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In praise of boredom and the legacy of a tradition in contemporaneity: *Mu*, *Ma* and Yasujiro Ozu

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Abstract

In the early 1970s, Paul Schrader, speaking on film, *identified* a specific type of work, which he referred to as transcendental, in which tedium or boredom played a *constitutive* role. In Schrader's opinion, this ability to construct – to build a relationship between the film and the spectator – using a supposed “counter-action” is a tried and trusted part of the work of several filmmakers. The Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu is a member of this small group. The architect Kengo Kuma, also Japanese, alluded later to his own profession, to the advantages of treating boredom as a process of the rooting of an identity and of us returning that identity in an inventive system of growth. Whilst Kuma seeks a path towards redemption through the conscientization of boredom, Schrader sees the transcendental as a cinematographic style that precisely uses the boring or every day as a means of engaging the spectator. This chapter, using examples of the cinema of Ozu and concepts that are inherent to Japanese traditional culture, such as *mu* (無) and *ma* (間), aims to be a short reflection on a particular outlook inherent in architecture and in film-making, where boredom would seem to be an operational “tool” that can provide a path to a future.

Keywords: Boredom; Yasujiro Ozu; Void; Space-time interval; Traditional Japanese architecture

1. Ten steps

The lens of the camera is one of these machines
which dispel fatigue.
Le Corbusier, *Spirit of Truth* (1933)

In his text “Towards a Japanese-Style Architecture of Relationships,” of 2010 (2010, p. 13), Kengo Kuma writes on a very particular notion of Japanese culture. He points out that Japan had, for centuries, been the passive recipient of new technologies, most of which came from China. He also says that the constant violent clash caused by the reception of the new technologies has had – or still has – a destructive impact. A destructive impact on a society leads to imbalances and can result in the collapse of that society. In order to avoid such a collapse and to protect its societal structure, Japan, “this small country,” as Kuma describes it, concentrated its energy on resolving the consequences of those impacts. How did it do this? By assimilating the impacts through layers or limits. These layers gradually became layers of modernity. Kuma writes (2010, p. 14): “Japan nurtured an extremely original culture in order to ease the impact of new technologies and to facilitate the reorganization of society.” The layers work in successive folds, one on top of the other. Folds of advanced technology followed by folds of stagnation, which would then be followed again by folds of advanced technology. Like flowers that are forever blooming and then dying, “[a] country can

experience modernity any number of times” (Kuma, 2010, p. 14).

There is a reason for the allusion to flowers in this context. It is the expectation of a *Nō* (能) actor – *Nō* being the oldest performance art, still regularly practiced, in the whole world – to be able to cause the flower, *hana* (花), to open up and bloom in the audience. After this blooming, and after a master actor has used all the mystery of his art, the *hana* will remain forever with the spectators. This form of drama, dance and music require time to be shown; it requires attention and, probably, requires that one “lose” oneself in its twists and bends and become “alone” in order to receive the flower that is presented to us, allowing it to bloom in a space which is ours only, but which is multiplied by all those present in the act of the performance, remaining present beyond the real-time relating to a specific program. This image of a country that leaps from one form of modernity to another, in between periods of stagnation, recalls a particular duration of time and a relationship with that duration that is also very particular. There is a dragging of time, almost like a yawn. One can imagine a young apprentice who, from his old master, learns ancestral techniques, for example, the *Nō* arts, thus opposing the vertiginous speed of life in contemporaneity. Why take 100 steps if one can communicate the same thing with just ten slow steps?

One could say that this is an allusion to a certain

kind of boredom that goes beyond culture and reveals itself in specific situations, constituting a eulogy of that culture. In his text mentioned above, Kuma refers to this sense of boredom as “elegant ennui” (Kuma, 2010, p. 17). He goes as far as to argue that this elegant ennui is the originator of Japanese architecture.

In 1972 the critic and filmmaker Paul Schrader (b. 1946) published the book *Transcendental Style in Cinema: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. In an interview in 2017 on the occasion of a new edition of the book, Schrader refers to a specific scene from the film *Umberto D.* (1952) by Vittorio De Sica (1901-1974). In the scene, the character Maria, who is going about her daily morning chores in the kitchen, tries three times to strike a match. She strikes it on the wall – whereby the wall is marked by countless similar acts carried out by Maria over the years. In this scene, Schrader says the spectator is watching “dead time” (TIFF, 2017). De Sica provides, through the medium of film, the counterargument to film: dead time. It is an action without any consequence that is carried out three times. As a result of that action, the spectator will either get up and go or will stay definitively in the film and in the time of the film. For Schrader, the transcendental style in filmmaking uses boredom as a tool.



Fig. 1: Still from the film *Umberto D.* (1952) (33:54) by Vittorio De Sica. “Dead time.”

It is nothing new to argue that Japanese cinema has given us one of the greatest artisanal masters who makes use of this type of tool. Seeking a sublimation of the most tedious action in life, of our everyday routines, Yasujiro Ozu (1903-1963) wrapped us in his elegant ennui, opening up to us the spaces of his “house,” which is the cinema.

2. *Mu* (無)

Ozu's house is a bare one. Donald Richie, an expert on Japanese cinema, compares the filmmaker to an artisan, to a carpenter building a house. A house in which no paint is used, nor wallpaper – nothing but natural wood. Just like in traditional Japanese

architecture, in Ozu's films, the spectator can see all the support elements of a structure that functions only as a whole. Richie writes:

Ozu is not an intuitive film artist, he is a master craftsman; for him, film is not expression but function. In an Ozu film, as in Japanese architecture, you can see all the supports, and each support is as necessary as any other. [...] He makes a film as a carpenter makes a house. (Richie, 1964, p.11)

In Ozu's films, we essentially see a Japan that is stripped of all that is superfluous. That Japan is presented to the spectator through familial relationships that transcend time and geography. However, in this transcendental act, the spectator is also confronted with questions that are inherent to being Japanese – an implacable (in)formal exactness.

Yasujiro Ozu was born on 12 December 1903 in Tokyo. He died exactly 60 years later, on 12 December 1963, also in Tokyo. It was his will that his gravestone in the Engakuji Zen Temple in Kita-Kamakura feature no name or date. The inscription is that of a single *kanji* character representing the term *mu* (無)¹ – an implacable (in)formal exactness.

Mu is a concept that can be translated as “nothing” or “void.” A negation of existence that can also be a space that was, for example, occupied by a body. Ozu physically occupied space; after 60 years, he disappeared from that space. What remained was a void, his void. Characters also disappear in his films. The film goes on. Ozu was 41 years old when the atomic bomb was dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one bomb for each city. Bodies ripped apart. Bodies that were there, only to be nowhere a few fractions of a second later. Shadows and void. Life goes on.

In their appraisal of Ozu, several critics have identified him as the most Japanese of all Japanese filmmakers of a particular generation – more Japanese than Kenji Mizoguchi (1898-1956), than Akira Kurosawa (1910-1998). However, this view has been rejected by the critic Hasumi Shigehiko. Shigehiko (1997) argues that Ozu is what he refers to as a filmmaker of a blue sky. A clear sky. A filmmaker who is not concerned with natural phenomena, such as the seasons of the year, or the rainy season. In Ozu's films, there is always heat but never rain. Shigehiko writes: “[s]till, nothing could be more un-Japanese than Nature without cold and rain.” (Shigehiko, 1997, p. 121)

Ozu distances himself from a rhetoric associated with the seasons – a rhetoric that is immersed in the notion, and this is above all a Western notion, that precisely that is the essence of Japanese

¹ “*Mu* is an aesthetic term meaning ‘void,’ an emptiness that is nevertheless full of possibilities, such as the empty spaces in a traditional ink-brush painting or the spaces

between the branches and flowers in an *ikebana* arrangement.” (Geist, 1997, pp. 101-102)

poetics. However, such distancing does not take with it a poetic sensibility inherent to the work of the filmmaker. Ozu knows how to evoke the sensitive and the poetic through his work; he does this in a crude way. To use Shigehiko's words (1997, p. 121), he does so daringly and brutally. And he does so also in a silent, Japanese way. For example, in the transition shots between scenes using a camera that captures shots almost like still lifes: a landscape through which a running train passes; the roofs of various buildings and a harbor; a factory and its chimneys in production; a street and its "life"; a street without any life; a wall, the sea and someone looking at it; the sea; the sky. They are images that place us in those locations in the film, true, but they are also images of the void – they are alive but are also not; they are in a way contemplative, being no more than what they are in themselves. In *Tokyo Story* (Tōkyō Monogatari, 東京物語, 1953), a film about family relationships in post-war Japan centered around an aging couple, Shukichi and Tomi Hirayama, and their interactions with their children and daughter-in-law. Tomi falls gravely ill. The still life that precedes the scene in which Shukichi tries to comfort his wife in the final moments of her life is a serene image of a Buddhist temple on a hill overlooking the sea. The sound of crickets accompanies that still life. That sound remains as Shukichi slowly fans Tomi as she lies in her deathbed. The couple is framed by three successive partitions that open up to the exterior. The camera is positioned just above the lower horizontal plane – that is, Ozu's camera position. It is essentially a fixed camera, just centimeters off the ground. The sound of the crickets heightens the silence and the void.

The precise moment of Tomi's death is shown through a succession of images that reflect the beginning of the day, that day. The quay in the harbor; a stone lamp²; a boat on that same quay – now from another perspective –; three anchored boats with a mountain in the background; a street and two buildings; railway lines; roofs; and boats crossing the sea. They are images devoid of any human presence – no bodies people them. Void. *Mu*. When, after the death, we see him again, Shukichi is outside; his daughter Kyōko approaches him as he looks out to the sea. On this, Shigehiko writes:

Looking down at the sea, having just lost his wife, Ryu Chishu³ has not a thought in his mind. In this respect, Ryu is not unique among Ozu's characters; in his films, state of mind, as a rule, does not exist. At the moment, Ryu suddenly mechanically mentions the heat and the appropriately sunny skies, just as anyone might have done. No deep meaning is intended.

(Shigehiko, 1997, p. 125)

Life goes on, and the sky is cloudless, a kind of non-sky.



Fig. 2: Still from *Tokyo Story* (1953) (1:53:10), by Yasujiro Ozu. Shukichi and his daughter Kyōko after Tomi's death. *Mu*.

Kathe Geist writes: "Early attempts to link Ozu's films with Zen Buddhist aesthetics have been joined by later efforts to link his work with traditional Japanese art forms, many of which were inspired by Zen" (Geist, 1997, p. 101). Regardless of whether or not there are links between Ozu's work and traditional Japanese art forms, such as the *Nō* mentioned above and *Haiku* (俳句), the inheritance to the Japanese culture of specific Buddhist thoughts and philosophies, which exist well beyond religious institutions, would seem to be a reality. Many Zen aesthetic values, such as the state of "selflessness" (*muga*, 無我) (Geist, 1997, pp. 101, 109), are deeply rooted in "being" Japanese. Ozu was not indifferent to that state. Being "selfless." The crystal clear and the two-dimensional sky is a sky that figures as a counterargument. Deadtime again. One can speculate that the difference between one and the other is that De Sica's deadtime remains in the cinema. It remains there to confront us and to provoke us; we feel the weight of the deadtime, its duration. Ozu's deadtime drags on the flow of time, also in terms of duration, the glitch of being in the state of "selflessness." This dead time is open, marked intermittently by voids and presences to which we always return – a living deadtime. Ozu's *ennui* is a void waiting to be filled in successive steps. That is its modernity.

"Returning" in the films of Ozu is never a formal effect. "Returning" is an aesthetic attitude (Richie, 1964, p. 13).

Woojeong Joo (2018, p. 209) argues that a general view of the work of Ozu in its relationship with everyday life falls short of precisely what we

² Stone lamps are symbols of ephemerality and passage associated with the souls of the dead in the Buddhist religion. (Geist, 1997, p. 01)

³ The actor who plays the role of Shukichi Hirayama.

understand as everyday life. In other words, for Joo, the essence of the mystery of Ozu's work is to be found in the complexity, unexplored by critics, that is inherent in everyday life:

Ozu's everyday may seem to be a void; one may choose to point to the silently flowing cloud shots that are frequently seen in his films in order to assert the "emptiness" of the present, which essentially constructs the everyday. However, arguments such as this often miss out on the more significant point that such shots hardly stand alone in the narrative; the cloud implies the "gaze" of a subject of the everyday (even if absent or elided), and, moreover, a "drama" that has been building to necessitate the gaze. Ultimately, we do not merely respond to the beauty of the scenery Ozu presents us with; we also respond to the feeling it evokes, or a meaning that saturates Ozu's everyday. (Joo, 2018, p. 209)

More than in the almost cosmogonic inclination in the cyclical order, which, for example, is proposed by Geist (1997, p. 106) – in the search for redemption on the part of Ozu's characters – it is in the surgical and implacable gaze that he reflects the everyday life of a country (Japan) which, in modernity, looks at itself in a mirror, a look that Ozu's films register. There is a void, yes, but that void is neither blind, nor does it forego our gaze. In a way, the spectator is invited to look into a mirror that reflects an abyss. Without understanding it, the spectator is also in the void of the abysses of time. Ozu insisted, however, that cinema, in and of itself, was constructed to be merely cinema. It is, in itself and only in itself, cinema. Ozu: "'I'm a tofu seller so I only make tofu'" (Ozu quoted in Joo, 2018, p. 205). Ozu also says: "'It [his film work] may look all the same to you, but I begin each work with a new interest, trying to express new things'" (Ozu quoted in Joo, 2018, pp. 214-215). Joo finishes off thusly:

Concluding in his own rhetoric, Ozu actually made various kinds of tofu, each with different ingredients and tastes, but tofu is still tofu, always retaining intact its distinctively plain flavor of the everyday" (Joo, 2018, p. 215).

Is the tofu, in all its density, not a metaphor for a mirror reflection of an abyss? A long and elegant *ennui* that socks us with its impossible skies.

3. *Ma* (間)

In 1970 Roland Barthes published his book *Empire of Signs* (L'Empire des signes). It was to symbolize the renewed fascination for Japanese culture in the West, above all in France. That interest was also driven by literature, through writers such as Yukio Mishima (1925-1970) and Yasunari Kawabata

(1899-1972), by cinema, through filmmakers such as Mizoguchi and, of course, Ozu, and even by dance, through figures such as Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-1986), one of the founders of the *Butō* (舞) dance theatre. The organization of the exhibition, designed by Arata Isozaki (b. 1931), *Ma: Espace-Temps du Japon*, at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, part of the Festival d'Automne à Paris in 1978, was by no means coincidental in this context.⁴

On *ma* (間), Isozaki (1978, p. 6) wrote the following for the exhibition catalog:

In Japan, both time and space were conceptualized with the word *MA*, meaning "natural distance between two or more things that exist in a continuity," or "space or vacancy between things." [...]. The fact that time and space have not been distinguished from each other and have been conceptualized as one entity is very important among the unique characteristics of Japanese artistic expression in comparison with that of the West. [...]. Space was also perceived as identical with an event or phenomenon that occurred within it, i.e., space was perceived only in relation to time flow. The Western concept of space is three-dimensional, and when time is added it becomes four-dimensional, whereas in Japan space is strictly two-dimensional, or is a combination of two-dimensional facets. So the depth of space was expressed by combining plural two-dimensional facets, which means that through them existed a number of continuous time scales. *MA* was used to describe both time and space, and this fact correlates with the mode of cognition in which space was perceived within the structure of a facet with time scales.

The elegance of *ennui* referred to by Kuma – an elegance which, in his words, gives rise to Japanese culture – cannot be dissociated from *ma*; that would appear to be inescapable. Whilst it is true that Isozaki extolled that concept and exposed it to the West some 40 years ago, in the same period Tadao Ando (b. 1941) sought to realize the concept⁵, "constructing it" as a "meta" physical and aesthetic device. In reality, Ando converted it: the work of an architect can experience modernity multiple times. More so, the architecture of a country can experience a modernity countless times, even if it remains unconnected to that silent power for centuries.

However, one must also understand that any attempt to define what is essentially *kenchiku* (建築, architecture) will be lost in the immensity of concepts and precepts that construct an architecture that appears as familiar as it is totally unknown. It is in this interval, between the familiar and the unknown, that one can stabilize and attempt to identify an architecture of the void; of

throughout a wide range of areas, in particular architecture.

⁵ Tadao Ando's Azuma House was built in Osaka in 1976. In the middle of the house an interval.

⁴ One should point out that 40 years later Japan and France again cooperated in the organization of an extensive cultural program that aimed at showing the essence of Japanese culture in France, above all in Paris. The impact of *Japonismes 2018: les âmes en resonance* resonated

the non-form. This (*in*)formality of Japanese architecture has led Tadao Ando to describe it as “a-geometric”; producing an informal architecture that generates spaces that merge with nature, creating one body with it (Ando, 1999, p. 219).

That body is an eminently horizontal one. It is developed in layers of space in a progression based on horizontality. A progression from the inside outwards in order to capture the natural phenomenon, and from the outside inwards to return that phenomenon to interiority. In a way, through this folding and unfolding in layers, the form, as an element by which a particular object is recognized, becomes diluted and loses itself in its delimitation. Paradoxically, it is its modular nature, which is specific to a concurrent process for a particular form of tedium, that provides it with that particular *informality*.

The modular nature is the result of a process of spatial organization that is established using a particular device: the *hashira* (柱)⁶. *Hashira*, or pillar, is the element of ignition in the particular spatial system inherent to traditional Japanese architecture. It is fundamentally essential to acknowledge the role of the line, and not the plane, as the organizing principle of a form or body. This linearity opens up space to the value of the void and establishes the underlying bone structure – or frame, made of wood, and organized by a pillar and beam system known as the *hashira-hari* (梁) – that is liberated between the plane of the land and the weight of the roof, obliging it (the architecture) to opt for a horizontal extension. The interval between the posts, or pillars, is the *ken* (間). The apparent standardization of this system is essentially based on the appreciation of the interval and the multiplication of the interstitial spaces. For this whole system to work in architecture, from the most complex building projects to the humblest dwellings, the units of measurement – such as *shaku* (尺), *sun* (寸), *jō* (丈) and the *ken* mentioned above – become unavoidable reference values. Another measurement element, which is linked to the preceding elements, is the *tatami* (畳). A *tatami*, a rectangle consisting of a rice straw base covered with woven soft rush, is roughly equal to 1 ken by 0.5 ken (or 1800 mm by 900 mm). In the Muromachi period (ca. 1336 to ca. 1573), *tatami* were used as elements that were linked directly to the horizontal plane, covering the whole space in some rooms of a house in a geometric layout that was firmly based on to the basic wooden skeleton

of the house. Thanks to the generalization of spaces organized based on the number of *tatami* used, the traditional Japanese house as we know it was born.

This brief description of a structural logic omits a whole universe related to other questions and other concepts that contribute to the worth of such a particular architectural panorama. For example, although the *tatami* measurements vary slightly from region to region, no two *tatami* are exactly alike: each *tatami* is unique (Satō-Cruz, 2014, p. 479), which once more brings us to a paradox. And, in reality, *ken* is more a concept than a unit of measurement: it is an interval, and it is the sun that rises between two posts.

The interval is of extreme value in this architecture. In the folding mentioned above and unfolding of layers that make up the succession of spaces of a given architecture, the interval imposes itself as a non-physical limit that regulates said layers. In the duration of time, the space is intervalled and results in *ma*. Indeed, the intertwining of time and space is cut, in movement, by those same intervals. This whole model of events exudes modernity and contemporaneity, irrespective of its age-old origins. Kuma’s elegant *ennui* may reside in the ambivalence between the modular system and the sophistication of the interstitial space, which results in the interval, in *ma*. This ambivalence is open enough to allow space for deviation from the module and consideration of the value from the viewpoint of the aesthetic that can lead precisely to that same deviation. It is a boredom that lives in the paradox between appearance and essence; an appearance that seems to repeat itself countless times in the society of horizontality, as if there were a direct relationship between assimilation of alien technologies, intervalled by the periods of stagnation, and the multiplication of the interstitial spaces inherent to the very being of architecture, this being which, at its limit, may be close to the “selfless” state, to *muga*. To the state of being “selfless.” This brings one back to the question of the limit because, in reality, the limit of the traditional Japanese house is a spatial limit, an informal limit that results from an interval, but from an interval that is realized in the flow of time – in its profundity is expressed the manifold combination of two-dimensional facets. *Ma*.

Film montage is also a question of limit. Ozu’s film editing is based on an a-b-a structure. The cut is made some time before that pivotal action of the story, at that moment, and it also takes place after

already a work of art. It can serve as a container for a statue of Buddha, but at the same time there are extremely precise decorations on the building.” (Obrist, 2012, p. 36). Nishizawa helps to highlight the value of *hashira*, which, in 8th century Japan, was a singular vertical element that housed a divinity (Sendai, 2014, p. 168).

⁶ In answer to a question on the relationship between architecture and the arts, Ryue Nishizawa has argued: “In the history of architecture, when one looks back at the collaboration between architecture and the fine arts, it seems to me this was something that was unified right from the beginning. For example, when one looks at ancient Japanese buildings like Hōryū-ji, a single pillar, it’s

the action is over (Richie, 1964, p. 14). This time lag in the montage, like a draining away of time and space, relates, once again, to the interval and the bridge between intervals, in other words, to the use of *ma* as a concept. Geist (1997, p. 112) refers to a particular aspect that is used in this context: *hashi* (橋), the bridge over the void. The use of elements in movement – such as means of transport – that serve as elements of connection in a space-time geography, serve as transition devices, or as bridges, as used by Ozu. *Ma* thus establishes itself as a kind of *mu* in movement:

a void in which time and space interact and define themselves through an action. The frequently empty rooms that characters go in and out of in Ozu's films suggest *ma*⁷ (Geist, 1997, p. 112).

Here mesological character of a *trajectivity* springs to mind: the being in his milieu. And the milieu as a between-things – or a between-spaces – where said being acts, interrelating in continuity with said milieu and all the agents that operate in it, in a *kanjin* (姦), or context. In contrast to Western culture, Japanese culture is qualified by *awai no bunka* (間の文化), the culture of the interlink. *Ma*, which exists between the things – or between the spaces – carries in it the general sense of *fūdo* (風土), the Japanese milieu, which encompasses all these inter-relations (Berque, 2014, p. 295).

For Ozu, the moment for all these interlinks is the present. The past is not relevant. The present is the present of the characters; only they are of interest to Ozu. The characters are his concern, not the action. The meaning of the scenes of everyday life – beyond the *trajectivity* that is inherent to them – is shown to the spectator in the dialogue between the characters. The visual pattern and the time pattern function in the “interest” of the characters, and the camera, which is essentially static and strategically placed in the space, captures the assertive or errant movement of the bodies as they progress in that space. These bodies crossing paths and distancing themselves from each other are in a process of replacing each other. The bodies of the characters of interest to Ozu are, at times, lost amongst other bodies. They become diluted and anonymous because, in reality, they are part of a universe where anonymity is the norm – that void evidences everyday life, just as the sound of the crickets evidences the silence.

It is in this coming-and-going, intertwined in the essentially interior spaces that Ozu reveals himself to be the artisan he is. A constructor like a master carpenter, a *daiku* (大工). Ozu constructs the bone structure of his films, in a determined and finely

tuned way, through something akin to *hashira-hari*. Ozu makes a film like a carpenter builds a house. Each shot is essential, and the cut is the basis for the structure. It is his punctuation (Richie, 1964, p. 16). Nothing is superfluous. Everything is “selflessness.”



Fig. 3: Still from *Tokyo Story* (1953) (54:24) by Yosujiro Ozu. Bodies in movement in the layers of the domestic space. *Ma*.

The house as the location for a scene⁸, for example, functions as the everyday unit, which is evident in Ozu's films. The space of the house, as we know, extends to the exterior. Interior – exterior – interior communicate with each other in a singular time – bridges between the between in constant action. The low-placed camera, at the level of the eyes of someone kneeling on a *tatami*, or even lower, reveals the floor and the *tatami*, which are a module. They are there in agreement with the bone structure. The bodies get up, walk around, but always return to the lower horizontal level, return to the camera. The bodies also disappear, leaving the camera and space on their own. The framing of the space is carried out in layers; this is an inherence; it is inherent to the space – in Japan, if one wants to separate two spaces, one builds a third space, a void, an interval, *ma*. The bodies appear, only to disappear again:

Izosaki completed his refinements of the concept of *Ma*, with *Utsushimi*, the spaces in which people live, *Sabi*, which is often paired with *Wabi*, as the passage or movement of time, *Susabi*, as the place or space where things appear and disappear, [...] (Steel, 2017, p. 268).

The bodies appear, only to disappear again – an everyday routine of coming and going. In an architecture of intervals. In a culture that is also one of a succession of intervals and reinventions. The waving of a hand fan. A body that kneels before stretching out on the *tatami*. The sound of the crickets. A two-dimensional blue sky. The silence. A

⁷ “That the *mu* and *ma* of Zen aesthetics permeated Ozu's work there seems no question, though his interest in Buddhism as such was undoubtedly confined to aesthetics” (Geist, 1997, p. 115).

⁸ “[...] the household [...] is the traditional and fundamental social unit of Buddhism” (Geist, 1997, p. 104).

void space. The line of the horizon. And Shukichi, now a widower, with a melancholic smile on his face, is thankful for the birth of a warm day. A day on which a being stopped being and its body is no more.

4. In praise of boredom

The splendor and drama of life emerges from the truth: and 90 percent of the cinema's production is delusion. [...] Thus, it soothes us with images, sometimes engaging ones. And we wait patiently, we wait.

We await the truth.

—Le Corbusier, *Spirit of Truth* (1933)

For Paul Schrader, the great challenge of film that works with slowness, with transcendence, is the capacity to use boredom as an aesthetic tool⁹ (Perry, 2017). This instrumental boredom should be able to place us in the duration – the Bergsonian *durée*¹⁰.

Kengo Kuma writes:

We Japanese are already sick and tired of new technologies. Of course, new technologies will emerge in the future in different products and in different guises, and people are approaching a condition that transcends such enthusiasms. Enthusiasm over technology is unimportant. What is important is using a technology until it has nothing to show us, reaching a stage where that technology can fill us with boredom, and patiently repairing the damage inflicted on the world by the violence of that technology. An elegant ennui gave birth to Japanese architecture; boredom produced and nurtured diverse techniques. (Kuma, 2010, p. 17)

Construction of these structures, both cinematographic and architectural structures, takes time. More than taking time, in and of themselves, they are demanding. They demand the attention of the user. One has to commit to what they have to offer. Which requires time. Duration. The structures they form are the result of a reflection. They derive from a stretching out of time, from an almost visceral assimilation that places on in a new moment, a moment ahead. They derive from a stretching out of time up to the point of a certain boredom, a certain tedium, so to speak. The modernities of Ozu's work remain modern and innovative. The pertinence of the insistence, even the boredom, of the assimilation of modernities allows, in today's Japan, for a unique architecture. *Hana*, the blooming of the flower brought about by the master actor, will always remain with his

spectators. In the lag of time, a young apprentice, alongside his old master, perhaps a *daiku*, learns ancestral techniques. Let us return to Kengo Kuma: "We must not be afraid of boredom. Boredom is the mother of invention; boredom is the mother of an inventive architecture" (Kuma, 2010, p. 17).

This use of boredom as a tool – by filmmakers and, more specifically, in this case, by architects – creates a path towards a more complete experience by the user. Just as in Ozu's films, where the everyday is the everyday of relationships and the small moments that transcend them, Kuma advocates for an architecture of relationships, of limits that are derived from those relationships. An innovative built world, looking back whilst continuously in movement, leaping from modernity to modernity; a world that is gently and elegantly boring and exalts the human BEING.

Why take 100 steps if one can communicate the same thing with just ten slow steps?

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⁹ "Although transcendental style, like all transcendental art, strives toward the ineffable and invisible – trying to bring us close to the ineffable and the invisible as words and images takes us – it is neither ineffable nor invisible itself. [...] The transcendental style in film is seen at its purest in the films of Yasujiro Ozu in the East and Bresson in the West, [...]" (Schrader, 1972, p. 2)

¹⁰ See *Matière et mémoire* (1896) and *L'évolution créatrice* (1907) by Henri Bergson (Bergson, 2012; Bergson, 2013); *Cinéma 1: L'image-mouvement* (1983) and *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* (1985) by Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze, 1983; Deleuze, 1985).

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