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# Picturesque Theatrical Images into Film: Kurosawa Akira's *Ran*

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## Introduction

Of all the film directors both in Japan and abroad, the one whose films can be characterised with the word “picturesque” is undoubtedly Kurosawa Akira. Although film as a medium creates a complexity incorporating visual and audio effects, in Kurosawa's films the visual elements are far more important than the sound. This is not surprising, however. It is well known that Kurosawa originally planned to be a painter, and in his later films he again returned to painting as a means of visualising the yet to be created film.

Although Kurosawa is one of the world's most highly praised film directors, the major flaws of his films are related supposedly to the sound effects. The use of music for example is nowhere near as strong as the visuals. In addition he was criticised within Japan for the hardly audible lines of the characters. “Use subtitles for Kurosawa's films. The reason why *Rashômon* was highly praised abroad was because of the subtitles”<sup>1</sup> and even in case of *Throne of Blood* “one critic, who is extremely upset by Kurosawa's alleged disrespect for the sound quality of the actors' pronunciation, demands that he add subtitles to the film”<sup>2</sup> quotes Yoshimoto.

On the other hand, the visual beauty of Kurosawa's films, even when they depict poverty and distress, is overwhelmingly beautiful. As the Hungarian poetess Ágnes Nemes Nagy wrote in her review of *Yôjinbô*:

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<sup>1</sup> Kurosawa 1988a: 370

<sup>2</sup> Yoshimoto 2000: 267

The more we see the film, the more we understand that we could stop the camera any time and enlarge any frame and put the picture on the wall of our living room. ... With all its ambivalences we are struck by its style. It calls upon us in Japanese so that all of us will understand. Of course we will understand – as it is in the language of picture.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay I will examine how Kurosawa transforms the picturesqueness of the theatre into the picturesqueness of film in the case of his late masterpiece *Ran*. I will investigate firstly how he uses the visual effects of the classical Japanese theatre *Nô*; and secondly how Kurosawa turns the texts of the plays as literary works into visuals means. Although Shakespeare's *King Lear* also has a strong presence in the film, this time I am going to focus on the *Nô* and I am not going to investigate the use of Shakespeare. This is mainly because Kurosawa did not rely on the theatre acting traditions of Shakespeare's age, secondly because he uses Shakespeare's texts either for the storyline of the film or as speeches rather than pictures.

## Kurosawa and *Nô*

It is a well known fact that Kurosawa loved *Nô*. As Kurosawa himself mentioned many times, he first got acquainted with *Nô* during WWII, and admitted that this old form of theatrical art inspired many of his films. In *Something Like an Autobiography*<sup>4</sup> (*Gama no abura*) he writes about his first encounters with *Nô*, and he also mentions some personal experiences of seeing famous actors on stage such as Kita Roppeita, Umewaka Manzaburô and Sakurama Kintarô. The *Nô* actor Honda Mitsuhiro<sup>5</sup> who also participated in the production of *Ran* explained that Kurosawa mentioned how often he went to see *Nô* during the war as there was nothing else to do. In addition, the film

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<sup>3</sup> Nemes Nagy 1983: 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Kurosawa 1984

<sup>5</sup> Honda 2009

director Yamamoto Kajirô, Kurosawa's mentor remembers that it was him who first sent Kurosawa to see *Nô*<sup>6</sup> while Kurosawa was still his assistant.

Although Kurosawa uses theatrical motifs in several of his films, it is interesting to mention that he never worked as a stage director. Even so, he found a unique means of expression in the use of theatrical elements. While in some of his films he also uses *Kabuki* – such as in *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* (*Tora no o wo fumu otokotachi*, 1945/1952) or *Shingeki* in *Lower Depth* (*Donzoko*, 1957); he mainly relies on the abstract style of *Nô*. “I was attracted by the Noh because of the admiration I felt for its uniqueness...”<sup>7</sup> writes Kurosawa in *Something Like an Autobiography*.

Watching Kurosawa's films, we can recognise *Nô* elements on different levels. First, we can see *Nô* on the surface, such as the use of *Nô*-like costumes, mask-like make-ups, speech, music, highly stylized movements and positions – like walking with sliding feet on the floor, called *suriashi* (for example Asaji in *Throne of Blood* or Kaede in *Ran*); or in the way that the characters do not fold their legs as we can see in other period films, but rather, kneel on one knee. Apart from these surface elements we can also find elements of *Nô* at a deeper level – such as the film's structure and adoption of the *Nô* text into an isolated, abstracted speech, or even into visuals. Which is not surprising as Kurosawa was well aware of Zeami's *Nô* aesthetic works.

At the early stage of his career, Kurosawa arguably failed to understand and apply the deeper meaning of the traditional performing arts in his films. His use of *Nô* was little more than the copying of simple visual elements, movements, music, etc. Examples for this approach include *Sugata Sanshiro Part II* (*Zoku Sugata Sanshiro*, 1945) with its mad character referring to the mad or *monogurui* *Nô* plays; and the scene of Rikichi's wife in *Seven samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*, 1954), where the woman appears in slow motion accompanied by a *Nô* flute. Kurosawa also made use of *Nô* in a more complex way for some

<sup>6</sup> Kurosawa Kenkyûkai 2004: 23

<sup>7</sup> Kurosawa 1982: 147

other films, emphasising not only elements copied directly from the *Nô* stage, but by implementing its aesthetics and structure in the film. Kurosawa applies *Nô* in this way mainly to *The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* (*Tora no o wo fumu otokotachi*, 1945/1952), *Throne of Blood* (*Kumonosujô*, 1957), *Dreams* (*Yume*, 1990) and *Ran*, which now I am going to introduce in detail.

### Kurosawa's *Ran*

*Ran* (1985), the world-famous film by Kurosawa Akira, which he considered to be his life's work, is based on several different sources. While it is a rather free adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Kurosawa himself stresses that the starting point for the film is the parable of a feudal lord of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Môri Motonari and his three sons.<sup>8</sup> Kurosawa also emphasizes the importance of *The Tale of the Heike* (*Heike Monogatari*), the famous epic from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, from which several motifs were taken and incorporated into the film. While *Throne of Blood* (1957), another film that uses a play by Shakespeare and the Japanese *Nô* theatre, faithfully follows Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Kurosawa uses Shakespeare's play more creatively in the case of *Ran* though the influence from *King Lear* is also obvious. He changed the three daughters to sons, and drastically rewrote the subplot of Gloucester. Furthermore, Shakespeare's lines are hardly used for the film; though a few speeches and motifs remind one of *King Lear*, in most cases they are told by other characters and in other situations.

Apart from the resemblance to *King Lear*, Kurosawa strongly relies on the Japanese *Nô*. He uses motifs generally taken from this classical theatre form such as costumes, speech, and characterisation; he also uses images from specific plays such as *Funa Benkei*, *Yoroboshi*, and *Kurozuka*.

The use of *Nô* in *Ran* has been mentioned several times in previous studies.

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<sup>8</sup> In the parable, the father gives each of his three sons an arrow and asks them to break the arrow. He then gives each son three arrows and then are unable to break the arrows. This is teaching his sons that they are stronger together and should stand by one another.

These references, however, mainly focus on the Academy Award winning costumes, the characters of Tsurumaru and Kyôami, and on the quotations taken from *Nô* and *Kyôgen* texts. Nevertheless, there are many more motifs in this film that refer to *Nô*. The fact that Kurosawa employed the *Nô* actor Honda Mitsuhiro and the *Kyôgen* actor Nomura Mansaku to train the actors, and his preparations for a documentary<sup>9</sup> on *Nô* dated to these times are all evidences of Kurosawa's strong intention of the use of this genre of the Japanese performing art.

### Picturesqueness of *Nô*

Compared to *Throne of Blood* (another film that uses both Shakespeare and the Japanese *Nô*), *Ran* departs further from the structure and plot of Shakespeare's play and has stronger resemblances to the structure of *Nô*. The presence of sleep and dream repeatedly refers to *mugen* or phantasm *Nô*. For example, it can also be divided into five parts of *jo-ha-kyû* tempo structure.<sup>10</sup> And what is more significant the first battle scene divides the film into two parts: *maeba* or first part and *nochiba* or second part of the performance. As Nishi Shûsei mentions the route taken by Hidetora's group as they march into the Third Castle reminds us of the end of the first part of a *Nô* performance when the protagonist leaves the stage through the *hashigakari*.<sup>11</sup> If we follow this idea we can see that the film incorporates the structure of the *Nô*.

In a *Nô* play after the protagonist leaves the stage at the end of the *maeba*, a

<sup>9</sup> 『能の美』 (*Nô no bi*, 1983) was planned to be released in 2010 as 『現代の能』 (*Gendai no Nô*), which did not happen. (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1198401/> viewed: 21 November 2010, the page is not operational as of 9 July 2012, and information on the documentary is not available)

<sup>10</sup> *Jo-ha-kyû*: is a theory of tempo and partition in many classical Japanese genres including performing arts and literature. It consists of five parts; the *jo* is one part, the *ha* is three parts and the *kyû* is again one part. Zeami gives detailed explanation on the *jo-ha-kyû* system in his aesthetic works.

<sup>11</sup> Nishi 1998: 204

*kyôgen* actor retells an old story, after which the main character reappears in a new form. The same thing happens in *Ran*. The old story is not literally told by an actor but visualized through the horrors of the battle. Kurosawa's unique technique alienates this battle by muting all sounds and noises of the scene using soft music, whose style is in contrast to the context. During the battle, Hidetora, the protagonist goes mad, and in this way he also goes through a transformation just like the *Nô* character outside the *Nô* stage. Hidetora changes inside and outside, and when he appears again for the second part of the play or the film through a virtual curtain of heavy smoke, he practically looks like a ghost. The other characters assume Hidetora to be dead which is obvious from the character Kurogane's comment, "I suppose he will commit harakiri"<sup>12</sup>. Thus, when Hidetora appears it has the effect on the fighting armies of seeing a dead man's ghost. His image evokes *Nô* masks. He looks as if he had changed his mask from *Akujô*, a villainous old man to *Shiwajô*, an old man's spirit. The change in Hidetora's attitude and appearance happens in the most prominent way in this scene. Therefore the switch from *maeba* to *nochiha* is presented in visual terms.

Most of the film is set outside; however, backdrops or armoury create stage-like rectangular spaces, where the formal place of each character is decided – just like on a *Nô* stage. Kyôami, the *Kyôgen* role character of the story first appears from the upper left corner of the space, referring to the *kyôgen-za* of the *Nô* stage. The presence of the *Nô* stage can also be seen inside the castles. The room that resembles the *Nô* stage most significantly is in the First Castle, home to many important scenes – like dispelling Hidetora by his eldest son; and most scenes with Lady Kaede. Nevertheless, the bridge that leads to this stage is a staircase, in this way the oblique *hashigakari* keeps its obliqueness but in the third dimension. The use of stairs as *hashigakari* can be seen at the Third Castle too, when at the end of the battle Hidetora approaches through the stairs in a

<sup>12</sup> Kurosawa 1986: 50  
「御切腹でござろう」 (Kurosawa 1988b: 175)

ghost-like manner as mentioned before.

### ***Nô* costumes, masks, characters**

The use of *Nô* can be traced by references to costumes and masks very similar to those used for *Nô* plays. Hidetora in *Ran* changes from the facial expression of *Akujo* or villainous old man to *Shiwajo* that of a deeply wrinkled mask of an old man's spirit as mentioned before. This change does not simply present the images of *Nô* masks, but by the use of these different facial expressions Kurosawa expresses structural changes within the film that relate to *Nô* performances.

For Lady Kaede the *Deigan* mask is used – just like for Asaji in *Throne of Blood*. In the *Nô* repertoire this mask is used for Lady Rokujô in *Aoi no Ue* for example, and in the same way Kaede appears at the end of the film in a kimono of the same pattern as the one Lady Rokujô wears – the pattern of snake's scale (*uroko*), which – apart from the jealous Lady Rokujô – is used for the girl turned into a serpent in *Dôjôji*, or the demoness in *Kurozuka*, in other words, for fatal women. Lady Kaede, just like Lady Rokujô, the serpent or the woman of Kurozuka has an extremely strong and negative emotion towards the other characters of the story; this time towards Hidetora and his family, which is also expressed explicitly through her clothing. While Lady Rokujô and the serpent, a few prominent examples from the *Nô* repertoire, are led by their jealousy; Lady Kaede is led by her strong will for revenge. Therefore, Kaede's will for revenge alloys *Nô* characters and Shakespeare's characters; in this case Kaede's motivations show a strong similarity to that of Edmund in *King Lear*.

But we can also catch minor references of the presence of *Nô* symbolism: the moon in Hidetora's crest is a symbol of the Nomura family in the Izumi school of *Kyôgen*.

Another character from the *Nô* world is Tsurumaru in *Ran*, played by the *Kyôgen* actor Nomura Takeshi, the present Nomura Mansai. His figure is



based on two characters: Semimaru, the *tsure*, companion role of the play *Semimaru* and Shuntokumaru, the protagonist of *Yoroboshi* (*The Beggar and his Saviour*) – both of them are blind and hold a stick askew, which represents their blindness. Instead of making Tsurumaru's face resemble the masks of these blind characters with closed eyes, the upper part of his face is covered with his hair. The appearance of Tsurumaru resembles to *Yoroboshi* with his tangled hair; on the other hand his small hut and his affection for music are taken from *Semimaru*. Semimaru is playing his *biwa* lute, an instrument Kurosawa wanted to use according to his first script, but later changed to *Nô* flute.

As the blind boy in *Ran* is led by his sister, it reminds us of *Semimaru*, when Semimaru's sister appears desperately and they lament on their fate. Furthermore, it is also akin to the old version of *Yoroboshi* in Zeami's manuscript, where Shuntokumaru does not appear alone, but is guided by his wife.

The last scene of *Ran* with the solemn figure of Tsurumaru represents the transient world of *Yoroboshi*; or the final scene of *Semimaru*, when Semimaru's sister departs leaving the blind boy alone. At the same time, the scene was also inspired by a movement of the ceremonial court dance in the play *Kantan*. The dance is performed on a small stand, and the actor lowers one of his feet for a moment and pulls it back immediately (*Kantan no soraori*).

## ***Nô* texts**

The characters in Kurosawa's films "speak only when they can't communicate in other way, and then in language that is terse, unadorned, brutally functional"<sup>13</sup> writes J. Blumenthal about *Throne of Blood*, however, this statement is also true for *Ran*. One can hardly find direct quotations from *King Lear*; and in the same way exact lines from existing *Nô* plays are rare. Apart from a short text from *Funa Benkei* (*Benkei aboard Ship*) slightly changed and some *Kyôgen* songs sung by Kyôami, no other references for *Nô* plays have been mentioned so far.

<sup>13</sup> Blumenthal 1965: 194

However, by examining the film in detail one can find more references to *Nô* and *Kyôgen* texts – either through the words told by the characters of the film, or the original texts transformed into visual images.

### Kyôgen texts

Kyôami, Hidetora's fool sings and dances parts from *kyôgen* plays: the *Usagi* (*The Hare*)<sup>14</sup> from the play *Kakushi-Danuki* (*The Hidden Fox*) is textually almost unchanged, and the song *Hyôtan* (*The Gourd*)<sup>15</sup> where the text was changed so that the emphasis is on the grotesque dance of the fool Kyôami. In these scenes Kyôami was trained and the dances were choreographed by the *Kyôgen* actor Nomura Mansaku, whose family is especially fond of the play *Kakushi-Danuki*. Therefore, apart from the texts there is a strong reference to *Kyôgen* performances not by simply recreating the texts and dances, but by creating new ones based on existing performance practices. In addition, the fool in *Ran* corresponds to the fool in *King Lear*.

Later in the film Kyôami's words, "Go quickly. Heaven is far away, but Hell is not"<sup>16</sup> recited in a harsh *Kyôgen*-like manner, also show a close connection to

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- <sup>14</sup> *Ran*: あんの山からこの山まで／飛んで来たるは、なんじゃるの／頭に二ツ  
ぎんとはねたもの／兎じゃ (Kurosawa 1988b: 150)  
What is that / That has come / Hopping over there / From yonder mountain /  
Picking up one – / Two long ears? / A hare! (Kurosawa 1986: 5-6)  
*Kakushi-Danuki*: あんの山から此(んの)山迄飛(ん)で来た物な何だるの。頭にふつ。  
二つ。細長(う)て。ぎんとはねたを。ちやつと推した兎。(Shinma 1959: 207-8)
- <sup>15</sup> *Ran*: あの殿はのう／風の中の ひょうたん／あなたへひよろりひよ／こなたへ  
ひよろりひよ／ひよひよらひよひよ／ひよひよらひよひよ／本丸に／ひょうたん  
吊して おもしろやのう (Kurosawa 1988b: 158, 305, 160)  
That lord is a gourd in the wind, / Tottering this way, tottering that ... / Tottering  
this way, tottering that. / A gourd he will hang from the keep. / Wouldn't that be  
amusing? (Kurosawa 1986: 18-20)  
*Hyôtan*: あまりのとぜんに、へ、かどにひよたんつるいて、おりふし風がふひ  
てきて、あなたへちやきりひよ、こなたへちやきりひよ、ひよへらひよ、ひよう  
たんつるいておもしろやなふ。(Shinma 1959: 206-7)
- <sup>16</sup> Kurosawa 1986: 43  
「御急ぎ候え、極楽遙かなれど地獄遠からず」(Kurosawa 1988b: 169)

*Nô* and *Kyôgen* texts. Though it cannot be found verbatim in other sources, its meaning can be found with a different word order as well as phrases that reflect its sentiment. The last phrase “Hell is not far away”<sup>17</sup> can be seen in the *Nô* play *Ukai* (*The Cormorant-Fisher*, part 9, *shite-sashi*), and the whole part in reverse order “Hell is not far away, but Heaven is far. Go quickly.”<sup>18</sup> is in the *Kyôgen* plays such as *Uri Nusubito* (*The Gourd Thief*) and *Asahina* (*Asahina the Warrior*). Again, by the enlarged and exaggerated movements and strong intonation of Kyôami, the connection of this scene to the *Nô* and *Kyôgen* world is made obvious.

### *Nô* quotations

In *Funa Benkei*, the character Benkei envisions the killed army of the enemy Taira clan emerging from the sea; in *Ran* the mad Hidetora identifies the blades of grass in the meadow to be his own haunting victims. In the play Benkei says:

How strange! On the sea I see an entire clan of the Heike destroyed in the Western province, each one of them floating up before me.<sup>19</sup>

In the film this becomes:

How strange! On withered fields I see an entire clan destroyed by my hands, each one of them floating up before me.<sup>20</sup> (Underline by author)

These are parallel images that tell different versions of the same story. They differ only in the places of the events and the ways of the deaths. Just

<sup>17</sup> Waley [1921] 1965: 169

「地獄は遠きにあらず」(Yokomichi 1969 Vol. 1: 179)

I have named the translators for English language quotes from *Nô* plays. Where a translator is not named, the translation is my own.

<sup>18</sup> 「それ 地獄遠きにあらず、極楽ははるかなれ。いかに罪人、急げとこそ。」  
(*Uri Nusubito* - Yokomichi 1966: 311; *Asahina* - Koyama 1961: 117)

<sup>19</sup> あら不思議や海上を見れば。西国にて滅びし平家の一門、おのおの浮かみ出でたるぞや (Yokomichi 1969, Vol. 2: 160)

<sup>20</sup> Kurosawa 1986: 54

あら不思議や荒野を見れば わが手に滅びしあまたの一門 おのおの浮かみ出でたるぞや (Kurosawa 1988b: 311)

like in the case of the previous *Kyôgen* texts, this quotation from *Funa Benkei* also has a visual reference to *Nô* performance practice in addition to the textual resemblance. In the *Nô* the *waki* Benkei recites his lines while standing motionless in the boat, in *Ran* Kyôami dances dynamically. This dance was choreographed by the *Nô* actor Honda Mitsuhiro, and is closer to the *shite* role of a *Nô* play. Though bare handed, Kyôami mimes having a spear in his hands just as the protagonist Taira no Tomomori's ghost does in *Funa Benkei*.<sup>21</sup>

Another similarity is when Hidetora and his two followers find a small hut and want to enter. This scene resembles the scene in *King Lear* when Lear, Kent and the Fool enter poor Tom's hut, however, scenes of travellers seeking shelter are common in *Nô* and found in plays such as *Matsukaze*, *Yashima* and *Kurozuka*. Among these plays, the *Ran* scene is most similar to the one in *Kurozuka* (*Black Mound*), the very play referred to many times in *Throne of Blood*. In *Kurozuka* the priests ask the old woman in the following way:

**Bishop and Companion:** May we come in?

**Woman:** Who calls there?

**Bishop and Companion:** We are mountain priests on a pilgrimage who have lost our way in the dark. Please let us stay for one night.

**Woman:** This brushwood hut is far too wretched to be suitable for you.<sup>22</sup>

In *Ran* the conversation starts in the following way:

**Tango:** Anybody at home?

**Voice:** Who is it?

**Tango:** Travellers who have met hardship in today's storm. Please let us stay a night.

<sup>21</sup> Honda 2009

<sup>22</sup> Morley 2004

いかにこの屋の内へ案内申し候 シテ たれにてわたり候ふぞ わき これは回国の聖にて候、一夜の宿をおん貸し候へ シテ あまりに見苦しく候ふほどに、お宿はかなひ候ふまじ (Yokomichi 1969, Vol. 2: 370)

**Voice:** My house is too poor to put anyone up...<sup>23</sup>

In both pieces first the travellers ask for shelter, then the person inside the hut asks who they are, the travellers explain their situation and why they are in need of a place to stay, then the dweller gives an excuse saying that the house is too poor. In this example, Tsurumaru refuses Hidetora's company in the same manner as the old woman does in *Kurozuka*. Although the classical Japanese text was turned into modern Japanese and was adapted to the narrative of the film (thus the excuse of the long travel became a storm), the structure of the conversation faithfully follows the *mondô* (part 3) of *Kurozuka*.

This episode is a prelude to Tsurumaru's first appearance in the film. This blind character is not only played by the *Kyôgen* actor Nomura Takeshi (the present Nomura Mansai), but also has strong resemblances to two blind characters in the plays *Yoroboshi* and *Semimaru* – as already mentioned.

In addition, during these lines Hidetora and his companions are about to enter a small hut, the design of which is influenced by a stage prop or *tsukurimono* called *waraya* (straw hut) we are familiar with from the *Nô* stage. Kurosawa also calls this small hut in the same way *waraya* in his film script, emphasising the similarity to the *Nô*. A similar prop is used in *Kurozuka*, the play this conversation refers to, and we can see a *waraya* in *Semimaru*, where the small hut serves as the lodging of the blind character of the play just like in *Ran*.

At the end of the film when Saburô comes back to get his father he plans to wait until night before they meet:

If we move rashly, they will find out where my father is. It would be dangerous. We had best wait until night.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Kurosawa 1986: 58  
丹後「案内申す」  
声 「誰方じゃ」  
丹後「旅の者、今日の嵐に打たれて難渋致して居る。一夜の宿をお貸し下され」  
声 「あまりに見苦しく、お宿などとは、とても・・・」(Kurosawa 1988b: 179)

<sup>24</sup> Kurosawa 1986: 88  
三郎「いや、うかつに動いて敵に父上の居処をさとられるのは危い……夜を待とう」  
(Kurosawa 1988b: 318-9)  
あら不便と衰へて候ふものかな、人目もさすがに候へば、夜に入つてそれがしと名のり、高安へ連れて帰らばやと存じ候 (Yokomichi 1969, Vol. 1: 410)

This same motif is prevalent in a group of *Nô* plays known as mad play<sup>25</sup>. *Nô* scholars interpret this structure of keeping one's identity or presence secret and waiting until nightfall to reunite with a lost beloved one as a dramaturgical technique to create an opportunity within the play to perform song and dance. However, Professor Mikio Takemoto offers a different explanation. Despite parents and children being eager to meet after a long separation, they avoid the shameful act of revealing their association with a mad person in front of a crowd<sup>26</sup>. Thus, they wait until dark when they are alone and can have privacy. Examples for this are found in many *Nô* plays including *Yoroboshi*, a play that is strongly referred to in *Ran*. While in *Nô* plays shame is a driving force behind a character's refusal to reveal their identity, in *Ran* Saburô delays meeting his father but it is in the interest of protecting his father's safety.

#### *Nô* texts turned into images

Kurosawa's intention to draw from *Nô* in his films is well documented in his own notes, published online at *Kurosawa Digital Archive*.<sup>27</sup> The thoughts and ideas written in his notebooks include references to Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Nô*. Some drawings and early parts of the *Ran* script can be found together with several quotations of classical Japanese pieces, such as songs from the mid-Muromachi collection of songs *Kanginshû* and also from several *Nô* plays. These quotations are mainly listed consecutively without mentioning the source and his intention with the parts given. Nevertheless, Kurosawa's idea can be

<sup>25</sup> *Nô* plays are generally divided into five categories. Mad *Nô* plays create a sub-group of plays within the fourth category, also called miscellaneous plays. In most cases the central theme is losing one's beloved relative. The grief of the loss makes the main character go mad.

<sup>26</sup> Professor Mikio Takemoto provided this explanation during a lecture on *Nô* at Waseda University. (26 October 2009)

<sup>27</sup> Kurosawa's notes are published online at *Kurosawa Digital Archive*. <http://www.afc.ryukoku.ac.jp/Komon/kurosawa/index.html> (last accessed: 9 July 2012)

traced from the notes. In some cases he simply writes titles of plays, for example “*Sumidagawa, Kashiwazaki, Hyakuman*” – all three plays are mad plays where a parent loses a child. Kurosawa must have taken this image in creating Hidetora’s pain over the loss of his smallest son, and also for the final short reunion. A quotation from *Tenko (Heavenly Drum)* also emphasizes the same motif:

From beasts that stalk the earth  
to those that soar on wings in the sky,  
do any not know the pangs of parent for child?<sup>28</sup> (Part 5, *Kuse*)

Another important part of the film is the famous battle scene at the Third Castle. I have already mentioned the structural significance of the scene in terms of *Nô*. According to his notes, Kurosawa must have created this scene based on several plays. Though this relatively long part is made without a single word spoken, the visual images are based on battle scenes and explanations of the Buddhist hell from warrior plays of the *Nô* repertoire.

Suddenly black clouds rise,  
Earth and sky resound with the clash of arms;  
War-demons innumerable  
Flash fierce sparks from brandished spears.<sup>29</sup> (*Ikuta Atsumori*, part 8, *chûnoriji*)  
... my eyes do indeed behold a living Hell. And the heart of even the boldest man must quail before this fell sight, more frightful even than demons and fiends.<sup>30</sup> (*Utô, Birds of Sorrow*, part 1, prose)

These examples are all functionally represented in *Ran* to create the atmosphere for the battle scene. Hidetora, who is caught between the two

<sup>28</sup> Bethe and Emmert 1994: 31  
「地を走る獣、空を翔る翼まで、親子のあはれ知らざるや、いはんや仏性、同体の人間、この生に」(Yokomichi 1969, vol. 2: 335)

<sup>29</sup> Waley [1921] 1965: 79  
「その数知らざる 修羅の敵、天地を響かし満ち満ちたり。」(Yokomichi 1969, vol. 2: 243)

<sup>30</sup> Keene 1955: 272  
「目のあたりなる地獄の有様、見ても恐れぬ人の心は、鬼神よりなほ恐ろしや、」(Yokomichi 1969, Vol. 2: 341)

armies in the battle, senses the unaccountable number of soldiers of enemies as mentioned in *Ikuta Atsumori*; and as he surveys the situation below from the tower of the castle, the horrors of the battle look like the hell explained in the quotation from *Utô*. Nishimura Yûichirô<sup>31</sup> in his book about Kurosawa also stresses that the image of *Utô* was used for Hidetora's character; not only for the image of the lament of a parent over losing a child, but also for the character who cannot rest in peace because of killing living creatures in his previous life. In *Utô* the parent-child relation is represented on two levels: the human and the animal. Contrary to Hidetora in *Ran* who killed whole armies and families, the protagonist of *Utô* killed birds – nevertheless, the torments of the present world for Hidetora and the Buddhist hell for the bird hunter are the same. As it was mentioned before, in the second part of the film Hidetora behaves as a ghost of a dead man, therefore, indeed he percepts the world around himself as the hell, where he is not able to rest in peace – in this case die – and is tormented by the guilt of his – so to say – “previous life.”

Kurosawa's notes also mention the play *Kagekiyo* several times. The short inscription of “Hidetora and Lady Sue – *Kagekiyo*” shows that the director wanted to use the father-child relations from *Kagekiyo* in *Ran* as well as several quotations from the play. The following part rather shows the relation between the blind Tsurumaru and his sister.

To hear a voice,  
 To hear and not to see!  
 Oh pity of blind eyes!  
 I have let her pass by;  
 I have not told my name;  
 But it was love that bound me,  
 Love's rope that held me.<sup>32</sup> (Part 3, *ageuta*)

<sup>31</sup> Nishimura 1998: 372-3

<sup>32</sup> Waley [1921] 1965: 92

「声をは聞けど面影を、見ぬ盲目ぞ悲しき。名のらで過ぎし心こそ、なかなか親の絆なれ、なかなか親の絆なれ。」(Yokomichi 1969, Vol. 2: 419)



While the lines below represent the appearance of the old Hidetora.

I am old: I have forgotten – things unforgettable!

My thoughts are tangled: I am ashamed.<sup>33</sup> (Part 8, *uta*)

## Conclusion

By realising the existence of *Nô* in every moment of Kurosawa's film, *Ran* will give an even more complex viewing experience. He uses a wide range of possibilities of *Nô* theatre not only in employing theatrical gestures but also by incorporating the deep aesthetics of this old form of drama. As I pointed out, Kurosawa was influenced by storylines and structural elements of *Nô*. I have also argued that the references to ghostly images establish a link with the quality of *mugen*, common in many *Nô*. And finally, I showed how the visual landscape of Kurosawa's *Ran* was inspired by poetic images of otherworldliness and hell in the *Nô*.

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<sup>33</sup> Waley [1921] 1965: 99  
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## (日本語レジュメ)

## 映画での劇的なピクチャレスク：黒澤明『乱』をめぐる

マートライ・ティタニラ

日本の映画のうち、「ピクチャレスク」、つまり「画的」という言葉で説明できるのは黒澤明の映画だろう。映画自体は目で見たり、耳で聞いたりする、完全なメディウムでありながら、黒澤の映画の場合は、聴覚的要素よりも視覚的要素が強いといえる。これは、黒澤がもともと画家になりたかったことからわかるだろう。実際、黒澤は映画における音楽の利用や俳優の聞き取れない台詞などで批判される一方、映画の絵画的なフレームやビジュアルの美しさが高く評価されたのである。

本論文では、黒澤明の世界的に有名な作品『乱』（1985年）を通じて、映画における他の分野の利用や取り入れ方について論じる。『乱』は『平家物語』やシェイクスピアの『リア王』、日本の古典芸能の一種である能など、様々な先行作品や歴史的な背景から成り立ったものであるが、今回はこれらのうち、能の利用について分析する。まず、能公演の美がどのように映画に取り入れているかを検討し、次に能や狂言で使われる詞章に注目する。最後に、言葉で示されていない能からの引用が映画でどのように表現されているかについて考察する。このため、黒澤が『乱』の製作時期から残したノートをベースとして、黒澤がビジュアルを手段として見せたかった古典演劇を探していく。