

AUTHORSHIP

Author, *sakka*, *auteur*

Alexander Jacoby

When, in 1959, Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie published the first English-language book-length history of Japanese cinema, it opened with a dedication to ‘that little band of men who have tried to make the Japanese film industry what every film industry should be: a director’s cinema.’¹ Unsurprisingly given their seminal role, the values represented by Anderson and Richie’s book were to be mirrored in much early English-language writing on Japanese cinema, from Richie’s own auteurist studies of canonical directors Kurosawa Akira and Ozu Yasujiro to Audie Bock’s commentary on ten selected Japanese film directors.² While acknowledging that films are produced on a collaborative basis and in industrial conditions, these books nevertheless celebrated their chosen directors as artists displaying coherent thematic concerns and stylistic practices.

As in other areas of film studies, English-language scholarship of Japanese cinema from the 1980s onwards has broadened its focus to explore questions of genre, the conditions of production and socio-historical context. Such projects have sometimes been offered in deliberate opposition to an auteurist approach. Thus, recently surveying the field of academic scholarship on Japanese film in the West, Isolde Standish has challenged the traditional focus of Western critics on ‘a clique of “art” or “high culture” film-makers around whom a critical *orthodox* has formed.’³ In the past few decades, moreover, even some director-based studies have challenged traditional auteurist principles. Thus, Freda Freiberg’s brief monograph, *Women in Mizoguchi’s Films*, seeks ‘to avoid discussing Mizoguchi’s films as works of art created by a great artist’ and points instead

to film’s status as a collaborative art created ‘within a production system ... which,’ due to a mixture of state censorship and commercial obligations, ‘severely limits the powers of the individual artist to freely express his personal views.’⁴ David Bordwell’s canonical book on Ozu suggests that in the commentary of traditional critics, ‘stylistic elements are yanked out of their formal systems and reified as typical Ozuian, or even typically Japanese’; instead, he insists on the need to situate that director’s work in the context of wider film-making practices in Japan as a whole, arguing that ‘only by comparison with prevailing standards and practices can we specify the particular workings of one film or a body of films.’⁵ More recently, Catherine Russell’s study of the films of Naruse Mikio contains a declaration that ‘Unlike conventional auteurist studies, I cannot really testify to the distinctiveness of Naruse’s cinema, the degree to which it departs from the industry norms of his career, or the degree to which it is representative and typical of other studio products.’⁶ Nevertheless, Russell’s project is an auteurist one in so far as it continues to trace a unified subject, that of ‘vernacular modernism,’ through the output of a single director. Moreover, twenty-first-century scholarship on Japanese cinema still includes such firmly traditional auteurist studies such as Arthur Nalletti Jr.’s book on Goshō Heinosuke, which discusses the director’s *oeuvre* in terms of ‘a distinct style and set of themes that give unity and coherence to his career as a whole.’⁷ Japanese cinema thus continues to be viewed in part through an auteurist lens.

In his influential reader on film authorship, John Caughie economically sums up the basic assumptions

of the auteur theory in words that are suggestively echoed by Nолletti's on Gosho. The theory asserts that,

A film, though produced collectively, is most likely to be valuable when it is essentially the product of its director ..., that in the presence of a director who is genuinely an artist (an *auteur*) a film is more than likely to be the expression of his individual personality; and that this personality can be traced in a thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all (or almost all) the director's films.⁸

Caughie, like most Western scholars, traces these ideas to the French film journal, *Cahiers du cinéma*. But just as, in fact, earlier Western critics such as Paul Rotha had already insisted on the primacy of the director, so too questions of film authorship had long been a subject for critical debate in Japan.⁹ In 1935, the Japanese critic Shimizu Chiyota opened an essay in *Eiga nenkan* with the question 'Who is the person who creates a film?', and acknowledged that 'as far as today's film-loving intellectuals are concerned, probably nine out of ten would say that the director is the creator of the film'.¹⁰ While Shimizu went on to discuss the rival claims of the producer, his acknowledgment of an apparently broad acceptance of directorial authorship on the part of Japanese cinéphiles speaks for a long tradition in Japanese film criticism that anticipates the comparable assertions of the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics by some decades.

This chapter seeks to explore the way in which criticism both in the West and Japan has addressed the theme of directorial authorship in Japanese cinema. In the first place, I shall explore how Japanese critics debated and frequently championed the director's status as a film's primary author (*sakka*) during the prewar era. While to a degree this took place in an international context, as critics drew comparisons between Japanese and Western directors, a more profound international cross-fertilisation occurred in the postwar years with the popularisation of theories of directorial authorship via *Cahiers*. Elite Japanese film-makers became key auteurs in the analyses of Western writers, while the discourses advanced in *Cahiers* influenced a new generation of Japanese critics. While a critic such as Yamada Kōichi (who

himself wrote for *Cahiers*) closely echoed the French line, influential figures such as Hasumi Shigehiko and Yoshida Kijū went on to challenge or undermine some of the values and assumptions of traditional auteurism, a process mirrored in a Western context by the seminal work of Noël Burch. Finally, I shall examine how recent academic criticism, notably that of Aaron Gerow, has proposed a modified auteurism in the context of the work of modern Japanese film directors who have courted the status of auteur with a postmodern self-consciousness. In charting these perspectives over time, I hope to show how questions surrounding the status of the director have not only addressed the specific question of film authorship but also helped to illuminate broader questions about the nature of the medium, the workings of the industry and the place of a national cinema in an evolving international context.

Commenting on the critical values espoused in the 1910s and early 1920s by the so-called 'Pure Film Movement', which sought to modernise Japanese cinema, Aaron Gerow observes that 'a version of auteurism was prevalent in film criticism from its first decades', albeit 'one first centered in the screenplay'.¹¹ As Gerow notes elsewhere, it was 'pure film directors like Kaeriyama [Norimasa who] were the first to be accredited, in journals, with authorial status', and 'by 1922, *Kinema junpō* was running a series of feature articles on the new pure film directors'.¹² This coincided with developments in the industry: 'with studios like Shōchiku soon organizing the studio structure into teams led by directors, the groundwork was laid for the Japanese director system'.¹³

By the late 1920s, what Komatsu Hiroshi refers to as 'the auteurist view of the cinema', centred on the director, was becoming established in periodicals such as *Eiga hyōron*. As Komatsu notes:

Monographic studies were devoted not only to European and American directors, but also to some Japanese directors. In 1927 the monthly film magazine *Eiga hyōron* published special issues on Minoru Murata and Kiyohiko Ushihara (March and December respectively), along with monographic studies of Charles Chaplin, Jacques Feyder, Ernst Lubitsch and F.W. Murnau.¹⁴

Through the prewar era *Eiga hyōron* regularly dedicated specific issues to noted directors, including both domestic and foreign talents. Other journals and books essayed a comparable auteurist focus. The Japanese term *sakka*, analogous to ‘author’ or ‘auteur’, was already widely used in these publications to describe the director, and prewar Japanese-language analyses of directors described their work in terms of consistent stylistic traits and thematic concerns.

In 1936, *Eiga hyōron* devoted a special issue to Japanese film directors, with separate essays focusing on major film-makers of the prewar era including Mizoguchi Kenji, Ozu Yasujiro, Yamanaka Sadao, Uchida Tomu, Shimizu Hiroshi and Itami Mansaku. Throughout the text, the terms *sakka* and *eiga sakka* (‘film author’) are used to refer to the chosen directors, and at least one critic explicitly considered the claims of the director to be regarded as author of a film whose authorship might readily be contested. In an article under the somewhat polemical heading ‘The Author of *Older Brother, Younger Sister* is Kimura Sotoji’, Itō Akio discusses the authorship of *Older Brother, Younger Sister/Ani imōto* (1936), an adaptation by director Kimura of a respected short story by Murō Saisei, which had won the Bungei Konwakai Award, a prize established by the Home Ministry, on publication in 1934. Acknowledging the film’s fidelity to its source text, Itō also observes that the screenwriter, Eguchi Matakichi, bears some authorial responsibility but goes on to discuss the film’s relationship to Kimura’s other works as director, and eventually concludes that ‘the author of *Older Brother, Younger Sister* is, after all, Kimura Sotoji.’¹⁵

Likewise, in 1939 Tsumura Hideo structured his book *Film and Critique* primarily around directors, with individual chapters devoted to key Western and Japanese film-makers (along with such actors as Marlene Dietrich and Jean Gabin). Within Japan, Tsumura addresses directors such as Mizoguchi, Yamanaka, Kinugasa Teinosuke and Toyoda Shirō. His essay on Mizoguchi directly compares the director with various contemporaries, seeking to outline the dominant thematic concerns of each: thus, Naruse Mikio is presented as the maker of films about the private lives of artists, Goshō Heinosuke specialises in

films about women and couples in the *shitamachi*, and Mizoguchi himself is the chronicler of the private lives of Gion’s geisha.¹⁶ Later in the essay, Tsumura, in terms strikingly anticipatory of Western postwar auteurist discourse, speaks of ‘the director’s vision’, using the English-derived *katakana* word *bijon*.¹⁷

As Gerow notes, a stress on authorship was early associated with the project to modernise Japanese cinema and, in particular, with the desire to establish a stable text and authorial subject in contrast to the various and shifting texts created by the *benshi* commentary, which overlaid the visual discourse of Japanese silent films.¹⁸ This project of modernisation was to some extent a project to align Japanese cinema with Western norms, and the deliberate evocation of Hollywood and European films in the works of prewar directors such as Ozu and Shimazu Yasujiro relates suggestively to their wider interest in the styles and techniques of Western film. This cosmopolitanism is reflected in some prewar Japanese auteurist criticism, so that, for instance, Tōdō Satoshi, writing in *Eiga shūdan* in 1936, suggests that ‘it is indeed as if Itō Daisuke’s footprints lead us instantly onto Sternberg’s path’ while one may ‘catch the scent of René Clair’ in the work of Itami Mansaku.¹⁹ Already, then, in the prewar era, questions of authorship were being discussed in Japan in a transnational context. In the postwar years, this context was to be deepened as Japanese cinema itself became a transnational object. The discovery of Japanese cinema in the West opened it up as a subject of European and North American auteurist discourse, while, in turn, Western notions of film authorship began to exert an influence both on film criticism and film production in Japan.

POSTWAR JAPANESE CINEMA, THE AUTEUR THEORY AND THE NŪBERU BĀGU

In 1958, Marxist critic Iwasaki Akira wrote a study of Japan’s *eiga sakka* with individual chapters dedicated to twelve established directors (Imai Tadashi, Yoshimura Kōzaburō, Toyoda Shirō, Naruse Mikio, Mizoguchi Kenji, Ichikawa Kon, Kurosawa Akira, Kinoshita Keisuke, Shibuya Minoru, Ozu Yasujiro, Goshō Heinosuke and Uchida Tomu – all, except Mizoguchi,

then still living) plus an account of a number of emerging talents such as Kobayashi Masaki and Nomura Yoshitarō. Iwasaki had been critical of the concept of directorial authorship in the prewar era, and despite this ostensibly auteurist organisation, he explicitly acknowledges the complexities of film authorship:

Discussing the author of a film is always a complex problem. At times, he is really a film artisan producing work at the company's behest, but at other times, pressing his own ideas on the company, he realises his own ambitions. Moreover, in either case, since he writes the scenario or directs, he is expected to stamp his personality everywhere, but for the many film personnel who do not naturally display a very strong individuality, the usual state of things is that this too is not conspicuous. With the exception of such people as Kurosawa Akira, Ozu Yasujiro, Shimizu Hiroshi and Yagi Yasutarō, who obviously are authors maintaining a characteristic personality, the discussion of the film author always encounters this kind of difficulty.²⁰

Acknowledging that film authorship is a contested matter, Iwasaki includes not only directors such as Kurosawa in his list of 'obvious authors' but also a screenwriter, Yagi Yasutarō. Writing in the context of a director noted for his literary adaptations, Toyoda Shirō, he goes on to explore how the issue of authorship might be further complicated by the fact of his films' derivation from a pre-existing literary source.²¹ Iwasaki opens his book by commenting on the increasing fame of Japanese directors in Europe, including not only Kurosawa Akira but also the less widely distributed Imai Tadashi. He notes the attention paid to Imai by French film historian Georges Sadoul, as well as reporting that French film star Gérard Philippe, visiting Japan, had expressed the wish to meet him.²² In a suggestive coincidence, the year 1951, which saw Kurosawa's *Rashomon/Rashōmon* (1950) scoop the Golden Lion at Venice, had also seen the first issue appear of *Cahiers du cinéma*, which, as we have seen, championed a model of film appreciation focused on the creativity and artistic personality of the director.

Although the polemical arguments about directorial authorship made in Europe and North America

during the 1950s and 1960s occurred primarily in the context of Hollywood cinema, Japanese film nevertheless occupied an important position for the *Cahiers* critics. Their attention focused particularly on Mizoguchi, who was not only critically celebrated but would also prove a crucial influence on the later film-making practice of *Cahiers* writers such as Jean-Luc Godard and, especially, Jacques Rivette. Mizoguchi was also a favourite of the critics associated with the British magazine *Movie*, which championed an auteurist approach from its foundation in 1962; its editor, Ian Cameron, was to describe Mizoguchi as 'arguably the greatest of directors'.²³

In both Anglophone and Francophone circles, claims for Mizoguchi's status as auteur were intense and highly felt. Having dismissed a considerable number of other Japanese directors as mere *metteurs en scène*, Rivette wrote that: 'Mizoguchi alone imposes the sense of a specific language and world, answerable only to him'.²⁴ Rivette's commentary suggested an awareness that the Japanese cinema, like that of Hollywood, emerged from a studio system in which creative freedom was not absolute. Thus, he dismissed a number of other Japanese film-makers by aligning them with French directors associated with the so-called *cinéma du papa*: Kurosawa with Claude Autant-Lara, Imai with André Cayatte, Kinugasa with Christian-Jacque.²⁵

Three years after Mizoguchi's death, Eric Rohmer (writing not in *Cahiers* but in *Arts*) eulogised *Ugetsu/Ugetsu monogatari* (1953) in classic humanist terms: 'Like all great works, *Ugetsu* shatters the boundaries between genres and the frontiers between nations You will perceive clearly the common source of our humanity, the crucible from which emerged both the *Odyssey* and the Round Table cycle, works with which *Ugetsu* has troubling analogies'.²⁶ Jean-Luc Godard likewise drew comparisons with acknowledged masterpieces of Western literature: *Ugetsu*, he claimed, 'is *Don Quixote*, *The Odyssey* and *Jude the Obscure* rolled into one'.²⁷

The *Cahiers* critics' admiration for Mizoguchi was shared not only by the *Movie* critics but by Anglo-Saxon writers associated with more conventional journals, and the tactic of championing Mizoguchi by reference to canonical literature can be found in

English-language sources as well as French ones. Eric Rhode's *Sight and Sound* review of *Ugetsu* (released commercially in the UK in 1962, just after taking fourth place in the *Sight and Sound* critics' poll) claims that Mizoguchi is 'generally recognised as one of the masters of the cinema' and compares the director successively with Jacobean drama, Hokusai, Malory (and Tolkien), Ibsen, Ancient Greek theatre and Shakespeare.²⁸ This tactic was followed also by early writers on Ozu, whose films were achieving notice in the West by the time of his death in 1963. Tom Milne, writing a few months earlier, compares the consistency of the director's work with 'those endless Picasso variations on the dove', and approvingly cites Alan Lovell's comparison of Ozu with Jane Austen as artists who 'usually [keep] to [their] little bit of ivory'.²⁹

In addition to evoking figures of the highest stature within (primarily) the Western tradition, these comparisons constitute a powerful assertion of authorship on the part of Mizoguchi and Ozu, since the authorship of a painting or a literary text was, at the time (Roland Barthes was not to publish *The Death of the Author* until 1967), a relatively uncontroversial matter. By comparing Mizoguchi with Hokusai, Ibsen and Shakespeare, Rhode presents him not only as an artist of outstanding mastery but as indisputably the author of the films bearing his name. Indeed, as a statement of authorial consistency Austen's 'bit of ivory' (a figure of speech devised to contrast her own style with the 'strong, manly, spirited sketches' of her nephew Edward) is very close in spirit to Ozu's own description of himself as a restaurateur with a restricted menu: 'I only know how to make tofu Cutlets and other fancy stuff, that's for other directors.'³⁰

These claims for directorial authorship on the part of specific, respected film-makers were more broadly reflected in Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie's book-length history of Japanese cinema. A chapter on directors singled out nine key film-makers either still or recently active (Mizoguchi Kenji had died in 1956; the others were all still living) and discussed the work of each in a medium-length profile. All nine directors eventually enjoyed retrospectives of their work in the West, and although these in some cases took place decades later, Anderson and Richie's role in

canon formation for pre-1960 Japanese cinema cannot be overestimated.

Anderson and Richie's history was published in the year that witnessed the international emergence of the French New Wave, a movement that would decisively foreground the notion of directorial authorship. François Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups*, screened to great acclaim at Cannes in 1959, and Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* were both released in Japan in March 1960.³¹ Both film-makers saw their early film-making practice in part as an extension of the claims they had made in *Cahiers* for directorial authorship. Thus, Anderson and Richie's championship of the director was part of a broader trend in international film criticism and film-making, and although their book predated the general popularisation of auteur theory that emerged in the wake of the *nouvelle vague*, their vocabulary in relation to Japanese cinema was very similar. 'Obviously, as in any film industry, the really outstanding movie is the exception rather than the rule, and – just as obviously – it is usually the responsibility, if not the entire conception of a single man. It is these single men, all over the world, who have created the art of film.'³²

For Eric Cazdyn, Anderson and Richie's perspective typifies a liberal individualist vision of authorship, a 'great man theory', which asserts that 'an individual can rise up and produce greatness within – if not transcend – any structure'.³³ Yet the claims for authorship made by Anderson and Richie on behalf of the Japanese director were grounded in the specific conditions of production in Japan. For the *Cahiers* critics, authorship was perceived primarily through patterns discerned in the films themselves – the 'thematic and/or stylistic consistency' of which Caughie speaks – rather than through the expressed aims of film-makers, or the empirical situation of directors working within a commercial system. The assumptions underlying Anderson's and Richie's argument derived from a more precise industrial context. Japan's studios, they claimed, operated according to a so-called 'director system' rather than a 'producer system' as in the West:

The Japanese film director, as far as having the final say goes, is among the strongest in the world The

director is responsible for everything in a film His duties and responsibilities are greater than those of his foreign counterpart for he must assume some of the duties which elsewhere would be handled by a producer.³⁴

‘The top-line directors,’ they asserted, ‘are generally given a free hand in producing what they want.’ Audiences too, they claimed, understood the importance of the director: ‘Directors in Japan often have a box-office appeal which in the West is usually exercised only by the stars.’³⁵

These claims must be approached with one or two clear caveats. In the first place, ‘the Japanese film director’ as defined by Anderson and Richie is specifically a ‘top-line’ director, and they make no explicit claim for directorial authorship on the part of less prestigious film-makers. Moreover, they overlook different production policies at different studios: the ‘director system’ was associated primarily with Shōchiku, while Tōhō tended to operate according to a ‘producer’s system’ more analogous to the Hollywood model. Moreover, as Hasumi Shigehiko has noted, one facet of the Japanese studio system, in contrast to Hollywood, was that directors ‘consistently used the same staff’,³⁶ so that the apparent coherence of a director’s output may in part be attributed to the collaborative work of a team of personnel. Nevertheless, Anderson and Richie deserve credit for attempting to show how, in Japan, an auteurist discourse could plausibly emerge from conditions of production and reception. The perception of recurrent patterns and motifs in a director’s cinema was explained in the light of the actual degree of responsibility exercised by the director in the creation of films, and the claims of importance being advanced for the director were justified by reference to their prominence in the marketing of films and their ability to secure audiences.

From the vantage point of 1959, this argument was advanced in the context of a commercial studio system at a time when independent production in Japan was minimal. But that year also marked a significant development in studio-based film production within Japan, and in particular at Shōchiku, where Kido Shirō, the influential head of production, broke with

the norms of the traditional apprenticeship system, in a decision that, Maureen Turim suggests, was influenced by Italian neo-realism and the appearance in 1957–8 of early films by directors later associated with the *nouvelle vague*.³⁷ Like the French film-makers, Ōshima was an active film critic, who had harshly attacked the conventions of commercial film-making at Shōchiku’s Ōfuna studios. Kido, Mark Downing Roberts claims, sought ‘to promote intellectuals to the position of director, breaking with the old system of apprenticeship’.³⁸ This break was not, however, decisive, since conventionally trained directors, including those of an older generation, continued to work at Shōchiku; and, indeed, Ōshima and his colleagues had themselves served a traditional apprenticeship as assistant directors at Shōchiku even if they received promotion more rapidly than was the norm. In fact, as Roland Domenig writes: ‘The Japanese Nouvelle Vague was essentially a product of the studios ... whereas the French Nouvelle Vague like many other innovative movements in Europe established itself outside the studio system.’³⁹

Despite this vital distinction, the young directors operating at Shōchiku, who, alongside Ōshima, included Shinoda Masahiro and Yoshida Kijū (aka Yoshishige), quickly earned explicit comparison with their French contemporaries. As early as December 1959, *Eiga hyōron* had published a special edition entitled ‘Japanese Cinema’s New Wave’, and by 1960, another Japanese publication, the *Shūkan yomiuri*, was using the phrase *nūberu bāgu* in conscious homage to the French term and thus in implicit endorsement of an auteurist perspective.⁴⁰ Finding their creative freedom inhibited by studio priorities, the *nūberu bāgu* directors were eventually to leave Shōchiku and work independently. Nevertheless, Shōchiku continued to distribute the films Ōshima made for his own production company, Sōzōsha, while the leading sponsor of art film in late 1960s and 1970s Japan, the Art Theatre Guild, received funding from one of Shōchiku’s major competitors, Tōhō.

If the emergence of the *nūberu bāgu* directors suggests the growing international influence of their French compatriots on the level of film production, the 1960s was also marked by growing connections between

Japanese and French film criticism. Although the work of the *Cahiers* critics did not begin to be translated into Japanese until the late 1960s, it nevertheless exerted an influence on some of the leading Japanese critics of the era, a number of whom were Francophiles and French speakers.

By 1965, *Cahiers* had itself acquired a Japanese contributor. Yamada Kōichi, who had been François Truffaut's interpreter during his visit to Japan in 1963, wrote regularly for the magazine while on a government scholarship in Paris, focusing largely but not exclusively on Japanese cinema, conducting interviews and authoring film reviews and analyses of the work of directors such as Ichikawa Kon and Imamura Shōhei. Yamada's writings in *Cahiers* followed the auteurist line and shared some of the specific mannerisms of early Western auteurist analysis of Japanese cinema. Thus, he evokes canonical Western literature, comparing Kurosawa's *Living/Ikiru* (1952) to Tolstoy, and dismisses 'mere' *metteurs en scène* as opposed to genuine auteurs, so that Ichikawa's cinema is damned with faint praise as possessing 'a perfection which defines itself by the absence of flaws or remarkable qualities', and the director is condemned for accepting subject matter assigned to him by a company 'for which he is nothing but a salaried worker'.⁴¹ At the same time, an early piece on Imamura offered precisely the *difficulty* of generalising about the director's style as evidence that his cinema was 'a powerful and effective means of approaching, studying and analysing reality', in which 'each subject can impose its own style'.⁴² If this acknowledgment hints at a possible incompatibility between the *politique des auteurs* and the neo-realist aesthetic championed by André Bazin, Yamada nevertheless sees Imamura's commitment to realism precisely as the consistent authorial trait of his cinema.

After Yamada's return to Japan, he was to subtitle Truffaut's films and translate his writings. He also continued to author film criticism, with a focus on 'cinematic pleasure' and 'that which is beautiful'.⁴³ He addressed both Western and Japanese film and his focus on the latter spanned canonical auteurs such as Ozu, Mizoguchi and Kurosawa and popular genre filmmakers such as Makino Masahiro and Mori Kazuo. The acceptance of such figures may represent a more

generous evaluation of the talented *metteur en scène* than was implied by Yamada's dismissal of Ichikawa in *Cahiers*. Indeed, in a generally admiring 1977 essay on Makino, Yamada specifically denies the director's status as an auteur in the traditional sense, while nevertheless celebrating the diversity and craftsmanship of his films. After enumerating the huge variety of films in which he worked, from ninja film to melodrama to operetta and musical comedy, Yamada comments:

Rather than calling him a film author, one might say that he would do anything as far as film was concerned; he was a film-obsessed artisan director. Of course he was not a perfectionist who, in order to persist with one theme and one style, would never compromise, but he would manage admirably with whatever subject and under whatever conditions he picked up his camera. He was an expert at being good enough, a master of snapshots.⁴⁴

While this argument, in its willingness to celebrate the skilled artisan, moves generously beyond the relatively restrictive criteria of traditional auteurism, Yamada's focus remains largely on the celebration of individual films and film-makers. Two other critics of his generation, both strongly influenced by the French line, essayed a modified auteurism that challenged some of the assumptions behind notions of directorial authorship and attempted to develop a more extensive theoretical context. These were critic and scholar Hasumi Shigehiko and New Wave filmmaker Yoshida Kijū.

Commenting on his own films in 1969, at the end of his first, most productive decade as a director and shortly after completing his representative work, *Eros Plus Massacre/Eros purasu gyakusatsu* (1970), Yoshida seems explicitly to assert his identity as an auteur in the classic sense of a director whose *oeuvre* displays a thematic consistency: 'When I look back on the past ten years and reflect on the many films I have tried to make as eloquently as possible, I realize that, in the end, I have persistently repeated just one single thing' (Fig. 2.1).⁴⁵ Yet Yoshida challenged a number of the ideological assumptions underlying an auteurist discourse. Under the telling heading, 'A Logic of Self-Negation', he argues against the author's



Fig 2.1 *Eros Plus Massacre/Eros plus gyakusatsu* (Yoshida Kijū, 1970, Gendai eigasha).

authority to define meaning, proposing an ideal of active, collaborative interpretation and understanding on the part of film-maker and audience. Yoshida critically associates the value traditionally placed on personal authorship with the particular conditions of the studio system; in this context of ‘pre-fabricated’ films, he asserts, ‘what earns the greatest respect is the individuality of the filmmaker and a refined directing technique. The director then expects temperate, sensible, and appreciative behaviour from the audience.’⁴⁶

In contrast to this, Yoshida offers an ideal of self-transcendence that opens up a space for creative interaction on the spectator’s part. A new, egalitarian relationship is proposed in which the audience is as much the auteur as the director:

Making a film is an act that transcends me
The audience that receives this film also transcends the ‘film they are made to watch,’ insofar as they themselves create it. Within this new relationship ... the creator and the viewer enter into a free dialogue with one another.⁴⁷

In the light of such comments, it is interesting to reflect on Yoshida’s own in-depth analysis of Ozu, who became the subject of a book-length study by the younger film-maker. Written some three decades after the essay cited above, it both qualifies and sustains

the premises advanced by Yoshida’s early work on authorship. Calling Ozu ‘a lone rebel’,⁴⁸ Yoshida seems to align himself with traditional discourses of directorial individualism but, nevertheless, reads Ozu in the light of his own film theory and, in particular, of his belief that cinema should enable a free dialogue between director and audience. Yoshida’s Ozu seems to anticipate Yoshida’s own desire to avoid imposing meaning on the spectator and to allow an active, imaginative response. Criticising the ending of *A Hen in the Wind/Kaze no naka no mendori* (1948) for its excessive clarity of meaning, Yoshida writes:

Ozu-san did not find it pleasurable when his images sent specific meanings to his viewers. He found it sterile. He was afraid that moving images ... would prevent his viewers from using their unlimited imaginations. He ... was afraid that what his film’s images defined would disturb and distort the real state of the world. This means that he deeply loved cinema, but, at the same time he held strong doubts about it.⁴⁹

The last sentence in particular suggests the influence of Yoshida’s contemporary, Hasumi Shigehiko, also the author of a book on Ozu. A contradictory figure, Hasumi was explicitly indebted to the *Cahiers* critics and a close friend of Truffaut, whose films he championed in Japan. At times, Hasumi’s work seems

more or less traditionally auteurist, striving to identify recurrent motifs and themes in a director's *oeuvre*. For instance, an essay on John Ford demonstrates the persistence of the motif of throwing in the director's work and identifies it as 'a *theme* which, through its repetition, articulates the narrative structure of the films, whatever their genre It is a unifying element, making analogous moments from different films correspond.'⁵⁰ Yet Hasumi was also a critic who, like Yoshida's Ozu, 'held strong doubts' about cinema, and these doubts were expressed in a criticism that endeavoured to emphasise the limitations of the film medium. Ryan Cook contrasts this approach with traditional auteurist assumptions: 'Hasumi would not celebrate ... authorial genius or the perfection of works as objects. What he has valued in directors are the peculiarities, perversions, failings, or handicaps that make films confess their own absurdity.'⁵¹ Cook cites a famous essay on Howard Hawks – significantly, a totemic figure in Anglo-French auteurist discourse – in which Hasumi:

Moves through the oeuvre and finds in film after film an insistent 'back and forth movement' Something displaced is preposterously put back The unique gesture becomes adequate to the general 'absurdity' of cinema ... in relation to which form becomes empty and abstract The eye that thus encounters a Hawks film ... sees past the dualism of thought that pits the classicism of the studio system against the avant-garde: the two are similar as abstractions that, far from denying cinematic absurdity, reflect it in their form.⁵²

Thus, an auteurist analysis is used to undermine auteurism: the perception of recurrent motifs across the body of Hawks's cinema is developed into a claim about the medium as a whole that serves to erase distinctions between the *oeuvres* of different film directors and, indeed, between different production systems. Far from championing the artistic achievement a single director, Hasumi's iconoclastic appropriation of a key *Cahiers* auteur ironically questions the value of cinema as a whole.

Hasumi's book-length study of Ozu, published in Japan in 1983, offers a related perspective. While

Hasumi accepts Ozu's individuality as a film-maker, his primary concern is to use Ozu as a case study to reveal general principles of cinema:

It does not matter whether or not Ozu was an exceptional genius; the problem is not to evaluate his greatness in the history of cinema. The essential thing is ... to discern, even in the moment of the 'filmic experience', what cinema is and what it is not.⁵³

Again, Hasumi uses aspects of traditional auteurist analysis to challenge the premises of auteurism. Like an orthodox auteur study, the book is structured around the discussion of recurrent motifs in Ozu's work, several of which form chapter headings; and Hasumi does not deny that a director's attitudes and worldview may be expressed through his films. But he insists that this kind of 'personal vision' or worldview is less valuable than the degree to which a film-maker's practice may expose the workings of the medium itself:

It is certain that like other filmmakers, Ozu wanted to express his own ideas, his conception of humanity. But just like the act of expressing oneself in words, the act of filming is possible only if one accepts constraints. An idea that one could communicate without highlighting the limits of film language will not have a positive value. Ozu's cinema is the attempt to express these limits.⁵⁴

Hasumi's approach suggests a paradoxical response to auteur theory. Ozu's individuality as a director resides in the way in which his films highlight general properties of the film medium, which (Hasumi implies) are left unacknowledged by other film-makers. Ozu's ideas are valued not for themselves but in so far as they make these properties explicit.

One might compare the project of Noël Burch's classic English-language book, *To the Distant Observer*, which likewise enacts a subversive variant on auteurism in the context of Japanese cinema. Burch too retains a focus on individual directors: indeed, several chapters consist of the detailed formal analysis of the work of particular film-makers, and, as in a traditional auteurist study, Burch seeks to evaluate individual films, dividing them into masterpieces and minor works and locating them within the development of individual directorial

careers. Burch's criteria for excellence, however, differ from those of traditional auteurs in that he aims not to champion the individuality of specific directors, but to demonstrate how they participate in a collective approach to cinema associated with long-standing Japanese aesthetic traditions and presented in specific contrast to the stylistic and structural norms of Western cinema. Writing as a self-confessed 'distant observer', Burch champions Japanese cinema as an oppositional mode to the Hollywood and European cinema he repudiates. It follows that he values particular Japanese films not primarily because they express a personal voice but because they conform to a national artistic tradition. Accordingly, Burch claims that like the work of 'the great [Japanese] poets, painters or sculptors of the past ... Ozu's *oeuvre* is not merely an individual achievement but, more significantly, that of a historical and national collectivity'.⁵⁵ Likewise, Shimizu Hiroshi is acclaimed as 'an admirably representative figure, precisely because of the manner in which he remained so faithful and for so long to what we may regard as a combination of basic Japanese traits' – a statement immediately qualified by Burch's insistence that these traits 'seem to appear in a very large number of Japanese films indeed'.⁵⁶ Thus, while Hasumi seeks to appropriate concepts of directorial authorship to shed light on the principles of cinema as a whole, Burch does so to shed light on the principles of *Japanese* cinema in particular and to highlight its essential difference from that of the West. In doing so, he arguably paved the way for scholars such as Freiberg and Bordwell who, as previously mentioned, continued to focus on specific directors while challenging traditional auteurist principles.

AUTHORSHIP IN MODERN CINEMA

In 1991, a version of *Cahiers du cinéma* commenced publication in Japan. As its name suggested, *Cahiers du Cinéma Japon* incorporated not only translations from the French publication but also original writings in Japanese.⁵⁷ Although the French *Cahiers* was long past its auteurist heyday, the Japanese magazine was edited by a convinced auteurist, Umemoto Yōichi, and it numbered among its writers several men who had been

students of Hasumi Shigehiko at Rikkyō University including aspiring directors such as Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Aoyama Shinji and Shinozaki Makoto.

The Japanese film industry that these young men entered in the latter years of the twentieth century had witnessed a drastic transformation in the conditions of production. The major studios had declined, alongside the 'director's system' that operated within them, yet the emergence of smaller or independent production companies has arguably opened up new spaces for authorial individuality. Satō Tadao writes that 'Japanese cinema has lost the strong support of investment capital, but it has gained more freedom in its production'.⁵⁸ Certainly, the return of Japanese cinema to broad international awareness in the past thirty years has been premised to a substantial degree on the identification and celebration of auteur directors. Even the growing appreciation of Japanese genre cinema such as so-called 'J-horror' has seen directors such as Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Nakata Hideo, Tsukamoto Shinya and Miike Takashi singled out for discussion. The importance ascribed to directors such as Kurosawa is premised mainly on their ability to bring a personal inflection to generic structures: Kurosawa's own comment that he works in genres 'in order to better distance myself from them', is paradigmatic.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, film-makers such as Kore-eda Hirokazu and Kitano Takeshi have been embraced as international auteurs, their work securing screenings at prestigious film festivals, commercial releases in Western countries and DVD releases. While classical Japanese directors such as Mizoguchi in the last years of his career and Kurosawa Akira after *Rashomon* worked in the knowledge that their films would probably be seen in the West as well as in Japan, modern Japanese directors such as Kore-eda and Kitano operate in a context where the status of auteur is an internationally marketable commodity, and potentially one to be self-consciously courted.

Aaron Gerow's book on Kitano proposes a novel version of directorial authorship that reflects suggestively on the situation of modern Japanese film-makers. Discussing a director who is primarily associated with a specific genre, the gangster film, but whose work has also incorporated period drama (*jidaigeki*), low comedy, drama and such generically

unclassifiable works as *Dolls* (2002) and *Takeshis'* (2005), Gerow judges his work to be both a challenge to traditional auteurist assumptions and a model of a new, specifically Japanese brand of authorship. 'Kitano's works', he argues, 'may indeed constitute a single text, not one modelled on the bourgeois novel, as in auteur theory, but on the *manzai* act with its dialogic conflicts.'⁶⁰ For Gerow, Kitano is 'both an auteur and someone who self-consciously critiques auteurism, who pursues his unique worldview and escapes any who would define it.'⁶¹ This latter statement helps to clarify the nature of Kitano's departure from auteurist norms. Mere diversity within the *oeuvre* of a director is no novelty; one might relate the generic variety of Kitano's output to the 'systematic series of oppositions' that Peter Wollen identified several decades ago in the contrast between adventure film and comedy in the work of Howard Hawks, or the 'shifting variations' he found in John Ford.⁶² What sets Kitano apart is not his diversity but his self-consciousness – a quality that marks him out as an archetypal postmodern auteur.

This self-consciousness, and the complexity of Kitano's authorial personality, is expressed in part through the relationship between his various public faces. Kitano, like Charlie Chaplin, Woody Allen or Clint Eastwood in the West, is an auteur whose status as such is defined in part by his presence *in front of the camera* in most of the films he has directed. In modern Japanese cinema, similar assertions of authorship through acting can be seen in a film such as *A Snake of June/Rokugatsu no hebi* (2002), where director Tsukamoto Shin'ya plays the key role of the blackmailer, a character who functions within the narrative as a surrogate 'director'. Equipped with a camera he has used to take incriminating photographs of the heroine, he blackmails her into a series of sexually suggestive actions, contacting her by mobile phone to supply instructions. In these scenes, the off-screen, yet controlling presence of the blackmailer seems to symbolise the control exercised by the filmmaker over his actors, who follow his instructions to create a performance observed and recorded by his camera. Tsukamoto's on-screen presence in this role seems a visible assertion of authorship on his part.

Kitano, however, complicates this by insisting on the distinction between his directorial and actorly personae, designating them with separate names: thus, the credits of his films list the star as 'Beat' Takeshi, while crediting 'Kitano Takeshi' as director. Gerow notes that *Getting Any?/Minna yatteru ka* (1995), which marked a move into slapstick and scatological comedy, was billed in advertisements as the 'début film of Beat Takeshi', and was 'implicitly a critique of auteurist discourses themselves.'⁶³ Even the title of a film such as *Takeshis'* highlights Kitano's challenge to auteurism: not merely 'a Takeshi Kitano film', the film is an explicit commentary on the duality of the actor-director's public persona. Through such tactics, the notion of authorial consistency is self-consciously problematised.

If Kitano complicates notions of authorship through the presentation of multiple on-screen and off-screen personae, Kore-eda does so through homage and allusion. From the beginning of his career in feature film-making, Kore-eda attracted immediate comparisons with the canonical directors of Japanese film and in particular with Ozu: as David Desser writes, 'there have been almost universal invocations of Ozu in reviews of *Maborosi/Maboroshi no hikari* (1995)',⁶⁴ and such comparisons have subsequently been repeated in the context especially of *Nobody Knows/Dare mo shiranai* (2004), *Still Walking/Arutemo arutemo* (2008) and *I Wish/Kiseki* (2011). Kore-eda's cinema frequently makes direct reference to Ozu, such as the shots of industrial chimneys belching smoke in *Nobody Knows* or the static 'pillow shot' of a vase at night and group shots of family members seated around a low table in *Still Walking* (Fig. 2.2). Although Kore-eda seems in many respects the most traditional of modern Japanese directors, his self-conscious redeployment of instantly recognisable motifs from a canonical filmmaker again suggest a postmodern approach.

Discussing these elements of homage, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano argues that Kore-eda situates himself not only into the context of Japanese film but also in that of the canon of international art cinema:

What Kore-eda's film embodies through these acts of cinematic mimicry taps into the popular memory which is not limited to Japan but rather expanded



Fig 2.2 *Still Walking/Aruitemo aruitemo* (Kore-eda Hirokazu, 2008, Cine Quanon).

in the global market as 'Japanese cinema.' Those diversified and mixed 'memories' are displayed throughout the film's diegetic space as if they belong to 'Japan' or 'Japanese cinema.' The ingenuity of Kore-eda's films lies in how they shuffle those 'Japanese' memories with something else, such as the recurring images of hands ... in *Still Walking*, which let us recall other similarly poetic images of hands in cinema, such as the one in Robert Bresson's *A Man Escaped* Those intertextualized images/memories are displayed in the memory-architecture that Kore-eda carefully builds on the already structured knowledge of film history in Japan or elsewhere, and he expresses it as a reproduction of 'home drama,' the popular family melodrama, which was itself made out of the postwar cultural imaginary.⁶⁵

An authorial signature, Wada-Marciano argues, is created through allusion, and the distinctiveness of Kore-eda's cinema is ironically defined through recurrent patterns of intertextuality, of gestures that link his work to that of other cinematic auteurs, both Japanese and foreign, and to a generic classification that emerged from a shared postwar Japanese experience. While the auteur theory proclaimed a doctrine of directorial individuality, a Japanese auteur now ironically identifies himself as such through imitation.

Arguably, these practices are in keeping with long-standing Japanese traditions of the reiteration of motifs and techniques within vernacular art forms and the appropriation of imported motifs. Just as painters of *Nihonga* sustained, while subtly modifying, the styles of classical Japanese painting in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, so too Kore-eda borrows motifs and images from classical Japanese cinema in a fashion characterised by critical awareness but without the irony that generally characterises the postmodern. And just as historical Japanese architects subtly transformed Chinese architectural styles into vernacular ones, so too Kore-eda integrates motifs from international art cinema into a Japanese narrative context.

James Udden has proposed that Taiwanese, South Korean and Japanese film-makers have in recent years jointly developed a pan-Asian film style characterised by long takes and a largely static camera.⁶⁶ Kore-eda's *Maborosi* is offered as the Japanese exemplar of this style. The internationalism of this style has been suggested by the fact that Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien has travelled to Japan to direct a homage to Ozu, *Café Lumière/Kōhī jikō* (2003), but such gestures in fact have operated in both directions and have expanded beyond an Asian context as Japanese directors have begun to work in the West.

In the late twentieth century, the opportunity to direct in the West was restricted to a very limited number of prestige directors, such as Kurosawa Akira and Ōshima Nagisa; indeed, even Kurosawa's attempts to direct in Hollywood proved abortive, despite his international fame, although he did later work in the Soviet Union and subsequently secured partial backing from American interests for projects made in Japan. But by the turn of the millennium, Kitano had made *Brother* (2000) in Los Angeles, while Nakata Hideo directed the US sequel to the remake of his Japanese horror film, *Ring/Ringu* (1999). If this was explicable in terms of his status as originator of the franchise, a few years later, the employment of Kitamura Ryūhei as director of the American Clive Barker adaptation, *The Midnight Meat Train* (2008) was premised on his recognised facility with horror and fantasy genres, but the material had no direct connection to his Japanese films. Likewise, in 2005, Suwa Nobuhiro (who with *H Story* [2001] had self-consciously reworked a classic French film on Japanese themes, *Hiroshima mon Amour*) made *Un couple parfait* in Paris and in French, with a French cast and crew. His subsequent *Yuki et Nina/Yuki to Nina* (2009), shot in both French and Japanese with scenes set in both France and Japan, was made under the acknowledged influence of André Bazin, founder of *Cahiers du cinéma*.⁶⁷ And in *Le lion est mort ce soir* (2017), in an obvious act of homage, Suwa cast Jean-Pierre Léaud, an actor famously associated with Truffaut and Godard, in the lead role.

These instances testify to a globalised cinema in which national boundaries have begun to dissolve. Presenting himself as a Japanese auteur in the twenty-first century, Kore-eda stands self-consciously in relation not only to a local but also to a worldwide cinematic tradition. As this chapter has argued, throughout film history concepts of cinematic authorship in Japan have developed in an international context. Today, perhaps, to be a Japanese *eiga sakka* is also, increasingly, to be an international auteur.

Notes

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- 3 Isolde Standish, *Myth and Masculinity in the Japanese Cinema: Towards a Political Reading of the 'Tragic Hero'* (Richmond, VA: Curzon, 2000), p. 8.
- 4 Freda Freiberg, *Women in Mizoguchi's Films* (Melbourne: Japanese Studies Centre, Monash University, 1981), p. 1.
- 5 David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (London: British Film Institute; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 1.
- 6 Catherine Russell, *The Cinema of Naruse Mikio: Women and Japanese Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. xiii.
- 7 Arthur Nolletti Jr., *The Cinema of Gosho Heinosuke: Laughter through Tears* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), p. 7.
- 8 John Caughie (ed.), *Theories of Authorship* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 9.
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- 12 Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895–1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 162.
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- 15 Itō Akio, 'Ani imōto no sakka ga Kimura Sotoji de aru', *Eiga hyōron* no. 129 (December 1936), p. 59.

- 16 Tsumura Hideo, *Eiga to hihiyō* (Tokyo: Ōyama shoten, 1938), p. 159.
- 17 Ibid., p. 162.
- 18 Gerow, 'Critical Reception', p. 63.
- 19 Tōdō Satoshi, 'Itami Mansaku ron', in Makino Mamoru (ed.), *Senzen eizō riron zasshi shūsei* (Tokyo: Yumani shobō, 1989), p. 24.
- 20 Iwasaki Akira, *Nihon eiga sakka ron* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron-sha, 1958), p. 47.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 47–8.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 6–7.
- 23 Ian Cameron, 'Shin Heike Monogatari', *Movie* 5 (December 1962), p. 36.
- 24 Jacques Rivette, 'Mizoguchi Viewed from Here', trans. Liz Heron, in Jim Hillier (ed.), *Cahiers du Cinéma, the 1950s: Neo-realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 265.
- 25 Ibid., pp. 264–5.
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- 27 Jean-Luc Godard, quoted in Freiberg, *Women in Mizoguchi's Films*, p. 6.
- 28 Eric Rhode, 'Ugetsu Monogatari', *Sight and Sound* vol. 31 no. 2 (Spring 1962), p. 97.
- 29 Tom Milne, 'Flavour of Green Tea over Rice', *Sight and Sound* vol. 32 no. 4 (Autumn 1963), p. 186.
- 30 Ozu Yasujiro, quoted in Mark Schilling, 'Re-examining Yasujiro Ozu on Film', *Japan Times*, 7 December 2013.
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- 32 Anderson and Richie, *The Japanese Film*, p. 350.
- 33 Eric Cazdyn, *The Flash of Capital: Film and Geopolitics in Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 73.
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- 38 Mark Downing Roberts, 'Masumura Yasuzo and the Cinema of Social Consciousness' (PhD thesis, University of California Berkeley, 2007), p. xxvi.
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- 43 Yamada Kōichi, quoted in Kan, 'Japanese Readings', p. 392.
- 44 Yamada Kōichi, *Yamada Kōichi no Nihon eigashi* (Tokyo: Waizu shuppan, 1997), pp. 189–90.
- 45 Yoshida Kijū, 'My Theory of Film: A Logic of Self-Negation', trans. Patrick Noonan, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* no. 22 (December 2010), p. 104.
- 46 Ibid., p. 109.
- 47 Ibid., p. 107.
- 48 Yoshida Kijū, *Ozu's Anti-Cinema*, trans. Daisuke Miyao and Kyoko Hirano (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2003), p. 53.
- 49 Ibid., p. 58.
- 50 Hasumi Shigehiko, 'John Ford, or the Eloquence of Gesture', trans. Adrian Martin, <<http://www.rouge.com.au/7/ford.html>>.
- 51 Ryan Cook, 'An Impaired Eye: Hasumi Shigehiko on Cinema and Stupidity', *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* no. 22 (December 2010), p. 141.
- 52 Ibid., p. 143.
- 53 Hasumi Shiguéhiko, *Yasujirō Ozu*, trans. Nakamura Ryoji and René de Ceccatty (Paris: Éditions de l'Étoile, 1998), p. 24.
- 54 Ibid., p. 151.
- 55 Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in Japanese Cinema* (London: Scholar Press; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 185.
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- 57 See Kan, 'Japanese Readings', pp. 326–7.
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- 65 Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, 'A Dialogue through Memories: Still Walking', *Film Criticism* vol. 35 nos. 2–3 (Winter/Spring 2011), p. 118.
- 66 James Udden, 'The Future of a Luminescent Cloud: Recent Developments in a Pan-Asian Film Style', *Synoptique* no. 10, <www.synoptique.ca/core/en/articles/udden>.
- 67 See Kan, 'Japanese Readings', p. 328.