

Change, Horizon, and Event in Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949)

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Abstract:

Over the decades, the films of Yasujiro Ozu have inspired a number of contradictory responses from film critics and theorists. Initially, formal aspects of his work, which Western commentators found difficult to comprehend in relation to the thematic dimensions of the films, were often said to reflect aesthetic and philosophical principles associated with Zen Buddhism. Like the recurrence of plots that explore the transformations of the Japanese family, many formal attributes of Ozu's films were assumed to express various ideas related to traditional Japanese values. In their work on Ozu, Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell do an admirable job of debunking many clichés and misconceptions about the relationship of Ozu's work to Zen philosophy, aesthetics, and social conventions. Undoubtedly though, a metaphysical outlook emerges in Ozu's work that is neither wholly conditioned by the socialised norms of Zen and tradition, nor entirely free of them. This paper considers and analyses a claim made by Gilles Deleuze about the metaphysical orientation of Ozu's work, one which ascribes aspects of Ozu's style to a Zen conception of time. This particular argument concerns Ozu's famous still lifes, and it is my contention that through considering some aspects of Deleuze's reading of Ozu alongside Bordwell, Thompson, and Noël Burch's writing on the director, we can see what is asked of us by a film like Ozu's *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, 1949), which offers us an opportunity to rethink the relations between cinematic form, narrative, and emotion.

Keywords: Ozu; Deleuze; Bordwell; Burch; Thompson.

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Many commentators on the films of Ozu Yasujirō have insisted on the importance of the observation and evocation of change in the director's work. Change may be understood in this regard as personal, social, or cosmic: as a transformation that characters and their relationships undergo, as the giving way of traditional norms and adoption of new modes of living, or as an ephemerality that characterises all existence, human or otherwise. In this article, I will offer a reading of *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, 1949) inspired by Gilles Deleuze's brief consideration of Ozu's work in *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985). In doing so, I will situate Deleuze's claims about Ozu both in relation to some of his other philosophical writings, and to various claims made by scholars, theorists, and critics in considering Ozu's work, particularly *Late Spring*. The first section will use a number of these writers to establish Ozu's engagement with social change, as well as the fact that such engagement is linked to both a considerable involvement in the lives of his characters and a metaphysical outlook that emerges through the relations binding style and narration. Like many of Ozu's best critics, Deleuze emphasises the films' observation of social change, but he also clearly recognises an affinity to his own philosophy in the metaphysical vision refracted in the filmmaker's work. Ozu is for him 'the greatest critic of daily life', whose films after the Second World War observe the 'mutation of an Americanized Japan' (1985/2005, p. 18–9), but these films also, Deleuze claims, establish a perspective in which 'one and the same horizon links the cosmic to the everyday, the durable to the changing' (p. 17). It is above all in his analysis of the famous images of a vase set before a shoji screen in *Late Spring* that Deleuze's view of Ozu's work crystallises, and it is by way of this crystallisation that I ultimately argue for the importance of linking change to questions of horizon and event.

Documenting Change

In his chapter on Ozu in *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film*, Robin Wood attacks two assumptions he considers to be particularly entrenched in Western spectators' understanding of Ozu: the 'Japaneseness' and essentialism of his work.¹ That is, the films are often conceived of as at once quintessentially Japanese, and about a universal and eternal human condition.² While Wood allows that Ozu's strategies – notably the use of

1. Wood's chapter is a revised version of an article that appeared in the Winter 1992 edition of *CineAction!*.

2. For instance, Donald Richie – whose *Ozu: His Life and Films* (1974) Wood sees as having done much to establish these assumptions – argues that Ozu's abiding subject was the dissolution of the family, a particularly Japanese 'catastrophe' for Richie (p.4),

extended transition sequences – establish a relationship of ‘contemplative distance’ between the spectator and the situations depicted on screen, he insists that such contemplation is not directed toward ‘some ineffable mystery but the concrete and often prosaic realities of life-in-society’ (p. 112). And while such realities are placed in what Wood calls a metaphysical context, in which ‘awareness of time, transience, death, and an inanimate universe’ is elicited, there is, he rightly claims, no need to be versed in the intricacies of Zen philosophy in order to appreciate this, nor any reason to subsume the particularity of the lives explored in the films to an essentialist vision of ‘Japaneseness’, human nature, or cosmic being.

The virtue of Ozu’s work is for Wood that it compassionately involves us with characters, while maintaining enough distance for reflection on issues of relation and value that are both social and metaphysical (p. 112). This is an apt summation, but we should note that the social ‘contemplation’ inspired in Wood is directed mainly toward the way the institution of marriage serves the patriarchy (*Late Spring* and *Early Summer* [*Bakushū*, 1951]), and the erosion of community, beginning with the family, realised by capitalism (*Tokyo Story* [*Tōkyō monogatari*, 1953]). While the latter point, in particular, raises an issue pertinent specifically to Japan after World War 2, overall Wood does not deal with the specificity of the situation in Japan at the time these films were made. Rather, he argues – in opposition to the vision of Ozu as culturally conservative corollary to the assumptions of his Japaneseness and essentialism – that the films offer a critique of patriarchy and capitalism that transcends the national. These films are, for Wood, against the way things are. However, they can better be understood as engaged with the mutation of Japan from within, rather than as judgments of either tradition or transformation.³

David Bordwell clearly establishes in *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* that early in his career the filmmaker was at home amidst the growing mass culture of the 1920s. ‘The director so often identified with ascetic otherworldliness’, Bordwell writes, ‘turns out to be constantly referring to contemporary concerns, alluding to passing fashions, and developing political ideas’ (1988, p. 33). Ozu regularly reveals his interest in the sociocultural changes taking place in a modernising Japan, even if at times

while contending that the Ozu film is essentially about ‘human nature in all its diversity and variation’ (p.17).

3. Wood contends that *Late Spring* is a tragedy and a radical condemnation of traditional marriage as an institution that subordinates and imprisons women (1998, p. 119). But as Andrew Klevan argues, this reading ‘seems incongruous with the film’s moment by moment style which understands the characters worries in terms of their everyday perspective, not in terms of an all embracing sociopolitical theory’ (2000, p. 166n2).

we may sense in the director's irony a reluctance to embrace new alterations of everyday existence introduced by capitalism and imported Western ideas, styles, and commodities. More recently, Alastair Phillips has argued that Ozu's work should be understood not as reflecting a static conception of 'Japaneseness', but as observing a transformation of national identity, 'an active contestation between the past and present' (2003, p. 163), corresponding to two distinct periods of modernisation, before and after World War 2 (p.157).⁴ In particular, Phillips claims the films after the war – which Richie, for instance, sees as turning away from social issues – vigorously engage the contestation between tradition and progress in postwar Japan, a period in which a new formulation of nationhood inevitably occasioned a sense of loss (2003, p. 155).⁵ That the postwar films for the most part present the lives of members of middle-class families, rather than the struggling underclasses – as in Ozu films from the 30s such as *Passing Fancy* (*Dekigokoro*, 1933) and *The Only Son* (*Hitori musuko*, 1936) – can thus be attributed to both drastic changes in the economic situation in Japan after the war, and to the director's intuition that middle-class families offered innumerable possibilities for examining the mutation gripping the country.

Late Spring is of particular interest in this regard, as Professor Somiya (Ryū Chishū) and, especially, his daughter, Noriko (Hara Setsuko), can be seen as both invested in tradition and open to the change offered by the new Japan. As Kristin Thompson has argued, the knowledge that marriage became a matter of mutual consent in Japan after World War 2, with the signing of a new constitution, is critical to understanding the film. When the marriage laws went into effect in 1948, legal equality between men and women on a number of matters – such as inheritance, property rights, and divorce – was established (1988, p. 319–20).⁶ In this light, we may interpret differently the behaviour of Somiya, who urges his daughter to marry in order to begin her own family, apart from the traditional Japanese family structure, or *ie*. In short, we may see him as more interested in pushing her to 'live her own life' than in trying to ensure that she lives in accordance with established traditions, and this,

4. Both Wood and Phillips centre their arguments on the trilogy of postwar films – *Late Spring*, *Early Summer*, and *Tokyo Story* – starring Hara Setsuko, which makes their differing approaches to the films' social engagement stand out all the more clearly from one another.

5. See Richie 1974, p.5.

6. Phillips more fully develops the notion that Ozu's films engage gender issues contemporary to their making, and relates this to the proliferation of 'new classes of Japanese female consumers and spectators' during the period (p. 156).

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Thompson argues, was quite a departure from earlier notions of how a Japanese father should act (if not from many of the fathers in other Ozu films).⁷

The case of Noriko is more complicated. As both Wood and Andrew Klevan argue, Noriko's resistance to marriage is attributable to her reluctance to relinquish the considerable freedom she enjoys in her life with her father. But Noriko is indeed also somewhat idiosyncratically traditional (for instance, in seeing the remarriage of her widowed uncle, Onodera [Mishima Masao], as 'unclean'), and Phillips seems correct in insisting that she is a link between generations, a woman both attracted to the new and sensitive to the continuities of the past (p. 160). She is thereby different in a crucial respect from her friend Aya (Tsukioka Yumeji), the *moga*, or modern girl, who, both sympathetically and humorously presented, arranges her house, cooks, and dresses in Western fashion.⁸ While Noriko also dresses in Western clothing and prefers sitting on chairs to the floor, her embrace of the new opportunities open to women after the war is most forcefully registered through the relative liberty she enjoys for the majority of the film. This freedom is perhaps most evident in the bike ride to the beach she takes with Hattori (Usami Jun) – her father's assistant, who her father and aunt briefly believe may be a potential husband – without provoking censure.⁹ Through the character of Noriko, then, Ozu engages the uneasy co-existence of pervasive national nostalgia and the drive for social (as well as technological and economic) progress that defined the period.

We should not, however, let the social relevance of Ozu's work lead us into regarding the experiences of the characters, with which Ozu involves us deeply, as simply illustrative of contemporary issues. As Klevan argues in *Disclosure of the Everyday* (2000), perhaps what is most stirring about *Late Spring* is its treatment of personal loss that arises through 'situations which seem to be part of the expected (living) order of things...[or] as a result of the realization of an intended project' (p. 203). The loss explored in the film is that of a daughter having to separate from a father – with whom she has a markedly genial relationship – in order to marry, and it is by his own design, in making Noriko believe he will remarry, as well as in urging her to move forward, that Somiya winds up alone in a house mostly

7. For a similar reading of Somiya's attitude, see Rothman 2006, p. 34. Thompson's vision of the 'occupation liberalism' of both Professor Somiya and Ozu is certainly not without contention. See for example Geist 1989 and 1997, p. 116–7n18.

8. On this point, see Phillips 2003, 159–60.

9. Though their arguments are quite different, both Wood and Klevan stress that the relative freedom of Noriko's life with her father is gradually curtailed.

emptied of his daughter's presence. There is, then, something universally human about the loss explored in the particular relationship the film examines, although it is also clearly expressive of a specific moment in Japanese history. Ozu's work thus, quietly and remarkably, brings together change and loss at the levels of the individual and society.

It also does more than this though, illuminating the horizon of the human sphere depicted in his films, and evoking a sense of universal transience through the suggestion of forces of life at nonhuman scales. Klevan makes some of the clearest and most evocative arguments in this regard. Considering the sequence in *Late Spring* where Somiya speaks to Onodera at Ryōan-ji Garden, in Kyoto, Klevan notes that the images of the rock garden (or *karesansui*) that make up the transitions before and after the narrative 'block' – the conversation between the two men – are nearly identical, a not uncommon tactic of Ozu's. Arguing for the importance of such repetitions, Klevan claims the transition shots in cases such as this should be understood as framing devices, which have the effect of placing 'the minutiae of the human incidents stylistically, and therefore thematically, *in the centre* of a wider world' (p. 144). We could say that the film thus establishes, or at least elicits thought of, a horizon outside of that enveloping the human situations at the film's core. It is not that we aren't made to contemplate, as Wood insists we should, particular social issues, but that alongside this contemplation another is made way for, which would embed the changes taking place at the personal or social levels within a more cosmic perspective.

Thus Klevan argues that Ozu's transition sequences 'inflect' our understanding of the film's events with a sense of the 'incongruity which arises when we consider our day to day lives beside something more enduring' (p. 152). While they don't determine what we understand the film to be about, or its primary effect on us, these sequences do alter the way in which we think about the human events depicted (p. 144). So while the shots of landscapes, urban spaces, or interiors always have something to do with the locations where the story takes place (even if we don't recognise them as such initially), they also exceed that function. They embed in the regular rhythm of the film – which arises most generally from repetitive movements from one block of story development to another by way of Ozu's distinctive transitions – the spectre of rhythms at different scales: the scale of trees, for instance, as well as those of the ecosystem and world of which they are part. If we accept this evocative account, what then are we to say of a 'still life' or 'landscape' image that interrupts these rhythms, which enters into the blocks of narrative? It is to this question that Deleuze's consideration of Ozu offers a forceful response, but to understand his argument it is first necessary to turn to

Noël Burch's claims regarding Ozu's 'pillow shots', as well as to some of the problems raised by these claims.

Pillow-Shots and the Horizon of the Diegesis

In *To the Distant Observer*, his book on Japanese cinema published in 1979, Burch groups Ozu's still lifes, landscapes, and shots of empty spaces together under the heading 'pillow-shot', whether they belong to transitions or are interpolated into story sequences (p. 160–2). He calls them pillow-shots because he judges them to be similar to the pillow-words, or *makurakotoba*, of classical Japanese poetry of the Heian Period, which are stock epithets, adjectives that tend to serve a decorative function rather than modifying the meaning of the nouns to which they are appended. Burch argues that in Ozu's films some pillow-shots are more 'pure' than others, depending on their relations to the development of story information, the purest being those that 'transmit no diegetic information beyond the suggestion of a timeless place or presence' (p. 170). For Burch, it is especially important that these images constitute a decentring of a film's telling of a human story, contributing to a style of narration that is opposed to the 'profoundly anthropocentric' world-view he judges to be implicit in the 'Western mode of cinematic representation' (p. 161). Here, we need to consider why Burch sees this decentring as critical to Ozu's contribution to cinematic stylistics.

As a system of continuity is one of the defining features of what Burch refers to here as the Western mode of cinematic representation, he places particular emphasis on the way Ozu's cutaways cause a suspension of the diegesis. He contends,

while these shots never contribute to the progress of the narrative proper, they often refer to a character or a set, presenting or re-presenting it out of narrative context. The *space* from which these references are made is invariably presented as outside the diegesis, as a pictorial space on another plane of 'reality' as it were, even when the artefacts are, as is often the case, seen previously or subsequently in shots that belong wholly to the diegesis. (1979, p. 161–2)

In another passage, Burch claims that it is characteristic of Ozu's pillow-shots that the emptiness of the image is 'unsituated in diegetic space-time', and that sometimes this emptiness is a result of characters having left or not yet entered the frame, while at others it is due to the fact that the images are simply 'outside the film [and] show a setting or prop in and for itself' (p. 293). The problem here seems to be twofold. Firstly, we need to ask if it is true that these images mainly serve the function of

introducing discontinuities that break up the flow of the diegesis, and, what is at stake, at least for Burch, in their doing so. Secondly, we need to determine just what these images should be considered outside of: what is the diegetic horizon that Burch is here referring to?

We can better understand the context of Burch's claims if we consider the manner in which he defines diegesis at the outset of *To a Distant Observer*. Burch declares a preference for the notion of processes that produce a diegetic effect to that of the diegesis as a stable entity. He claims that the two key processes are the development of the spectator's 'absorption', and 'the implementation on the screen of the "codes" which catalyse that absorption' (1979, p. 19). The result of these very loosely defined processes is then said to be an effect 'whereby spectators experience the diegetic world as environment', in a sense entering into the imaginary space-time constituted by the diegesis for the duration of a film (p. 18–9). Burch contends, drawing on Brecht, that this effect is ideologically suspect. It is then a power of distancing, or of introducing discontinuities that facilitate critical thought in spectators about such absorbing processes, that Burch attempts to attribute to Ozu's 'pillow-shots' and other aspects of the director's stylistics.¹⁰ This is clearly related to his claim that Ozu's work presents us with a 'typically Japanese approach to the perception of three dimensions by stressing that *their representation is not to be taken for granted*' (p. 160, Burch's emphasis). Seen in this light, it appears Burch is arguing to some degree that Ozu's work shows us that traditional Japanese aesthetics has something to offer in the construction of a less ideologically suspect, less 'absorptive' cinema.

Bordwell closely attends to and criticises a number of Burch's claims considered above. He takes issue, for instance, with both Burch's descriptions of how those images he defines as pillow-shots function, and with the classification of them as pillow-shots itself, since there are other specific types of words in traditional Japanese poetic forms that Bordwell claims Ozu's images are often more similar to (1988, p. 104–5). It is his criticism of Burch's deployment of the term diegesis that is here of greatest interest though. Bordwell argues that Burch seems to be working with multiple definitions of diegesis, moving indiscriminately between the conception of it as story information, as action, and as a bounded space-time in which these appear. He claims that Burch falters when he uses analyses of the effects of particular images to designate general shot

10. See Wood for an insightful outline of the assumptions underlying Burch's approach in *To a Distant Observer* (1998, p. 102–5).

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types without considering the strategies and systems of which the images are part. Burch's main problem is thus, according to Bordwell, that his conception of narrative remains undefined, that he refers 'indifferently to causal, temporal, and spatial principles of organization' (p. 105).

It is doubtless bizarre to claim that any shot in a film is outside of that film. We can, however, deduce easily enough that Burch really means some images are outside of what could be called a narrative horizon. We should recall though that the diegetic processes he describes, while they produce a narrative, are first of all occupied with the production of a stable, 'absorptive' space-time through conventional techniques of constructing cinematic space, such that an apparent continuity between movements, within and between shots, produces an effect of verisimilitude. His problem is thus not, as Bordwell claims, that he needs an undergirding notion of narrative since Burch wants to make 'diegetic' processes those that produce a world and involve the spectator in the events of that world. This may remind us of Deleuze's conception of the two most general processes at work in the regime of the movement-image: the differentiation of the elements of a world in which they are simultaneously integrated; and the specification of images as signs in rational intervals of movement, as perception-, affection-, or action-images, the rational relations of which 'catalyse' the first process (2005, p. 27–8).

Burch's problem may then be understood as his conception of diegetic processes as conventional features of continuity editing, such as shot-reverse shot procedure and the 180° rule. As Bordwell and others argue (and my own experience bears this out), the principle function of the alternatives to these employed by Ozu as part of his own system is not to, as Burch asserts, effect discontinuities, for instance through 'bad' eyeline matches (p. 159). The claim that cutaways introduce discontinuity is more plausible, though, and Bordwell acknowledges that Ozu's cutaways and transitions often break up or delay the development of causal relations within the story. However, he also argues that they can be linked with other images in a film along different parameters: they may be parts of 'parametric' patterns developed by way of graphic matches, conceptual links, or the symmetrical organisation of shots (p. 122–3). As we will see, Deleuze also acknowledges that Ozu's still-lives, landscapes, and images of urban spaces are not simply discontinuous. But while some connections made are, as Bordwell contends, often 'outside of' the causal chain by which our involvement in the film's story is developed, Deleuze seems to suggest that some images, while they may indeed impede sensorimotor connections, are intimately involved with the lives of the characters.

The Reserve of Events in their Appropriateness

Burch's analysis of Ozu's pillow-shots clearly influenced Deleuze, but Deleuze is more coherent in describing the horizon that he believes certain images transgress, and more ambitious in the value he ascribes to some of them. In the few pages he devotes to Ozu in *The Time-Image*, he differentiates between still lifes and shots of empty spaces or landscapes, claiming that the distinction is one between fullness and emptiness, in accordance with the subtle relations taken on by these terms in traditional Chinese and Japanese thought.¹¹ However, while Deleuze is careful to note he is aware of the subtlety of the distinctions developed between these images, and that many images transform from empty to full, or vice versa, the conclusion he comes to about those that should be considered still lifes is drawn from a very specific example.

This example, taken from *Late Spring*, is the famous image of a vase placed before a shoji wall – a transparent screen through which silhouettes of bamboo can be seen – in the Kyoto inn where Professor Somiya and his daughter stay during their last trip together before she is to be married. Deleuze's interpretation of the image emphasises its relationship to those images that precede and follow it. This image, Deleuze argues, occupies an interval in which a change takes place since it appears between an image of Noriko smiling, and another of her staring at the ceiling and beginning to cry (1985/2005, p. 16) [Figures 1–3]. A change takes place during an image in which nothing seems to take place. But this paradox is only the shadow of a larger one for Deleuze. The form, he argues, in which change takes place, which never itself changes, is made use of to express change. Or, as Deleuze puts it, the image of the vase 'gives what changes the unchanging form in which the change is produced' (p. 16). Thus, the eternal and the ephemeral are here brought together in a single image, and an absolute horizon – the form in which all change takes place – enters into a chain of images that describe a transformation within the horizon of everyday human existence.

We can relate these complex arguments to one that Deleuze makes in the Nineteenth Series of *The Logic of Sense*, in which he discusses Zen. There he claims, adopting the language of Zen to define a concept he takes up repeatedly in his own work, 'The event is the identity of form and void' (1969/1990, p. 136). The vase image seems like precisely such an event for

11. On the importance of the distinction between emptiness and fullness in relation to still lifes, also see Deleuze's reference to D.H. Lawrence's consideration of Cezanne's work (1985/2005, p. 274n38). Of course, as is central to Deleuze's analysis of Ozu, the still life in cinema must be distinguished from both photographic and painted still lifes because the filmmaker gives it a duration (1985/2005, p. 16).



Figures 1–3: From smile to tears

Deleuze: change takes the form of an image emptied of human presence, and yet that image expresses a transformation, or event, at a human scale. The image constitutes what Deleuze calls an ‘aberrant movement’, a movement of time itself, rather than a movement in space that reveals time through the modes – duration, succession or simultaneity – by which it is generally known.¹² The ‘representation’ of duration is made here to paradoxically express change, but also that which endures ‘through the succession of changing states’ (1985, p. 16). That is, according to Deleuze, the image of the vase reveals time as the unchanging form of all that changes, as a pure and empty form ontologically prior to the movements, regular or otherwise, through which we are generally made aware of it. ‘What aberrant movement reveals’, he writes, ‘is time as everything...anteriority over all normal movement defined by motivity...anterior to the controlled flow of every action’ (1985/2005, p.36). As he phrases it in *Difference and Repetition* (1968), what is revealed is that ‘time itself unfolds...instead of things unfolding within it’ (p. 111). The play of emptiness and fullness is therefore seen to be as well the play of change, the form it takes, and the ultimate horizon to which this form attests.

While the image of the vase is not, as Deleuze implies, entirely static, since the bamboo stalks outside, beyond the shoji wall behind the vase, move in the breeze (attesting to another scale of time), its form is nevertheless relatively stable, and its most evocative attribute is indeed its duration.¹³ The image is then full both because its persisting form brings time to the forefront, and since a change in a human soul occurs while it is on screen. However, it is ‘void’ both because it does not *immediately* offer a human content, or logical or formal connection to any of the film’s other images, particularly to the human events it is cut into. Its relation to the shots of Noriko is not clearly given, but its continuity with them is.

We can partially understand the shot of the vase as a meeting point of Ozu’s emphasis on aesthetic form – in cutaways and transitions, but also images where characters are present – and the development of his story line. It magnifies the film’s recurrent and varied emphasis on stable composition, which gives ‘empty’ images a power (however slight) of

12. This is a point Deleuze derives from Kant and develops to his own ends: ‘Time, [Kant] tells us, has three modes: duration or permanence, coexistence and succession. But time cannot be defined by any of the three because you cannot define a thing through its modes’ (1978, p. 15).

13. The first image of the vase and shoji lasts four seconds, but Deleuze’s assertion that it is ten speaks to the fact that it seems longer than it is because the time given over to it suggests a meaningfulness that is not apparently ‘justified’ by its content.

affecting the way we think about the human events depicted, and a value that is to varying degree independent of the role such images play in temporally and spatially situating plot elements. But because in its placement it serves as the continuity link between two disparate mental states, the vase image seems to take on a particularly intense valence in relation to the story. It's in this crossing of formal and narrative series that the unique charge of the image resides. Abé Mark Nornes, in a piece entitled 'The Riddle of the Vase' (2007), remarks that while Bordwell and Thompson effectively correct Richie's loose description of the shot as one that captures Noriko's point of view, which it does not, they fail to engage with why the image is so 'oddly powerful', a question which preoccupies Richie and Paul Schrader (p. 86).¹⁴ The image does not simply brake 'the narrative flow because of its indifference to Noriko's emotional situation' (Thompson & Bordwell 1976, p.65), but enters into that flow by standing in for an emotional 'event'.

While disputing Schrader's claim that the image occasions a transcendence of the everyday, Deleuze agrees with his contention that it 'links the everyday in "something unified and permanent"'. It brings together the everyday and a cosmic horizon, a single time: 'the visual reserve of events in their appropriateness' (1985/2005, p. 17). In this phrase, which is a reference to the *Shōbōgenzō*, written in the 13th Century by Dōgen, a Zen master of the Rinzai School, Deleuze reveals that he recognises an affinity between his own philosophy, Ozu's films, and the Zen notion of a 'reserve of events'. He, in fact, makes further reference to such a 'reserve' in both *The Fold* (1988/1993) and *What Is Philosophy?* (1991/1994). In the latter, he states that this 'reserve' marks out 'a horizon of events' that is 'independent of any observer and distributes events into two categories, seen and nonseen, communicable and noncommunicable' (p. 220n2). It is the source of all events, and within it horizons dependent on observers are established, within which some events can be perceived. 'As the Chinese (or Japanese) philosopher would say', Deleuze writes in *The Fold*, 'the world is the Circle, the pure "reserve" of events that are actualized in every self and realized in things one by one' (p. 106). Such a 'reserve of events' is also referred to as the 'secret part of the event that is at once distinguished from its own realization, from its own actualization, even though realization does not exist on the outside' (p. 105). In this view, the world and time are equated as the source – and thus part – of all events, both those within and outside human horizons, as well as,

14. See Richie (1974, p. 174) and Schrader (1972/1988, p. 49–51).

importantly, those events through which such horizons – within which legible, localised events become perceptible – are themselves produced.

In the *Time-Image*, Deleuze describes the distinction as one between man's banal horizon and an inaccessible and always receding cosmological horizon. In specifically cinematic terms, he claims that Ozu's still lifes not only interrupt the formation of a 'human' horizon through sensorimotor linkages, but move outside that horizon, constituting new types of connection between it and an absolute horizon beyond. Some 'still lifes' may thus be seen as not only or primarily transgressions of the development of a human story, but also as events that redefine both that story's relationship to an absolute horizon (which the world of the film at the least contains a gesture toward), and the relationship of humans to the world outside the perceptions of it they are able to form in pursuit of their needs or desires.

Rhythm: Duration and 'Legibility'

In examining the transformation of individuals and their relationships, as well as in observing the 'mutations' taking place in Japan at various points in time, Ozu occupies himself with transience at a human scale. But in carrying the form in which such changes take place into a narrative through which such transformations are explored, he moves toward an identification of incessant change and a permanence of which it is part. It is something like the inverse of the large-scale strategy realised through the employment of transitions made up of images of the natural world, which Klevan explores. Whereas such transitions generally embed human change in the greater permanence of the natural world (and establish a rhythm with the suggestion of rhythms at other scales within it), the image of the vase and bamboo silhouettes is a localised event that injects a link with permanence into the transformation in *Noriko*, making time suggest a 'hidden' meaning through rhythmic 'aberration'.

This relation between rhythm and the power attained by the image of the vase and *shoji* can be related to Burch's observation in *Practice in Film Theory* (1973) that a spectator's experience of a shot's duration is conditioned by its 'legibility'. Legibility refers for Burch, as it does for Bordwell, to our ability to see what the image offers us without having to attentively attempt to 'read' it. 'An uncomplicated two-second close-up', Burch writes, 'will appear to be longer than a long shot of exactly the same duration that is swarming with people; a white or black screen will appear to be longer still' (p. 52). This observation appears in a section in which Burch attempts to show the complexities involved in structuring a film along fixed rhythms. It is not only the length of the shot that matters when considering cinematic rhythm, he concludes, but also the amount of time

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it takes for us to recognise (consciously or not) that we have seen in the image what we were intended to see.

Shot length and legibility are thus two parameters that Burch sees involved in a fundamental structural dialectic, one which he argues should be exploited to creative ends rather than evaded by composing images for which the relation between the two terms is constant. In regard to Ozu, what is of interest is Burch's claim that one pole of such rhythmic innovation is the employment of shots that cause a 'tension' because we seem to be able to recognise what they offer in a far shorter amount of time than they remain on screen (1979, p. 53). Such a tactic may result, as he suggests, in boredom, but this is clearly not the case in the image of the vase and shoji. Rather, the tension developed here is a result of the fact that the time allotted, as well as the emotionally charged atmosphere into which it is inserted, suggest the importance of the image without revealing its meaning, a meaning that the remainder of the film will do little to clearly illuminate. Burch's argument here was also clearly influential on Deleuze, though Deleuze gives legibility the opposite meaning.¹⁵ The image becomes legible for him to the degree it makes us aware that it exceeds the role it plays, or simply does not play a role, as a sign in a sensorimotor schema. A legible image is an image we must read, in which habitual recognition fails to locate such signs, and such recognition is first of all dependent on the dialectic between shot length and what Deleuze calls the relative 'rarefaction' or 'saturation' of the image, its having, or seeming to have, too little or too much information to be taken in during the time it is onscreen (1983/2005, p. 13–4). Rarefaction, as in Ozu's work is found in images that 'place the whole accent on a single object', or images emptied of humans, which play no clear part in the development of sensorimotor relations (or the plot). We may need to do more than simply 'see' a rarefied image if it remains onscreen for an apparently excessive length of time.

The image of the vase first of all announces itself as an event, then, through the way it emphasises this dialectic between the parameters of shot length and legibility, in Burch's sense of the latter term. We must then retrospectively consider that a change has taken place while it was on screen, that it serves as a link between the two images of Noriko, with which it is – judging by her father's snoring, which continues from image to image – temporally contiguous. And because the length of the shot of

15. Nevertheless, Deleuze's notion of the legible image, or 'lectosign', is indebted to Burch's analysis of Ozu's work in *To a Distant Observer*, as is explicitly acknowledged (1985/2005, p. 275n41).

the vase seems to exceed that necessary for us to take in the information offered visually, time impresses upon us a weight that seems to demand that the image be read as intimately related to what is taking place narratively. Time ceases to arise from the connections between perceptions and actions, as a succession revealed by movement. Instead, it becomes an event in its own right, which is evident firstly from the force with which it brings out the importance of the dialectic between shot length and legibility and focuses our attention on the amount of time granted the image, and secondly from the teleological perspective in which it is the interval in which a transformation takes place in *Noriko*. Yet we may, prompted by Ozu's deployment of the image, 'read' even further, finding 'legible' in it, like Deleuze, an evocation of the unchanging form of all that changes, or, as I have asserted, an event of the identity of form and void.

Rock Garden (of Forking Paths)

We can though think of the first image of the vase and shoji not only as standing in for the transition that takes place in *Noriko*, as an interval of change, but also as binding her disparate states together. Her smile is bound to her tears in a single temporal movement. In this regard, it is important that her smile is associated with the marriage of Onodera, of which she is speaking to her father just before he falls (or pretends to fall) asleep. She expresses regret for having told Onodera it was 'unclean' of him to remarry, commenting that he and his new wife, Misako (Katsuragi Yōko), are perfect together. Thus, her smile, and apparent enthusiasm, is associated with this relationship, which appears to her as a 'good' marriage. It is not much of a stretch to imagine that her vision of the possibilities for her own marriage becomes more optimistic alongside this recognition. The sudden emotional turn would then be linked not to a contradictory thought, but rather to a correlated recognition: that even if her marriage is 'perfect', she will lose her relationship with her father. There is, we could say, no life without the embrace of change, no living without loss.

Thus, the film examines both the need to invent a new mode of existence to move forward, and, as Klevan argues, the loss that is inevitably brought about through such invention. Furthermore, this 'truth' about life, can be related to the pressing issue of forging some uneasy balance between tradition and progress in postwar Japan, between the promise of possibility in the new and the fear of losing what has grounded one, and given life meaning, in the past. From this perspective, it is not the case that, as Klevan contends, the 'inanimate vase' gives us a sense of [Noriko's] 'uncrystallised thoughts circling around varying

manifestations of stillness', stillness conceived as potentially both that of a tranquil marriage and an 'ornamental lifelessness' (p. 137). Rather, the image of the vase crystallises this conjunction of life as transformation and loss, and thus, as Rothman writes drawing on Klevan's claim, it can be seen as standing in for what Noriko sees in her mind's eye (2006, p. 40). It stands in, that is, for a recognition that links potential happiness with an accompanying sorrow, elation and nostalgia. The film does not affirm that the life to be lived will be worthy of what has been lost. But while offering no such guarantee, it does seem to present Somiya's view that Noriko must actively create a life with her husband, rather than fitting into an established model of marriage, as well as the tacit affirmation that such creation is not possible without loss of some form, as wisdom.

And, of course, there is a second image of the vase, which follows that of Noriko silently crying. About four seconds into this image, which lasts nine seconds, the sound of Professor Somiya's snoring is joined by a musical theme that serves as a bridge to the following scene, which tellingly takes place at the famous rock garden at the Ryōan-ji Zen temple in Kyoto. The musical bridge seems to both serve the familiar function of alerting us to the fact that a transition is about to occur, and to join this image to those of the rock garden that follow, such that we may feel that what Bordwell calls a 'categorical inclusion' is taking place (1988, p. 122). That is, we can see the image of the vase and silhouettes as being compared to, or, more to the point, belonging to the same class as, not only the images of the garden, but the garden itself, as associated with an aesthetic that is allied to a view of the nature of life [Figures 4–7].

The impossibility of ever knowing if an act that occasions loss will be worth it, and knowing about that impossibility: such is the immanence of human existence, and this perspective can be related to a recognition conveyed by rock gardens like that at Ryōan-ji. Burch actually uses rock gardens as his example when arguing that Ozu's films reflect the traditional Japanese belief that artistic representations of three-dimensionality should not allow the perceiver to take them for granted (1979, p. 160). He alludes to the fact that in such gardens there are fifteen stones, and that no matter where one sits on the veranda (like that upon which Somiya and Onodera sit in *Late Spring*), only fourteen can be seen. The fifteenth, it is said, can only be seen by someone who has experience *satori*, which is commonly, if incompletely, rendered as enlightenment. Thus such rock gardens emphasise our immanence in the world, since they place us in a position from which at least one element of a totality always escapes our perspective. They remind us that transcendence is denied us, but also that in contemplating this truth, or simply moving to a different position, we may transcend the limits of our own thought and



Figures 4–7: From the Inn to the Rock Garden

vision at a given moment. In this regard, we can think of Ozu's work from a broader point of view, of the new perspectives opened up by his constant recycling and reorganisation of versions of the same story, each giving us a new image of the world.

To assert that such a metaphysical vision is at work in *Late Spring*, or Ozu's films generally, is not necessarily to suggest the personal and social change explored in the films is diminished beneath thought of human knowledge as limited, as haunted by processes that elude representation. Such a thought is only part of everyday existence, nothing without it, incapable of wholly ameliorating the pain of personal loss, or resolving the claims of tradition and progress in the present. As Klevan perceptively argues, *Late Spring* evokes 'an everyday perspective where one cannot see the *complete* picture, so to speak. The film suggests that an all-embracing, long-term philosophy of an ongoing natural cycle cannot act as a consoling influence if a character, such as Somiya, is living and *feeling* a life day by day' (pp. 151–2). But whereas Klevan claims that the film's images of nature feel lifeless because they are without human movement (p.144), they seem to me to fill the film with a sense of the degree to which life exceeds the narrowly human horizons in which it appears to us in our

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everyday lives. That the numerous trees seen in transitions are alive with a life that moves at a scale significantly removed from our own, suggests not that such life is 'insubstantial' in comparison with the familial relationship explored, but that such relationships could themselves be clarified if one could understand the work of forces that escape human representation.

In any case, the films' linking of cosmic mystery with the travails of individuals and Japanese society, as well as their establishing its residence in everyday objects and ephemera, is an integral part of their wonder. The worlds constituted by Ozu's films relate scales of change in a manner that forcefully evokes the meaningfulness of such relation without fixing it. We may, like Deleuze, dwell upon the way Ozu's work, while never attempting to escape a human perspective, gestures toward the horizons of it, bringing us in contact with thought of what lies beyond. It is certain that such thought puts us on ground that is somewhat unstable. It also, though, reminds us why – however strong the arguments offered through consideration of the historical periods they address, or the aesthetic or philosophical traditions and notions they may be suggestive of – Ozu's films remain vital for many living far outside the contexts in and for which they were produced. There is no point at which that fifteenth stone will make itself available to us, such that we can close the book on an Ozu film, but our thought remains alive to the degree that we continue to formulate and multiply the way in which his works are able to move us, emotionally and cognitively, from one position to the next.

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