

Article

Camera Movement, Reading, and Coloniality in Ichikawa Jun's Film, *Tony Takitani*

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Abstract

The function of film grammar in the creation of narrative cinema is a central one when considering the realities of cinema as a global art. Since its birth from a confluence of European scientific and aesthetic principles, cinema has become a ubiquitous art form, but together with this growth has come the spread of those very principles from which cinema sprang. As an example, camera movement in Japanese film typically follows a grammatical pattern to privilege left-to-right, chronological movement as set by western cinema. That is, the camera will introduce information as a visual analogue to the process of reading a written, western text, with the lens operating very much as an eye in its trajectory across the 'page' of the screen. Building on work by Jean-Louis Baudry, Brian O'Leary and Jean Louis Comolli, this paper demonstrates this feature of Japanese cinema, using Ichikawa Jun's 2004 film, *Tony Takitani*, as a case study. Through a close reading of the film and its pattern of movement, this paper proposes that we may discern a symptom of the persistent inscription of coloniality imposed in and through cinema—the movement of the camera parodies reading but also accepts as natural an 'unnatural', western pattern of movement. The act of adaptation, too, both anticipates and supports the conception of cinema as reading-parody, with Murakami Haruki's short story "Tony Takitani" operating as a meaningful substratum to the process of vision-as-coloniality.

Keywords: Japan; cinema; camera movement; coloniality



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1. Introduction

In the journal, *Visual Communication*, Matthew Egizii et al. argue that "lateral directionality of film character and camera movement can affect spectator reactions" (Egizii et al. 2017, p. 222), and, further, that "the manner in which shots are edited together can indeed lead to an emotional response from the audience" (Egizii et al. 2017, p. 222). The implication here is that, in addition to the content of the cinematic narration, the *form* of presentation as well has a direct impact on the reception of that content. This is not a new implication, nor is it one especially unique to cinema. The relationship between form and content has been the subject of scholarly inquiry for rather a long time; that this relationship exists in the realm of cinema is not surprising.

However, Egizii's suggestion has a further implication that is germane to cinema, and that is that the very directionality of movement on screen can have a direct relationship to how an audience can receive a particular character or event. In this regard, the problem of the direction of movement carries with it a range of issues that are more complex than simply whether a character should move left-to-right, right-to-left, towards or away from the camera, etc. Movement on screen, as with virtually every other on-screen element,

presents an opportunity for an examination of ideology, for the *assumptions* around which direction feels more “natural” on screen come directly from the assumptions a director and audience make about the very definition of “natural” in the first place.

To put this another way, the basic question is, in which direction should a character move, should a camera move, should a *plot* move, to approach the next steps in the story? From which direction should new information arrive, and to which direction should our attention move to anticipate, expect, or meet that new information?

These questions lead us to the goal of this paper, and that is, to argue that the technical apparatus of the cinema and the assumptions about the correct uses and forms of that apparatus grow from a particular set of assumptions about perception and directionality of movement that are intimate products of a ‘western’, i.e., European aesthetic and scientific history which privilege ideologies of information delivery. That is, cinema—its look, its equipment, its practices—grows from an intellectual context in which ‘new’ information arrives from the right, and therefore *expects* a movement from left to right to anticipate that arrival. This is clear when we consider the writing systems of western languages, in which, without exception, ‘new information’ arrives along a horizontal plane from the right of the visual frame, necessitating a left-to-right movement of that visual frame to meet this new information. In short, cinema, in its fundamental visual form, accepts and recreates that horizontal plane, and privileges a pattern of movement which is predominantly (though not exclusively) from left to right.

That cinema, writing, and literature have an intimate relationship is a truism which masks within it a range of provocative questions. Interestingly, this relationship can often facilitate cinema parodying literature by borrowing its conventions for its own ends. The films of Wes Anderson, for example, often give sterling examples of the ways in which cinema can appear ‘literary’, utilising conventions or techniques such as use of titles, chapter markers, extensive lateral pans, on-screen quotes, or voice-over narration to provide narrative presence or to give an entry into the thoughts of a character.

Other techniques or conventions also highlight the relationship between literary and cinematic text. For example, the very substances and conceptions of narration itself come to cinema from literature—the use of characters, linearity and unity in plot, and so on represents assumptions about the process of ‘telling a story’ which cinema (like drama before it) has inherited from literary progenitors.

Cinema has by necessity adapted some of these techniques to its particular medium—after all, it cannot rely exclusively on intertitles or voice-over to provide information about action or character, nor can it tell ‘a story’ without characters, setting, and plot. Rather than reliance on words alone, of course, contemporary cinema utilises a range of sensual affects, especially what we may consider to be its ‘primary’ essence, *visuality*, to accomplish what literature accomplishes verbally. Nonetheless, as in literature, “classical narration quickly cues us to construct story logic (causality, parallelisms), time, and space in ways which make the events ‘before the camera’ our principal source of information” (Bordwell 1986, p. 24), but it is possible to conceive of cinema making use of the very *mechanisms* of this narration—the technical, technological apparatuses and processes of cinema itself—in ways which not only impart information but do so in critical ways.

The function of film grammar in the creation of narrative cinema is a central one in considering the realities of cinema as a global art. Since its birth from a confluence of European scientific and aesthetic principles, cinema has become a ubiquitous art form, but together with this growth has come the spread of those very principles from which cinema sprang. In particular, the use of camera movement as a means of ‘replacing’ verbal narration—especially description of setting or action—will be our central focus in this paper, aiming to demonstrate how the introduction of information through particular

patterns of camera movement in a given cinematic text both parodies the act of reading and invites a critique of what we may consider a continuing process of colonisation—the importation and application of ideological assumptions from one cultural setting to another, traditionally different one.

To clarify what I mean by this ‘continuing process of colonisation,’ let me describe the basic premise of my argument. Camera movement typically follows a grammatical pattern to privilege left-to-right, chronological movement, but this is an artefact set by a particular model, one applicable and made ‘logical’ by western cinema. That is, the camera will introduce information as a visual analogue to the process of reading a written, western text, with the lens operating very much as an eye in its trajectory across the ‘page’ of the screen. In that western languages are written from left to right, the process of acquiring new information about a text ‘logically’ follows that pattern and appears ‘natural’—but this logic, this naturalness, are things which *only* apply to languages which follow the same pattern. For a language such as Japanese, traditionally speaking, the ‘logical’ or ‘natural’ pattern for the acquisition of new information from a text is contrary to that for English, with the Japanese text introducing information from the top right of a page, and either down or to the left (or a combination of both of these directions); I will address this in greater detail below. Even such Japanese scroll paintings as run horizontally—artworks which we may consider as early, indigenous forerunners to Japanese artists’ adoption of photography and cinema—contain an explicit right-to-left narrative process. How is it, then, that Japanese film itself reproduces the left-to-right movement of western film in its patterning of introducing new information?

Building on work by Jean-Louis Baudry, Brian O’Leary and Jean Louis Comolli, I argue in this paper that the adoption of left-to-right camera movement by Japanese filmmakers is an example of what I term the technological though insidious “colonisation” of Japan continuing from the early years of the 20th Century to present. Camera movement, borrowing what for the traditional method of the introduction of textual information in the Japanese written context—right-to-left and top-to-bottom—is in fact the opposite direction of semiotic information or chronological flow, comes to represent a particular acceptance of a form of technological coloniality.

I will demonstrate, moreover, that despite the persistence of a ‘technologised coloniality’ within the conventions and techniques of Japanese cinema, it is possible to utilise these very techniques to invite a critique of both the continuing condition of ‘coloniality’ in visuality, on the one hand, and cinema’s relationship to literature, on the other. Through an emphatic use of camera movement and voice-over narration, cinema is capable of parodying the reading process to call into question the presence of an original literary text in a cinematic adaptation, to signal the potential for a resistance to the simple ‘faithfulness’ of adaptation, and assert a type of autonomy for the cinematic text independent of literary precedent.

Further, but secondarily, I will argue that, in Ichikawa Jun’s film, *Tony Takitani* (2004), this ‘autonomy’—by existing in a narrative explicitly ‘about’ a present moment sprung from a colonial past—is capable of critiquing both coloniality and the relationship of the present to the past, on top of its critical relationship to reading and a set of assumptions about reading which come into Japan from abroad.

I have used the phrase ‘technologised coloniality’ above, and this is one which invites comment. Japan has never been a ‘colony’ of a foreign power, in the sense that no foreign government or military force has occupied it with an aim to control it for the extraction of its resources, for example, in the way that much of North, Central, and South America were colonised by various European powers; even though for seven years from 1945 to 1952 military forces under the direction of General Douglas MacArthur, or SCAP, the Supreme

Commander of the Allied Powers, occupied Japan, this was a period of transition with relatively narrow goals: “The initial American strategy in Japan was encapsulated in two words: demilitarize and democratize” (Gordon 2003, p. 229), and while the American military was a visible, nearly ubiquitous presence in postwar Japan, it did not operate as a totalitarian force of coercion or change.

Despite the surface appearance of overwhelming American power in occupied Japan, both elites and ordinary citizens retained space to interpret the reforms of the occupiers. SCAP ruled indirectly, implementing changes through the existing Japanese bureaucracy. This choice was probably inevitable. The occupiers simply did not have sufficient personnel or language ability to staff a full government to put the vast changes into practice. Instead SCAP’s General Headquarters (GHQ) consisted of a shadow government of smaller offices parallel to the Japanese government bureaucracy. SCAP/GHQ passed orders to its Japanese counterparts through a liaison office staffed by bilingual Japanese officials. This structure offered government officials and other wartime elites some important room to maneuver, whether to resist or reshape the occupation directives. (Gordon 2003, p. 234)

And yet in many ways since the beginning of the Meiji Era in 1868 which saw Japan embark on an ambitious programme of recreating its industries and institutions along western lines, Japan has in fact been a ‘colony’ of the western world by virtue of the very technologies which Japan imported and adopted wholesale. Agriculture, manufacturing, corporate structure, education systems, fashion, food, even governmental institutions themselves all underwent dramatic and radical transformation (Gordon 2003, pp. 77–92), and while Japan certainly retained its sovereignty and political autonomy, in terms of *technology*, the differences between this willing adoption and outright colonisation offer an intriguing venue for debate. Japan’s transformation turned its cities into mirrors of the western world—outright colonisation would have accomplished something very similar. Japanese industry adopted the techniques and consequences of the industrial revolution; here, too, outright colonisation would have accomplished something similar. While my intention here is not to diminish or dismiss critiques of colonisation around the world, and certainly not Japan’s own imperialist, colonial enterprise and the destruction it caused, we may point to numerous such examples of Japan having adapted itself in ways which colonisation would have wrought upon it, even while fully recognising that Japanese sovereignty remained intact.

Through this adoption of technology and its underlying ideological assumptions (about capitalism, gender division and participation, the needs for resources and markets, and so on), Japan, following the Charter Oath of 1868, set itself on a path to adopting many of the institutions and assumptions of the western world (Gordon 2003, pp. 77–92), and we may use cinema as an illustrative example of the “look” and consequences of this programme. The phrase ‘technologised coloniality’ thus refers to all of these features, but also, and principally, in this paper I use it to refer to the adoption of the cinematic apparatus itself, something which exists precisely because of a set of western (European) scientific, optical, and aesthetic innovations and assumptions.

In this paper, I will analyse Ichikawa Jun’s film from 2004, *Tony Takitani*, a cinematic adaptation of the Murakami Haruki short story of the same name, through a close reading of the film and its pattern of movement as a case study to demonstrate both the standardisation of left-to-right movement in contemporary Japanese cinema, and the potential which cinema has to exaggerate its relationship to literature and writing, creating a parody of these other modes of creativity, something which Ichikawa’s film does especially well. This paper argues that here, we may discern both a symptom and a potential critique of

the persistent inscription of a coloniality imposed in and through cinema—we may argue that the movement of the camera parodies reading but also questions the acceptance as natural of an ‘unnatural’, western pattern of movement. The act of adaptation, too, both anticipates and supports the conception of cinema as reading-parody. In this, Ichikawa Jun has very cleverly chosen Murakami Haruki’s short story, “Tony Takitani,” itself a work critical of consumerism and interfamilial distance, to operate as a meaningful substratum to the process of vision-as-coloniality.

2. Reading Literature, Watching Cinema: Points of Departure

Here, an astute reader might point out that, at least since the postwar years, the printing of the Japanese language in a horizontal, left-to-right pattern, has become common, and this is certainly true. And yet, everywhere from newspapers to most pocketable novels, printing from top to bottom, right to left, remains the norm in Japan; Japanese cinema, however, despite the visual precedent of scroll paintings which I mentioned above, has never presented itself from top to bottom or right to left on the screen, instead adopting a visual field which primarily accepts the technical features and aesthetic assumptions of western film.

An equally astute reader may argue that Japanese artists and filmmakers alike have contributed much in their own right to innovations and developments in global cinema, and this is entirely true. Daisuke Miyao argues that even the Lumières brothers, early French pioneers of cinema as an artform worthy of attention and respect, received significant influence from Japanese arts during the late 19th Century when “le Japonisme” captured the European imagination, suggesting that “Japonisme-generated conversations and negotiations in the transnational flow of cinema during the period of global imperialism” (Miyao 2020, p. 8) influenced “compositional principles... and the new idea of a kinetic and corporeally grounded realism” (Miyao 2020, p. 9). Directors such as Kurosawa Akira borrowed from, and gave back to, genres as diverse as the detective story (*Tengoku to jigoku* (*High and Low*), 1963), the swashbuckling adventure (*Kakushi-toride no san-akunin* (*The Hidden Fortress*), 1958), the Western (*Yōjimbō*, 1961) and even adaptations of Shakespeare (*Ran*, 1985), and yet they did so using the apparatus of cinema without changing, challenging, or even paying especial attention to its underlying ideological dimensions. Further, it is also true that directors such as Quentin Tarantino have great admiration for Japanese films (Russell 2024, online), and so one may argue with solid justification that Japanese cinema and directors continue to influence global cinema. Nonetheless, until such time as the concept of a ‘normal lens’ changes its meaning considerably, western perspectives, assumptions, and principles will continue to dominate the visual aspects of global cinema—and it is these aspects and assumptions that are the primary concern of this paper.

Further, and using Kurosawa’s film *Rashōmon* (1950) to anticipate some of the arguments to come, it is worthwhile to point out how camera and character movement from right to left operate as a mechanism of destabilising narrative and chronological progression. The story of *Rashōmon*, which Kurosawa and scriptwriter Hashimoto Shinobu adapted from two of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s short stories, “Yabu no naka” (“In a Grove”) and “Rashōmon,” tells of three wanderers trapped at Kyoto’s Rashōmon Gate during a torrential rainstorm some time during the Heian Era (794–1185 AD). They fall into conversation, and relate to each other a strange tale which is occupying the attention of the local magistrate—a tale of an encounter between a bandit, a nobleman, and his wife, an encounter which resulted in the death of the nobleman and the arrest of the bandit. From shifting perspectives, each participant seeks to maximise his or her innocence, bravery, or nobility, while denigrating that of the others.

Interestingly, the film presents itself as fundamentally two stories—that of the wanderers trapped by the rain framing the ‘inner’ story of the bandit and nobles; this is a narrative structure which necessitates a series of flashbacks, or retrospectives on the part of the wanderers—and, *very* interestingly, the film introduces the first of these flashbacks through the use of a right-to-left camera and character movement, literally “going back in time,” against the expectations of “conventional” narrative and chronological progression. In this respect, *Rashōmon* and its use of movement highlights the very conventionality of the assumption that chronology and narrative both flow in a particular, “natural” direction, and underline ways in which reversing that flow can function literally to “go back” in time.

In a related way, Ichikawa Jun’s film *Tony Takitani* offers a range of theoretical comments on the relationship between cinema and literature. It is unashamedly an adaptation of a written work to a visual one—and a clever, thoughtful adaptation at that, making use of a number of techniques to call attention to the printed page while also altering (“adapting”) the ending in a powerful way. It is also an engagement with Japan’s historical process of adapting itself from an island nation separate from the Asian mainland to a militaristic, colonial power, and the consequences that then arose. Its story deals with two people adapting themselves to each other’s lives, and the challenges and consequences that come from adapting to an affluent, consumerist way of life. At root, however, this paper cannot deny the importance of the Murakami story to the film. Murakami Haruki first published a short version of “Tony Takitani” in the June, 1990 edition of the journal, *Bungei shunju*; a longer version of the story subsequently appeared in Volume 8 of Kōdansha’s *Murakami Haruki zensakuhin—1979–1989* (*Complete Works of Murakami Haruki—1979–1989*) in July of 1991.

This paper is primarily concerned with the presence of ‘literary’ elements within a specific work of cinema in order to analyse the function of ‘reading’ and parody within film, and from here to discuss the problem of coloniality. While the careful reader may indeed detect a subtext of adaptation running through this paper, that subtext serves as an informing, though informal, layer to the discussions to follow. The specific problems of parody and technologically necessitated coloniality, in the form of the use of specific features of the cinematic apparatus, are related to the issues of translation and adaptation but in ways which exceed the limitations of the literary/cinematic boundaries which typically prescribe debates about their interconnectivity. Putting those limitations aside by considering ways in which technology itself has been adapted, together with the underlying assumptions it makes about ‘naturalness’ or ‘logic’ in narrative, permits a more interesting approach to the issue of translation, change, and even resistance to coloniality through parody in an increasingly homogenised ‘world cinema’ that has had its visuality imposed upon it, rather than having borrowed or adapted at leisure existing techniques for its own look or purposes. “Certainly, movement on the screen is a part of the language of film that audience members might either consciously or subconsciously apprehend” (Egizii et al. 2017, p. 223), and thus has a direct relationship to the ways in which ideology can spread and bring with them assumptions about propriety, naturalness, and visuality—as well as further political implications which take on increasing importance in an emerging uni-, bi-, or multi-polar world.

I should note at the outset that, unlike literature (that is, the writing of literary works: poetry, prose, fiction, non-fiction alike), but similar to the theatre (plays, opera, and so on), cinema is a cooperative enterprise in which actors, writers, composers, and experts in lighting, camera work, and film development come together to create a complete, unitary work of art. *Tony Takitani* is no exception—Ichikawa Jun worked collaboratively with actors (Ogata Issei, Miyazawa Rie, Nishikima Hidetoshi), a composer (Sakamoto Ryūichi), and a superb cinematographer (Hirokawa Taishi) to craft every aspect of this film. In

what follows, I will speak of Ichikawa Jun, the director, as almost a shorthand for this collaborative ensemble, not to diminish their contributions to the finished film, but simply for the sake of convenience—and, further, to acknowledge that, ultimately, it is the director who “directs,” and brings the skills and abilities of the contributors together in a way which is coherent and (ideally) effective. “Ichikawa Jun” can serve here as a collective noun representing the totality of talent responsible for the creation of the film, while also serving as the name of the director whose responsibility it was to bring these individuals together to cooperate in the act of creation.

3. The Context: Cinematic Apparatus and Ideology

That cinema has been complicit in an ideological imposition has certainly not gone unnoticed, but typically this notion has considered the ways in which film has presented a view of visuality based on a western model as appropriate for the developing world. As Philip Rosen writes,

Hollywood filmmaking has dominated our conception of what a ‘normal’ movie is since the formation of the film studio apparatus since roughly 1910 and the early 1920s. Thus the U.S. film industry can be treated. . . as the most influential model of filmmaking practice in history. . . there are certain identifiable parameters of form and style which have for the most of film history served as norms and limitations throughout the world, and these norms are associated most closely with the kinds of films produced most successfully and extensively in the American narrative film industry. (Rosen 1986, p. 8)

These ‘norms and limitations’ emerge directly from the *content* of film—from its characters and narratological method of ordering the construction of its stories, and from the specific genres into which these stories fall. ‘Classical’ western film has established particular patterns as necessary in narrative, and from these patterns comes the conception of film as a ‘modern’ art form with particular requirements adopted as ‘universal’.

Indeed, Hollywood screenplay-writing manuals have long insisted on formula which has been revived in recent structural analysis: the plot consists of an undisturbed stage, the disturbance, the struggle, and the elimination of the disturbance. Such a . . . pattern is the inheritance not of some monolithic construct called the ‘novelistic’ but of specific historical forms: the well-made play, the popular romance, and, crucially, the late nineteenth-century short story. The characters’ causal interactions are thus to a great extent functions of such *syuzhet/fabula* patterns. (Bordwell 1986, p. 19)

It is the adoption of these ‘patterns’ as the best model for cinema’s narrative endeavours that creates and feeds into a conception of ‘cinema’ and what is appropriate, suitable, and ‘right’ therein in non-western nations, and is responsible for a type of visual and narratological homogenisation in world cinema.

That there are definite ideological assumptions at play is something to which Lubomir Kocka calls attention. Kocka argues that the goal of cinema and cinematography is to reproduce in two dimensions the three dimensions of reality convincingly and closely.

In order to successfully visually communicate with the audience and keep them emotionally invested, art and shot design must go hand in hand. They have to follow some fundamental design principles and rules. The goal is not to create merely aesthetically pleasing scenes, but to create scenes which will clearly communicate ideas and messages, scenes which will believably and plausibly portray characters, scenes which will have the biggest possible emotional impact on the audience. In order to achieve these goals and create a well-crafted film,

it is important to stage and block scenes properly; decide on camera angles and camera movement; decide on character's eyesight and body orientation; decide on lateral movement of performers; and decide on the spatial organization and orientation of all elements in a composition. (Kocka 2021, p. xv)

This process of selection, choice, and presentation must follow from aesthetic principles, of course, but at root aesthetics, like all ideologies, grow from specific contexts. These contexts and their assumptions are always present, for "as a film progresses, a visual language communicates with the viewer's subconsciousness, creating a sense of logic everywhere—in story movement; in the creation of believable characters; in character development; in conveying emotions; and in creating the mood" (Kocka 2021, p. xvi). This "logic" can be insidious and problematic—not in the sense of corrupting of morality, for example, but in the sense of making the promotion or acceptance of a particular attitude towards perspective or visuality seem inevitable and *de rigueur*. Kocka himself points to this when he writes,

I believe there is a universal law or a universal cognitive principle that rules lateral organization and drives us to scan from left to right. I lean toward a view based on the claim that lateral orientation is a universal phenomenon. Regardless, if the theory of left-right/right-left orientation and regularities is woven into shot design, the result can be a highly subjective and successful handling of characters and viewers alike. If mishandled or ignored, left-right/right-left orientation may leave the viewer questioning the story; if used to the film's advantage, the viewer will be deeply moved. (Kocka 2021, p. xxii)

Note the *ease* with which Kocka presents this idea of universality, while conflating it with the principles of reading which govern European writing systems. This is the very issue of ideology to which Jean-Louis Baudry himself points, when he writes, "Does the technical nature of optical instruments, directly attached to scientific practice, serve to conceal not only their use in ideological products but also the ideological effects which they may provoke themselves? Their scientific base assures them a sort of neutrality and avoids their being questioned" (Baudry and Williams [1974] 1986, p. 40). Baudry further identifies the ideological assumptions implicit but not always obvious in cinematography:

We must first establish the place of the instrumental base in the set of operations which combine in the production of a film. ... Between 'objective reality' and the camera, site of the inscription, and between the inscription and projection are situated certain operations, a work which has as its result a finished product. To the extent that it is cut off from the raw material ("objective reality") this product does not allow us to see the transformation which has taken place. Equally distant from "objective reality" and the finished product, the camera occupies an intermediate position in the work process which leads from raw material to the finished product. (Baudry and Williams [1974] 1986, p. 40)

Chelsea Birks, in summarising André Bazin, argues,

the objectivity of cinema is based on our psychological impressions of reality because the camera sees more or less as we see, but the automatic, mechanized process involved in representation works to conceal cinema's basis in subjective impressions. Bazin's realism therefore rests not on the simplistic idea that cinema is able to give us direct access to objective reality but on the fact that it provides a subjective impression of objectivity. ... Cinema might represent a desire to produce a perfect reproduction of reality (Bazin calls this the "myth of total cinema"), but it will always fall short because of the particularities of its perspective. Like ours, cinema's view of the world is only partial, deficient, and incomplete. Its

objectivity does not imply totality: to borrow the logic of speculative realism, the reality reproduced by cinema is not exhausted by the camera's access to it. (Birks 2018, p. 10)

Birks astutely notes here that the perspective of the camera is “more or less” that of the human eye, but also, and this is the key point, always “partial, deficient, and incomplete”—something which, of course, cinematography and directorial choice exaggerate and use to specific artistic or aesthetic ends. The problem comes to us when the perspective of cinema, growing from particular sets of apparatus and the ideology behind them, appear to be ‘universal, logical, or natural’. This is a problem which filmmakers *outside* of the western context face, for it is one which in many ways *requires* the acceptance of western aesthetics, ideologies, and perspectives.

Because cinema is a technology invented by humans, it is of course bound to be related to us in some way, but that relationship does not only go in one direction: we both affect and are affected by cinema.

Crucially, however, cinema also reveals that these encounters are never neutral or uncontaminated by human perspectives and ideological structures. The apparatus of cinema establishes a mode of perception before the spectator encounters any specific impressions of reality on-screen, and this mode of perception is conditioned by both the material objects involved (camera, projector, screen) and the ideological structures that gave rise to those objects. Baudry's apparatus theory explains cinematic realism by looking at subjectivity and objectivity in relation to each other; although unlike speculative realism it cannot do without a theory of subjectivity, it also cannot do without the mechanical elements involved in cinematic representation. The ideological effects of cinema have a material basis, as they are not imposed on it from the outside but are part of its material functioning as a technical apparatus. (Birks 2018, p. 10)

In short, cinema operates as a doorway to westernisation, which in many instances dangles the tantalising prize of *modernisation*, but also always has within it the risk of colonisation.

4. The Context: Ideology and Expectation

Numerous scholars such as William O. Gardner, Isolde Standish, and of course Donald Richie have explored ways in which cinema functions as an inspiration for Japanese artists and audiences alike in the early years of the 20th Century, by focussing on the conscious emulation of western film patterns by Japanese directors. Even directors critical of Japan's continuing flirtations and fascinations with the non-Japanese, technologised, institutionalised world, such as Kinugasa Teinosuke in his early *Kurutta ippeiji* (*A Page of Madness*, 1926), used the formal qualities of western experimental film—double exposure, cross-cutting, split-screen effects, distortion of the cinematic image, and so on—to create a vision of Japan being driven insane by the pressures of imposed western identities, while equally criticising the persistence of a ‘traditional’ form of community as a mask placed overtop of madness. But what we have in all of these instances is a tacit acceptance of the ‘look’ of film—of its perspectives, its lighting, its creation of space and depth within the boundaries of the projected frame—as inviolate, as of necessity corresponding to a particular model growing forth from a root manifestly not Japanese.

In short, film historians, commentators, even filmmakers have yet to question the easy acceptance of an imported conception of visual ‘reality’ which derives precisely from artistic practice developed within a particular historical, geographical, and even ideological context. This context, of course, is European in origin, although it had been developed in

the United States of the late 19th Century before being exported so effectively throughout the developing world in the early years of the 20th. Typically, however, the understanding of the exportation of cinema as an artistic medium has focussed on the aesthetic conditions of the finished, cinematic product—that is, film history has been the chronology of *film* and directors; of art. This is natural, but it hides the underlying exportation of a very particular ideological component vital to the very conception of ‘cinema’ itself.

Jean-Louis Comolli, writing in France in the early 1970s, has described the need to create a ‘materialist history’ of film, one which is capable of accounting for the relationship between a particular attitude toward conceptions of ‘reality’ and the technical developments in the mechanisms and sciences of art necessary for enabling their expression. That is to say, a materialist history—opposed to an ‘idealist’ or aesthetic history concerned only with chronology and the development of techniques seemingly separate from the economic, political, and technological realities around them—would understand the function which ideology has in driving forward technical innovation. For Comolli, ‘conventional’ histories of art (cinema for our purposes) amount to “the selection and review of the greatest possible number of technical, stylistic, and formal innovations, each of which is presented (and researched) as the initiator of a succession of aesthetic developments. . . the culmination of the process is the cinema practiced at the time that the given historian writes, when it is discovered in its final and *perfected* form” (Comolli 1986, p. 425).

In this view, technical innovation is isolated from motivating factors in its development—it, the innovation, is a given which compels artistic/aesthetic practice. “The fault. . . [in this aesthetic/idealist history] is that it explains technical transformations through other technical transformations, never for a moment considering that these transformations do not come about ‘freely’, that they bring into play economic forces and forces of work, in short, economically and socially programmed demands” (Comolli 1986, p. 437)—in a word, ideology.

For Comolli, this is contrary to the true conditions pertinent to innovation—artistic vision driven by an ideological assumption is what compels technical innovation to bring about an ideologically validated goal: “a gain in realism” (Comolli 1986, p. 437). Western aesthetics which developed through ideology steeped in the demands and practices of science and rationality *require* art to function in particular ways, and this requirement in turn propels artistic technical innovation. Technology becomes the handmaid to artistic, ideologically informed expressions of ‘reality’ conceived of in particular ways.

Seen this way, cinema emerges as an answer to specifically ideological problems posed in technical terms, through codes established by generations of philosophical and spiritual assumptions, refined through the scientific method, and conventionalised through historical progress. Cinema grows from the codes of both theatre and the static visual arts—“the ideological instrument cinema is itself produced within these codes and systems of representation, completing, perfecting, and surpassing them. . . . Contrary to what the technicians seem to believe, the restoration of movement and depth [to the static visual images of painting and photography] are not the effects of the camera, but the camera is the effect—the solution—to the problem of their restoration” (Comolli 1986, p. 434), something demanded by the ideological assumptions of the social and historical realities in which cinema *by necessity* ‘appeared’.

Thus for Comolli, ideology—the specific conceptions of reality which dictate its expression in art—has propelled the development of technical innovations to permit an ever-increasing degree of ‘realism’ in the European context, from the Renaissance establishment of perspective to the mechanical refinements of optical lenses and, in the context of cinema, specific developments in the light sensitivity of film emulsions. These issues taken together have occurred, in many ways, invisibly or beneath the surface, as it were—

ideology's driving force does not manifest itself as something extrinsic to the social system in which it has operated, but rather as the 'natural' or proper way of developing a mode of expression.

Daisuke Miyao also addresses the issue of economic motivation behind the development of cinema, when, in discussing the business activities of the Lumière brothers, he writes,

It is true that the Lumière brothers were industrialists. Their letters of correspondence with various scientists and craftsmen clearly indicate that they were keen to use the best devices created by others and to add new technical solutions to succeed in the photography business. The number of patents that they obtained helped to establish their company. (Miyao 2020, p. 31)

As we can see, artistic expression is thus a response to attitudes towards reality informed by precisely the economic, political, philosophical, and spiritual conditions of the society which supports it—and technology or technical innovation, the things which permit artistic advance, are not separate 'entities' in dialogue with art or society but rather themselves specific expressions of an underlying ideological assumption. As Jean-Louis Baudry has pointed out,

central in the process of production of the film, the camera—an assembly of optical and mechanical instruments—carries out a certain mode of inscription characterised by marking, by the recording of differences of light intensity. . . . Fabricated on the model of the camera obscura, it permits the construction of an image analogous to the perspective projections developed during the Italian Renaissance. Of course, the use of lenses of different focal lengths can alter the perspective of an image. But this much, at least, is clear in the history of cinema: it is the perspective construction of the Renaissance which originally served as model. (Baudry and Williams [1974] 1986, pp. 288–89)

That there is ideology at play here is immediately apparent, for the construction of a particular perspective within a frame and the designation of that as 'normal' implies the rejection of other perspectival possibilities as *not* normal. These other perspectives are indeed found in film. Wide-angle lenses to increase the apparent available space and expand the feeling of depth or telephoto lenses to bring distant objects nearer but also to 'flatten' an image and apparently diminish the relative depth of a field of vision are common tools of both photography and cinematography, but their use is defined "in comparison with so-called 'normal' perspective" (Baudry and Williams [1974] 1986, p. 289) and is typically in response to a particular compositional or logistical problem.

Filmmakers generally use these 'alternative' lens choices sparingly, but even so, as Baudry correctly asserts, their use "does not destroy [traditional] perspective but makes it play the role of norm" (Baudry and Williams [1974] 1986, p. 289). As Comolli corroborates, 'normal' lenses (with focal lengths of 35–55 mm in 35 mm photography) were adopted *as the norm* because they "restored the spatial relationships which corresponded to 'normal vision' and. . . they therefore played their role in the production of the impression of reality to which the cinematograph owed its success" (Comolli 1986, p. 433). This norm may correspond to unaided vision, i.e., to a physiological condition of human sight, but here too we have a mechanical imposition, a compromise, serving as the model of normality, in that human vision is stereoscopic, while the camera is (typically) capable of producing only a monocular image. The reduction in a stereoscopic image to a monocular one necessarily entails the construction of a convention—half the image must be eliminated, after all, and the result must be captured on a two-dimensional plane.

Granted, the ability of artists to create on that two-dimensional plane the illusion of depth and fullness, as well as of shading, colour, gradation, movement, and nuance, amounts to a triumph of human technical achievement, and yet the *insistence* that art must contain these things—and this perspective, first and foremost—is a reduction in the human artistic potential to a particularly limited vision of creativity. Ironically, at the moment in history, the late 19th Century, when photographic (and soon thereafter cinematic) vision was being stabilised as ‘the norm’, western artists were beginning to experiment with form, lighting, and, indeed, perspective in ways which “broke” traditionally established conventions through, for example, the work of the Impressionists, Expressionists, Cubists, and later Dadaists and Surrealists. Ironically, too, at the time when Japanese artists were learning those western conventions and adopting them as ‘modern’, western artists were learning from Japanese prints new artistic possibilities and rules for expression. The waves of ‘Japonisme’ which washed over Europe and the United States and brought so much vibrancy and validation to western avant-garde art (Miyao 2020, pp. 19–39) did not pull back, in their undertow, a corresponding ‘bravery’ sufficient for Japanese artists to resist the conception of a ‘normal’ visual perspective alien to that of the *ukiyo-e* or scroll-painting.

5. Cinematic Movement: Textual Interventions in the Visual Field

As I have argued above, an imported—or, as I have said, imposed—perspective has become established in cinema as the norm in global cinema. Together with this perspective comes a corresponding convention in terms of camera movement. The problem is of the direction of introduction of new information. Western cinematography favours this introduction with a camera movement from the left to the right, such that ‘new’ information arrives at the right-hand edge of the screen, as it does for the eye moving over a page of text printed in a western language. This has been established as ‘normal’ but manifestly it is not normal in the context of the Japanese language. How this movement stands as the norm and how its use may be subverted will form the subject of our present considerations through Ichikawa Jun’s film, *Tony Takitani*.

As Brian O’Leary demonstrates, writing itself forms a conception of the world which will differ based on specific societies—depending upon precisely *how* those societies write. O’Leary’s research is in effect to resurrect the importance of linguistics in film theory, and to return in particular the work of several independent linguistic researchers to what he feels is its rightful position of, if not prominence, at least respect and attention. These linguists are Michael Halliday, Theo van Leeuwen, and Michel Colin. It is not appropriate here to discuss O’Leary’s interpretation of the work of these various semioticians, beyond to summarise his use of their work as a project to demonstrate the validity of a ‘functional semiotic’ approach to visual expression in cinema. In this, he has conducted a persuasive experiment to determine the extent to which the conventions of western writing systems operate in cinema, and has demonstrated that indeed, the assumption borne by western writing, that ‘new’ information will appear ‘from’ the right and proceed to the left of a line of type, transfers very readily into cinematic visuality, with the technique of panning following this pattern significantly more frequently than not.

O’Leary builds on several assumptions, or predictions regarding camera movement, proposed by Michel Colin. These assumptions are as follows: “(1) Due to horizontal vectorialisation of the image, pans will occur more often than tilts; (2) Due to the simplicity of concatenation over expansion (or, in linguistic terms, branching over embedding), pans (which create branching) will occur more often than zoom outs (which create embedding); (3) Due to the organisation of discourse according to the principles of functional grammar, pans to the right will outnumber pans to the left” (O’Leary 2003, pp. 204–5). He begins with the question, “Are there identifiable regularities in the way visual discourse is constructed

and interpreted (that is, written and read)?” (O’Leary 2003, p. 199), and answers tentatively that “the most important visual organising principle that comes from linguistics is the vectorialisation of narratives according to a left-to-right reading. This generalisation is culture based, of course, applying to the West and areas heavily influenced by Western language and culture” (O’Leary 2003, p. 199).

As O’Leary states, paraphrasing Colin, the regularities in the construction of shots and the accompanying visual presentation of information “conform to the linguistic principles of the written language in which the image makers and users. . . achieved their linguistic competence” (O’Leary 2003, p. 199). From here, O’Leary sets out to demonstrate how such a tentative answer to this fundamental question may be proven based on an analysis of ‘classical’ Hollywood cinema. Although O’Leary restricted his representative sample of American films to this made during the ‘golden years’ of Hollywood’s studio system—between the 1930s and the 1950s—his results are applicable to contemporary film, as well. Further sampling and analysis would demonstrate similar patternings of movement in European films. O’Leary’s work, together with Comolli’s and that of Baudry, has significant implications for *non-western* film—for our purposes, Japanese film in general but Ichikawa Jun’s work in particular. In it, and despite the ‘foreignness’ of such movement patterns, we find a preponderance of movement patterning very similar to that found in western film. Our purpose here will be to demonstrate this in *Tony Takitani*, and to speculate on some of the critical possibilities of this movement pattern.

6. Case Study: Tony Takitani

As a preparatory comment to his interview with Ichikawa Jun, Andrew Heskins writes,

Jun Ichikawa is rightly pleased of *Tony Takitani*. It’s the sort of film he always wanted to make, one that ‘whispers’. Even when he used to direct commercials, and made rather a successful career out of it, people would ask him to be louder or noisier. Haruki Murakami’s short story was the perfect match to make that ‘whisper’ happen. The only thing is, Jun is so quietly spoken I begin wonder how metaphorical he is being. (Heskins 2006)

One of the things that Ichikawa enjoyed in the process of transferring Murakami’s story to the screen was the very camera movements that make the film such a critical comment on reading:

He enjoyed the process of adapting someone else’s work, rather than creating an original piece. But, at a relatively brief 75 min in running time, did he not feel tempted to flesh out characters and situations in the film that were only hinted at in the original story, like Ang Lee did with his adaption of *Brokeback Mountain*? ‘No,’ he replies, smiling when I tell him it was over two hours long. ‘I liked the format of the camerawork, passing from scene to scene smoothly, as the passage of time moves quickly. We don’t stop. I didn’t think it necessary to make a much longer film!’ (Heskins 2006)

Additionally, and as a further parallel to the reading process, a process fundamentally different to the process of encountering a film, play, opera, or even a television commercial, Ichikawa has suggested that making this film was an opportunity to enjoy a “quiet” work: “When I was a commercial director people often said ‘You’re whispering, can you make it louder, or noisier.’ It was a very common thing. But I didn’t want to” (Heskins 2006). It’s true that *Tony Takitani* is a relatively quiet film—the music (by the composer Sakamoto Ryūichi) is subdued, the conversations are *conversational*, without dramatic shifts in volume or intensity, the lighting is generally devoid of great shifts in intensity, and even during

the scenes involving Tony's father playing in the jazz bar, the music's tone and volume harmonise with the tone of the rest of the film.

Ichikawa Jun enjoyed an increasingly successful reputation before his untimely death at the age of 53 in 2008. His career as a director spanned nearly twenty years, beginning with the relatively short mystery, *Ho-ryu-ki* from 1986, till his final two films in 2008 and (posthumously) 2009, *Sūtsu wo Kau (Buying a Suit)* and *Tokyo rendering kashu*, respectively. These last two approach documentary to greater or lesser extent, with his final film consisting of a series of questions and answers on the streets of Tokyo. *Tony Takitani* represents, therefore, the work of an accomplished, mature director, working with an accomplished, mature team to create an emotional rich, captivating story.

This film presents a simple story of loss and recovery. Takitani Tony (Ogata Issei) is the principal character, whose life we follow from his youth to middle age. The film utilises voice-over narration to introduce its setting and main events: we meet, first, a jazz musician—Takitani Shozaburo (Ogata Issei)—who, in the 1930s, had been forced to leave Japan for China as a result of 'shady dealings'. This man is Tony's father; he stays in Shanghai throughout the war till, at its close, his past catches up with him and he is arrested, imprisoned, and on the verge of being executed. Avoiding this fate (though the narrative never tells us how), he returns to Japan where he cooperates with the American military forces during the Occupation. He marries and has a son, whom he names 'Tony' after one of his American military colleagues, thinking that the American influence on Japan will continue. From here, the narration focusses on Tony and his growth as a shy 'outsider' who becomes a successful illustrator. Although typically withdrawn from society and working, for the most part, from his home, he happens to meet a woman, Konuma Eiko (Miyazawa Rie), who captivates him. He falls in love, telling his father—on one of their brief and infrequent meetings—that he is impressed by how she wears her clothes.

Clothing becomes an obsession for Eiko after they marry—she tells Tony that somehow clothes fill up what is missing inside her. She spends her time, energy, and much of Tony's income on purchasing an 'astounding' amount of new, designer clothing, enough to fill in their home a large room which they have converted to a closet. Becoming concerned for her obsession, Tony asks her to consider purchasing less. Eiko agrees to try, even returning some of the clothing she has bought—but, after doing so, she regrets herself, and, turning back to retrieve the pieces, she is killed in an auto accident. Tony, devastated by her loss, tries to overcome his grief by hiring a young woman—Hisako (also played by Miyazawa Rie)—to serve as an assistant but, more importantly, to wear Eiko's clothing and so to help Tony realise her absence. Hisako, although puzzled by the request, agrees, and yet when she sees the enormous number of clothes available, she breaks down into tears. Tony, although he sends her away with a week's worth of clothing for her to wear as her 'uniform', reconsiders, and telephones Hisako to cancel her employment. In loneliness, Tony disposes of his wife's clothing. His father soon passes away, leaving Tony his collection of old jazz records, of which, in turn, Tony disposes. The film ends with Tony attempting to reach Hisako to renew their relationship.

For the most part, the film is a faithful adaptation of Murakami Haruki's short story, "Tony Takitani," from 1990, maintaining the same characters and plot points (up until the ending, which Ichikawa and his screen writer changed, effectively accentuating the optimism of Tony's and Hisako's continuing relationship). Despite the relative simplicity of the story—few characters, linear plot, few direct, dramatic exchanges between the characters, relatively little 'action' and most of what does occur coming through expository narration rather than through visual demonstration—there are several thematic issues that are especially interesting. Chief of these are the issues of Japan's colonial/wartime past as a starting point for the narration and the relationship between the events implicit in that point

and the obvious critique of consumerism coming later on in the film, and the issue of female identity—or, more properly, its lack—in relation to that consumerism. The suggestion that Eiko feels ‘complete’ only when she’s buying clothing is a particularly poignant acknowledgement of the problematic aspects of contemporary consumer culture—and the plot point of Eiko’s death coming directly as a result of trying to fight her consumerist compulsion is especially pessimistic about the possibility for change.

These points are certainly worthy of deep and careful analysis, for the story and film both highlight the tragic aspects of consumerism in persuasive, though highly gendered, ways. Other key points which deserve critical attention are the resolutely urban aspects of the setting, and the resistance to references of “Japaneseness” in the film, beyond the opening minutes. This work could effectively have been set anywhere with—for the most part—only slight changes in the corresponding interpretive possibilities arising from location. Nonetheless, as I will argue, this lack of ‘national specificity’ is in itself important and indicative of meaning. While these aspects, especially the critique of consumerism, are valid and worthy of study, they are outside of my present focus, which is on the visual presentation of the film’s narrative.

Mark Schilling has written about the film,

Based on a story by Haruki Murakami about an introverted illustrator (Issei Ogata) with a fashion-crazed wife (Rie Miyazawa), *Tony Takitani* may have had certain affinities with Ichikawa’s earlier films, from the withdrawn personality of the hero to the restraint of the shotmaking, but it was in fact another experiment, with a laterally moving camera shifting from scene to scene, like sliding picture cards in a *kamishibai* (traditional picture play), as a dulcet-voiced narrator told the story. It won the Special Jury Prize, Youth Jury Prize and FIPRESCI Prize at the Locarno fest, as well as many honors elsewhere, but I found it overly stagey and literary (though Murakami himself apparently loved it). (Schilling 2008)

Beyond the thematic issues contained within the plot of the film, its real interest for our purposes here comes from its method of presenting those themes. That is, the visuality of the film and its technical approach to the challenges of its narration present us with opportunities for analysis of a subtle though insistent parody of, first and foremost, reading, but also, the colonial reality of Japan’s past and present. This ‘colonial reality’ comes in direct reference to Japan’s wartime experience as is made obvious by the use of still photographs at the film’s outset to situate its subject temporally, but also and critically in the very cinematic techniques which create that visuality itself. These techniques call attention to themselves repeatedly and exaggeratedly—effectively to create the opportunity for a critique of contemporary Japan as (still) a ‘colonised’ country.

There are numerous instances of “literariness” influencing the visuality of Ichikawa’s adaptation, in addition to directorial intervention in the plot itself to heighten its optimistic humanism.

One of the primary examples of visual response to literary adaptation comes in the relative “flatness” of the images here—through the use of a short telephoto lens, which to me appears to be of a focal length of from 70 to 85 millimetres, the *mise en scène* is typically very shallow, with the background relatively close to the foreground, or else thrown out of focus to minimise feelings of depth in the composition. Walls, windows framing views onto out-of-focus trees in full leaf, interior shots of small rooms, even the surface of a roadway are all objects which at various points of the film block the background, serving to limit depth of the image, but also, providing a “page” on which the action of the film takes place. This use of the roadway, in particular, offers an innovative method of introducing a character—at one point, as Hisako arrives, she seems to drift or rise up out of the roadway as she approaches the camera, her head appearing first, then shoulders, and so on. In

this way, Hisako's increasing height indicates her increasing proximity to the camera—a remarkable moment that echoes the ways in which size can indicate proximity in drawing, by having the character or object move *away* from the vanishing point of classical painting and *towards* the vantage point of the spectator. In the film, this arrival emphasises the lack of background depth, further limiting the characters and diegetic space to a shallow plane, one which extends more horizontally, along, rather than “into” the screen.

A further scene with Eiko emphasises the flatness of the visual image—when Eiko is washing her car, there is literally no background, for she does so standing against a background of moving leaves. Here, the camera presents Eiko without depth, without space to ‘sink into’ behind her, and only horizontal, lateral movement available to her, very much as the eye can only move laterally on the printed page, either moving ‘forward’ to the right to read more, or ‘backward’ to the left to re-read an amusing passage. Focusing attention on this lateral plane emphasises the flatness, the page-like quality, of the screen and the dramatically two-dimensional image it presents.

In this way Ichikawa has structured the look of *Tony Takitani* to resist a ‘typical’ cinematic presentation. The effect works in tandem with other technical and performative issues to accentuate the presence of the printed word within this cinematic experience. A further example of this comes in the opening montage of photographic images of Shanghai in the 1930s, to establish the colonial episode in the life of the protagonist's father, uniting him with the reality of Imperial Japan. These static images could be equally at home within the opening pages of a textbook or novel; their transitions are analogous to the turning of pages as a prelude to the act of reading.

And, finally, we have the use of voice-over narration to give us access to the thoughts of the characters in ways commonplace in literature but less so in film; here, however, the voice-over comes in two forms. One is the ‘usual’ form of an off-screen narrator describing or explaining a situation. This off-screen narrator is not part of the diegetic world of the film and is directly comparable to the narrator of the Murakami short-story. The voice is male, omniscient, and, for the most part, unobtrusive—providing only enough information as is necessary to establish the situation of the plot and characters. The lines of this narrator come from the Murakami story verbatim, permitting ‘him’ to function analogously in both cases. The innovative use of voice-over in this film, however, comes from the characters themselves. Throughout the film, many of the characters have occasion to supplement the narrator by providing—typically in third-person voice—their own thoughts or impressions about a situation or event. This happens when they are alone on screen, but even, in one poignant scene, when Tony and his wife are together. This type of voice-over removes the characters from the diegetic time of the cinematic narrative while maintaining them within diegetic space. It provides a complex and nuanced comment on the function of narration itself—not of *narrative*, of which it remains a component, but of the act of deliberate and direct address of the implicit audience by a character who remains fictive.

This type of narration, where an omniscient, separate narrator “tells” the story while characters themselves occasionally offer glimpses into their thoughts or moods, is relatively common in Japanese literature. It is a feature which the Japanese language itself facilitates—the use of pronouns in Japanese is less common or “necessary” than in English, for example, in that context often provides sufficient information to indicate who is speaking or narrating, but it is relatively uncommon, nonetheless, in cinema.

These literary acknowledgements on the part of Ichikawa are impressive of the presence of the ‘page’ on screen, but they do not critique that presence or the process of cinema as part of a larger, more insidious coloniality. That is, they are not culturally bound, in the sense that they do not contain within themselves an indication of the cultural venue which inspired them. The flat, printed page of a pre-modern Japanese novel is ‘the same’ as the flat,

printed page of a Victorian novel in the overall ‘look’ of each. A voice-over narrator functions as ‘the voice’ of Ihara Saikaku as well as of Dickens—and while characters narrating their own thoughts is amusing, it is not a critical response to the problem of demonstrating state of mind. Where we do find critique is in something fundamental to cinema and its presentation of the narrative through one specific aspect of visuality—camera movement.

Here, Ichikawa Jun’s camera flows from scene to scene, ever to the right from the left, in a stream of time and space propelling the protagonist, Tony Takitani, from his childhood through the lonely years of his education, work, and marriage, towards the tragedy which sets the drama of the film in motion. The opening gives a very clear example of this, as the camera moves across a horizontal plane, along which the young protagonist builds a sand sculpture. As we meet Tony in a drawing class at school, we have the same type of dolly shot, the camera moving from the left towards the “new” information coming into the screen from the right, before giving a close-up of Tony’s remarkably detailed, though narrowly focussed, drawing of a leaf. All these shots seem to utilise the same short telephoto lens to create the same flattening of the image, the same sense of shallowness and lack of background depth.

The shot in the drawing class anticipates what will become Tony’s employment, an illustrator and graphic designer—something we learn as, again and ever, the camera moves from the left to the right, introducing new information and moving chronologically ‘forward’ to the future—to the right side of the screen, almost as if Tony himself were ‘drawing’ the film’s narration in its two-dimensional space.

This left-to-right camera movement as a chronological metaphor is not unique to Ichikawa Jun’s adaptation of *Tony Takitani*, certainly, and neither is it a particularly recent device. After all, Mizoguchi Kenji’s *Gion no shimai* (*Sisters of the Gion*, 1936) opens with a similar tracking shot to establish the bankruptcy of Furusawa (Shinagoya Benkei) and the inevitability of time’s relentless march—the two things which drive the plot forward (the one, narratively, the other, to enable the film’s metaphor of social change). As I have described above, Kurosawa’s *Rashōmon* (1950) consciously plays with this device, inverting the movement from right to left to demonstrate a remembrance, a return to a previous narrative time.

Chronology is so coded with camera movement, though, that it is grammatical to assume that a lateral traversal of the screen from left to right *means* forward motion in time, and the reverse indicates a retrogression, as Kocka points out (Kocka 2021, p. xxii)—even *Tony Takitani* follows this coding when, toward the film’s end, Tony Takitani on two occasions retreats into the memories of his dead wife, and these memories are preceded by his movement “back” to the left of the screen.

However, this virtually grammatical encoding of camera movement’s left-to-right chronological construction implies something more than the passage of time—it implies the hegemonic aspects of the western, or non-Asian, approach to visuality itself, being a precise match of the ways in which all western languages are read. This link between language and visuality mirrors the translation of Murakami Haruki’s short story into Ichikawa Jun’s film, but why should the camera not move at the very least more often laterally from right to left, to match the “proper” motion of the eye in reading a Japanese text?

As we have seen, Brian O’Leary, paraphrasing the French semiotician Michel Colin, has demonstrated it is specifically culturally bound linguistic principles which determine the ‘naturalness’ of a particular direction for the introduction of ‘new’ information to any given visual plane. “The cognitive assumption behind this approach is that at some mental level linguistic and auditory/visual data [are] coded in a complementary way; it is assumed that there are only a limited number of ways the mind can work, and these mechanisms can act across multiple sensory modalities” (O’Leary 2003, p. 199).

When we couple this notion of camera movement from left to right as ‘proper’ with Comolli’s work, suggesting that the very perspectival presentation of cinema created using ‘normal’ lenses in the 35–50 mm range itself imposes a western “look” on the world to displace non-Western modes of artistic presentation, the implication is quite profound for the study of non-western film. These subversions of non-western perspectival approaches to visuality, through technological development (35–50 mm lenses) on the one hand, and ‘visual normativity’ (camera movement predominantly from left to right) on the other, demonstrate the ways in which western visuality has come to be accepted as a global norm, a suppression of local difference in the ways in which the world is visible. Ichikawa Jun’s decision to use the left-to-right tracking camera creates in *Tony Takitani* a duality of interpretive potential, simultaneously to show the passage of diegetic time in the life of the protagonist, and also metaphorically to show the increasing westernisation of Japan throughout the course of the film’s chronology.

Tony Takitani, in its presentation of camera movement as a metaphor for chronological progression, is an opportunity to see a mimicking of its literary precedent while simultaneously calling attention to the westernisation of Japan which had, through the course of the period of its setting, come to be accepted as a given. The camera’s movement creates a tension between the incessantly arriving ‘future’ and the regrettably retreating ‘past’ which remains unresolved—while Tony discovers his need for Hisako and the film implies, in its closing shot, that he will make every necessary effort to connect with her, the situation of Tony in relation to his memories is left unstable. Tony visually overlaps with his father and thus the film presents Tony as the inheritor of his father’s isolation and inability to adapt to his changing time, but this relationship with the past remains problematic, showing Tony to be equally trapped within a chronology always threatening to leave him behind. His frustrated attempts visually to return to the time of his nostalgia—the abortive movements from the right to the left of the screen—create an unbridgeable gap between the present and the past that remains troubling here, for the highlighting of the uneasy relationship between the present and the traditions upon which it is based.

7. Conclusions

Camera movement thus, as I have shown, is a ‘problem’ here, as it is, indeed, in films from non-western language countries which perpetuate the notion that left-to-right movement is grammatical. This problem is one of acceptance of coloniality through the adoption of a technological process without adaptation. This process, of translating visual information into a durable medium (film) through an optical/chemical mechanism (the camera), necessitates certain assumptions about ‘the look’ of reality which grow forth from several hundred years of artistic, philosophical, and scientific development in one very particular part of the world—Renaissance and post-Renaissance Europe—which are then exported *as directly applicable* to other parts of the world with no regard for the corresponding traditions and developments of those parts.

The very question “Well, but how *else* can a film look?” demonstrates the ubiquity within global cinema of what we may term the visual colonisation implicit in the adoption of the cinematic apparatus intact and wholesale. This is the very ground upon which deconstruction as an enterprise was able to produce such fertile growth—the question “But how else. . .?” always carries with it the seeds of its own answer, and here, those seeds need be no more complex than the suggestion that camera movement, at the very least, may proceed from right to left to introduce new information. At the very least, camera movement in the *opposite direction* from that established as ‘normal’ by the traditions of western writing systems transcribed onto film and exported throughout the developing/technologising

world also ‘as normal’ has the potential to demonstrate one possible “how else” and so critique not only the processes of technology but the validity of coloniality as well.

There is indeed a stake here, and there is indeed a process by which the very subjectivity of an audience may be co-opted surreptitiously by something as innocuous as ‘entertainment’. This stake is the very ability of an audience to accept the visual traditions of its own national history as valid in the face of an imported visuality intent on presenting itself as a ‘norm’. As Jean-Louis Baudry has suggested,

The ‘reality’ mimed by the cinema is thus first of all that of a ‘self’. But because the reflected image is not that of the body itself but that of a world already given as meaning, one can distinguish two levels of identification. The first, attached to the image itself, derives from the character portrayed as a centre of secondary identifications, carrying an identity which constantly must be seized and reestablished. The second level permits the appearance of the first and places it ‘in action’—this is the transcendental subject whose place is taken by the camera which constitutes and rules the objects in this ‘world’. Thus the spectator identifies less with what is represented, the spectacle itself, than with what stages the spectacle, makes it seen, obliging him to see what it sees; this is exactly the function taken over by the camera as a sort of relay. (Baudry and Williams [1974] 1986, p. 295)

In other words, the very act of watching a film places the spectator in the position of the camera—the camera’s gaze becomes that of the spectator, the camera’s perspectival rules and expectations supplant those of the spectator and become his or her ‘norm’.

The ideological mechanism at work in the cinema seems thus to be concentrated in the relationship between the camera and the subject. The question is whether the former will permit the latter to constitute and seize itself in a particular mode of specular reflection. . . . What emerges here. . . is the specific function fulfilled by the cinema as support and instrument of ideology. It constitutes the ‘subject’ by the illusory delimitation of a central location—whether this be that of a god or of any other substitute. It is an apparatus destined to obtain a precise ideological effect, necessary to the dominant ideology”. (Baudry and Williams [1974] 1986, p. 295)

Watching thus can never be a neutral activity. It always implies the acceptance, at a very fundamental level, of a particular way of looking, a particular process of seeing. This process is historically formulated, as we have seen; it is ideological and insidious. While ideology exists in the substance of the narrative, “ultimately, the forms of narrative adopted, the ‘contents’ of the image, are of little importance so long as an identification [of the spectator with the perspective of the camera] remains possible” (Baudry and Williams [1974] 1986, p. 295). This is because while the ideology of the narrative is something accessible to the *consciousness* of the spectator, the ideology of visuality typically appears as so transparent as to disappear; it is of such a basic nature and yet so overwhelmingly prevalent that this ideological imposition is virtually unnoticeable without considerable attention and effort. And yet nonetheless, by virtue of its very ‘invisibility’, this ideological imposition is powerful, insidious, and transformational.

As I wrote at the outset, artistic goals for the representation of reality in response to ideological assumptions about conceptions of that ‘reality’ have dictated the ways in which technology has developed, in order to permit, in the western context, ever-greater ‘realism’.

However, in the case of cinema, the centuries of ideological development culminating in its genesis are absent in many of the countries which have adopted its techniques and its ‘look’ wholesale. Especially in the case of Japan, the very look of cinema is in many ways

antithetical to the artistic traditions which had stood for countless generations before the arrival and acceptance of this foreign-born herald of ‘the modern’. Adopting cinema as a given, meant equally the adoption of an ‘alien’ set of assumptions about what is ‘normal’ in visuality—perspective, depth, and, most importantly, what is a ‘proper’ direction for motion and the corresponding pattern of introduction of new information.

Lubomir Kocka can argue that “there is a universal law or a universal cognitive principle that rules lateral organization and drives us to scan from left to right,” (Kocka 2021, p. xxii), even suggesting that this is a universal principle—but we must remember, however, that this argument *requires* the acquiescence to a pattern of writing which is an intimate component of the ideological and cultural milieu from which cinema emerged.

This unconscious adoption of a set of assumptions as an integral component of cinematic visuality has continuing consequences for Japanese and other filmmakers coming from different ideological and cultural backgrounds. I do not argue that Japanese and western cinema should necessarily be *different*, however one may define “difference”; rather, I argue that cinema, by virtue of the inextricable ideology which constitutes the mechanisms of cinematic creation, will always look “the same.”

The unconscious adoption of this set of ideological assumptions about camera movement and the arrival of ‘new information’ creates, surreptitiously although in plain sight, a location of ideological indoctrination in the medium of cinema, making film far from an innocent entertainment, but rather always a site of engagement with Japan’s visual history and its transformation. In other words, the acceptance of the non-Japanese scientific and aesthetic principles which contributed to the development of cinema as an artform carried with them the seeds of a cinematic grammar which continue to exert influence on alternative grammars, despite the very real legitimacy of those grammars as they themselves grow from the various principles of their contexts. As I have argued here, however, cinema is *capable* of a self-aware engagement with the conventions of visuality, creating through the exaggeration of those conventions a playful though politically astute parody of both reading and an ongoing though often unconscious coloniality.

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