

Light and Colour in the *Nuberu Bagu* Japanese Cinema¹

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Abstract

In the 1960s and 1970s, a few young Japanese filmmakers made a series of films that, by their common political and aesthetical features, were critically and theoretically brought together as the *Nuberu Bagu* or “Japanese New Wave”. These works became a fundamental aspect of the political, social and aesthetical revolution that took place in post-war Japan.

Politically, after World War II, there were riots against the American presence but also against the ethical principles of Old Japan, advocating militarism and sense of honour. Aesthetically, the uprising was against classical Japanese cinema, and mainly against the work of directors such as Ozu Yasujiro, Naruse Mikio and Mizoguchi Kenji, which the young filmmakers considered artistically and morally conservative.

The social and political concerns of these New Wave filmmakers were deeply rooted in a left-wing ideology and the will to eliminate oppressing forces, such as those influencing the role of women and the expression of sexuality.

Visually, in addition to major changes in the creation of characters and editing, Japanese cinema began using light and colour in a completely distinct way. On the one hand, the programmatic lightening of cinematography embodied a full disconnection from the aesthetics of the Old Japan, in which shadow was associated to artistic excellence, while simultaneously allowed for a more faithful depiction of the habits of a new born Japan. On the other hand, the use of bright colours and their insubordination to line was not only a sign of the inversion of the traditional aesthetical paradigm and a consequence, of Western influence, of the introduction of new colours in society, but also a demonstration of the social revolution, creating space in Japanese cinema for the expression of marginal aspects, both of the Japanese culture and of imported ones.

Taking as a starting point two main works of the theorisation of “Old Japan,” *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* by Nitobe Inazo, who considered it from a political and ethical point of view, and *In Praise of Shadows* by Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, who judged it on an aesthetical level, this paper focuses on the study of the political, social and aesthetical breaches of which the New Wave cinema was, simultaneously, consequence and cause. The analysis in this study is primarily based on light and colour, not only by the symptomatic nature these compositional aspects had throughout the history of cinema, but also due to the semiotic importance provided by these elements to the study of the attempted construction of counter-politics and counter-aesthetics by the Japanese New Wave. On these grounds, I believe the changes in colour treatment and cinematography were crucial elements for the *Nuberu Bagu* revolution, simultaneously reflecting and causing striking changes in Japanese society and cinema in this period.

¹ Translated by Ricardo Hans.

Resumo

Nos anos sessenta e setenta do século XX vários jovens cineastas japoneses realizaram filmes que, pelas suas afinidades políticas e estéticas, foram reunidos a nível crítico e teórico sob a designação de Nuberu Bagu, ou “Nova Vaga do Cinema Japonês”. Estas obras constituíram uma vertente fundamental da revolução política, social e estética que teve lugar no Japão do pós-guerra.

Politicamente, o motim teve lugar tanto contra a presença dos Estados Unidos na sequência da Segunda Guerra Mundial como contra os preceitos éticos do Velho Japão, dos quais se destacavam o sentido da honra e o militarismo. No campo estético, a revolta deu-se contra o cinema clássico japonês e, principalmente, contra as obras de realizadores como Ozu Yasujiro, Naruse Mikio e Mizoguchi Kenji, considerados pelos jovens cineastas como sendo artística e moralmente conservadores.

As preocupações políticas e sociais dos cineastas da Nova Vaga estavam profundamente marcadas por uma filiação ideológica à Esquerda e pela vontade de destruição de forças opressoras, como, por exemplo, as que afectavam a figura da mulher e a expressão da sexualidade.

Ao nível plástico, além de profundas mudanças na construção das personagens e na montagem, verificaram-se alterações radicais na forma como o cinema nipónico passou a utilizar a luz e a cor. Por um lado, o clareamento programático da fotografia de cinema consubstanciou um afastamento total em relação à estética do Velho Japão, na qual a sombra era associada à excelência artística, e, simultaneamente, permitiu um maior rigor no retrato dos hábitos de um Japão renascido. Por outro lado, a utilização de cores vivas e a sua insubmissão à linha constituiu não só um reflexo da inversão do paradigma estético tradicional e uma consequência da introdução, pela influência ocidental, de novas cores na sociedade, mas também uma manifestação da revolução social, abrindo um espaço no cinema japonês para a expressão de vertentes marginais, quer da cultura nipónica, quer das culturas importadas. Partindo de duas obras fundamentais na teorização do “Velho Japão,” Bushido: The Soul of Japan de Nitobe Inazo, que o pensou a nível político e ético, e Elogio da Sombra de Tanizaki Junichiro, que o considerou sob o ponto de vista estético, este texto dedica-se ao estudo das rupturas políticas, sociais e estéticas de que o cinema da Nova Vaga foi, a um tempo, consequência e causa. Neste trabalho, a luz e a cor constituem o núcleo primordial de análise, não só pelo carácter sintomático que estes aspectos composicionais sempre tiveram na História do Cinema, mas também pelo relevo semiótico que estes elementos apresentam para o estudo da tentativa de construção de uma contra-política e de uma contra-estética pela Nova Vaga do cinema japonês. Por estes motivos, defendendo neste artigo que as alterações no tratamento da cor e na concepção da fotografia de cinema constituíram elementos essenciais para a revolução da Nuberu Bagu, sendo reflexo e causa de transformações marcantes na sociedade e no cinema japoneses deste período.

要旨

二十世紀、1960から70年代に、幾人もの日本の若手映画監督たちが政治的、美的親近感から、批評的かつ理論的レベルでヌーヴェルヴァーグまたは「日本映画のニューウェーブ」と評価される映画を制作した。これらの映画作品は戦後の日本で起こった政治的、社会的、美的革命の重要な動勢となった。

政治的には、第二次世界大戦敗戦後のアメリカ合衆国進駐軍の占領への反抗や、特に名誉心や軍人主義に代表される古き日本で重んじられた礼儀への抵抗の要素があった。美的分野では、この抵抗が日本の古典映画への反抗という形で表れた。若手の映画人はとりわけ芸術的にも道徳的にも保守派であると考えて、小津安次郎、成瀬巳喜男、溝口健

二といった映画監督の作品に対して反発した。

ニューウェーブの映画人たちの政治的、社会的関心事は、左翼よりのイデオロギーや、圧政的勢力を破壊する意欲に深く根付き、例えば、彼らの描く女性の役割や性的描写に影響を与えた。

外観上は、登場人物の設定や編集に認められる大きな変化に加え、日本映画での光と色彩の使い方に革命的な変化が確認される。一方においては、映画撮影での実際的な明るさについては、陰が鋭い審美感と結びついていた古い日本の美意識とは完全にかけ離れたものとなっていることが解釈でき、同時に、生まれ変わった日本における習慣をより誠実に描写することを可能にした。そして他方では、明るい色彩の使用とそれまでの潮流への反抗は、伝統的な美意識の思考体系の逆転の兆候となって表れるとともに、欧米の影響で日本社会に新しい色彩が導入された結果となっただけでなく、日本文化および海外から入って来た文化において考えられる社会からの脱落者の要素を表現する空間を日本映画内に作り出し、社会的革命の示威行動にもつながった。

「古き日本」を理論化する際、欠かすことのできない二つの著作がある。具体的に挙げると、ひとつは政治・道徳的観点から考慮される新渡戸稲造の「武士道：日本の魂」であり、もうひとつは美学的観点から考慮される谷崎潤一郎の「陰翳礼賛」である。本稿では、これらの二作品を考察した上で、ニューウェーブの映画が果たした政治的、社会的、美学的決裂の研究にあたり同時に、その背景にある因果関係をも追及する。本稿での分析の核は、照明と色彩の分析である。この二つの構成要素が映画史全体を通じて常に保つ兆候的特徴からだけでなく、これらの要素が示す記号論的 중요さを考慮した分析を試みる。その分析を基に、本稿は、日本映画のヌーヴェルヴァーグが画策した反政治、反審美の構築の試みについての研究に取り組む。その結論として、本稿は、色彩の使用および映画撮影のコンセプトにおける変化はヌーヴェルヴァーグ革命における決定的な要素であったとともに、その時代の日本社会および日本映画の大きな変化を反映し、さらに日本社会、日本映画にいつそうの変化をもたらしたことを主張する。

Keywords:

Japanese cinema; *Nuberu Bagu*; New Wave; light; colour; aesthetics; politics; Ôshima; Imamura; Matsumoto; Teshigahara; Masumura; Shindô; Terayama.

Cinema japonês; *Nuberu Bagu*; Nova Vaga; luz; cor; estética; política; Ôshima; Imamura; Matsumoto; Teshigahara; Masumura; Shindô; Terayama.

日本映画; *ヌーヴェルヴァーグ*; ニューウェーブ; 光; 色彩; 美学; 政治; 大島; 今村; 松本; 勅使河原; 増村; 新藤; 寺山。

Introductory note

Until the 1980s, due to a multitude of contexts for their release and the different criteria for their translation, Japanese films would reach the West with a range of different titles, thus hindering the interpretation and cataloguing of Japanese cinema. For example, Ozu Yasujiro's *Kohayagawa-ke no Aki* is known as *Dernier Caprice* in France, *Early Autumn*

in the United Kingdom, *L'Autunno della Famiglia Kohayagawa* in Italy and as *The End of Summer* in the United States of America. *Sanma no Aji*, the filmmaker's final work, was translated as *An Autumn Afternoon* in the United States, *Le Goût du Saké* in France and as *A Rotina tem Seu Encanto* in Brazil.

Because of this, for this study, it was decided to retain, throughout the text, the titles in the original language, according to the romanisation process adopted by the IMDb project (www.imdb.com).

It was also decided to refer all Japanese names following the rules of Japanese onomastic composition, that is, first the surname and then the first name. Therefore, as an example, we will refer to 'Mizoguchi Kenji' instead of 'Kenji Mizoguchi' and 'Ôshima Nagisa' rather than 'Nagisa Ôshima.'

Introduction

I absolutely could not stand the films that were mass-produced by the studio in which I worked: tear-jerking melodramas and flavorless domestic dramas in which imbecilic men and women monotonously repeat exchanges of infinitely stagnant emotions. The places where these exchanges, which can only be called artificial, unfold are gloomy, decaying eight-mat drawing rooms and a four-and-a-half-mat living rooms that contain such symbols stability as tea cabinets. In the background there was generally a totally commonplace garden. I hated such characters, rooms, and gardens from the depths of my soul. I firmly believed that unless the dark sensibility that those things engendered was completely destroyed, nothing new could come into being in Japan.

Ôshima Nagisa (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 118)

"Japanese New Wave" (or "*Nuberu Bagu*," as it was translated in Japan), the subject of this article, much like the French *Nouvelle Vague*, is an ambiguous term which does not refer to a single cinematic core with a defined outline. In fact, there are several groups of Japanese films made between the late 1950s and early 1970s that were theoretically and critically labelled New Wave: films for youngsters, made at Nikkatsu by directors starting their career, grouped under the term *Taiyozoku*, stolen from a novel by Ishihara Shintarô; the early works of Ôshima Nagisa, Masumura Yasuzo and Imamura Shôhei that presented new behaviour patterns of youngsters and women, in Shochiku, Daiei and Nikkatsu, respectively; films from independent production companies founded by filmmakers that never worked in the

studio system, such as Matsumoto Toshio² and Teshigahara Hiroshi;³ the short and feature films partially financed by the Art Theatre Guild, an institution that played a crucial role in the introduction of European *auteur* cinema in Japan but also promoted independent film productions by young experimental authors, such as Hani Susumu, Yoshida Yoshishige, Shinoda Masahiro and Terayama Shūji; and even some *softcore* pornographic films (the *Pinku eiga*, a genre in which Wakamatsu Kōji stood out), that created a dramatically different visual universe from that of classical Japanese cinema.

However, these subcategories of this Japanese film revolution correspond in fact to fully distinct groups made with different purposes, means and aesthetic, political and social conceptions. Hence, a consistent analysis of the *Nuberu Bagu* must consider the differences among the various production clusters as well as the internal variations within each.⁴ But it is also important to search for common denominators, in order to coherently catalogue and examine these works, theoretically associated to the movement.

Firstly, there is, without a question, a common ideological orientation, questioning aesthetical, social and political principles of the “Old Japan.” However, the revolutionary force that drives the Japanese New Wave is just one symptom of a general state of dissatisfaction against both the American occupation of Japan following World War II, and the persistence and the threat of perpetuating the values of the “Old Japan.” But the downfall of this institution was foreseen several decades before, namely in two fundamental works of modern Japanese literature: *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* and *In Praise of Shadows*. These books describe the most important aspects of the “Old Japan,” focusing, respectively, on the moral and aesthetical elements of this agonising society. Despite fundamental differences between these texts, not only by their 25 year gap but also because they present opposing ideological views, they find common ground in the nostalgia of a dying spirit and announcement of its complete demise.

In *Bushido*, by the thinker Nitobe Inazo, the message is clear: the “way of the warrior,” which for many centuries was one of the most peculiar elements of Japanese culture and philosophy, was in decay and its end was drawing near. The book states that the whole contemporary Japanese culture, however distant from *Bushido*, had been deeply shaped by this ethical path, that it was its strongest pillar: “Bushido, the maker and product of Old Japan, is still the guiding principle of the transition and will prove the formative force of the new era.” (Nitobe 1905, 271).

The fundamental elements of this path were: justice, courage, benevolence, kindness, truthfulness, honesty, self-control, honour and loyalty, particularly towards figures

2 Matsumoto Toshio founded the Matsumoto Production Company in order to co-finance his *Bara no Sôretsu*.

3 Teshigahara Hiroshi created Teshigahara Productions in 1959, that followed him in his entire career from *Jose Torres to Rikyu* (1989), his penultimate film.

4 It is exactly for this reason that Max Tessier, in his *Le Cinéma Japonais*, chooses to speak of “Nouvelles Vagues,” in the plural. (Tessier 2005, 69).

of Father, Lord and Nation. To each of these aspects, Nitobe dedicates a full chapter, constantly establishing comparisons with Western models.

In turn, *In Praise of Shadows*, written by the novelist Tanizaki Junichirō in 1933, attempts to summarise the aesthetical notions that ruled the “Old Japan,” resorting to images of diverse body expressions and artistic fields, from painting to *noh* theatre, from architecture to ceramics and even interior decoration. The main concept is the presentation and apologia of an aesthetic alternative to the prevalent one at the time which, according to Tanizaki, was defined by an invasion of excessive and misplaced light on countless aspects of everyday life, completely contrasting with Japanese tradition. It was presented as an enemy of the shadow, which provided such richness and subtlety to Japanese art and experience.

The decadence of the values upheld by these works had been increasingly evident since the mid-19th century, but two moments were instrumental in this process. The Meiji Restoration was undoubtedly the first one.

During this period of Japan’s history (between 1868 and 1912), the general political direction was towards modernisation, inevitably drawing closer to Western culture. This radical break with the traditional isolation of the archipelago led to major changes in its foreign relations but, more importantly, to a complete internal reorganisation. The contact with Western aesthetical paradigms and the awe before scientific and technological breakthroughs hitherto unknown resulted in the experimentation, in several fields, of alternative models to Japanese tradition. While there were constant violations of the acting aesthetic precepts, the evolution of hierarchy and ethics, especially with regard to the warrior class, was more ambiguous. Thus, despite having witnessed the fall of the samurai, the Japanese still got the opportunity to apply the precepts of war ethics, particularly in the conflicts with China (First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, disputing the possession of Korea), and Russia, mainly based on the issue of Manchuria. But the largest battle in which the Japanese Empire, for the last time, fully demonstrated the teachings of the *Bushido* was naturally World War II, where the scale and violence of their warfare shocked Europe and the United States. For the allied forces, the most incomprehensible situations were the *kamikaze* attacks and the ascetic honour suicides, whose performative intricacy was an absolute surprise to the Western world. For example, regarding the last phenomenon, Nitobe Inazo tried to extensively study it and contextualise it, so that Western readers could understand it better.⁵

⁵ It is important to note that the book was clearly targeted to North American readers, its major purpose being to help bridge the gap between Japan and the United States by clarifying the aspects of Japanese culture harder to understand and accept. As Eiichiro Uchikawa, director of the Nitobe Foundation, writes in the preface to the book: “At the age of twenty, Nitobe expressed his desire to become a bridge between the two sides of the Pacific, and the following year he set sail for the United States. Within less than ten years, he published a volume that would become famous around the world – *Bushido*. It was *Bushido*, reflecting the spirit of Japan, that would serve as a “bridge” between Japan and America and bring them into a closer relationship.” (Nitobe 1905, 9). To better understand this desire to bridge such contrasting cultures, it is important to consider as well other initiatives undertaken by Nitobe, namely his active presence in seminars for the dissemination of Esperanto.

The most radical breakdown of the teachings of the “Old Japan” happened a few years after the end of World War II, driven by a series of artistic and street demonstrations, mainly by young people, showing their disapproval of the country’s political path.

David Desser, in his *Eros Plus Massacre*, which I consider to be, even now, the most important theoretical Western work on the Japanese New Wave, situates his definition of *Nuberu Bagu* precisely on this topic, highlighting the importance of politics:

The Japanese New wave is here defined as films produced and/or released in the wake of Oshima’s *A Town of Love and Hope*, films which take an overtly political stance in a general way or toward a specific issue, utilizing a deliberately disjunctive form compared to previous filmic norms in Japan (Desser 1988, 4).

Aside from the political involvement, Desser refers another two core features of the movement: a historical one, suggesting the notion of a generational affiliation (since *Ai to Kibo no Machi*), and an artistic one, clearly associating the *Nuberu Bagu* to an avant-garde experience.

Regarding the first of these two aspects, the placing of the movement within a perspective of historical succession, it is essential to consider not only its internal evolution, but also their foreign models, which preceded and accompanied the making of the *Nuberu Bagu* films. In fact, there is an undeniable interest of the Japanese filmmakers in the new trends of European cinema, even though, until 1961, only a very limited number of works reached the archipelago.⁶ The main emotional partnership was developed with the French *Nouvelle Vague*.⁷ Just like the main names of the French movement, several of those who would be the key players of the *Nuberu Bagu* began their film activities as critics. Ôshima Nagisa, Shinoda Masahiro and Yoshida Yoshishige, for example, at the start of their careers at Shochiku, created a film magazine, where, against the cinema of Ozu

6 Debut year of the Art Theatre Guild.

7 The attraction between the *Nuberu Bagu* and the French *Nouvelle Vague* was mutual. Indeed, the young critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* were responsible for the introduction and praise of several *Nuberu Bagu* films, giving rise to laudatory articles, as the one François Truffaut dedicated to Nakahira Kô’s *Kurutta Kajitsu*, and practical experiences of joint filmmaking, such as *L’Amour à Vingt Ans*, where the sketches of Truffaut, Marcel Ophüls, Renzo Rossellini and Andrzej Wajda coexisted with a segment directed by Ishihara Shintarô. However, the studies of the connection between the two “New Waves” are not consensual. Moreover, some theorists warn of the danger of too linear interpretations: “Superficial comparisons between the Japanese New Wave cinema and the French New Wave, typically to imply greater integrity to the latter, have served the cultural cliché that the Japanese are merely great imitators, that they do nothing original. [...] To see the Japanese New Wave as an imitation of the French New Wave (an impossibility since they arose simultaneously) fails to see the Japanese context out of which the movement arose. [...] While the Japanese New Wave did draw benefits from the French New Wave, mainly in the form of a handy journalistic label which could be applied to it (the “nuberu bagu” from the Japanese pronunciation of the French term), it nevertheless possesses a high degree of integrity and specificity.” (Desser 1988, 4).

and Kinoshita, which they considered to be morally and aesthetically conservative,⁸ they praised the avant-garde qualities of Michelangelo Antonioni's films and, especially, of the young filmmakers of the *Nouvelle Vague*, such as Alain Resnais and François Truffaut. *À Bout de Souffle* by Jean-Luc Godard was particularly popular among the foreign imports of this time. About him, Ôshima wrote:

À Bout de Souffle de Jean-Luc Godard, qui nous a fait prendre à nouveau conscience que le charme du cinéma réside dans la continuité de la discontinuité, me paraît un film vraiment magnifique. Un aspect intéressant y transparait: visiblement, l'auteur n'espère pas pouvoir, toute sa vie, bouffer et vivre en faisant le travail de metteur en scène. Peut-être est-ce même à cela qu'il faut attribuer le fait que sa volonté subjective s'inscrit remarquablement dans ce film, du début à la fin." (Oshima 1980 *apud* Tessier 2005, 73).

The freedom Ôshima found in *À Bout de Souffle*⁹ left him yearning for the emancipation from the studio (which would in fact happen after the *Nihon no Yoru to Kiri* incident) but also had a direct influence on his cinema and that of his generation.

Finally, after grouping the *Nuberu Bagu* films around a common political content and in accordance to a perspective of historical continuity of the movement, Desser brings them together by the radicalism of their expression that is their positioning in the sphere of avant-garde. Thus, he resorts to a definition of "movement," advocated by Renato Poggioli as opposed to the concept of "school": "movement is differentiated from schools by that passion and conceit which seek to transcend the limitation of art and reach out to all areas of culture and civilization." (Poggioli 1968 *apud* Desser 1988, 5). According to Desser, the interventionist position of the *Nuberu Bagu* filmmakers should not be neglected, but it should not also be interpreted solely within a formal context:

The assumption that an avant-garde artistic movement *already* has a political dimension was as crucial to the Japanese New Wave as it had been to the Russian Revolutionary cinema of the 1920s, the theatrical theories of Bertolt Brecht, and the French *nouvelle vague*, especially after 1968, with Jean-Luc Godard entering the "Dziga-Vertov" collective. Poggioli sees something suspect in the idea of formal radicalism being equal to

8 Possibly, the denial towards the masters could also be of a psychological nature, which David Desser relates to the thesis of Harold Bloom's "Anxiety of Influence." Regarding this, Desser quotes a statement from Imamura about the legacy that he (didn't) received from Ozu, of whom he was assistant in three feature films: "I wouldn't just say I wasn't influenced by Ozu. I would say I didn't want to be influenced by him." (Desser 1988, 44).

9 Keep in mind that, unlike the first works of the filmmakers of *Nuberu Bagu*, *À Bout de Souffle* was not a studio production. Desser emphasises the commercial nature of these early films several times in *Eros Plus Massacre*: "It should be stressed that the avant-garde/political cinema that constitutes the Japanese New Wave movement occurred within a mainstream context. With the exception of the early features directed by Hani Susumu, all the major films within the initiating moments of the New Wave were produced at a major commercial film studio, Shochiku studios in particular." (Desser 1988, 6).

political radicalism and one should share a basic mistrust of this facile equation. We should thus maintain that the Japanese New Wave cinema moves beyond the merely formally radical, or avant-garde, that many Western modern critics are fond of claiming is already political. (Desser 1988, 5-6).

This standpoint was defended not only by critics and theorists, but also by many filmmakers of the movement. Terayama Shūji, for example, in *Sho o Suteyo Machi e Deyou*, his first feature film, as a postscript to the film, presents a monologue of the protagonist, aware of his condition as an actor, explaining how he experienced his first and only work in cinema:

Turn on the lights. The film ends here. Now it's my turn to speak. When you think about it... a film can only exist in the dark. When the lights go up like that... the world of the film is blotted out. In this film I dreamed of the human aeroplane. After the shooting, when I got back to my room... with all my moaning and groaning... I dreamed of the human aeroplane. I wonder why. And bit by bit, while that went on, the line between life and film disappeared. I no longer knew who I was. And in my dreams... I was falling and falling... I don't know why. But even without understanding, I would fall. And as I was falling I thought: "There's nothing to hold on to." That's why I was falling. Scene 1. Kominato, Hiranai. Higashi-Tsugaru, Aomori, Eimei Sasaki. This is me speaking, after the clapper board claps. I speak words written by other people, in other languages. And while the cameras are rolling, I call Mr. Saito "father." But bit by bit it becomes real. And Mr. Saito really becomes my father. Then someone says "Cut!". "Next scene.", "Hurry up!", "Action.". That's how it is. And you go on to the next scene. The next scene begins with another lie. The lie of lies. And between one "cut" and another... I am caught up under the cold February sky. This fantasy takes hold of me bit by bit. I can't go to my home on the screen any more. Polanski, Nagisa Oshima, Antonioni... All that is a world that disappears when the lights go up. You just try showing a film in broad daylight... on the wall of a building. Goodbye. I won't be back. A family for 28 days' shooting. A State only 28 days old. A father just for 28 days. 28 days of disillusion and anger. 28 days of ashes and hope. I'm taking off my costume and placing it somewhere else. A human aeroplane for only 28 days. A Tokyo life 28 days long. I loved Humphrey Bogart. I loved Cinemascope... shooting in the city... love scenes... I loved Mr. Sukita, the cameraman... Mr. Terayama, the director; Mr. Usui, the assistant. I loved the whole of that world, but I don't love cinema. Goodbye! Goodbye, cinema! Goodbye!¹⁰

Terayama's hypothesis, forwarding Guy Debord and his *La Société du Spectacle*,¹¹ is that cinema is not enough, that when the projector's lights go off, life remains unaltered.

10 Film subtitles between 2h07m and 2h12m (subtitles adapted from subzin.com).

11 "Tout ce qui était directement vécu s'est éloigné dans une représentation." [Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation] (Debord 1971, 3).

The revolution taking place on screen, if it settles with the form and is not put into effect in real life, loses its purpose. Ultimately, this farewell from cinema shouted out by the film's protagonist represents a distrust towards art's actual capacity for intervention and, therefore, a verification of the mismatch between formal revolution and reconfiguration of society that would become the "liberation of everyday life." The expression was coined by Guy Debord, who used it in the text spoken in his film *Sur le Passage de Quelques Personnes à Travers une Assez Courte Unité de Temps*, in which the liberation of cinema *per se* is considered useless and harmful to society:

Il y a maintenant des gens qui se flattent d'être auteurs de films, comme on l'était de romans. Leur retard sur les romanciers, c'est d'ignorer la décomposition et l'épuisement de l'expression individuelle dans notre temps, la fin des arts de la passivité. On entend louer leur sincérité parce qu'ils mettent en scène, avec plus de profondeur personnelle, les conventions dont ils sont faits. On entend parler de libération du cinéma. Mais que nous importe la libération d'un art de plus, à travers lequel Pierre, Jacques ou François pourront exprimer joyeusement leurs sentiments d'esclaves? L'unique entreprise intéressante, c'est la libération de la vie quotidienne, pas seulement dans les perspectives de l'histoire, mais pour nous et tout de suite. Ceci passe par le dépérissement des formes aliénées de la communication. Le cinéma est à détruire aussi.¹²

The truth, however, is that both Guy Debord and Terayama Shuji criticised the onanistic nature of cinema through films that, by no accident, were presented as avant-garde, also at the formal level. To this effect, if it is accepted that the formal revolution does not make the political revolution, it is equally arguable that there may be politics in form. I defend in this paper that this is certainly the case with the Japanese *Nuberu Bagu* and, in this sense, I will carry out an analysis of the counter-aesthetics introduced by the movement, which will not only focus on the role the New Wave assumed as destroyer of the artistic precepts of "Old Japan," especially those applied to cinema, but will also examine the counter-political action that motivated and followed it. This study of the *Nuberu Bagu* cinema will focus on the use of two specific compositional elements: light and colour. In fact, I'm convinced, on one hand, that these two variables are particularly characteristic of the counter-aesthetics of the movement and, on the other, that these are remarkably important factors for the political cause of the *Nuberu Bagu*, becoming simultaneously reflection and cause of the striking changes in society and in Japanese cinema in the 1950s and 1960s.

12 Text spoken between 00h16m and 00h17m of the film.

1. Politics and aesthetics in Japanese cinema

The Japanese New Wave is an unflinching encapsulation of a nation experiencing political turmoil and social unrest.

John Berra (Berra 2010, 229)

1.1. The three main moments of political cinema in Japan

If all cinema is political, reflecting the State's politics, the economy's politics or the intellectual politics that led to its making, some filmic production, present in all national film industries, stands out for the exhaustive elicitation of its political purpose and self-assumption as an ambivalent piece, acknowledging its validity, both as a work of art or entertainment and as work of clarification, argumentation, persuasion and intervention. Despite the continuous presence, in Japanese cinema, of works that responded to political imperatives, there were three specific moments in which, among the annual film production, there was a large number of these projects, attending the will of the State or the intellectual elites.

The first moment corresponds to the creation of militaristic propaganda films, urging the Japanese to fight against the West for the honour and glory of the Empire. Following a similar process to what took place in other major dictatorial systems in Europe in this period, Japanese cinema of the 1930s was defined by the exaltation of militarism, self-sacrifice, patriotism and dignity, in other words, the old ways consolidated by the book of Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*. However, the purpose of this cinema was not to convince the Japanese of the reasons for which to fight but rather of the need to obey the orders enacted by the Empire. It is in this regard that Donald Richie, for example, is somewhat reluctant to designate this cinematic core "propaganda":

In a nation where obligation rather than feeling or reason rules the social order, it was not necessary to hide horror nor to present a rationale for war. It was necessary only to show the people what was required of them. Not that such films were actually more common in Japan than they would be in any wartime country; still, the propaganda film was scarcely necessary. It was not even necessary for the militarists to inspire hate for the enemy: it was quite enough that the soldier was ordered to annihilate him. The soldier's feelings simply never entered into question (Richie 1971, 55).

Among these productions, *Hawai-Marei Oki Kaisen* stood out, commissioned to the filmmaker Yamamoto Kajiro in the early 1940s, which perfectly embodied the State's approach to political cinema in Japan: a realistic portrait of war that would inspire the audience regarding this reality and convey the importance of following superior orders. A very famous and often-quoted episode concerning this film was that given its realism in

the creation of sets, mostly based on miniature models,¹³ the American troops mistook it for footage of actual combat.

Following the political and moral defeat in the War, came the second moment of extraordinary development of political cinema in Japan, with the creation of works supervised by the American occupying forces, which not only ensured that films did not break the post-war cinematographic production rules set by General MacArthur himself (that included the prohibition of incentives to militarism, revenge or suicide, as well as any other restatements of the principles of the *Bushido*), but also insisted on the making of films that exalted harmony and the need for peaceful reconstruction of the country, seizing what seemed like, for the United States, the new democratic opportunity the West was creating for Japan:

Filmmakers were to show all Japanese of every walk of life endeavoring to construct a peaceful nation; soldier and repatriates being rehabilitated in civilian life; those in industry and farming in the process of resolving the problems of post-war life; labor unions being peacefully organized; the hitherto bureaucratic government casting off and adopting true governmental responsibility; the free discussion of government problems taking place; every human being and every class of society being respected; individual rights being upheld; and historical personages, too, struggling for government representation of the people and for freedom (Richie 2005, 107).

The third moment of openly political cinema in Japan was that of the New Wave, setting itself against the first two. The young filmmakers that gave rise to the movement hated the war propaganda films for their militarism and violence and, as much as these, the cinema of the occupation period, for its submission to the United States and the growing attachment to the capitalist bloc, which was starting to face the communist bloc on the global stage. The films of this generation, made in the 1960s, were strategic means of ideological conveyance, basically resorting to two types of political action: one more direct and circumstantial, attempting to have a critical role in the decision making process of the Japanese that were, at the time, starting their lives as active citizens; and another, a more subtle and structural one, aiming at a slow path of deep social changes, particularly towards the liberation of the patriarchal and misogynistic structure of Japanese society and of the servility to entities advertised as transcendental. Thus, although this first form might be mistaken for the precepts of the *Bushido* (the service to the motherland, the return to national autonomy, the fight against the subjugation of others), the second association certainly could not operate, since the social conceptions upheld by the new generation of young revolutionaries claimed a new Japanese system, completely decoupled of the values of *Bushido*.

13 "A huge model of Pearl Harbor was constructed on the Toho lot, and exact scale models of warships were floated here and there." (Richie 2005, 103).

The direct political action was mainly against three spheres of control: the old, feudal and militaristic Japan, which led to its involvement in World War II; the American, which *de facto* ran Japan since the end of the conflict; and the new Japan, weak and submissive, ambiguous and contradictory. Despite involving more extensive views on the political operation of the nations, for several years, the action of the New Wave had as a backdrop the Ampo issue, the "Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan."¹⁴ The treaty, signed in 1960, strengthened Japan's ties to the West during the Cold War, thus becoming a precious ally for the United States in its strained relationship with the Soviet Union. The preparations for the signing of the Treaty angered large masses of young Japanese, who did not want to see their country gradually lose its sovereignty or fall into capitalism. The revolt, led by the Japanese Communist Party and the Zengakuren, the largest revolutionary student association in the country, gave rise to the most violent demonstrations witnessed in Japan throughout the 20th century. Among them, the known episodes of the attempt to prevent the plane of Nobusuke Kishi, who was going to the United States to sign the Treaty, from taking off and, a few months later, the death of Michiko Kamba, a twenty-two year old student, who soon became a martyr of the struggle and of the oppression by the Japanese police, accused of gratuitous violence.

Several episodes associated with this protest had a sporadic but strong presence in the early works of the New Wave filmmakers, namely in Ôshima's *Seishun Zankoku Monogatari*. But it is in *Nihon no Yoru to Kiri*,¹⁵ Ôshima's third film, made in 1960 (the year of the signing of the Treaty), that the topic of the demonstrations and the revolutionary movements start to stand out, taking on the centre stage of an unusual narrative. The film's action takes place at a wedding between two former revolutionaries, which is interrupted by the violent intrusion of a character named Ota. This Japanese protester questions the allegiance of the two spouses to the movement, accusing them of weakness and self-indulgence. The nature of the event makes room for a discussion among the members

14 "The rejection of humanism and Old-Left Communism and the artistic practices associated with them, are a function of a specific event in Japan in May-June 1960: the renewal of the Japan - U.S. Mutual Security Pact (Ampo)." (Desser 1988, 24).

15 The title, literally *Night and Fog in Japan*, owes its name to the celebrated documentary by Alain Resnais *Nuit et Brouillard*, made in 1955, about the Nazi concentration camps. It is known today that, despite Ôshima's admiration for Resnais work, he had not yet seen the film that inspired his title. Richie defines the project as: "A political fable which criticizes both right and left, it was made with minimal means, many long takes, and is filled with theatricality. [...] It is about the failure of the left to end the United States - Japan Security Treaty during the 1960 demonstrations." (Richie 2005, 197).

of the “Old Left,”¹⁶ that is, those who had fought since the end of World War II, and the “New Left,” which was currently conducting the demonstrations against the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security.¹⁷ The film’s production company, Shochiku, assuming a film that revolves around a wedding could easily be perceived as a melodrama, agreed to distribute it. However, the political and aesthetic scandal¹⁸ it caused was so great, largely for coinciding with the assassination of the Chairman of the Japanese Socialist Party by a young right-wing fanatic, that the company decided to withdraw the film immediately. Ôshima, disgusted with the decision, determined to follow the dream he had nurtured since *Ai to Kibo no Machi*: leaving the studio and starting his own production company.

The second type of socio-political action, more structural, had an undeniable role in the Japanese New Wave cinema as well. It is also present in the work of Ôshima and was particularly noticeable in the female characters. What is the behaviour of Makoto¹⁹ when she leaves home to move in with her boyfriend, starts smoking, takes part in illicit schemes to make money and has an active sex life before marriage, if not a systematic escape from the role and duties which, according to Japanese tradition, she should hold as a young Japanese woman? But this hint at alternative behaviours to the traditional model was also particularly important in the films of other great filmmakers of the New Wave, such as Imamura Shôhei and Matsumoto Toshio.

16 Just like with the characters of *Nihon no Yoru to Kiri*, the uprising of the young filmmakers is both against the militaristic and reactionary right-wing and the post-war weak and defeatist left-wing which, lured by the convenience provided by American tutelage, was accused of abandoning the fight. On the other hand, those that actively fought against the American presence in Japanese cinema came from both the Left and the Right, although, obviously, their motivations for opposing were different. This share of responsibilities in the fight against the American presence had, in fact, a parallel in other parts of the world during this period, including France, as Dudley Andrew explains in his article “The post-war Struggle for Colour”: “Despite their image as saviours of Western civilization, the Americans were feared and distrusted by many elements of the French populace. In the world of cinema both right and left-wing factions had reason to speak up against the extent of the American presence in Europe. The left-wing naturally was hoping for a Russian solution or a French solution based on Russian ties. They felt France to be an occupied country and loathed the economic net US industry was able to weave in every sector of French life, notably in their second largest industry, the cinema. The right-wing was comprised of two segments, capitalists and nationalists. The nationalists were, of course, opposed to every kind of intervention; the capitalists opposed those interventions which were disadvantageous to them.” (De Laurentis and Heath 1980, 63).

17 Ian Buruma, in his *Inventing Japan*, specifically refers Ôshima’s attitude regarding the contrast between the enthusiasm of the left in the post-war and the subsequent disappointment towards politics and the country: “In December 1955, a young radical student at Kyoto University, soon to become a world-famous film director, wrote the following sentence in his diary: ‘Ten years after the war it looks superficially as if democratic forces have suffered a setback. But in fact they have progressed. The time of unruly romanticism has come to an end. The masses have got their foothold now and we enter a time of realism.’ A few years on, Ôshima Nagisa would be deeply disillusioned.” (Buruma 2003, 133).

18 Max Tessier describes the film-Ôshima scandal as: “[...] ouvertement politique, traitant du renouvellement contesté du traité de sécurité nippo-américain en pléines manifestations anti-américaines et critiquant le PCJ, le film était un brûlot révolutionnaire, de surcroît filmé en plans-séquences d’une stupéfiante complexité, avec des dialogues ininterrompus.” (Tessier 2005, 71).

19 Lead female character in *Seishun Zankoku Monogatari*.

The work of the former was mainly focused in questioning various values of the *Bushido* and traditional Japanese society, especially the issue of women's rights, during the 1960s. An unconscious heir of another great Japanese woman's director, Mizoguchi Kenji, Imamura made a series of films where he staged several forms of escapism from the traditional family structure, in which the hierarchy of values was altered and the subjugation of women to their husbands was no longer one of the pillars of heterosexual relationship. Two Imamura films were especially marked by this trend: *Nippon Konchuki* (whose feminist nature led David Desser, in his canonical book *Eros Plus Massacre*, to name "Insect Women" to the chapter devoted to women in Japanese New Wave cinema), and *Akai Satsui*. The latter was an even bigger blow in the Japanese socio-moral framework, both because of its formal innovation and for the heterodoxy of the presentation of a Japanese marital model. In fact, the protagonist of the film, raped by a delinquent, slowly overcomes her repulsion for the aggressor and develops a sexual obsession with him, progressively yearning for his return. The work is obviously not a mere portrait of a sexual obsession, as it was often considered by the critics, but rather a demonstration that the Japanese marital model was so oppressive to women that any escape solution,²⁰ no matter how unusual or disturbing, could be used as a retreat.

The other major author of the deconstruction of the moral and behavioural system of "Old Japan" is Matsumoto Toshio, who, through a vast work of experimental films, built a comprehensive portrait of deviant behaviours in post-war Japan. Originating in the experimental documentary field, where he directed, for example, a well-known hymn to the figure of the Mother, *Haha-tachi*, Matsumoto soon made what would eventually become, along with *Tsuburekakatta Migime no Tame Ni*, his most radical film: *Bara no Sôretsu*. This work has the peculiar feature of being almost exclusively performed by homosexuals cross-dressed as women and, given its formal and political avant-gardism, caused a scandal in Japanese society. It was born within the context of the Art Theatre Guild, a project with an important influence on some of the strongest aspects of the Japanese New Wave,²¹ having brought to Japan the work of foreign avant-garde filmmakers such as Federico Fellini, Luis Buñuel, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Agnès Varda, Mikhail Kalatozov, Tony Richardson, Satyajit Ray and Glauber Rocha. Due to financial reasons²² and Matsumoto's approach to filmmaking, almost all of the cast members of *Bara no Sôretsu* were amateurs²³ and the film was shot in real-world scenarios. With the dramatic enclosing of an Oedipal relationship, there are two central themes in this film: the sexual revolution and the assimilation of avant-garde elements of Western culture by Japan's youth.

20 Alternatively, in *Manji*, Masumura suggests lesbianism.

21 Responsible for co-producing, among others, the first and only film directed by Yukio Mishima, *Yûkoku*, and for distributing key films of the *Nuberu Bagu*, such as Hiroshi Teshigahara's *Otoshiana*.

22 The ATG only contributed with ¥5,000,000 and the filmmakers were supposed to raise the other half, so typically the total budget for these productions was modestly around ¥10,000,000. A studio film, at that time, received an average funding of ¥50,000,000.

23 Tsuchiya Yoshio, who played one of the samurai in the Kurosawa's *Shichinin no Samurai*, is one of the film's scarce professional actors, interpreting the lover/father of the protagonist.

With regard to the first aspect, Matsumoto draws an accurate portrait of Tokyo's gay underworld in the 1960s, in which Peter,²⁴ the lead character, moves with great ease. The character is the result of the construction of a new individual,²⁵ setting himself apart from the traditional Japanese through his sexual preferences, his gender indefiniteness, his sleep and work schedule, his notions of free love, the consumption of hallucinogenic drugs, his political and social beliefs and the new free expression. This aspect is particularly important, since one of the core values of the *Bushido* is the restraint of emotions, usually associated with masculinity. The issue of cross-dressing is once again fundamental, enabling, through gender ambiguity, an evasion from the behavioural assignments as they were theorised by the advocates of the traditional system:

It was considered unmanly for a samurai to betray his emotions on his face. "He shows no sign of joy or anger", was a phrase used, in describing a great character. The most natural affections were kept under control. A father could embrace his son only at the expense of his dignity; a husband would not kiss his wife, - no, not in the presence of other people, whatever he might do in private! There may be some truth in the remark of a witty youth when he said, "American husbands kiss their wives in public and beat them in private; Japanese husbands beat theirs in public and kiss them in private. Calmness of behavior, composure of mind, should not be disturbed by passion of any kind (Nitobe 1905, 173).

On the other hand, Matsumoto's film presents an incorporation of avant-garde politics and Western aesthetics in the Japanese *underground* society, notably through the consumption of cultural items from Europe and the United States, and also by the political and iconic worship of figures such as John Lennon and Che Guevara. However, in terms of this appropriation, the film addresses it with great irony, presenting a generation so focused in being part of the avant-garde, that it sometimes consumes mindlessly what comes from abroad. Some of the most famous scenes include the one in which the character who tries to imitate Che

24 Played by a transvestite with the same name as the character, who, two decades later, would play the role of Kyoami in Kurosawa's *Ran*.

25 However, it would be wrong to think that only the New Wave movement portrayed this emerging generation in Japan. The so-called "classic" filmmakers had already explored the clash between the representatives of two historic moments, the traditional parents and the revolutionary children. In fact, the generation gap is a recurring subject in the post-war films by Yasujiro Ozu: Aya, Noriko's rebel friend in *Banshun*, is divorced and has a world view drastically different from a traditional Japanese woman. On the other hand, *Munekata Kyoudai* is a portrait of a family tensely divided, while *Ohayō* presents children born during the American occupation, whose consumerist whims are constant attacks to the untouchable status of the father figure in traditional Japan. What the New Wave brought was a transfer of perspective: the young generation which until then had only been portrayed by "classic" filmmakers and therefore by an exogenous glance, won for the first time a voice of its own, internal. In this sense, the vision of change is not just a product of socio-political trends, but it has also an age factor, since the new wave filmmakers themselves grew in a different Japan from their parents. And it was precisely this aspect that enabled them to contribute to the final blow to the spirit of *Bushido*.

Guevara's looks sneezes and his false beard falls off. Or the one with the young Japanese who, after the literally *underground* screening of a film from a friend, wishes to impress the audience with a quote from Jonas Mekas and speaks very wholeheartedly of "Menas Jokas." Even the undefined genre of the film contributes to the portrayal of this young generation, with its fluctuation between fictional moments and documentary sequences. So, for example, after the diegetic projection of the film²⁶ by the character Guevara, we witness an interview with several Japanese youngsters speaking of their experiences with drug consumption.

Against Japanese politics and against American politics, New Wave cinema built its critical structure and provided governing and social solutions. But while filmmakers felt that the political battle through film was strong enough to face the American control over Japan, they did not seem to believe that this plan would suffice for Japanese society to distance itself from the structure of "Old Japan." Only by attacking and replacing the country's prevalent tastes and tendencies could they reverse the predominant aesthetic paradigms. And, in this regard, if on the one hand the New Wave fought politics with counter-politics, on the other it fought aesthetics with counter-aesthetics.

1.2. Politics, counter-politics. Aesthetics, counter-aesthetics

It would be unfair and oversimplifying to speak of a New Wave aesthetic as if it corresponded to a single thing, a singular unity of methodological irreverence with defined parameters and limiting margins. But actually it would also be misleading to suggest that this counter action was against a single aesthetic, as if the concept of "Old Japan" would necessarily involve a framework of indivisible precepts, present in all kinds of artistic production born in this context. Aware of this fact and perhaps because of it, several Japanese theorists intellectually engaged with the "Old Japan," tried to define, perhaps more programmatically than descriptively, the common denominators of this structure. Foremost among those texts we find *In Praise of Shadows*, written by the novelist Tanizaki Junichirô, which, by resorting to images from many body expressions and artistic fields, from painting to *noh* theatre, from architecture to ceramics and even interior decoration, claims shadow as a key element of the old Japanese aesthetic, shaping, in his opinion, the most exquisite artistic and intellectual works made in the country. Other features stand out from the essay which integrate this creative unit, namely discretion, simplicity or sobriety.

The New Wave cinema used various means to destroy these precepts. In regard to the renewal of the visual components, *Nuberu Bagu* offered new conceptions of the hero, stripped of traditional Japanese costumes and heavily influenced by Western fashion and hairstyles. Here, the inspiration was the hero out of a film genre quite fashionable in the late 1950s and early 1960s: the *taiyozoku* ("the sun tribe"). Created by Nikkatsu with the

26 Which, incidentally, is an independent short film by Matsumoto, entitled *Ecstasis*.

goal of attracting a younger audience to its films, the *taiyozoku* owes its name to a novel by Ishihara Shintarô. Nikkatsu's favourite actor for these films was Ishihara Yûjirô, brother of the writer and teen idol. The most successful works and, consequently, the most viewed of this trend, were *Kurutta Kajitsu* by Nakahira Kô and *Taiyo no Kisetsu* by Furukawa Takumi. According to Desser, this hero's image was of a:

moderately rebellious youth who breaks away from the rules imposed by society and his family, but only up to a point. He was both heroic and sensitive²⁷ (Desser 1988, 68).

Max Tessier, in his *Le Cinéma Japonais*, adds to this description:

Les nouveaux héros étaient des jeunes gens désœuvrés qui dépensaient leur énergie en faisant des « bêtises » et en regardant le soleil en face tout en faisant l'amour, et cela pouvait choquer une société japonaise encore relativement traditionnelle (Tessier 2005, 69).

On the other hand, the New Wave filmmakers also altered the landscape depicted as background of their films, and thus the modern home and the open spaces of large cities would often replace the traditional house and intimate ambiances.

The interconnection between architectural and sociological aspects in the early 1960s is essential to understand this evolution. Firstly, it is necessary to remember that the notions of space and intimacy do not have the same semantic and social meaning that they have in the Judeo-Christian matrix. David Desser warns about this fact in his analysis of *Erogotoshi-tachi Yori: Jinruigaku Nyûmon* by Imamura:

This issue [incest] is complicated in Japan, in a strange way, by traditional Japanese architecture and the nature of the home itself, where concepts of privacy do not hold sway as they do in the West. *Shoji* (paper) screens may have the function of walls, but they certainly do not act as walls (Desser 1988, 84).

This duality of perspectives on intimacy and privacy between Japan and the West is clear when analysing texts as distant as the *Genji Monogatari* of the courtesan Shikibu Murasaki, where indeed the *shoji* merely suggests a separation of spaces. There are several moments in the story where characters in same area, divided by a *shoji* or a curtain, maintain a strong face-to-face relationship, as evidenced by the description, evoking the invisible lust of Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'amour*, of the separation of Fujitsubu and Genji after his wedding:

²⁷ This quote specifically matches Yûjirô Ishihara's description, "unquestionably the most popular movie star in Japan" (Desser 1988, 68).

Now that Genji was an adult, His Majesty no longer allowed him through Fujitsubu's curtains as before. Whenever there was music, he would accompany her koto on his flute; this and the faint sound of her voice through the blinds were his consolations, and he wanted never to live anywhere but in the palace (Shikibu 2001, 17).

However, even a Westerner not familiarised with the mismatch between the Japanese and Western concepts of privacy and intimacy, will notice that the cinema of the 1960s expressed renewed tendencies in this field, for example, regarding the space of the romantic relationship. Whereas in Japan, love, sexualised or not, happened traditionally inside the home (remember, "Japanese husbands beat [their wives] in public and kiss them in private." (Nitobe 1905, 173)), New Wave cinema offers new spaces to it, frequently presenting it as just another element of a social structure gradually inclined towards spectacle, towards public fruition. For this matter, it is worth highlighting, for example, the famous scene of sexual violence in *Seishun Zankoku Monogatari*, where love is experienced outdoors, much like the affair between Pierrot and Marianne in *Pierrot le Fou*. Or, even more viciously, the scene of sexual humiliation in Ôshima's *Nihon Shunka-kô*, which, ironically, takes place in a college auditorium.

The public space also becomes the primary place for discussion and confrontation, as demonstrated by the early films of Ôshima. In several of his works of the 1960s, like *Seishun Zankoku Monogatari* and *Nihon no Yoru to Kiri*, the filmmaker shoots the political demonstrations of young people on the street and the fights between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. But perhaps the filmmaker who used public space more extensively as a confrontation field was Suzuki Seijun. His disruptive films riled Nikkatsu and he was forced to leave the production company that had funded almost all of his films in the 1960s. It also led to one of the most famous artist lawsuits of 20th century Japanese history.²⁸ *Koroshi no Rakuin*, an unusual variation on the *yakuza* genre (Max Tessier describes it as a "parodie délirante des films de yakuzas" (Tessier 2005, 78)), was the final straw for the conservative management of Nikkatsu, that did not tolerate the excessive ambiguity of the script and the formal exuberance of the film. However, one year before, Suzuki had directed a feature film which used space even more radically: *Tôkyô Nagaremono*. In this crime opera,²⁹ exteriors are privileged for the combat scenes, and the snow that serves as battlefield in several scenes is the canvas for the plasticisation of violence. Between these two works, Suzuki directed a third, whose title refers to the bond between lyricism and fight: *Kenka Erejii*

28 Max Tessier thus describes the episode of Suzuki's dismissal: "Horriifié par cet esprit iconoclaste, le président de la Nikkatsu, Kyusaku Hori, déclara que ses films étaient absolument "incompréhensibles pour le public", ce qui équivalait à une sentence de mort. Suzuki fut renvoyé de la compagnie mais, défendu par les intellectuels et les cinéphiles, il entama un long procès contre elle, finissant par le gagner. Ce fut une sorte « d'affaire Langlois » à la japonaise." (Tessier 2005, 78).

29 The operatic nature of Suzuki's films is consciously one of the most prominent aspects of his work, so much that his penultimate film is entitled *Pisutoru Opera*.

(*Elegy of Violence*). The climax of the film is a scene of a scuffle between two gangs, including the lead character, a young student for whom fighting is an addiction and a guarantee of sanity. Again, the confrontation occurs outdoors, in a structure reminiscent of the backstage scaffolding of Federico Fellini³⁰ that acts as a visual support for the combat, yet another reference to the spectacle dimension that the physical manifestation attained in Japan in the 1960s. And it is precisely this aspect, despite their differences, that binds together Ôshima's and Suzuki's conceptions of space: the notion that public space acquires a new dimension during the downfall of "Old Japan," becoming a show stage.

Connected to the dichotomy of public space/private space lies the question of sexual representation, which concerned all New Wave filmmakers without exception. Firstly, through social conditioning and gender relations, as in Imamura Shôhei's films, where the woman runs away from her role as wife and mother in traditional Japan.³¹ Secondly, as a reflection of the global trend of sexual liberation of the 1960s, portrayed yet again in the youth films of Ôshima,³² the feature films of Masumura and Matsumoto and in the work of Shindô Kaneto, especially in *Onibaba*. The narrative line of this film is particularly explicit in this sense. Based on a traditional Eastern tale, the action unfolds in an extremely harsh rural environment, where the sexual involvement between a soldier and a young woman gives rise to the disapproval of her mother-in-law, who, after her deterrent strategy against the relationship fails, admits to having been wrong.³³ Shindô uses a highly eroticised portrait of the physical acts in the film. The characters quite often flaunt their breasts or genitalia, in a statement of the contradiction between the naturalness and organicity of the body and the artificiality and repression imposed by the ethical censorship.

Thematically, this conflict is especially present in the work of another prominent filmmaker of the New Wave cinema, Hani Susumu. His work was assorted between documental exercises, reminiscent of the Jean Rouch's "fictions documentaires" (Serceau 1996, 121), namely the ones shot with children or those of an even more hybrid genre as *Bwana Toshi no Uta*, and the films about adolescence. *Hatsukoi: Jigoku-hen* is part of this latter category, a work about a young man's first erotic experience with his girlfriend. Once again,

30 As in *8½* and *E la Nave Va*.

31 However, it should be noted, once again, that the representation of women in this transition of roles is not an appanage of the New Wave cinema, and that the last films of Yasujiro Ozu, for example, are inextricably linked to this issue. In his ultimate work, *Sanma in Aji*, the irreverent attitudes of Akiko deeply change the traditional conjugal relationship.

32 Even after the 1960s, Ôshima continued to explore the social boundaries of the sexual act, writing and directing films that, in various forms, addressed this topic: the possibility of body fusion through the sexual act in *Ai no Corrida*, the possibility of interspecies love in *Max Mon Amour* and the possibility of homosexual relationships in the training of the samurai warrior in *Gohatto*.

33 The film is also deeply connected to the issue of violence and Max Tessier even sees it as a cruel portrait of the civil wars (Tessier 2005, 61). Indeed, the young woman and her mother-in-law make a living from a criminal activity: murdering wandering renegade soldiers who end up there after the battles and exchange their armours for food. But the violence in *Onibaba* is also conveyed by the dishonest persuasion and pressure of mother-in-law about the sexual relationship of the young woman, a dark vision of the social pressure on the free expression of sexual desire.

the theme is the social pressure on sexuality, in this case embodied in a story about the inability to carry out sexual intercourse to the end. Hani shapes the image of his protagonist thinking of an insecure teenager who has a dual feeling towards the sexual act, in which the physical desire and affection he feels for his girlfriend excite him, but the traumas of the past lead him to repulse this type of contact:

Their voyage to experience finds its central statement in the desperate sincerity of the young people and in the machinations of a society which threatens to (and eventually does) overwhelm them (Richie 2005, 194).

Hani has developed an extremely volatile use of the camera, possibly influenced by his experience with documentaries, but undoubtedly linked to his vision of a nervous young generation and an insecure country. In addition, he resorted to an editing heavily marked by flashbacks, so that the narrative becomes a constant jumping between the present and obscure images from a stigmatised childhood.

Hatsukoi: Jigoku-hen's script was written by Hani, but in collaboration with Terayama Shūji, having been heavily influenced by the surrealism of this poet, novelist, playwright, boxer, and himself a filmmaker. The work of Terayama strays from other great names of the New Wave, as Imamura, Ōshima and Suzuki, for his late start (already in the 1970s, in spite of an experimental short film named *Ori* made in the mid-1960s) but also because most of his films were independent productions (or with grants from the Art Theatre Guild, like *Sho o Suteyo Machi e Deyou* or *Den-en ni Shisu*). Terayama became famous for his experimental films, whose forms of a baroque surrealism and disturbing sexual components led to praises such as “iconoclaste” (Tessier 2005, 85) with “idées originales, excentriques et divertissantes” (Sato 1997b, 166).

In his short films *Tomato Kecchappu Kōtei* and *Chofuku-ki*, Terayama, visually, goes a step further than Ōshima in upholding the image of sexual liberation, staging situations of revenge and humiliation, including, for example, moments of sexual relations between adults and children.

However, while the musical and visual representation of Japanese cinema changes radically in the 1960s, this is not the result of a mere shift in the way of facing certain political and social elements (family, women, young people, sexuality), but also a consequence of the migration to other formal construction paradigms, especially in terms of sound, handling of the camera, direction of actors, editing and the treatment of light and colour.

Let us consider, for example, the sphere of music production for film: if classical Japanese films, such as Mizoguchi's works, especially the *jidaigeki*, copiously used music produced by traditional instruments like the *koto*, the *biwa* and *shakuhachi*, following the precepts of “Old Japan,” New Wave cinema gambled on a new conception of soundtrack, whether by the groundbreaking use of traditional instruments, or the incorporation of new sound sources, giving rise to a new musical ontology. Only a few names crossed the work of almost all of the New Wave filmmakers, but there was an artist who stood out

for having created the soundtracks for Nakahira Kô, Matsumoto Toshio, Ôshima Nagisa, Kobayashi Masaki, Hani Susumu, Imamura Shôhei, Yoshida Yoshishige, Shinoda Masahiro and, especially, Teshigahara Hiroshi.³⁴ Takemitsu Toru, fascinated by traditional Japanese instruments, especially for their sonic limitations, used them profusely in his compositions. The most recurring situation was the introduction of the *biwa* in his musical creations, which, according to the composer, was the ideal instrument to achieve sounds close to his concept of 'noise': "The large plectrum, like a sharpened hammer, is appropriate to the creation of 'beautiful noise'" (Toop 2005, 6). On the other hand, for the same purposes, Takemitsu used another type of sound source in his works, ending up with a musically hybrid result. When writing about *Shinju ten no Amijima* by Shinoda Masahiro, David Desser explains: "Period music predominates although Takemitsu Toru, composer and co-scenarist, has added modern electronic motifs to parts of the composition" (Desser 1988, 175). Takemitsu's goal was the following:

I came up with the idea of mixing random noise with composed music. More precisely, it was then that I became aware that composing is giving meaning to the stream of sounds that penetrates the world we live in (Toop 2005, 7-8).

And the result was a complex and ambiguous music, original and deeply unsettling, that reflected the gregarious and identity concerns of modern Japan. To that effect, perhaps his most radical creation was the soundtrack of Teshigahara's *Otoshiana* and *Tanin no Kao*, responsible for their enigmatic and disturbing ambience.

As to camera handling, the New Wave also explored the expressive possibilities of its movement. As alternatives to Ozu's fixed camera or Mizoguchi's straight line shots, several filmmakers experienced full mobility, with unique results, both in independent productions such as Hani's and Terayama's, and in the studio works of Suzuki and Imamura. Nonetheless, Hani is perhaps the most seduced by the power of the camera, a matter that was omnipresent in an interview with Joan Mellen published in 1975:

Many [...] think that looking through the finder is not respectable for film directors. They pass the responsibility to the cameraman, the director of photography. But I don't include myself in this category because I'm particularly fascinated by the power of the camera (Mellen 1975, 187).

This fascination led Hani to extensive experiences with the mobility of the camera (consider the "nervousness" of the glance in *Hatsukoi: Jigoku-hen*) and, on the other hand, to an ontological redefinition of the camera before the filmed subject. Hani, much like Rouch, believed that the process of filmmaking should be the result of a multilayered collaboration between the crew and cast:

³⁴ Takemitsu also worked in films of the previous generation of filmmakers, such as Akira Kurosawa, Naruse Mikio and Ichikawa Kon.

If I give people in my movies the chance, they can conduct an experiment with their own lives in my films.

In my new film I count on performers not only to act, but also to observe, narrate, and express themselves with the camera (Mellen 1975, 187).

The film Hani is referring to is *Gozenchu no Jikanwari*, in which this exercise goes even beyond, for example, Rouch's *La Pyramide Humaine*, since the actors not only participate in the making of the film and react to the previous day's rushes, but they themselves become filmmakers within the film. Hani handed out seven or eight 8 mm cameras to his non-professional actors and they created films that were incorporated into the narrative itself, constructed with the footage shot by both Hani and his actors. Other filmmakers had their performers go beyond their functions, like Matsumoto Toshio in the aforementioned experiences of *Bara no Sôretsu* and Terayama Shûji, who, in the 1960s and 1970s, used members of his own crew as actors in several films, including his debut, *Ori*.

This stylistic renewal was also the result of innovations in editing, both within the shot and between shots. Consider, for example, the *assemblage* of images in *Tsuburekakatta Migime no Tame Ni*, based on archive photographs, abstract animations and small narrative sequences, like the scene with the transvestite. Or also the alternate, unconventional, editing of *Erosu Purasu Gyakusatsu* by Yoshida Yoshishige, where historical scenes from the life of the Japanese anarchist Sakae Osugi are interspersed with sequences of two students, in the 1960s, discussing politics and the freedom of love, and even scenes where the characters from both periods are together.

Experiences with two other aspects of filmic creation also distinguished the *Nuberu Bagu* pieces from those of classical Japanese cinema, and will be the main focus of this study: light and colour. Firstly, for the symptomatic nature that these visual elements always had in the history of Cinema, from German expressionism to the contemporary independent cinema of Werner Herzog, Gus van Sant or Lance Hammer. Secondly, because of the semiotic importance presented by these elements to the study of the attempted construction of counter-politics and counter-aesthetics by the Japanese New Wave.

2. Light in the *Nuberu Bagu*

Like a moon that hangs in the night sky, the Golden Temple had been built as a symbol of the dark ages. Therefore it was necessary for the Golden Temple of my dreams to have darkness bearing down on it from all sides. In this darkness, the beautiful, slender pillars of the building rested quietly and steadily, emitting a faint light from inside. Whatever words people might speak to the Golden Temple, it must continue to

stand there silently, displaying its delicate structure to the eyes of the world and enduring the darkness that surrounded it.”

Mishima Yukio (Mishima 2009, 26-27)

2.1. Light in Japanese cinema

When Tanizaki Junichirō published his *In Praise of Shadows*, he was aware that the aesthetical nation he advocated was already in decline. He considered that Japan was “irreversibly wrapped in Western culture, in such a way that all that was left was to bravely move forward, leaving behind those that, like the old, [were] unable to continue...” (Tanizaki 2008, 84). However, he still sees the aesthetics of the “Old Japan” as superior to Western influence and, in most fields of art and Japanese life, suggests ways to perpetuate the traditional precepts. He starts with the example of Japanese architecture and the problems he had in building his own home, which was designed in such a way as to completely respect Japanese tradition. One of the most challenging issues he faced was the *shoji*. Tanizaki wanted to set this kind of room divider, but, given the obstacles imposed by the new Western techniques, he did not achieve the desired effect:

A few years ago I spent a great deal more money than I could afford to build a house. I fussed over every last fitting and fixture, and in every case encountered difficulty. There was the *shoji*: for aesthetic reasons I did not want to use glass, and yet paper alone would have posed problems of illumination and security. Much against my will, I decided to cover the inside with paper and the outside with glass. This required a double frame, thus raising the cost. Yet having gone to all this trouble, the effect was far from pleasing. The outside remained no more than a glass door; while within, the mellow softness of the paper was destroyed by the glass that lay behind it (Tanizaki 2008, 16).

By this excerpt from the second page of Tanizaki’s text, one might assume that the author defended the old Japanese aesthetics by a mere belief in the “pretext of good taste” as he mentions. However, the persistence in *shōji* untainted by Western “glass” is more than a mere aesthetic whim, it is a deep belief in their light-filtering features:

The dim light, basking in the faint glow reflected from the *shoji*. [...] There is a cold and desolate tinge to the light by the time it reaches these panels. The little sunlight from the garden that manages to make its way beneath the eaves and through the corridors has by then lost its power to illuminate, seems drained of the complexion of life. It can do no more than accentuate the whiteness of the paper (Tanizaki 2008, 28).

From the onset, the work of Tanizaki praises the elegiac nature of shadow, arguing that it is one of the most exquisite features of Japanese art. In order to support this theory, the author refers, for example, Japanese lacquerware, Noh theatre,³⁵ cuisine, sculpture, costumes and even makeup.

However, this advocacy of shadow is not carried out as if this were the ultimate goal in itself, but because it allows the existing low light to significantly stand out. In other words, according to Tanizaki, that which glows in the dark takes on a far superior value to everything that shines in light. In regard to lacquerware, he writes:

Lacquerware decorated in gold is not something to be seen in a brilliant light, to be taken in at a single glance; it should be left in the dark, a part here and a part there picked up by a faint light. Its florid patterns recede into the darkness, conjuring in their stead an inexpressible aura of depth and mystery, of overtones but partly suggested (Tanizaki 2008, 39).

Although Tanizaki does not address film in his study, it is undeniable that a large part of Japanese cinema prior to World War II followed this aesthetic of shadow. To better understand the use of light and shadow in film during this period, let us consider three examples: Yamanaka Sadao's *Ninjo Kami Fusen*, Mizoguchi Kenji's *Zangiku Monogatari* and Ozu Yasujiro's *Banshun*.

Ninjo Kami Fusen is a very specific case in the history of the pre-war Japanese cinema, both by the vicissitudes of the life of its director (Yamanaka Sadao, Ozu's best friend and one of the most critically acclaimed Japanese filmmakers, who died at the age of twenty-nine in the war in China) and by the unusual portrait of the warrior aristocracy presented in it. In fact, unlike the *jidaigeki* of that time, which glorified the teachings of the *Bushido*, *Ninjo Kami Fusen* displays a disappointed portrait of the samurai class, revealing that courage, honour and fidelity would not always transcend greed, selfishness and mediocrity.³⁶ This dark vision of the military class, self-evident in terms of action, also manifests itself in the formal level. Freda Freiberg, as a preface of her text "Turning Serious," connects this fact with Yamanaka's life itself:

In the light of this knowledge, it is easy to read the doomed destiny of both the cheeky Shinza and the cowardly samurai as a synecdoche of Yamanaka's own situation. [...] The overall darkness of the film and the prevalence of dismal weather in it can be read as objective correlatives of his gloomy and depressed mood (Phillips and Stringer 2008, 51).

35 "[...] The darkness in which the Noh is shrouded and the beauty that emerges from it make a distinct world of shadows which today can be seen only on the stage; but in the past it could not have been far removed from daily life." (Tanizaki 2008, 51).

36 "Unlike in the case of monumental cinema, *Humanity and Paper Balloons* does not try to reify Japanese artistic or spiritual traditions. On the contrary, it provides a disillusioned and somewhat bitter critique of traditional values by exposing the selfishness and greed of the privileged classes, and focusing on the trials and tribulations of the marginal and the underprivileged." (Phillips and Stringer 2008, 59).

Nevertheless, the use of shadow in *Ninjo Kami Fusen* is not just a consequence of the depressive personality of Yamanaka, but is also a key element for the creation of a certain atmosphere. Actually, the film represents a microcosm full of misfortunes and dark feelings: "It's the third suicide here. They say the lane is haunted. A party will liven the place up,"³⁷ says one of the characters in the beginning of the film. However, not even the momentary lightness of the party can negate the funereal tone of the narrative, and shortly thereafter, the film resumes its particular gloomy atmosphere and dark cinematography.

Thus, Yamanaka associates darkness to one of the primal institutions of traditional Japanese history: the warrior class and their ethical precepts. However, this does not occur because Yamanaka believes, like Tanizaki, that "taste" is in the use of shadow, but rather due to the filmmaker's semiotic association with the degrading nature of the Japanese military class.

Mizoguchi Kenji, in turn, in several of his works of the 1930s, uses virtually the same dark tone as Yamanaka, albeit with a different aim. In *Zangiku Monogatari*, for example, darkness has an emotional purpose, just like the framing or the long take.³⁸ An interesting case is the known shot in which, during the watermelon-sharing ritual, Kikunosuke confesses his feelings for Otoku, the nursemaid of his foster brother, after she disclosed his shortcomings as an actor. The two characters, who throughout the sequence, only execute the required movements for slicing and eating the fruit, are shot within a frame of darkness, where a table and some shelves are vaguely perceptible. This frame aids in the construction of an increasingly intimate space, creating the conditions for confiding in each other. It should be noted that Otoku, during the whole scene, is always very embarrassed about the situation, aware that her social status does not allow her to spend time in such way with a member of a large and important family of actors. It is Kikunosuke, though, who insists in meeting under those circumstances, risking his reputation: "Here is fine. [...] Yes, right here, together."³⁹ Mizoguchi, in this manner, by respecting the lighting design of a typical Japanese house, provides shadow to Otoku and light to Kikunosuke (both by the lighting of shots and by the tones of their costumes), evoking Tanizaki's association of shadow with discretion and light with extravagance.

While Yamanaka uses the scarcity of light as a formal resource to highlight political and social aspects and Mizoguchi for its emotional properties, Ozu resorts to it perhaps for the most tanizakian reason of all: by its ability to create complexity and ambiguity to interpretative reading. In fact, almost all of Ozu's films (up until the arrival of colour) are also marked by a dark-toned cinematography, best represented by *Tôkyô Boshoku*, perhaps the darkest film, in all senses, of the director's work. But, instead, let us analyse *Banshun*, which, aside from being a more representative work of Ozu's career, is also one of the

37 Subtitles between 7m46s and 7m54s, Eureka release (The Masters of Cinema Series), translated by Tony Rayns.

38 The film has only one hundred and forty shots, as opposed to the usual four hundred to six hundred for a feature film of the same length (Rodrigues 2005, 49).

39 Subtitles between 27m14s and 27m18s, Prismo release, translated by Alexandra Valle.

works that originated a great critical controversy. An important article about *Banshun* entitled "The Riddle of the Vase," by Abé Mark Nornes, develops his project of a history of Western criticism to Ozu's work, following its evolution from *Transcendental Style in Film* by Paul Schrader to the articles of Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, while questioning possible paths for future criticism. To demonstrate the Western theoretical evolution on the work of the filmmaker, Nornes chooses one of the most critically controversial scenes: in the Kyoto *ryokan*, where Noriko, before her wedding, spends one last vacation with her father. In this sequence, the grounds for the theoretical debate are two shots of a vase in a window, seemingly unconnected and irrelevant for the story, but representing the transition from happiness to anguish in Noriko's face. Nornes presents several perspectives about these shots: Paul Schrader's, who parses it as another manifestation of the transcendental style of Ozu; Donald Richie, who, in his *Japanese Cinema: Film Style and National Character*, considers them as a kind of container for the viewer's emotion; Kristin Thompson, who, in *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*, classifies them as non narrative images and thus of arbitrary nature; or Eric Cazdyn, who, in *The Flash of Capital: Film and Geopolitics in Japan*, sees them as a invitation for an allegorical reading of the film:

The time images⁴⁰ of the vase and the clocks are read here as a way of coming to terms with a world in which various needs and desires were interpreted as symptoms of something larger, as something that, in however distorted and unknowable a form, exceeded immediate demands. To be attentive, weary, and respectful of this 'something larger' ... this is how a cutaway to a clock quietly implores us not to recoil into an exclusive and hazardous particularism. This is also how a seemingly apolitical film quietly implores us to read it allegorically (Phillips and Stringer 2008, 85-86).

Nornes himself suggests an alternative theory to all these opinions and argues that the inclusion of the shot could represent a private obsession of Ozu, the fetishistic accumulation of objects that would quench his collector spirit:

His own art displays all the prototypical hallmarks of a collector's activity: the totalizing obsession with tiny detail, the fetishistic arrangements of favorite objects such as props and actors in space, the unending quest for refinement and the perfect collection, and a love of display combined with an obstinate indifference to the significance others might find in the collection's arrangement and composition (Phillips and Stringer 2008, 87).

Nevertheless, is it impossible to sustain an interpretation of this shot that would not support either an immediate narrative function (such as Richie's, who sees the images of the vase as a point of view shot), or a fetishist vision, like Nornes' and, at ultimately,

40 The expression "time images" refers to the concept developed in *L'Image-Temps*, in which Gilles Deleuze specifically analyses this scene and considers it as a direct time-image.

Thompson's as well? Bordwell, perhaps the least convinced with these readings, in his *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, rejects, on the one hand, the shots as *point of view*, and, on the other, leads the way to a new line of analysis by stating that, in the second version of the script, the vase is not mentioned, only the silhouettes of bamboo (Bordwell 1988, 117). In fact, the vase shots are mainly shadows, and the light that enters through the window is not enough to illuminate the space and undo these inherent ambiguities. Thus, the vase shots are pure expressions of the importance Tanizaki gave to shadow in his study. Therefore it does not seem excessively risky to consider them as generators of intentional ambiguity, reflecting, essentially, the very ambiguity of Noriko, unsure of her own feelings. The fact that the shots illustrate the transition from joy to sadness on her countenance necessarily connects them to the duality that characterises, at this point in the narrative, the psychological state of the protagonist, torn between the desire to start a new life and the sorrow of leaving her father. Thereby, it seems reasonable to consider the vase shots not as a container of the viewer's emotion, but rather as a container of the ambiguity of Noriko's thoughts. And it is precisely the dark tone of the scene that makes this interpretation reasonable.

Ozu, indeed, abundantly uses underexposure as an expressive resource, believing that, from shadow, rises the amphibology that enhances the cinematic text.

Thus, despite different motivations, the use of shadow was extensive and hegemonic by pre-war Japanese filmmakers, proving that its use was deeply attached to a traditional Japanese aesthetic,⁴¹ in which it held a role as creator of ambiguity and was responsible for the "unspeakable resonances" (Tanizaki 2008, 39) that characterised Japanese art.

2.2. Light and counter-light

The moment that gave rise to a programmatic lightening of cinematography in Japan occurred with the set of films made in the 1950s under the designation of *Taiyozoku*. Indeed, Nikkatsu's releases directed by young filmmakers⁴² for an even younger audience were a sensation when they premiered, not only for their moral revolution and exhaustive portrayal of post-war Japanese youth behaviours, but also for their openness to light, one of the aspects that marked an explicit inversion of the traditional aesthetic paradigm.

In this field, *Kurutta Kajitsu* is an exemplary film: the action is set in a coastal village in Japan, where a group of young people leads a bohemian and rather unambitious life. Their daily activities include playing cards, dancing at home parties or clubs and, more importantly, cruising in motor or sailing boats belonging to their wealthy families. Nakahira Kô's

41 According to Burch, it was consolidated during the Heian period: "Japanese aesthetics, Burch argued, were fundamentally set in the Heian period (794-1185) and have thus continued, essentially unchanged, to inform every aspect of Japanese culture and artistic production into the modern era." (Phillips and Stringer 2008, 83).

42 Nakahira Kô, for example, was thirty years old when he directed *Kurutta Kajitsu*.

film, with special focus in this latter activity, is almost flooded with light from the first to the last scene, both with the protagonist, played by Tsugawa Masahiko, driving the family's boat, suggestively named "Sun Season."⁴³ The last scene, the climax of the film, is in its entirety an exercise in white, where clarity gradually dominates the atmosphere until the final shot where the boat barely stands out from the sea, which, in turn, seems practically blended with the sky. In *Kurutta Kajitsu*, the ubiquitous white is clearly associated with the new lifestyle of Japanese youngsters. Frank, the result of a mixed marriage, always appears dressed in Hawaiian shirts or very light toned suits, while Eri, the *femme fatale* that ruins the relationship between the two brothers, wears blinding white dresses when invited to parties. The sunny climate of the coastal resort asks for, at the same time as it triggers, a cinematography of white tones, also present on the sailing gear and water sports accessories, such as the sail of the "Sun Season" or the towels on which Natsuhisa and Mie made love. In this sense, as clarity is associated to modern habits and behavioural tendencies of Japanese youth, the final scene of *Kurutta Kajitsu*, a borderline expression of the new (a)morality, whiteness and madness become one: Haruji runs over his lover with the boat and rams the "Sun Season," causing the death of his brother. After this explosion of violence, he drifts away at sea, merging into the light shaded landscape.

Thirteen years later, when the *Nuberu Bagu* is creating its most important films, Matsumoto Toshio directs *Bara no Sôretsu*, which takes a decisive step towards the reconfiguration of Japanese aesthetics through the use of light. This practice goes beyond the mere intention of portraying the new behaviours of Japanese youngsters and showing a new image of the country by suggesting that whiteness and light represent the ambiguity and complexity of the new Japan in the same way that blackness and shadow, according to Tanizaki and other theorists of his creed, did in respect to traditional Japan.

Firstly, Matsumoto's film takes on white as a starting point,⁴⁴ rather than the traditional use of black.⁴⁵ Black was used as the base colour for cinema, not only for its common association to neutrality, but also because it is this colour that separates the twenty-four

43 "Sun Season" is a reference to the novel by Ishihara Shintarô that originated the literary and cinematic genre of the *Taiyozoku*.

44 Terayama Shûji also sees white as the neutral colour of cinema. Just as *Bara no Sôretsu*, *Sho o Suteyo Machi e Deyou* is deeply obsessed with white blindness associated to cinema and life. In the first minute of Terayama's film, in which the black image lingers in silence until the first comment of the protagonist, in which he addresses the audience and states "the screen is blank." On the other hand, the first postscript, dedicated to the protagonist's monologue, is constantly splashed by moments where the screen is actually blank, and, after a certain point, takes over the scene. In this way, the transition from the initial black to the ending white can be seen as representing the transition between two types of absence: a first one, intra-cinematic, represented by black, uncomfortable but safe, and a second one, white, suggesting the departure from the film, that is, a return to the clash with "everyday life," in the words of Guy Debord.

45 Even the film's title, heterodoxically, appears in black characters over white. Four years later, Yoshida Yoshishige will follow these footsteps, with his *Kaigenrei*.

images that are projected each second.⁴⁶ *Bara no Sôretsu* replaces it with white.⁴⁷

On the other hand, with this reassociation, white serves as a canvas for the ambiguous and diffuse action. Let us consider the opening scene: Gonda and Peter are in a moment of sexual intimacy, later identified as incestuous, where the abstraction of bodies slowly gives way to personal identification, a reminiscence of the bodily fragments of *Une Femme Mariée* by Jean-Luc Godard, made five years before.⁴⁸ The immediate effect is a visual chaos, at first by the difficulty in identifying both bodies and, afterwards, in realising the gender of each character, given that the initial perception of the inattentive viewer is soon foiled. In this sequence shot in overexposure, imbued with an abstracting but not abstract eroticism, Matsumoto makes use of features that Trond Lundemo, in his article "The Colours of Haptic Space," believes to be inherent to the white image:

The white image engages the body, and consequently the tactile, in a very direct and physical way. [...] it usually invades the whole image and eradicates all lines and contours. In the white image, light is not filtered and differentiated. The image consists of white noise, as there are no figures or spatial distinctions to convey any means of orientation. As all perception depends on the filtering and sorting of information, the white light makes impossible these processes of making meaning (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 97).

The resistance to figure, outline and spatial orientation, which, according to Lundemo, is inherent to the white image, fully serves the process of ambiguation carried out by

46 Trond Lundemo calls it the colour of invisibility, since it is used by the invisible editing processes. (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 91). He also names another colour of invisibility: blue, not only for its role in the Chroma Key era, but also by the association he establishes between this colour and blindness. In this regard, he mentions the film *Blue*, by Derek Jarman: "Apart from the titles, the film image consists solely of a monochrome blue image, denoting the blindness of the director's near-terminal stages of his AIDS disease. We here encounter the blue colour as a code for invisibility, since the colour is not invisible to the spectator. On the contrary, we are asked to accept the monochrome blue as the colour seen by the blind director. With Jarman, blue, the colour of sadness in our culture, becomes the colour of blindness as well." (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 92).

47 Curiously, the film Matsumoto directed right after *Bara no Sôretsu* (he only directed an experimental short film in between, *Metastasis - Shinchin Taisha*) was *Shura*, a feature which is, in many ways, the opposite of the film starring Peter. It is a minimalist *jidaigeki* based on a *kabuki* play, while *Bara no Sôretsu* was an eccentric *gendaijeki* based on a western play, and, more importantly, it is a film entirely underexposed and deeply imbued with black, vividly contrasting with the white of the previous work. Matsumoto himself, in an interview, considered it as his most sober and classical film: "*Shura* is the most classical of all my films and at the same time the most austere. I consciously avoided calling on a great many technical artifices in order to confront my subject in a realisation stripped down to its essentials. I simplified the décor to the extreme, retaining only light and dark, the play of shadows being the only element used to translate the dramatic intensity. I abandoned camera movements which were abundant in *Bara no Sôretsu*, simplified the editing and made no use of music." (Whitaker 1977, 28). However, *Shura* has a political dimension that, by different means, also attacks the institutions of family and Empire: "[...] there is a criticism of national and family structures or limitations." (Whitaker 1977, 30).

48 *Une Femme Mariée* (and, actually, most of Godard's films in the 1960s) was in fact the result of an experience ontologically and methodologically similar to *Bara no Sôretsu*, in the sense that it was born from a subversion of the principles of classical cinema.

Matsumoto in the opening scene of *Bara no Sôretsu*. Its overall effect is thus a great glare, resulting in the rapid immersion of the viewer in an almost state of protohypnosis. Incidentally, this a process that Matsumoto will use in several of his abstract short films of the 1970s and 1980s, such as *Enigma: Nazo*, *White Hole* and *Connection*. The sequence does not establish the only cinematographic mode used throughout the film (also because, as the action progresses, one realises that the initial sequence is in fact the shooting of a scene from a *pinku eiga*, a softcore pornographic film), but creates a tone motif that comes back several times throughout the story, with a very specific narrative value. In fact, white on white is used precisely to create ambiguity, which is an absolutely revolutionary aspect for the traditional aesthetic conception. Tanizaki praised shadow because he believed that, when in contrast to it, light would attain a renewed value. Referring to the objects lacquered with golden colour, which, according to him, should be appreciated in dark places in order to enjoy their aesthetic beauty to the fullest, he writes:

The sheen of the lacquer, set out in the night, reflects the wavering candlelight, announcing the drafts that find their way from time to time into the quiet room, luring one into a state of reverie. If the lacquer is taken away, much of the spell disappears from the dream world (Tanizaki 2008, 39).

Conversely, in *Bara in Sôretsu*, the “lure into a state of reverie” happens in a different way, and the white-on-white, precisely because it makes it difficult to identify the boundary between object or character and background, challenges the paradigm: it is as challenging to figure out what it is almost indiscernible in the glare as it is to discover what is hidden in the shadow. This was the conclusion of Trond Lundemo in his article: “Too much light renders the image invisible and may denote blindness just as well as obscurity does” (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 91).

The link to blindness is also especially relevant in Matsumoto’s film, since *Bara no Sôretsu* is in fact an updating of *Oedipus Rex*, in which Peter plays a transvestite “Eddie” in Tokyo, during the 1960s. Despite the significant deviations from Sophocles’ play, the closing scene of the film matches the final moment of the text, the self-inflicted blindness of Oedipus. In the film, Eddie, after gouging out his eyes, comes out to the street and becomes dazzled by the light, whether from the exterior light or from his increasing blindness (which, it should be noted, is not represented by black, but by white). Thus, Matsumoto, at the closing of the film and until the fade-to-white ending, resorts once again to the dual purpose of white light: “the ambivalent role of white light as an image of maximum light and, simultaneously, of blindness” (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 98).

Another use of light in film which contradicts traditional Japanese aesthetics is that of Teshigahara Hiroshi. Indeed, the author of *Suna no Onna*, after some more conventional experiences in this respect (like *Otoshiana* and *Ako*, more focused on the questioning, respectively, of behavioural and identitary aspects of Japanese culture), directed *Tanin no Kao*, in which white serves very specific semiotic, political and ethical purposes. The film tells the story of a man who lost his face in an accident and, through a plastic surgery experiment,

tries to assume a new identity through a mask, built artificially, but inspired in a face of a stranger. In the first part of the film, the protagonist wears white bandages to hide his face, a visual layout that suggests from the onset a parallelism with *The Invisible Man* by James Whale, and not just for visual reasons. Just like Whale's, Teshigahara's faceless man is an invisible man, but the protagonist of *Tanin no Kao* wishes to put an end to this situation by using a mask of another man. The whiteness of the bandages is his identity void, but salvation will not come from the switch with another man's *persona*: the mask, fully made from fake and removable elements (the glasses, the beard,⁴⁹ the mole), starts to come off and, in the scene where the protagonist tries, anonymously, to win back his wife, it startlingly undocks from his real face. The biggest visual proof that a mask can't fill the identity void implied by the absence of a face is perhaps the final shot, in which the false countenance of the protagonist, in a freeze frame, is completely covered by the white character "End": 終.

In *Tanin no Kao*, whiteness is also the protagonist of a game of cleanliness versus filth and it is the privileged colour in the plastic surgeon's office, with its multiple painted glasses and the geometrically arranged exhibitors, more likely suggesting an art gallery than a medical experimentation centre. However, the clinical nature is very present in the lab and the "white and clean" dimension of the surgical office is ultimately just another mask hiding the "dirty" experiences carried out by the doctor. Therefore, the questions in *Tanin no Kao* surpass the identity issue and extend to the political and ethical limits of scientific experimentation. In fact, this theme was inconvenient for both Japan, which had carried out, for example, the famous human experiences of Unit 731 in China,⁵⁰ and the United States, with the military science research that culminated with the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a revenge against the cynical white of various masks applied to him, the protagonist, in an act that brings to mind Roy's uprising against his creator in *Blade Runner*, kills the doctor who, following a failed scientific experiment, thwarts the promise he had made of giving him a new identity.

49 "It seems unnatural without the beard," says the doctor while trying the several beards on the patient (subtitles between 49m44s and 49m47s, Eureka! release (The Masters of Cinema Series)).

50 These experiences, commonly known as "Factories of Death," took place between 1933 and 1945 in China and consisted in a series of extreme medical exercises carried out by the Japanese on Chinese, Russian, Mongolian and Korean people, involving torture and, inevitably, resulting in the death of the victims. Unit 731 became famous not only for the gruesome crimes committed, but for conducting experiments on such a large scale. It is estimated that at least 3,000 people were murdered in this unit. The official goal underlying these practices was to train war surgeons. Under this pretext, they would constantly perform vivisections on prisoners and even more extreme experiences, such as the intentional contagion of diseases and combat injury simulation, in which physicians would deliberately shoot patients so they could afterwards teach apprentices how to remove the bullets. (Tsuchiya 2000, 1). Scientific experimentation not subject to ethical precepts and, above all, the episodes of the Chinese "Factories of Death," were heavily criticised by the New Wave and, as a topic, particularly by Imamura Shōhei. His concern about this chapter in the history of Japan led to the creation of *Kanzo Sensei*, in 1998, in which the protagonist, a doctor significantly wearing white throughout the film, putting his practice at the service of good, lives terrified by the suspicion that his son may have participated in the experiments in China.

Yasuzo Masumura's *Akai Tenshi*, another acclaimed work of the *Nuberu Bagu*, released in Japan two and a half months after *Tanin no Kao* by Teshigahara, also presents the use of black and white as an opposition between cleanliness and filth, respectively associated to good and evil. The story takes place in 1939, during the Japanese occupation of China, and it focuses on the character of Sakura Nishi, a nurse who is sent to several field hospitals, where she is daily confronted with the human horrors of armed conflict. Formally, the entire work is imbued with a dense darkness, associated to the dying soldiers, the walls of hospitals, the weapons, the army trucks and all the elements linked to war and death. There are, however, a number of figures of whiteness that move in the dark: the nurses and Dr. Okabe, a doctor in charge of all operations in the field hospital. In the film, Masumura clearly makes use of the traditional white uniform of so-called "health conveyors" to associate them with hygiene (physical and moral) and distance them from the filth (literal and intellectual) of war. Early in the narrative, Dr. Okabe confesses to the nurse his disbelief in the profession he exercises and doubts his role of "perpetrator of good." In fact, considering the war period Japan was living, the treatments in field hospitals had to be adapted to the scarce existing medical resources. Hence, for example, blood transfusions were reserved for officers alone and anaesthetics were only used in extreme cases. The anti-inflammatory and palliative medication was also in short supply. In this situation, since the one possible treatment for wounded members was amputation, the doctor's duties were reduced to deciding whether each soldier would die or survive as a cripple. During a private conversation with the nurse Nishi Sakura, Dr. Okabe, dressed in a white shirt, the only spot of brightness in the entire sequence, confesses:

We have no blood or medicine here. That's why I cut off arms and legs. Even those I don't have to. They say I'm an expert at it. I've cut off hundreds of arms and legs. I've crippled hundreds. I can't begin to count how many. [...] But are the cripples happy? Perhaps they're better off dead. I'm doing a terrible thing. I'm a doctor who can do nothing but watch soldiers die or turn them into cripples. Can you call that a doctor? It's a wonder I don't go mad.⁵¹

But even more disturbing than a doctor that doubts his "whiteness" is the figure of the nurse, whose actions, under the auspices of good, invariably lead to suffering and death. Sakura realises three of these cases in her work in the hospitals. The first is with Sakamoto, a soldier she reports for raping her and, therefore, is sent to the front lines and dies as a result of a war wound. The second, Orihara, is a soldier with both arms amputated, who Sakura, out of pity, would satisfy sexually. Orihara decides to commit suicide since he will never be reunited with his wife again and, above all, because he knows that his sexual relationship with the nurse could never last. Finally, Tsurusaki, the assistant Sakura had chosen to go with her to the front and that ultimately perishes in the final attack of the Chinese troops.

51 Subtitles between 20m10s and 21m05s, Yume Pictures release.

Because of these events that sway between misfortune and metaphysics, David Desser, in his attempt to clarify the political meaning of the film, fits Sakura (the “Red Angel” of the English title) in the category of “priestess,” of “healing woman”:

Sakura is the archetype of the healing woman, as a nurse and as a sexual partner. She heals men’s bodies and souls, yet for all the good she does, the men she helps still die. Masumura’s point is that the saving essence of woman is not enough in time of war. As Sato notes, Sakura’s “zest for life is unable to save them because they are trapped within a social code that stresses glory on the battlefield and regards weakness with shame”. [...] The feudalistic values that the militarists favored are subtly castigated when Masumura shows Dr. Okabe’s corpse, the hands clutching a broken samurai sword. Even the priestess is unable to save men betrayed by the system in which they live (Desser 1988, 120).

The fact that the good done by the “priestess” is not enough to dispel the evil caused by the war is visually translated in the final fifteen minutes where, after Sakura “experiments” being an officer by wearing Dr. Okabe’s clothes and, ultimately, exchanges the white nurse gown for the grim combat uniform, the film acquires a general dark tone, with minimal brightness blurs breaking the monotony of grey and black.⁵² In this sense, in order for whiteness to succeed, that is, for a new Japan to be born, it requires a complete elimination of black, of the militaristic and feudal values of the past that shaped traditional Japan.

While it cannot be exclusively interpreted as a semiotic aspect, the emphasis on clarity in black and white Japanese New Wave cinema is, nonetheless, an undeniable phenomenon. In fact, its use as a significant direct factor dates back to pre-*Nuberu Bagu*, reflecting the attempt to portray the behaviours of Japanese youngsters, as in *Taiyo no Kisetu* and *Kurutta Kajitsu*, to the questioning of the identity and boundaries of science in Teshigahara’s and Masumura’s films. But it is Matsumoto’s *Bara no Sôretsu* that proposes more clearly a new role for clarity and whiteness in cinema and, consequentially, in Japanese aesthetics: to provide greater accuracy in the portrayal of the new Japan, and, at the same time, to become the ideal visual vehicle for the ambiguity of the new times. Thus, whiteness and light, while not necessarily superior to Tanizakian shadow, were certainly more faithful to the complexity of the social, cultural and political Japan that emerged from the post-war period.

⁵² One of the few signs of faint brightness is the naked corpse of the assistant nurse Tsurusaki, found by Sakura, dead because of her.

3. Colour in the Nuberu Bagu

The moving image in colour is no mere piece of frivolous amusement but a force capable of profound psychological revelation.

Sergei M. Eisenstein
(Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 113)

3.1. Colour in Japanese cinema

Colour, as the vast majority of technical innovations originating in the West,⁵³ came belatedly to Japanese cinema. Indeed, the first complete colour film in Japan was a comedy by Kinoshita Keisuke, directed in 1951: *Karumen Kokyo ni Kaeru*. However, other major Japanese masters had an even later adoption, sometimes even reticent and discontinuous, of colour.

Ozu Yasujirō, for example, only used colour in 1958, with *Higanbana*. Max Tessier explains: “Comme il l’avait fait pour le son, Ozu resta longtemps opposé à l’usage de la couleur, prétextant que les procédés n’étaient pas satisfaisants” (Tessier 2005, 52). Nevertheless, the filmmaker stayed with this new technology in all of his subsequent films, creating an idiosyncratic chromatic universe.

Kenji Mizoguchi, in turn, used colour only twice in all his work, in *Yōkichi* and *Shin Heike Monogatari*. If his entire career is marked by the constant osmosis between a realistic tone and a fantastic one, colour helped Mizoguchi highlight the power of the latter. Let us consider the death sequence of Kwei Fei, where the dim tones underline its oneiric dimension. Notwithstanding, Mizoguchi, for his final film, *Akasen Chitai*, decided to return to black and white, investing however in a more contrasted cinematography than that which characterised his production in the early 1950s.

Kurosawa also arrived quite belatedly to colour, although, like Ozu, he continued using it until his last film. It was in black and white that Kurosawa directed all of his works in the 1950s and 1960s, having refused colour even for his 70 mm superproduction *Akahige* in 1965. *Dodesukaden*, the first of the only two works of The Four Horses (Yonki-no-Kai),⁵⁴ was the filmmaker’s debut in colour.

53 Sound, for example, only began to be widely used in Japanese cinema in the mid-30s, when its use was already widespread in Europe and United States.

54 The “Four Horses” were Kurosawa, Kobayashi Masaki, Kinoshita Keisuke and Ichikawa Kon, who decided, given that they were all going through difficult stages of their careers and were unable to find producers for their projects, to set up their own company. Yonki-no-Kai, however, dealt with major financial problems right from the start, due to the disastrous commercial failure of *Dodesukaden*. Five years later, after financing the extremely long *Kaseki* by Kobayashi Masaki, the company closed down.

In order to illustrate the various trends in the use of colour by filmmakers who started their career before the advent of the *Nuberu Bagu*, let us consider three works, one from the 1950s, another one from the 1960s and finally one from the 1970s: *Karumen Kokyo ni Kaeru* by Kinoshita, *Sanma no Aji* by Ozu and *Dodesukaden* by Kurosawa.

Kinoshita's comedy tells the story of Carmen, a young Japanese girl who leaves her village to live in Tokyo. When she returns to her countryside hometown, she brings the novelties of the modern city, including her profession: striptease dancing. The scene in which Carmen offers a striptease show to a crowd of villagers could be read as a metaphor of the arrival of colour to Japanese cinema. Just as the striptease from Tokyo reaches Carmen's village, colour comes from the West to Japan, enchanting and, simultaneously, causing disgust to viewers. In the film, the dance is so shocking for the rural lifestyle that the show becomes extremely tense, and the stage starts to shake, almost collapsing with the frantic steps of Carmen. The band itself begins to swing from one side to the other, barely being able to play the music for the dance. This unstable stage is, in fact, the world that trembles before the introduction of such a revolutionary innovation, as is the striptease to Carmen's village and colour to Japanese cinema. Kinoshita, in this sense, is aware of the strength colour has for its novelty and, naturally, uses it in a similar way to that of the early American commercial experiences in this field, such as *La Cucaracha*, *Becky Sharp* and *A Star is Born*.

If, like *Karumen Kokyo ni Kaeru*, many films of the 1950s used colour solely by its novelty, in the 1960s this feature clearly began establishing itself as an idiosyncratic stylistic trait. We can also consider an intermediate stage: after the initial use of colour as something exotic, the viewer became accustomed to its presence in film. Before the dissemination of colour, many productions began to apply it to the narrative and aesthetic structures already existent in black and white cinematography without exploring the creative potential of the new feature, which was strongly criticised by Rudolf Arnheim in his article "Remarks on Colour Film": "every scene must be built up from shapes and colors right from the beginning, and the shooting script must be based on color motives" (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 56).

Ozu's colour films, of which *Sanma in Aji* was his last, represent the antithesis of this type of use. The colour in Ozu already expresses an aesthetic concern which renders it necessary, that is, a *mise-en-scène* based on chromatic motifs. Its compositional and stylistic importance draws it close to the colour of Jacques Tati's films. In *Sanma no Aji*, it is also a sign of exoticism, although this attribution is intradiegetic rather than duplicitous (intradiegetic and extradiegetic) as in *Karumen Kokyo ni Kaeru*. Actually, the filmmaker uses bright colours to portray a changing society, mostly due to American influence. Thus, it is the modern outdoor neon signs that receive the bright colours in the film, while the more intimate settings, less manipulated by exogenous cultures, respect the more discreet colours of the "Old Japan." However, the walls of the house are not sufficiently opaque to prevent the intrusion of foreign elements: the very symbols of traditional Japanese culture, when assigned with new colours, acquire a sort of alien touch. Therefore, watching a colour film by Ozu is not the same as watching a coloured version of one of his black and white works. Take the

example of one of his pictorial ex-libris: the empty shots with the kettle where water boils. If it were possible to make an instinctive association of colour to this utensil in Ozu's black and white films, surely primary red would not be one of the first choices. The fact that this colour is practically ubiquitous in the final works of the filmmaker and that it is associated with several home objects (such as the pots and watering cans in *Ohayô* and the mailboxes in *Ukikusa*) may cause a sense of strangeness, the same that one can perhaps feel in relation to the changes in Japanese culture following World War II.

Besides the films from the early 1950s, that were driven by the spectacular novelty of colour; the ones that used colour as just another technical element independent from the profound evolution of themes and forms; and the ones that used it for the reconfiguration of a compositional universe, there were films that used colour as a means to build a new imagery. *Dodesukaden*, Kurosawa Akira's first colour film, falls into the latter category. The work is essentially a patchwork quilt on the microcosm found in an extremely poor neighbourhood in Tokyo, inhabited by outcasts that reveal themselves through the expression of various "tics," behavioural or physical, which give rise to different visual worlds. So, for example, the relationship between the two drunkards, who exchange wives without conscience problems, leads to such promiscuity that only the different colours of their clothes (yellow and red) help identify whose wife is whose. The psychological complexity of the young woman that made paper flowers, in turn, has its supreme visual expression in the scene where she is raped by her uncle: the whole chromatic world associated with the character is condensed into that sequence, and the bright red of the roses that serve as ground for the uncle's sexual crime is inextricably connected to her terrified perception of the situation. But the scenes where colours assume a stronger diegetic force and greater role in paving the pictorial delusions are the ones representing the "quirks" of the two characters considered by the community as mentally ill: Rokuchan and his father. In Rokuchan's case, the constant hallucination that makes him daily roam the neighbourhood driving his imaginary tram has two types of formal expression: an audible one and a visual one. The first one consists in the fact that the tram noises also exists diegetically in the film, revealing a humanist compassion towards the character. The second is the graphic production of the young man, who paints trams in hundreds of sheets coating the interior of the house. The visual strength of the paintings drastically contrasts with the dim tones of dwellings in the neighbourhood. This association between the vivid colour and imagination and how it is put into contrast with the binomial chromatic circumspection/regularity is also quite evident in sequences involving the child's father: virtually all of them are motivated by the fantasy of a luxurious house that would replace the carcass of the car where they live. The materialisation of the house is, to a certain degree, explicit in the film, with its colours turning more vivid as the project becomes more and more megalomaniac.

Kurosawa himself, whose academic background, significantly, focused in painting, coloured all the sets in the film. Colour in cinema as a tribute to colour in painting, incidentally, is not merely evident in this work and thus manifests itself on multiple occasions

in his subsequent films. But perhaps the more pertinent parallel of the use of colour in *Dodesukaden* is his *Dreams* (1990): If, in the first film, the characters never cross the bridge between the chromatic mirage and the walkable and inhabitable reality, in *Dreams*, the main character in the Vincent Van Gogh sketch, after a conversation with the painter, penetrates the master's paintings and *effectively* inhabits the chromatic delirium. The relationship between cinematic colour and painting is therefore a central element for the analysis of Kurosawa's late filmography. Writing about *Dodesukaden*, Frederico Lourenço explains this point:

The first aspect that stands out from the outset is that Kurosawa employs colour with the eyes of the painter. The colourful drawings of young Rokuchan doubtlessly symbolise this factor, so much in fact that Kurosawa stated that "Rokuchan symbolises the artist, filmmaker, that creates exclusively through his imagination, in this case the imaginary railroad, that is, cinema." Nuanced and brightened colours in this film are so excessive that they go far beyond the ravings of the great master of colour, Michael Powell (or as if we could imagine a film where the "normal" standard would be Kathleen Byron's *débordante* makeup when preparing to murder Deborah Kerr in *Black Narcissus*). The countenances of the sick beggar, desperately taking care of his son, are so livid that they end up looking like a horrible mixture of green and blue; the house that they imagine to forget the horror of the surrounding reality is expressed in garish (tacky) tones; the ground, the sun and the sky appear in shades that leave the real colours far behind; the red flowers around the niece, soon to be raped by her uncle, resemble a lake of blood; the inescapable dirt of the depicted bodies [...] is a constant provocation to the "civilised" ease with which we loath filth, that symbolises the worst things... it is a colour that assaults, screams, exposes the sickening atmosphere the characters breathe, where no birds sing and the only visible tree, as the adulterous wife of the autistic says in her "blind" despair, does not even look like a tree because it is dead (Lourenço 2001, 87).

If, in regard to light, the *Nuberu Bagu* uprising was against the cinematography of classical cinema, through the creation of multiple and consistent alternatives, the revolution in colour was not against the use the Japanese masters gave to it. On the one hand, because the use of colour in Japanese cinema was still very recent.⁵⁵ But also because the experiences of filmmakers like Kinoshita and Ozu in this field were bold and could easily be classified as modernists. New Wave cinema, on the other hand, used colour, in different ways, as a powerful counter-aesthetic weapon, attacking solid structures associated with Japanese tradition, but also the history of its usage in Western art.

⁵⁵ We could calculate around eight years of pre-New Wave chromatic experiences, if we consider the gap between *Karumen Kokyo ni Kaeru* by Kinoshita (1951) and *Asu no Taiyô* by Ôshima (1959).

3.2. Colour and counter-colour

In the Japanese New Wave, colour is only present in a limited number of films: most of the studio production is in black and white (such as almost all the works of Imamura, Yoshida and Shinoda), as is the case of virtually all independent films, including those co-financed by the Art Theatre Guild. The exceptions are some studio films (as the early works of Ôshima after *Ai to Kibo no Machi*, Suzuki's later ones and almost all of Masumura's) and certain independently produced exercises, such as Matsumoto's and Terayama's.

However, this historical fact does not mean that when New Wave directors shot in colour, they did not assign to it a fundamental importance as a compositional element and with a semiotic charge. To prove this, naturally, we find the *Nuberu Bagu* films themselves, but also theoretical writings penned by the filmmakers. Ôshima, especially, proved to be particularly concerned with the use of colour, as in his text "Banishing Green," in which he proscribed green from his cinema:

At that time, the green of shrubbery was, for me, the root of many evils. No matter how severe a confrontation you are portraying, it immediately becomes mild the instant that even a little green enters into it. Green always softens the heart – well, I don't know about foreigners, but at least it does in the case of Japanese. This was definitely true, at least as I have observed it in frames on movie screens. For that reason, I banished all green (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 119).

From a semiotic point of view, colour within the *Nuberu Bagu* has favoured two channels of expression: one that contrasted with the traditional Japanese aesthetic and another one connecting it to the philosophy of colour in the West and, particularly, to the social and political moment of the 1960s.

Regarding the latter, David Batchelor, in his book *Chromophobia* (2000), argues that colour was the target of systematic discrimination since the dawn of Western civilisation. He starts with the example of 19th century theorist Charles Blanc who, in his *Grammaire des Arts du Dessin*, assigns the use of colour to the non-thinking beings, that is, according to the author, to the more primitive forms of nature:

Intelligent beings have a language represented by articulate sounds; organised beings, like all animals and vegetables, express themselves by cries or forms, contour or carriage. Inorganic nature has only the language of colour. It is by colour alone that a certain stone tells us that it is a sapphire or an emerald... Colour, then, is the peculiar characteristic of the lower forms of nature, while drawing becomes the medium of expression, more and more dominant, the higher we rise in the scale of being (Batchelor 2002, 25).

Batchelor substantiates this discriminatory vision of colour with other theoretical examples, such as that of Immanuel Kant, who believed that colour could never participate

in the grand schemes of the beautiful and the sublime; that of Joshua Reynolds, founder of the Royal Academy, who advocated that colour was a weak element, unworthy of the gaze when the work aspired to greatness and to the sublime; or also that of Bernard Berenson, who saw the “surrender” to colour as a trait from communities where brain was subordinate to muscle. The yielding before colour would therefore represent not only a dive into lower standards, but also a fall from Grace.

The author then offers some examples of contrary views, in which colour is seen not as a fall *from* grace, but a fall *into* grace: some texts by Charles Baudelaire and Paul Cézanne and the films *Der Himmel über Berlin* by Wim Wenders and *The Wizard of Oz* by Victor Fleming. Nevertheless, both of these films, despite their idiosyncratic visions of colour, may be accused of perpetuating a certain prejudice, given that, in the first case, the protagonist falls from an (apparently) stable black and white heaven into a tough world of colour, and in the second, Dorothy, as her ultimate wish, asks to return to her home in Kansas and to the grey life with her family.⁵⁶ Batchelor considers that these interpretations are unfounded, since Wenders’ film progressively shows that it is better to be in the complex and tough world in colour than in the sterile and monotonous black and white heaven. As for the return of Dorothy home, with the famous line “There’s no place like home,” Batchelor believes that this could be merely a concession to the rooted chromophobia of Western civilisation:

In the end, Dorothy has to return from colour – to Home, Family, Childhood, Kansas and Grey. ‘East, West, Home is Best.’ So she chants (in the book), albeit without a chance of convincing anyone who has taken a moment to compare the land of Oz with the grey-on-grey of Kansas, as Rushdie points out. Perhaps the implications of not returning, of not recovering from the Fall into colour, were too radical for Hollywood to contemplate (Batchelor 2002, 45).

If colour was historically excluded from the canon (or, at least, was considered one of the minor elements in the aesthetic hierarchy), it was only natural that practitioners of certain strands of artistic expression considered marginal or minor would appropriate themselves of this ingredient. Batchelor highlights certain fields of literature, painting and art criticism, but it would be possible to add, for example, comic books and graphic design to the list. On the other hand, colour also served the purpose of describing social and marginal practices where its presence was especially strong. As a model for his thesis on the topic, Batchelor chose drug consumption, specifically the hallucinogenic type. He quoted

⁵⁶ Salman Rushdie, in his book *The Wizard of Oz*, describes the grey in the life of Dorothy as follows: “everything is grey as far as the eye can see – the prairie is grey and so is the house in which Dorothy lives. As for Auntie Em and Uncle Henry: ‘The sun and the wind... had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober grey; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were grey also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled now’. Whereas ‘Uncle Henry never laughed. He was grey also, from his long beard to his rough boots.’ The sky? It was ‘even greyer than usual.’” (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 73).

Aldous Huxley's well-known essay *The Doors of Perception*, in which the writer shares his experience of mescaline consumption and strongly insists on the persistence and exponential increase of colour strength⁵⁷:

Half an hour after swallowing the drug I became aware of a slow dance of golden lights. A little later there were sumptuous red surfaces swelling and expanding from bright nodes of energy that vibrated with a continuously changing, patterned life... (Batchelor 2002, 32).

The chromatic frenzy in artistic representations of this type of experience quickly surpassed a mere illustrative direction and became an icon of the underground culture (and, subsequently, overground as well) of the young intellectual avant-garde of the 1960s. Thus, intrinsically related to this phenomenon are the flashy colours of Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe series, Roy Lichtenstein's panel-painting *Girl with Hair Ribbon*, George Dunning and the Beatles' musical animation *Yellow Submarine*, the poster for Roger Vadim's erotic science fiction epic *Barbarella*, or even the cover of Elvis Presley's album *Blue Hawaii*.

Through the channels opened during the American occupation of Japan, this Western culture arrived in the country in the 1960s and 1970s and nourished many Japanese artistic practices of this period. As previously stated, colour was not constantly associated with the experimental Japanese cinema of this period, but it was used in several cinematic projects, most of which short films. Let us consider two cases: Matsumoto Toshio's *Tsuburekakatta Migime no Tame Ni* (1969) and Terayama Shûji's *Chofuku-ki* (1974). Due to their theme and chromatic profile, both films fall into the first method⁵⁸ Batchelor refers when analysing the millennial attempt to purge the evil that colour constitutes in itself:

[T]he purging of color is usually accomplished in one of two ways. In the first, color is made out to be property of some 'foreign' body - usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer and the pathological. In the second, color is relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic. In one, color is regarded as alien and therefore dangerous; in the other, it is perceived merely as a secondary quality of experience, and thus unworthy of serious consideration. It is typical of prejudices to conflate the sinister and the superficial (Batchelor 2002, 22).

While *Tsuburekakatta Migime no Tame Ni* lives on an interlacing of black and white fictional images with exogenous coloured elements drawn from comic books, posters and animations of psychedelic effects, *Chofuku-ki* uses colour as a kaleidoscopic filter over the

57 Ang Lee, in the 2009 film *Taking Woodstock*, where he portrays the 1969 Woodstock festival, insists on the link between drug use and chromatic delirium. The moment where the protagonist takes LSD gives rise to a hallucination with extremely vivid and moving colours, radically contrasting with the mostly faded colour of the rest of the film.

58 Kinoshita's *Karumen Kokyo ni Kaeru* might, eventually, match the second.

film.⁵⁹ Through this filter, colour is only minimally dependent of the narrative, assuming a prominently abstract nature. This is why *Chofuku-ki* is such a good example of Batchelor's vision of the exclusion of colour from the canon and, in this sense, the struggle between line and colour. Brian Price, in his article "Colour, the Formless, and Cinematic Eros" emphasises precisely this aspect:

In terms of painting, then, and ultimately cinema, line controls color by creating a figure in which color will be contained. As such, the relation between color and line becomes a question of perception; the more distinct the line, the more recognizable the figure, and ultimately the narrative. But what begins as a question of perception and narrative comprehension is, as the example of Aristotle's Poetics suggests, a matter of ideology. In particular, Jacqueline Lichtenstein and David Batchelor have noticed the ways in which color has been subordinated in the service of formal purity. As Lichtenstein suggests, behind the opposition of line to color lies an impulse toward "moral Puritanism and aesthetic austerity in which only what is insipid, odorless and colorless may be said to be true, beautiful and good (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 79).

Through the use of the filter, colour departs from form and, therefore, becomes less obedient to it. On the other hand, Terayama's film resembles a parade of perversions where each one of the categories listed by Batchelor is present, from "female" to "pathological," as well as "childish" and "queer." *Chofuku-ki* is therefore a double insubordination: it escapes "moral Puritanism" for its exhaustive portrayal of deviant behaviours, and the "aesthetic authority" that outlawed the abusive use of colour and, even more zealously, the use of colour unsubordinated to form.⁶⁰ It should be noted that this last transgression occurred mainly in regard to the rules imported from the West, not because there was not an "aesthetic authority" in Japan, but because it had a different perspective about the relationship between colour and form.

Notwithstanding, the filmmakers of the New Wave of Japanese cinema did not defile solely the chromatic rules imported from West, but also internal precepts linked to the Japanese aesthetical canon. It should be noted, as an example, that traditionally vivid colours were used in portraits of foreign or strange figures. In fact, a careful examination of the chromatic construction of the *namban* screens of the late 16th and early 17th century will

59 Similarly to *L'illusion Comique* by Corneille, the short film has also a third level, since Terayama placed over the base film a layer where another action takes place: a game of shadows of extra-diegetic characters, including the butterfly of the English title (*Butterfly Dress Pledge*). This technique was used by Woody Allen, in 1966, to make his *What's Up, Tiger Lily?*, where a virtual sound film was superimposed to a visual film (directed by Senkichi Taniguchi) stripped from its soundtrack and with a frequent shadow of an inside viewer passing in front of the images.

60 *Sho o Suteyo e Deyou* can be viewed as an even more radical escape to the colour's subordination to form: in fact, this film often uses the same colour throughout the image of a shot, transforming entire black and white sequences into pink and white moments or, even more often, green and white. In this respect, it will be hard to miss the influence of the Western modernist vanguards of the early 20th century, mainly fauvism.

show that, as a rule, Japanese are painted with etched or dark colours and foreigners with very vivid colours. Let us notice, for example, the detail of a *namban* screen representing the arrival of the *Nau do Trato* and the *Namban-jin*, in which green and red were assigned to the figures of the “Southern barbarians.” On the contrary, with the *Nuberu Bagu* there was a democratisation of employment of vivid colour, not only in its attribution to the minorities of Japanese society, governed by alternative codes of conduct, but also in its association with the figure of the “new Japanese,” a product of the contamination of the Japanese *way of life* by several foreign cultures.

Interestingly, an author of the New Wave specifically addressed the subject of the representation of foreigners in Japan in the period that the *namban* screens were painted, in a film depicting the arrival of two Portuguese missionaries in search of a mysteriously disappeared Christian priest. *Chinmoku*, an adaptation of the homonymous novel by Endo Shusaku, a Japanese Christian writer, is, chromatically, a film with dim tones, to which one could perfectly apply the description that Richard Allen makes of Alfred Hitchcock’s *Topaz*: “[its] world, though it contains color, is essentially a colorless world of black and white and beige” (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 134). In fact, apart from the appearance of a mystical, premonitory figure, fully dressed in bright red, the only evidence of colour in Shinoda Masahiro’s feature film is the suit used by the protagonist, father Rodrigues.⁶¹ Even though the character is in fact a foreigner, ostracised by Japanese society, he actually stole the clothes from an abandoned house, being, therefore, Japanese. The film, while visually highlighting the character by degrading him (that is, the one who is not dressed like the others), suggests that the origin of the discrimination and the Japanese hatred towards the Other (in this case, the Catholic priest) lies indeed in the traditional Japanese society and not in the intruder. With this game about the origin of the bright colour, Shinoda subverts the nature of its assignment to the “foreign body” (to use Batchelor’s expression), a practice incorporated in traditional Japanese culture, as evidenced by the *namban* screens.

In addition to the cultural and political aspects underlying the different approaches to the use of colour in films, it may be essential, for a visual study of its use in the *Nuberu Bagu*, to consider as well the question of composition from a theoretical point of view. I believe that there are, in general, two distinct methods to construct colour in cinema (which should not be confused with technical processing vocabulary) and that both were used frequently and variously in the cinema of the New Wave: the additive one and the subtractive one.

In the first case, the director or cinematographer devise the film as being in black and white and introduce colour, through a significant insertion process, in specific moments.

⁶¹ This figure, although diegetically unidentified, may be related to that of an *Akaoni*, the Red Devil of traditional Japanese mythology that would drag sinners to Hell (just like Charon, ferryman of Hades who, according to Greek mythology, would carry the recently deceased across the river Acheron, border of the infernal territory). Following this hypothesis, the appearance of the red figure in *Chinmoku* could insinuate a mark of sin imputed to father Rodrigues and, therefore, justify his passion, while, on the other hand, the association of the two characters through the colour red could identify them both as “demonic beings, from Hell.”

This was the method adopted, for example, by Alfred Hitchcock in the composition of the fifteen films he directed in colour. Richard Allen, in his article "Hitchcock's Color Designs," quotes, in this respect, an interview given by the filmmaker to Charles Thomas Samuels:

Colour should start with the nearest equivalent to black and white. This sounds like a most peculiar statement, but colour should be no different from the voice which starts muted and finally arrives at a scream. In other words, the muted colour is black and white, and the screams are every psychedelic colour you can think of, starting, of course, with red (Hitchcock 1995 *apud* Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 131).

Several *Nuberu Bagu* filmmakers saw colour composition in film from Hitchcock's perspective, that is, they considered a film was, by default, a colourless object in which this element was surgically introduced according to specific expressive functions. Within the movement, three of the filmmakers who governed the chromatic organisation of their works according to this method were Terayama Shûji, Matsumoto Toshio and Wakamatsu Kôji.

Terayama, for example, followed this approach in the aforementioned shots in *Sho o Suteyo Machi e Deyou* (Cf. note 59), where he filmed in black and white and later coloured evenly in green and pink tones.

Matsumoto Toshio, in turn, in several of his experimental films of the 1970s, took as a starting point several universally recognisable referents and worked them chromatically, assigning them extrinsic colours. His *Mona Lisa* is an exemplary model of this process: Matsumoto fixes an image of Leonardo da Vinci's painting in the centre of his composition and then, over it, introduces colours that are radically different from the chromatic organisation of the original painting. The filmmaker also resorted to another additive process in the chromatic composition of his films. In black and white films, he embedded coloured shots which, due to their contrast with the rest of the work, attain increased significance. Hitchcock also discussed this phenomenon in an essay published in the *Hitchcock on Hitchcock* compilation:

I should never want to fill the screen with colour: it ought to be used economically - to put new words into the screen's visual language when there's a need for them. You could start to colour film with a boardroom scene: sombre panelling and furniture, the director's all in dark clothes and white collars. Then the chairman's wife comes in wearing a red hat. She takes the attention of the audience at once, just because of that one note of colour (Hitchcock 1997, 258).

In *Shura*, the "red hat" used by Matsumoto is the initial shot, in colour, displaying a sunset, his version of the burial of "the sun," of the military aristocracy, of the ethics of the samurai and the Empire. This shot, being the only one in colour throughout the whole film and, moreover, being in bright red, emphatically contrasts with the rest of the film,

in black and white and deeply imbued with dark shades (Cf. note 46), thus increasing its metaphorical charge.

Wakamatsu Kôji takes this process to a greater radicalism with the *pinku eiga* he directed in the 1960s. In fact, he made several black-and-white films interspersed with colour shots that, by their contrast, have their narrative strength and visual expression enhanced, allowing the introduction of elements provoking shock, destabilisation and anguish, so typical of the genre and, particularly, of this filmmaker's work. *Yuke Yuke Nidome no Shojo* is such a case. The action focuses on two characters of different sex who become close because both went through experiences of sexual humiliation: Poppo had been the target of repeated rapes in Tsukio's building and in turn, he had been abused in his own home. Unlike Poppo, Tsukio, however, revolted against his attackers and brutally murdered them. The rape scene and subsequent revenge of the protagonist appears suddenly in colour, with the bright red of spilled blood visually standing out from the beiges and greys of the bodies and of the house.

In the second method for the use of colour, the camera's role as seizer of the real is privileged and, accordingly, the control over the colours of the film is exerted on the level of what is captured on film. To accept or avoid colours is thus a work of inclusion or exclusion of the objects that bear them. Ôshima, in the aforementioned article "Banishing Green," completely outlaws the use of green in his work and manages this by avoiding filming objects of that colour, that is, using a subtractive method:

The first time I made a film in color - my first film was in black and white and my second was in color⁶² - I imposed a small taboo on myself.

I was never to shoot the color green. It's easy to avoid green costumes. There probably isn't a lot of green furniture. You need only remove any green signs. The problem is the green of trees and plants. That film was set in a city, and so there were no green fields. In the end, the problem boiled down to the green of shrubbery. I didn't have a garden made to go with the house on the set, and while shooting on location I took care to see that the camera angle excluded trees and shrubs (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 118).

Ôshima kept away from green because he considered that it "softened the heart" (Dalle Vacche and Price 2006, 119), but also because Nature's green and its inherent mysticism were increasingly distant from the reality of the new post-war Japanese world, predominantly urbanised and uniformly grey, as a consequence of both the destruction

62 The first film directed by Ôshima was *Asu in Taiyo*, a short film whose real purpose is unknown. Considering that, at this time, Ôshima did not have enough power within the studio to direct a work freely, and also the very title of the film - translatable as *The Sun of Tomorrow*, the more plausible hypothesis is that it is a showcase of Shochiku's young actors and actresses of that period, although it is also possible to read it as a parody of Japanese musical comedies. Nonetheless, Ôshima does not consider it as an important work in any of his writings and interviews. Thus, when the filmmaker, in this quote, mentions his first film, he is referring to *Ai to Kibo no Machi* ("in black and white") and when he alludes to his second one, he means *Seishun Zankoku Monogatari* ("in color").

caused by the conflict and the architecturally aggressive reconstruction, with reinforced concrete buildings. But although his first colour films in fact fled from green, they showed no sympathy for black either. Indeed, *Seishun Zankoku Monogatari* and *Taiyo no Hakaba* (and also *Asu no Taiyo*) are all works where the dark colours are constantly handled as secondary. In these films, there are extremely few frames that are not marked at least by one element of a strong colour, even those where the atmosphere is usually darker. Good examples are the red umbrella, the blue phone and the green shirt in *Seishun Zankoku Monogatari*. Ôshima's *Taiyo no Hakaba* also makes an eclectic use of the chromatic palette provided by Eastmancolor. The result is a blazing film, for both intra and extradiegetic reasons. The apocalyptic scenario of the story is created not only by the anarchic and insane behaviour of the characters and by the pessimistic political predictions, but also by the portrayal of an exceptional climatic situation: Osaka is under a heat wave and all the characters are drenched in sweat, carnality and indolence. In the words of Julian Ross:

A carnal physicality radiates from the individuals, whose emotions are veiled by sweat and dirt, shown in intense close-ups that swallow up the screen. The fierce red of the sun engulfs the characters, metaphorically blaming the entire nation for the anti-social state of these lost souls (Berra 2010, 242).

The metaphor is clear: the film, whose title can be translated as *The Burial of the Sun*, the Sun representing the Empire,⁶³ is the final downfall of "Old Japan," with all its aesthetical and political implications. But the Sun falls over Osaka and this is the cause of the heat wave that floods the city and, consequently, of the light and vivid colours that dominate the film.

The revolution in colour carried out by the *Nuberu Bagu* was thus the product of distinct conceptions of its role in cinema and had consequences at various levels. Both the filmmakers who saw colour as an additional compositional element, adding it to a chromatically neutral base, and those who acknowledged its intrinsic nature in relation to the image and thus avoided colours they did not want to be present in the shot, attempted to charge it with purpose and use it as a field for aesthetical experimentation. This action had varied implications, some visual, such as the refusal of colour's submission to line in the work of Terayama Shûji, others of cultural and social purport, allowing for the representation both of new everyday habits, in Ôshima Nagisa's colour films, and activ-

63 This is also Desser's opinion, although the author of *Eros Plus Massacre* additionally suggests that the "Sun" in the title may refer to the *Taiyozoku*: "The title, *The Sun's Burial*, is a highly allusive one. It refers to the image of the Sun as a symbol of Japan, Land of the Rising Sun; the Japanese flag is alluded to by the frequent shots of the rising or the setting sun blazing red in the sky. The recurrent use of the Japanese flag is an important visual motif for Oshima in this film and in many later works. The burial of the sun may also refer to the burial of the sun tribe, the genre of the youth film; youth destroyed by the commercial-materialistic society that Japan has become. For in this film, people are reduced to mere flesh and blood, valuable only for how much these are worth on the black market." (Desser 1988, 51).

ities previously regarded as marginal, in Matsumoto Toshio's short films. However, all these strands violently converged to a common purpose: the radical disruption with the role and representation of colour in Japanese artistic and cultural tradition (and often in Western as well), opening the door for entirely new paradigms of creation and figuration.

Conclusion

Throughout the still short history of film, works associated with a specific socio-political context proved to be strongly influenced by the reality they had emerged from, while simultaneously having an important impact in the generation of this same reality: if the films of Leni Riefenstahl were monumental works of propaganda, responsible for the conversion of thousands of people to Nazism, it is equally true that they absorbed, by osmosis, aspects of composition and organisation of the masses that were typical of the Third Reich.

Similarly, the Japanese New Wave filmmakers raised the flag of new artistic and socio-political conceptions, but they were also deeply shaped by the reality that surrounded them. Therefore, the importance of their films derives from their place in the History of Cinema, but also in History *tout court*:

The Japanese New Wave films are not simply political tracts or historical records; nor, on the other hand, are they merely aesthetic texts which intersect with currently fashionable areas of film theory and criticism. Like the French New wave, the Japanese cinema of the period bears a relationship to its cultural/political context and to the cinematic past from which it arises and rebels (Desser 1988, 1).

The ontological complexity of the *Nuberu Bagu* films derives precisely from this multifaceted nature. However, the goals of the various revolutions carried out by the movement, although divergent, ultimately converge in a methodical and global revolt against the past, whether political, with attacks to militarism, the *Bushido* and the subservient attitude of the Japanese Government towards the United States, or aesthetic, with the destruction, by direct opposition or by substitution, of the art, and specifically of the cinema, associated to traditional paradigms.

In this article, I have argued that the work of the *Nuberu Bagu* filmmakers on light and colour was not merely a secondary element of the visual avant-gardism, it was at the centre of a shift, both in terms of artistic expression and social revolution, drawing close to a "flight for life." This "bleed"⁶⁴ of cinema into the "vie quotidienne" (in the words of Guy Debord (Cf. note 10)), was conquered largely by the *Nuberu Bagu* revolution, which,

⁶⁴ "Bleed" is a term related to printing which indicates a picture that overflows its margins and contaminates the panel frame.

by contemplating and proposing new colours and a new light for Japan, was responsible for renovated habits, trends and behaviours of the large mass of cinema spectators that existed in the country in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, it introduced a radical cut with the colours and light of the past, which perished with the death of the objects and traditions they accompanied. Thus, the revolt of light and colour of the *Nuberu Bagu* struck the final blow to the chromophobia in Japanese tradition but also to its intrinsic photophobia. It was significant not just because of the contrast with the past, but also due to efforts to portray new cultural and social experiences, representing the breaching of rooted taboos or the living of new realities of the present.

Born in a period of great political struggles and opportunities for reviewing social and cultural values, the work of the young Japanese filmmakers of the *Nuberu Bagu* was hence, in its Oedipal revolt, partly responsible for the final destruction of the old aesthetical models, as described in Tanizaki's *In Praise Of Shadow*, and the moral precepts of the Old Japan, compiled in Nitobe's *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*. Furthermore, since one of the main features of the cinematic art is its ability to shape icons, it was also responsible for changing the country's image and for providing new aesthetic paradigms and renewed solutions of representation, as well as creating and disseminating new tendencies and trends. In spite of clear elements of continuity that should not be ignored, the activity of destruction and social and aesthetical reconstruction proposed by the cinema of the New Wave, especially through light and colour, partly built this new country, far from the old imperial Japanese nation as kingdom of honour and shadow.

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