

**Fists, Youth, and Protest:
Oshima Nagisa's Filmic Rebellion in 1960**

By

Kari L. Shepherdson

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Department of Fine Arts

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

In 1960, as the heated protests against the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty raged on the streets of Tokyo, Japanese director, Oshima Nagisa, produced three films: *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan*. Privileging tales of angry, young rebels, lashing out at oppressive social, economic, and political forces, the films seemed to capture the frustrated feelings of the protesting students on the streets in front of the Diet. Oshima revealed the inspiration the momentous protests (known as the Ampo Struggle) had upon him and his filmic production by referring directly to the protests and the angry demonstrators. However, I argue his films were neither simple anti-authoritarian youth films nor solely concerned with the party politics of the Ampo struggle. Rather, I will explore the ways in which Oshima's films intersect with the several layers of Japanese history and point to the director's pessimism towards the repeated ideological defeat Japanese generations in Japan. I will discuss in this paper the ways in which Oshima sought out the adolescent audience to existentially challenge them to find meaning within themselves by actively critiquing those systems which worked to define their existence: (American) materialism, violence and crime, and participation in left-wing protest politics. I argue that through these films, Oshima sought to inspire the young rebels of Japan to rebel in such a way that they would fracture their perpetual, easily betrayed, dependence upon abstract ideals to lend their life meaning. To unwrap the possible message Oshima intended to convey to the youthful audience, I will use Albert Camus' *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. Camus' text and the controversy among the existential elite in France after its release help to read Oshima's filmic juxtaposition of protests and personal rebellion.

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INTRODUCTION

Oshima's Tales of Frustrated Adolescence

I am independent, and for that reason I am positively full of rebellion. Rebellion is a sure sign of adolescence. You could even say that it is the surest sign. I couldn't possibly stop rebelling yet. When I talk with young people, I think to myself, "They too will soon have an occupation and a family and become like the average intellectually idle Japanese. And I will remain, remain, remain. I have to remain. I must remain in an adolescence that takes the form of independent rebellion."

- Oshima Nagisa, *Reading for Youth* (1969)¹

In 1960, heated demonstrations against the renewal of the U.S. – Japan Security Treaty threw Japan into a state of upheaval unmatched since the end of World War II. The massive left-wing protest, also known as the "Ampo struggle," reached its boiling point in May – June of that year. Amid cries of "Ampo Tōsō" ("Fight Ampo!"), student protesters flooded the streets, waved flags, and fought with the police. During the time the violently charged demonstrations took place and after they were ultimately defeated by the end of the summer, Oshima Nagisa directed three stylistically disparate films: *Cruel Story of Youth* (*Seishun Sankoku Monogatari*), *Graveyard of the Sun* (*Taiyo no Hakaba*),² and *Night and Fog in Japan* (*Nihon no Yoru to Kiri*). Oshima's fresh, visceral style of filmmaking in *Cruel Story of Youth* and *Graveyard of the Sun* and his anti-authoritarian themes of rebellious youth secured the director's popularity among the adolescent market. His films captured the "frustration of adolescence,"³ and the underlying feelings of anger that fueled the socio-political turbulence of 1960. Rupturing the quiet naturalism and humanism of Japanese filmic traditions that came before him, Oshima became a leader in the Japanese New Wave of films.⁴

¹ As included in Oshima Nagisa *Cinema, Censorship and the State: The Writings of Oshima Nagisa, 1956-1978*, Annette Michelson, ed. Dawn Lawson, trans., (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1992) 196.

² *Graveyard of the Sun* is also translated as *Burial of the Sun*. However, according to historian, Wesley Sasaki-Uemura, *Graveyard of the Sun* reflects a more accurate translation of the original Japanese title.

³ Oshima, 197.

⁴ Unlike the New Wave of cinema occurring simultaneously in France and England which were the result of independent directors, Japan's New Wave was commercial in origin. See David Desser *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to Japanese New Wave Cinema*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988) 6.

Oshima, a young filmmaker who had only begun working for Shochiku Studios in 1959, was emblematic of the latest studio trend which endeavored to capture the youth market. Those between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two were the dominant audience. Furthermore, the new generation had grown tired of *jidai-geki*, period dramas dominated by such directors as Kurosawa Akira and Mizoguchi Kenji, and *shomin-geki*, sentimental family dramas popularized by such directors as Ozu Yasujiro. Though masterfully crafted, the films which depicted the melodramatic sword fights, period romances, and quietly naturalistic family crises created by the older generation of humanistic filmmakers no longer attracted the rebellious youth to the theaters. Despite the Oshima's resentment of the studio's control over his work, he was the beneficiary of Shochiku's desire to profit from the youth market by securing a position as director when he was only twenty-seven years old. Like the slightly younger youth generation, Oshima was also nonplussed by the seeming stagnation of Japanese films since the end of the war. Times in Japan had changed. The young director felt that it was imperative that film transform as well to connect with the audience who struggled in contemporary moment with the "status quo".^o

Rebellion was in the air and on the streets. As the protests demonstrated, it was the youth who struggled the most with the status quo as they sought to locate themselves in the social fabric of democratic/ capitalist Japan in 1960. Therefore Oshima, in stark contrast to the nostalgic filmic practices of his predecessors, attempted to cinematically articulate the volatile contemporary moment and chose the frustrated youth themselves as his subject. However, despite the protests which dominated the news in 1960, *Cruel Story of Youth*, released in June, and *Graveyard of the Sun*, released in August, make almost no mention of the demonstrations. Only *Night and Fog in Japan*, released in October when the Ampo demonstrations had already been defeated, calls attention to the students who participated in the protests. Yet even in his last film of that year it was not the right-wing government that Oshima's rebellious youths fight. Rather it is the alienating microcosm of their immediate socio-economic environment that

The movement in Japan was originally called "Shochiku New Wave" and was, according to Annette Michelson, "proposed by an editor of *Weekly Yomiuri*, which published feature articles on *Cruel Story of Youth*." See footnote by Annette Michelson in Oshima Nagisa's *Cinema, Censorship and the State* (56). Some film scholars such as Desser attribute the appointment of new young directors and the subsequent development of the Japanese New Wave to the attempt by the studios to compete with television (8-9). Frustrated by the iron grip the studios had over their directors, many of the New Wave directors like Oshima and Shinoda Masahiro eventually broke from the studios to work independently. Oshima started Sozoshu (his own production company) in 1961. (Oshima, 112).

provokes their anger and frustrations. It seems Oshima recognized the necessity and potential of the youth culture's rebellious nature as they endeavored to assert their subjectivity. As adolescents, they had yet to be fully incorporated into the social fabric of Japan. They had yet to secure jobs and have families. The young rebels still existed on the margins of society and could act as a critical voice within political/social debates at work since the war. Though Oshima embraced the possibilities of adolescence, this is not to say he created celebratory films of youthful rebellion. His tales, in fact, are quite bleak.

To expose the possible message he wished to convey to his youthful audience, the goal of this project is to unwrap Oshima's dark filmic commentary on the socio-political circumstances that oppressed the Japanese youth in 1960. I will argue that Oshima's cinematic pessimism was symptomatic of the director's frustration with the seemingly passive way the new youth generation adopted external political, economic and social systems through which to exorcise their rebellion. The youth of Japan, like those Oshima critically depicted in film, rebelled but not enough. I argue that Oshima warned of a cycle of defeat, begun at the end of the war, by juxtaposing his young rebels against the betrayed and sadly beaten generations that preceded them. Should the next generation fail to actively establish their own subjective voice within the shallow materialism Japan inherited from the U.S. during the Occupation, they also risked inviting their own defeat. In other words, Oshima warned the threat to the youths lay in the same passive acceptance of political and social dogma that betrayed their parents' generation during the war and the youths who came of age during in the late 1940s and early 50s.

Thus far, film scholars have yet to comprehensively discuss *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan* as a collective body of work, indicative of greater social concerns in Japan in 1960. This may be due to the films' distinct lack of stylistic continuity and seemingly disparate subjects. It is not my goal to be reductionist in this analysis, attempting to unify Oshima's films when the director called for each work to be recognized individually. Rather, I intend to reveal the thread of nihilistic, rebellious ideals that link these films to the tumultuous, historical moment of their production. I read Oshima's varied filmic stylings as way for the director to not only subvert the easy categorization of his own work within the studio system but also as a way to formally draw attention to the different

^o Oshima, 38.

manifestations of rebellion at work in contemporary Japan. His jarring, hand-held camera work caught the fast paced, self-absorbed nihilism of bourgeois youth in *Cruel Story of Youth*. His gruesome, slow moving images enhanced the brutal criminality of *Graveyard of the Sun*. His rigid theatrical framing of *Night and Fog in Japan* highlighted the stifled agency of the individual within the Marxist movement. While I will address the differences of these films, the similarities are the primary impetus for this project. Each film, in its own way, focuses upon the struggle of contemporary Japanese youth to find meaning and purpose for living in a society dominated by the empty interests of capitalist bureaucrats. I argue that these films not only intersect with the history of Japan since the end of the war but also exemplify the postwar existentialist debates that occurred concurrently in France. As with the French, the Japanese had enjoyed economic recovery and liberation from a fascist system during the war through democracy and, reciprocally, capitalism. However, as Oshima so cynically conveyed, materialism was not an adequate replacement for values and traditional systems of belief lost at the end of the war. In 1960, it would be up to the young rebels to actively create new values which would lend their lives meaning in such an “unsacrosanct moment of history.”¹ Yet the director did not afford his young viewers a clear solution to the problem of creating values in a seemingly valueless society. To have posited the solution would only encourage following a path rather than creating it for oneself. Rather, as I will discuss throughout this project, he created pessimistic tales of defeat that attempted to initiate a cycle of criticality for the youths as they reconciled their own position with that of the characters on screen. By invoking active viewing, Oshima sought to liberate his young audience from complacent living.

¹ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Anthony Bower, trans., (New York: Random House Inc.,

Cycle of Defeat

Looking back, I think that that day – August 15, 1945, the day on which the Emperor conceded, on the radio, Japan's defeat – was probably the beginning of my adolescence. If so, I would have to say that it was strange adolescence, in the true sense of the word. The reason my adolescence began on the day is that I learned that there was nothing of which one could say that it could never happen. I had been think that adolescence would be more full of hope because my father, who died when I was six, had left me so many books, and by that time I had already read most of the classics. I had even scanned a few pages of *Das Kapital*. According to the knowledge I had gleaned from those books, adolescence was something that began with innocence and hope and ended with heartbreak and frustration. My adolescence, though, began with frustration. There was nothing resembling hope.

- Oshima Nagisa, *Reading for Youth* (1969)^v

Though World War II brought the devastation of many Japanese cities and massive loss of life, the aftermath of the war and American Occupation (1945-1952) was almost as devastating to the spiritual and ideological fabric of Japanese society. Emperor Hirohito's broadcast of Japan's surrender on August 15th, 1945 laid bare the fiction of those values which had unified the national body of Japan in the previous decades. Since the Meiji period (1868-1912), filial piety had extended far beyond the microcosm of the home to help unite Japan as one great family under the patriarchal, spiritual protection of the Emperor. Hirohito's carefully worded renunciation of his divinity, overseen by the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP), secured the destruction of the myth behind the Emperor system and the humanization/ weakening of the Great National Father. The defeat of the Emperor meant the defeat of values he represented. The nation was thrown into a state of ideological confusion.

Inundated for years with anti-U.S. imperialist and anti-Bolshevik propaganda used to perpetuate the ideals of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere during the war, Japan's populace had to then reconcile themselves with the American Occupation, sweeping democratic reforms and the postwar revival of the Japan Communist Party (JCP) and Japan Socialist Party (JSP). During the war, school children had been taught again and again that Americans were "inhuman devils."[^] After Japan's defeat,

[1951] 1991), 21.

^v Oshima Nagisa, as included in *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*, 197.

[^] Sato Tadao, *Currents in Japanese Cinema*, Gregory Barrett, trans., (Tokyo: Kodansha International/ USA Ltd., 1982), 36.

children and adults alike grappled with the reversal of such ideology. Sato Tadao, one of Japan's leading film critics, wrote of the impact seeing American movies had upon him as a young boy during the Occupation. He stated that, "I was able to accept our defeat for the first time because I learned that Americans were not devils, and I realized that Japan had suffered a moral defeat as well."⁹ The beliefs that had, at times, been forcibly enforced during the war seemed to be turned upside down with the arrival of the American Occupation and democratic reforms.

SCAP, and members of the Japanese government such as Yoshida Shigeru who was Prime Minister for much of the Occupation, worried that the ideological vacuum left in the wake of the war and Occupation would leave the Japanese susceptible to negative left-wing influences from the U.S.S.R. and China. According to historian, John Dower, Yoshida claimed the Emperor was still the Great Father which bound together the national body, attempting to reassure the public that Japan was not in state of moral crisis. Yoshida proclaimed that, "there is no distinction between the imperial house and the people. . . . Sovereign and subject are one family. . . . The national polity will not be altered in the slightest degree by the new constitution. It is simply that the old spirit and thoughts of Japan are being expressed in different words in the new constitution."¹⁰ Despite such optimistic reassurances, the fissure in the fiction of a homogeneous nation had already begun. In effect, Japanese politicians and bureaucrats who had held positions of power during the war and scrambled to retain those positions of power afterwards, attempted to efface the fractured identity of the nation. Yet the socio-political fabric of Japan had already been transformed. Historian and cultural theorist, J. Victor Koschmann, described the postwar transition in Japan as that, "from a social imaginary that construes society as a unified, organic totality – indeed, as a "national body" (*kokutai*) – to one that recognizes the impossibility of such a totality."¹¹ The attempt to assure people that the integrity of the national body had been retained spoke only to the emptiness of the ideological rhetoric used by the state. The fiction of a unified nation had already been exposed.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Yoshida Shigeru, as quoted by John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1999), 389.

¹¹ J. Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 12.

The rift between the Emperor and his subjects was only exacerbated when Hirohito's exoneration from wartime responsibility left the people of Japan to bear the burden of guilt and responsibility for Japan's loss. In what Dower described as the "sociology of despair," the Emperor's subjects had to try to reconcile themselves with the, " 'shame and dishonor' of unconditional surrender," what to say to their war dead, and how to live with such a "psychically numbing" loss of purpose.¹¹ As Hirohito continued to enjoy material prosperity, sheltered from his involvement in the war, many Japanese starved, fought for basics for survival on the black market, and faced their feelings of shame and guilt. It seemed that like in their recent time of war when they were asked to sacrifice their homes, jobs, sons and brothers, the people were meant to bear the brunt of suffering while politicians, bureaucrats and the Emperor were left relatively unscathed. Granted, many wartime officials were charged with war crimes under the Occupation. Many, too, were indicted. Some were executed. However, the "reverse course"¹² saw the release of many war criminals, including Class A war criminal, Kishi Nobusuke, who was Prime Minister of Japan between 1957 and 1960.¹³ It seemed that democracy was as much a fallacy as that system which it had replaced. Betrayed by the moral collapse of their symbolic father, the values he represented, the fracturing of a perceived national unity, and the empty promises of the new democratic system, the Japanese consequently faced existence in a moral/ ideological vacuum. Many people from the parent generation of the young rebels who would eventually fight the right-wing government in 1960, passively slipped into despondency.¹⁴ They had become resigned to the idea that no change would actually be effected under the new system.

¹¹ Dower, 104.

¹² The "reverse course," first labeled as such by the Japanese media, refers to the trend towards recanting certain ideals of the "democratizing of Japan" by Occupation forces. Influenced by the Cold War, American forces began to realign themselves with right-wing, conservative elements in Japan. Though many of the politicians and other wartime leaders were initially prohibited from holding public office, they were once again allowed to seek out those positions. In effect, the American Occupation ended up supporting old systems of power as they were in opposition to the threatening left-wing Communist movements taking hold at this time. According to John Dower, the idea of democracy became a "cliché." See John Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 525-526. See also, Gary D. Allinson, *Japan's Postwar History*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997) 53.

¹³ According to Gary D. Allinson, Kishi had been a minister of munitions in General Tojo Hideki's wartime cabinet. It was this position that made him a target for SCAP's war tribunal. See Allinson, *Japan's Postwar History*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 90.

¹⁴ At this point, I refer only to the general pessimism among the working class population of Japan. After the war and after the Occupation, the Japanese intelligentsia continued to actively debate the ways in which one could assert their subjectivity within the less than ideal democratic system. Though I do not specifically address those debates here (as I wish to posit that generation which had been defeated and against which the youth in 1960 also rebelled), I

In the early 1950s, the youth generation who came of age during the Occupation, Oshima's generation, rebelled against the general malaise and despondency which had infected the social fabric of Japan. Many youths vented their frustration and anger through participation in left-wing protest movements. However, as I will later discuss, this generation also felt the sting of defeat as shifting political ideologies and strategies, influenced by Cold-War tensions, betrayed their adopted systems of beliefs. The left-wing opposition to the right-wing government attempted to unify its voice but instead alienated many of those students who had joined the struggle. The movement continued throughout the 1950s but many of those youths who had initially joined the left-wing opposition, eventually dropped out or passively resigned themselves to being pawns in the political tug-of-war in Japan. Floundering in the capitalist boom that saw the recovery of Japan's economy in the 1950s, another generation attempted to reconcile their feelings of guilt, shame and betrayal with the shallow offerings of the new materialism of the country. The cycle of defeat had begun.

will briefly discuss some of those debates later in the section dedicated to the analysis of *Night and Fog in Japan*. For a comprehensive discussion of the immediate postwar positions of Japanese philosophers and political theorists, see Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan*.

Subjectivity, Rebellion, and Oshima's Filmic Existentialism

At some point, however, people stop seeing films. Once they have jobs and families they practically stop seeing films altogether. They say things like, "Oh yes, films. I want to see them, but I don't have the time." I had a television confrontation with a large group of housewives who talked like that. "What do you do about this kind of person?" the moderator asked. I said that I don't make films for people who say they don't see films. It's fine if they don't. What bothers me is the air of intellectual superiority with which they say it. As if to say, "We don't see that sort of thing." I said, "You're lying. You don't see films. In fact, films don't interest you. I'm sure you don't read books either. Other than passively taking in images projected from the nearest television set, you don't absorb a single thing. You've fallen into a state of total intellectual idleness."

- Oshima Nagisa, *Readings for Youth* (1969)¹¹

As the new social imaginary was constructed around the economic prosperity of laissez-faire capitalism, many Japanese endeavored to image themselves after the American materialistic ideal they had seen in imported movies. However, not everyone had benefited from the new prosperity which the government claimed had visited Japan. As people settled into their jobs and had families, they hoped for new cars and the fancy trappings of the domestic sphere. They sought to be incorporated into the new economic image of Japan, one based upon the safety and security of monetary affluence. They were not critical of the newly constructed image of Japanese identity. They dreamed of partaking in it. In a summary of the public's reaction to the economic "miracle" that swept Japan in the 1950s, filmographer, Dennis Washburn, pointed to the impact the new economy had upon the youth generation. He wrote that, "[t]he disparity between economic growth based on supplying goods for other consumer societies and the actual lifestyles of most Japanese was not lost on the general public, and became a source of tension, especially among the younger generation whose desires and expectations were being raised by a government intent on recovery."¹² In effect, the rosy optimism the government attempted to give the average Japanese, only aggravated the new generation that much more as they realized that they, like

¹¹ Oshima, as included in *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*, 195.

¹² Dennis Washburn, "A Story of Cruel Youth: Kon Ichikawa's *Enjo* and the Art of Adapting in 1950s Japan," James Quandt, ed., *Kon Ichikawa*, (Toronto: Cinematheque Ontario, 2001), 156.

many others, had been left out of the new social imaginary. They heard of the economic prosperity but had yet to taste it.

Responding to the “intellectual idleness” he saw manifest in complacent, older generations who perpetuated the new fiction of Japan in 1960 through their desire to simply be absorbed in its economic promises, Oshima sought to give a voice to youthful rebels of Japan whose anger and frustrations contained the potential for active criticism.¹⁸ Moreover, he wanted to create a, “revolution in Japanese film through [his] work and criticism,” and make a “cutting edge of films directed towards the liberation of the Japanese people.”¹⁹ Film, the director argued, could not be “passive and complacent” so he sought to imbue it with the rebellious style and subjects he thought inherent in “adolescence.”²⁰ Adolescents, who have yet to be incorporated into the fabric of the larger social body, still seek out their identities through rebellious action. To tap the rebellion of adolescence, Oshima wanted to infuse his work with the same creative potential as that which the youth possessed through filmic innovations of form and subject. With such grand ambitions, Oshima attempted to make innovative films which eschewed sentimental discontinuity with contemporary social conditions, a trait that many popular, more conservative filmmakers such as Ozu Yasujiro and Kurosawa Akira perpetuated during and after the war.

Oshima not only rebelled against the established styles of the generation of filmmakers who came before him, however. He also targeted younger filmmakers for criticism. Cutting-edge, postwar-modernists like Masumura Yasuzo, the director of “iconoclastic” films like *Kisses* (*Kuchizuke*, 1957) and *Giants and Toys* (*Kyojin to Gangu*, made in partnership with Shirasaka Yoshio in 1958), had great influence over Oshima’s work with their rapid editing, and anti-realist stance. Directors like Masumura had done a great deal for the transformation of film as he eschewed “realism, emotion, and atmosphere,” favoring the depiction of “exaggerated behavior” instead. When attacked by critics, Masumura claimed that realism, though making the viewer aware of the “evils of society,” only encouraged resignation.²¹ Nonetheless, Oshima was critical of Masumura for ignoring the “social realities” of the “human images

¹⁸ Oshima, 195.

¹⁹ Oshima, 14.

²⁰ Oshima, 196.

²¹ Sato, 212.

[within the film] as well as the composition of his audience.”^{yy} Oshima argued that though directors like Masumura and Nakahira greatly transformed film formally, they still needed to progress, “to the level of content, innovating and modernizing as they confront the premodernity of Japanese film and society.”^{yz} Oshima argued that the imperative of film at this crucial stage was to depict people struggling with the status quo, a symptom of the contemporary, postwar condition in which the fiction of Japanese unity and, as parallel, the homogeneity of Japanese film had become transparent. Sex and violence, a more visceral subject matter, brought to light in contemporary settings was the rebellious response to the pre-modern naturalism and quiet nostalgia of directors like Ozu.

According to Oshima, film suffered from its own struggle between the pre-modern and modern, linking it to the seemingly futile attempts of the modern, postwar Japanese populace to reconcile themselves with the pre-modern traditions, such as the Emperor system, that were still being asserted. Film was a perfect medium through which audiences could be liberated from both the complacency of directors who perpetuated old studio formulas, and from their own socio-political malaise. Oshima outlined what it would entail to enact this filmic “revolution,” in the following passage:

To create works that are centered on the vivid desires and actions of people who are grappling with their circumstances, it is of course, necessary to destroy the old naturalist methods. First of all, we must be liberated from the confines of storytelling for its own sake. We must destroy the illusion that films are characterized by flat story-telling of the naturalist novel and affirm that what is cinematic is bold fiction and free structure.^{yt}

Film, Oshima would argue, was only capable of “liberating” the people only if first it was liberated from filmic traditions which compromised its contemporary relevancy. Films such as *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan* which focused upon the rebellious, nihilistic youth who exist on the “margins” of society, stylistically embodied Oshima’s rejection of “naturalist” methods. Furthermore, by infusing the transformation of the filmic medium with transformed content, Oshima was able connect his characters and youthful audience, an audience caught in a system based upon failed value structures, in a way never before achieved.

^{yy} Oshima, 33.

^{yz} Oshima, 34.

^{yt} Oshima, 38.

Annette Michelson summarized Oshima's revolutionary filmic intent in her introduction to the collected writings of Oshima, *Cinema, Censorship and the State: The Writings of Oshima Nagisa, 1956-78*. She argued that Oshima's desire to assert an independent directorial voice to create new films aimed at the "liberation of the people" was a demand for a "cinema of subjectivity" which was "poised between the voiding of a national historical tradition and the adventurism of the left, confronted as well with the rising generation for whom the claims of victimization were becoming meaningless [. . .]"^{yo} She went on to state that to understand Oshima's new notion of cinema is to recognize it as "the *subject of history*" (Michelson's emphasis).^{yi} By this, Michelson may have meant that Oshima's filmic attempt to innovatively assert subjectivity occurred by intersecting with the historical moment during which they were produced. This, in turn, affected both authorial voice and the audience who would consume the product. To shock the audience, to free them of complacent resignation, the contemporary moment in which people struggled to make sense of their daily lives had to be asserted. In other words, to bring subjectivity into the film, to create a link between the audience and characters, and inspire the audience to transcend inaction, the director must firmly locate his images in the contemporary historical moment. This moment, in the case of Oshima's three films of 1960, happened to be one of great cynicism and distrust for the status quo, a year when rebellion and protest had gripped a generation of young people.

The time during which *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan* were produced had an unmistakable impact upon the films. 1960 was the apex of the student protest movement that had been gathering momentum since the early 1950s. The Ampo Struggle mobilized thousands of people in, according to propaganda from the Left that sought to whitewash factional infighting between the JSP and the JCP, a "unified" front against the right wing conservative government's attempt to locate Japan once again in a dangerous military position.^{yv} It was during this heated time that Oshima released *Cruel Story of Youth* (released in June) and was working on *Graveyard of the Sun*

^{yo} Annette Michelson, "Introduction," *Cinema, Censorship, and the State: The Writings of Oshima Nagisa, 1956-1978*, 5.

^{yi} Ibid.

^{yv} Many monologues by conservative, reform leaders of the students in *Night and Fog in Japan* repeatedly asserted the "unity" of the demonstrations. As will be discussed later in this analysis, Oshima effaced this "unity" by drawing out internal ideological and personal conflicts within the movement. For an in-depth critique of the attempt to create a "unified front" by the left, see Packard, *Protest in Tokyo: The Security Crisis of 1960*.

(released in August). In both cases, Oshima related the filmic narrative to the “history” taking place on the streets of Tokyo. Yet, though the films refer to the protests, the characters remain uninvolved in the organized struggle. It was not until October of that year, after the movement’s attempt at political opposition had been defeated, that Oshima released *Night and Fog in Japan*, a film that directly dealt with students of the left who participated in the struggle against the Treaty. In all three films, the protests are brought to light but, even in the case of the overtly political characters of *Night and Fog in Japan*, politics serve as a complicated foil to the problematic social relationships, anger, and guilt felt by the individual. Politics and revolution are elements the three films have in common. Nevertheless, the way in which Oshima handled the historical moment in the films points to a revolutionary ideal which targets the very existence of a cynical youth culture attempting to survive in a contemporary environment defined more by its(Americanized) economic prosperity than by its criticism of such an imaginary. An initial reading of the politically charged atmosphere Oshima posited as backdrops for his films reveals a revolutionary metaphor for a more fundamental revolt, one which attacks the fiction of a traditional value system and reveals the distrust the youths in 1960 had for the older, complacent war-generation. However, the films’ pervasive pessimism hints at a darker, more critical directorial stance on the political machine that deserves greater attention.

Given the complex layering of meaning in *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan*, it is understandable that approaches to the interpretation of these films have varied. Despite the many differing methodologies used, many scholars agree that the underlying history, the protests which were occurring concurrently with production, was greatly influential upon production. Even so, the ways which one may interpret Oshima’s reference to that history is highly debatable. For instance, David Desser, film scholar and author of the seminal text on Japanese New Wave film, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to Japanese New Wave Film*, drew out the cultural/ historical framework for the development of New Wave filmmaking, giving the protest culture of 1960 specific consideration. In the course of outlining the protest history of that year, Desser concluded that Oshima Nagisa’s films, *Cruel Story of Youth* and *Night and Fog in Japan*, possess the “Ampo spirit.”^{1A} However, the way in

^{1A} Desser, 36.

which he applied the phrase remains ambiguous. What is the “Ampo spirit?” How is it made manifest in the films? Did Desser see Oshima’s work from this year as possessing a political message? Or did he apply the phrase in a more abstract manner?

Reconciling such a politically charged historical moment with Oshima’s filmic production in 1960 has led to similar statements from other authors as well. Arguably, Oshima’s reference to the heated political environment in Tokyo contributed to Dana Polan’s reading of the films in a similar way.¹⁹ In a chapter entitled, “Oshima’s Political Art,” Polan conducted a thorough formal analysis of *Night and Fog in Japan* and, like Desser, related the film to the history unfolding in Japan the year of its production. Polan discussed Oshima as a “political filmmaker” who sought innovation through repetition.²⁰ According to Polan, the director’s struggle with the relationship “between the weight of tradition and the potential for cultural innovation” is set against conflict the left-wing activists in the film face in coming to terms with their own pasts to better envision the future.²¹ Yet, as I will later discuss, the characters of *Night and Fog in Japan* fail to envision a better future. Rather, responsibility for past events continues to be displaced. Nonetheless, Polan’s assessment of Oshima as a political filmmaker remains ambiguous. While both Desser and Polan, inspired by the volatile political protest culture occurring at the time Oshima produced his films, have brought key insights to the interpretation of his work, it is unclear how they assigned “politics” to the authorial voice. If Desser and Polan used the word “politics” to indicate Oshima was a political filmmaker who directly involved his projects in (institutionalized) party politics, their position becomes problematic.

As I will argue in this analysis, Oshima firmly established the historical moment of his stylistically diverse, filmic-productions during 1960 to concretely locate his audience in the present. News of the Ampo struggle was prevalent at the time and Oshima’s reference to it was an attempt to capture the audience’s attention through the familiar. However, his address of the protests also served another important purpose: they acted as a foil against which Oshima could posit opposing forms of struggle that dealt with the immediate, individual problem of existing in a cruel world devoid of values

¹⁹ Dana Polan, “Oshima’s Political Art,” *The Political Language of Film and the Avant-Garde*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press),

²⁰ Polan, 101.

beyond that of material acquisition. In other words, I argue that Oshima was not interested in specifically discussing the collective, political activism en vogue during the 1950s and early 1960s but endeavored instead to invite the comparison between such forms of revolutionary agency and other forms of rebellion. In other words, Oshima was not as interested in creating films on politics as he was in investigating the creative possibilities (and potential failures) of rebellious actions.

Oshima was one of many in the postwar generation who saw the need for revolt against traditional systems, be they governmental, symbolic, or social. Even so, his films speak to the failure of such external systems in rectifying the missing beliefs and values within the individual as they are faced daily with problems of money, violence, and immorality. Those systems such as democracy, communism, socialism, or even those represented by the Emperor, may be negatively influenced by issues as large as global politics or as small as an individual seeking to secure their own position of power. Such systems are ideologically flexible which may lead to the betrayal of the individual and their position within that system. I argue that *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan* highlight the differences between the individual “rebellion” and a communal “revolution.” He seems to warn that passivity can occur even when one is in the midst of a revolutionary struggle like Ampo. I argue that called for the continuation of a critical and active voice – a voice of rebellion – within such movements and within the established social/ economic systems. Consequently, I read the “spirit of Ampo” in Oshima’s films as an abstract concept rather than one rooted in a specific reaction to the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. It is not a spirit that necessarily calls for the individual to become involved in party politics. Rather, the “Ampo Spirit” is the imperative of the individual to assert a critical voice against and within failed socio-political systems, to take action in creating *new systems* of belief. Implicit in the need for action is also the need for moral awareness, a self-effacing code of ethics that one must bring to their personal revolt, and a sense a responsibility that is easily forgotten when the individual is absorbed in the institution of collective movements. Though they seem so different on the surface, each of the films Oshima directed in 1960 engages with the struggle of the socially-alienated individual in an isolating society. These films bring into focus the youthful attempt to struggle with the burden of responsibility

¹¹ Ibid.

their existence entails and their attempt to reformulate their own, new moral codes in a postwar Japanese culture where the traditional system of beliefs had been ruptured and yet to be replaced.

Oshima's juxtaposition between the revolution and other possibilities for youthful rebellion to redefine meaning in existence exemplified the postwar, existentialist debates that seized those rebellious youth and intelligentsia who were disillusioned with the failed morality of entrenched institutions of power. The irreparable ideological split between Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus^{rr} that ensued after Camus wrote *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*^{rr} (1951) epitomized this debate. Whereas Sartre argued for the creation of values "through action in time" within the collective, (Marxist) left, Camus saw the imperative to create values within the "individual consciousness" that is "independent of action and history."^{rt} I argue that Oshima brought this debate into filmic reality with *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan*. As the next generation in Japan responded to their "inheritance" of a cruel past wrought with the guilt of militarism, the defeat of their parents' generation, and the destruction of the myth of the Emperor, they also struggled with their own feelings of frustration in defining their existence in contemporary society which seemed devoid of ethical awareness and values. Many Japanese youth expressed their guilt and frustration, their need for rebellion against systems that failed them, through participation in left-wing movements. They acted as the embodiment of Sartrean, collective activism in voicing their opposition to the oppressive, right-wing government led by Prime Minister, Kishi Nobusuke. However, as Oshima's films exposed the director's pessimism towards the successful fulfillment of values in a movement based on abstract ideals which seem to subvert individual agency rather than encourage it, they reflect more of Camus' sentiment than that of Sartre.^{ro}

^{rr} Though Camus is frequently discussed in terms of existentialist movement, he did not consider himself an existentialist. For biographic references to Camus and a summary of his ideological underpinnings, see Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Robert C. Solomon, *From Rationalism to Existentialism: The Existentialists and Their Nineteenth-Century Backgrounds* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1972).

^{rt} Throughout the rest of this text, I will refer to Camus' book only as *The Rebel*.

^{rt} John Cruikshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 121.

^{ro} Camus' work was read in Japan as much of it was translated into Japanese by the mid 1950s. In fact, Oshima made reference to Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) in his article entitled "My Adolescence Began with Defeat" (please see Oshima, *Cinema, Censorship and the State*). I have not a reference to *The Rebel* (translated into Japanese by 1956) specifically in the writings of Oshima I have examined. However, as his other reference to Camus would indicate, Oshima was familiar with the existentialists. Furthermore, I argue throughout this project the

To draw out and better define Oshima's filmic expression of the "Ampo spirit," his expression of rebellion in *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan*, I will use Camus's text, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*⁷¹ to link the moral impetus of revolt for which Camus argued with the struggle of the individual represented in Oshima's films. While Camus and Oshima both argued for individual responsibility in actively creating their own value structures, both also seemed to be unable to posit an effective example that reflected the way in which that endeavor may be fulfilled and maintained. Only one character in *Graveyard of the Sun* seems to cultivate his own system of human values and ethics. Subsequently, he dangerously locates himself in a position which challenges the criminality of his environment. But Oshima did not posit an example of an individual who can *live* by such beliefs. The character he created in *Graveyard of the Sun* ends up *dying* for his values. However, whereas Camus may have been too absorbed in the (impossibly optimistic) ideals which he championed, I argue that Oshima purposefully omitted the means through which the youth of his films would successfully rebel in contemporary society. Oshima did not want to offer an easily appropriated pattern of action that his young audience could then imitate. Instead, I argue that the director's depiction of beaten and defeated characters, juxtaposed against the defeated generations before them, was used to invoke a critical response in his audience which attempted to liberate them from both the complacent viewing of film and passive rebellion in life. Though Sartre and many leaders of the left wing involved in the Ampo protests would have argued that participation in the revolution was the only means to actively assert subjectivity, Oshima's films indicate that the director argued such participation could also lead to action devoid of criticality. Whether they attempted to define existence and meaning in the empty materialism of American capitalism, in the violent slums of Osaka, or within the collective of the Marxist

ways in which Oshima seems to intersect with the ideas of Camus and the need for the self-reflexive critique on the revolution and the nature of rebellion itself. It is not crucial to my project to know whether or not Oshima read *The Rebel*. Camus is a tool with which I attempt to draw out Oshima's rebellious position. As I will argue in this discussion, there are several instances where Oshima and Camus differ in their perception of successful rebellion. I will also discuss how debates such as those occurring in France were also happening in Japan.

⁷¹ Although Camus produced many significant texts before his death in 1960, I refer only to *The Rebel* as it was this text which brought about the debate between Sartre and Camus on the way in which the individual might find meaning in the empty materialism of the postwar age, an age wrought with Cold War rhetoric. I feel it is this debate which possesses the greatest connection with the existentialism on film Oshima created in 1960.

left wing, the youths had to question the very ideological premise upon which such communities were founded.

Throughout the rest of this project, I will investigate the ways in which the complex narratives and filmic stylings of *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan* intersect with several layers of Japanese postwar history and existentialist debates. It is not my intention to reduce his immensely varied films to a cinematic whole, but to draw out the repeated message that Oshima seemed to convey to his young audience: be critical and rebel completely or you, too, will feel the sting of defeat. While addressing the ways in which the director formally conveyed his tales of frustrated youth, I will open up the characters' desire to partake in new, established systems – from the lure of money represented by the new economic social imaginary under capitalism to the established dogma of Marxist communal activism – that speaks to their passive dependence upon external sources to construct purpose and meaning in their lives. I argue that this cycle of dependence acts only as a replacement fiction for that lost in the symbolic body of the Emperor and leads to the young rebels' inevitable failure in actively establishing their subjectivity in contemporary Japan. As I work through each film individually, I will show how Oshima presented a multi-faceted image of youths in rebellion. However, whether depicting middle-class, self-absorbed nihilists, petty *yakuza* hoods, and left-wing activists, Oshima showed that they all attempt to reconcile the microcosm of their frustrated lives with the macrocosm of an alienating contemporary society.

PART ONE

Cruel Story of Youthful Defeat: Desire, Nihilism, and Money in Tokyo

Curious about men? Sex? I'll teach you!
- Kiyoshi, *Cruel Story of Youth*

Cruel Story of Youth, frequently compared to Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (*A bout de souffle*, 1959) with its use of the speeding motorbike, jarring camera movement, and "anti-hero" protagonist's association with crime, also reflects the strong influence of the *taiyozoku* ("sun tribe") literary genre made popular by Ishihara Shintaro's novel, *The Season of the Sun* (*Taiyo no Kisetsu*, 1955). The *taiyozoku* novel, which inspired many directors such as Nakahira Ko (*Crazed Fruit* or *Kuratta Kajitsu*, 1956), Masumura Yasuzo (*Kisses* or *Kuchizuke*, 1957) and Ichikawa Kon (*Punishment Room* or *Shokei no Heya*, 1956), took disaffected, rebellious, bourgeois youth as its subject matter.^{rv} *Cruel Story of Youth*, only the second film in Oshima's oeuvre, continues this theme by focusing on reckless bourgeois youth, fast cars, dark cities spotted with the flicker of neon lights, jazz, petty hoods, and abortion clinics. Nevertheless, it also reflects a stylistic departure from the earlier films. Oshima's hand-held camera work throughout much of *Cruel Story of Youth*, not only served to underscore the psychological tensions of his characters but marked the director's break with the refined, polished techniques of his contemporaries. The result

^{rv} For greater insight into the influences of the "Sun Tribe"/ *taiyozoku* generation in the 1950s, see also Wada Natto, "The 'Sun Tribe' and Their Parents," *Kon Ichikawa*, James Quandt, ed. (Toronto: Cinematheque Ontario, 2001), 191-195.

was a fresh, visceral style of filmmaking which brought the audience into a closer relationship with the young rebels of the screen.

Oshima described *Cruel Story of Youth* in his production plan as a, “story of young people who were only able to show their youthful anger in a perverted way. This distortion drives their adolescence – which could have been beautiful – into cruel defeat.”⁷⁸ As Oshima’s statement and the title of the film suggest, this tempestuous story of two young lovers, Mako and Kiyoshi, is tainted with failure and tragedy which addresses the larger social concerns of rebellious youth attempting to reconcile themselves with the moral complacency on the moneyed streets of Tokyo. The lovers are torn by their desire to partake in the material affluence around them and their resentment of it which is fueled by their exclusion. To vent their frustrations, they nihilistically occupy themselves in petty-extortion scams.⁷⁹ However, their destructive love affair and exploits eventually lead to their ultimate defeat – death – as they prove to be incapable of fully destroying their dependence and desire for security the material affluence that Tokyo offers. In Oshima’s first film of 1960, the director depicted his youthful protagonists in a vicious cycle of violence and destruction. Their failure to find meaning within themselves is emblematic of the critical position Oshima took throughout the rest of his filmic production in 1960: the new generation must fully destroy their passive desire to find their missing purpose for living in external systems such as that offered by the Americanized capitalist economy otherwise the youths of Japan will succumb to the same stunning defeat as the generations before them.

The lovers meet one night when Mako and her friend, Yoko, hitch a ride home with a middle-aged business man. After dropping Yoko at her destination, the businessman attempts to rape Mako outside of a seedy hotel rather than take her home. Fortunately, Kiyoshi appears, beats up the aggressor,

⁷⁸ Oshima Nagisa, “Oshima on Oshima,” as included by Max Tessier in “Oshima Nagisa, or the Battered Energy of Desire,” Arthur Noletti, Jr. and David Desser eds. *Reframing Japanese Cinema: Authorship, Genre, History*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 89.

⁷⁹ Here, I use the word “nihilism” in its most rudimentary sense (the disbelief in prevalent morality, politics, laws or religious institutions). As I am interested in investigating the revolutionary spirit of Oshima’s films, I realize the close relationship between nihilism and revolt. For a more in-depth analysis of nihilism and its relationship to revolution, please see Eugene (Fr. Seraphin) Rose, *Nihilism: The Root of the Revolution of the Modern Age* (Forestville, California: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1995). For an in depth reading of the link between nihilism and revolution see Hermann Rauschning, *Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West*, (New York: Alliance Book Corporation; Longman’s, Green and Co., 1939). For the philosophical underpinnings of nihilism, see Randall Havas, *Nietzsche’s Genealogy: Nihilism and the Will to Knowledge*, (Ithaca, New York and London:

and saves her. The businessman, in an attempt to stave off possible police involvement, offers Kiyoshi money. Kiyoshi chases the would-be attacker away but the money, fallen from the businessman's hands, remains. These initial scenes not only introduce the characters and establish the licentious world in which Mako and Kiyoshi live, but also set up a cycle of violence that plays throughout the rest of the film. Unlike the sort of productive and protective violence Kiyoshi unleashes upon the businessman the first night he meets Mako, much of the violence throughout the rest of the film is directed towards victimizing others. At first, there appears to be no real explanation for their actions except that their destructive activities appear to satisfy their nihilistic, rebellious urges.

Eventually, Kiyoshi and Mako develop a "scam" which replays the scene from the first night. However, lacking the innocence of accident that marked the first incident, the lovers look to set up other weak-willed businessmen or, "suckers," who wouldn't mind the favors of a young girl. Through this scam, Kiyoshi, who follows on a motorbike the car in which Mako secures her ride, reenacts her salvation while extorting money from the victim of their ploy. The repeated rape attempts by moneyed businessmen of a young high school student like Mako, set against a backdrop of American material culture speaks to the moral void in which Kiyoshi and his lover are left to fend. This is not to say that Kiyoshi and Mako are mere victims of an amoral world, attempting to survive by turning the violence used against them upon their possible attackers: rather, they are agents who choose to direct their nihilistic actions, their adolescent anger, towards the older generation, the businessmen, who lack not only moral fortitude but also the strength to face their guilt by attempting to buy off Kiyoshi's silence. Their scam and its violent overtones, ideologically ratified by the youths as invoking a form of justice against those who would take advantage of a young girl, is revealed to be driven by the same monetary interests as the "suckers" they con. What begins with the mobilization of violence for an act of salvation, transforms into the use of violent means to achieve material ends. The markers of materialism, represented by large American cars, wads of cash the businessmen carry, the stolen motorbike Kiyoshi rides, and vacations on the beach are in sharp contrast to the "hovel" apartment where Kiyoshi and Mako

Cornell University Press, 1995). I will further address Oshima's apparent philosophical position on nihilism and its relationship to Camus' position later in this discussion.

live. Furthermore, materialism becomes an insufficient replacement for lost values and eventually leads to Kiyoshi and Mako's death.

The Fiction of Dependence

The violence which Kiyoshi and Mako seek to inflict upon the businessmen is symptomatic of their conflicted desire to be absorbed in the new socio-economic fabric of Japan. They attempt to create meaning in their lives by targeting those who represent what they lack: money. Their rebellion is distorted, however as they resort to violence not as a way to criticize the system but as a way to get the money they desire. Their ultimate failure is a result of their dependence upon the social imaginary – by 1960, defined through the economic prosperity of Japan – which came to replace the idea of the homogeneous nation united under the body of the Emperor. In effect, Mako and Kiyoshi seek to replace the symbolic body of Hirohito, to fill the void of those values he represented lost after the war. However, their failure comes because they sacrifice active criticism of the construction of such imaginaries for the self-absorbed nihilism that brings them into closer contact with the money they are denied. They desire a place in the community of new materialism of Japan rather than question the fallacy of such a construction in the first place. I argue that Mako and Kiyoshi perpetuate the processes of an old system of beliefs because the Emperor, though stripped of his authority and a continuous reminder of Japan's moral defeat in the war, was kept on as a (now empty) symbol of the state and, by proxy, a reminder of the individual's submission to the good of the nation. The retention of Emperor Hirohito served to remind people of the weakened Father and their need to replace him with another unifying system of

beliefs. The two young rebels fail because they don't fight the system. They fight to be in it. Such systems, so similar to those established during the Meiji Restoration to affirm the power of the imperial state, rely upon the same blind faith to sustain them. If challenged by a struggle for power within that system, as with the Emperor's attempt to retain power after the war rather than step down, the veneer that sustains those systems begins to crumble, leaving the individual betrayed once more. Before Mako and Kiyoshi could rebel successfully they needed to critically address the source of the cycle of defeat: the passive dependence upon social, political, and economic systems to provide their lives with meaning. In other words, they needed to fully destroy the symbolic Father of Japan and to criticize such cycles of dependence before they could find purpose to live by.

Psychoanalyst, Doi Takeo, discussed the implications of this socio-political Oedipal paradigm in his (problematic) study of Japanese behavior, *The Anatomy of Dependence* (1971).⁴⁰ According to Doi, the new generation was left without a system of values. Denied their "inheritance," values by which they could live, they consequently developed a distrust of the older generation.⁴¹ This distrust led to an attack on the remnants of the patriarchal system that were still in place. In the macrocosm of Japanese society, this generational war manifested itself in the evolution of student organizations like the Zengakuren and the budding protest movements that started early in the 1950s that offered a communal voice of opposition against the right-wing government. Other youths, according to Doi "dropped out" of society, looking for a replacement for lost values. As they rebelled against traditional, paternal systems of belief which had been evacuated of meaning after Japan's defeat, they simultaneously sought a "stronger father" to replace both that in the domestic sphere which had been defeated and weakened to the point where his authority had ceased to exist and the highest symbol of patriarchal authority, the Emperor, who was proven to be fallible.⁴²

The need for a "replacement father," one who could fill the void of values, hints at that which acts as the foundation for Doi's analysis on Japanese behavior: *amae* or, simply translated, dependence. While I agree with Doi's assessment of the psychological postwar condition, his use of the term *amae* as a

⁴⁰ Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, John Bester, trans. (Tokyo and New York: Kodansha International, [1971] 2001).

⁴¹ Doi, 142-152.

foundation for understanding both historical and contemporary Japanese behavior is extremely essentializing. Rather than use his concept of *amae* as a means to unwrap the Japanese mind as he did (which locates the importance of the “replacement father” *within* the individual), I argue that his construct is emblematic of the complacent desire to seek out values in the external rather than within the self. In other words, I argue that the “replacement father” is merely the substitution of yet another fiction for another. Furthermore, it was against the repetition of such mistakes that Oshima warned his audience in 1960. Nonetheless, Doi’s idea is useful in outlining the inevitability of Mako and Kiyoshi’s defeat in *Cruel Story of Youth* as they were unable to transcend new incarnations of the same old patriarchal system, disguised in the garb of American capitalism. As I will discuss, their complacent dependence upon fragile external systems, based upon governmental reports of national economic prosperity in which they wanted to include themselves, only lead to their failure and death. Doi would argue that the youths, faced with existence in a society where the traditional channels of *amae* had been ruptured by defeat in the war and without a clearly demarcated cause through which to focus their frustrated energies, focused their violent revolutionary attack upon the older generation. This allowed them to exorcise their feelings of guilt in perpetuating the destruction of the father (what Freud refers to as “patricide” in his Oedipal paradigm) and to hold their “old fathers” accountable for failure to provide an environment in which *amae* could continue and the failure to provide a system of values. However, I argue that the system of *amae* ruptured after the war because it was only a facet/ symptom of the kind of imperial, fictional values which maintained the Emperor as the Great Father and spiritual focus of the state. Oshima’s films reveal the director’s rebellion against the perpetuation of these old systems of belief. His films indicate that it is not enough to destroy old patriarchal systems to make way for the new from which one can inherit a new system of beliefs. Rather, his films advocate the *total* annihilation of the Father, the *total* annihilation of dependence upon outside systems to create and replace the void where old, empty values once were. The responsibility of the individual is to create their own code of ethics and system of morality. To do otherwise is to inevitably succumb to further betrayal and defeat.

⁴⁷ Doi, 155.

The cruel defeat which befalls the young protagonists in *Cruel Story of Youth* is directly tied to their inability to cultivate their own values. They remain caught in the vicious cycle of dependence upon external forces to dictate meaning in their life. In the opening scene, Mako and Yoko seek a ride home in one of the comfortable, big cars driven by the businessmen. The selection of the right car has only to do with the direction in which the driver is heading. The reliability and moral trustworthiness of the man they presume upon is not taken into consideration. Though the trains are still running, they seek out the comforts and privilege the businessmen have to offer. The businessman, a symbol of the new (American) material prosperity of postwar Japan, becomes a potential replacement for the old values. However, rather than drive Mako home and fulfill her idealistic desire to simply enjoy the comforts of a big American car, to participate in the image of economic prosperity, he betrays her. He drives her instead to a seedy hotel off a dark alley where he reveals the very real price – sex – she must pay to be included in that imaginary. The subsequent scams Kiyoshi and Mako act out are outlets for their distrustful feelings of the businessmen and the system. Through their violent acts, each attempts to reconcile their conflicted feelings of desire to be included in the system and their resentment towards it. Mako attempts to cleanse the guilt she feels from the near-rape and betrayal of her youthful ideal represented by the licentious actions of the businessmen. Kiyoshi is resentful of the monetary power that the businessmen represent and the guilt he feels in wanting to participate in the same power structure. He wants the money but to exorcise his guilt in wanting, he vents upon those who represent that which he is denied. Therefore, he assaults them under the superficial pretenses of his own value code of “giving them what they deserve.” They are suckers and want to prey upon a young girl. They deserve to be beaten and robbed.

Distorted Passivity and Primal Drives

Though the violence Kiyoshi and Mako vent upon the businessmen seems to point to a simple anti-establishment tale of frustrated youths, Oshima complicated his film by inserting other layers of violence as well. In fact, the distortion and perversion of Mako and Kiyoshi's youthful anger to which Oshima referred in his production notes for the film does not so much occur in the violence they unleash upon the businessmen but in that aggression Kiyoshi directs toward Mako. By incorporating this second layer of violence, Oshima began to reveal the characters' passivity and dark primal drives which eventually led to the failure of their rebellion and their ultimate destruction.

At the beginning of the film, it appeared that Kiyoshi possessed the potential to be a different "replacement father," a moral foil to the amoral consumer society in which Mako so desperately desired inclusion. After their first meeting when he saves Mako from her would-be rapist, he becomes her protector and seems to uphold a certain value system, a moral code, that otherwise seems to be lacking in the society around them. However, further problematizing such a system of dependence, Oshima fractured that possibility soon after their initial meeting. While Oshima had posited Kiyoshi early in the film as Mako's "savior," the student paradoxically becomes her only real threat as well. On an "island" of floating logs, under the bright sunlight of the day after Mako's salvation from the perverted intentions of the businessman, Kiyoshi forces her to submit to his sexual advances. He does this, as he explains to Mako after the incident, not because he was angry at her, *per se*, but simply "at everything." The destructive sexual energies he unleashes upon Mako erase the moral potential of his intervention the night before. This scene, however, not only reveals the moral failings of Kiyoshi as he succumbs to his violent urges, but reveals a great deal about Mako as well. Many film scholars such as Desser to Maureen Turim⁴⁷ have read the scene as one depicting rape. However, Oshima included subtle nuances to the scene which speak to a more complex relationship between the characters. Kiyoshi forces his sexual intent by slapping Mako and throwing her in the water. She calls out for help, claiming she cannot swim. However, her victimization is blurred by her unconvincing helplessness in the water. In this scene, she seems to feign helplessness so that her inevitable (passive) submission to Kiyoshi will be without the

⁴⁷ See Maureen Turim, *The Films of Oshima Nagisa: Images of a Japanese Iconoclast*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), 36.

consequent acknowledgment of the possible guilt and shame resultant of that action.⁴⁴ However, soon after, Kiyoshi repeats a similar cycle of violence rooted in salvation and victimization. In the later scene, Oshima presents a far clearer representation of rape than before.

The scene begins when Mako, hoping to meet with Kiyoshi who has failed to call her in the week following their first date/ rape, is left outside a bar by Yoko and Kiyoshi's friend who decide to leave. As Mako begins walking down the dark street to depart, she is targeted by a couple of the local thugs who had seen her the previous week when she was at the same establishment with Kiyoshi. Passively, she agrees to drink and dance with them. Kiyoshi finally gets to the bar to take her away, inciting the anger of the hoods who make their money prostituting women and who had targeted Mako as a possible new recruit. Kiyoshi fights for her, eventually agreeing to a pay off to keep them away from her. However, once they leave, Kiyoshi throws Mako to the ground and attacks her again. Unlike the first scene which took place in full daylight, the Oshima filmed this scene at night. The difference works to convey the darker nature of the scene. . In this later scene, Mako does not passively submit. She is forcibly taken. Also unlike the first scene where Mako only worries what Kiyoshi "must think of her" after their first sexual encounter, the second scene shows Mako angrily asking why Kiyoshi does such things. She even threatens to leave him. Here, it would seem Mako begins to actively challenge the situation in which she finds herself. However, once Kiyoshi tells her that he loves her, she again submits and passively embraces him.

Oshima emphasized these rape scenes and the destructive effects of Kiyoshi's actions by switching from the jarring, hand-held camera style that sets the anxious pacing for the rest of the film to a slow-panning camera movement that juxtaposes base material such as dirt, mud and logs with images that linger on the consequences of Kiyoshi's violent actions. In the first rape scene, the camera slowly and deliberately tracks along the mass of floating logs, to reveal, eventually, the violated length of Mako's body. In the second rape incident, Oshima repeated this filmic strategy by panning the ground to reveal the faces of the two youths in the moments immediately following Mako's attack. By breaking the pace

⁴⁴ Given the violence of this scene, I realize that it is extremely risky to read Kiyoshi's actions as anything other than rape. However, it is not my intention to dismiss the grave circumstances in which Mako found herself within this

of the rest of the film in these key scenes, Oshima systematically marked Mako's body as the target of Kiyoshi's distorted frustrations, and symbolically relates these actions to that which is most base and visceral. Through the expression of his primitive drives, Kiyoshi loses what makes him human: his self-conscious reflexivity. Camus addressed the necessity for self-consciousness in *The Rebel*. Camus did not subscribe to Hegel's theories on historical and cultural dependence, but he used the nineteenth-century philosopher to discuss the need for the individual's conscious awareness. According to Camus, Hegel argued that which separates man from animals is the knowledge of the self. Camus, summarizing Hegel's theory, wrote: "To act is to destroy in order to give birth to the spiritual reality of consciousness. But to destroy an object unconsciously, as meat is destroyed, for example, is a purely an animal activity. To consume is not yet to be conscious. Desire for consciousness must be directed towards something other than unconscious nature."⁴⁰ By juxtaposing the consequences of Kiyoshi's actions with dirt, mud, logs, and the darkness of the street, Oshima threw light upon the privileging of primitive rage the youth enacts. Kiyoshi's actions are seemingly without reason except to vent an anger and frustration that would otherwise have no outlet through the productive awareness of the self.

In separating reason from that which is visceral and base, Oshima pointed to the inability of Kiyoshi to direct his frustrations through a moral center. He had nothing to believe in and does not seek out a way to critically activate his subjectivity other than through aimless nihilism. When he fails to reason, he slips instead into unleashing his frustrations and desires through his most primal drives. One reason for this is that Kiyoshi recognizes his own lack reflected in Mako's desires for participation in materialism. Without the temperance of a value system, he is left to vent his frustrations upon the body of that person who reminds him of his deficiency to replace old moral codes. Furthermore, Mako has access to the privileged world of the moneyed class by proxy of her sex or her sexual potential. She can ride in the cars and be treated to the cocktails and favors that are accessed through money. Oshima clearly marks out the monetary "lack" by which Kiyoshi suffers. Kiyoshi is without money, a marker of successful "living" in the postwar, capitalist society of Tokyo. This is made abundantly clear by the

scene. Rather, I wish to call attention to the way Oshima pointed to her submission rather than Kiyoshi's overt brutality. I'm sure many viewers of this film will tend to disagree with me.

⁴⁰ Camus, 138.

marked difference between the glittering city spaces dominated by large, gleaming American cars and the dirty, tiny apartment in which Kiyoshi lives. Even the scams Kiyoshi and Mako act out reveal Kiyoshi's inability to participate in privileges of material culture. He is left on the "outside," riding his motorcycle in pursuit while Mako enjoys the cars and money from an insider's perspective. She rides in the cars as she baits the prospective "sucker" with the potential of sex.

Turim began to address this aspect of Mako's relationship with the older men of the film when she argued that such a relationship, "links desire and sexuality to system of perverse exchange, where the need for money makes the young subject to unequal power relations."⁴¹ Such power relations (money for sex) is a powerful reminder of the rampant prostitution of Occupied Japan where prostitutes (*panpan*) were able to afford to wear the latest in Western fashions by exchanging their sexual favors to occupational GIs.⁴² Their modern moneyed appearance was in stark contrast to the poverty marked by those who still wore their *monpe* pantaloons. Mako, in her stylish western clothes, brings the association of the "money exchange" to even greater bear in the film. Turim also applied her argument of the close relationship between sex, money and exchange to the relationship between Kiyoshi and the older woman with whom he has an on-again-off-again affair. Though they both effectively prostitute themselves to find entrance into the new socio-economic identity of Japan, Kiyoshi is "stuck with a cheap chick" (as he refers to the older woman early in the film) and may feel the frustrated limitations of his gendered position. In other words, Mako has greater potential to gain entry into the privileged world of money than he. As Turim did not offer a reason for the repeated rapes of Mako, if one reads Mako as symbolizing that which Kiyoshi lacks then a possible motive for the violence he unleashes upon her becomes apparent.

Mako and Kiyoshi's primal nihilism and passivity eventually culminate in their death. After being arrested and released for their scams, Kiyoshi and Mako silently walk down the twilight-lit streets of the city. During the course of their brief incarceration, the local detective reveals the monetary drive behind the scams which evacuates the "they deserve it" moral system Kiyoshi had adopted of any real meaning. Kiyoshi, faced with his own moral failure and resigned to his inability to "protect" Mako from the forces of the outside world, leaves her. However, in a cruel twist of fate, it is his later refusal to tell

the local thugs they “can have her” for bringing trouble down on the gang that leads to his death. Oshima, however, did not take the opportunity here to redeem Kiyoshi by showing him in a moment when he asserts a sense of values. He simply says nothing. He remains passive. As a result, the thugs take him to a deserted lot where they beat and strangle him to death.

After showing the couple’s parting on the street, Oshima then cuts back and forth between their respective situations to maintain the link between the two. Mako, after being left on the street alone by Kiyoshi, walks as if in a trance, down the dark city street. She is “cut in half” by the framing of the camera which cleaves her image on the right side of the screen, fracturing the unity of her filmic body. The blurred images of city lights and the darkness of the night comprise the rest of the frame. As all other background city noises are obscured, the only sound the audience hears is the echoing sound of her heeled shoes. Oshima isolated her within the action of the city and also showed the “completion” of her body/self as being comprised by that of the lights and passing cars on the glittering streets of Tokyo. Almost hit by a car in a crosswalk, she automatically gets in, a reminder of the many cars in which she has ridden in the past. Abandoned and betrayed by Kiyoshi, the one who through whom she had enjoyed purpose of living, she resorts to her old habits. In so mindlessly getting in the car, she not only demonstrates old behavioral patterns of reliance/ dependence upon the moneyed older generation which is comprised of only monetary authority not moral authority but also reveals her inability to conceive of her own potential to create meaning for herself. Faced with Kiyoshi’s absence and the guilt of her abandonment/ betrayal, she has no direction and slips into her old behavioral pattern. She is unable to transcend the old, fallible system of dependence. She is left to fend for herself with no promise of salvation by Kiyoshi. A white-shirted youth who speeds by the car like a ghostly blur on his motorcycle, a grim reminder of Kiyoshi’s absence, only serves to imbed that reality even further. While Mako rides in the car, the thugs mercilessly beat Kiyoshi until his body submits completely. As Kiyoshi gasps his last breath between bloodied lips, Mako suddenly spins around in the car as though having a premonition of his death. She begs the car driver to stop but he hesitates too long. In an act of desperation, she impatiently opens the door to jump out but her shoe catches in the car, and she is dragged to her death.

⁴¹ Turim, 41.

Oshima, as he did earlier in the film, revealed the mangled form of Mako's body by slowly using the camera to pan along the ground to reveal her lifeless form. By connecting the senseless acts of rape Kiyoshi had committed earlier to Mako's gruesome death, Oshima effectively pointed to the tragic consequence of Mako's failure to redirect her energies in a way that transcends destructive impulse and enacts the creative potential of her rebellious frustrations. The final frame of *Cruel Story of Youth* splits to show the lovers' bloodied, lifeless faces. In an interesting reading of the end of this film, Turim referred to Mako and Kiyoshi's demise as an "involuntary double suicide."^{4v} I agree with Turim's assessment. To take her reading further, however, I argue that like the double suicide narratives popularized during the Edo period which were a form of passive social protest against restrictive social hierarchies, Mako and Kiyoshi died because they did not actively rebel against those conditions which led to their deaths. Rather, they succumbed. Their defeat was almost assured as they were unable to critically challenge existing systems in order to establish a new system of beliefs through which they could reconcile their existence. Their rebellion, entangled in their frustrated desire to partake in the material affluence they saw around them, became twisted, inevitably leading to their ultimate defeat in life: death.

Differencing Rebellion and Revolution: Existentialism in *Cruel Story of Youth*

Given the volatile events that were unfolding as the Ampo demonstrations reached their apex in May-June 1960, it is little wonder that Oshima brought such a heated and violent film to the screen at this time. While the film was in production, Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke used police to forcibly oust opposition members from parliament and ratified the treaty on May 19. Enraged, many protesters saw his

^{4v} Dower, 123-132.

^{4A} Turim, 42. Double suicide was a romantic narrative ideal popularized (before its censure) in the Edo period through *bunraku* puppet theater and in *kabuki* theater. Called *shinjuu*, narratives dealing with such subject matter usually centered around two lovers who, due to the strict dictates of Edo social hierarchies, could not be together in

actions as a testament to the right-wing's return to prewar, fascist politics.⁴⁹ By the time *Cruel Story of Youth* was released, the protests had reached their boiling point. The presence of violence and the anxiety of the protagonists' failed rebellion in the film seem to parallel the heated feelings of revolution and possible defeat that dominated Tokyo during the demonstrations. However, besides *emotionally* linking the film to the violent, revolutionary events unfolding in Tokyo, Oshima specifically referred to the historical moment as well. In fact, by representing the political protests which occurred while he was producing his film, Oshima introduced one more level of violence which further complicates reading the intended message the director wished to convey.

Oshima followed the initial act of violence when Kiyoshi originally intervenes to save Mako from her potential rapist, with original newsreel footage of recent student riots in Korea which had, by April 27, 1960, deposed Syngman Rhee from power. The footage shows a massive mob of students running through the streets as the police attempt to control what is called an "emergency." It then shows a burning truck and more scenes of the riot. The images, run through a blue filter, seem strangely out of place given the way Oshima used full color to film the action in the rest of the film. The flash of the neon signs, and the gleam of the business man's car in the previous scene seem almost seem garish in contrast to the starkly serious footage of a fully realized, violent political revolution. Oshima shows the footage only at this moment in the film and does not make mention of it before or after. It is inserted very early in the film and left to create an unspoken differentiation between the sort of action occurring in Korea and the action taking place in the rest of the film, a difference that the audience is meant to interpret for themselves.

The difference and impact of the newsreel is heightened by a quick cut to a sunny street scene where Mako nonchalantly waits for Kiyoshi to arrive. The couple seems distant from the sort of violent political activism depicted in the newsreel footage. This becomes even more apparent as an Ampo demonstration takes place on the street where they chat. While the protest unfolds in the background, Kiyoshi grills Mako on her curiosity about sex, men and thrills. Mako coolly sips a drink as the youths

life so chose to die together. It was eventually banned by the shogunate as lovers began emulating the plays, creating a disturbing trend.

stare non-plussed into the crowd. The only engagement the two have with the demonstration occurs when Kiyoshi recognizes one of his friends amongst the crowd and offers a wave. Instead of joining the mass of students, however, they head off to squander the money left by the businessman from the night before.

By including the reference to the protests, Oshima effectively acknowledged contemporary events and the *moment* in which youths were living, creating a connection between audience and characters through the shared experience of the protests. Furthermore, by showing Kiyoshi and Mako's passive voyeurism of the demonstrations, he invoked a critical comparison of ways in which the youths of Japan attempt to assert their agency. This is not to say that Oshima's inclusion of the previously mentioned Korean footage and brief depiction of the student protests marks *Cruel Story of Youth* as a didactic/moralizing film about the necessity of youth to join political movements. To argue this is to ignore the great importance Oshima placed upon Mako and Kiyoshi's individual struggle to find meaning for themselves within a seemingly amoral society. In reading *Cruel Story of Youth* with the other films Oshima directed the same year, the emphasis upon the individual's own moral imperative both within and outside the group is of greatest importance. In light of this, it is not necessarily communal, political activism that Oshima advocated but the frustrating problem of *being* in a world that is cruel and without defined values. In the microcosm of the everyday and the local, under the bright lights of Tokyo, as the flash of American materialism lures youth with its empty promise of the "good life," individual culpability and the actively critical approach to the new formation of values for oneself becomes of much greater concern for the possibility of daily existence than the abstract, passive participation and diffusion of energies in political activism.

Oshima's emphasis upon the problems of the individual grappling with existence at a fundamental level outside of political activism points to the existential debates raging in France. Many French intelligentsia such as Jean-Paul Sartre associated strongly with leftist politics argued that the path towards reconciling the individual with a world evacuated of meaning was through involvement in political activism. Many revolutionaries seeking out a way to exorcise the guilt that was generated during World War II under the Vichy government, looked to active participation in Marxist politics,

⁴³ Wesley Sasaki-Uemura, *Organizing the Spontaneous: Citizen Protest in Postwar Japan*, (Honolulu: University of

specifically that of the French Communist Party.^{o°} They had a chance to reconcile their previous guilt of inaction with a positive and active, political voice within the new French democracy under Charles de Gaulle. In an attempt to redefine values in a world in moral crisis, Sartre argued for the “efficacy of collective endeavor – always at the risk of mistakes and failures – and the creation of values through action and time.”^{o¹} In his book, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, John Cruikshank argued that Sartre thought human values could “exist in any useful sense only by being fashioned in political activity. As a result Sartre insist[ed] on the necessity of accepting moral shortcomings and possible guilt in the service of the revolution.”^{o²} However, Albert Camus saw the “revolution” as leading towards the removal of governmental system only to be replaced by another. Camus, inciting the criticism of his politicized peers, argued that values must be found in the “individual consciousness, independent of action and history.”^{o³} In other words, Camus chose not to define the struggle of postwar existence within a political paradigm but rather located it within the individual’s imperative to find meaning for the self within the self. Though the debate between Camus and Sartre seems to be emblematic of the Cold War rhetoric which posited the group (Communist activism) against the primacy of the individual (embodied by U.S.-capitalism), Camus’ position was one that could not be so clearly associated with the promotion of American individualism. Capitalism, which is reliant upon a sort of economic evolutionary ideology rarely takes personal responsibility and individual culpability into consideration. It is instead rooted in the idea that “the strong will survive.” Camus’ vision for rebellion which he outlined in *The Rebel* represents a distrust for any such institutionalization of the individual. His argument was not for which (politicized) system of existence is better. Rather, it grappled with the fundamental question of existing at all in, as he so eloquently stated, such an “unsacrosanct moment of history.”^{o⁴} When nothing is sacred, how can the individual survive?

Camus attempted to answer this question by seeking out the nature of “rebellion” within the individual and outside the restrictive borders of communal politics. He wrote:

Hawaii Press, 2001) 16.

^{o°} Mark Poster, *Sartre’s Marxism*, (London: Pluto Press Limited, 1979), 9.

^{o¹} Cruikshank, 121.

^{o²} Ibid.

^{o³} Ibid.

Rebellion is born of the spectacle of irrationality, confronted with an unjust and incomprehensible condition. But its blind impulse is to demand order in the midst of chaos, and unity in the very heart of the ephemeral. It protests, it demands, it insists that the outrage be brought to an end, and that what has up to now been built upon shifting sands should henceforth be founded on rock. Its preoccupation is to transform [. . .] Rebellion engenders exactly the actions it is asked to legitimate. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that rebellion *find its reasons within itself, since it cannot find them elsewhere. It must consent to examine itself in order to learn how to act.* (my emphasis)^{oo}

In this statement, Camus located the primary imperative of rebellion, born out of a world of chaos, as being that which is rooted within the individual. In a time where nothing is sacred any longer, it becomes of even greater importance that the individual seeks to define their values within themselves rather than rely upon the (inevitably failing) systems established outside the individual. Camus made a point of differentiating between the “revolution” marked by the participation in communal political movements and “rebellious” which he argued was the way the individual could positively formulate meaning in the world. Through rebellion, the individual could discover “how to act.” Sir Herbert Read, who wrote the forward to Camus’ *The Rebel*, summarized this difference in the following: “[Camus] recognize[d] that revolution always implies the establishment of a new government, whereas rebellion is action without planned issue – it is spontaneous protestation.”^{ot} The need to keep these two terms distinct points to Camus’ belief that revolution such as that proposed by the Marxist left-wing, results in the affirmation of the existing state powers.

To slip out of this cycle of political oppression, one must relinquish the (complacent) desire to give the self and responsibility over to external forces to find meaning in existence but seek them out inside the self instead. The political machine and party politics may rationalize certain immoral strategies to gain power, bringing it closer to the regime it seeks to replace.^{ov} Only through the creation and maintenance of human values within the self can the individual find meaning and save their “rebellion” from transforming into “revolution.” For Camus, the moral imperative of rebellion occurs when the

^{ot} Camus, 21.

^{oo} Camus, 10.

^{ot} Sir Herbert Read, “Forward” *The Rebel*, viii.

^{ov} Camus makes “murder” the measure of morality in differentiating between revolution and rebellion. Revolution, ratified by communal participation, rationalizes murder as a necessity. Camus challenges the individual to instead create a system of values against which they can decide whether or not they can “murder” and in return be killed for the belief in their values. At stake is the individual responsibility whereas such responsibility tends not to be acknowledged within the revolution.

individual is faced with the “absurd,” the contradiction between “thought and experience” and “what feelings demand and what the mind can achieve,” and is therefore confronted with impossibility of maintaining innocence in such a situation.^{o^} Using “murder” as the ultimate test for human values, Camus posited the following challenge: if faced with the moral test of taking another’s life, the individual must “discover the principle of reasonable culpability.”^{o^1} In other words, to escape the mistakes of the past, and the mistakes of the Marxist left-wing which absolves the individual of responsibility under the mandate of the revolution, the individual must claim responsibility to exorcise their guilt and lay a foundation for new values to be formed. To take part in the revolution, Camus would argue, is only to replace the absence made with the death of God with the deification of history. In either respect, such an action takes the individual “out” of themselves and into the dependent relationship with yet another fictional external belief.

Of course, the problem of reconciling existence in a world devoid of values after the war was not a problem only located in France. In postwar Japan, the continued political power of the right wing (a reminder of the prewar power structure which had brought Japan to war and to defeat and also a symbol of failed patriarchal value systems), and the threat of the “reverse course” during the Occupation slowly erased the hope that democracy would provide a new system of beliefs to replace those shattered by defeat. The continuation of the right-wing, the exoneration of the Emperor of wartime responsibilities, and the revelation that “democracy” may not be all that democratic, left many Japanese pessimistic and despondent in the 1950s. Oshima referred to the generation left to deal with the guilt of a “double defeat,” those of the wartime generation faced not only with the failure to win the war left to them by the Emperor but with their defeat in becoming a fully realized democracy, in *Cruel Story of Youth*. In the scene where Mako returns to her family’s house for a night after “bungling a scam,” her sister, Yuki, chastises their father for not doing more to influence the situation. Mako’s father, depicted as a man without authority in his own home, feels helpless to do anything. When Yuki points out his lack of action with his daughters, he states:

^{o^} Cruikshank, 48.

^{o^1} Camus, 11.

Times were tough after the war, but we had a way of life. I could've lectured you that we were reborn a democratic nation; that responsibility went hand in hand with freedom. But today what can we say to this child? Nothing. I don't want to tell her not to do this.

In this statement, Mako's father points to the initial hope for new values democracy gave postwar Japanese but how that hope had been dashed by the maintenance of old power systems under a new name. Democracy was seen as the hopeful replacement for the nation which had lost its spiritual and imperial focus through the symbolic body of the Emperor. However, such systems as democracy are only ideals and were as fallible and weak as those imperial (fictitious) systems ruptured with Japan's defeat. The potential for the realization of a true democratic ideal was ruptured when the Cold War power struggle located Japan in the dangerous position between the U.S.S.R. and America. In effect, abstract political ideology, full of hope and the potential for change, is susceptible to the whims of those in power. The hypocrisy of democratic reform quickly became apparent as American Occupation forces began aligning themselves with those in the right-wing in an attempt to stave off communist influences. Some Japanese politicians and bureaucrats who had at one time been persecuted by the U.S. as war criminals then came back to positions of power. Faced with a socio-political, superficial replacement for the transparent, traditional values and systems of belief lost after the Emperor announced Japan's defeat, many Japanese like Mako's father became resigned to living in a world with no system of beliefs to rely upon. In turn, the next generation sought to fight not only the failure to achieve true democracy but to exorcise the guilt they inherited from the previous generation as well. Oshima pessimistically portrayed both generations, both that which was subjected to the faith and defeat of immediate postwar democratic idealism and that which rebelled against that failure and guilt by participating in left wing politics that were also defeated. By critically framing both generations and their betrayed ideological hopes, he confirmed his position outside the Cold War rhetoric that positioned American individualism/ capitalism against Marxist Communism. Oshima, like Camus, did not argue for the imperative of the individual to locate themselves within the political paradigm to find meaning but repeatedly asserted the necessity to remain critical in the active search for meaning within the self.

Mako's sister, Yuki, directly refers to the first wave of postwar student radicals that attempted to rid themselves of guilt by, as Sartre advocated, taking part in the protests against the Security Treaty that

occurred in 1952.¹¹ But this generation also met with defeat. Influenced by Stalinist strategies, the JCP (and by proxy those of the Zengakuren which was heavily associated with the JCP) used strategies of “terrorism and violence” which included the use of “molotov cocktails” in the early 1950s. Strategies such as this contributed to the JCP’s damaged reputation following the contentious incidents surrounding “Bloody May Day” on May 1, 1952.¹² The students, seeking an avenue through which to vent their frustrations and anger at the established system which, like the failed father figure, had betrayed them, became dependent upon a new system, the Party, and new symbolic fathers, Marx and Stalin. Yet again, by placing their faith in system as transparently fictional in its ability to give new meaning to the life of the new generation, they were betrayed when it was revealed their path had been a mistake. Shortly after the “Bloody May Day” incident, the JCP recanted its violent strategies to return to the “loveable image” it had cultivated during the early stages of the Occupation.¹³ When the JCP later associated violent activism with extremists, it left those who had participated in such activities under the sanction of the Party were left with moral contradictions they were unable resolve. Camus addressed these moral contradictions in a section he devoted in *The Rebel* to Marx and the implications of “historical rebellion.” He wrote:

Marx destroys all transcendence, then carries out, by himself, the transition from fact to duty. But his concept of duty has no other origin but fact. The demand for justice ends in injustice if it is not primarily based on an ethical justification of justice; without this, crime itself one day becomes a duty. *When good and evil are reintegrated in time and confused with events, nothing is any longer good or bad, but only either premature or out of date.* (my emphasis)¹⁴

Here, Camus drew out the erasure of morality under the proscribed duty of the Marxist revolution. While the movement legitimized violence at one moment, the leaders then reversed their strategy, leaving the individual in a moral dilemma. If they continued to use violence to “wake up the masses” or to attempt to stir them from their complacency, the movement by the late 1950s was quick to label such revolutionaries

¹¹ For a greater discussion on the circumstances surrounding the protests in the early 1950s, see Packard, *Protest in Tokyo*.

¹² There is some discrepancy in the way historians depict the events of “Bloody May Day.” Some like John Dower locate initiation of violence in the hands of the police (see Dower, 554-555) while others such as Packard more heavily implicate the violent strategies of the JCP as leading up to the escalation of violence that erupted that day (see Packard, 91). Despite the cause, the effect was the same: the JCP’s image was damaged afterwards leading to the loss of political power.

¹³ Packard, 91.

¹⁴ Camus, 209.

as “dissidents,” “Trotskyites,” or “extremists.” The individual was without a consistent moral foundation within the revolution. They did not know right from wrong, or good from bad. Violence that had been used in the early 1950s was considered “out-of-date.” Abstract ideology, as Camus argued, cannot create values. It denies them in the face of duty.

Many of the first-generation revolutionaries in postwar Japan fell into resigned despondency as they were beaten down by their inability to affect change and their lingering moral confusion. In a powerful scene at a clinic where Mako lies an anesthetized sleep after an abortion, Oshima yet again drew out the hope one generation places in the next to successfully rebel against a world which seems to perpetually drag them down. The director literally marks out a “wall,” a barrier that separates the young couple/ new generation, from that of the decade before. As the camera remains fixed upon Kiyoshi and Mako in the darkened space of the next room, Yuki and her old love and clinic physician, Akimoto, talk.

Yuki: How ironic! You worked as a doctor and I in public relations. We tried to make the world ours. We were great. Now look at us.

Akimoto: Can’t be helped. It’s in the past. It’s a twisted world. It twisted our love. At least our love was pure. We never even touched one another. We vented our rage against society by demonstrating. But what we did got as twisted as the world. We hurt each other, parted, and had to admit defeat. We had no choice! But your sister and her kind by contrast indulge in every desire to express their rage against the world. Maybe they’ll win! Eventually, failures like this abortion racket, if accumulated, destroy them and their relations with one another!

Kiyoshi: (looking towards the door): Never!

Akimoto: I wonder. That girl seems desperate.

Kiyoshi: (looking again at Mako’s sleeping body) You’re wrong! Quit the bullshit! We’re different from you.

Yuki: I wish it were so... (to Akimoto) don’t...don’t destroy my final hope. Are you trying to destroy theirs, too?

Kiyoshi: We have no dreams, so we’ll never end up miserable like you

Yuki: you’re confident your relationship will last?

Kiyoshi: Certainly!

Yuki: I’d better go.

Akimoto: Don’t rush off, Yuki. Tonight we witness our second defeat. Let’s drink...

Yuki and Akimoto, participants in the protests a decade earlier, sought to direct their youthful energies through political activism. However, the consequence of such action is that while the individual is able to lose their sense of responsibility within the movement, they are left to deal with the feelings of guilt upon its failure without an internal value system with which to recognize their own culpability. As Akimoto stated, their actions “were twisted” as if from the outside. They are unable to reconcile themselves with the guilt that was a consequence of their participation and which remained after their defeat. As a result, they fell into grim resignation instead. Unlike the generation before them, Kiyoshi and Mako “protect” themselves against failure by refusing to dream at all. In other words, they do not seek to create a new system of values or put their faith in the “dream” of achieving such a goal. In this way, they attempt to avoid defeat such as that experienced by Yuki or even Mako and Yuki’s father. However, their decision to only nihilistically exploit the existing material culture in which they live does not fulfill their needs. They remain without any values save the superficial ones they create to rationalize their extortion of money from businessmen. Their youthful anger is left without any positive channel of expression and, caught in the vicious cycle of crime and to satisfy their conflicted desire to participate in capitalist culture, they are doomed to the frustration of being denied a place in a society that remains based upon the imaginary construction of the national whole.

Kiyoshi and Mako endure cruel defeat at the end of the film as they lay claim to no values within themselves. Faced with the absence of meaning in their lives, they were unable to continue existing. Though they did not commit suicide, they blindly submitted themselves to circumstances which took their lives: Kiyoshi fell to the association he had cultivated through his nihilistic need for crime and “thrills;” Mako succumbed to her passive desire to taste money and privilege. Camus comes quite close to describing Mako and Kiyoshi’s existential dilemma in the following passage:

If we believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance. There is no pro and con: the murderer is neither right nor wrong. We are free to stoke the crematory fires or to devote ourselves to the care of lepers. Evil and virtue are mere chance or caprice.¹⁴

Kiyoshi and Mako, unable to formulate any reason for living, any values they can affirm, die, tragically, easily like the caprice and whim by which they lived. They are caught in the destructive cycle of their

own nihilistic urges. As a result, according to Camus, they are “indifferent to life,” and give in to its alternative: death.¹⁶ In part, their destruction was due to their failure to fully destroy their need for a replacement system that they sought outside themselves on the moneyed streets of Tokyo. Arguably, it was their failure to fully embrace their nihilistic potential to destroy which could then be turned into the creative potential to rebuild their own value structures that led to their downfall. Though Camus defined nihilism as “rational obscurantism,”¹⁷ Oshima seems to have demonstrated a sort of creative nihilism that is closely akin to that discussed by Japanese philosopher, Nishitani Keiji, in a section he devoted to Nietzsche.¹⁸ In this context, nihilism is not purely destructive but has the potential to establish an emptiness upon which the new might be established. Nishitani was not only interested in exploring the connection between Nietzsche and Buddhism but looked to push past that construct even further into the realm of creative potential. He quoted Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamādhyamikakārikā* in the following passage:

By virtue of emptiness everything is able to rise
But without emptiness nothing whatsoever can rise.¹⁹

This excerpt implies that through emptiness, the new may grow. Mako and Kiyoshi seemed to possess that destructive/ creative potential. As Kiyoshi had stated at the abortion clinic, they had no dreams therefore they could not be defeated. However, Kiyoshi’s proclamation was untrue. They wanted material freedom afforded through money. They wanted to take part in the materialism around them but were denied.

Mako and Kiyoshi, had they been able to fully realize their nihilistic potential to completely rupture their guilty reliance upon and desire to be included in the economic social imaginary of Japan in 1960, could have begun to rebuild their own system of values. However, they remained inured with the external lure of the “good life” which American materialism seemed to offer. As a result, they died as their lives remained deprived of meaning. They had nothing to believe in, no reason for living. While Camus did not ultimately subscribe to the absolute values which Nietzsche was known for and, therefore, did not

¹⁶ Camus, 5.

¹⁷ Camus, 6.

¹⁸ Camus, 155.

¹⁹ Nishitani Keiji, *The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism*. Graham Patkes and Setsuko Aihara, trans. (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), 179. The ideas which primarily inspire this section of Nishitani’s discussion come from Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. Trans. (New York: Random House, [1967]).

²⁰ Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamādhyamikakārikā* as quoted by Nishitani, 180.

agree on the creative potential of nihilism, Oshima seemed to recognize the potential nihilism possessed through his characters. However, he also depicted their inability to fully destroy those systems which lured the young protagonists. Ultimately passive in their rebellion and frustrated by their desire for material affluence, they are destroyed.

PART TWO

Graveyard of the Sun: Pessimism in the Slums

Though continuing the sex and violence theme of *Cruel Story of Youth* that incited controversy in the media and brought a new youth audience into the theaters, *Graveyard of the Sun* abandoned the moneyed streets and bourgeois youth of Tokyo to take on the urban decay of Kamagasaki, the largest slum in Osaka.¹⁹ Oshima's second film in 1960, *Graveyard of the Sun* departed greatly from the relatively carefree nihilism of middle-class youth depicted in his previous work to tell a gritty story about prostitutes, gangs, and middle-aged con-artists all of whom attempt to piece together a meager existence

through various scams which prey upon the very bodies and identities of those people unlucky enough to live in their poverty stricken neighborhood. The slow, melancholy melody of a lone, acoustic guitar replaced the lively jazz soundtrack used in *Cruel Story of Youth*. The music, coupled with long close-ups of sweaty, almost gruesome faces brings the audience into a much more tangible relationship with the unfolding events. Such scenes are juxtaposed with shots of cramped streets and shots of a bloated, red-orange sun (a leitmotif used throughout the film) framed between the ruins of buildings. *Graveyard of the Sun*, like *Cruel Story of Youth*, depicts the seedy side of contemporary life in Japan. Undoubtedly, *Graveyard of the Sun* does so in a much more grisly manner, one that highlights the poverty, and inevitability of violence in a dog-eat-dog world

Bringing to the screen a vividly dismal portrayal of the slums, Oshima's film calls to mind the postwar, Italian Neo-Realism of films such as *Open City (Roma, Città Aperta)*, 1945) by Roberto Rossellini and *The Bicycle Thief (Ladri di Biciclette)*, 1948) by Vittorio de Sica. However, Oshima did not depict characters with whom the audience could sympathize. Rather than use the skeletal remains of an urban wasteland in which the film is set to elicit class sympathy, Oshima used it as a material prison for the *yakuza* or gangsters and other inhabitants of the neighborhood. Oshima's characters, unlike those of Rossellini and de Sica's films, lack a definitive reason for the audience to actually *like* them as most prove to be grossly flawed in some way. No character, save for one, acts for the good of anyone but his or herself. Gang leaders beat up their pregnant whores, they bludgeon and shoot each other; con-artists buy blood to sell to the cosmetics industry and identity cards of the men working in the junkyards to resell to foreigners. Given the brutal criminality and struggle for daily living Oshima depicted in *Graveyard of the Sun*, values only seemed to be defined in the slums by their marked absence.

Sato Tadao summarized the film in a way which captures its grit and desperation. In the process of doing so, he also attempted to capture the possible message Oshima intended with such a visceral production. He wrote:

Oshima presents [. . .] a place where men bare their fangs and fight like wolves with their fellow human beings. The story unfolds like a scroll painting of hell, with the director saying: Rip away the façade of peaceful, modern Japan and you will find a dog-eat-dog philosophy. At

¹⁴ Sato, 215-216.

the same time, he exhibits a romantic yearning for a situation in which human beings can express the violent side of their natures, exhaust it, and plunge suddenly into an abyss of annihilation.

This is a film where only the strong survive, and even the strong perish at the slightest show of weakness. The dead are then disposed of as though they are insects. If there is a message here, it is probably simply that human beings have to be strong.^{v.}

Given the vivid description Sato offered of the bleak, hell-like setting and vicious inhabitants of such a world, he seemed to provide a fairly optimistic reading of Oshima's authorial position in creating such a pessimistic work. He stated:

The setting sun, photographed in red-orange tints, dominates the screen, slowly sinking behind what seem to be the ruins and black-market area of Kamagasaki in 1945. In that image of the fat, setting sun I see Oshima's self-projection, as though he is saying grandly and contentedly: "I will shine at my utmost over this scene of tragic sorrow." Braced by such an expansive feeling of self-esteem, or conceit, he may have felt a heroic surge to tackle more difficult situations, and the result was *Night and Fog in Japan*, which he began working on soon after.^{v1}

While I find Sato's brief description of *Graveyard of the Sun* an accurate portrayal of the sort of brutal environment that did not benefit from the glowing economic recovery of the 1950s, I take issue with his dismissal of the film as being a mere reference to the director's own transcendence over such horrors. Such a message would tend to liken Oshima to Marie Antoinette as she said "Let them eat cake," reflecting a sentiment that ignores the brutal reality many face in day to day existence. How would such a message serve to liberate the young audience viewing the film? As I will show in this section of my analysis on Oshima's films, social idealism was not part of Oshima's plan in creating such an impacting work.

Other authors such as Turim took a slightly different approach to reading the film. Highlighting the separation between the slums of Osaka and the "privileged world" of the university whose protesting students are referenced in the film, Turim concluded that, "[i]f Japan's rising sun is pictured in the process of being buried in 1960, the funeral is conditioned by the right wing first having driven the country to self-annihilation in the war, then trying to profit on its aftermath."^{vy} Such a statement points to Turim's politicized reading of the film. I agree with Turim to a certain extent in that the depiction of the

^{v.} Sato, 217.

^{v1} Sato, 217-218.

^{vy} Turim, 51. Turim specifically talks about the privileged world of those students at Kyoto University. However, the film refers specifically to those students in Tokyo. While the students in Kyoto were also active and are in much closer physical proximity to the characters in the film, it is unclear as to what Turim refers to in the whole passage from which the above quote was taken.

slums acts as vivid contradiction of the economic imaginary optimistically projected by the right-wing government. However, the way in which Oshima handled references to politics – through the almost comical rantings of a character only referred to as the “Agitator” who wants to see a return of the “Japan as she once was” – indicates the director attempted to use politics more as a foil against the struggle to exist within a viciously and physically oppressive environment. The political, as defined in the national paradigm as right versus left or, as the Agitator still conceives of it in the global perspective, as Japan versus the world, alludes to an abstraction of the term that exists in the equally abstract macrocosm of the world outside the slums. However, as I will discuss, Oshima depicted a very insular microcosm in *Graveyard of the Sun*, one which the outside world beyond the urban ruins of the slums does not penetrate. In tearing away the peaceful façade of modern Japan as Sato so eloquently stated, Oshima revealed the raw wound of Osaka: the slums and the inevitable necessity of violence in a world where moral fortitude seems not to be an option lest one be devoured by the amoral. Here, Oshima points to the absurdity of political rhetoric in the destitution of Kamagasaki. Here, Oshima investigates another form of rebellion which addresses the necessity of the individual to find meaning for living when faced with grueling physical oppression

Far removed from the glittering lights of Tokyo shown in *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun* focuses on the hardened existence of *yakuza* (gangsters), middle-aged con artists, prostitutes, and junk-salvage workers. The film is much more grisly than its predecessor. Gone are the relatively innocent schemes of extorting money from sexually-hungry businessmen. The scams Oshima represented in this film pierce the very bodies and identities of those unfortunate enough to have to live and survive in Kamagasaki. While the local *yakuza* sell the pleasures of the flesh through their contingent of prostitutes, the middle-aged con artists prey upon the junk salvagers’ desperate need for money. They buy their blood to resell to the cosmetics industry and, when their clinic is trashed, turn their sights upon the purchasing of census cards from the local men so that they can sell them to foreigners attempting to enter the country.

The filmic action unfolds around three main characters. Hanako, a free-lance prostitute who changes allegiances with local gang members as many times as she changes her stylish, western clothes,

is vastly different from Mako who passively sought the pleasures of materialism and relied upon Kiyoshi for protection from the local hoods. Rather, it seems the local gangs need protection from the criminally scheming Hanako. Oshima seemed to posit her character as a realist, the one who responds to the vicious oppression of the slums by being equally as cutthroat. Shinei, the young leader of a gang who seeks to carve out a small niche in a neighborhood dominated by an old, established gang leader named Ohama, serves as another crucial character around which the film plays out. Both vicious with members of his gang and also, to his ultimate undoing, merciful and kind, Shin is complex in that one neither despises him nor empathizes with him. The third and, as I will argue, most important character in *Graveyard of the Sun* is Takeshi. Takeshi, a youth who joins Shinei's gang with his friend, Tatsu, is strangely out of place in the gang as he abhors murder and seems to be the only one in the film who possesses a sense of responsibility for his part in destructive activities. However, Oshima did not create in Takeshi an easily readable hero that lays claim to a clear moral path lacking in postwar Japan. At times, the motivations and personal beliefs which govern his actions are virtually inscrutable. He is, like all of the characters in Oshima's films of 1960, completely fallible, and therefore, more human. By utilizing this strategy of developing Takeshi's character, I argue that Oshima attempted to avoid didactic moralizing of how a youth should live his/ her life. Instead, he created the image of a youthful rebel who constantly is at odds with the seemingly hopeless situation around him. In this way, the youthful audience who has yet to reconcile themselves with their own frustrations and inner contradictions achieve greater empathy with the constant moral dilemmas Takeshi faces. Should they disagree with the choices he makes along his conflicted path, they at least achieve active criticality in their viewing position.

Oshima represented violence in *Graveyard of the Sun* in quite a different manner than *Cruel Story of Youth*. Whereas Mako and Kiyoshi effectively *chose* their violent paths to focus their youthful energies, the violence shown in *Graveyard of the Sun* is far more closely linked to power within the microcosm of the slum and the very preservation of one's own life. In other words, Oshima depicted violence as an integral part of everyday living in this vicious neighborhood. In creating a film that positions violence at the core of the environment in which one is forced to exist, Oshima posed new questions to the audience. How does one establish a system of values in such an isolating world where

each individual is pitted against each other for survival? How can someone find meaning in a world where a sense responsibility is only to the perpetuation of one's own meager existence rather than to the active creation of new value structures? What hope is availed to those to those who live in filthy shanties among the skeletal ruins of buildings? Can one begin to overcome their physical surroundings to assert a new code of ethics and morality? By framing Takeshi's rebellion amidst the seemingly insurmountable poverty and violence of the slums, the youth acts as an example of how one can and should continue to question the oppressive nature of their surroundings. Whether the youths are faced with the tempting lure of materialism in Tokyo or the violence on the streets in Osaka, they must actively claim their subjectivity at all costs.

Inserting the Political

While much of the filmic action unfolds around Hanako, Shinei, and Takeshi, the Agitator lends greater complexity to the message Oshima may have intended to convey to his audience. If Oshima had merely intended to create a shocking film about the alienating poverty in the slums, a character such as the Agitator would not necessarily be needed. Or, if he was inserted as a reference to the older, war generation who chose to find escape from the misery of existence through the idealization of the past, he could have been conceived of as one of the salvage workers who waxed poetic about the glory of the past over his beer in the local restaurant. However, Oshima used the Agitator in quite a different way. Responding to the desolate material conditions in which he lives, the Agitator frequently acts as a pseudo-

prophet who wishes to help bring about the return of the glories of the Japanese Empire conceived of before and during the war. His desire to restore the old Empire and the totality of the Emperor as he once was, points to his frustrated need to recoup the Great National Father and the sense of purpose he had when fighting in the war. He is locked into the past and is unable to conceive of a new system through which he can begin to create a new system of values. He is destined to live only in the past. Should his character have been shown isolated in his musings, he would have just been a sad testament to the defeat of past generations. However, Oshima constructed the Agitator as a dangerous character who rationalized his victimization of the local salvagers by applying a thin veneer of self-righteousness over his cause, much in the same way as Kiyoshi did in the earlier film. The ideological ratification of his actions becomes apparent in an exchange with Hanako where the Agitator informs her that her monetary share in the “blood money” clinic that she started will be cut to offer the doctor more.

Agitator: Though we share equally in this, there’s a difference. Our money will help save our Empire. Your money is for bedding with delinquents.

Hanako: A dirty bum shackled up in a junk yard talking about the Empire, what a laugh! Go cool your filthy head!

Agitator: I live in want, so what? Soon the Soviets will attack! We need guns! Patriots will fight them off with guns supplied by us.

In this brief dialogue, the Agitator points to the illusion which comforts him in his misery: he will be a part of the reconstruction of the Empire and will fight to save the nation from what he perceives as the country’s new threat – the Soviet Union. Yet, as he conceives of his role in the reconstruction of Japan, he dangerously legitimizes the crime he enacts. Like the legitimization of murder under the revolution of which Camus warned, Oshima draws out the careful manipulation of political rhetoric – though superficially invoked for the involvement in the cause to which the Agitator lays claim – in the selfish struggle for power even in the microcosm of the slums.

Throughout the film, Oshima developed the character of the Agitator to show his progression from a man in rags to one who wears new flashy shirts and pants. His new material prosperity comes in part, with the help he receives from his recruits in the junkyard. Luring them with his promises of their inclusion in the revolution that will bring about the renewed glory of Japan, he uses the men to help run the blood bank. Seeking a meaning for living in a world that does not seem to offer them anything but

misery, they join his ranks. While they work at the blood bank, however, the Agitator secretly acts out another scam where he buys the census registry cards, the very identities, of the men who work the junk yards. He gains the trust of the desperate men by offering to satisfy their participation in a greater cause and the sense of community that will come from that involvement. However, he then preys upon that community of men. The thin veneer of his brotherhood with his fellow criminal revolutionaries is not fractured until a scene near the end of the film. In an interesting twist, Oshima uses the Agitator to bring a reference to the Ampo struggle into the film in the same scene. Unlike the strategy Oshima used in *Cruel Story of Youth*, where he located the protests near the outset of the film, he waits almost until the very end of *Graveyard of the Sun* to bring the demonstrations into the film. This strategy effectively distances the viewer (who has been subjected to the grisly images of crime and poverty on the streets) from the idealistic political activism occurring in Tokyo. Also unlike *Cruel Story of Youth*, the protests are not given pictorial representation. They are only spoken about by the Agitator in a passing comment. By taking this very different approach to the filmic treatment of the Ampo struggle, Oshima not only made the political activism of the demonstrations seem oddly out of place in the grueling environment of the slums but also relegated the movement to the realm of abstract idea, creating a quick but powerful comparison to the sort of political rhetoric the Agitator uses throughout the film.

During this scene, the Agitator is doing what he enjoys the most: talking loudly about the glorious plans he has for the future and the political revolution in which he will take part. As the local junk salvagers have little hope of their own, they are easily whipped up by the Agitator's words. In the greasy, local restaurant, he launches into yet another fantastic sermon about the changes ahead but Hanako challenges his fantasy with implications of the real world:

Agitator: I'm headed to Tokyo to squelch those students. Our luck changes!

(a man's voice from off screen): And if things improve, he's calling all of us to Tokyo!

(another man's voice): No more scrambling for junk. I'll be a politician.

(another voice): You can take care of us!

Hanako (breaking into the room's conversation for the first time): Will things improve?

Agitator: Without a doubt!

Hanako: In what way?

Agitator: It's beyond your ilk.

Hanako: Stop hedging! Tell us about it!

Agitator: It would be a Japan as she once was. The Japanese Empire.

Hanako: Empires... the past ... are beyond me! Will things change for the better? Will tramps like these disappear? And the slums, too? Come on, tell us!

While the Agitator and the men in the restaurant envisioned their glorious futures, the camera remained fixed upon the dirtied face of Hanako, drinking her liquor. The camera's position serves to remind the audience of the separation between reality, marked by the survivalist, Hanako, and the Agitator's abstract, utopic vision for the future. Once she enters the conversation to confront the Agitator once and for all, however, the camera moves with her across the dingy room to frame her and the drunken prophet who sits at a table. Once Hanako asks the loaded question about the realistic prospects for change in the slums, the room falls into quiet, awaiting the answer that they most need to hear. The sad guitar track that plays through most of the film is all that can be heard. At this moment, the camera cuts from one close up to another of the men in the room. They say nothing. Oshima focuses instead upon lingering momentarily upon each face, made grotesquely individual by their sweaty desperation. The men simply look on, their mouths agape, their grimy eye-glasses askew. They appear vulnerable in their sleazy hopelessness.

Rather than receive assurance that their political plan will succeed, the men learn instead of their betrayal. Their silence is broken when one of the workers whose "identity" had been purchased returns to the bar having "drank away the money" he had been given. When Hanako exposes the scam through which the Agitator and his secret partner had preyed upon the very workers who looked to him for guidance, they violently turn upon him and a violent mob is born. The workers' lack of hope and their blind desire for something better had led them throughout the course of the film to "follow" the Agitator, to believe in anything including his vision for a better life by restoring the Empire to its former glory. Their desperation not only makes them vulnerable to the empty political promises the Agitator makes but to his exploitation of them as well. They are unable to conceive of the creation of a new system of beliefs within themselves and so passively clung to the grand images the Agitator drew. However, Oshima showed how their passivity not only leads to the Agitator's selfish, monetary empowerment but inevitably

leads to their own betrayal. Hanako reveals the blind faith the workers had placed in the Agitator as flawed which leaves them to bear the guilt and shame of their defeat. Upon hearing of their betrayal, the local men violently drive the Agitator, who had become almost messianic in his claim to deliver the men from their plight, from the restaurant. The mob then swarms onto the streets to burn and destroy the Agitator's house. Ironically, the Agitator is only able to escape with his life with the help of an old grenade he had carried since the end of the war. To survive, he trades his last, material reminder of his involvement in Japan's militaristic past for escape. Several houses in the little neighborhood, however, burn to the ground as result of the mob's unleashed furies. The burned scar upon the neighborhood acts as a physical reminder of the danger of passive, blind faith in political rhetoric.

Oshima's New Existential Hero

Within such a volatile, pessimistic environment wrought with physical oppression and the dangers of passive mob mentalities, Oshima posited a new possible hero who comes closest to the ideal for the individual involved with the existential moral imperatives of rebellion: Takeshi. Takeshi is new to Shinei's gang, a young relatively new gang in the neighborhood that seeks to make a small place for itself in an area already claimed by Ohama, an old and powerful gang leader. As Takeshi joins a gang at the urging of his friend, one might argue that his character represents the power of the collective to lend the individual purpose and meaning for living. However, he is, in fact, a rebel within the group who, despite the repeated threat of physical trauma from the gang, goes against, "the rules." Unlike Kiyoshi from *Cruel Story of Youth*, who fits into a rebel-stereotype with his fast fists and quick, antagonistic statements,

Takeshi is quiet and slight of frame. He submits to several beatings without fear and without attempting to fight back. Yet he is not a character who is merely passive and resigned to fate. He repeatedly breaks the "rules" even knowing the possible violent consequences. He leaves the gang on several occasions only to return at Hanako's prompting. As people around him compel him to take certain actions, it could be argued as well that he lacks the internal sense of self to stand up to external pressures. However, as Hanako pragmatically points out at one point in the film when Takeshi says he's finished with the gang, there is really nowhere for the youth to go. The poverty of the slums and the insularity of ruined boundaries of their neighborhood means that Takeshi must reconcile himself with the absurdity of his position. He is at once repulsed by his environment and those actions he is compelled to take to survive in it but is unable to leave. Therefore, within his urban prison and within the confines of the gang, Takeshi chooses his moments of rebellion carefully. Joining the gang and eventually returning to it do not mark a weakness in his character. They are simply inevitable consequences of living in the slums. However, like the rebel ideal Camus discussed, he "refuses to approve the condition in which he finds himself."^{yr} Takeshi, as Oshima's new hero, recognizes the oppressive inevitability of the condition in which he must live but rebels against practices such as murder which work to define it as such.

Takeshi stands out from others in the film and even from those characters in Oshima's other films from the same year in that he maintains his convictions at the risk of his own safety. Not only does Takeshi attempt to leave the gang on several occasions, running the risk of severe beatings, he is very open about his opposition to some of the gang's practices. In fact, Oshima made the relationship between Takeshi and the gang quite complex as he did not create an easily recognizable evil, moral foil in the gang leader, Shinei, who could victimize Takeshi. Rather, Oshima created a very human young gang leader who affords the rebellious Takeshi many mercies. By avoiding a straightforward good versus bad dichotomy, Oshima achieved several things. First, he subverts the image of Takeshi as victim of his circumstances. Takeshi does not lash out against threatening forces in an effort to protect to his life. He rebels against some of the practices the gang which, in turn, *risks* his life. Second, Oshima was able to

^{yr} Camus, 23.

construct a more complex relationship between the two which would further highlight the dangers of the cycle of dependence.

Though Shinei is the leader and the one provides shelter for Takeshi through the gang, he does not occupy the power position within the relationship. Rather, Takeshi subtly subverts his authority on different occasions – through his repeated abandonment of the gang, leaving his lookout post, and even through his refusal to stop singing a song. The punishment Takeshi receives for such infractions seems relatively light given the grisly brutality with which others in the gang are treated. Within the isolated microcosm of the slums, Takeshi becomes Shinei's replacement for those values lost through the symbolic body of the Emperor after the war and yet to be replaced since the Occupation. In the amoral world of Kamagaski, Takeshi reflects the quiet, moral fortitude that Shinei lacks. However, rather than inflict violence upon Takeshi for reminding him of his lack (as Kiyoshi had done to Mako), Shinei seeks out a closer dependent relationship with the youth. In doing so, Shinei reveals his desire to find meaning in his own life and even hopes for Takeshi's moral legitimization of his actions. In the following brief scene, Oshima captured the complexities of their relationship. The two talk alone in one of the rooms in the Shinei-kai hideout. Takeshi, seeming to ponder the actions which led up to the death of one of the gang members and his involvement in other crime, stakes his moral position in opposition to that of Shinei's.

Shinei: (with a slight yet warm smile on his face) Getting sick of the gang?

Takeshi: (his voice comes form off screen. The camera remains focused upon Shinei throughout the exchange) Well, no... I can see how you've tried to help me (Shinei smiles a little to himself) However...

Shinei: (looking up suddenly, more on his guard) However, what?

Takeshi: Murder is too much

Shinei: (looking for the right words and finally, in resignation, leans against the wall behind him) Can't be helped. If he lives, Ohama will get me. When you stop moving, it's the end.

Takeshi: You mean, like a top?

Shinei: A top?

Takeshi: A spinning top.

Shinei: How's that (smiling a little)

Takeshi: Stop it and it falls (Shinei's smile fades).

In this scene, Shinei attempts to rationalize his position to Takeshi, seeking out the youth's approval and understanding. Shinei, inured in a cycle of violence, the spinning top, which maintains his small position of power within the neighborhood, needs Takeshi's approval because he is unable to conceive of any way other than violence to survive. Takeshi rebels against the cycle of violence by opposing murder and therefore attempts to subvert his own passive slippage into that cycle. The top spins like a ride, carrying those caught in its movement along without the possibility of disengaging from it. Shinei and his gang members only face death as a way out from its movement.

Takeshi further demonstrates his need to assert his individual moral position in other scenes as well. However, Oshima does not represent the youth as doing so in an uncomplicated way which would construct Takeshi as an impossible, abstract fiction that would erase the potential of the youth audience to identify with him. The brutal environment in which the characters survive at times forces Takeshi to morally position himself after the fact. In some situations the youth does not act even though he knows what is transpiring is wrong. However, he is the only one of all the characters from these 1960 films to actually claim responsibility for his part in the action. In other words, he does not attempt to passively diffuse his guilt by attempting to justify it as the Agitator or Kiyoshi had. He actively claims it. One such instance occurs when Shinei sends Takeshi and Tatsu out to "prove themselves" as gang members by pulling "something big." The two youths happen across a pair of lovers in the overgrown ruins of a cemetery. Takeshi knocks the man out with a stick but Tatsu, instead of simply robbing the couple, rapes the girl. Takeshi protests but does not act to stop it. Later, upon hearing that the girl's boyfriend committed suicide out of the shame he felt for failing to protect her, Takeshi tells Hanako that he is a murderer. Though he did not actually kill the youth, he lays claim to the guilt he has in setting in motion a cycle of events which led to the other boy's life. He expresses his guilt and responsibility openly as a way to reconcile himself with the murderous consequences of his entrance into the cycle of violence. Later, Hanako and Takeshi happen upon the same girl standing in field where the crime initially took place. She stares into the distance. Takeshi tells her that she should go home as it is getting late. As the girl doesn't make any effort to help herself, Hanako tells her to come with them. The ensuing scene is

one of the only times in the film which ruptures the sort of realist filmmaking that that marks the rest of the picture, working to maintain Oshima's anti-realism stance. The camera cuts from the field where the three were standing to a shot of the ruddy-orange sun setting over a tower. It then cuts again to show Hanako, Takeshi and the girl standing on a rooftop, overlooking the slums. The camera, kept at a distance, slowly starts a circular movement that begins to wrap around the back of the characters. Each is isolated from each other. As the sad, guitar track plays, they stare off into the distance, lost in their own thoughts. Oshima makes their isolation even more distinct as the camera picks up the tempo of its circular motion, swinging in closely around the head of the girl, then the head of Hanako, then Takeshi, then back to the girl, eliciting in the audience a sort of vertiginous nausea. Watching the events unfold, one feels as though they and the characters are caught in the motion of the "spinning top," on a swirling ride from which they are unable to step off. Finally, the girl's trance is broken as she suddenly lifts her head to look at Takeshi who stares back with sadness in his eyes. The camera captures her eyes in a close up then cuts to a shot of the knife she holds. She begins to approach Takeshi who is initially wary of her attack. He then drops his head and seems to submit to what he feels is the repercussion of his involvement in the cycle of violence when the girl was first raped. He awaits the girl's attack as his penitence. It is also a way of subverting his continued participation in that violent cycle. However, just as the girl raises her hand to slash at Takeshi, Hanako intercedes and pushes the young girl off the roof to her death. The girl's scream is the only sound which penetrates the continual guitar track. In this scene, Takeshi becomes the rebel ideal of Camus. He upholds his values at the possible cost of his own life. Though finding himself implicated in the spinning movement in the cycle of violence, he rebels against that participation. He refuses to take action against the girl, choosing instead to feel the blow of her revenge. Takeshi abhors murder and when faced with the guilt of his inaction which led to (indirect) murder, he acknowledges the rupture in his moral code and submits to the repercussions. He is willing to die to affirm his personal beliefs. Despite the ease with which one could subscribe to a "kill or be killed" system of beliefs, he chooses another path. Takeshi rebels as he looks within himself to find a value system that will place borders on the irrational environment in which he must exist.

However, just as Oshima complicated the character of Shinei by divesting him of clearly defined amorality, the director also makes Takeshi more “human” by showing unexplainable slippage in the youth’s character. Near the end of the film, Takeshi and Tatsu walk alone in a deserted field. The sun shines brightly upon the desolate scene. Here, Takeshi pushes Tatsu to leave the gang with him. Tatsu refuses. Takeshi pushes his point several more times and, subsequently, Tatsu flashes a knife, a symbol for his friend to “back off.” Their discussion seems to end as a lighthearted, Latin-inspired music fills the soundtrack. The camera pulls into the distance to show the youths wrestling upon the ground. Each is dressed in a light colored shirt so it is difficult for the audience to ascertain who does what to who. However, Takeshi’s submissive body language reads on several occasions as the youth is pushed to the ground where he remains with his legs in the air. He only rises again after his friend turns to leave. The fight then ensues. The camera, keeping such a distance from the action, makes it impossible for the audience to understand what transpires. Furthermore, the festive music which dominates the soundtrack confuses the audience as the actions of the youths seem more like play than a life and death struggle. When one of the youths lays immobile upon the ground, it is not immediately discernable who walked away from the fight. In the following scene, the audience learns that not only did Takeshi win but that his friend was killed in the scuffle. As Takeshi confesses his crime to Hanako, he does not use the word, “murder” as he had previously. He only states, “Tatsu and I went to school together.” He does not elucidate his moral position or his reasons behind the killing.

The distance of the camera maintained during the fight and the lack of explanation means that only Takeshi can know of what motivated his actions. The fact he does not use the word “murder” in the scene following the altercation may mean that he feels as though it is somehow already rationalized. His moral position, defined within himself, can only be known to himself in the end. The scene of struggle between Tatsu and Takeshi so unexpected in the development of the film and shocking in the lighthearted way it depicts the fatal fight, seems wrought with contradictions: the violent action of Takeshi in his struggle with his friend, the playful music, the bright sunshine, and the shocking result of the fight between the two friends. Without offering any explanation as to why the murder took place and seemingly ruptured Takeshi’s moral position, Oshima seemed to cinematically represent the existential

absurd, the conflict between the values Takeshi wants to assert in his life and the situations of living which work to undermine those values. Oshima's insertion of scene which seems to contradict the moral fabric of his youthful protagonist worked to create a more believable, fallible character with whom the audience would either sympathize or criticize. Takeshi's position as a possible existential hero is not totally erased with the inclusion of this scene. According to Camus, his failure in his rebellion would only be secured should he become indifferent to life.^{vt} As Oshima showed shortly after this unexplainable cycle of events, the young rebel, Takeshi, remains far from indifferent. In fact, it is his attempt to save the lives of those who are indifferent to it that leads to his death.

In the same scene as that where he confessed to killing Tatsu, Hanako reveals to Takeshi that the Shinei-kai "is dead." Hanako had betrayed Takeshi by giving information on the new Shinei-kai hideout (which the youth had inadvertently and naively told her) to Ohama's men. Takeshi, set on finding Shinei, is momentarily stopped by Hanako. In the following exchange, as the camera focuses almost entirely upon a tight close-up Takeshi's face, highlighting the intensity of his feelings, Oshima defines the existential position of each character. :

Hanako: Where are you going?

Takeshi: To find Shinei

Hanako: No! They'll kill you.

Takeshi: He's my boss... and a good man.

Hanako: Yeah? Well, he was so good he's getting his now. You're no better! Going out in search of danger. You won't live long.

Takeshi: (looks at her, intensely, in silence for a several moments) I'm no bitch like you. I should live like you?

Hanako: At least I'm alive!

Takeshi: (pausing) I'm not impressed.

Hanako, who has perpetually sought to improve and secure her material position in the slums, is caught in the cycle of violence symbolized by the spinning top. She exists only for the sake of existing and is indifferent to those lives she sacrificed to perpetuate her own. She is caught without a value system in the

^{vt} Camus, 5.

cycle of the absurd. She had attempted to show Takeshi the mean-streets way of existing in the slums, a way of living which divorced itself from culpability. However, she proves her irreconcilable contradiction by claiming to have no belief outside of her own life yet seeks to warn Takeshi of the dangerous situation which she had instigated. When Takeshi asserts his own value system, he reveals the void in which Hanako lives. Hanako's life is one where, to again quote Camus, "evil and virtue are mere chance or caprice." Because nothing has meaning for her, anything is possible. Takeshi, however, rebels against the oppressive condition of the slums which dictates one must destroy or be destroyed. After the fatal fight with Tatsu, he looks to reinsert meaning into a life that would otherwise have none.

Takeshi sets out to find Shinei and upon reaching his goal, even offers his shoes to him. The youth's protective instincts toward the gang leader seem to affirm his acceptance of the dependent relationship which Shinei had sought to cultivate with him. Shinei seems to be the benefactor of the moral code which he, through his lack, had desired in the youth. However, in affirming his pessimism towards the flawed fiction of dependence symbolized by the new, moral Father figure, Oshima fractured what could be construed as an ideal affirmation of a patriarchal relationship, a replacement for that filial ideal lost 15 years before with the end of the war. Soon after Takeshi and Shinei's meeting, Shinei spots Hanako in the distance. Convinced that Hanako was the one who talked to Ohama, Shinei takes off in pursuit of her. Closing in quickly, Takeshi attempts to stop Shinei at a railroad crossing. Noting Takeshi's attempt to stop his pursuit of Hanako, Shinei comes to the realization that the youth and Hanako were somehow involved. Furthermore, he realizes that it was Takeshi who slipped (even inadvertently) information on the hideout to her. At this moment, Shinei feels the guilty sting of betrayal as he realizes that Takeshi does not legitimize and approve of his actions. The youth's moral code, in fact, has come into direct conflict with Shinei's perpetuation of the cycle of violence. The ideal relationship he had thought he had forged with the youthful rebel, Takeshi, and the dependence which he had hoped would sustain his own violent cycle of beliefs is fractured. As a result, in a need to exorcise his shame for needing Takeshi as a replacement for his own lost values, Shinei pulls a gun and shoots Takeshi twice. Takeshi, in a dying effort to keep Shinei from pursuing Hanako, clings to gang leader's leg. By doing so, Takeshi keeps the Shinei from leaving the railroad tracks and they are both killed by an oncoming train.

Takeshi seems to fit the rebel ideal for which Camus argued. Though faced with an overwhelming, physically oppressive environment, he looked into himself to determine the ways in which he could find meaning in his life. His rebellion draws borders of what he will and will not tolerate. He does not rely upon empty religious, political, or social institutions to provide values. He claims responsibility and openly admits his guilt rather than repress it or look to outside systems to erase it. Even at the risk of his own injury, he maintains his convictions. Merely surviving (as his moral foil, Hanako, does) was not enough for the youth. Such an existence is devoid of creative potential and lacks meaning beyond the perpetuation of the physical self. Hanako's existence is more like that of an animal which can only conceive of protecting its life. Takeshi, as proven on the rooftop with the girl and on the railroad tracks with Shinei, willingly risks his life to protect his convictions. Takeshi seems to have expressed the positive possibilities of rebellion which Camus had deemed the ideal. However, in creating this character, Oshima marks his departure from the sort of optimistic ideal that Camus had hoped for. In other words, Takeshi's rebellion and attempt to create a value system in an environment devoid of any morality also lays bare one of the many contradictions theorized for the ideal rebel within Camus' text. Shinei's perception of Takeshi as a possible replacement father who symbolizes a power of beliefs which he does not have himself results in the betrayal and death of both characters and points to the inherent impossibility of success for the sort of rebellion Camus offered. Idealistically, Camus argued that, "[t]he rebel undoubtedly demands a certain degree of freedom for himself; but in no case, if he is consistent, does he demand the right to destroy the existence and the freedom of others. He humiliates no one."^{vo} This idealistic statement is one of the many reasons why many of the French, existentialist intelligentsia criticized *The Rebel*. Furthermore, this statement seems to contradict his prior argument that, "[i]t is not rebellion itself which is noble, but its aims, even though its achievements are at times ignoble."^{v1} This may be because the legitimization of "ignoble" achievements to reach noble rebellious ends. The rebel, according to Camus, then, seeks a principle to explain "moments of happiness" and the "misery of the world," and a moral philosophy. These ends are indeed noble. The achievements that result of the path to find these ends, however, may be dishonorable. Did Camus recognize the implication of this statement

^{vo} Camus, 284.

to mean the possibility of murder may become necessary in the attempt to reach these noble ends?

Camus had even admitted that “rebellion kills men while revolution kills both men and principles.”^{vv}

However, Camus seemed unable to reconcile the very real possibility of murder in rebellion, leading him to recant his statement by stating the rebel will not destroy others. By the very nature of creating a code of existence by which one can find meaning, the rebel will impinge upon the freedoms of others by asserting that code. Takeshi, be it in his hidden motivations to assert his value system with Tatsu (leading to his friend’s death) or in betraying the dependent relationship Shinei had hoped to develop with the youth, denied each their personal freedom and, ultimately, their existence. Initially, Takeshi only voiced his opposition to the practice of murder to Shinei, allowing the gang leader to decide/ rationalize his own moral position on the matter. However, when their value systems (or in the case of Shinei, the absence of individually defined values) came into direct conflict, violence was the result. In this way, Oshima recognized the need for personal culpability in rebelliously creating new values in an “unsacrosanct moment of history,” in a real world evacuated of meaning, but also sees the inevitability of (violent) conflict as the rebel adheres to their new system of values.

I argue that it was not Takeshi’s inconsistency that led him to betray and kill Shinei but rather his consistent assertion of self and his self-consciously formed value structure which led to that conclusion. He accepted the consequences by laying down his life to confirm his beliefs. It is within the self that values are created but it is in the real world that they must be expressed, resulting in the inevitable infringement upon the freedoms of others. To argue otherwise is not only unrealistic but relegates the possibilities of rebellion to failure. Through Takeshi, Oshima attempted to forge a character divorced of a victim syndrome and impossibly idealistic moral virtues. Set amid the squalor and economic decay of Kamagasaki, far away from the political activism on the streets of Tokyo, Oshima constructed a character who challenged the cycle of violence which seemed to be an inevitable part of the brutal surroundings in which he existed. He subverted the expected subservience to violence and questioned those conditions which defined his oppressive environment. Takeshi, though arguably less than a perfect hero, becomes a

^{vi} Camus, 101.

^{vv} Camus, 106.

new possible existential hero who actively asserts his subjectivity in the creation and maintenance of personal values.

PART THREE

Night and Fog in Japan: Filmic Rebellion and Filming Revolution

Through the sex, violence and his rebellious, filmic youth of *Cruel Story of Youth* and *Graveyard of the Sun*, Oshima demonstrated his ability to “capture the spirit of the times” and act as a voice for the new generation. Though representing a slight shift in the director’s style – from the “speed, sex and

thrills” of the first film in 1960 to the slower, gritty viscosity of his second – these films contributed greatly to the director’s popularity.^{ya} However, *Night and Fog in Japan*, Oshima’s third film in 1960, marks a drastic departure in the director’s choice of style and subject, seemingly erasing the possibility of reading authorial intent through continuity in the director’s early oeuvre. *Night and Fog in Japan*, though not adopting the documentary style of Alan Renais’ film, certainly hints at the title: *Night and Fog* (*Nuit et Brouillard*, 1955). As with the earlier French film, *Night and Fog in Japan* grapples with issues surrounding trauma, memory and responsibility. However, instead of broadly asking the question, “Who is responsible?” and implicating many faceless numbers in the asking, Oshima addressed guilt and responsibility at a far more personal level, marking out a filmic space where specific characters are forced to reconcile with the decisions of their past. Revolving around the wedding of two left-wing activists associated with the Zengakuren,^{ya} it focuses upon the protest movement, betrayal, and personal atonement for the disappearance and death of two colleagues.

Given the incredibly slow tempo of the film and the absence of the gruesome violence which worked to define the previous two films, the relationship between *Night and Fog in Japan* and Oshima’s first two films in 1960 becomes difficult to discuss. Lacking the quick-cutting, hand-held camera movement that helped to define the cutting-edge style of *Cruel Story of Youth* and the sweaty, (pseudo) realism of *Graveyard of the Sun*, *Night and Fog in Japan* is stunningly rigid by comparison. Oshima used only 43 shots throughout the entire film, and framed these shots as though one was watching events unfold in a playhouse rather than in a movie theatre. The effect upon the audience is also incredibly different: rather than be sucked into the psychologically jarring, fast-paced nihilism of the middle class youth or into the grim, vicious world of the slums, the audience is kept at a firm distance from the characters. Oshima’s use of theatrical devices in his film serves to isolate the audience from the filmic events. Furthermore, it formally reinforces the formal isolation of the characters from each other and,

^{ya} Sato, 217.

^{ya} The Zengakuren (also known as the All-Japan Federation of Student Self-government Associations) was founded in 1948 and was an important factor in the left-wing protests against the security treaty. Initially under the control of the Japan Communist Party (JCP), the Zengakuren was instrumental in splitting the “unified front” of the left wing. For a detailed examination of the Zengakuren, please see George R. Packard III, *Protest in Tokyo: The Security Crisis of 1960*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966). Also see Stuart J. Dowsey, ed. *Zengakuren: Japan’s Revolutionary Students*, (Berkeley, California: Ishi Press, 1970).

effectively, the world outside of the movement as well. The flashbacks, philosophical, moral and political debates also have a significantly slower tempo. Rather than privilege a recognizable style that would define Oshima's work as his, he endeavored to create a fusion between the film's subjects and the techniques he employed. *Cruel Story of Youth* and *Graveyard of the Sun* each reflect a difference in style. Yet their depiction of sex and violence created were similar enough to invoke a relationship between the two films. His last film from that year remains difficult to reconcile with the others.

His timing in directing such a divergent work further complicates a reading of Oshima's possible intent. First, Oshima was at a critical moment in the development of his directorial career with Shochiku Studios. Rather than create films which were stylistically or thematically continuous which could potentially lend him recognition at the theaters and develop a following among the youthful audience, he broke from the sex and violence formula. Second, while the Ampo demonstrations were at their peak during the summer of 1960, he gave them only brief attention in his first two films that year, focusing instead upon the need for the individual to assert a critical voice within the confines of their immediate materialistic or poverty-ridden environments. By the time Shochiku studios released *Night and Fog in Japan* in October, the Ampo demonstrations had already been defeated. Yet the director chose that moment to create a darkly critical filmic commentary about those youth who participated in the protests. Why this film at this time? What did Oshima endeavor to communicate to his youthful audience?

A possible explanation for Oshima's sudden departure from using sex and violence in his films lies in the director's own attempts to critically and rebelliously assert his subjectivity against the system in which he was forced to exist: the studio system. Upon the success of *Cruel Story of Youth*, Shochiku actively marketed Oshima as a "New Wave" director. This marks out one of the most evident differences between the development of the New Wave in Japan and the concurrent rise of the French New Wave which was defined by its "independence" from the commercial system of production. But Oshima, in response to Shochiku's pulling of *Night and Fog in Japan* after only four days of release, wrote a letter in *Film Criticism* (1960) that not only protested the film's premature withdrawal, but launched a criticism of the phrase "New Wave" used so readily by the media and studios. In this protest, Oshima wrote:

What do you mean, "New Wave"? Have you ever used the term "New Wave" as anything other than a synonym for sex and violence? Where is the sex and violence in *Night and*

Fog in Japan? What relationship does the film have to your so-called New Wave? By taking a concept that has already been smeared with your dirty hands and forcing it on *Night and Fog in Japan*, by sweeping the revolutionary aspects of that work into the realm of public morals, you are giving support to the political and artistic reactionaries.

With unrelenting anger, I protest!

Stop using the term "New Wave" once and for all! Evaluate each film on its own merits![^]

Oshima's angry argument for the treatment of each film as an individual project helps to understand the lack of stylistic continuity between his films in 1960. Oshima's subsequent freedom from developing a recognizable and marketable style may also explain how the director was able to switch filmic stylings to best suit the subject he addressed. Nonetheless, Oshima's film was pulled from distribution within days of its release. Shochiku claimed it was because the film lacked box office support to which Oshima responded with: "This massacre is clearly political oppression. This is demonstrated by the film's having been withdrawn in spite of the fact that its box-office figures were only slightly lower than usual [. . .]"[^] As the leader of the JSP, Asanuma Inejiro, was assassinated by a right-wing extremist the day before Shochiku pulled the film from the theaters, Oshima's claim that his work fell victim to political oppression may be correct.[^] However, it is unclear whether Shochiku would have pulled the film because it spoke (specifically) pessimistically about the left wing or because it departed from the sex and violence formula upon which the studios had endeavored to profit. Regardless, the studio's decision to pull the film marked out the irreparable rift between the studio system and Oshima. He left the studio soon after to form Sozoshu, his own film company in 1961. Responding to the rigid studio system and the Shochiku's desire to promote the "speed, sex, and thrills"[^] of New Wave filmmaking, *Night and Fog in Japan* is in itself a form of rebellion against the borders of marketability the studios set for their young directors.

Oshima's negative response to the politics surrounding the production and release of *Night and Fog in Japan* and the director's pessimistic representation of politics *within* the film seem to point to a overt politicization of Oshima's filmic voice that was not so readily apparent in his earlier work. It is unclear, however, in what sort of political debate Oshima takes part. A comment he made as a part of his

[^] Oshima, article from *Film Criticism* as reproduced in *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*, 56-57.

[^] Ibid., 54.

protest in *Film Criticism* seems to clarify his position. In his attempt to pinpoint the underlying reason for the studio's lack of support for his film, Oshima scathingly wrote:

I really think that what killed *Night and Fog in Japan* is the same thing that killed Kamba Michiko,^{^t} and Asanuma Inejiro, and I protest with unrelenting anger.

What is it? It is everyone and everything that is displeased when the people try to erect reform from their side, to carve out new conditions for themselves. The enormous strength shown by the people in the fight against the security treaties terrifies and intimidates them, ultimately sending them into a frenzy.^{^o}

This statement would seem to imply Oshima's sympathies with left wing political activism. Though long recognized in Japan for his extreme left-wing beliefs, his undeniably pessimistic film about the Old and New Left complicates a reading of his rebellious, authorial position. An article Oshima wrote in 1969 entitled, "My Adolescence Began with Defeat," reveals the intention the director had in releasing the film. In this article, Oshima outlined his production plan for *Night and Fog in Japan*, writing:

All men have responsibility. Those who created the current situation must change it. Those who should become the nucleus of reform but remain embedded in their lives; those who once stepped forward as the nucleus of reform but became frustrated and now impatiently wait for reform to come *from outside themselves*; and those who preserve the stagnant conditions in spite of their unceasing belief that they are the nucleus of reform – I strongly denounce the corruption, depravity, and mistakes of such nuclei. (my emphasis)^{^t}

In light of this statement and of the highly critical position Oshima takes in his film against the insular conflicted world of left-wing activism, rather than interpret Oshima's heated protest as a call rallying cry for the youths of Japan to participate in the movement, I argue that it acts as an indictment of those existing power structures that are threatened by the assertion of the individual voice which questions the culpability of the institution of politics. *Night and Fog in Japan*, though so seemingly different from *Cruel Story of Youth*, and *Graveyard of the Sun*, continues to challenge the individual to be critical of the system in which they are involved, be it the lure of economic prosperity, the cycle of violence in the slums, or the alienating, abstract ideology of the Marxist left-wing. As with his other films, he

^{^t} Max Tessier, 74.

^{^r} Oshima, 33.

^{^e} Kamba Michiko was a student from Tokyo University who was killed on June 15th when the demonstrations became more volatile. Though the police blamed the rioting students and the students blamed the police, her death, unlike the "Bloody May Day" incident 8 years before, succeeded in rallying greater support for the protesters. She became a martyr for the movement. See footnote by Annette Michelson, Oshima, *Cinema, Censorship, and the State*, 57. Also see Packard, 296.

^{^o} Oshima, 57.

^{^t} Oshima, 198.

cinematically projects the “Spirit of Ambo” by calling for the active protest of systems which only act to alienate the youths from each other and fail, in the end, to lend purpose and meaning to their lives.

Oshima epitomized this sort of rebellion by fracturing the marketed unity of the New Wave under the studio system. As I will discuss throughout the remainder of this analysis, he represents the necessity of such criticality in *Night and Fog in Japan*, by exposing the inevitability of the individual’s defeat and betrayal should they fail to actively assert their subjectivity within the restrictive confines of the movement. Through this film, Oshima did not attack participation in the movement, per se, but the passive adoption of abstract ideology which erases individual culpability and leaves the youthful rebels in a moral vacuum.

Memory, Violence and the United Front

If one really thinks hard about it, it’s better to be ‘alone together’ than ‘only alone’[. . .]
New-Left Coed, *Night and Fog in Japan*

The film’s events unfold around the wedding between Nozawa, a member of the Old Left, and Reiko, a member of the New Left. The wedding itself is a significant symbol of the unification between the two factions. The Old Left, who were involved in the Zengakuren during their student days in the early 1950s when the student movement still had close association with the JCP, were still given to the

strong influence of the Communist Party in 1960 and dictates of the United front” imperative to oppose the treaty. The youths representing the New Left and involved in the Zengakuren student movement, represent the new factionalism of the left wing that had primarily occurred since 1959. Given the couple’s history of political activism and marking out the movement’s insularity from the outside world at the outset of the film only their political colleagues seem to be in attendance at their wedding party. Despite the symbolic unification of the divided political affiliations and practices of the group, the guests of the bride and groom each stay on their own side of the room. Some tension permeates the reception hall as the Zengakuren supported by the New Left was seen by the JCP and the Old Left as a threat to the solidarity of the movement. Though the leaders of the JCP recognized the value the students had as demonstrators, they criticized the students as “agents of imperialism” and as “Trotskyites.”^{AV} However, as the film progresses, the tension stems less from the rift between the Old and New Left and more from the unspoken tensions within the groups themselves.

Political speeches outnumber those of simple, friendly congratulations in the opening scene. Oshima began the film with a long shot into the interior of a wedding hall from the darkness of the outside. As the credits finish, the camera slowly penetrates the interior space and reveals Professor Utagawa in the midst of his wedding speech about the movement. Highlighting the support of “ordinary citizens” for the Anpo struggle on June 15th, Utagawa also links the future of the couple with the future of the Japanese nation:

Japan’s new postwar era began with June 15th. I believe that without a doubt that we can conceive a new future which steps beyond the experience of 15 years of mistakes piled on more mistakes. I pray [hope] that the growth of Mr. and Mrs. Nozawa, who were joined in the midst of that June struggle, will follow the fate of the Japanese nation in the future.

Only the occasional barbed comments of Toura, an Old Left colleague of Nozawa, disturb the fiction of the camaraderie of the wedding guests who celebrate the couple’s (and, symbolically, the left’s) union. When Ota, a member of the New Left, suddenly crashes the reception, Oshima revealed the primary thrust of the film. Wanted by the police for questioning concerning events in June, Ota does not risk possible arrest to merely wish the couple well. Rather he seizes the opportunity to charge the bride,

^{AV} Packard, 223. For greater insight into those specific circumstances which led up to the development of the New Left and the break in the close relationship between the Zengakuren and the JCP in 1959, please see Packard,

Reiko, and other wedding guests of inaction concerning the disappearance of their colleague, Kitami. In effect, he attempts to force members of the movement to account personally for their actions, reaffirming Oshima's previous focus upon the individual to define their moral position in an environment where responsibility and personal values may be lacking. Through the use of flashbacks which reference moments of the individual's involvement in the movement and, more importantly, with other members in the left, Oshima created an indictment of a left wing that tries to bury personal guilt under revolutionary dogma. As a result, the director sent a message to the audience that participation in politics and communal activism does not absolve one from the guilt and responsibility accrued through such actions. The audience, like the characters must be prepared to reflect upon their own motivations and convictions.

The filmic flashback takes those in the wedding party back to the incidents of June 15th, the day Kamba Michiko was killed and many protestors were injured. However, though referring to a violent day, Oshima avoided showing the violence as it took place. Unlike his first two films in 1960, violence in *Night and Fog in Japan* is kept off screen and out of view of the audience. The lack of violence shown on the screen in *Night and Fog in Japan* serves several purposes as Nozawa, Reiko and other members of the left are forced to reflect upon their past actions. First, it serves to reinforce the alienation of each character from each other and the vacuum in which their party values exist. The outside world, the fighting on the streets outside the Diet, is never shown. Oshima showed them only in their interaction with each other. Whereas Oshima depicted the characters of *Graveyard of the Sun* as isolated from the outside due to the economic borders of the slum, he depicted the left-wing protestors as isolated by their abstract, political ideology.

As those in the wedding party are suddenly transported back to June 15th, the screen begins to turn black, turning back in time. Out of the darkness, a disembodied voice says, "I hear a coed died." Then another unknown voice replies "Really?" Then another voice, "That's what they said." Their voices slowly die out, replaced by a general stir. The set, now completely black save the spotlight which first stays on Ota, alone, then picks the same groups of people as those at the wedding out in darkness. This time, they are shown dirty and disheveled from the day's events. The coed of which the voices speak is

Kamba Michiko and makes reference to the heated, violent demonstration earlier that day. Rather than show newsreel footage (like the footage of the Korean riots) or an reenactment of the students protesting on the streets, two strategies of depicting political activism used in *Cruel Story of Youth*, Oshima kept the student activities referenced in *Night and Fog in Japan* removed from interaction with the outside world. Moments later in the scene, after a voice on a car loudspeaker has ordered a moment of silence for the fallen student, Oshima again alluded to violence but did not actually show it. The speaker-car voice rallies the forces once more, saying, "Moreover, 20,000 of our fellow students wait outside a side gate to the Diet without going in. In order to get our school comrades inside, let's go forward to the front gate of the Diet." The students, singing as the speaker delivers his impassioned order, reach a musical peak and then break off. Another voice off screen yells "Charge!" The lighting reverses, then, from almost complete blackness, punctured by the spotlight, to the now dim wedding hall where the guests are silhouetted, caught in thoughts of the past. Sounds of a violent *mêlée* can be heard in the background as Oshima then cut to a long shot that slowly panned a dark, muddy street, capturing images of torn flags, broken placards and lost helmets. The shot is remarkably reminiscent of those used in *Cruel Story of Youth* to show the violated Mako after her second rape and was even repeated in *Graveyard of the Sun* when Shinei's gang killed Ryū, a gang member, for attempting to run away with his pregnant, prostitute-lover. In that scene, Oshima kept the camera focused on Ryū's body as he twisted and convulsed upon a dark, dirty street of Kamagasaki. As with the earlier films, the shot of the mud and filth of the street brings the violence into association with a visceral side of human behavior, one without higher reasoning. The difference between the scenes, however, Oshima showed only the street at this point and did not immediately juxtapose the shot with a prone body. From the wreckage depicted upon the ground and from the darkness, Ota and Ono appear carrying Kitami. Reiko, blood falling from her badly injured arm, also appears out of the darkness. Again, Oshima did not show the moment of violence that caused their injuries, but only alluded to it by showing the consequences: the wreckage that lays upon the street and, eventually, the injured bodies of the students.

The result of this allusion points to the second and most important purpose behind the avoidance of depicting violence in a way that he did in his earlier films. The agent of violence in *Night and Fog in*

Japan has no face or identity and therefore cannot be blamed for his/her action. Within the revolution, the individual is injured but the one who inflicted such an injury, the one who remains off the screen, escapes being *seen* and subsequently avoids responsibility. As no one person may be held accountable for the harm that comes to those in the movement, abstract ideology or party “strategy” absorb the guilt. Oshima clearly referred to this when he cut from the street scene to one of a hospital room where Reiko and Kitami recover from their injuries, side by side in their hospital beds. Kawasaki, one of their peers, and Ono, a member of the Old Left, come to visit. In the following exchange, Kawasaki attempts to comfort his injured comrades by blindly seeking to locate blame for the sacrifices made during the demonstration without accusing a fellow protester:

Ono: (To Reiko) Does it hurt? You don't look well

Kitami: She's the one who dragged me out to the demonstrations. It was already June... She gets worried seeing me like this.

Kawasaki: It's too great a sacrifice, huh? Even though it was great when we stopped Ike's visit.^{^^}

Kitami: But I'm glad I went. It was awful. It drove me crazy, I was so mad.

Kawasaki: But isn't there a problem with the leadership's strategy when someone gets killed? They ought to draw up plans which don't sacrifice anyone.

Kitami: I think it's okay even if we sacrifice someone. If we can force Kishi to resign and stop Ampo.

Though Reiko had been the one to urge Kitami to protest, she is not targeted for blame in his injuries. Rather, it is the leadership's strategies which Kawasaki implicates in the sacrifice of students like Kamba Michiko and, indirectly, for injuries that demonstrators like Reiko and Kitami sustained. Surprisingly, it is not Kitami, the one who was injured, who looks to assign blame for the incident. In fact, demonstrating either great naiveté in the face of the political machine or great faith in his belief in the goals of the protests, Kitami stands up for the cause. Soon after their friends visit, Kitami returns to the protests despite the fact his head injuries are not fully healed, leaving a despondent Reiko behind. The audience is left unsure as to whether he runs back to the protests out of blind faith in the movement or out of the great strength of his convictions. By the end of the film, Oshima revealed that Kitami's return to the front line

was motivated by both faith and his convictions but that when faced with the passive resignation which gripped other left-wing protesters the night the treaty was renewed, he was compelled to leave the movement altogether.

After Kitami leaves the hospital, he disappears and no one from the movement seems to know what became of him. His disappearance prompts Ota to intrude upon Nozawa and Reiko's wedding to launch a criticism of Reiko and others who have forgotten their lost comrade. However, he does not blame them for causing his disappearance and the possibility of his death. Rather, he attacks them for so easily casting him "into oblivion." When Ota questions the group whether or not they knew what happened to Kitami, Reiko coldly states, "I don't know. That guy wasn't anything to me. He was just a friend, classmate. I don't know where that guy would go." To this, Ota replies,

Is that so? (He looks around the room, directing his accusations to Reiko and the rest of the room) Really? A comrade who you linked arms with in struggle has disappeared. Is that okay? (looking back at Reiko) Wasn't it you who dragged him to the demonstration on June 15th? Is it okay to forget that comrade who's disappeared, break off from the ranks and bury yourself in the day to day world, in domestic bliss?

A friend of Reiko's tries to come to the bride's defense by arguing Reiko still cares about Ampo. But Ota does not question Reiko's belief in the cause. He challenges the extent to which the revolution has absorbed fundamental human values that would spark concern in the group for their missing comrade. He draws attention to the fissure between believing in cause and bearing responsibility for the well being of their colleagues. To drive his point home further, Ota passionately questions Kawasaki, "When we were bleeding from the clubs of the police at the Diet, didn't you guys quickly leave and indulge in idle slumber? When we dispersed at Yurakucho soaked in rain and blood, what the hell did you do?" Near the end of the film, Misako, the wife of the vanguard leader, Nakayama, exposes his own failings to move past empty rhetoric of the party interest in "the people" to actually show concern for those very real individuals who suffer in the demonstrations. Though sounding at this point in the film as though she is attempting to deflect her own guilt, she says,

Do you know what a boring life I've led with this man, what a sham our life is together? On June 15th after the demonstration had dispersed, we went home early to watch the TV. The students were fighting and getting hurt so bad that I couldn't watch it. When I said, "wasn't it a

^{^^} Here, Kawasaki refers to Eisenhower's cancelled visit to Japan due to the uprising that was taking place there at the time. Given the repeated defeats of the movement, this was seen as being a minor, but important, victory.

mistake to disperse the crowd?" he didn't answer me. All he did was demand my body. This man who won't even acknowledge another person's existence (*jinkaku*), this man is called the vanguard, a leader.

He did not visit the wounded, his supposed friends and those who look to him for guidance, at the hospital. Instead, the same night Nozawa took Kitami and Reiko from the care of Ota and Ono to the hospital, Nakayama watched TV of the unfolding violent incidents at home and demanded sexual gratification. Empty rhetoric which preached the value of rallying the masses only adds to the feelings of alienation the characters feel from each other. The flag of solidarity under which they fight on the field turns into a fiction when the existence of the individual is threatened and fellow members of the movement turn their backs upon the situation.

Frustrated Subjectivity

Shortly after Ota uses the disappearance of Kitami to force Old and New Left wing guests of the wedding party to recognize their hypocrisy and lack of personal beliefs within the movement, Takumi, another uninvited guest, crashes the wedding. Takumi comes to the wedding assuming the name of Takao, an Old Left student who committed suicide during their student days. Like Ota, Takumi is there to make Nakayama, Misako, and Nozawa, colleagues since their student days in the early 1950s, revisit the circumstances that led up to the youth's death. He wants the three to finally admit that they helped to create the incredible feeling of isolation and guilt that forced Takao to take his own life. As the young student committed suicide, however, it becomes far more difficult to assign guilt or responsibility. As the film slips into another flashback to revisit the events that occurred years before, Toura leads the investigation of the events of the past in an attempt to air grievances he had then but was unable to articulate at the time. As the camera moves outside into the fog of the night, Toura's voice can be heard:

It was almost ten years ago. For some reason, the fog continued deep into the night...In the neighboring country, the quagmire of the Korean war slogged on and it seemed that the

freedom and democracy Japan had been given after the War were about to be swept by the wave of the "reverse course." In order to stop that, we thought there was no alternative but to take up arms, and we students stood at the forefront around the country and fought it... the fog was thick that night as well...

Cutting through the "fog," cutting through the ideological language which had obscured personal responsibility in the past and allowed the perpetuation of old mistakes as a result, the flashback brings the audience out of the wedding hall and into the dark, foggy yard at a student dorm. Students run in and out of the building. Yells can be heard in the background. The camera then cuts inside to show a mob of students wrestling a youth down the stairs. They think he is a spy from the police, reflecting the widespread paranoia among the left wing of the "reverse course" and the possible revival of the prewar special police.

Taking justice into their own hands, the students hold the youth for days and interrogate him unmercifully. Takao and a handful of other students including Takumi seem to be the only ones who question his "spy" status. Gripped by fear and riled by the inflammatory speeches made by Nakayama, the other students ignore the dissenting voices. Such voices in a paranoid environment are perceived as a threat that could (ironically) compromise the unity of the movement against oppression. When the spy escapes, the Control Committee, the leadership panel of the local student organization, targets Takao as having possibly let him escape. In a dimly lit room, Nakayama, the head of the committee, sits facing Takao and grills him:

Nakayama: I see. You aren't very strong and the other guy was probably frantic... but why is it you didn't become desperate the same as him? ... Wasn't it because deep down inside you thought that youth wasn't a spy?... That feeling was conveyed to the enemy and it gave him an advantage. That's it. That kind of petty bourgeois thinking made a formal loyal supporter of the party like you degenerate into an ally of the enemy spy. The next time there's a spy problem, there'll be no way to explain your actions, even if people think you're the spy.

Takao: ...but Nakayama! What was the basis for your calling that kid a spy?

Nakayama: Takao, even now, do you still have doubts about our judgment, about our unified view? Are you against them? If you do, then it will immediately be evident that you're an enemy spy. We will demand that you engage in thorough self-criticism before the party and the masses. You write how your petty bourgeois attitude has made you yourself a degenerate spy. That will be a valuable experience and lesson for our movement. If you refuse to do it, we have no choice but to bury you as an enemy spy, an imperialist agent and an enemy of the people. You think about it carefully.

As party ideology relies upon the thin fiction of a unified front, Takao's tenacious assertion of his personal beliefs, no matter how logical, are viewed as a threat. Though the political debates within the Marxist left after the war were varied as political theorists, leftist literary scholars and philosophers attempted to grapple with issues surrounding the expression of individual subjectivity within the reform movement, Nakayama's threat to Takao represents the Communist-party, ideological hard line of the time: the assertion of the individual's voice speaks to the factionalism of the petty bourgeoisie.⁴⁴ According to Marxist philosopher, Matsumura Kazuto who acted as a voice for the Communist Party in the early 1950s, subjectivity of the individual is already expressed in "struggle through class consciousness."⁴⁵ To express a sentiment which conflicts with that of the movement is to privilege one's own ideas over those of the movement and undermines the goals of the collective. This scene between Nakayama and Takao not only speaks to the immense influence over the Zengakuren the Communist party had in the early 1950s but also testifies to the suffocating insularity the political ideology created for the young student rebels. Should Takao not bow to the judgment of the collective, or, more accurately, the party ideals set by the committee, he must be made an example. According to the dictates of the Control Committee, there is no room for rebellion within the revolution.

Faced with the existential absurd – the irreconcilable contradiction between what he feels is right and what his environment/ the movement will allow – Takao reveals his ultimate passivity. The young student already suffers from feelings of alienation within the movement. Furthermore, his personal relationships (or lack thereof), marked most poignantly in the unrequited love he feels for Misako, who dated the charismatic Nozawa at the time, only heightens his sense of isolation. Unable to reconcile his stifled subjectivity with his need to vent his feelings of alienation and frustration, he can no longer find meaning for living. He submits to the absurdity of his situation. He kills himself. Again, Oshima did not show the act of violence Takao inflicts upon himself. Rather, the director only reveals the consequences

⁴⁴ The plurality of voices within the left-wing debate for subjectivity was great in the early 1950s. According to Koschmann, in opposition to the Communist party's ideological hegemony in the early '50s, a group of writers promoted a new set of ideals which focused upon "self-expression rather than self-effacement," the primacy of art over politics, and "the need for literature to nurture modern subjectivity." (7-8) However, their strategies were seen by the Communist party as a distraction from the proletariat. Such alternative perspectives within the left wing were often harshly criticized. For an in-depth discussion of the debate for individual subjectivity in postwar Japan, please see Koschmann.

of his self-inflicted violent act when Takumi carries his lifeless body into a dorm room where Sakamaki and a drunken Toura sit talking. Takumi looks as though he is about to cry. As three students look at Takao's lifeless body, confused and lost, Toura finally gets up, staggers to a window, and throws up. Despite their sadness, however, Takumi, Toura, and Sakamaki do nothing at the time to draw attention to their sympathies for their dead colleague. They remain silent within the movement.

In coming to the Nozawa wedding party, Takumi not only lays blame on Nakayama but also upon Misako and Nozawa. Like Takao, they were away from the room in which the students kept the spy. His escape was possible because an alarm went off, momentarily distracting the guards and allowing the youthful suspected of spying to push through them. Nozawa and Misako argue that if they are being accused of letting the spy go, of pulling the alarm, that their involvement was an impossibility. They were, much to the chagrin of Nozawa's new wife who did not know of the relationship between the two prior to that evening, in the bushes when the alarm sounded. Takumi pushes his assault further, however, asking them why they didn't stand up for their comrade. It is not clear why Takumi specifically targets Misako and Nozawa when any number of the members of the Old Left in attendance at the wedding could be held responsible for failing to stand up to the Control Committee to speak on behalf of Takao. However, Nozawa held a position of great influence within the student dorm at the time. Consequently, it was only someone in his position who could possibly achieve success in speaking for Takao when others such as Takumi would most likely be labeled as supporters of Takao's "petty bourgeois thinking." When Nozawa angrily asks Toura why he brings his misgivings up at such a time rather than voicing them years earlier, Toura points out Nozawa's past close association with Nakayama's group. By maintaining such a close relationship with those in power, those who were "infallible," Nozawa became untouchable by proxy. Toura states, "We could do nothing to stifle our doubts and criticisms." The revolution, reliant upon a unified subservience to the voices of authority, nullifies the freedom of individual expression. The revolution, then, has become as oppressive as the political system they seek to overthrow. Just as the students of the Old Left had feared the return of such policies as the Peace Preservation Law in the early

⁹¹ Matsumura's position as summarized by Koschmann, 209.

1950s, the very nature of their “solidarity” had become as oppressive and limiting. The revolution, just as Camus had formulated, inevitably becomes the monster it seeks to replace.

Critiquing the Revolution

I argue that Oshima’s criticism of the passive adherence political rhetoric within the left-wing protest movement was the same as that he launched through his rebellious youths in his previous films who slipped easily into cycles of violence and materialism. According to Oshima’s films, the desire of the youths to be led, passively seeking out an (external) system of values in which they can believe and which gives their life meaning, will only result in their betrayal and defeat. The systems through which they endeavor to replace the lost values and sense of community symbolized by the unifying body of the Emperor are only fictions. They perpetuate those conditions which led to Japan’s moral defeat 15 years before and secure their own bitter cycle of moral lack. The left-wing activism which they trust will provide their lives with meaning, is only a thin façade. The leaders within the movement, who preach their concern about “the people,” only reveal their hypocrisy when they do not endeavor to help those very real individuals who had placed their trust and lives in the hands of those in power. Like Oshima, Camus was highly critical of such hypocritical doubletalk. Addressing the Russian anarchists, the Decembrists, he launched a pointed criticism which targeted the fundamental failings of the revolution:

Henceforth, violence will be directed against one and all, in the service of the abstract idea. The accession to power of the possessed had to take place so that it could be said, once and for all, that the revolution in itself, was more important than the people it wanted to save, and that friendship, which until then had transformed defeats into the semblance of victories, must be sacrificed and postponed until the still invisible day of victory.⁹¹

⁹¹ Camus, 161-162.

According to Camus, the revolution cannot surpass rhetoric. As a result, reform can never be realized as the people are sacrificed for the possibilities of an intangible future. Leaders such as Nakayama can preach ideology but the ideals of the party lose their potential when sullied by his selfish desire to perpetuate his own power within the system. Though far away from the slums and grim environment of Kamagasaki and legitimized by the system, Nakayama is ultimately the same as the Agitator in *Graveyard of the Sun*. He lures youth with the fiction of values that cannot be truly achieved. As Oshima so pessimistically portrays in *Night and Fog in Japan*, liberation from political oppression will never be realized as the students themselves actively support a new patriarchal system as oppressive as that of Kishi's regime. In other words, as long as they remain submissive to those forces which oppress them in their immediate microcosm, they will be defeated before their goal to effect change in the national macrocosm can take place. Marking his departure from Camus' position, Oshima, it seems, claimed that the revolution could surpass rhetoric only if those who participated remained actively critical of the hypocrisy which dampened its creative potential.

Nakayama's desire to perpetuate his own power within the movement assures the abandonment of his fellow protestors in their time of crisis. The ideological language of the revolution, which potentially can expose the hypocrisy by which the leader lives and his failure as the replacement father, is also what buoys his position of power. He distracts attention from his own culpability in Takao's death by blaming it on that which is intangible. One of his most unbelievable speeches manipulates abstract ideology so magnificently that it is like a fiery sermon that converts the sinning masses. He states near the end of the film:

Nakayama: Takumi, what is it you want to say? Are you trying to slander your friends? Do you want to break up the group?! Are you trying to stab us in the back?! (looking at everyone now) What do you all think? Isn't it as clear as day what killed Takao? ... Wasn't it the U.S.-Japan reaction that killed Takao? He was killed by the imperialists. The U.S.-Japan reaction which in the midst of the rising worldwide peace movement now is getting more and more isolated and commits more and more atrocities has taken yet another step to oppress the lives of the Japanese people. Takao was pushed to his death by [that oppression] which students' lives poverty-stricken and hopeless. Takao just couldn't stand that. We all deeply regret his death and at the same time we have to turn to a brighter future which overcomes such weakness. However, Takumi wants to get rid of the picture and pass Takao's precious death on to us. Do any of you here really feel that you have the slightest responsibility [for his death]? (he starts to weep)

Nagata: No way! Takumi has lost sight of the provocateurs, the [real] enemy. He's an undisciplined student.

Sasahara: That's right!

Nagata: Takumi, keep quiet!

Everyone including Takumi falls into a feigned silence after this and Takumi soon slips out of the room, defeated once again by the abstract rationality and skewed, intangible values of the movement. Nakayama is like a preacher taking the pulpit to whip his believers into a frenzy of faith. Unfortunately, in a world where the youth look for meaning, such language, though powerful, is without consistent values to support it and only serves to obscure rather than construct. In this respect, such language is like the "fog" in the film's title. Eventually, the fog disperses, however, and reality of the world in which one must exist remains. The cover of fog can only be temporary and, if relied upon, will eventually fail in the end.

The zeal with which Nakayama delivers his impassioned speech speaks to the "deification of history," or the new, revolutionary "prison" of man about which Camus warned.¹¹ Such a scene only confirms Camus' argument that God is dead but that man replaced the worship of God to worship the Marxist dialectic/economic conception of history ("man's pursuit of his own ends")¹² in God's absence. The humanization and weakening of Hirohito, the Great unifying Father of nation *and* the spiritual focus for the imperial state, destroyed the faith in the deified Emperor. God was dead in Japan. To fill the void, participation in doctrinaire political activism, inserting oneself into history, became the replacement. Abstract political ideology replaced the intangible myth of the Emperor system. It became the replacement Father. Marxist revolutionary dogma replaced the rhetoric of filial piety. Yet the result was the same. The people became willing slaves for the "cause" to eradicate their own personal culpability. Summarizing this effect, Camus quoted Nietzsche in the following:

Modern socialism tends to create a form of secular Jesuitism, to make instruments of all men [...] What we desire is well being. . . . As a result we march toward spiritual slavery such as never been seen. . . . Intellectual Cæsarism hovers over every activity of the businessman and the philosopher.¹³

¹¹ Camus, 80.

¹² Cruikshank, 125.

¹³ Nietzsche as quoted by Camus, 79.

Lacking definitive value structures of their own, the members of the left wing in *Night and Fog in Japan* blindly succumb to the “religion” that Nakayama preaches. They are willing slaves under the flawed leadership of the vanguard.

Though the pessimistically oppressive environment Oshima depicted in *Night and Fog in Japan* seems quite different from that he featured in *Cruel Story of Youth* and *Graveyard of the Sun*, it is merely a different facet of oppression found in Japan in 1960. However, whereas Oshima posited Takeshi in *Graveyard of the Sun* as a young fallible hero who rebelled, from within the gang, against the cycle of violence which defined his oppressive environment, Oshima created no such hero in *Night and Fog in Japan*. Youths such as Takumi, Takao, and Reiko were too beaten down by the JCP and Zengakuren’s internal politics and strategies brought in from the outside to make these men impotent, to challenge the hypocrisy of the movement. Figures such as Nozawa and Nakayama were too inured in the power positions they held to question the empty rhetoric which supported them. The exception to this may seem to lie in Kitami, the character who disappeared and consequently is in very little of the film. He returns to the protests despite his injuries. He acts alone, seemingly demonstrating strength of character and convictions. He leaves the hospital despite Reiko’s argument to stay. In fact, he rebels against her beaten resignation that their return to the protest would be to no avail. Before he leaves the hospital he and Reiko argue over his desire to go back to the front lines:

Reiko: You say you’re going, but in the end the treaty will go into effect.

Kitami: What are you talking about?... Did you join the movement and participate up to now thinking that?

Reiko: but it’s a grim fact. Despite this marvelous nationwide uprising, the treaty will still pass.

Kitami: You never said that kind of thing to me before.

Reiko: That’s because it was the first time for you to join this struggle. Except for the struggle against the Police Duties Bill, we’ve lost every battle I’ve joined since coming to the university, despite our opposition. That’s why deep inside of me I felt this struggle too would end in defeat. (She gets up from her bed) I was so glad when you finally decided to join the Anpo struggle after not budging no matter how much I urged you. But when I saw you rashly moving forward without considering the results, I felt rather that you couldn’t go.

Kitami: I’m going, after all. I have to. I can’t let it pass.

Reiko: It’s not just me. Ota and Kawasaki too, they all feel the same as me.

Kitami: Is that so? But still, the way I feel, we have to keep Anpo from passing at all costs. Most of the people gathering in front of the Diet today must have the same simple idea. I'm going.

As Kitami attempts to leave, Reiko jumps from the bed to try and stop him but Kitami breaks free and leaves. It is unclear why Reiko attempts to stop the youth. It may be because of his injuries. It may also be that she does not want his empty bed next to her in the hospital as a reminder of her own despondency.

Following Kitami to the demonstration where the hopeful youth seeks camaraderie with his fellow revolutionaries, Oshima cuts from the hospital to show Kitami walking amidst a sea of flags, not other protesters, under the night sky. He is alone and isolated even amid the crowd. In going to the protests, hoping to find others as seemingly impassioned as he, hoping to discover the zeal and power of the movement embodied in his fellow demonstrators, Kitami inevitably finds himself alone with his sense of betrayed convictions. He does not find the impassioned display of beliefs that he had hope for. Resignation on the part of the other protestors denies Kitami's need for a collective experience to feed his appropriated value system. His voice can be heard as he walks through the seas of flags:

My comrades from the university staged a sit-in. They sat without moving. It looked like nothing was going to happen there. Because of that, I didn't feel like joining in. I felt more frenzied and I just walked back and forth, back and forth. I thought with the countless number of people, something would happen. I thought they would be unable to swallow the "automatic ratification" and something would happen...But the time came and went without any regard for my will.

There is a flash and then Oshima freezes the close-up image of Kitami. In this scene, Oshima revealed that Kitami's convictions were not based upon his personally held belief that he could effect change. He sought to participate in a communal movement and be part of the youthful energies which flowed around him. Rather than actively protest the Treaty to the bitter end, he submits to the malaise around him. Oshima not only revealed in this scene the failure of the individual to find solace in the communal activism of the movement but also the inevitable isolation of Kitami when his values, based upon a faith in abstract ideas, are defeated by complacency. At this moment, Oshima deprived the audience of a character of convictions. Kitami, though frenzied as he walks about the sit-in, falls into resigned complacency like his peers. Oshima exposed the fragility of his beliefs, created in a source outside himself. They can only exist as intangible ideas and offer the youth no solace when his fellow followers

reveal their inability to believe any longer. Like the generation before them, the students involved in the New Left are destined to the same failures of the Old Left if they fail to actively rebel against the stifling political hierarchies that hinder their protests. They will face defeat if they fail to realize their protest should come from their passion for their own convictions and not be reliant upon the passing mood of the collective.

EPILOGUE

As *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard in the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan* represent, Oshima argued for the necessity of the young rebels of Japan to actively construct meaning and purpose for their lives through the critical engagement of those social, economic, and political systems which defined their

existence. Though film scholars have both ambiguously and clearly read the spirit of politics in these films, I have attempted to show that Oshima's intent in making these works is much more expansive. His films depict frustrated tales of adolescence and charge his young viewers with the task of critically breaking the cycle of defeat in which they and his characters are caught. Actively engaging with political systems is only one small facet of the active rebellion they need to enact. Covering a spectrum of different classes, and varied types of rebellious expression, Oshima's films capture the existential struggle for the individual to find meaning in their lives. In this respect, he revealed his ideological similarities to Camus who argued for individual culpability in the creation of meaning in *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*.

Arguably, Camus and Oshima may have recognized the fallibility of the easy lure of the cause when they each explored the possibilities of left-wing political activism in their youth. Camus briefly joined the Communist Party in the 1930s¹⁰ whereas Oshima joined a student organization with close ties to the Communist party called the *Jichikai* in his high school days and briefly while he was a student in the Law Faculty at Kyoto University in the 1950s.¹¹ Yet their associations were relatively short-lived given the heated political atmospheres of the pre and postwar eras. Though it is virtually impossible to speculate on what may have contributed to their cynicism within their respective left-wing movements, their criticisms of the revolution are quite clear. The individual will continue to repeat the mistakes of the past if they are unable to look inside themselves for the active creation of meaning in their lives. No noble end may be found by replacing the absence of God (in Japan, the absence of the Great Father/spiritual focus for the nation) with the equally abstract fictions of political movements and the deification of history. With the abstraction of ideology come moral absolutes which obscure personal culpability and seemingly erase the individual's critical potential. Camus eschewed any such absolute position, preferring instead a middle path. Literary theorist, Peter Royle, in summarizing Camus' moral position, drew out the threat of the two absolutes Camus attempted to avoid. He wrote that,

[. . .] instead of remaining true to the original humanist inspiration of the rebellion, people get carried away by abstractions, such as Justice or History. They abandon morality for another form of servile obedience to the gods. They say either absolutely yes, like Nietzsche or the

¹⁰ Cruikshank, 13.

¹¹ See Desser, 31. See also Turim, 9.

Fascists, which means, amongst other things, yes to killing; or absolutely no, like Marx and the Communists, which means the ruthless suppression of any form of opposition to the party of the revolution, the doctrine that the end justifies the means, and the deferment of happiness to some future millennium.^{9v}

Ultimately, to subscribe to such absolutes is to undermine the possibility for the assertion of the individual's subjective voice. Within a system which dogmatically adheres to absolutes, such as that represented so pessimistically in *Night and Fog in Japan*, it seems as though there is no room for rebellion. Through his films, Oshima challenged the young, angry rebels of Japan to criticize the fiction around new absolutes in Japan – democracy, capitalism, Marxism, and even the inevitability of violence. He, too, demanded through his filmic rebels the need for active self-awareness and responsibility. His filmic expression of the “Spirit of Ampo” called for absolute protest and rebellion against the new glossy fictions that worked to define the social fabric of Japan in 1960. The youth had yet to be fully absorbed into the optimistic social imaginary of economic prosperity and democracy. They possessed the frustration and rebellious potential to rupture the resignation of the generations before them. They could effect change and disrupt the cycle of defeat.

As Camus and Oshima textually and cinematically explored the moral and ethical imperative of the individual to return to the foundations of revolt – to reclaim the creative possibilities of rebellion – they did not offer a clear explanation as to how one could successfully achieve such a process. While Camus seemed to be overwhelmed by the idealistic vision he had constructed to visualize the application of his theories in the real world, Oshima's filmic pessimism, his lack of a clear example of a youth who successfully lives by his/her rebellion, can be read in several ways. One reading is that the seemingly bleak endings of *Cruel Story of Youth*, *Graveyard of the Sun*, and *Night and Fog in Japan* act as filmic testament to the dark psychology, the “sociology of despair,” that continued to grip Japan in 1960 despite glowing reports of economic recovery. The youth generation in 1960 was the inheritor of decades of guilt and unclaimed responsibility, leaving it frustrated and without a positive avenue through which to vent their anger. Many students took to the streets to participate in the Ampo demonstrations, yelling “Ampo Tōsō!” and finding solace for their empty, tumultuous lives through the camaraderie they found in the

^{9v} Peter Royle, *The Sartre-Camus Controversy: A Literary and Philosophical Critique*, (Ottawa, Canada: University of Ottawa Press, 1982), 8.

movement. However, even though Kishi Nobusuke resigned as prime minister after the treaty had been ratified and put into effect that summer, he was succeeded by Ikeda Hayato. Hayato, who had been a high ranking official in the Ministry of Finance before and during the war, was a bureaucratic/ politic heir to the ideologies of Yoshida Shigeru.^{9A} In other words, the prime minister changed by the system remained the same. The Treaty had gone through and those who participated in the Ampo struggle felt the sting of defeat. Though Oshima's films responded to the pessimism of the historical moment during which they were produced and the socio-political cynicism many Japanese felt, I argue he had other motivations for leaving the endings of his films so bleak. He did not offer his audience a clear path to rebellion because it was up to them to actively and critically interpret their mode of action for themselves. Just as he had created a fallible hero in Takeshi through whom the young audience could either momentarily empathize or criticize, Oshima left the possibilities for the formation of adolescent rebellion up to his viewers. His films were not didactic, moralizing tales that encouraged emulation. They were left to decide for themselves how they would have resolved to change the oppressive filmic situations and, hopefully, how they could reconcile themselves with their own existential absurdity.

In the end, Oshima fulfills Michelson's argument that his films are the "subject of history." He firmly rooted his films of 1960 within the volatile framework of the Ampo struggle to create a political foil to the existential problem of how to exist in a world where one can believe in nothing. Like Camus, Oshima depicted the imperative of the individual to critically develop their own position within social, economic, political and moral debates. To passively succumb to the inevitability of established systems is to perpetuate the fiction of dependence that crumbled with filial piety after the war. It is to set in motion the spinning top. To continue to seek out that fragile, easily betrayed system of beliefs, is only to submit to inevitable defeat and failure once more, repeating the mistakes of the previous generations. To escape the vicious cycle of defeat, the youth generation of Japan must relinquish their desire for participation in a system which offers them a place in the new social imaginary. They must relinquish their desire for a system which acts as only a replacement Father for the lost Great National Father, the Emperor. They must fully annihilate the Father. This is not say that Oshima was an anarchist who argued for the

^{9A} Allinson, 90.

complete abolishment of the government and law. Rather, I argue he challenged his young audience to subvert their desire for collective social, political, and economic identity and their dependence upon abstract systems to provide their lives with meaning. In other words, as they looked to position themselves within the new socio-political fabric of Japan, they must remain critical of such systems and actively assert their *individual* subjectivity lest they be passively absorbed into and betrayed by the inherent fallacies such constructions possess. In capturing the rebellious "Spirit of Ambo," Oshima did not seek to inspire his viewers to enter history through passive participation in a revolution. He challenged them to create history.

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