like if she was covering the body of the deceased. However, the body has already been removed and at the same time, it still seems present but in its absence. Following the death of his father, Tsuda
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receives a phone call. First, he thinks he’s talking to Kojima, then thinks about Hizuru. Her voice answers, saying that she had a feeling about the death of Tsuda’s father. The salaryman asks to see her and makes an appointment near the highway. There, he waits all night long but she does not come. He then finds himself wandering in Tokyo, in the middle of the crowd, in the subway, in an elevator, in more and more underground and narrow alleys and corridors of concrete and metal, poorly lit spaces. Eventually, he resurfaces in the crowd, his clothes dusty, while a voice-over from his answering machine relays a message from an unseen coworker worried about his disappearance, but probably more for professional reasons than personal ones (Figs. 8, 9, and 10).

During this scene, the distance between the fictional character and the director is blurred. The combination of both gives rise to a bitter observation about the nature of the modern Japanese person embodied by Tsukamoto: the loss of any form of rooting, of belonging to a place necessary for the building of an identity. This lack of connection between the individual and his environment is even more accentuated both by the fictional character of Tsuda and by the filmic process that reduces Tokyo to some ‘any’ space, space de-territorialized and framed as a stage for representation. Deleuze draws a brief history of these spaces and notes that “after the war, a proliferation of such spaces could be seen both in film sets [decors] and in exteriors, under various influences. The first, independent of the cinema, was the post-war situation with its towns demolished or being reconstructed, its waste grounds, its shanty towns, and even in places where the war had not penetrated, its undifferentiated urban tissue, its vast unused places, docks, warehouses, heaps of girders and scrap iron.” Thus, this type of space

retains one and the same nature: it no longer has co-ordinates, it is a pure potential, it shows only pure Powers and Qualities, independently of the states of things or milieux which actualise them (...). It is therefore shadows, whites and colours which are capable of producing and constituting any-space-whatevers, disconnect ed or emptied spaces. (Deleuze, Cinema 1 169)

There is a proliferation of such spaces in Tsukamoto’s and Kurosawa’s movies, but also in other contemporary filmmakers’ works, such as Aoyama Shinji’s or Shibata Go’s. But they are part of the very continuity of Ozu’s

By distilling a sample of Olympiad images accompanied by a French and non-Japanese commentary, Marker associates these images with a Western vision that Japan tends to take as a model. By adopting this distorted view of the “stereotypes” of the Japanese miracle, the filmmaker indirectly qualifies them as simulacra.
If Tokyo is a recurring scene among filmmakers, it is a depersonalized Tôkyô, with no name, no spatio-temporal landmarks, a landscape dehistoricized both by the gaze of the camera and the presence of industrial deserts – remains of the lost decade – which endures.

works. Thus, when reviews see this kind of space as a simple contemplative gaze related to Japanese sensibility, Kiju speaks of the contemplation scene from Tokyo Story:

This Ozu’s Tokyo shows gigantic chimneys from a garbage incineration plant in a remote corner of the city, or even clothes swaying in the wind on terraces. Rather than scenes watched by the elderly couple in Tokyo, these are depersonalized images seen by anonymous people. (Kiju 146)

The approach of filmmakers such as Kurosawa and Tsukamoto excludes the ethnological register of Western documentary to better reinvent a Japan and reveal the artificiality of an allegedly objective discourse on the post-war legacy and its socio-economic model that has shown its limits particularly during the 1990s.

If Tokyo is a recurring scene among filmmakers, it is a depersonalized Tokyo, with no name, no spatio-temporal landmarks, a landscape dehistoricized both by the gaze of the camera and the presence of industrial deserts – remains of the lost decade – which endures. As a consequence, the characters of these films find themselves dispossessed of their identity under the mechanical eye’s gaze as well as cold and sterile buildings made of metal and glass.

In fact, the filmic image as a mental image finds its extension in the city of Tokyo, which becomes mental landscape and space of the disappearance, crystallization of the historical-social vision that the filmmaker produces in the continuity of the post-war period’s legacy, that is a vision of the Japanese miracle as a historical-social desert, characterized by “an already popular array of de-historicized signs and symbols that encourage consumers to see themselves as national subjects” (Sakamoto 3).

CONCLUSION

In his Sociologie du cinéma, Pierre Sorlin considers that cinema carries an important ethnographic part because it provides information like documentaries or reportages could do. With time, it follows the evolution and the mutations of modern societies. As a result, “the construction founds the cinematographic image of society, society as shown in cinema.” Therefore, the image is not “the ‘full-scale’ duplication, reproduction of observable data but the transformation of these data in accordance with accepted principles within a social ensemble” (Sorlin 270).

The 1960s mark the economic and industrial boom of Japan, a new Japan rising from the ruins of the post-war period. Cinema itself is a documentary gaze on this reconstruction coupled with an ideological tone for this triumph, as demonstrated by the Tokyo Olympiad. However, it is against this silent manipulation of images that subversive filmmakers keep in mind – just as Ozu did – that “the camera reveals the secret (...) shows the back side of a society, its slips.” In fact, cinema becomes “a sort of counter-analysis of society” and reveals “other reading systems” (Sorlin 50-51). Thus, instead of sticking to the capture of an objective reality likely to be perceived as a testimony of Japanese particularism, these filmmakers consider the cinema as a pure mode of representation. In that view, this Japanese cinema has no authentic but its artificiality and, ironically, invites to question the Japanese identity within a social fiction in crisis. ■
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