Peter Brook's KING LEAR and Akira Kurosawa's THRONE OF BLOOD

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From *Filming Shakespeare's Plays: The Adaptations of Laurence Olivier, Orson Welles, Peter Brook and Akira Kurosawa* (Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Peter Brook and Akira Kurosawa have both made films which are in their very different ways, logical extensions of the endeavours we have so far discussed, to accommodate Shakespearean drama in cinematic space. The plays involved here (*King Lear* and *Macbeth*) both demand a juxtaposition of the world of nature with the world of man, yet the directors are at opposite ends of a spectrum in the spatial strategies they employ. While Brook's KING LEAR seeks a spatial selectivity in der to heighten the effect of dialogue, Kurosawa's films RAN and THRONE OF BLOOD find a spatial articulation which almost dispenses with the need for dialogue. Both directors incorporate deliberate theatricality in their films, in pursuit of very different cinematic effects. Like Olivier, Brook has directed films yet he is most strongly associated with the theatre. Like Welles, Kurosawa is best known for films he has made. Both Brook and Kurosawa stand apart from Olivier and Welles in that neither is an actor. Their spatial strategies are, therefore, likely to be more objectively developed.

Like Olivier, Brook emerges from an eminent theatrical involvement with the works of Shakespeare. Like Welles he has shown himself to be original, unorthodox and experimental in his cinematic work. Of his five major films only one is an adaptation of a Shakespeare play, and in all his work, he has expressly attempted to push forward the frontiers of cinematic potential.

With MACBETH and OTHELLO Welles broke away from the narrative cinema of Olivier and delivered jarring shocks of perspective, dislocated angles, bravura contrasts of light and dark, delocalized space and distinctly untheatrical acting. His cinematic language gave his adaptations explosive power by juxtaposing simple and complex compositions, and by alternating the long take with rapid montage successions. Brook's KING LEAR was a more drastic innovation. It broke away from cinematic tradition- and from a substantial Shakespearean tradition - by rebelling against its romanticism. The film makes Shakespeare's play a revelation of the grotesque rather than a tragedy, and there is some justification for the suggestion that in this film Beckett and the critic Jan Kott come dangerously close to displacing Shakespeare.

It is little wonder, then, that Brook's film has provoked a more profound critical division than any other Shakespearean film, suggesting that by 1971 the field had reached a level of maturity which engaged the minds of Shakespearean scholars and film specialists in lively debate. The most searching criticism separates clearly into favorable and

unfavorable response. Several critics, among them Frank Kermode and Charles Eidsvik in his book Cineliteracy: Film among the Arts, champion the work as a significant cinematic achievement, while others, notably Pauline Kael, and William Johnson in his review for Film Quarterly, regard it as a limitation and a distortion of Shakespeare's play and consequently an unsatisfactory adaptation.

The film explores complicated aspects of the relation of theatre to cinema. In some respects, the film has a clearly theatrical commitment, yet there are dimensions of its spatial strategy which remove it from the kind of theatricality which the films of Olivier and Welles acknowledge. There is a duality of treatment in the film whereby the camera tends to treat the actors and the environmental spatial detail separately. and in this conventional sense cinematic commitment, which occasionally promises to develop from the landscape shots, fails to mature. More specifically, the reasons for the film's lack of conventional cinematic poise centre on a suppression of camera movement and transitional flow. In the first place, the presentation of the play as primarily a drama of faces brings it closer to television than to cinema, as does the relation of dialogue to visualization. The spoken lines consistently dominate in the total impact of word and picture, so that the visuals increasingly take on the function of illustrative rather than expressive development. Secondly, when faces are not held. in close-up the frame composition is consistently limited to the medium close-up shot, holding characters – in either sitting or standing positions – from head and shoulders to waist. Sometimes only one character is held thus in the centre of the frame for a sustained shot, as is the case when Goneril and Regan speak their respective opening speeches to Lear. Sometimes two characters balance the frame composition, standing or sitting side-by-side, as Lear and the Fool do, or as Goneril and Regan do, travelling in the covered wagon. Very occasionally a third face is recognizable holding the centre of the frame in soft-focus depth, as Cornwall's is when Lear and Regan discuss the earlier violent departure from Goneril's castle. These compositions so recurrently emphatic in the visual style of the film achieve the effect of isolating characters from their spatial background so that the important reciprocity between actor and decor is broken and the dramatic energy of cinema vitiated.

Furthermore, certain items and details which the camera frame reveals take on a theatrical rather than a cinematic significance because their integration with the film’s development is not dynamic. The animal-skin costumes, the flames in the heath, the landscape in the exterior shots ~ all these suggest stasis rather than process. They indicate the relationship and the distinction between man and beast, and the hostility of bleak ‘nature’, but they hold these ideas within and around the action as monolithic statements whose significance, like a fixed stage set, becomes apparent in the dialogue. One means of investing an object with cinematic development is to vary its relation to a light source,

but the uniform grey diffused light in which the film's action fs bathed throughout eliminates this possibility as it does the dramatic contrast- effects which offer to cinema such powerful resources, The cinematic possibilities of presenting either cosmic or expressionistic dynamics within the universe of the action are deliberately eschewed. Only in the brief distanced shot of the duel between Edgar and Edmund is there a low sun in the background.

Nor are there many instances where movement of the camera makes any cinematic statement. For the most part, the cameras held still Where it does move, the most memorable shots of the film are produced. One such shot is the slow moving-camera exploration of the feet and sodden bodies of dead rats drowned in the storm flood. The close anatomical detail which is revealed to accompany the great breadth of Lear's prayer gives specificity to the 'houseless poverty' while the 'generalizations of the prayer give a wider relevance to the sodden fur of a rat. It is superb cinematic synthesis. The opening sustained shot in the film too is effective. The camera pans and tracks, moving slowly across a deep composition of still faces while the opening credits appear on the screen. Taken without interruption and in complete silence, this shot establishes the importance of faces in the frame composition, and the diffused uniformity of light.

Like the adaptations of Welles, Olivier and Kurosawa, this film exploits a combination of interior and exterior locales. Unlike the other films, though Brook's King Lear does not integrate the exterior shooting to liberate the action, nor does Brook exploit the varied spatial relationships which outdoor locations afford him to any marked degree. Like the skins, the fire and the grey light, the bleak expanse of snow-covered undulations presents a pre-eminently static image; one of unrelieved, bitter desolation. Most of the outdoor shots could be 'stills', but they establish one important motif in the film, the *traveling* motif which gives the film a dimension of space which no stage production could have.

Finally, the relation of sound to the visuals is unusual, Sound effects and vocal projection only occasionally evoke a sense of spatial realism. For most of the film, the closeness of the voices and the lack of resonant acoustics suggest an oppressive containment of space. The amplifications of whispers and the silence together with the vocal restraint in speaking the dialogue tend to dislocate utterance from character. Most striking in the abnormal restraint of the sound-track is the total absence of music. Film as a medium of expression almost always incorporates music. Brook's King Lear is the only Shakespearean film which relates action to spatial realism, and which refuses to include a musical dimension. Given the cinematic convention of a musical component and the music associated with and intrinsic to the plays of Shakespeare, Brook's exclusion of it must stand as one of his most emphatic statements.

All of these will, on first consideration, give strength to the argument that the film remains ‘very much a stage play’, and that in failing to move away from the stage, Brook even imposes its lighting dimensions on the screen by plunging that stage in darkness They also support William Johnson's impression that the action seems to be forced into unnatural shapes and that this unnatural constraint is inimical to the spatial freedom which can clearly distinguish cinema from theatre. The uneasy sense that the film is not removed from the theatre stage with clear commitment is given substance by the comments of the film's producer, Michael Birkett, Four important points emerge from the decisions taken about the making of the film.

Much time and experiment were given to the dialogue (considered purely as dialogue and not as part of a total aural and visual cinematic structure). Recognizing that Shakespeare's poetic complexity is not easily accessible to the modern audience, Birkett and Brook asked Ted Hughes to prepare a modem ‘translation’ for the film. Hughes's script was later abandoned because ‘the greatest passages in the play…have a force and emotional power that no translation, no paraphrase can possibly match... Once using some of Shakespeare's text, it seemed unnatural not to use it throughout’ Hughes was not asked to prepare a film scenario or a shooting script: he was asked to treat it ‘exactly as if it were a foreign classic’. Such detailed consideration of dialogue without its integration in a predominantly visual context must invite an ultimate seniority of word over visuals. Such a deliberate decision not to abandon Shakespeare's language would seem to imply a reluctance to abandon the original mode of expression.

The major concern about the visuals appeared to be the danger of their displacing, the dialogue by intruding ‘between the audience and the power of the words’. Most ironically, the challenge became one of almost eliminating visuals, of trying to find a way of producing a blankness on the screen without suggesting a total technical collapse of medium, and this isa major explanation for the reductiveness of the film's spatial strategy.

The two final points concern the décor and the actors. The décor of the film was evolved less to allow the creation of dynamic metaphoric development and more to invent a setting which has a period and a flavour of its own’. Birkett’s words here seem to imply that interior shots will dominate, and that the function of the décor is theatrical rather than cinematic: a spatial context which reflects dialogue rather than a spatial development which expresses drama. Like much that is important in the filmthe casting of the key roles was the direct result of Peter Brook's stage production of the play at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1962. Not only were theatre actors considered eminently suitable for the film, but to some extent the making of the film was dependent upon ‘Paul Scofield himself (who] was one of our reasons for undertaking King Lear in the first place’.

Birkett's very frank discussion gives an insight into the formative thinking which launched the making of the film, and suggests that while on the one hand the intention was to make a film, on the other the priorities that emerged were strongly theatrical as they resolved themselves in the process of crystallization. Indeed Brook's own remarks further substantiate this conclusion. In a letter to Kozintsev, he writes:

What happens when the close-up on Shakespeare carries material through another vehicle? As the speech ceases to be dialogue and becomes the vehicle of inner meanings, then recognize that in Shakespeare, speech is the carrier... Then (if) you destroy the speech rhythm, the power of the Shakespearean text is destroyed.

A commitment to verbal priority and to the predominance of close-ups emerges clearly from this. The implicit intention to restrict the specific development of the drama through spatial detail and context becomes explicit when Brook later writes of his desire to reduce the compositeness of the image, and to give the actor's face almost total dramatic responsibility within the shot. 'Is the best we can achieve a safe compromise in which our close-up is longer than "normal" film, but short of "boredom length"? I say "close up" — but what is the relation of close-up to full-shot – when full-shot always reveals background? . . . I want to avoid background'.

An arresting question arises at this point, for it may be recalled that Welles's intentions before he started shooting Chimes at Midnight were identical with Brook's as implied here. The same conscious desire to concentrate on faces and to exclude background detail moved both directors as their respective films took shape in their minds. Why, then, are the films so very different in their spatial priorities? Differences in creative temperament and in the value given to dramatic character seem the most convincing explanations. Welles is clearly a director for whom spontaneity is important. Brook, on the other hand, is much more intellectual in his approach, refining his material and his conception of it through prolonged experimentation. The centre of Welles's Chimes at Midnight clearly gathered expressive richness to itself in the journey from conception to presentation, while the central assertion of Brook's Kinc Lear finally arrives as a distillation. Since Welles concentrates in his film upon the development of characters, it is logical that he should do this through spatial correspondences. Brook de-dramatizes Shakespeare's play, and in removing the richness of character, also removes the spatial particularities which would naturally be its cinematic expression.

Thus far it has been argued that Brook's King Lear is essentially unsatisfying as cinema and that the cause of the film's failure to achieve the orchestrated fluidity of conventional cinematic expression lies in a stubborn theatrical rootedness. It is, however, possible to argue that what appears to be a major flaw is in fact deliberate intention and to accept – on a purely intellectual level – the film's ambivalence of spatial commitment as intrinsic

to Brook’s especial exploitation of his medium. This is to argue that the film’s tightly organic structure demands that Brook’s interpretation of Shakespeare's play must be understood before the spatial strategy of the film can begin to make sense. Such an argument is given substance by the fact that the major critical divide is consistent. Those who praise the film find Brook's interpretation of King Lear legitimate; those who find dissatisfaction with the film also find Brook's view of the play repugnant.

In an article which deals with the lighting dynamics of the film, William Chaplin maintains that these constitute a significant articulation of an interpretation which centres on bringing into the open that inalienable ‘barbarism {which] resides still at civilization’s centre’. Chaplin discerns a clear cinematic logic in the progress of Lear from the dimly illuminated interior court scene where the action is motivated by Lear's initial ‘darker purpose’ to his destination on the white beach with the blinded Gloucester and finally with the hallucinations of Cordelia. If barbarism is concealed at the centre, then its exposure means bringing ‘the puzzling inner landscape of feeling in the King himself (hinted at in the prolonged dark facial close-ups at the start of the film) into harmony with the most open natural landscape, so that ‘the dark *style* of the inner landscape is sprung open into a cancerous visibility: the animal is driven out into the open’.

Lilian Wilds, in an article published in 1976, admits that while Brook's interpretation of the play is arrived at through ‘slanted editing’ of the text, she considers the interpretation acceptable and finds the film coherent in its own terms. The spatial strategy of the film is, for her, a logical articulation of ‘the Lear-world Brook has created — a world of complete negation’. The landscape of the film is therefore static, ‘a physical universe that is forever winter; frozen, bleak, inimical to man’, with the positioning of dead Gloucester’s body starkly reminiscent of the dead animal carcasses glimpsed during the storm.

Frank Kermode accepts that an original line of interpretation will necessarily result in some distortion, but he claims that creative adaptation depends upon a ‘violent process’ of imaginative engagement with the original text. For Kermode, then, the film maker will no longer seek to make an adaptation which sets out to satisfy traditional expectations. Nor, indeed, should he. Rather, he will strive to disturb an audience in the same way that his insight into the play disturbs him. The ‘new maker's’ authority is grounded not so much in the text as in the nature of his own engagement with the play. Kermode discerns this painful process of reconstruction to lie at the heart of Brook's film, which he consequently judges to be ‘the best of all Shakespearean movies’.

Those critics who take issue with Brook's interpretation of the play clearly also challenge Kermode's view of the film. For them tis wrong in principle to subordinate the complexity of a dramatic classic to a limited line of philosophical exposition by editing

the text to fit an interpretation Whatever coherence may be attained by such means is no compensation for imposed distortion. There is a significant critical consensus which finds the restrictions of Brook's interpretation responsible for a spatial reductiveness which emasculates the film from the start.

Of Brook’s conception of the play, Pauline Kael writes, “The world’s exhaustion and the light’s having disappeared may open up new meanings in Shakespeare's play to us, but as the controlling metaphors in this production they don’t enlarge the play, they cancel it out”. In addition, she finds cinematic development undermined by a ‘theatrical conception [which] kills not only the drama but most of the poetry’. When the spatial strategy does move away from its theatrical emphasis it remains locked in with Brook's interpretation so that it can only further insist that the world of the characters isa ‘glacial desert’. William Johnson, too, finds the spatial strategy of the film to be trapped within the confines of interpretation so that the bleakness of the exterior locations and the unrelieved ‘slow, dry, deliberate voice’ of Scofield combine to suggest ‘the place beyond hope where Beckett's characters live’.

Both Kael and Johnson find what in dramatic terms is the most serious result of Brook's vision of the play, the film’s failure to develop character. Kael's sense that the “unified vision’ of Brook demanded a rigidity of control which deadened performance is supported by Johnson who finds the characters appearing ‘only as Brook's puppets instead of the puppets of fate’.

As Johnson goes on to point out, the problems of characterization are not the same in the cinema as they are on the theatre stage. As we have seen, characters on the screen gain their dramatic stature and vitality through their relation to the details of their spatial context; for the camera objectifies the actor and the décor in the same way. Power and authority on the screen are qualified by ‘whatever objective signs are visible’, and Brook's refusal to incorporate objective signs ‘reduces Lear's predicament to the dimensions of a family quarrel’. The particular vitiation of character development in this film arises, in Johnson's judgement, from a combination of Brook's deliberate reduction of character ‘to fit his desired world-view’ and his, failure to realize that ‘the objectifying power of the film will shrivel them still further.

Finally, there remains the argument that identifies the significance of Brook's King Lear as residing not in its stature as a Shakespearean adaptation, but in the originality with which it exploits the resources of film's impact on the viewer. The central relationship becomes not so much that of the camera to its object as that of the rectangular cinema screen to its viewers.

In an interview with Geoffrey Reeves, Brook maintained that the devices for alienation on the Brechtian stage had their technical parallels in the cinema, He identified the

freeze-frame, the caption and the sub-title as examples of these and claimed that alienation was the only means whereby the flexibility of cinematic visuals could be brought to match the versatility of blank verse. Alienation would be achieved by the repeated dislocation of cinematic identification so that the viewer would be constantly reminded that he was in the cinema. An effective example of this in the film is observed by Lilian Wilds. At the moment when Cornwall blinds Gloucester, Brook blacks out the screen so that the viewer too is blinded. The effect here is initially to establish an identification with Gloucester, but at the same instant, the black screen alienates the viewer by frustrating his desire to see what is happening. The major effect is to remind the cinema audience that 'the film is a mechanical projection, not a window looking on a real event'.

Equally conscious in its alienating intention, though more subtle, is Brook's use of dialogue conventions. Paul Acker, in an illuminating article published in 1980, observes that cinematic convention normally associates the frontal two-shot in medium close-up with intimacy. Brook uses this frame composition with Goneril and Regan sitting in their wagon, and elsewhere 'primarily in contexts of complicity'. Two-shots in profile, on the other hand (with faces looking in toward the centre of the frame), are conventionally associated with 'contexts of dialectic'. Brook stretches the convention so that in the flash-shots during the storm, close-up profile shots of Lear facing opposite directions follow each other in rapid succession, giving Lear's disintegration the implicit dimension of self-examination by argument. The third dimension which Brook employs isthe alternation of shot with reverse-shot, a device used to follow the frontal shot of a speaker with a frontal shot of the listener, or to hold the camera on a first speaker and then to shift it to the second who replies. This is most consciously sustained in the opening court scene during which the exchanges between Lear and his daughters are so statically framed in medium close-up that even at this early point in the film one is made uncomfortably aware of the mechanics – the separate components – of the medium of film.

Peter Brook's King Lear emerges as a complex work-whose engagement is almost exclusively with the intellect. Viewed with expectations induced by conventional cinema (and by the most satisfying films of Olivier and Welles) it will frustrate anticipation by seeming to miss all opportunities for cinematic development. Viewed as a critical interpretation of Shakespeare's play it must be judged both intellectually narrow and aesthetically impoverished. Viewed as a film 'about what it means to watch a film [with] a self-reflexivity which will require the active participation of the aware and cinematically literate viewer, its segmented self-denials and apparent aesthetic masochism can be seen as part of a broader cinematic intention. Fusing the mechanics of Brook's objective to the greatness of Shakespeare's play is not a particularly attractive aesthetic challenge. Why, the question remains, does Brook choose to perpetrate with

such dispassion his cinematic deconstruction on King Lear? As Pauline Kael asks, ‘Who wants to be alienated from Shakespeare's play and given the drear far side of the moon instead’?

Charles Eidsvik sets out to answer this question by seeing the film as an extension of Artaud's concept of the Theatre of Cruelty. Brook’s intention, in Eidsvik’s judgement, is to ‘dissect Shakespeare and what Shakespeare has become for many, a source of insights’. Brook’s King Lear presents a view of man which is intended to be an attack upon the sensibilities. While Shakespeare's view of man and action encompassed personal choice, personal action, personal redemption, Brook's view of Shakespeare's play denies the personal dimension. In an age which is clearly not in essence ‘personal’ Brook seeks a relevance for Shakespeare's play by depersonalizing it and posing it as a question. ‘The result is an impersonal film, in which Shakespeare's language is made to serve something other than the stages in Lear's narrative move toward personal redemption.’ The question which underlies the film is whether there is any redemption of the world of barbarism, and if the final verdict of the film is ultimately one of fatigued incomprehension’, then the potential for redemption must lie in a refusal to accept that verdict, ‘to strike back, to think, to act so that Brook's version stands as a challenge rather than a condemnation.’

Eidsvik does in fact confirm the inital sense that the film is in essence theatrical. There are theatrical elements in its spatial strategy as many critics have found, but the film has about it a theatricality of a novel kind. Brook treats the cinema audience in a way which is outside the cinematic conventions. In regarding the primary relationship as that between the screen's rectangle and the spectator/listener, he seeks to ensure the shared participative experience of the theatre. The film is not only frustrating in the sense that Brook intends, but in another sense, because where response to a theatrical assertion is corporate, that to a cinematic challenge is individual. Where the theatre unites its audience, the cinema isolates in darkness those who. occupy its seats.

Of the two Kurosawa films, the one which most rewards intensive discussion as a Shakespearean film is THRONE OF BLOOD, released in 1957. Any objective review of Kurosawa's RAN, released as recently as 1985, will probably have to be awaited for some years. This is partly because of the stature which the work of Kurosawa has assumed in contemporary film studies, and partly because the film has had such brief and recent exposure that assessments of its affinity with Shakespeare's King Lear are still critically tentative.

There is an essential stylistic typicality about Kurosawa's work, and the basic ingredients which comprise the dramatic structuring of THRONE OF BLOOD are soon evident in RAN —horses, castles, warriors, hills trees, mist and quiet moments of great dramatic

intensity within enclosed space derived from the Noh theatrical tradition. Yet this film has a less substantial claim to be an adaptation of a Shakespeare play than does the earlier film. Lear's daughters are made into sons in RAN, and the feminine dimensions in the drama are therefore provided by the daughters-in-law. Their distance from Hidetora (the Lear figure) tends to vitiate their dramatic effectiveness, for the whole issue of marriages, dowries and the particular significance of Cordelia's rejection loses its force. Furthermore the most vicious action against Hidetora (the Lear figure) is motivated by the eldest son's wife, Kaede, through her husband. Such indirect action is wholly consistent with Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* but it reduces the weighty questions about 'nature' and the family which are central to Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Having no secondary Gloucester plot, the film lacks too, the particular dimension of vindictiveness which Edmund brings to the Lear world.

The rigid ritualization of the culture within which Kurosawa places the action, with its restrained expression of feeling, reduces the drama of individual confrontation between father and offspring so profoundly embedded in Shakespeare's play. The repressed aggression which finds many complex outlets in the Lear family expends its energies in RAN, undoubtedly with more spectacle but with less psychological subtlety, in open warfare. Kurosawa dramatizes his universe historically. As he did in THRONE OF BLOOD, he places the Lear action within a sixteenth- century Japanese warrior culture. Macbeth is a warrior and he is established as such early in the play. Shakespeare's Lear, however, is not. That, I believe, is why RAN depends much more than did THRONE OF BLOOD upon substance which lies outside the centre of Shakespeare's play.

The dramatic presentation of the world of nature, no less important in Shakespeare's *King Lear* than it is in *Macbeth*, is not integrated with anything like the same force in the later film. The extent to which it invades the minds and compulsions of the characters is suggested only with ambiguity in RAN. Certainly, there are carefully placed reminders of its presence — the boar hunt at the start of the film, the sounds of birds and insects accompanying, sometimes with oppressive stridency, certain moments in the drama, and the shots of darkening clouds in the sky (a recurrent device to indicate the cosmic correspondence of the action). Much of the setting for the action, too, is on outdoor locations. The opening sequence of the film, for instance, establishes a relationship of man with nature, with four mounted archers riding over lush grassland on mountain slopes in pursuit of the wild boar. Initially the photographing of this landscape, with its deep valleys extending into the far distance and the impact of its colours, appears more scenically dramatic than anything afforded us by the monochromatic forest in THRONE OF BLOOD, but these dramatic qualities in the later film are visually arresting rather than structurally assertive. Where the forest becomes the projection of psychological space in THRONE OF BLOOD the nature signals in RAN tend to be reiterated rather

than thematically developed and the dimensions of the natural world run parallel with the developing, drama of human relationships rather than being interwoven with it.

Tom Milne, writing the review for Sight and Sound, has pointed to the infusion of Buddhism in the film, and to the resigned acceptance that the fate of the characters is decided in their past lives. 'Where Shakespeare's play is focused on future consequences as Lear discovers the extent of his folly . . . RAN is rooted in past causes. Where Shakespeare's tragedy is that of a foolish, fond old man … Kurosawa's is that of a monster… And Peter Ackroyd, in his review for Spectator, rightly maintains that 'this is essentially Shakespeare...stripped of its human dimension, and forced within a schematic framework derived from quite different attitudes or preoccupations'.

All this is not to diminish the cinematic stature of Kurosawa's latest film as a film in its own right. But the film does not gain substantially from an attempt to trace specific correspondences with Shakespeare's play. Nor is it easy to find memorable moments in the film which are directly derived from dramatic high points in King Lear. On the contrary, the dramatic rise and fall in THRONE OF BLOOD bears a remarkably close relationship with the dynamics of Shakespeare's Macbeth. Dramatic peaks in the play are consistently reflected in the film. Moments like the arrival of Duncan at Dunsinane, Macbeth's move off to murder Duncan, his confrontation with Banquo's 'ghost at the banquet. Lady Macbeth's attempts to clean her hands and the moving of the wood to Dunsinane are all directly part of the film, and they develop the drama of the film with the same structural force that advances the action in Shakespeare's play.

Those like Geoffrey Reeves and Peter Brook, who argue against the consideration of THRONE OF BLOOD as a Shakespearean film do so on the grounds that Kurosawa is 'doing what every film-maker has always done ~ constructing a film from an idea and using appropriate dialogue; where the story comes from doesn't matter'. Like RAN, it deals with human action set in a religious and philosophical framework very different from that of Shakespeare's plays. Despite the occasional echo of a Shakespearean image in the lines, THRONE OF BLOOD, like RAN, is further from Shakespeare than the films of Kozintsev, who clearly took Shakespeare's dialogue and his characterization as starting points. While Reeves and Brook have recognized THRONE OF BLOOD as 'a great masterpiece', they discount it as a Shakespearean film 'because it doesn't use the text'. On similar grounds, Frank Kermode in an essay called 'Shakespeare in the Movies' pointedly excludes THRONE OF BLOOD on the grounds that it is 'an allusion to, rather than a version of, *Macbeth'*. However, in the thirty years since THRONE OF BLOOD was released, the film has become, for those who have seen it, a part of our thinking about Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. It has extended the frontiers of discussion on the play and has made Western scholarship more aware of the universal appeal of Shakespeare's

dramatic material. The two most authoritative surveys of Shakespearean film give it substantial coverage.

The initial reception of the film in the West was not enthusiastic. Reviewers found difficulty in taking the film seriously at all. Bosley Crowther, who had reviewed with acuteness and sensitivity Olivier's *Hamlet*, had, in 1961, no compunction in reviewing the New York showing of THRONE OF BLOOD as follows:

If you think it would be amusing to see Macbeth done in Japanese then pop around to the Fifth Avenue Cinema and see Akira Kurosawa's THRONE OF BLOOD. For a free Oriental translation of the Shakespeare drama is what this is, and 'amusing' is the proper word for it... Probably Mr. Kurosawa...did not intend it to be amusing for his formalistic countrymen, but its odd amalgamation of cultural contrasts hits the occidental funny bone – that is all one can say – and the final scene, in which the hero is shot so full of arrows that he looks loke a porcupine, is a pictorial extravagance that provides a conclusive howl.

Whilst it is certainly true to say that there has been an important change of attitude since 1961 in the way North America and Western Europe look at Oriental culture, there remains – however serious we accept its artistic intentions to be a substantial interpretative problem, and this is especially true where an original work is taken from one culture and articulated through conventions of another. It is deceptively easy for a Western observer with a knowledge of Shakespeare's play (and therefore with certain expectations of his own emotional response) to impose that response upon the unfamiliar idiom of the film; to make the unaccustomed semiotics of the film fit the known textual and sub-textual signals of the play.

Because this film dispenses with all but the most essential dialogue to carry forward the narrative, we are placed in the position of having to rely wholly on the manipulation of spatial detail within the screen's rectangle — upon movement, gesture, facial expression, décor and the reinforcement given to these by non-verbal sound for all subtleties which go beyond the information of the story. Its therefore natural to assume that the expressions on the faces of Washizu and Miki when they receive their swords of promotion from their 'war lord' articulate the very feelings and emotional complexities of Banquo and Macbeth when, after hearing the prophecy of the witches, Macbeth is greeted with the title of Thane of Cawdor. It is a trap into which J. Blumenthal falls, not \standing the valuable contribution which his essay for *Sight and Sound* in 1965 makes to an appreciation of the film, when he suggests that Washizu is a fully valid equivalent of Macbeth.

When Macbeth hears of his wife's death he delivers the famous speech beginning, "Tomorrow and tomorrow, and tomorrow..." Washizu, looking into his wife's chamber,

sees part of the result of his folly huddled in the centre of the room; his whole being sags and he moves off heavily to his own chamber. We follow him there. He enters the room and lets his limp body drop to the floor. ‘Fool!’, he cries. ‘Fool!’ These are the only words he speaks. Occupying the frame with his seated figure, however, are two other objects: his sword and the throne. Kurosawa holds this eloquent shot for a long time. It is as good an indication as any that Washizu is not a brutish man incapable of reflection. He is rather the spirit of Macbeth distilled into almost pure materiality.

Kurosawa has not, however, created dramatic equivalents in the film’s characterizations. Among other things, Macbeth isa drama about the power of choice, and the exercise of that power. THRONE OF BLOOD, on the other hand, is a drama about inevitable prophetic truth, and the film is more accurately titled THE CASTLE OF THE SPIDER’S WEB. Where Macbeth has choice, Washizu has only destiny, and this distinction between Shakespeare's play and Kurosawa’ drama is forcibly announced at the beginning and the end of the film, by the chanting chorus which rings out the inevitable fate of ambitious men and proclaims it to be a truth which transcends particular circumstances of history. This major difference between Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Kurosawa’s THRONe OF BLOOD is succinctly propounded by John Gerlach, in his riposte to Blumenthal.

Most of Kurosawa's changes are gauged to increase our sympathy for Macbeth so as to involve the viewer in an experience more psychologically acceptable. Although we are not likely to admit we would do what Macbeth has done, we can conceive ourselves being trapped, as was Washizu, by a deceiving set of circumstances. What Shakespeare has done is all the more difficult – he has made us find something of ourselves in a character whose avarice estranges us. In the words of Alfred Harbage we ‘attach’ ourselves to Macbeth because he is as “humane in his reflections as he is inhumane in his acts”. Kurosawa eliminates the contrast between act and reflection and gives only acts performed in mitigating circumstances.

If Washizu, Asaji and Miki (the representative character figures for Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and Banquo) are not specifically invested with the psychological complexity of the Shakespeare characters, that is certainly not to suggest that the film does not project its own artistic complexities in a tightly structured and forcefully integrated way. It does this through its spatial strategy, which might be described as ‘symphonic’ in that it selects four clearly established and autonomous elements and then, through a process of combination, development and modulation, achieves an aesthetically satisfying form in its finished composition. The four essential elements. are the mist, the forest, the horses and the castle; elements which also constitute the dramatic world of RAN.

Kurosawa's films operate within more rigidly controlled conventions than do Welles's Shakespearean films, but their presentation of dramatic opposition is very similar in

concept. The films of Welles and Kurosawa assert their dramatic conflicts through organically different spatial elements, and through the spatial development of separate worlds. It is least easy to find vital elements in MACBETH, partly because it is a film which deals with the evolution of form, but in OTHELLO the elements are stone, water and iron: in CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT they appear most clearly to be wood, stone and iron. In OTHELLO the worlds of Venice and Cyprus are opposed CHIMES, the Tavern and the Court.

The major conflict in THRONE OF BLOOD is presented through the spatial polarity between the castle and the forest; the world of man and the world of nature. The opposition between these two worlds is made more starkly dramatic by the subtle pointing of those simplest of contradictions, the vertical and the horizontal. Where the forest is a maze of great, immovable tree-trunks growing upward so that their tops are outside the space of the frame, the castle interior suggests wide space, expansive, uncluttered floors, ceilings supported by clean-cut, evenly placed beams. Even the vertical wall in the background has upon it a painted decoration which suggests long, horizontal cloud shapes. Further evidence of Kurosawa's affinity with Welles comes from his remark on the interior designs and the horizontal stress. To emphasize the psychology of the hero, driven by compulsion, we made the interiors wide with low ceilings and squat pillars to create the effect of oppression.

The castle and the forest interact throughout the film, but they do not merely represent opposite ends of a spectrum. Their interaction is subtly interwoven so that the ultimate triumph of one over the other is as organically inevitable as the process of evolution. On the purely narrative level, the process is simple enough. Washizu visits the forest twice, and then through a dramatic reversal the forest visits him with devastating finality. The finer details of the interaction are, however, very subtle, for Kurosawa establishes connections between the forest and the castle which cut across the stark opposition he had earlier established. Firstly, there is a military connection; secondly a material connection; thirdly a connection whereby each is composed of ‘opposites which reflect the greater opposition between the two.

Both the castle and the forest have strategic importance in the war-torn situation of the realm. The film opens its narrative action (after the initial chorus) with a desperate and weary soldier beating at the gates of the fortress within which the warlords sit making their tactical decisions. The soldier is a dispatch messenger bringing news of the battle, and in this early dialogue the strategic importance of the forest is identified. It is a maze of deceptive trails in which an invading army will lose its bearings, its cohesive unity and its morale. The military impregnability of the castle (and therefore the stability of political order) depends in the last resort on the forging of a successful alliance between the castle and the forest, the world of man and the world of nature.

The material connection of the castle with the forest is so obviously natural, that it is apt to pass unnoticed. The forest is not merely a military resource. It provides a natural building material for the assertion of the world of man. Nor is the fact that the castle is essentially a wooden structure simply a demand of the film set. Kurosawa's insistence on accuracy of detail is evident. Donald Richie, in his comprehensive study of Kurosawa's work, quotes Yoshiro Murali (the designer) as saying: 'We studied old castle layouts, the really old ones, not those white castles we still have around'. Kurosawa's own standards about material accuracy are uncompromising. He refused to make do with a 'false-front' set, because, he said:

I wanted to get the feeling of the real thing from wherever I chose to shoot... About sets, *I'm on the severe side. This is from IKURU onwards. Until then, we had to make do with false fronts. We didn't have the material. But you cannot expect to get a feeling of realism if you use, for example, cheap new wood in a set which is supposed to be an old farmhouse. I feel very strongly about this. After all the real life of any film lies just in its being as true as possible to appearances.*

The insistence on accuracy of design and materials paralleled in the searching choice of locations. The castle was constructed on the upper slopes of Mount Fuji, because only there could Kurosawa be assured of the kind of soil he wanted, the sweeping mists and the forests. Even where the interiors and castle courtyard shots were filmed in a studio, the organic material correspondences were sustained with meticulous care, volcanic soil from Fuji being transported to the Tokyo studio. Not only is the castle made from the natural resources which the forest provides, but so also are the protective shields which Washizu's armour has over the upper arms and shoulders, and so are the weapons which Washizu's soldiers use to destroy him.

The organic correspondence between the forest and the castle is made emphatically clear when, shortly before the final battle, the birds from the forest fly into the castle. The flight of the birds to the castle fulfils a complex function, but their arrival on the eve of battle is prompted by the cutting of the trees and their blundering flight into the repose of the interior geometric design makes two statements about the castle. They link wood with wood: and their haphazard intrusion juxtaposes the unregimented world of nature with the mathematically restrained world of man. The birds carry the suggestion that in the very nature of its organic composition, the wood of the castle — and of the artefacts within it – is ultimately allied with the wood of the forest.

As the trees move through the mist towards the castle (they are photographed in slow motion to give them an ominous fluidity of movement), Washizu's men turn against him and pin him to the wall with volley after volley of arrows. His groping attempt to move along the wall through the ever-thickening cluster of arrows which stick into it is like a

man clawing his way through a forest, and reiterates in metaphor Washizu's earlier disorientation in the forest, after his initial military triumph. The forest of arrows lodges in the wood of the castle and of Washizu's protective armour with a cumulative suggestion of organic affinity. The attempt to retain military and political control through allying the world of nature with the world of man has eminently failed.

The third level on which the castle and the forest are connected is on their accommodation of contradictions within themselves. While the forest imagery is dominated by the density and rooted strength of tree trunk verticals there are paths and trails between the trees, and it is along these Washizu and Miki ride with mounting panic in the early minutes of the film, as they try to find their bearings. The invading army which finally moves in to capture the castle is only assured of success when they obey their commander's instruction to move directly through the forest and deliberately to ignore the paths.

Similarly, while there is an insistent emphasis on the horizontal dimensions of the castle interior, the final sequences of Washizu's preparation for the siege, his keeping watch on the forest, his exhortations to his men and his derision of the attempts of the invading enemy are all filmed to suggest a nervous and precarious vertical elevation of Washizu. The arrows that pin him against the wall and which lodge in his armour are all loosed from below. As the arrows render him increasingly helpless, he comes down from the upper storey to the castle courtyard, The final moments of his dying show him moving towards his men along the same horizontal level as that on which they back away, and collapsing forward away from the camera.

There is a suggestion, in both of these developments, that conflict between the world of nature and the world of man results ultimately in the destruction of both worlds. In both the castle and the forest, the horizontal defeats the vertical. Both man and the trees are brought low: reduced to a level with all things and gradually obscured from sight by the mist. The swirling and opaque clouds which seem to rise from the ground after Washizu's collapse and which obscure the outlines of the wide circle of Washizu's mutinous soldiers, move us back to the mist which so dominated the opening of the film and which recurs to accompany the closing repetition of the chorus which tells of the mighty fortress, where

> Lived a proud warrior
> Murdered by ambition
> His spirit walking still.
> Still his spirit walks, his fame is known
> For what once was is now yet true,
> Murderous ambition will pursue …

In a horizontal movement, the camera pans across and dimly discerns, through the mist, the ruins of the castle. The panning shot across empty, mist shrouded desolation is identical with the opening shot of the film's action, and it is accompanied in the same way by the unmelodic drone of the chorus. The only upright which the camera explores vertically downwards is the wooden stake whose Japanese script commemorates the site of the ruin. With these simple camera movements, the dramatic opposition between the vertical and the horizontal is articulated at the very start of the film, and implicit in its cyclic return is the philosophic frame of the world's futility when power is the object of ambition.

If the major conflict in the film is that between the castle and the forest, it is a spatial and organic articulation of the philosophical conflict which lies beneath it; that of Asaji's — and later of Washizu's – view of the world where achievement and success are won through opportunism and the cunning abrogation of trust, set against the kind of world that the forest witch cynically describes – a world of vain ambition, of futility of action, of reductive mutability and ultimate insignificance. The film does not present an alternative world of moral goodness. Because the story of Washizu is not one of choice but of prophetic inevitability, there is no alternative for the man of ambition. The only hint of another priority in life comes in the reluctance with which Washizu accepts Asaji's persuasion that Miki (the Banquo figure) is not to be trusted, Washizu can only answer that somehow or other "we must have faith in our friends". It is a weak answer but it is after all the only one.

The dimensions of dramatic conflict are expanded through three other spatial articulations. There are juxtapositions between movement and stasis, geometric design and natural shape, horizontals and diagonals, The most elaborately developed of these oppositions is that between movement and stasis, and, like the contrast between the hunt and the sedate ceremonial order in RAN, its established at the start of the action.

One messenger after another rushes into the fortress enclosure to report on the state of the battle. Each one, approaching the seated row of war lords, assumes the crouching posture of obeisance and then gives his report. The description is of frantic and precarious military actions, but the war lords sit unmoved in their long line, raised above the ground on a dais. The only movement in the scene, as each speaker pours out his words, is the fluttering of pennants in the wind. Later, when Washizu and Miki encounter the forest witch, they find this strangely asexual figure sitting within a flimsy enclosure. Her eerie stillness of body while she sings, set in the frame against the spinning movement of her wheel and its flow of thread, gives a visual dimension to the conflict between the flow of her prophecy and the unmelodic monotone which carries the words.

The first meeting between Washizu and Asaji (the Lady Macbeth figure) takes place within the cool respose of the castle's interior design. As Washizu relates the details of

the encounter with the witch, he and Asaji sit very still on the floor. Asaji is expressionless in both voice and gesture, and so in apparent harmony with the simple stillness of the room. The tension in Washizu's facial muscles suggests the repression of violent conflicts within himself, while outwardly he is controlled in both posture and gesture. As Washizu's instincts begin to yield to Asaji's rational persuasion, our attention is drawn, by the intrusive sound of galloping hooves in the silence, to that part of the courtyard visible through the open door in the depth of the frame. A horse gallops wildly round within the courtyard stockade. In its evocation of powerful instinctive forces unnaturally contained, it is a most eloquent commentary on Washizu's emotional confusion. The shot achieves an effect very similar to that following Welles's sustained tracking shot of lago and Othello as they walkalong the fortress wall. Iago, it will be recalled, first invades Othello's instinctive trust with a rational argument about Desdemona's affection for Cassio. Iago, his back to the sea wall, pushes home his advantage facing Othello and the camera, so that through a vacant gun-port behind him we see the breaking waves rolling in towards the fortress.

There is a very subtle development of the opposition between stasis and movement in the characterizations of Washizu and his wife, Asaj. The conventions of movement through which each of these characters is revealed are drawn from frame, but when she does, it is with smoothness and control so that she 'glides across the screen as a unified presence, totally committed to ambition'. Donald Richie maintains that her movement, gesture and expression are highly conventionalized and shaped within the choreographic discipline of the Noh drama. She moves heel to toe as does the Noh actor, and the shape of the actress's face is 'used to suggest the Noh mask'. According to Richie, too, both the frame composition in the scenes when Washizu and Asaji are together, and Asaji's 'hand-washing scene' are wholly stylized within Noh conventions.

The movements of Washizu, on the other hand, lie distinctly outside the stylization of Noh. Indeed, according to both Kinder and Anna Laura Zambrano (who relates the film to a context of Japanese art in general), they do not rise from theatrical tradition at all, but from the depictions of the Yamato-e picture scrolls Washizu moves like an animal. He paces up and down, he breathes heavily, he flexes his facial muscles rhythmically and bares his teeth, He gives the illusion of a capability to move simultaneously in several directions as he considers various courses of action'. The disruption of the banquet, for instance, is articulated through the juxtaposition of Washizu's violent movements with a symmetry of reposed composition which reflects both architectural and social order. The stillness and mathematically precise positioning of the guests within the room and within the frame is shattered by Washizu's frenzied response on seeing Miki's ghost.

It is Washizu who forges and sustains the link in the film between exterior and interior space, and Zambrano observes the logical extension ofthe scroll influence to exterior composition. She notes the similarity of those compositions in many of Kurosawa's films,

in which ‘Samurai horsemen are often set against a natural background of fog or sloping hills’, with the scroll paintings of battle action. The horses charge at full gallop, mouth agape with tension while their riders hold their weapons defiantly, moving in clusters along the landscape as had the samurai of the Kakamura era.

The clear distinction between the style of movement of Asaji and that of Washizu has a further important dramatic function. There are moments of intensity when the influence and power of the dominant character reveals itself in the ‘infection’ of the posture, movement and gesture of the submissive partner. As Marsha Kinder notes, there is a flow and recoil of influence between Asaji and Washizu during the tense silences which precede and accompany the murder of Tsuzuki (the Duncan figure) Washizu sits motionless, in the posture which we have come to associate with Asaji. Washizu's unaccustomed bodily stillness suggests that Asaji has invaded his character, ‘temporarily suspending his identity’. Asaji returns to the room, bringing a spear which she places in Washizu's hands. He then rises and leaves the lighted area on his way to murder Tsuzuki. The camera holds Asajiin its frame while she waits in silence. Suddenly, to the accompaniment of shrill, dissonant music, Asaji rises and begins to ‘dance with frenzied and ecstatic movement, ‘as if acting out the violence’. Her own frantic dance movements suggest the reciprocal invasion of Asaji’s character by Washizu. The balanced transfer of the dominant role from Asaji to Washizu in this central scene is consistent with the change in each character from observer to agent; from one *waiting* to one *committing*. It is also consistent with the wider shift of dramatic dominance from Lady Macbeth to Macbeth, in the developing action of Shakespeare's play.

Finally the purely technical resources of fast- and slow-motion are used to heighten the disparity between the approach of the forest, filmed in slow-motion as it advances through the mist, and the fall of Washizu as he is unceremoniously toppled with sudden speed down the stairs, in the last minutes of the film. The intricate organization of this polarity between movement and stasis and between controlled movement and frenzy justifies itself thematically in the culminating overthrow of both man-devised and natural logic: the fulfilment of the prophecy that something as rooted as a forest will move. The movement-stasis polarity can be seen to have an implicit relevance to the medium in which Kurosawa works, for ‘Making a forest move is no more miraculous than creating the appearance of motion out of still photographs – the illusion that lies at the centre of cinema’.

The film's spatial strategy announces the world of man through geometrical design. Horizontals, verticals and diagonals are prominent as structural supports within the castle. The world of nature, on the other hand, is in its essence totally unregimented by the straight line. Only in man’s perception is nature made up of verticals and horizontals. The strategic value of the forest resides in its refusal to be a geometrical system, and in the

predictable certainty that man will impose his own perception upon it and consequently lose his way.

The dramatic conflict between the world of nature and the world of man, broadly expounded through the opposition of the castle and the forest, is elaborated through the collision of shape and design. One instance of this (the blundering flight of the birds into the castle rooms) has already been noted. A second and more important instance is encountered in the room which Washizu will occupy during the favouring visit of Tsuzulki. It is a room once occupied by a traitor who killed himself and left, upon its floor and wall, an indelible bloodstain. The room is therefore a centripetal spatial articulation of time in its pulling together the past and the future. In being prepared for Washizu, it ominously heralds his own act of betrayal. In the silent eloquence of this still, interior shot of the wall with its explosive, irregular outline of the bloodstain so at variance with the quiet angles and lines of design, prophecy and destiny become irrevocably knit. The repeated cry of the screech owl links the establishing shot of this room with its later location as the place from which Washizu and Asaji move to accomplish the murder.

A final instance of the aesthetic collision of shape with design emerges at the end of the film when Washizu – all too clearly a human shape – is trapped and cornered within the lines of the castle's interior design. As the volleys of arrows are shot into common need for straight lines of access to their victim. The final shots of Washizu, pierced and penetrated with arrows, ae the culminating ironic interaction between line of design and shape of natural organism.

Because it distinguishes with such finality the cinematic image from the darkness which surrounds it, the rectangular frame is highly appropriate for the articulation of dramatic opposition through linear emphasis. The conflict expressed through the vertical and the horizontal has been explicated at length. The geometrical system, however, incorporates a subsidiary element, the diagonal. In many of the shots in THRONE OF BLOOD the diagonal introduces a negative force which cuts across the dialectic of horizontal and vertical. Marsha Kinder relates the horizontal line across the frame to stability and order, and the diagonal to the disruption of that order.

The initial order is asserted at the start of the film’s action by the horizontal line of war lords seated on their raised dais. The sequence of messengers who arrive to report on the battle is punctuated by horizontal wipes across the frame to indicate time lapses, The dramatic significance of the diagonal first asserts itself in the long shots of the arrival of Tsuzuki’s procession. The line of the procession is first shown along a horizontal moving from left to right across the frame. Suddenly it makes a sharp angular tum to continue diagonally down the frame toward the lower-left corner. This angular turn coincides with the arrival of Washizu's opportunity for treachery and for the realization of ambition.

During the sequence preceding Tsuzuki's murder, the guards outside Tsuzuki's chamber sit initially in an orderly horizontal line. The disintegration of this orderliness is wrought by Asaji so that they later sprawl haphazardly in their drug. induced sleep. Washizu waits for Asaji's return when she comes and places in his hands the murder weapon, a long spear which is accommodated diagonally within the frame.

The antithesis between the horizontal and the diagonal dramatizes too, in spatial terms, the distrust which has arisen between Washizu and Miki after the murder. When Washizu ultimately gains entrance to Miki's castle, with the coffin of the murdered Tsuzuki, he is confronted by Miki and his followers ranged in a horizontal line, 'supporting the authorized order of [the] deposed ruler'. The moment is awkward and tense and Washizu's horse stands at an oblique angle to the line of men. Miki rides forward to Washizu and turns, so that both men ride abreast away from the camera. 'By restoring the horizontal and making this truce with his rival, [Miki] re-establishes a temporary stability'.

One further emphatic use of the diagonal is the prolonged sequence during which Washizu is shot with arrows. The volleys of arrows which pin Washizu to the wall of the castle fly along a diagonal line. The shooting by several archers is consistently from one specific direction, so that the arrows come from below and slightly across the plane of the picture.

It is possible to argue that this constitutes cyclic use of the diagonal and that the which destroy Washizu do not constitute a just retribution. The cycle of betrayal and murder is not broken, for the soldiers who kill Washizu are as guilty as he. They rose to power by accepting his leadership, and they kill in order to save themselves. 'Washizu is destroyed not by his judges, but by his peers who suffer the same malady. Order is not established because it springs from men who are themselves without order'.

The incorporation into THRONE OF BLOOD of the Noh theatrical conventions invites comparison, in this respect, with Olivier's *Henry V*. Olivier did not regard cinema and theatre as opposites, yet within *Henry V* itis quite legitimate to consider the staged presentation, for instance where the bishops justify Henry's claim to the throne of France, and the wholly cinematic presentation of the French cavalry charge as extreme ends of the dialectic between theatrical and cinematic drama. Both at the start of the Chorus's prologue and at the end of the film where the actors' theatrical constraints operate when the King rides his white charger. Olivier's inclusion of explicit theatre as part of the film's overall spatial strategy sets up a polarity between theatrical and realistic space, yet by incorporating theatre and realism within the medium of film, it reconciles them both in the film's presentational development and in its structural cycle.

The incorporation of the Noh conventions within THRONE OF BLOOD is much more complex, and the levels of its aesthetic operation are multiple. In the first place, like the theatrical conventions in *Henry V*, the Noh in Kurosawa's film constitutes one extreme of conventionalized movement, gesture and vocalization, but here it is part of a tripartite structure rather than one of direct binary opposition. THRONE OF BLOOD is a film of very dense stylization. All character movement in the frame is stylized in terms of artistic convention, as is the frame composition itself. The only movement which can be considered natural is the movement of a riderless horse, and of the return of Miki's horse without its rider after his assassination. The Noh choreography, therefore, is in direct opposition to natural movement, but it is also, as has been noted, at a clear remove from the frenzied — but nonetheless stylized —movements which characterize Washizu throughout most of the film.

Secondly, the Noh stylization in Kurosawa's film makes particular statements about the character of Asaji. In its conventional limits, the Noh is capable of presenting perfectly finished expression. Richie suggests that Asaji's characterization within Noh's rigid conventions is a reflection of her own limitations. The resemblance of her face to the fixed expression of the Noh mask is an indication of her refusal to become anything more than she is. Just as the world of the Noh is 'both closed and artificial', so too is Asaji 'the most limited, the most confined, the most [obsessively] driven' of the film's characters. Within the spectrum of this film, Noh suggests the futility of perfection and the denial of nature in the distillation of personal potential down to the mere achievement of ambition.

Any connection which might be seen to ally Lady Macbeth with the witches in Shakespeare's play is tenuous. However, in THRONE OF BLOOD, Noh clearly relates Asaji with the forest witch. The stillness and postural repose, the 'husky and unintoned' vocalization, the subdued but distinct ambient sound are all elements peculiar to Noh, and all are common to the presentations of Asaji and the forest witch, whose faintly clattering spinning wheel is later paralleled in the quiet swishing sound of Asaji's kimono as she walks in the silence before Tsuzuki's murder. While both women are dramatized within the Noh conventions, there remains nevertheless a degree of ambiguity, for if they are both articulators of Washizu's unexpressed wish, their dramatic functions differ. The comment of the witch embraces a wider perspective. It is not only a specific prophecy about Washizu and Miki, but has universal relevance in its cautionary cynicism. She is, as Zambrano maintains, a 'warning of chaos', and this is visually emphasized in the piles of skeletal remains which surround her flimsy enclosure.

The Noh stylization of the banquet scene is especially important, for it is here that the opposition between choreographic styles reaches its climax. The banquet scene in THRONE OF BLOOD is intricately built around the collision between intentional and unintentional theatre. One element in the scene is an entertainment, a dance performed by

one man who relates through song and movement a moral tale of an ambitious man who tries vainly to escape inevitable self-destructive retribution. Washizu halts this performance — presented through typical Noh conventions – and proceeds to drink in silence. On seeing the ghost of Miki, Washizu launches into a dance whose frantic movements break out of the established context of ritualized control, as he slashes wildly with his sword and then backs away against the wall.

The grotesque choreography which now becomes the centre of attention is an indelible public revelation of Washizu's guilt. It develops out of the preceding deliberate theatre in the same way that Claudius' reaction to the staging of 'The Mouse-Trap' suddenly becomes a moment of revelatory and unintentional theatre in its disruption of ceremonial occasion. The integration of Noh conventions has enabled Kurosawa to intensify the banquet scene and so to exploit the Shakespearean potential of the theatre-within-theatre as a dramatic tuning point, while at the same time enhancing the organic complexity of the film's overall spatial strategy.

Finally, the incorporation of the pervasive Noh devices in characterization and in the film's cyclic structure give the action an amoral universality. Zambrano claims that the ethical roots of the Noh drama are traditionally Buddhist, so that the life of man is seen to be 'a turbulent period, ruled by passions and endured despite continual fear of death'. Its revelation of human nature as a constant, with no redemptive potential for the ambitious man, places it quite clearly outside the medieval Christian universe of Shakespeare's play. A view of life without the implicit spiritual possibilities of redemption or of moral progress necessarily affects the dramatic relation of action to time. Zambrano maintains that Noh concerns itself with an event in the legendary past, and presents a re-embodied spirit which is forced, in human form, to 'symbolically relive its struggle' in terms of its 'decision and commitment made centuries before'. By linking character with spirit, therefore, Noh refuses to consider death an interruption of dramatic issues, and the system of placing events in past, present or future breaks down.

This complexity of the film's time dimensions is important because it strengthens the case for the film's inclusion in the category of Shakespearean film. THRONE OF BLOOD has a spatial strategy which, in its organic integration and complex development of dramatic opposition, is directly related to Welles's OTHELLO and CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT. However, in its relation of spatial manipulation to time, Kurosawa's film has its one truly profound affinity with Olivier's *Henry V*. Through the incorporation of their theatrical dimensions, both these latter films transcend simple time structure. While THRONE OF BLOOD (through the implications of its Noh element) connects character with 'spirit' and so links a particular tale with what are seen as universal traits of human nature, HENRY V relates the particular occasion of a performance at the Globe in London with the universal and enduring relevance of Shakespeare's play. Both films deal

essentially with the transformation of history into myth and legend; with the fusion of the instant with the imagination.