

Pink Bodies:
On the Aesthetic and Ideological Dimensions of the Female
Body in Japanese Pink Cinema

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by Frédéric St-Hilaire

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Abstract:

Pink cinema, a genre of erotic Japanese film that emerged in the early 60s, has exerted a large influence on Japanese cinematic history both stylistically and industrially. Known for its short length, small budgets and presence of erotic elements like nudity and sex scenes, Pink film has surprisingly been understudied in the West given its large span (its heydays lasted from the late 60s to the late 80s) and impressive production (at its height in the late 70s it accounted for 70% of Japanese cinematic production). This thesis seeks to rectify this by taking a chronological look at Pink cinema in relation to its main iconographic concern, the female body. To do this, this thesis will engage with genre theory as well as feminist theories of abjection allied with close analysis of key films over the years to understand the aesthetic and ideological underpinnings of the genre.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The “Age of Competition”: Wakamatsu Koji and the Political Body.....	15
Chapter 2: Mainstreaming the Pinks: <i>Roman Porno</i> and <i>Violent Pink</i> ’s Body as Performance.....	48
Chapter 3: Alienated Psyches: The Transcendent Bodies of Sato Hisayasu.....	85
Conclusion.....	104
Bibliography.....	112
Filmography.....	117

Introduction

Erotic cinema is perhaps the most telling representation of cinema's innate artifice. Erotic cinema aims to titillate, but it can't show too much, lest it lose the criteria which constitutes its ontology. Its *raison d'être* is sex, but, rather than deploying connotations that could render it as a "pornographic" text, it aims to merely suggest, wrapping itself in codes and allusions. It's thus legitimate to question the positionality of the body in erotic cinema's logics of artifice. Must the body also be subject to imitation, passed through a world of genre codes and aesthetic conventions to become palatable to an imagined audience? When we narrow this question to the female body, it becomes even more fraught particularly considering cinema's frequently phallogentric approach¹ to the female form². A genre that allows us to appropriately address these questions is Pink cinema, a form of Japanese erotic cinema that began in the early 1960s and flourished in popularity and scope in the 70s and 80s, only to diminish significantly in the 90s with the rise of home pornography. Its extensive repertoire of film, replete with sexuality and female nudity, allows us an impressive opportunity to explore the representation of the female body when it must exist within generic conventions. For the rest of this text, body will be synonymous with cisgender female body, except if stated otherwise.

A generic convention of erotic cinema is simulated sex, unlike pornography (at least, hardcore as opposed to softcore pornography) which features unsimulated sex. Pink cinema is still highly graphic, although genitalia is invariably hidden due to censorship laws, and aims to "arouse sexual desire" (as Merriam-Webster defines the word "erotic"). However, it

¹ As we will discuss, Pink films were made primarily by men for male audiences.

² For the remainder of this thesis, we will use a cisgender definition of the female body since Pink cinema has primarily operated under this assumption. There have been a few Pink films that have dealt with transgender characters, but we won't be focusing on them.

hides the visual representation of penetrative sex, which would then mark it as pornographic. Some may label Pink cinema as softcore pornography, but I will continue to describe it as erotic because of its occasional higher artistic aims (as I will discuss further, Pink films do not always aim to sexually excite) that places it outside of the “frenzy of the visible” logic, to borrow Linda Williams definition of the goals of pornography.

Pink cinema, also known as *Pinku* or *Pinku eiga* (terms that will be used interchangeably in this text), is marked by its generic specificity of eroticism, and the female form, among other industrial practices (meaning production models and trends). The accepted starting point of Pink cinema is in 1962 upon the release of Kobayashi Satoru’s *Flesh Market* (*Nikutai ichiba*). That film struck a chord with the public following a dispute with censorship authorities, going on to make over 100 million yen and effectively launching the genre (Weisser, 21). Of course, Pink cinema did not exist in a vacuum and one can find several forbearers in the Japanese film industry that opened the way for an erotic cinema. One can look at pearl-diver films in the 1950s or youth films that started introducing ever more flesh in the cinematic landscape. *Taiyozoku* (sun tribe) films, in many ways, anticipate *Pinku*’s treatment of bodies using young, tanned shirtless men in their tales of rebellion to symbolize a new generation. Some non-Japanese films like Bergman’s *Summer with Monika* (Ingmar Bergman, 1953) also brought female nudity onto Japanese screens (Weisser, 22).

The history of the term also clues us in to the history of Pink before Pink, as it were. Pink or *Pinku* as a term evolved as a buzzword from the Japanese word *Momo eiga* (peach cinema) since the Japanese word for pink is *momoiro* (peach colour). *Momo* also has sexual connotations in Japanese because of the fruit and colour’s resemblance to Japanese skin tone. From the Japanese word, it evolved into *Pinku eiga*, a cooler sounding name to the Japanese

public (Domenig, 2014, 28). *Momo eiga* is also indebted to the term Blue cinema which referred to illegal stag films, which is also a precursor to Pink cinema.

Why then did Pink cinema so quickly become a force to be reckoned with in the Japanese cinematic landscape? In less than 10 years Nikkatsu, the oldest Japanese film studio would switch production entirely to erotic cinema. Practically, Pink films had to be made fast and inexpensively (usually over a week for about 10000 yen), they had to meet a certain number of sex scenes (the unspoken rule was one every 10 minutes, but there have of course been exceptions), and had to be about an hour long so businessmen could watch them on their lunch break (Domenig, 2001). Outside of these constraints, filmmakers were largely given free rein to experiment since most of the movies were meant to pad out double or triple bills or for specialized Pink theatres (Nornes, 6-8). This meant cheap overheads for studios and a guaranteed captive audience flocking to an alternative distribution network; Pink theaters.

Some of the immediate success can be placed on the titillating images of naked flesh, but to really understand the genre, one must understand its economic realities. Much of the early success of Pink cinema directly came out of the distribution system of Japanese cinema. In the 60s, studio films would usually be split 50/50 between studio and theaters. Pink films, however, would instead work on a 30% commission, dropping further to 10% in the late 60s because of competition and over-production (Domenig, 2014, 28), making them much more attractive to film theaters. As a result, this early period witnessed a large number of new Pink theaters popping up as well as older theaters converting to Pink films or integrating them into their lineup. Pink films were also an easy addition for double or triple bills with their short length and sensational content.

Given this context of distribution, the 1960s saw a quick explosion of Pink film production following the success of *Flesh Market* with new filmmakers and studios quickly emerged to fill the market. This period was subsequently dubbed the “Age of Competition” by legendary Pink actress Tani Naomi (Tani, 7), with many independent studios competing to capture the attention of audiences. Following their success, bigger studios like Nikkatsu and Toei decided to start producing Pink films leading to a golden age of production that would last until the late 1980s when in 1988 Nikkatsu closed its *Roman Porno* line of Pink films following diminishing financial returns. In this vacuum stepped in a new generation of independent Pink filmmakers sometimes dubbed the “Four Devils of Pink” for their violent, nihilist films.

Pinku can be understood as slightly different from our normal definition of genre. Rather than a set of narrative patterns, shared iconography and ideology, Pink cinema is linked by its erotic nature and the practices surrounding the making and distribution of the films. In practice, this means that you can make a horror Pink film or a Pink comedy. This meant that from the moment of their inception in 1962 through the highs of the Nikkatsu *Roman Porno* era and up until now, Pink films have been remarkably varied. For the purposes of this text, we will treat Pink cinema as a mega-genre composed of subgenres in the vein of how Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano describes them. However, rather than dividing movies along a temporal structure like the *jidaigeki* and *gendai geki* (Wada-Marciano, 44), it divides through industrial practices and the relationship to the female body. Those distinctions will of course be at the centre of our discussion of Pink cinema.

This thesis will thus engage with these films as being part of an overarching genre, but in a less forceful relationship than conventional genre theory argues for. Put differently,

these films are linked by industrial practices that mandate a certain level of nudity and sexual content, which brings with them their own ideological baggage (but not necessarily elements like narrative conventions or character archetypes). These conventions do indeed exist in some the filmic case studies I will address, but this text won't feel obliged to look at everything from the position of a predetermined theory of genre. When discussing subgenres like *Violent Pink*, which are much closer to the traditional idea of genre, those elements will take much more space in our discussion.

In those cases, this text will use elements of Keith Barry Grant's genre theory, namely that genre is disseminated and understood based on a network of conventions, iconography, settings, narratives, characters, actors and that it contains, reflects and promulgates ideology through these generic networks. Grant also places genre in discussion with wider society in a role similar to myth and ritual, addressing and commenting on issues both minute and universal. Finally, Grant also allows for authorship within his genre theory, locating a space for artistic voice within generic conventions. In accordance with Pink cinema's vaunted artistic freedom, this thesis will engage with much of its texts through an auteurist lens. It will assume that these movies were made by filmmakers with a certain artistic project, a set of themes and visual quirks that identify them as auteurs, and that most importantly they have a personal vision of the female body.

My thesis will therefore attempt to find whether a common aesthetic and ideology regarding Pink cinema's relationship to the female body can be sussed out of this mountain of film. If Pink cinema can be said to have an iconography, one linking image, it must be the naked Japanese woman. Westerns have the cowboy, Pink has the topless Japanese woman. And if that woman engages in a single act, that act is heterosexual intercourse (there have

been Pink films with gay and lesbian themes, but the clear majority use an heteronormative definition of sexuality). We can therefore understand Pink cinema as developing the female body as a receptacle of male desire, that it views it as a tool to sexually please a man. Interestingly, however, the female body is not often seen as a space of motherhood, which opens the door for redefinitions of the body as a site of pleasure and fluxes as some directors have done. Because of the logic of the genre (a set number of sex scenes), it positions women's main purpose as being sex objects. Even if they are strong-willed or independent, they must reach their logical conclusion within the parameters of the genre; to have sex with a man. It doesn't so much limit women (they can and have done a number of things in Pink films outside of sex scenes) as reduce them to a single act, an act that ultimately gratifies men. Some films have of course tried to subvert, question, deconstruct and reject this sexist logic, but Pink's phallogentric nature (made by men, with few exceptions like Hamano Sachi, for a public largely imagined as male), and its essence as a distributor of images of women forces us to understand it this way at this early juncture. As we dig deeper and uncover singular voices within its long history, nuances, subtleties and contradictions will no doubt emerge.

Since we are setting up a number of basic assumptions, what then is the archetype of the Pink sex scene? It is between a man and a woman, the woman is topless. The man can be clothed. We cannot see genitals because of censorship laws, the focus is therefore switched to the breast area with Pink films devoting an inordinate amount of time to mammary groping. This focus on touch is important in Pink's erotic strategies. Visualizing female pleasure (which takes precedence over the implied male one) in the form of faces contorted in rictuses of ecstasy, writhing bodies and audible moans is also a large part of the quintessential Pink

sex scene.

Another aspect of the genre to consider is the presence of sexual assault within its erotic strategies. We could link this to a particularity of Japanese sexuality, with its links all the way back to *shunga* (erotic painting) and a long tradition of erotic literature from the bawdy tales of the Edo period to the writings of Tanizaki Junichiro that depicted sexual assault. Oftentimes the films present rape as a form of seduction, the woman unwilling at first until she is overcome by the manhood of her aggressor and succumbs to her inner desire. Such depictions are of course deeply problematic for a number of reasons, but sexual assault in Pink cinema are not limited to fantasies of male dominance (although as we'll discuss, it is often the case). As always the reality is far more complicated. For example, feminist film critic Saito Ayako sees in Wakamatsu's mistreatment of women a link to a Buddhist tradition of seeing women as the saviors of men. So in Wakamatsu's *Eros Eterna* (*Seibo kannon daibosatsu*, 1977), as per Sharon Hayashi, "rape is used as a process of purification for the rapist" (Hayashi, 2014, 272) Hayashi also sees in Wakamatsu's work that "rape highlights the powerlessness of a victim oppressed by society" (Hayashi, 2014, 272).

Now for the question of positionality. I am a Québécois cisgender heterosexual male. Those films were made by Japanese heterosexual male for a similar audience from the 60s to the 90s, and deal extensively with the female body. There is a certain distance between me and those texts that will always be there. The best I can hope is to acknowledge this distance and try to bridge it with strong contextual understanding and a rejection of ethnocentric points of view. This however does not mean moral relativity, but a willingness to respect and engage with the other on its own terms.

This thesis will not try to defend or shy away from discussing more troubling aspects of the genre, but will, as with everything else related to these films, apply a methodology that allies formal and narrative readings of specific scenes with a socio-political inquiry into the context from which these films emerged and a questioning of the ideological nature of these images by harnessing feminist and Marxist film theory. In this, I will borrow Kristin Thompson's evolution of the close reading, which she terms "close analysis", as a way to counteract the lingering effects of New Criticism and its credo of being alone with the text. Such a view, in its evincing of the positionality of the writer and of extra textual elements, seems now misguided if not purposefully short-sighted. For Thompson, "close analysis" is more open than close reading, which implies interpretation, whilst analysis is more welcoming to various methodologies such as including film history or political context in one's research. "Close analysis" with its openness to the text and its formal approach fits most closely with my research goals, meaning understanding these films as engaging with the female body in both formal and ideological terms.

For this, I will structure the work around a chronological reading of the history of Pink cinema and a number of case studies to further emphasize how the changes in industrial practices shaped the type of films being produced. But then, with a genre as prolific as Pink cinema, we must ask the questions of which films should we look at, what films can we use as case studies. The answer seems to be to gather a number of representative films, films that in some way can be seen as exemplary of the large body of work that would otherwise be impossible to cover. We have already singled out Wakamatsu as such a figure both for his historical importance and the recognition he has accrued in academic fields. Pink cinema is interesting in that fans and film critics of the period have already done some of this work. A

slew of directors have been given mythical sounding nicknames like “The Seven Heavenly Kings of Pink” or “The Four Devils of *Pinku*” to describe the 90s generation. Many fan magazines and awards have also delineated the best films of each year and the filmmakers that stood out. The fact that these lists and descriptions seem to largely come out of dedicated fans (the Pink Grand Prix award is run by a fan magazine for example) also offers an interesting window into the preferences of the public rather than the opinions of the intelligentsia which can stand somewhat at a remove from the taste of the larger public.

Of course, with a genre like Pink which often trafficked in unsavoury subjects like rape or incest, only looking at the vaulted would not tell the entire story. That is why I have a chapter dedicated to the more low-rent films which coasted on shock value and violence against women. By finding movies that can both illustrate the highs and the lows of *Pinku*, that can tell us about the time they were made in and the people who made and watched them, I believe we can accurately portray and do justice to the genre whilst still remaining critical and perceptive in our unpacking of the genre’s ideological and aesthetic values.

For this project, I have developed three chapters which help me in thinking of Pink cinema as an evolving system that follows along with changing industrial norms and socio-political issues like the place of women in modern society. The first chapter will focus on the politically relevant early period of the 60s with filmmakers like Wakamatsu Koji and Adachi Masao making politically charged films in line with that decade’s student movements and radical politics. This chapter will examine Wakamatsu’s treatment of the female body as a political object through the films *Secrets Behind the Wall* (*Kabe no naka no himegoto*, 1965), *The Embryo Hunts in Secret* (*Taiji ga mitsuryo suru toki*, 1966) and *Ecstasy of the Angels*

(*Tenshi no kokotsu*, 1972), as well as their engagement with the theories of embodiment of Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks.

The second chapter will focus on *Roman Porno* and the attempt from major studios to legitimize the genre as Japan is leaving behind its tumultuous political past and entering a period of unprecedented wealth. This period spans from the late 60s to the late 80s and sees more generic conventions applied to Pink cinema. This chapter explores the idea of the body as a site of performance (using Judith Butler's definition of performance and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection as intellectual touchstones) in and outside of genre logics through Ishii Teruo's *Orgies of Edo* (*Zankoku Ijo Gyakutai Monogatari Genroku Jokeizu*, 1969), Kumashiro Tatsumi's *The World of Geisha* (*Yoyo-han Fusuma No Urabari*, 1973) and Tanaka Noboru's *She-Beast Market* (*Maruhi: shikijo mesu ichiba*, 1974). The second part of the chapter extends the discussion of performance to *Violent Pink* films and their treatment of rape and violence against women as a tool to punish female bodies by looking at Hasebe Yasuharu's *Rape! 13th Hour* (*Reipu 25-ji: Bôkan*, 1977), *Attacked!* (*Osou*, 1978) and *Raping!* (*Yaru*, 1978) as well as Wakamatsu's *Serial Rapist* (*Jûsan-nin renzoku bôkôma*, 1978) which aims to deconstruct the violent subgenre.

The final chapter will cover the independent scene of the late 80s and 90s which sprouted as the major film studio stopped producing Pink films. Those violent, bracingly personal films chronicle Japan's "Lost Decade" of economic uncertainty and recession, showing a disconnected society in search of something tangible to hold on to after the economic disaster. By looking at Sato Hisayasu's *Lolita Vibrator Torture* (*Lolita vib-zeme*, 1987) and *Splatter: Naked Blood* (*Megyaku : NAKED BLOOD*, 1995), we will discuss the

idea of the female body as a site of transcendence by engaging with Gilles Deleuze's theories of schizophrenia and Georges Bataille's *expérience extrême*.

What will structure these three chapters however, is their engagement with the idea of the female body as both an aesthetic and ideological crux of Pink cinema. Each chapter is based around a new moment in Pink cinema instigated by changing industrial practices, but those practices take their full sense only when understood through their treatment of the female body. In the first chapter, we find a political body, a body that is both political in itself and made political by its involvement in film as political discourse. The second chapter with its greater emphasis on genre finds the body transforming into a site of performance, performance within genre norms of sexuality, but also of social narratives, class and marginality. The final chapter finds the female body once again changing along with industrial practices to become a space of transcendence within an alienating society.

Over these three chapters some ideas recur, making it necessary to define them now. The term abjection will come up, oftentimes applied to bodies, sex and various other acts. First theorised by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva defines the abject as something like a corpse or bodily fluids, although this extends beyond these examples, which menaces and is repudiated by social reason since it does not "respect borders, positions and rules" (4). The abject creates disgust in its threats to subjecthood like the corpse which "seen outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (4). This reaction is caused by the fear the abject creates of the disintegration of meaning caused by the effacement of distinctions between the self and the other, the object and the subject. Abjection is, however, necessary for identity formation in that a distinction between the "self" and "the abject" is needed in the creation of subjectivity.

This still leaves us with the question why look at Pink cinema at all. Isn't there a reason it's largely forgotten now? Why lavish such attentions on a disreputable genre where women are often no more than objects to ogle or mistreat? Above all else, Pink cinema has produced some amazing films over its storied history. Whether it be the political, experiments of Wakamatsu, the lived-in intensity of Tanaka or the wild and bracing films of Sato, the archives of *Pinku* are filled with treasures. Pink cinema also acted as a training ground for a whole generation of film directors. Many of the big names of modern Japanese cinema started out in *Pinku*, Kurosawa Kiyoshi or Takita Yojiro to name just two. Pink's importance as a space for young talent to develop following the collapse of the studio system is invaluable in understanding contemporary Japanese cinema.

Pink cinema's relatively lax rules also meant those young directors could experiment and create radical, personal works on the cheap. Anyone with interest in underground, political or low-budget cinema can find a wealth of interesting films in the world of Pink. Looking at *Pinku* as a space of freedom and political speech can be a productive way of thinking of the genre and its legacy.

The relatively small amount of academic work done on the subject is also tantalizing for would-be historians, one last untouched patch in the history of Japanese cinema, as it were. Only two printed books have been published on the subject in English (*Behind the Pink Curtain* by Jasper Sharp and *Japanese Cinema Encyclopedia: The Sex Films* by Thomas and Yuko Mihara Weisser) with a third EBook (*The Pink Book* edited by Abé Mark Nornes) accounting for most of the written material on the subject. The two printed books are more histories than academic texts and will therefore serve to fill in historical details. *The Pink Book* provides several pieces on a variety of subjects from different writers with differing

opinions on the subject. For example, Andrew Grossman is very critical of other writers and their defense of Pink cinema. Kirsten Cather provides a fascinating history of censorship of Pink cinema, whilst Kimata Kimihiko writes a more personal account of his past relationship to the genre. A handful of articles and chapters scattered across academic journals and books on the history of Japanese cinema round out the pack. Those smaller pieces tend to focus on Wakamatsu or his collaborator Adachi Masao (like *Walls of Flesh: The Films of Koji Wakamatsu (1965-1972)* by Alberto Toscano and Hirokawa Go or *Masao Adachi: Portrait of a Radical in Cinema and Politics* by Johannes Schönherr), but some like Ryan Taylor's *Demon(ized) women: Female punishment in the 'pink film' and J-Horror* or "*The Dream Has Not Ended Yet*": *Splattered Bodies and the Durable Orgasm in Hisayasu Sato's Naked Blood* by Jay McRoy offer perspectives on other aspects of the genre. Because of the relative lack of literature specifically dealing with Pink cinema, this thesis will engage with a variety of thinkers and theories both in and outside of film studies, as the chapter breakdown bears out.

Pink film centres on sexuality, an important aspect of any society. For our purposes, the subject of sexuality allows us to ask questions about the place of women in society and the changing morals. Also, the size of the output of Pink cinema renders it somewhat inevitable. Can we really ignore a genre that played such a large role in Japanese cinematic production? Any historian of Japanese cinema must at least acknowledge the importance Pink cinema had on the makeup of the studio system for over two decades. Following the history of *Pinku* also means following the history of censorship in Japan, another interesting way of understanding that culture and the changes it went through during the second half of the 20th century.

For all these reasons, Pink cinema offers itself as a fascinating field of research. We will focus our interest on the figure of the female body, but such a large grouping of films offers endless possibilities. The female body, as we will soon see, is also limitless.

The “Age of Competition”:

Wakamatsu Koji and the Political Body

When Pink film “officially” started in 1962, few could have predicted the immense impact the genre would have on the history of Japanese cinema. What started out as nudie pictures peddled for a quick buck became a cornerstone of the Japanese film industry at a moment when it was shaken by its most important changes, namely the fall of the studio system. But was there something deeper hiding in the little genre that could? By virtue of its breadth, both in terms of duration, quantity of production and thematic consistency, the genre affords us an unique opportunity to think through a fundamental problem in cinema, that of the representation of the female body, especially in the gendered dynamics of eroticism. Ultimately Pink film forces us to think of the ethics, aesthetics and pluralities of the sexual body as image.

Looking at the work of Pink film pioneer Wakamatsu Koji offers us a few questions to investigate. The young film director made defiantly political films that meshed taboo subjects, experimental ambitions and strident politicking to create a cinematic oeuvre entirely his own. Watching his films, one is struck by the necessity of sexuality to his political message, by the feeling that for films of such force a genre like Pink film needed to be invented. It is not merely a question of breaking bourgeois taboos, but of creating a context within which questions as personal as sexual desire can intermingle and enter into dialogue with the macro of politics. In some ways, he made films that spoke directly to his audience, tackling political subjects with the same honesty he would bring to his sex scenes. One gets

the feeling that Wakamatsu needed Pink cinema, a brash, underground, disreputable group of films to make sense of the political waves shaking the archipelago.

That Wakamatsu also serves as a pioneer of the form, he is sometimes referred to as the “Godfather” of Pink cinema, only serves to highlight the shared DNA between politics and Pink cinema, something we will continue to explore in future chapters as the genre changes and mutates along with renewed industrial practices and an evolving Japanese society. This chapter will try to understand the ways in which Pink cinema and its relationship to the body, in particular the female body, helped Wakamatsu achieve his politico-sexual cinema, how his cinema engaged with a more politically active society and how the genre and its unique context evolved into a potent tool of political expression. It will also attempt to define the ways in which Wakamatsu and other filmmakers of the era engaged with the theme of sexuality in the infancy of the genre. *Secrets Behind the Wall* will lead us into a discussion of the complicated “matrix of engagement” Wakamatsu creates in order to produce a dialogue between his film and the audience. After this, a discussion of *The Embryo Hunts in Secret* will explore how Wakamatsu’s use of the female body within narratives of class struggle complicates his treatment of systems of power. Finally, *Ecstasy of the Angels* finds the director reckoning with the way radical leftist politics and his own cinema have failed to produce truly revolutionary work. Through all this, we will analyse how Wakamatsu presents a political body that allows him to mediate a number of issues in his films.

When talking of Wakamatsu, it is essential to start by discussing the context from which his films emerged. It seems almost too easy to reduce an *oeuvre* to the high points of its author’s life, but Wakamatsu’s biography differs strongly enough from the typical

narrative of Japanese filmmakers of the time (film school, then assistant director, then rebellion, then New Wave) to warrant a mention. Born in 1936 in Wakuya, Miyagi prefecture, a small town in northern Japan, Wakamatsu joined the *yakuza* at a young age and began to work as “security” on film shoots. From there, he decided to jump into directing low-budget *Ero-duction* (erotic education) films, growing more and more as an artist until his international breakthrough, after about 20 films since 1963, at the 1965 Berlin Film Festival with *Secrets Behind the Wall*, a film the Japanese government deemed a “national disgrace” (Furuhata, 180). He then moved further from his exploitative early films towards a more ambitious, experimental and radically political cinema.

Wakamatsu in many ways is exemplary of this early period, too low-rent for the studio system, his films would document, almost in real-time, the young filmmaker’s relationship to the tumultuous politics of the period. Oftentimes, he would base his plots on headlines of the times (as in *Violated Angels* (*Okasareta hakui*, 1967) based on a murder spree in Chicago) or even anticipating events (*Ecstasy of the Angels*’ chilling echo of the Asama-Sanso incident). The rapid production schedule of Pink films allowed Wakamatsu and his screenwriter Adachi Masao to make a film commenting on Mishima Yukio’s suicide within a month of the incident with their film *Sexual Reincarnation: Woman Who Wants to Die* (*Segura magura: shinitai onna*, 1970) including newspaper clippings of the event in the film and even parodying it by having one of the characters be a member of Mishima’s group who misses the suicide by sleeping with his girlfriend.

These movies had their detractors, most famously Donald Richie, who argued that Wakamatsu made “embarrassing soft-core psychodrama,” and that Noël Burch had mysteriously persuaded the French into seeing “great cinematic depth” in Wakamatsu’s

Violated Angels. Ritchie continued: “It occurs to no-one that the reason for making it was non-cinematic. So Koji [Wakamatsu] was treated like his junk meant something” (2004, 259). This is a position which seems to reduce the films to the functions of their genre in order not engage with them. Wakamatsu’s Pink films have also gained a number of defenders, such as the critics Hirasawa Go and Alberto Toscano, who seem to want to elevate his work over their genre trappings. This is not my purpose. I believe the genre and its spectatorship was central to Wakamatsu’s work, both in how he dealt with abject sexuality and how it afforded him freedom to experiment.

Adding to this, the films’ production schedule, often filmed over only a week with relatively short pre-production, only exacerbated the idea that Pink cinema, with its unique production circumstances was uniquely suited to tackle the raucous 1960s. Much of the political strife of the time centred around the idea of returning Japan to the Japanese, of expulsing outside hegemonies out of the country, in this case symbolised by American military bases and the renewal of Anpo (Sharp, 69). In this sense, we could understand the political actions of the younger generation as trying to redefine their identity outside of both the oppressive value system that dominated Imperial Japan and the imposed Western ideals of the American victors (Sharp, 70).

Radical politics was in the air, with the 1960s emerging as one of the most politically tumultuous periods in Japanese history. As in the West, a new, politicized generation started making its voice heard, with the most extreme example being student riots mostly targeted at the renewal of the American military presence on Japanese soil and Japanese fears of being an Asian frontline in a possible war between the U.S. and the Soviets (Sharp, 69). The young generation found itself torn between two poles. Following the end of World War II and the

dropping of two atomic bombs, Japan was a nation in crisis, wounded and confused. America imposed a new set of values centred on individualism, democracy and capitalism through its hegemonic influence in most spheres of society, what Yoshimi Shunya calls a “directly present ‘other’ with which people had to deal on an everyday basis” (436). At the same time, traditional Japanese values which emphasized the group before the individual and championed subservience to authority became taboo for fear of a return to the dark days of Japanese imperialism. Those values as Sakuta Keiichi explains it meant that “The individual is so submerged in community—from family all the way out to the state—that identity and autonomy are almost entirely obscured” (226), translating the ambivalence some people felt towards their past. Others, however, saw Westernized values of postwar individualism as “an amorphous form of selfish privatism that would most likely entail apathy toward public affairs” (Koschmann, 613).

Out of this tension emerged a radical left which can be seen as a rejection of Western values and a return towards prizing the group in the form of class unity. At the same time, the post-war economic miracle was rapidly creating an affluent middle class which would split the difference between Western and Japanese values after the failure of the radical left movement in the early 1970s.

Concurrent to this, a new market for more sexually explicit films emerged as a result of relaxed censorship in the form of *Ero-duction* films, a precursor to Pink cinema. Wakamatsu stands as a synthesis of those two strands, allying political commentary with explicit sexual content to document and capture the troubled younger generation. His films also pitched themselves to this same audience by walking a thin line between exploring the

complicated sexuality of Japanese audiences and fuelling it. These films were, in fact, intended for a primarily male audience both in their distribution through private theatre chains and in the types of sexuality they catered to. Women in these films are sometimes raped and assaulted. They are often allowed revenge, but that does not change the fact that, for most audiences, the main interest of these films lies in their prurient pleasure, pleasure that is more often than not gendered and violent. Do the films enact a different kind of politics for male and (potential) female viewers? The question is complicated by the intentionality of the author. Is Wakamatsu using the trappings of the genre to deliver his political messages, half-heartedly including sex scenes to draw in audiences only to spring on them his revolutionary rhetoric, or is he more complicit in the representation of sexual violence? Does that attitude taint his message? Can he be genuinely revolutionary while still promoting a sexuality that appears to reaffirm patriarchy?

You could see those heavy topics being discussed in the more respectable works of the Japanese New Wave, with the lost young men of Oshima Nagisa striking out at everything around them or the incest as sublimated attempt to reconcile with traditional Japanese values narrative of Yoshida's *Story Written on Water* (Yoshida Yoshishige, *Mizu de kakareta monogatari*, 1965). However, Pink cinema with its direct access to the deepest secrets of his Japanese audience, namely its sexuality, could in some ways dig deeper, or at least engage in a different dialogue with audiences. Adachi Masao, frequent collaborator to Wakamatsu and accomplished radical filmmaker in his own right, talked of audiences at the time of these movies as being enraptured, saying: "People would watch them quietly and intensely, even reverently" (Nornes, 14). What then inspired such devotion and attention in a public we would assume would only be interested in the visual pleasure of bare flesh?

We can trace the beginning of an answer in this mix of politics and sexuality that would come to define this early era of Wakamatsu's career. Politics is often thought of as being exterior, as presenting itself more in the background of things, affecting environments (something Adachi explored with his Landscape Cinema³), but it can also have deep effects on the psyche, mixing itself in complicated ways with sexuality and becoming enshrined in the body. Most of the films we will look at will in some ways deal with the topic of authority, one of the most visible ways the political manifest itself. Some films will even fetishize authority figures or the fascist past of Japan, complicating the audience's relationship to this difficult period of history. Wakamatsu positions himself within this fluid and ever-evolving discourse, trying to chart with his public the changes shaking him and his society, both on the political and sexual level.

A thread that seems to link all those movies is their portrayal of sexuality as a mostly negative concept that can be used to oppress people or to represent a broken psyche. This seems strange given that Wakamatsu was working in erotic cinema, a genre that would seem to present sexuality as a positive experience meant to be enjoyed. This is perhaps representative of the times, Wakamatsu being an angry young radical out to change society could not produce happy films, for him the paradigms of oppression and violence needed to infiltrate every part of his films if they were to impact the viewer. We do find some small pockets of dissent among his works, of broken people using sex to mend and create bonds, to create a space of love amid an uncaring world. This is perhaps most prominent in *Go Go Second Time Virgin* (Wakamatsu Koji, *Yuke yule nidome no shojo*, 1969) where two brutalized young adults share a moment of respite together on a rooftop before the world

³ A political and cinematic theory that the political could best be captured by looking at landscapes.

catches up to them with fatal consequences.

This tug-of-war is evident in Wakamatsu's first mature work, *Secrets Behind the Wall* which follows a young student on edge before taking his college entrance exams as he spies on his neighbour's sexual bouts with a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, herself an ex peace activist stuck in the stifling role of an housewife. At the film climax's, the student ultimately kills her in a sublimated attempt to recover his manhood. The film, starting with a montage on the banality of post-war housing and the *danchi*, introduces us to a character pressured by his environment, being asked to conform to expectations of entering a good college and settling into society and another disillusioned by matrimonial life. The film at first keeps them at bay. It's interesting to think of them as representations of two archetypes that dominated post-war Japanese cinema, the angry student and the disillusioned housewife and what their eventual meeting can tell us about Wakamatsu's views on his generation.

The viewer is also subtly asked to empathize with the character of the student, who is surely closer to the lived experiences of the largely male audience. The peeping tom narrative mirrors the viewer's relationship with the screen, even more so in this case where one has come to see an erotic film in an underground setting. Frequent images of eyes reinforce this idea of watching and being watched. The student also uses a telescope to spy on his neighbours, a form of proto-cinematic camera that is afforded numerous POV shots, further emphasizing the link between viewer and character. The student character comes to embody the "scopophilic pleasures" that Laura Mulvey would later diagnose as well as provide a space for the audience to project their ego, to identify with the "image seen" (1975). This is the first part of what I will call Wakamatsu's "matrix of engagement", a set of formal and

narrative choices meant to fully engage the viewer within a dialectic on sexuality and politics.

Another part of this project lies in Wakamatsu's treatment of the actual. The political aura of the time is well represented with footage of student demonstrations and newspaper headlines splashed throughout the film. As Furuhata Yuriko puts it: "a number of his films from this period similarly appropriate, remediate, and directly cite then current news and media events. It is this citational strategy that confers on his work an uncanny sensation of *actuality*." (150). In this, the films are "contiguous with the historically 'real' world outside the screen." (151). They reach out to the audience and their shared experience of the "real" to create a sense of being in the moment with the viewer, of sharing the same mediated journalistic space, the same political landscape. The epiphanies or letdowns, the political discussions and realizations presented in the films are therefore amplified by their relationship to an "actuality" that envelops the audience in a shared experience of the temporality of the journalistic images (fast, ever-changing, rooted in the "real" of the event) and the cinematic images (slower, manufactured), something that Furuhata describes as: "the temporal proximity between the media event and its calculated repetition" (151). The films in those moments expand beyond their diegesis into the no-less manipulated world of the journalistic to further engage with audiences and their previous engagement with the political and its systems of dissemination: the journalistic image.

Other forms of media, in this case Western pornography, are also used to signify a space of desire outside of the pro-filmic space, placing sexuality as its own layer of meaning that can be superimposed to form another understanding of the scene, similar to the director's own entanglement of sex and politics. Wakamatsu exteriorizes and physicalizes those

emotions and desires, putting bare on the screen the complicated interplay of sexuality and politics that is at the base of his character's identity. In one particularly interesting scene, the main character masturbates. He is filmed at chest level at a frontal angle. What would normally be distancing for its frankness is rapidly turned-around when Wakamatsu superimposes the sexual images in the young man's head on the screen, in effect visualizing his desires and creating a direct visual link between the viewer and the character's psyche. Those images mainly show big-breasted Western women, showing how profound the "invasion" of the West has progressed in the period that Yoshimi terms the "The Period of American Penetration". As he explains it in his summary of the book *American Culture*: "Against the backdrop of rapid economic growth during this period, American lifestyle penetrated deeply into the lives of average Japanese." (434)

Wakamatsu shows a generation lost between the scars of the past and a future that seems dictated by outside forces, a generation guided by an anger it doesn't know where to direct. In some ways, Wakamatsu is searching for answers to a more national problem, using the tools of sexuality to get at the heart of the issue that would be familiar to everyone in the theater, a problem that as Yoshimi describes became rooted in questions of desire and national identity:

The postwar phenomenon of 'Americanism' in Japan was seen not just as the result of American military and political imposition, but as a process of deep structural change involving the emotions and desires of Japanese people. 'America' provided a convincing answer to the void left in the collective consciousness by war defeat. During the course of postwar history, Japanese people reconstructed their own sense

of national identity through the medium of desire and antipathy towards 'America'.
(434)

The superimposition also acts as a potent metaphor for the complicated interplay of desire happening inside the character. The filmic image, which melds the two images into a single one, affects both, changes them in minute ways. This friction between character and desire is messy and ever-moving, like the image we are presented. Nothing is clear, everything is shrouded in a sort of haze where the results of the political meet the depth of the sexual to create a strange, beautiful image of a lost young man.

Even when the trifecta of past, politics and sex is present in a single image, its delineation is as unclear and ever-changing on screen as it is in the minds of the viewers. There is no fixed position or hierarchy, each element contaminates and complicates each other like different liquids in a glass. Superimpositions, with their constantly morphing images, each movement creating a different interplay between layers, are a perfect formal representation of this.

Wakamatsu reuses this trick in order to deal with the specter of bomb and the looming scars of Japan's imperial past. The character of the Hiroshima survivor is strangely fetishized by Wakamatsu's camera, his scars gleaming in the harsh black-and-white, becoming sexualized by the caresses of his lover. Wakamatsu keeps the scars in close-up, further fetishizing them, distancing them from their human context, until they become pure symbols of history and pain, of Japanese flesh being dirtied by American bombs. The body here becomes subsumed inside the political, losing its innate individuality to stand in for the scars of a nation, pushing this scene into the realm of the semiotic, reimagining sexual desire as a series of signs for the larger traumas of the post-war period. He becomes as Julia Alekseyeva

notes “an embodiment of Japan’s national trauma” (99). The female character vocalizes this process saying: “You are the symbol of Hiroshima, the symbol of Japan. You are the symbol of anti-war. I am so happy... I love you, in order to not forget the war.”

Interestingly, this scene aligns itself more with the desire of the woman, who is sexualizing the scars of her lover as a way to bring herself back to her past as a peace protester. Both viewer and character turn this man into a symbol, something quietly revolutionary as it is a woman who is able to redefine this painful past into a tool of pleasure. She is also the only character who is ultimately able to positively engage with this shared past. Just like the student, we see her desires superimposed over her climaxing face, visually representing a woman’s sexuality as both personal and in some ways central to this generational moment of redefinition and searching. In her moments of pleasure, we see the Hiroshima bombing and student protests attacked by police, all part of this woman’s complicated inner world. The radical statement is that this woman is able to overcome personal and national trauma, to sublimate this dark past and complicated present into a moment of pleasure if however, fleeting. This almost utopic view of pleasure brings to mind the idea of a revolutionary pleasure which in its shapelessness transcends all notions of power structures, the “explosive desire” of Deleuze, something Wakamatsu only gestures at here, but which he would explore a decade later with Oshima Nagisa.

Perhaps, as Herbert Marcuse argues in *Eros and Civilisation*, this view of a politically liberating sexuality, of a revolutionary orgasm is counterproductive since it emerges from a context of social repression (society) and blinds us to its ills. Maybe it only gestures to a revolutionary state or worse consigns political fulfilment to an unreachable transcendental state. I would disagree with this by pointing out that any state of being that supersedes our

repressive capitalist one can only help in showing alternatives to its oppressive logics and dispersed false consciousness. It also locates revolutionary potential within the individual that can be shared and communicated with others. Or we can be pessimistic like Andrew Grossman and view Pink film as being part of a larger model of production that entraps libido and which reduces individuals to “the inexorable mechanics of nocturnal masturbation before a video monitor, becomes circumscribed, enslaved to means of commercial production, and cordoned off from reality.” (238). Sadly, this view strikes me as profoundly patronizing of the audience who are reduced to mindless zombies unable to discern the subtleties of the dancing light before them or make any sort of choice about their lives. It is also strange since Wakamatsu seems to be railing against the same enemy in his critique of the corrupting effects of Western pornography.

This woman’s desire in some ways opens a door for the audience to rethink and reappropriate their history, to take this matter of history which belongs to them and engage with it however they see fit. This can also be read as a rejection of the major narrative pushed by the government at the time of a new young Japanese body untouched by the specter of the war as exemplified by the public display of the Atom Boy at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics (Hayashi 2010, 53).

In this moment of the female orgasm here finding its visual representation in both the orgasmic face of the character and the explosion of the H-Bomb, Wakamatsu is also able, and perhaps forced by the censoring of genitals, to devise a form of what Linda Williams calls the “frenzy of the visible”, the search for the “truth” of female orgasm, outside of the phallogocentric logic of the “money shot”. Here the “immoral” nature of synthesizing death and sex in the image itself suggest this elusive “frenzy of the visible” of the female orgasm that

cannot be achieved simply acoustically or even visually (a woman can fake an orgasm), in that it seems to emerge from an unwanted place. It becomes an almost organic consequence of sex like the male ejaculation. By mixing the embodied visibility of orgasm in the profilmic space of the performer's face with the invoked cinematic images of desire, Wakamatsu is able to escape the "obsessive focus on the female body (which) proves to be a narcissistic evasion of the feminine "other" deflected back to the masculine self." (Williams, 267).

The film acknowledges, even visualizes, her desire, displacing the obsessive focus onto the scarred male body of the nation and disrupting the gendered construction of desire within the genre. The focus on an ultimate orgasm is perhaps still rooted in masculine sexual economies of result and "goal-driven release" (Williams, 273), but the presence of the sexual encounter outside of the spheres of the marital and reproductive (she had herself sterilized to "free herself up for the struggle"), as well as the casting of the woman in the role of the desiring subject and not desired object, suggests from Wakamatsu a desire to represent a female sexual subjectivity rooted in a female body that is meant to be understood as a more productive projection of national discourse than her scarred partner.

Those formal gestures also function as a form of self-indictment for Wakamatsu who uses the tropes of a genre that is historically indebted to the liberalizing forces of the American occupation. As Jasper Sharp notes, the Civil Information and Education Service (CIE) encouraged the "three S's of 'Sex, Screens and Sport' that conservatives had railed against in the 30s" (22), leading to the first onscreen kiss in 1946's *Twenty-Year-Old Youth* (Sasaki Yasushi, *Hatachi no seishun*) that were heavily criticized in the national press. Donald Richie writes of the scandal: "Was the kiss 'merely commercial' or was it 'artistically motivated'? Was it 'hygienic'? Did it have a 'sexual motive'? And, was it 'Japanese or

not’?” (1987, 223) Read in this context, is Pink cinema merely a consequence of the policies of the American occupation to change the attitudes that CIE’s David Conde condescendingly describes as “Japanese tend to do things sneakily. They should do things openly” (Sharp, 22).

By recentering the experience of desire in a Japanese body (the orgasmic faces of the boy and the housewife, the scarred body of the Hiroshima survivor) and by acknowledging the presence of outside influence (Western pornography, rallies against American presence, the bomb) within that dialectic of desire – here meaning both characters and audiences – Wakamatsu is able to engage with the contradictory impulses at the heart of his characters and of the genre itself, if only for a brief moment as the tragic end of the film and of Wakamatsu’s early political phase seems to suggest. We’ll see in the next chapter strategies that were used to reclaim the Japanese body and by extension Pink cinema itself from the logic of Western influence.

Wakamatsu doesn’t extend this instant of bliss beyond its momentary sublimity, quickly bringing the proceedings back down to earth in a melancholy post-coital scene where both lovers agree love can only exist in the fleeting moment and the man discourages the woman of thinking of him as being able to take her out of her banal everyday life. The man, in rejecting his role in this economy of desire, regains some of his humanity outside of the semiotic formal logic of the scene which continues to focus on and abstract the detail of both bodies. But his physicality still inspires fascination.

The flesh bears the mark of history, but also of death. It materializes the potent link between a lost identity, mainly the traditional Japanese values of self-sacrifice and subservience to authority that became abstracted by the Imperial regime, pushed to their logical limits by a system that demanded total subservience to the divine power of the

Emperor, and the legacy of death attached to them. Here this fascination with death is made flesh and history, it still radiates an aura from this fateful day in 1945. The scarred body is also abject, hence the fascination it inspires. It is abject because it is half-cadaver, dead tissues always linking back to their moment of death. History, therefore, becomes abject because it is death. Thinking too long about this history can destroy the viewer, but also as we've mentioned in the introduction, unsettle polite society and its systems of power, infect the audience with its lack of rules and borders.

The body, therefore becomes replaced, stands in for objects and symbols of a larger past, that can then become sexualized by the touch of a pretty woman, of a Japanese woman untouched physically by the war, but still drawn to it, affected by its memory, just like the viewer in the darkened theater. This becomes another piece of the puzzle of the characters' sexual identity, something they share with an entire generation blocked off from their darkened, abject history. The flesh stands in for death, but also for an entire tradition that has been deemed too dangerous, too outdated by the American victors. Here lies the fascination, the Eros and Thanatos pull at the centre of the image. There is an impulse to return to the familiar to the basis of the Japanese identity that is only emboldened by the aura of death. The woman touches him, but the image itself with its textured black and white suggests, as Laura Marks termed it, an "haptic visuality", an image that asks to be understood as a tactile experience (2), something replicated in the actual sexual encounter which is represented through close-ups of fingers running over scarred flesh and hands grasping at clumps of flesh. The emphasis is therefore placed on the body of the characters, but also on the body of the viewer who is brought back to his own bodily experience and his own relationship with the signs of history the bodies stand for.

Marks locates a feminine experience of cinema, in line with the scene's engagement with female sexuality, saying:

“Haptic images are erotic in that they construct an intersubjective relationship between beholder and image. The viewer is called upon to fill in the gaps in the image, to engage with the traces the image leaves. By interacting up close with an image, close enough that figure and ground commingle, the viewer relinquishes her own sense of separateness from the image – not to know it but to give herself up to her desire for it.” (183)

This process of “filling in the gaps” and of giving oneself to the image seems in line with Wakamatsu's project of a discursive cinematic image that allows for the strong embodiment of sexuality within a revolutionary political project or as Vivian Sobchack puts it that the “subjective lived body and the objective world do not oppose each other, but on the contrary are passionately intertwined” (286). Just like Wakamatsu's superimposed images there is an ethical and utopic project in seeing those two worlds intertwined on screen.

The film, in its constant dialogue between body and history, viewer and image, also suggests this “haptic visuality” is part of a general strategy from Wakamatsu to implicate every part of the viewer, whether it be their body, their intellect, their desires or their politics, within a productive dialectic. In Wakamatsu's film, the viewer creates and is created by desire, by his relationship to images and history and this history's relationship with him. Bodies are made political and imbued with signs, because the body of the viewer is inherently political. Marks, reading Sobchack, explains: “The phenomenological model of subjectivity posits a mutual permeability and mutual creation of self and other. Cinema spectatorship is a special example of the unfolding of self and world, an intensified instance

of the way our perceptions open us onto the world.” (149). This co-creation is at the center of the sexualities of the characters, as well as the engagement of the viewers who are brought into the world of the film, but also the worlds of actuality and politics and history through the myriad ways Wakamatsu engages with the perceptions of his imagined viewership, something that starts and ends in the embodied cinematic and spectatorial body.

The scenes of love-making are watched over by a portrait of Stalin, further pushing those scenes in the realm of semiotics, of symbols of history and trauma. This image of Stalin watching the painful past of Japan being fetishized by a lost young man is an apt summation of Wakamatsu’s melding of sex and politics. In depicting a psyche pulled in various directions, weighed down by history and societal expectations, he creates indelible images, that shock in their symbolic bluntness and taboo subjects. Alekseyeva, however, reads this visual quotation as an implicit critique given Stalin’s recently disclosed savagery (100). She extends this view of an implied and formal critical distance to the rest of the film which to her eyes refute the types of embodiment theorized by Sobchack and Marks in favour of a male-centric “kino-eye” (as seen through the character of the student voyeur) which prizes an “hyper-optical framework” in an “attempt to prevent the viewer from affect-oriented relation to the events on screen” (107). This can be seen in the emphasis placed on voyeurism, distancing geometric compositions and fragmentary editing patterns over the haptic openness of the early scenes. (105)

I would agree to a certain extent that Wakamatsu embarks in a more theoretical, less embodied form of address after the first few scenes of intimacy. It seems that Wakamatsu is less interested in the body as a physical reality existing before his camera, than as a receptacle of history, politics and desire, a conduit through which he can enter in a dialectic

with his audience. This might help explain his use of sexual violence, his characters are less living human beings than figures through which abstract concepts can be explored. In that sense his films are rarely purely erotic. His aesthetic is either created through a cold remove that presents the naked body as a white mass within the frame or through close-ups that abstract the corporeal. Bodies are meant to become ideas that can shock and force people to react. I tend to agree with Grossman's assessment that people tend to read too much into Wakamatsu's supposed Brechtian tendencies, whether it be Burch, David Desser or Sharp. I disagree however that this lack of pure "Brechtian didacticism" means Wakamatsu engages in "false consciousness" (Grossman, 246), a criticism we can begin to levy later on in the genre's life. Wakamatsu's films are more complicated than a simple binary between haptic visuality or Brechtian aesthetics. Maybe they "mystify and bury" their themes in allegory (Grossman, 246), but this is part and parcel of a project that puts audience engagement at the center of its formal system.

Furthermore, I do not think those strategies act to refute the "haptic visuality" of the early scenes, but instead engages them in a dialectic with another type of subjectivity, complicating and challenging both viewpoint. Alekseyeva saw them as being feminine and masculine, one embodied, the other scopophilic, and the film's splitting between a female and male character seems to bear that out. Wakamatsu in that sense doesn't try to negate a female subjectivity, but to put it into contact with a male visual "objectivity", both within the diegesis of the film and the logics of a male-centric viewership and genre. Through the filmic, he is able to both subvert and pleasure a male-centric viewpoint, pointing at a way in which the female embodied subject can exist and subsume the political within her own body, whilst allowing for a more distanced, analytical and optical political discussion to take place.

Of course a strict gendering of feeling and intellect like Alekseyeva seems to be working under brings with it its own set of problems to untangle, which is why Wakamatsu's strategy of *mélange*, allowing for both a female subject to fetishize and look at a male body and a male character to have his sexuality embodied (in the masturbation scene), yields more interesting results. To a certain degree, Wakamatsu is trying to bring together two radically different experiences of reality, to think through a possible genre that could engage both mind and body, both the feminine and the masculine.

It is when these two strands are separated as when the student is unmoored from his sexuality, that this dialectic breaks down, that violence occurs. As the stress of exams bares down on the young man and his peeping takes up more of his time, he finds himself becoming impotent further fuelling his psychosis. Cut off from his sexuality he resorts to violence, sublimating his desire by raping his sister with a phallic vegetable and stabbing his neighbour, the ultimate act of violence/sex. If the woman found a way to engage with the darker parts of herself and turn them into a potential pleasure, the student represents the other side of the coin, someone who gets swallowed up by the systems of pressure around him (societal expectations, American hegemony, etc.) and whose sexuality becomes co-opted and then divorced from him. The ending seems to suggest that this type of violence if not properly dealt with will engulf everyone, even the woman who had found a way to cope with the past and the drudgery of her present. This sad conclusion is anchored within the female body which receives this residual violence, but is also in some ways the possible answer to this problem. The female notion of embodiment emerges as a way to mediate those dark impulses, this is perhaps why the character must use a knife to engage with it, a mechanical tool to maintain a distance, similar to the cinematic apparatus that can only suggest an

“haptic visuality” not a real touch. The female body and its embodied subjectivity is therefore political in that it suffers the blows of history and also delineates a revolutionary regime of engagement with reality, a possible ethical way of dealing with the world.

Wakamatsu’s “matrix of engagement”, therefore points to a possible answer within the embodied experiences of his audience. His formal dialectics and treatment of history and sexuality can be seen as trying to conjure up this radical embodiment, this political body. Wakamatsu’s films in some ways try to awake something within his viewers, to release an energy within them that could be directed towards political activism. As Sharp puts it:

“And just as mimesis lies at the heart of pornography, so it does with propaganda. The spectacle of bodies in motion, whether engaged in sexual activity of larger collective bodies of uniformed ranks of troops or rioting mobs whose individual members act as one provokes a subliminal response in its viewers, inviting them, inciting them to join in the fun” (76).

Wakamatsu addresses himself to a generation that is meant to continue the Japanese economic miracle, to place Japan within a political context dominated by the West and dictated by capitalism. His films, speaking on the almost subconscious language of impulses and desire, be it sex or violence, seek to ignite an anarchic response to authority rooted within the political body, an energy in line with the political protests happening in universities all over Japan that rejected American interference and oftentimes capitalism too. Protests is, after all, the body taking over a social space. The turn towards communism and the milieu of radical activism for Wakamatsu’s characters can also be read through this lens. Communism, with its tenets of putting the good of the community before oneself share some similarities with Japanese values of self-sacrifice (Richie, 2014, 346). It allows his

characters, who had been unmoored from their history and values to engage with them without the baggage of its violent history and also to enter into modernity without entirely sacrificing their national character.

Pink cinema also enters into this discourse. Its central metaphor of sex allows for an interesting dialogue between a society and its individuals navigating between a powerful over ego, the coded Japanese society (the pressures of exams in the case of *Secrets Behind the Wall*), and more subconscious, but no less powerful, impulses towards a pain-pleasure dynamic (the act of voyeurism, the charred skin lovingly caressed). Sex serves as a vehicle for these Japanese characters to enter into modernity by transgressing taboos and traditions and sublimating the pains of the past in search of a new identity outside of those imposed by the West and its invading pornography, an identity rooted inside the experiences of the body.

1966's *The Embryo Hunts in Secret* engages with this anarchic anti-authoritarian spirit in its story of a store employee being abused and tortured by her boss over a few days. The metaphor of violent authority that uses economic means to assert its power is easy to see. Early on the employee feels pressure to follow her boss back home for fear of losing her job, underscoring the dynamics of power present in every sphere of a capitalist society.

The film walks a fine line, showing how authority relishes in its violent ability to demean and dehumanize people, showing us the lengths of sexual violence the boss will go through to assert his dominance over his employee and to mold her into a submissive wife. However, the film is meant to be enjoyed on an erotic level, therefore to derive the same pleasure from the sexual images as the character, to fetishize the suffering of the oppressed. Now it's fair to ask, was Wakamatsu subservient to the genre of Pink cinema or was he in some ways using it to get his message across. Was his only goal to titillate audiences with

scandalous images or did he want to use the genre and its built-in audience to address his ideas to a larger group of people expecting only bawdy pleasures. There is something to be said for the shocking, especially in the space of cinema, a communal space but also an interior one, a darkened dialogue with images that are supposed to entertain and please.

In that sense, we can see the film playing two different sides. On the one hand, you share a certain amount of sexual pleasure with the main character. You begin to understand the mindset that seeks to dominate and belittle, and understanding the enemy can be an important tool in political activism. But more important is understanding those impulses in ourselves. If we derive pleasure from these images, it can be productive to ask why. Wakamatsu doesn't set himself up as a moral authority eschewing condemnations from high above. He understands that there is something seductive about power and violence and that his audience will probably also feel the same. He doesn't reject any part of the human experience, just like before he seeks to engage with the complexities inherent in sexuality.

This doesn't mean he entirely condones the action of the character. He subtly tips his hand throughout the movie as to his real allegiances by continually darkening the screen. As the violence gets more intense, the light seems to leave the film until an almost pitch-black climax where the employee finally kills her boss. Following her cathartic act of revenge, the light floods back into the movie, leaving us on a strangely optimistic note, showing that the meek can tear down those in power.

Borrowing Juana Maria Rodriguez's matrix surrounding object sexuality becomes useful in thinking through the complex interplay Wakamatsu creates. It also opens the possibility of a female audience who could take pleasure in the movies and perhaps more fully partake in the revolutionary project behind the films. Rodriguez, in trying to understand

the pull of racially violent sexuality on Latina women, recognizes the power of the type of sexual fantasies that “mark us as improper sexual subjects of feminist politics” (152), but also exposes the possibilities of that reaction being a productive way to engage with systems of power.

Rodriguez’s ideas allow us to more fully engage with the complexity and fluidity of Wakamatsu’s use of sexuality, of the type of scenes “that etch their way into our psychic imaginaries, that slither into our most shameful fantasies” (153). This engagement with the audience’s sexual fantasies lends these films a peculiar and complicated power. Like the characters who wrestle with their sexualities on screen, Wakamatsu’s representation of sexualities impacted by the trauma of war and the clash of values is meant to create a feeling of the abject, which paradoxically pushes the viewer further towards visceral embodiment. Rodriguez further argues that abjection “also becomes the site through which the particularities of our material embodiments exert their most powerful influence, and exert it in a way that returns us to an encounter with our sensing bodies” (141). It is in this power relationship between the abject and the embodied experience that Wakamatsu attempts to articulate a political argument, not a stale and rigid message, but a complicated engagement with the oppressive systems of power which embed themselves in every part of the individual from his attitudes to his body.

Wakamatsu himself said in an interview on the film that: “Pour moi l’homme représente le pouvoir, ou en tout cas tous ceux qui l’ont, et la femme représente le peuple. C’est mon interprétation mais elle peut très bien ne pas être celle de tout le monde”⁴. If the metaphor is somewhat reductive, it nonetheless explains a certain Marxist vision of class

⁴ For me the man represents power, or anyway those who have it, and the woman represents the people. It’s my interpretation, but it doesn’t have to be that for everyone.

struggles allied with a critique of gendered hierarchy that permeates the work and extends to the representation of the female body. In this context, the violence enacted upon the female body becomes subsumed within the larger violence and oppression power systems dispense on society. The female body once again comes to stand in for something larger, for the suffering proletariat. In its analogous suffering the body becomes political, a site of instrumentalised violence and gendered oppression. We see once more a clash between two gendered visions of society mediated through the female body.

This approach to the female body, however, is closer to what Furuhata (citing Saito Ayako) describes as providing “a blank canvas on which to paint vivid contradictions” (158) in effect returning the female body to an object, a metaphoric tool without agency. It’s true that in framing the body as political, Wakamatsu deploys it within a narrative logic in which it becomes subservient to a larger point, although as Furuhata points out he also extends this to male bodies (159). In this, Wakamatsu’s political use of the female body mimics the genre’s use of the same image, one is revolutionary, the other capitalist, but already we can sense contradictions within Wakamatsu’s work that would come to a head in *Ecstasy of the Angels*.

The Embryo Hunts in Secret can also totally outrage, however. You can derive no pleasure from the images and be mystified by the violence on screen. The climax also works in this case as an affirmation of the power of humans to overcome oppression and hardships. The power of Wakamatsu is that he allows both types of viewing, by not condemning the impulses outright but instead acknowledging their power, he engages viewers on a deeper discussion on the seductiveness of power and the ways any form of authority can become violent and oppressive. In this sense, the film’s many references to Sade (the main character

is named Marukido Sadao, the story echoes the narrative of *Justine*) seem to acknowledge a potential view of the paradoxes of desires and the strong pull of death present in both victim and perpetrator.

Or we can view the film, as Grossman puts it, as being an “easy commentary on patriarchal impotence, embalmed in Oedipal platitudes” (243). But is easiness such a bad thing? Grossman attacks Wakamatsu for not being forthright with his message, comparing him disapprovingly with Jean-Luc Godard’s *Weekend* (1967) which directly addresses his audience with speeches about Algerian independence (242). However, I see Wakamatsu’s engagement with various ideologies and use of metaphors which can sometimes be blunt, clumsy and even ambiguous as being more productive than direct address. They allow for a more equal dialogue with the audience who are asked to bring more than a simple listening ear but the entirety of their experience to the theater. They allow for evolution, change, openness and yes ambiguity and sometimes easiness.

Here Wakamatsu seems to discard the subservience to authority that had been a central part of Japanese identity in favour of a more individualistic instinct for survival rooted once again in the metaphor of the female body as stand-in for social injustice. Outside the world of Pink, similar redefinings of the Japanese woman were being done, most notably with Imamura Shohei’s earthy, self-preserving heroines in movies like *Intentions of Murder* (*Akai satsui*, 1964) and *The Insect Woman* (*Nihon konchuki*, 1963). We can see an attempt by those films to create new paradigms within this strict society, to evolve Japanese identity into something that can thrive in the modern world.

Other films of this period, also in some ways push this anti-authority agenda, most notably in the works of Wakamatsu’s brother in arm Adachi Masao. Takechi Tetsuji’s work

of the period also showcases a particular mixing of politics and sexuality. One only has to look at 1965's *Black Snow (Kuroi yuki)*, the story of a young man who discovers his mother with a black GI which leads him to only be able to be aroused when carrying a loaded weapon. It seems that for filmmakers of that period sex could not be divorced from the questions of politics and identity that were central to much of the student movements of the time.

This anarchic spirit finds its climax in *Ecstasy of the Angels* the final film in his early political period and a work that seems to anticipate Japan's depoliticization. Following a group of radical activists stealing arms from an American military base and the violent consequences of this act, the film powerfully explores Wakamatsu's disillusionment in the organized left of Japan. The film, with its story of higher-ups in a radical leftist organisation using sexual violence to assert their authority over their members, eerily echoes 1972's Asama-Sanso incident and Japan's own distancing from radical politics. The Asama-Sanso incident, where a fringe faction of the Japanese Red Army retreated to a remote encampment to "purge" bad elements, killing some of its members, culminated in a day-long shoot-out with police that was televised live throughout the day and reached records-high ratings of 89% (Schreiber, 210). After this, the population largely left organized politics and entered an apolitical era that it still hasn't left to this day. Radical politics became the domain of fringe groups both on the left and the right. Japan's brush with large-spread public dissent and activism became bookended by two acts of televised political violence, with the murder of the Japanese Communist Party leader in 1960 making way for the Asama-Sanso incident.

Seven years and multiple films later, in 1972, Wakamatsu has by this time quit the studio system following the disappointing domestic release of *Secrets Behind the Walls*

(Nikkatsu Studios had preferred to sink the film to avoid the ire of the Japanese ratings board) and founded his own production company. He has become wary of the authoritarian tone the radical left has taken and has been forced to redefine his approach now that their project appears to be a failure. Nevertheless, *Ecstasy of the Angels* continues the revolutionary goals that run through his *oeuvre*, this time showcasing a radically personal political view.

The film targets the power dynamics of radical left-wing movements, telling the story of a group of political activists who, after being betrayed by their leaders, devolve into paranoia, violence and sexual torture. The film extends its critique to any exercise of power, even that of the superficially “good” guys fighting for their beliefs. The film shows how even the revolutionary group uses the authoritarian tools of sexual violence to control their followers just as mainstream society does as in a scene where two characters are beaten and raped until they reveal where they are hiding their weapons. In previous films, the villains were conventional agents of power like the boss in *The Embryo Hunts in Secret*, but here Wakamatsu extends his critique to any institution contaminated by the logics of power.

Wakamatsu demonstrates the ways in which individuals absorb and regurgitate those structures of authority in the systemic breakdown of every character once authority is shown to be unreliable. This is represented in multiple scenes where sex is used as a bargaining chip or to humiliate one another (in most instances men and women participate). Wakamatsu even seems to implicate himself in a scene where a lecherous photographer takes pictures of two women having sex in an apparent bid to anger another member of the group. In this world, everyone is trying to assert their authority over one another and to do so they use the very tools mainstream society uses to oppress people. The film showcases Wakamatsu’s weariness

with organized movements in the ways they perpetuate existing forms of power and oppression of individuals.

This self-critique is interesting since a criticism that could be levied at Wakamatsu is that his films, even if they condemn acts of oppression, still partake in their logic by staging those acts of violence. Even on a formal level, Wakamatsu seems more interested in his performer's bodies as theoretical figure that can be drenched in fake blood, broken up in close-ups or abstracted through unusual angles as in the bird's eye view shot following the beating of two radicals that finds them lying on top of each other in the form of a cross, a true symbol. The bodies that populate Wakamatsu's films are subservient of the political or social ideology they are meant to stand in for. By beating them into symbols for his causes Wakamatsu also oppresses these bodies, not on a narrative level where this can be dismissed as a critique of these types of behaviours, but on a deeper, more profound stage, at the level of cinematic language. Grossman seems to think that those "rough sex scenes are a seeming afterthought, a commercialistic decoration" (241) which is ostensibly worse since their bodies are not even central to the political message, but merely an abdication to genre logics.

Wakamatsu perhaps understood the ways in which his project was compromised, how the realities of the cinematic apparatus created its own forms of oppression. That's why he chose to blow it all up. The final scene is a wild stylistic sequence which can be read as the film destroying itself, with anything resembling a rule being broken. The message seems to be that if we exist in a world where oppression is inscribed everywhere, even in revolutionary art, then we might as well blow it up. Wild jazz plays and stops abruptly over shaky images of people running and explosions. The film cuts between images with no regard for coherence of time and space. It is an encapsulation of his revolutionary philosophy, that the

only true revolutionary ideal is an individual one. The final shot of an half naked woman walking along an empty road taken as a full shot, pointing towards a possible cinema where performers bodies are allowed to retain their totality and their physical integrity, to exist and move within a space without being subjected to the logics of genre.

We can also imagine the final scene of *Ecstasy of the Angels* as a sort of metaphor for the consummated sexual act. The parallels between the crescendo of the scene and its final explosions with the act of orgasm are easy to trace, but no less interesting. Sex can be just as destructive as terrorism if it is meant as a total rejection of the status quo. This final act of destruction and self-destruction is joyful, a total abandonment of the self to the powers of the flesh, a loss of self that is paradoxically a rebirth and an affirmation of the self outside of the rigid constraints of polite society. Alas this is relegated to the realm of metaphor and not to be visualized, to be made flesh. It seemed the master of erotica could not consummate whilst Japan was still brewing with political unrest.

In this final act of self-destruction, Wakamatsu seems to gesture to a possible future for Japan, one where any form of authority is disbanded, where the individual is central. He also seems to open the door for a new way of dealing with sexuality and the body within the world of Pink cinema, one that is untainted by the specter of authoritarian society. As we will come to see, this future was not meant to be realized.

Not everyone, however, saw it the same way. Matsuda Masao, a companion of the director, criticized Wakamatsu's apparent abandonment of his leftist ideals saying:

Today in the fall of 1977, it is difficult to write criticism about Wakamatsu Koji. The reason is simple. For the sake of his livelihood, Wakamatsu started collaborating with ATG in 1971, releasing the epoch-making *Ecstasy of the Angels* the following year in

1972. Why did a director so full of energy become so confused? It is unfortunate, but when he once again collaborated with ATG five years later on *Sacred Mother Kannon* (Seibo Kannon daibosatsu, 1977), he failed to strike a period on this slump...Wakamatsu Koji was overtaken by events of the early 1970s, and was passed by in the end...To be honest, through subjective efforts to surpass the aporia of the era, I discovered Wakamatsu Koji to be remarkably lazy. One can only be astounded by this over and over again. (Kimata, 86)

What we can gather however from this early period is that in its infancy, Pink cinema's relationship to its main feature, the female body, was akin to that of a tool, a tool to talk about the political, a tool to awake the consciousness of viewers and a tool to create a special link with them. This however gets complicated in execution with the body becoming just as much a part of the political message as the scenes of protest or the blunt sloganeering of some of the movies. Some films also simply paraded leftist politics as topical accessory without really engaging with them like Okuwaki Toshio's *Naked Pursuit* (*Kofun*, 1968) (Sharp, 75)

What this underscores is Wakamatsu's view of the body as a central part of the political economy of oppression. If his collaborator Adachi Masao focused on the place of the landscape within those paradigms (something Wakamatsu also addresses in his mainly urban films), Wakamatsu locates those intangible forces of history, politics and class-based oppression in the very tangible spaces of the bodily. They come in the form of scars, but also in ingrained gestures, in acts of violence, in the way a body, most often a feminine one, is pushed against the ground, disrobed and physically assaulted. In this repertory of heinous acts, Wakamatsu relocates the body from the individual sphere to allow it to stand in for the

travails of a generation, a country and ultimately an entire class. But in this act of transcendence, Wakamatsu reformulates the same strategies of the oppressive classes to strip non-conforming bodies of their humanity. Through violent imagery he allows the bodies he films to take on greater meaning, to become symbols of a larger problem, but in this act of sublimation the personal gets lost, turning the very real bodies he films into politically charged images. He submits them to his vision, a noble vision, but a vision that strips them of their individuality nonetheless. Understanding this Wakamatsu destroys (his) cinema.

But might there have been another way? *Secrets Behind the Wall's* climax scene, where the woman is able, if only for a moment, to sublimate and bring together the scars of the past, the eventful political present and her own ecstasy (all inside the same frame), presents a possible different path. The character is able to keep her individuality, it is even within her individuality and her desires that those larger battles between the past, the present and the future are able to be waged. Inside her pleasure, signified here by her beatific expression and her desire towards her scarred partner, the viewer can find a way to navigate those treacherous questions, the personal becoming universal not through symbolic suffering but through ecstatic pleasure. Sexuality opens a space where those warring impulses can cohabit and be redefined in the light of pleasure and joy. Sex then becomes the most revolutionary act, because at the moment of climax all the systems of oppression stop to exist, if only for a second.

Sexuality in these movies is a link, a discourse with the audience, but it is also more often than not shown in a negative light, whether it be through scenes of sexual violence or sexual deviancy, mediated through the medium of a battered female body. Wakamatsu seeks to speak to the baser instincts and then to elevate to a higher plane outside the bounds of

polite society, but this does leave us with a mainly negative depiction of sexuality, something strange for an ostensibly erotic cinema. Further generations of filmmakers would play around with this legacy, finding different ways to express the myriad shades of sexuality possible in Pink cinema, but this does not change the fact that at the beginning, sex and the body became ambiguous political tools, not the bombs that would destroy polite society itself. They became as tainted with the logic of oppression as the systems they were meant to dismantle.

Mainstreaming the Pinks:

Roman Porno and Violent Pink's Body as Performance

As the 1960s were closing on Japan, major studios, which had previously dipped their toes in the Pink pool most notably with Toei's line of *Pinky Violence* action films (mainly period pieces with scantily clad heroines), started turning more and more towards Pink cinema as a way to reverse their falling fortunes (Sharp, 123). Throughout the 60s, cinema attendance had declined from the highs of the 50s. This was primarily the result of television's offering of free entertainment, and studios like Nikkatsu and Toei saw in Pink cinema a cheap, reliable method of producing films in this new economy while staying afloat. And so in 1971, Nikkatsu made the drastic turn of switching its entire production to Pink films and inaugurating its *Roman Porno* line (Sharp, 123). Toei would also start producing more Pink films but would still continue making non-erotic movies. Toho, one of the sole holdouts among the big studios, would instead focus on its Kaiju line and a few prestige releases each year.

Of course, the involvement of the big studios ignited an explosion in the number of Pink films produced. This led to Pink films dominating the market place in the late 70s, accounting for more than 70% of Japanese film production (Domenig, 2001). A proliferation of subgenres ensued, including Pink comedies, romantic Pinks, coming-of-age Pinks, etc., which introduced novel voices and ways of looking at the female body. So then, what to look at, which films to focus on? There are two central approaches we can deploy to answer this query. 1) We can decide to fix our gaze on the work of a handful of filmmakers that were heralded in their time and whose work has stood the test. 2) We can instead focus on the

ways in which emerging genre conventions have redefined Pink's relationship to the female body.

That said, this chapter will split the difference by first looking at the work of a few emblematic figures like Ishii Teruo, Kumashiro Tatsumi, the "King of Nikkatsu *Roman Porno*" (Weisser, 204) and Tanaka Noboru who is often singled out by critics as the best of Nikkatsu's *Roman Porno* directors (Weisser, 323). Later in the chapter, we will focus on a subgenre, the *Violent Pink*, which came to prominence in the late 70s and would leave a lasting mark on the face on Pink cinema by elevating sexual assault to the level of genre convention.

I will therefore address this new moment in the history of Pink and the evolving engagement with the image of the female body it entailed. By looking at the transitional films of Ishii for Toei as well as the work of some of the visionaries of the movement (Kumashiro and Tanaka for the *Roman Porno* side of things), we will analyze the ways in which the Pink cinema of that era produced a dialectic of the female body as a performance; an aesthetic performance, but also a performance of class, of marginality and of capitalist discourse. In the second part of this chapter, we will also look at the phenomenon of *Violent Pink* and its positioning of the female body as a performance of gender and class struggles by examining the films of Hasebe Yasuharu and Wakamatsu Koji.

I will be using a definition of performance that borrows heavily from Judith Butler's idea of gender construction around performative acts, but also around issues of abjection and marginality. For Butler, repeated acts of performance create the binaries of gender, but also the binary of "normalcy" and "abjection". Therefore, the gendered body constructs itself around social parameters and the rules they enforce, which dovetails with similar processes

of setting genre rules. This is exemplified in repeated acts of gendered performance, like hegemonic deployments of femininity or in this case, more explicitly, sexuality. In that sense, the body is always performing whether it be adhering to or transgressing rules. Likewise, Pink cinema provides a set of genre rules that its films can adhere to or divert from. Performance, in effect, allows us to understand how the gendered body defines itself within genre conventions.

Orgies of Edo and the depoliticizing of Pink

This marks an interesting new chapter in the history of Pink cinema with the genre abandoning its more outwardly political roots propelling the films to a more mainstream positionality. Conventions of studio cinema, like film series, feature players and stars would start inching themselves into the DNA of the genre. With increased respectability for the genre came a different mode of address. If the “Age of Competition” represented a politically charged scream, this new era of Pink acted more as a mirror to society, reflecting some of the attitudes people had towards sex and gender. These films also continued the ideological project movies from the Golden Age of Japanese cinema had been engaged in, trying to reconcile Westernized values with Japanese tradition. In this sense, more and more period pieces began to be produced, introducing more feminist (or at least proto-feminist) themes into Japanese iconography.

These new tendencies, whilst only definitively adopted when the big studios started producing their own films, would start to appear earlier, most profoundly in the work of long-time journeyman director Ishii Teruo. Sometimes called the “God of Cult film” in Japan, Ishii had by the late sixties worked in almost every genre imaginable, starting out making risqué crime films, horror movies and rom-coms. Even before coming to Pink

cinema, Ishii was well-versed in the intricacies of Japanese studio cinema, having worked on a number of series like the *Abashiri Prison* (*Abashiri Bangaichi*, 1965-1972, 18 films) series and collaborated with a number of stars. His early genre work had also shown his interest in more prurient subject matter, like one of his first film 1960's *Black Line* (*Kurosen Chitai*) and its focus on prostitution, making him an ideal fit for the demands of Pink cinema.

This period in Ishii's career (from around 1968 to 1972) was an immensely prolific moment for him, helming two series (the *Hot Spring Geishas* (*Onsen anma geisha*) and the *Joy of Torture* (*Tokugawa onna keibatsu-shi*) series) and setting up a template for what Pink cinema in the studio system could look like. These films introduce us to this new period of Pink cinema and its changing relationship to sexuality and the body.

Wakamatsu and his generation saw the body as political. Ishii, instead, views it as primarily aesthetic, steeping it in an idea of performed sexuality, placing his cinema in a pictorial discursiveness with the great erotic artists of Ukiyo-e like Utamaro and Yoshiwara, and the larger *shunga* tradition. This comes through most clearly in *Orgies of Edo* the tale of the apprenticeship of a young Geisha. In a singularly gorgeous scene, the main character is pursued and has sex in a garment factory. The act is framed against rows of elegantly patterned fabrics and at a slight high angle, giving the bodies and the background a flat look reminiscent of traditional Japanese painting. The predominance of patterned tissues creating a frame within the frame and the staging of the act - the man on top pulls up the Kimono of the woman over her thighs - strongly recalls the brothel scenes of traditional erotic art.

By pictorializing the body, Ishii does a number of things. He reappropriates a certain understanding of the body and of eroticism from his country's art tradition, subtly linking Pink cinema to those more respectable works and therefore participating in redefining *Pinku*

in this new era. By reframing the body within this tradition, it depoliticizes it, or at least inscribes it within a nationalist politic of Japanese identity. The body is no longer a political vehicle to engage with issues of the present but an aesthetic concept with its own long history of representation that can be tied to a national identity, cultural history and a set of values.

This gesture, therefore, functions in several ways, both within the film and the larger context of the Pink genre. On a practical level, those industrial practices like the period piece and the adaptation (the 70s saw an impressive number of literary adaptations for the Pink genre, oftentimes the work of Tanizaki Junichiro) serve the purpose of lending respectability to the genre and pushing it out of its original underground aura towards a more palatable studio product.

It also in some ways provides a different framework for understanding the genre. If *Pinku* emerged in the underground and kept up an aura of salaciousness for most of the 60s and even sometimes jettisoned eroticism in favour of politics, then *shunga* and its visual context offer a form of artistic linearity divorced from the political work of the 60s and a more self-consciously erotic origin. By looking so far into the past, Pink cinema is in some ways able to ignore its immediate present, but also its root in the censorship policies of the American occupation as we've mentioned in the last chapter. And to a larger extent, it also allows it to place cinema, an art form that has its origins in the West and inscribe it within a Japanese visual tradition. It subsumes Pink cinema within a national history of bodily representation outside of its original context of the othering apparatus and foreign state mandates upon the national body.

Shunga and a large extent of the Ukiyo-e tradition also provide a basis for the emerging star system that would partly define this new phase of Pink cinema. *Shunga* and

Ukiyo-e (pictures of the floating world) would often take as subjects denizens of the demimonde (Geishas, Kabuki actors) using their celebrity and beauty for inspiration and to sell more prints. This rudimentary form of star system would, of course, lead to the divas of the Golden age, but also to the stars of *Pinku*, oftentimes also plucked from a demimonde of strip clubs and erotic photography.

Those strategies also go further than mere visual pastiche. *Shunga* were often sold in albums that collected various images, their arrangement forcing a certain narrativisation. The vignette structure of the film, as well as its presence within a series of film, further lends itself to the parallel, the films and the *shunga* albums acting as catalogues of sexual scenes. Ishii's films, and the genre itself, can therefore be understood as engaging with this tenuous narrative tradition, centring themselves around spectacular acts of sex as industrial necessities.

Circling back to *Orgies of Edo*, this idea of the body as an aesthetic concern over a political one establishes itself in the movie's other vignettes as well, especially in its introductory scene, a tonal non-sequitur following a roving character played by famous avant-garde choreographer Hijikata Tatsumi. Here the idea of the body as a primary tool of art is foregrounded by the strange movements of the character (Hijikata's *buto* dancing style) presented in full shots to emphasize the entirety of the body as artistic material. The performer's links to dancing, an art form where the body is uniquely central to expression, also pushes this idea. Meta-textually, we can read this as a sort of passing of the torch between creators or at the very least a strong hint from Ishii as to his artistic priorities in the rest of the film, namely to present the female body as an aesthetic concern both within the formal system of the film and within its diegesis. What this means is that we find the body

acting both as image (a necessity of the cinematic apparatus from which Ishii does not shy away), but also as canvas, as art object, something all the stories in one way or another narrativise.

The middle story centres on a woman engaging in violent sex with deformed men and interestingly a burned man. The burned man, fetishized by Ishii with close-ups of his scars, underscores the difference in politics and aesthetics between Wakamatsu and Ishii. As opposed to Wakamatsu's representation of history, Ishii focuses on the aesthetic qualities of the man's burned skin, contrasting it with the immaculate white skin of the woman and indulging in the abjection created by the clash of beauty and the tainted. The woman gains sexual gratification from those sexual acts, in some ways enacting a regime of desire based on a scopic understanding of the relationship between beauty and ugliness. Reading her sexual desire as a mere desire for abjection, disregards both the scopic traditions of *shunga* and cinema, something which as we've established are concerns of Ishii and his formal system and by extension the main characters of his stories. Those characters all in some way take on the role of the director in enacting spectacular sexual acts (the first segment's rapist, the promiscuous woman here and the final vignette's sadistic Shogun).

In that sense, the woman's desire takes on a more visual dimension, the screen becoming a simulacrum for how she imagines the encounter, the film's style an extension of her desire. It is not enough to simply touch the abject, she must see her beauty reflected in the repugnant, the contrast making both more pronounced, and strangely purer. In order to perform beauty, she must find someone to perform the abject, to define her normative "self" against an "other", both coming to shape one another. Through abject desire, the woman is able to turn her body into an aesthetic object, sex becoming merely an excuse for two visual

concepts to be placed next to one another, the contrast acting like a frame would, delineating a certain practice as being artistic, worthy of being looked at. We can therefore read the woman's use of abject sexuality as a tool to turn her body into a piece of art and in that same movement to establish a level of authorship and agency over her body within Ishii's larger formal system and its own fetishizing.

Here in this performance of the abject, the female body becomes abject and separates from the self. In the essay *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva theorizes that in the formation of identity and subjectivity, a distinction between "the abject" and "the self" is capital. Therefore, when the body becomes abject, it is distinct from the self, and can be manipulated, become purely visual or conceptual to the eyes of this subjectivity. In that distance, the character is able to achieve a form of authorship over her own body turning it into a purely visual concern, a sign of beauty rubbed against a representation of the abject in a kind of semiotic ballet.

We could extend this argument outside of the diegesis by implicating the performer's body within this dialectic of abject authorship. If we place the director as the conventionally understood auteur, then, in this performance of abject sexuality, the performer is able to wrestle away some of the authority of looking by also offering her own subjectivity divorced from her body. She is also looking at herself performing abjection and therefore authoring her body even within the formal system of the director. In this, the performer is able to co-opt the cinematic apparatus, turn it into an extension of her subjectivity, another tool she can use to look at herself, at her "self". The cinematic becomes subsumed within the double vision of the actress and character, permitting them to see their body as abject and construct their "self" around this distinction.

This realignment of the cinematic gaze and problematizing of authorship also parallels the power dynamics of masochism that Gilles Deleuze lays out in “Coldness and Cruelty”, namely that in masochistic relationships, the “submissive” holds the power. It is their fantasy that is being pursued and enacted. Along those lines, it is the performer who is in power, that uses the cinematic apparatus, the formal system, to enact her abject sexuality. As Ryan Taylor suggests;

“The genre’s reassertion of masculine authority is problematized by the fetishistic orientations of these films, which, although guilty of projecting images of a misogynistic construction, allow for the female to preserve complete sexual power as it is the male who is in the subordinate position of desiring consumer (the audience).”
(203)

This in turn forces us to think through more profoundly the dynamics of power between image and viewer, performer and director.

I bring up masochism for a number of reason, one being that we see examples of such acts, oftentimes in the form of bondage or *kinbaku*, in other films of Ishii and later as an entire subgenre of *Roman Porno*, and that it allows us to make a distinction between masochism and sadism, which, as Deleuze argues, exist as two independent philosophical systems. In that sense, my defense of abject sexuality and its performance in the body of the performers as potential challenges to authorship and phallogocentric scopophilic powers does not extend to all films that present abject sexuality (it does not even extend to all three vignettes of Ishii’s film), as the second part of this chapter will demonstrate, but movies that in some ways partake in this logic of masochism.

The films of Tani Naomi, one of the biggest stars of Nikkatsu's stable and their first S&M Queen, attest to this malleability of authorship, at least on the level of the performer's body. Although Tani has herself directed two films (*Sex Killer (Sei no koroshi-ya)* and *Starved Sex Beast (Ueta inju)*, both from 1972) in which she "accentuated scenes with a lot of torture and bondage" (Tani, 44), her authorship exists more in the extra-textual realm of screen persona. She has repeatedly appeared in S&M themed films, often based on the novels of Dan Oniroku, even pressuring Nikkatsu into producing S&M themed films by only accepting to star in the company's movies if they would adapt an Dan Oniroku novel as her first project for them. What came of it was Konuma Masaru's *Flower and Snakes (Hana to hebi)* in 1974, which became a big hit for the company (Konuma, 22) and lead to more S&M film and the creation of the *Best SM* subgenre.

Tani herself speaks about her body more as a tool, an extension of her artistry, than anything else. She avoided getting a suntan to keep her skin immaculately white so that the red marks of whipping or candle wax could be seen more clearly (Tani, 43-44). The way she speaks of her own body also suggests a certain distance, a depersonification of the embodied experience so that the body can become a site of performance. "The woman's naked body must not only be seen as a sensual object, but must also be able to express emotion; so, I did my best to keep Naomi Tani's body as close as possible to perfect condition" (Weisser, 9). There is the actress and there is Tani Naomi; an emotive space that can be authored by the actress, in effect allowing for a form of agency and control in an industry that is commonly understood to be both dominated by male voices and geared towards male desires and viewership.

Once again the language used by Tani and her collaborators attest to this level of authorial control the actress extends upon her body: “I engaged in elaborate discussions with the filmmakers concerning Naomi Tani’s torture scenes, to ensure that they were both cruel and beautiful” (Weisser, 12). From Konuma: “Stylish. No matter what she did-- her behavior, her attitude, her body-- everything became a perfect picture.” (Konuma, 24). We can find in this ambiguous space between directorial control (*mise-en-scène*, composition, etc.) and performer independence, a site of authorship that finds its locus within the female body and opens up a new dimension of authorship and agency for female voices. This relationship of authorship also extends to potential viewers with Tani saying that she wants to “exist in the audience's memory as a *forever blooming flower*” (Weisser, 333), underlining the dynamics of power described by Deleuze and the potential of abject female authorship to realign male viewership as a possible site to express and explore female desire.

Tani’s example, in both her roles as actress and director, opens possible avenues for female centric authorship and performances within the space of Pink cinema. We can find commonalities with Katherine Mezur’s idea of the abject agency she locates in the practices of female Japanese performance artists and Tani’s own abject authorship. As Mezur sees it: “creative agency arises in the rich wastes of social aversion. Performing in that created space of abjection, forced outside a regular system of performance... they enjoy a radical freedom” (182). Here the female body and abjection allow for redefinition of social mores and the creation of a space outside of the normal, therefore outside of ingrained power dynamics. The Pink context is of course mediated by its phallogentric voices and viewership, but the central claim of abjection and its performance opening spaces (for Pink actresses the literal space of the body) of radical freedom still rings true.

The film's final sequence, telling the story of a bored and cruel Shogun visiting tortures upon a group of geishas in various forms, proposes a third approach to the idea of the body as a pictorial element: literally turning the body of a woman into a canvas. As a form of torture, the Shogun paints a woman entirely in gold paint, turning her body into a purely visual instrument. Interestingly, this act of authorship from the character, of turning a female body into an aesthetic object, parallels the work of Ishii as director. The scene's emphasis on scopopic regimes in its proliferation of mirrors within the setting, here presented as a pre-filmic moving image screen technology, only furthers the analogy to cinema, the link between the Shogun and the director. Since the Shogun also acts as sole viewer of the scene, the film implies a certain fraternity between audience and filmmaker, that they are one or united in the act of looking and desiring. That this act is presented as a form of torture also underscores the violence inherent in the act of capturing an image, of affixing the living into the material of the pictorial, the paint standing in for celluloid.

Furthermore, by looking towards the past, the film and its use of the body find a way to re-engage audiences with their own aesthetic history and to resituate desire within the purview of the national, taking the geisha, a Japanese archetype of beauty and femininity, as its main avatar of desire. In that sense, we can see some of the debates that fueled Wakamatsu's cinema, the "invasion" of desire by the West, somewhat resolved, if not entirely satisfactorily since those figures also link back to their own set of patriarchal attitudes and paradigms.

Kumashiro Tatsumi and the Genre as Space of Performance

To deal with the lingering ideological meanings inscribed within the archetypes they use, the films of this era often inject feminist themes and subtext in their treatment of woman.

The archetype would be the geisha, or the prostitute or stripper in films set in modern-day Japan, who fights back against the oppressive constraints of her environment by using her body as a weapon and succeeding at the game of capitalism.

In that sense, we can read the films of this period as participating in the ideological project of the era to redefine Japanese identity as both linked to the traditional and the cutting-edge. The strategies parallel some of those used in Samurai films of the post-war period that sought to inject westernized values like individualism within traditional Japanese archetypes. In the Samurai film, the masterless male *ronin* emerged, whereas in these Pink films, the headstrong geisha serves to reframe the traditional to include new modern values like a proto-feminist view of the place of women within society and much more forcefully, capitalism.

The films of Kumashiro embody this new dichotomy through their representation of an independent body that finds mobility within a capitalistic system that ultimately acts to further imprison them. Kumashiro was often seen at the time to be the most talented director of Nikkatsu's stable and a valued member of the "Seven Heavenly Kings of Pink", a nickname given to the most famous directors of that period by fans. He also received plenty of praise abroad. François Truffaut likened him to Jean Renoir, tantamount to God in Truffaut's mouth. The Renoir comment is apt, Kumashiro would often place headstrong heroines in oppressive contexts, marvelling at woman's ability to overcome hardship, oftentimes by using their sexuality as a weapon. Style wise, he favours long-takes with actors guiding the camera's movement, the character's fighting and winning against the frame. The director could comfortably switch between modern-day films and period pieces without

changing his stories too much, further highlighting the lack of change for women in Japanese society.

For Kumashiro then, the female body is not a static image to be ogled, but instead a mobile, autonomous, living thing that can break through crowds of people and grab the attention of the viewer. Kumashiro lets the body of his heroine lead his camera, often following the characters in long shots as they move about a chaotic space, for example the lavish geisha parties of *The World of Geisha* or the wild live shows of *Wet Lust: 21 Strippers* (*Nureta yokujo: Tokudashi 21-nin*, 1974). In that sense, one does get the impression of the body as a more independent entity, forcing the film to reform itself around its whims. If the female body is divested of its political dimension in this era, it is nonetheless imbued with a spirit of rebellion and a quest for independence, an apt metaphor for the stories of Kumashiro's heroines.

The demands of the changing genre, however, make this independence impossible. If Kumashiro's women demonstrate their influence on the frame, they are unable to break it or leave it. They can push it around, but they can never completely leave their status as images, become more than pictures. One can sense Kumashiro trying to fight against this. He infuses his character with an earthy, bawdy quality, preferring the "reality" of the lower-class to the abstraction of the bourgeoisie. In his present-day films, he uses Guerilla filming techniques to put his characters in the "real" world, in the streets of Japan. But at the end of the day, even if he presents feminist narratives of women fighting for their freedom and using their sexuality to assert their right to exist, the Pink film genre forces him to reduce them to images that can never escape their fate of being watched, of being turned into entertainment.

This is perhaps why a lot of Kumashiro's films centre around this world of adult entertainment with geishas, whose primary role was entertaining, and strippers populating his filmography. These women using their bodies as a tool of social independence merge the filmmaker's preoccupations with headstrong heroines, mobile performing bodies, and the genre's focus on displays of sexuality. Like a constant *mise en abyme*, these narratives of women performing sexuality for a ravenous audience finds them constantly pushing at the boundaries of acceptable femininity and displaying outwards signs of independence like promiscuity and financial self-reliance. These stories however come to mirror the relationship between the female body and the larger forces of genre logics. One can't help feeling that these characters are trapped within a new no-less constricting logic, be it the need to see a sex scene every few minutes or the forces of capitalism. Tellingly, the female body is asked to perform financial and sexual independence within a set of genre rules, just like individuals are asked to perform normative identities in capitalist society.

Once again, this seems more fateful to the realities of women at the time which were still expected to center their identity towards the family unit, but it does read like a step back compared to the anarchic destruction of Wakamatsu's cinema. Here the question becomes what do we want out of our cinema. Do we merely want films that document a sad reality, the implication being that we need to change things, or do we want an aspirational cinema that presents those dreams of change as possible? A truly feminist cinema would break the frame, and at the same time patriarchy, and allow its characters the freedom to decide whether to show themselves or not, to define their images and the context in which they wish to show themselves and be seen. Short of that, any attempt to represent a feminist struggle within the patriarchal confines of the genre can only be read as self-defeating, especially

when we think of genres as “mass-produced fantasies of a culture industry that manipulate us into a false consciousness” (Grant, 33).

This struggle against the frame at the centre of the film’s formal system also offers an interesting reading when placed within the context of a more and more capitalistic Japanese society. The heroines of these films oftentimes find ways to thrive within the capitalistic worlds of the sex trade, they find ways to monetize their body, to turn their bodies into tools of physical mobility within the frame, but also of social mobility. Within this system, we find the characters reclaiming agency of their own body, but their aforementioned inability to fully leave the frame, forces us to see their efforts in a new light. The spaces the characters enter initially offer them more freedom, formally represented through their moving bodies, but that same formal system ultimately traps them, just another form of restraint. These formal constraints problematize the new challenges of the capitalist system, demonstrating in formal terms the freedoms and limits of the capitalist ideology. These women find freedom in their ability to monetize their body, to ascribe a numerical value to the body that placed them in a subservient state, but within that freedom a new set of constraint, the endless search of profit, greed, etc., imposes itself on the characters. As Laura Mulvey argues in relation to pre-Hays Hollywood movies but still applicable here, female sexuality “could be channeled into commodification and negotiated into a more conventional relation to money and power” (2001, 10). The capitalist system, to which the characters conform, recuperates “female desire so that it functioned in the service of patriarchy” (Rabinowitz, 15).

The body also becomes part of an economy of desire which becomes monetized and affords the female characters some amount of agency over their own body. In the somewhat pessimistic world of the films, being able to sell one’s body is paramount to owning it.

Digging into the ideology hiding behind the *Roman Porno*, namely that women are most valuable as sex objects and that the logical conclusion (the only possible conclusion) of their existence is to sexually gratify a man, helps us understand the dynamics of power at work. Female bodies have to perform sexuality for an imagined audience in accordance to genre conventions, just as the individual has to submit to the logics of the market in capitalist society. Are Kumashiro's feminist leanings only a form of false consciousness then, blinding us to the ideological forces at play behind the scenes? The film could be more forceful in their denunciation and as Oshima points out there is a certain regression at play in *Roman Porno's* relegation of sex to the realm of subject matter and not theme, an unwillingness to engage with it fully (250). But once again, one must extend a certain degree of agency to the viewer. Mirroring Pam Cook's argument about B movies and exploitation films as being more easily understood as representations permitting a critical viewing position in their lack of sophistication, we could read *Roman Porno*, especially given its roots in underground political cinema, as facilitating this critical viewing position and allowing viewers to pick at the genre's misogynist ideology.

Sexuality, it seems, also suffers from a similar dichotomy. On one level, sexuality often serves as a tool for the female characters to delineate some amount of control on their lives and the men around them. It shows women to be smart and resourceful, somehow able to "play" the system, but at the same time accepting this system, legitimising it by their tacit acceptance of it. Sex therefore becomes the ultimate trap for these characters, seeming to provide a level of freedom but actually sealing them in.

Kumashiro shows this shrewdly. The only moment when his characters stop moving is during moments of sexual intercourse. If before they could be counted on to pace around

the frame, now they are often pinned down, their body weighed down by the torso of a man. They are allowed to show emotions, to visualize their pleasure through facial rictuses, but they are once again trapped as images.

The repeated mantra in *The World of Geisha* of not falling in love with the client is therefore rewritten not as a command meant to keep women trapped in sex work, but as a warning against giving away the product for free, of losing the control. The film follows the life of three geishas around the time of the Russo-Japanese war where each, in some ways, violate that edict. One is heartbroken when her love, an infantryman, is sent to the Siberian front, the other, more mercenary in her approach, is abandoned by her long-time client, showing that promises in mercantile relationships don't stand for much. The central figure, however, is Sodeko, an experienced geisha who still falls in love with a client after giving in to overwhelming sensual passion and is swiftly humiliated for breaking the rule and letting emotions enter a purely capitalist space. A painful scene sees her chasing after her lover who is having sex with his wife in a push-cart, lending the would-be love story a suitably melancholic ending, a tone that hangs over much of the film. The women all seem like they've seen this before, and the scenes of downtime and training share this disenchantment.

And this is where Kumashiro is able to locate the humanity of his characters, in those moments of emotion and heartbreak not dictated by the necessity of a sex scene. In those scenes, the director shows a keen insight into female relationships and psychologies that make him worthy of the praise singled out above. The more titillating scenes are somewhat less personal, even though they showcase the body of the characters, their nudity (which we often equate with fragility and honesty), they are more "covered". This brings us back to the idea of performance. Performing, i.e. creating a distance between the "self" and the

performed identity, allows these women to thrive in the environment of sex work. Performing sex allows them to sell it, to sell images of their body and access this realm of agency and independence, to the degree that it still exist within a capitalist logic.

Abject sexuality is once again a useful tool in attaining a new level of freedom, whether it be the formal freedom of movement within the frame or the social agency of financial independence. It can even be used to parody, or at least mock, the dynamics that underscore this world, as in a scene where a geisha grabs a tube full of gold pieces with her vagina and proceeds to spit them back out on the assembled guests. The performance of abject sexuality and physical prowess redefines the power dynamic with her now in control and “paying” the watchers. A similar control is at play in the sexual relationships, with sex becoming a sort of battlefield between the sexes, with men trying to make the women stop performing and fall in love, to lose the game of capitalism. Because within this system, the least human, the one ablest to sell himself, to discard emotions, is the winner, and like capitalism men have an unfair advantage in that they are the one drafting the rules. Kumashiro seems to lament a world in which falling in love means losing, but he is able to locate the dark irony at play here and even critique the stupidity of men and the army in a scene where the infantryman joins his regiment with his pants halfway down after leaving the geisha house.

Kumashiro also reframes the female body as a weapon in his amusing critique of Imperialist Japan. Early in her geisha education, the main character learns to shoot objects out of her vagina in scenes of stern training with a strict matriarch. This is juxtaposed with scenes of military training, the parallels between the two locales at once radicalizing the feminine body as a weapon and underscoring the latent sexual aggression present in

imperialist ideologies. Most of the men in the film try to dominate the women within the only context where they have achieved a level of agency and Kumashiro draws parallels between military tactics and the men's piggish stubbornness. Everything is an area to be conquered, a woman's heart is to be taken over through cunning and tactics. But, in this logic, at least, women are allowed to fight back and their weapons are their bodies.

The setting and time period also allows Kumashiro to mount a pretty devious critique of government censorship. As we've discussed, the entire Pink genre exists in this paradigm of censorship where genitals are to be hidden from view. These policies are fraught with meaning, namely that the government has a say in the sexuality of its citizens and that a woman's body is subservient to the needs of the state. *Pinku's* preoccupation with feminine bodies means that every film, at least subconsciously, reminds viewers of the state's control of female bodies. Every film reminds viewers that a woman's body is first and foremost tributary to the state.

That those policies became solidified in the immediate post-war period also suggests a certain lasting post-colonial presence from the West on the representation of Japanese bodies. The female body becomes the domain of the state, but so do masculine bodies, suggesting a form of visual castration, compounding the emasculation suffered by the Japanese nation following their loss. This mirrors Lowenstein's reading of the cinematic national image becoming feminised in the post-war period. We are witness to a:

“pronounced shift in postwar Japanese cultural representation that covers over Japan's pre-Hiroshima imperial aggressions in favor of post-Hiroshima national victimhood,

where national iconic images of the militarized male are replaced with images of the blameless, self-sacrificing maternal figure” (Lowenstein, 86).

This gaping wound at the centre of the genre, this impossible image, was sidestepped by Wakamatsu who sought to visualize the inner desires of his characters, therefore de-emphasizing the physical realities of sexuality, the need for a “frenzy of the visible” as it were. But the conscious quoting of *shunga* aesthetics forces us to contend with that visual tradition’s explicit depiction of genitals, and makes us think of Pink’s inability to entirely engage with Japanese bodies.

Kumashiro’s response, and for that matter many other filmmakers of this era, to these policies is to parody the edicts of censorship. Oftentimes a judiciously placed object will obscure the pertinent bits of the scene, thereby calling attention to both the act of censorship and the very thing censorship was hoping to hide. *The World of Geisha* pushes this aesthetic of censorship to the realm of political critique by also censoring some historical details like the number of Japanese casualties during the Russian Civil War. The censorship of female bodies and desires (an intertitle of Sodeko screaming out “I’m cumming again” is also censored) is therefore equated with political propaganda, foregrounding their politically radical possibilities. In the censorship of the female form, Kumashiro also draws a direct link between the work of Eirin and the Imperial censorship policies, underlining the ways in which the state’s authoritarian stance on information has failed to evolve.

But, ultimately, Kumashiro does not so much challenge the status quo as he lampshades it, calling attention to its hypocrisies without pushing for real change. Here female bodies perform their role as objects to be censored, positioning themselves a certain way so that the camera does not capture something the government would judge unfit for the

public. This, in many ways, is the limit of Kumashiro's cinema. He is happy to present narratives of strong women where we can sympathize with their struggles and cheer at their victories, but they must always buckle under the forces of generic demands for sexually explicit content. The director foregrounds themes of performance and abjection in his films, as in the scene in *Wet Lust: 21 Strippers* where an exotic dancer at the end of her set runs backstage and has sex with a stagehand only to return on stage and display her vagina for the audience. This allows for a certain liberty for his characters who enjoy financial independence and mobility, but also restricts them to a new set of constraints: capitalism and its dehumanizing logics. Those narrative concerns ultimately mirror the place of female bodies within his formal system. They are allowed mobility in their performance of abject agency, even a form of abject authorship with actresses oftentimes taking on the roles of sex work artist, but are finally constrained within the logics of the Pink genre to remain images trapped within a phallogentric frame. Kumashiro lessens this by oftentimes focusing on the small details of his character's life, lending them a rich inner life, but this must ultimately become subservient to the needs of the genre. His characters like their bodies must perform for a system that offers a nominal amount of agency in return for everything they have.

Tanaka Noboru and the Performance of Marginality

Another important filmmaker of this era, Tanaka Noboru, for his part makes remarkably tactile movies. His way into the reality of his characters is through an experiential conception of the image, emphasizing the tactile reality of the performers body and their environment, embodying in many ways the "haptic visuality" Wakamatsu had explored earlier. In that sense, he rebels against the diminutive tendency of the image by attempting to infuse them with a sensual quality. If Ishii films sex scenes to resemble

paintings, Tanaka's films are like repertoires of sensations, oftentimes cutting between different images of hands grasping at clumps of flesh, better to relate to the affect of the viewer. A striking sex scene from *She-Beast Market*, follows the wet finger of the main character's sexual partner as it slides along her naked back, presenting the limit of the body as a receptacle of feeling.

A long take like this, especially in its marrying of the detail rich world of the close-up with the redefining of the cinematic frame afforded by the moving camera, gestures to a new understanding of the body within the Pink genre. If before the feminine body was trapped within a frame it could effect, here the female body literally defines the frame, forcing the camera to espouse its sinuous lines. Of course, one can't make abstraction of the male finger in this scenario which defines the pace of the movement and is the instigator of the touch, a touch that at once feels more generous, more mobile than the typical mammary grabbing which takes so much space in the sexual representation tactics of the genre. Here the touch is not forced, it does not push against the body or grasp at lumps of flesh, but lets itself be reconfigured against the solidity of the female figure. It portends a different way of looking still anchored in the male gaze, but engaged in a different dialogue with the frame, which contorts itself around the body.

The female figure here, Tome, a prostitute working in the lower-class areas of Osaka, falls within the lineage of the fallen women of Mizoguchi and the fearless heroines of Imamura. Tome has more in common with the earthy, unscrupulous characters of Imamura, but if Imamura's women personified a moment of upward mobility to be captured in the rubbles of the war, a metaphor for a country having to slum it to survive and ultimately rebuild, Tome's plight is finally more analogous to Mizoguchi's prostitute who use men only

to give back to other men in their lives, a vicious circle that trapped the characters until they are rejected by the system. Tome has to take care of her mentally disabled brother, a charge her mother, also a prostitute (once again this lineage), leaves entirely to her. Tanaka visualizes this plainly in a scene where Tome is taken over a table in front of her brother eating an ice cream cone, money in hand.

The film's narrative is ultimately pessimistic about Tome's chances. Even after her mother is arrested, and her brother, who hangs himself from the Tsuten-kaku (the tower that touches the sky) while trying to fly like a chicken, both leave her, she decides to stay in her neighborhood and continue her life as a prostitute. However, the use of sexuality and the body tell a different story. Sex in this film is not pretty, but it feels honest. Tanaka visualizes the blistering Osaka summer in litres of sweat and focuses on his characters' bodies in extreme close-ups emphasizing hairs and imperfections. Tome for example is allowed to have imperfect skin, as in her introductory scene where her acne is clearly visible.

Tanaka formally equates Tome with her neighborhood, preferring to introduce the viewer to this downtrodden place in pointillist, documentary-like gestures. He shows us the heat, he shows the grime, all in little details like a man practicing his sword strikes against flying litter or men washing used condoms in buckets of water. Tome's body is also afforded a similar liberty. She can be dirty, sweaty, bawdy, angry, sad and everything in between. And we discover her in close-ups, her skin covered in beads of sweats or sometimes artificially moistened with sake or beer, or even washing her teeth with her finger between two johns.

It's through this living body, with which she makes her living, that she is allowed her humanity, her inconsistencies, and, ultimately, her liberty. Sometimes she gives herself as when she beds her brother, because "he's still a man." Sometimes she is taken, but she is

always a living, breathing body, even if at one point she exclaims: “I’m no longer an human being, I’m a blow-up doll.” But she isn’t, and Tanaka shows how seeing women that way, robbing them of their humanity, can be dangerous.

One of Tome’s suitors (played by poet Hagiwara Sakumi, one of a few counter-culture figures populating the film like Hanayagi Genshu, an avant-garde dancer and avowed feminist), after being supplanted by a local pimp with a surgically implanted pearl on his penis, takes to carrying around a blow-up doll which he parades through the neighborhood. The doll, which he has filled with gas, is ultimately used to kill a group of local gangsters in a cathartic explosion. The scene is given an ironic coda at the end of the film when Tome asks a client to light a cigarette in her vagina. Tome can be explosive, but when she’s allowed to be herself, the fuse doesn’t always have to blow.

At one point, Tome says: “This place is like me, it’s why I stay.” Her body is like her neighborhood, it stays there, unflappable, uncompromising, forgotten or despised by polite society. The final shot sees her, freed from her every burden following the death of her brother, spinning in an empty lot, dwarfed in the distance by the Tsuten-Kaku. It may seem derisory and pathetic, but there is beauty and liberty in this action, in staying true to who you are in your own home. Like a spinning top she can’t fly away, but she can keep on spinning in the face of an uncaring society and a barrage of viciousness.

We can understand Tome’s character and her body as performing a form of marginality in both her imperfections and her wild sexuality. Here abjection allows the character liberty away from social norms discussed before, but also an avenue to rebuke polite society. Her continued existence and survival becomes a way to spit in the face of the society that marginalizes her and her body. Her performance of marginality also parodies and

mocks any type of judgemental or pitying gaze. Her outward, exaggerated demeanor, her lack of self-pity and redemptive arc anchors her and the neighborhood she embodies in defiance of any type of judgment. As Butler describes, abject sexuality and its performance become a way to parody and unsettle normative gender roles and power structures and provide agency to marginalized identities.

Then her performance of sexuality, which we would assume to be a form of seduction given the erotic film context, acts not as an abdication to the gaze of the viewer, but as a confrontation of that gaze. We've discussed the solidity of Tome's body when confronted with the male finger and phallogentric frame, a steadfastness that we can extend to her neighborhood and its denizens. In performing this marginality, her body comes to stand in for her neighborhood but also a certain marginalized subset of Japanese society. By confronting the gaze, she shows herself, but also this whole sub-society that is often hidden from view. Performance here is showing oneself, to defiantly exist in the face of a society that wishes to look away.

Tanaka's ultimate victory is in creating a multi-faceted portrait of a woman and her neighborhood, by making them one and the same. Tome's body is her neighborhood and vice-versa. Her body in that sense, transcends the simple dynamics of visual pleasure at the centre of the Pink genre, to embody the marginal social spaces that Tanaka points his camera at. Wakamatsu's political body gives way to a social body, anchored less in the machinations of power and the systematised violence of the state and history than in the lived-in reality of poverty and the resilience of the marginal. In that sense, Tanaka's project is less abstract gesturing at the realities as they are on the surface and more showing how they inscribe themselves into the corporeal dimensions of identity. Notions of class and gender are given

flesh under Tanaka's lens, never calcifying into rote academic discourse, but pulsing through every fibre of his character.

Violent Pink and the Performance of Punishment

As the 70s drew to a close and the 80s arrived, a new tendency in Pink cinema that would come to define much of the output of the decade, and in some ways cement a certain understanding of the genre in the public's mind, started to make waves. Characterised by a much more predominant use of sexual violence as a visual and narrative trope, this phase of *Pinku* sees the genre focusing on the more unsavory undercurrent of the genre in a bid to capture audiences' attentions. This means a reliance on taboo breaking subjects like rape and incest, but also a redefining of the female body as a receptacle of grievances and punishment. This wave of films started to be grouped together under the banner *Violent Pink* beginning in 1976 when Nikkatsu brought Hasebe Yasuharu on to direct a trilogy of sorts (*Rape! (Okasu, 1976)*, *Assault! Jack The Ripper (Boko! Kirisaki Jack, 1976)* and *Rape! 13th Hour*) that proved remarkably successful (Hasebe, 39).

We can read this period in Pink history as a conscious set of industrial practices meant to chase audiences and later curb the descending tide of audience interest, but as always every decision is fraught with its own ideological network affecting aesthetic and formal concerns at the heart of the genre. The failing fortunes of the genre are due to a number of factors from audience fatigue, hence the doubling down on the more salacious aspects of the films, to the rise of Adult Video available for home viewing since Sony's release of the Betamax video cassette recorder in 1975. Adult Video, whilst still censored, offered the thrill of unsimulated sex and the convenience of personal viewing, rapidly affecting the box-office prospects of the genre.

The movies of this period also signal an interesting change in the types of stories films decided to tell. As opposed to the films of the 70s that oftentimes presented female protagonists (all the movies examined earlier in this chapter have female protagonists, and the entire *Pinky Violence* sub-genre also centres on female main characters), films of the 80s, or the *Violent Pink* period, introduce more and more male protagonists. In the context of the genre, these choices read as more than simply different narrative priorities, but as a rearrangement of the moral and visual relationship of the films to the female body. Now the main character, the ostensible figure of identification for the audience is called upon to enact scenes of sexual violence upon various female characters.

This is not entirely new, Wakamatsu often portrayed the tortured psyche of lost young men in his films of the 60s and Ishii relished in presenting refined sadists. Toei, for its part, often used narratives of rape-revenge in its *Pinky Violence* films and also upped the ante in a series of late 70s ultra-violent gory films. One could also include the *Best SM* films in this discussion, but the intent and the context of all these disparate films appear quite different. Most of the movies we've discussed so far engage with sexual violence and abject sexuality to a certain degree, but those films still evolved within a different set of genre conventions.

What this means is that the use of rape, whilst still oftentimes lazy and insensitive in those films, was still seen as a break, meant to shock and, as in the work of Wakamatsu, imbued with narrative and political meaning. *Violent Pink* does not use sexual violence in the same way. Instead, it codifies rape into generic convention, a set of tropes to be applied and reapplied *ad nauseam*. It takes rape, which was an aspect of earlier Pink cinema, and magnifies it into a complete thematic concept that can sustain an entire movie, an entire subgenre. By edifying sexual violence to the level of genre conventions, *Pinku* naturally

breeds complacency towards the subject and, counter-productively for the commercial goals of the genre, trivializes it, renders it banal. If the immoral nature of the act is somewhat lessened by its codification into conventions, its repetition and visualisation is still questionable given the genre's tendency to adopt a prosaic and un-moralising approach which tacitly and indirectly glorifies such acts.

This dramatically rearranges the genre's relationship to its main image: the female body. If before, *Pinku* structured itself around the representation of the naked female form in various sexual acts, now the body is limited to a single purpose: to be sexually assaulted. In this context, our reading of the female body can no longer stay formal, be understood as emanating from the discourse between genre conventions and a phallogocentric apparatus (director and audience), but must be thought as existing within the logics of a genre that has superseded that of any singular voice. We can see this interplay in Kumashiro's own entry into the subgenre *Forbidden Games* (*Kairaku Gakuen: Kinjirareta Asobi*, 1980) which strikes a decidedly more misogynist tone than his usual female-centric universe. The genre also influenced already established film series like *The Professor* series (1973-1983) which was cancelled following backlash from teacher organisations. Different directors will of course attack sexual assault from a variety of angles, whether it be Hasebe Yasuharu's cold handheld shots and dark atmosphere or Segawa Masahito's more composed tableaux, but the focus now lies on the forces of genre which dictate a certain position for the female body, a sense of inhabiting genre conventions, tropes and archetypes.

One of these archetypes, the figure of the country boy coming to the big city also dramatically changes. He was already present in Pink cinema, although more often modulated within the comedic side of the genre as in the work Yamamoto Shinya and

especially in his *Widow's Boarding House* (*Mibojin geshuku*, 1969) series with its bumbling main character Ozaki and his voyeurism. This figure now starts taking on a more sinister edge, in line with Kimata's description of it as "brutal and wretched" (64). Where in Yamamoto's films the rural characters are good-natured never-do-wells, perhaps stereotyped as bumpkins and the like, this new variation presents them as avatars of a more traditional view of society, as gatekeepers of what is truly Japanese set upon the scourge of the *modan garu* (modern girl), a common archetype of the subgenre. As Taylor explains, the modern girl (an archetype that dates as far back to the 20s) is a constructed image of a young woman who had "disposable income with which to purchase consumer goods and pursue westernized styles and behaviors" and stood in for growing female emancipation (201). Isolde Standish explains that "in cinematic narratives, the social response to the new femininity was to contain it within a 'masculine point of view' or masculine voice." (57), something which *Violent Pink* doesn't shy away from in its tales of voyeurs and slasher-like killers.

This is why in looking at this subgenre we will focus on the films of Hasebe that help set-up the conventions and tropes that would solidify into the *Violent Pink* model, although as we will come to see he sometimes resisted the rules he was putting in place. We will also explore movies that resisted, subverted, commented and/or deconstructed the conventions of the genre to achieve a fuller understanding of *Violent Pink's* relationship to the female body.

To better understand those films, we can borrow some of the conceptual frameworks set up by Robin Wood to study horror cinema, namely his theorising of the return of repressed emotions in the form of a monster, here taking the rapist at the center of this subgenre. This reading of the rapist as an horror movie monster also allows us to understand how *Violent Pink* films can use the "monster" to sexually punish members of society that

break social norms whilst also disavowing this tool of punishment as an evil force, if sometimes sympathetic or pitiable. This is also helpful as some of these films also consciously engaged with horror cinema by adding murder and slasher-like narrative set-ups in their arsenal of shock tactics.

We find a certain number of narrative tropes that define the subgenre and its relationship to the female body. The first one of these is what I would term the “serial rapist” narrative. These films follow a single male character as he goes about sexually assaulting a series of women, similar to a “slasher” in horror films. Variations of this set-up run the gamut with couples, as in *Assault! Jack The Ripper*, going on Bonnie and Clyde like sprees, but the central conceit remains of an individual punishing female bodies for perceived transgressions to the social order. Rape becomes a tool of humiliation meant to “reposition women as subordinate while reasserting male dominance” (Taylor, 202).

Rape! 13th Hour is an interesting example of this particular strain. Declared by Thomas Weisser and Yuko Mihara Weisser as "the pinnacle of this genre, a movie long-considered the most offensive, the most grotesque movie of all time." (52). The film follows Crimson, a serial rapist who, following a rape at a gas station, takes an apprentice under his wing, showing him the ropes as it were. The young man at first takes on the role of a voyeur in these encounters, aligning him with the audience in their shared scopic relationship to the events, before finally taking the place of his mentor after his demise, suggesting it is possible for the audience to achieve a similar role (at least in metaphorically reasserting masculine dominion over female bodies).

Hasebe also couches his reactionary sexual politics in a discourse surrounding class, the rapist/working class enacting revenge upon the idle female body/bourgeoisie. This is

most evident in scenes where the rapist's animalistic violence is set upon the extravagant living spaces of affluent women and most importantly their unworked body. Here the female body in its visual perfection, suppleness and general softness comes to embody a certain idea of bourgeoisie, the traits of the body which had before been fetishized for their beauty now become coded as foreign, lazy, etc. The female body, which in this movie is represented by a stripper (coquettishness, outwards displays of sexuality) and a rich woman in her luxurious house decorated in a rococo style (foreign influence, independence, idleness) comes to stand in for every attack on traditional Japanese values. The female body itself becomes the enemy which needs to be punished by the dirty, angular, overworked body of the rapist.

Crimson's end comes at the hands of an homosexual gang he had previously angered in a violent scene where he is sodomised and his teeth knocked out with a hammer so that his mouth can also be raped. More than simple narrative comeuppance, this strongly suggests that a certain type of virile masculinity is under attack by the feminised masculinity spreading through society. This, ultimately, gets reversed by the final rape committed by Crimson's protégé which closes out the film and hints at a possible resistance against the changes sweeping society. Of course, the film with its exploitative tone and excess often seems to mock its apparent self-seriousness, suggesting that Hasebe is playing a double game, adding absurd elements (the rapist gives a rose to his victims, a woman wishes to pay him after a rape) to question the codes of a genre he had helped to create.

Furthermore, women in these films are shown as taking pleasure in their rape, often asking for more or, as mentioned, insisting on financially rewarding their assaulter. More than simply a way to soften the acts of sexual violence on display and validate the masculinity of the characters (they are so sexually potent that even their rape victims ask for

more) and by extension the viewers, this suggests a complicity from the women who, at least subconsciously, wish to return to traditional ways, want to be stripped of their newfound independence by strong men. The films in enacting punishment and pleasure from punishment, a pleasure that first takes shape in the physical realm of the body, that is plastered over an orgasmic face, inscribe a fiction upon the female body, a fiction of sin and transgression and of a natural order to be reclaimed by violence.

Of course, this is all performance. Bodies perform class or promiscuity in their movement, their adornment, their environment. They perform this fiction of overpowering masculinity for the benefit of a phallogentric gaze. Genre here acts as Roland Barthes' myth does; "the very principle of myth is that it transforms history into nature" (129), promulgating this misogynistic ideology through repetition and codification, making it into nature. The devious evolution of *Violent Pink* lies in its recasting of performance and abject sexuality not as tools, however flawed they were, for women to create spaces of agency and liberty within the phallogentric gaze, but as canvases for male viewership to enact narratives of male dominance upon female bodies. Performance which had allowed for defiance in the face of male-centric desire is now reduced to participate in play-acting reactionary gender politics for an imagined audience.

The other narrative trope of these "rape films" plays upon this fiction more explicitly by showcasing narratives of raped women actively looking to be raped after a first encounter leaves them wanting more. Take Hasebe's *Attacked!!* which finds a female police officer (once again performing the breaking of traditional values by being in the role of a male authority figure) hunting down her rapist only to be repeatedly assaulted by other men during her quest to find him. She trespasses in publicly exhibiting "an ambition beyond their station

in violation of social convention, for which they would naturally become subject to “punishment” for their indiscretion” (Alexander, 2005). The film makes it clear the character is purposefully setting out to be raped, even implying responsibility in the first attack by showing her obsession for violent Western pornography (somewhat paradoxically she is sexually punished for her interest in sex). Here the female character is actively participating in this fiction of male dominance, pushing the story forward and being instigator of the genre machinations.

Hasebe, however, seems to be intentionally trying to expose the fallacy at the centre of the genre by sabotaging his own film. Apart from the relatively low-energy directing which exposes the artificiality and repetitiveness of the plot by defusing the tension, the film refuses to answer its central mystery and reunite the main character with her original rapist, ostensibly the point of the exercise. Add to that the grandiloquent use of Beethoven’s 9th *Symphony* in complete break with the salaciousness on screen, and one is left with the feeling of a director bored with the mandates of a calcifying genre.

This perhaps explain the trajectory of his final film for Nikkatsu, *Raping!*, which couches the conventions of the genre (the story of a young woman’s journey to Tokyo interrupted by numerous sexual assaults) in a critique of dynamics of power between individuals but also larger social forces. Rape is redefined as a tool of violence meant to oppress the weak in a similar vein to Wakamatsu’s previous use of weaponized sexual violence. We therefore see a scene of police officers abusing their power and raping the main character. A scene with a car mechanic arbitrarily raising his prices to absurd level in order to take advantage of the young woman illustrates forms of economic bondage. She also gets

betrayed by a prostitute friend leading to another rape, extending Hasebe's critique to both sexes and implicating the entire society in this dark tale.

Hasebe's real discovery is to not focus on the characters physical defiling. The sex scenes are filmed banally and lack any form of eroticism in that they resemble real sexual assaults i.e. a physical attack, but on her psychological degradation as her naivety and innocence get progressively destroyed. However, the film still engages with genre logic, it still presents the female body as a receptacle of punishment even if now the perpetrators are criticised. The movie still performs within a set of preconceived tropes even if those tropes are questioned or diverted. We must ask ourselves to what extent deviating from genre conventions remains useful, especially when dealing with a subgenre as reactionary as this.

What I have criticised in the previous chapter about Andrew Grossman's scepticism of Wakamatsu's politico-sexual cinema seem to me more useful here where genre forces are more clearly felt than his idea of a Pink "jargon of authenticity" (246). Grossman asks how we can have a serious political discussion, here slotted in for the film's social critique, by "representing political pain, with hardly any stretch of the imagination, as corporeal pain, *without transforming pain into a new content.*" (247). This new content can seemingly not exist when subjected to the ideology at the heart of *Violent Pink*, since it reduces pain to a form of discipline. Pain remains disproportionately aimed at women and they are still meant to learn something from it, even if that knowledge is transgressive in nature. The films of this subgenre are stuck, it seems, in "replacing a capitalist false consciousness" (Grossman, 246) with a generic one, the seeming rejection of genre blinding the audience to the real ideological processes at work. I have no doubt Hasebe meant to criticise society's violence to women in this film and such a reading of the film is valid and possible, what I'm saying is

that the ideological underpinnings of the genre nullify his point since they force him to enact violence on women.

Another way of engaging with generic forces, and one that Wakamatsu employs, is deconstruction. Maybe in exposing the mechanics at work in genre by ripping away any ostentatiousness and staring at the guts of *Violent Pink* one can hope to banish it. *Serial Rapist* attempts this by taking the prosaic tone with which rape is treated in many *Violent Pink* films and pushing it to its logical extreme. This means an absolute pitch-black tone, sex scenes filmed to be the least pleasurable possible and an absolute aversion to anything that could be construed as character psychology. Everything in this movie is a blank slate only pushed forward by genre logics. In this, Wakamatsu comes closest to the Brechtian adjective many critics have placed on him and which Grossman disputes. We are still not at the “true Brechtian didacticism” desired by Grossman (246), since apart from passing allusions to Landscape theory (a woman paints an industrial landscape, claims it is beautiful, gets killed and raped by the main character), the film is content to simply deconstruct *Violent Pink* and let its political message emanate from the dialogue with the unearthed ideologies of the subgenre. Can arch-irony be considered a direct political statement?

If the film fails to stand as truly revolutionary, then we can at least understand it as being what Barbara Klinger calls a category “e” film. The film problematizes in its tension between style (affectless tone, long-takes, overpowering nihilism etc.) and content (salacious wish-fulfillment) the ideological message of the subgenre to “partially dismantle the system from within” (Klinger, 24). Wakamatsu does this through style, but also by literalizing genre conventions and iconography. The main character becomes the ultimate country bumpkin in his overalls and big frame, emptied of any sort of psychology that an audience may want to

read into. He simply is a force of violence because the film and the genre needs him to be. The spaces around him, the countryside and the city, become signs of warring definitions of Japanese identity. In both, women are to be punished.

His victims also become little more than signs of perceived societal ills, bleakly exposing the ideological treatment of the Other within *Violent Pink*. With 13 rapes and murders in 60 minutes, the victims pass by like marking off a checklist; you get a policewoman, a promiscuous young woman (the killer: “It’s your fault, you didn’t have to follow me.”), two suicidal women (one he saves, then kills; the other he “helps” achieve her goal), two couples being intimate in nature, etc. Wakamatsu in this joyless exercise reduces *Violent Pink* down to its essence and gives back its dark twisted soul, full of unfocused rage, misogyny and violence. At the end, the killer gets gunned down by the police, but his spirit lives on in the many *Violent Pink* films that would follow.

What *Roman Porno* and *Violent Pink* show us is two different visions of performance that ultimately lead to the same end; a subservience to a set of rules out of the control of the individual. In asking the female body to perform a certain identity, these films trap it within genre logics and limit to a certain range of possibilities, in this instance; sex. I have tried to demonstrate how those generic systems mirror societal ones that also ask bodies to perform normative identities, in the case of Japanese society; the capitalist citizen and worker building a family. Thinking of genre this way allows us to unsettle its more reactionary tendencies, but also to extend this questioning to society at large. At the beginning of this chapter, I said Pink films of this era had become less political. I was perhaps wrong, maybe only filmmakers had become less overtly political. The films themselves still have a lot to say.

Alienated Psyches:

The Transcendent Bodies of Sato Hisayasu

“C’est toujours avec des mondes que nous faisons l’amour”⁵

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972, 348).

Following the steady decline of Pink cinema’s profitability in the 80s, a new era of independent Pink studios like *Shintoho* and of renewed auteurism settled over the Pink landscape. As a result of the diminished production from large studios culminating in 1988 with the closing of Nikkatsu’s *Roman Porno* line (the company would file for bankruptcy in 1993), the large network of specialty Pink theaters was now in need of more independently produced *Pinku*’s to make up for the lack of big studio product and fill its theaters (Sharp, 249). In this vacuum steps a group of young filmmakers with radically different ideas of what Pink cinema can, should, and could, do. Collectively known as the “Four Devils of Pink” (Sharp, 249) (or alternatively the “Four Heavenly Kings of Pink”) somewhat derisively by older fans of the genre and sometimes worn as a badge of honour, those young directors, Sato Hisayasu, Zeze Takahisa, Sato Toshiki and Sano Kazuhiro, approached the slowly dying genre as an opportunity to spin intensely personal visions rather than as a possible long-time career (Sharp, 260). This meant their films tended to be dark, moody pieces that eschewed conventional sexuality in favour of ecstatic abjection. A general interest in the cold metropolis link their films, which follow disconnected people trying to wrestle away a minimum of human connection from an uncaring world. This cold metropolis, this uncaring world, is Tokyo.

⁵ It is always with worlds that we make love.

In that sense, this moment in Pink cinema can be understood as synthesizing many of the philosophies that came before it, in essence allying the highly personal auteurist visions of Wakamatsu and the “Age of Competition” with the darker impulses of *Violent Pink*. The return towards the urban and its insidious corruption was already taking place in late period *Violent Pink* (of which Sato Hisayasu was a new voice having debuted in 1985) with narratives of gropings on the subway and scenes shot guerrilla style in busy streets lending the urban spaces of the city a chilling paranoid tone. Emerging from this period and bolstered by the crisis of confidence that was the “Lost Decade” in Japanese identity, we find these films repositioning the body as something alienated from the individual. This chapter will explore, through the films of Sato Hisayasu, the redefinition of the female body as a vehicle for transcendence and the challenges to traditional representation of female victimhood and suffering this entails. This transcendence, which is anchored in a schizophrenic destruction of the self, allows his characters to escape, to transcend the bleak alienating world around them. His films allow, to quote Jay McRoy’s quoting of Georges Bataille, “viewers to conceive of an alternative existence that ‘no longer resembles a neatly defined itinerary from one practical sign to another, but a sickly incandescence, a durable orgasm’” (36).

Sato’s cinema is a violent cinema, full of breaks and disruptions, of indelible images and piercing sounds. It is a cinema of madness where characters have a pronounced tendency to lose their mind, oftentimes to gain something greater. The experience of watching his films can be disorienting, all the better to share the fractured headspaces of his characters. His narratives share a complex, labyrinthine link with dream logic, hallucinatory diversions and deliberate obscurantism contributing to the hazy, lack of foothold feeling his stories communicate. This all relates to a general interest on how perception shapes reality and how

mediating effects can affect this perception. Also of note is that those narrative strategies push the viewer and the characters towards a particular type of postmodern condition where everything thought to be previously solid and axiomatic is reconsidered. Borrowing Giuliana Bruno's synthesis of Fredric Jameson's ideas, we can find that this postmodern condition is “characterized by a schizophrenic temporality and a spatial pastiche” (Bruno, 62). This idea of schizophrenia comes from Lacan who defined it as a “breakdown of the relationship between signifiers, linked to the failure of access to the Symbolic” (Bruno, 62). In effect, the postmodern condition seems typified by fragmentation with every piece losing its meaning.

This does not necessarily have to be a bad thing. This idea of “spatial pastiche” brings us to Deleuze and Guattari and their own definition of schizophrenia as the decoding or “uncoding” of “fluxes” (flux of desires, of merchandise, etc.) within a context of deterritorialization and its adjunct abstraction of codes. Here however, this decoding of “fluxes” gains a revolutionary power in its destruction of outdated and despotic “codes”. Desire reigns supreme over systems of power in a schizophrenic world. This does not mean, however, an apology of a cynical capitalism, which the term deterritorialization with its undertone of mundialization and neo-liberalism might imply. The authors criticize capitalism as “the reign of quantity”, a process which, paradoxically, reterritorializes in its production and reproduction of existing capital, preferring the “intensities” of a more unbounded schizophrenia (1972, 381). To Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism is trapped between its revolutionary tendencies (deterritorialization) and its reactionary ones (reterritorialization), leading to its own contradiction. This contradiction is present in the characters, the spaces they inhabit, but also at the core of the images Sato presents.

In that sense, even when Sato presents abject images, of which there are plenty, or scenes of “haptic visuality”, one can locate a certain distance between the signified and the signifier, between the mind and the body, a contradiction between the revolutionary mind and reactionary body. The body is therefore in a constant quest to define itself within changing parameters, just like the mind it must become malleable, reconfigurable. It can no longer be static, a representation of any form of self-evident truth, but become a new question, a new quest for Sato’s characters to unravel. His characters are in effect in the process of “arracher la conscience au sujet pour en faire un instrument d’exploration”⁶ to borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s phrase (1980, 198).

1987’s *Lolita Vibrator Torture* dramatizes this in its story of a lone killer who rapes and murders school girls. Here the female body becomes a site of exploration that progressively loses its physical and visual integrity through this violent process of redefinition. Sato and his character deploy an array of distancing techniques from abject sexuality to technologies of the gaze (the killer takes photographs of his victims) to posit the body as an extension of their perception. In this sense, the body becomes dematerialized, the link between the signified and signifier broken. The killer gets rid of his victims’ bodies in acid, destroying their physical presence leaving only an image of an object that no longer exists. Then the only real thing is the reproduced image, not the body itself. This marks the killer as reactionary, unable to cross the “absolute limit” of apocalyptic schizophrenia (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, 207). He can search for and decode the fluxes, but cannot cross a certain threshold, let go of the world completely. He destroys, but he clings to the remnants,

⁶ Tear away the conscience from the subject to turn it into an instrument of exploration.

to empty images that don't link back to anything real anymore. He seeks to deterritorialize bodies, desires, but reterritorializes them with his pictures.

Formally, the film cements this aesthetic of the simulacrum from the beginning. The first image of the film sees a schoolgirl, Kozue, putting up a wanted poster of a missing classmate, she is looking for an image. Another poster in the frame is of an eye looking directly at the camera introducing a productive discourse on the act of looking between the film and the viewers. The next series of shots are photographs of the girl assuming the voyeuristic point of view of a detective (actually the killer) taking photos of girls in the street. She is then interviewed by a street reporter and his camera, which she dismisses quickly. From the beginning the character is observed from every angle, from the film itself, from characters within the diegesis, etc. But she is the one searching, looking, as the poster of the eye reminds us and as the trajectory of the film makes obvious once she takes over the acts of torture. Already in its first scene, the film jumps between three modes of images; film images, photographs and the point of view of the television camera.

Add to these filmed images of a TV screen later in the film and we find a "schizophrenic" form which moves wildly between modes of filming but also points of view. We can take the "filmic" images as belonging to an omniscient point of view or relate it to the audience. Those images have their own temporality and spatial logic related to editing that allows them to jump in space and time to facilitate storytelling. The photographs, in contrast, are static in space and time, they capture a single instant, and they are part of the diegesis, related to the point of view of a singular character. Same thing for the televised images which are subject to the diegesis. They can only exist so long as the film lets them exist, but within that period they must retain a certain spatial and temporal integrity since the

cameraman cannot edit the reality before him. In this clash of points of view and temporalities, we find the schizophrenia described by Bruno, but also a form of deterritorialization of the filmic image in which the decoded fluxes of desire can be unleashed.

The images of a television set, which have a VHS quality to them, are more ambiguous in provenance (were they filmed by the killer, they sometimes seem to depict the point of view of specific characters in their awkward movement, but this is never made explicit) but serve a similar purpose of introducing differing points of view within the formal system. The film does something further in its filming of VHS footage, the imperfect images full of static calling attention to their own meaning as images. The film in these gestures creates distance, but also reminds the viewer of the indexical capabilities of cinema. In the act of cinematically capturing a VHS image, the cinematic asserts its supremacy over the pro-filmic image, which is itself a mediated vision of reality, the image supplanting the real, the signified supplanting the signifier.

This mirrors the main character's relationship to the body, but also a form of relationship to reality that is exemplified by, but not limited to, the distancing effects of technology. By capturing the image of the body, the killer asserts his authority over it, owns it in its perfect form forever. The mind is then able to attain a certain level of control over an exterior uncaring reality. The body that once twitched, that breathed and lived in a different space and experienced a different time is now subject to the will of the killer who can arrange the image how he sees fit. The mural of photographs of his victims that graces his lair then acts as a physical manifestation of this control and quest for control over reality. This search for control is of course reactionary in its attempt to impose meaning on a dense network of

fluxes. The character himself says he photographs people in the throes of death. He is trying to understand, to control the most illogical, unknowable, in flux part of life; death. Georges Bataille would also have quibbled with this attitude since he saw such transgression as the sacrifice of individuality to achieve continuity beyond the self and a possibility of a being beyond death (Hendershot, 26). By clinging to the image the killer denies the possibility for a transcendental loss of self and remains a “discontinuous” individual being (Bataille, 11). He insists on building a distance between him and the abject, to cling to his subjecthood, when true freedom lies in the loss of subjectivity (or an expanded subjectivity which are the same thing). But he does not want freedom. He wants control. He wants to impose codes on the decoded so he can enjoy fluxes from a safe distance, without the risk of losing his “self”.

Later in the movie, when the killer and the school girl meet, she follows along in his perversity. She tricks a classmate into going to the killer’s lair and they kill her together. Technology plays an important role in these acts of abjection taking a double role as a tool of distance (the titular vibrator is used to probe and penetrate the victim’s body), but also as a tool of connection. The phallic nature of the object is evident and its essence as a mechanical appendage would suggest an unreachable distance between two fleshy extremes that cannot meet, something that is only exacerbated by the killer’s decision to wear gloves during these scenes. The vibrator would, therefore, become the ultimate representation of a contemporary inability to connect on any human level. Even in sex and murder, a certain distance is necessary, a distance that is only exacerbated by the aforementioned formal strategies. This distance is primordial for the killer who refuses to join in the potentially destructive transcendence of the “absolute limit”. It is no surprise that he uses the abject to enter this ambiguous space since as Erin Jennings puts it when one feels contaminated by the abject

“one feels an urge to expel that which threatens it, while at the same time harboring a feeling of fascination with the possibility of losing oneself to the mystery of borderless being” (11). He is fascinated by the violence and pleasure he creates, but he cannot let go of his subjecthood to fully experience those schizophrenic impulses.

The killer, aided by the vibrator, mirrors capitalism’s relationship to schizophrenia and its logical end, he “approaches the wall and pushes the wall back at the same time” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972, 207). On a visual level, the vibrator does allow for penetration, for entering the foreign body even if this connection is to be mediated by a mechanical tool. The female body acts as the site of this exploration, a proxy on which to project schizophrenia in a coded attempt to destroy the rational individual holding the tool, however sexist, contradictory or ultimately futile such a project may be.

In the first vibrator scene, Sato follows the gloved hand, in an unbroken shot, as it slowly moves the vibrator along the glistening body of the girl, still in her school uniform, at a slow, almost sensual pace, the vibrator contorting until he shoves it in the victim’s mouth. This scene suggests a mechanical perversion of “haptic visuality” in its melding of the touch and the inorganic and marks an interesting contrast with a similar scene in Tanaka’s *She-Beast Market*. The sound design, dominated by the mechanic hum of the vibrator and punctuated by the moans of pleasure of the girl, also pushes this uneasy alliance between body and machine. The breakdown of the touch and its reinvestment within the mechanic also furthers the formal and narrative concern of alienation and schizophrenia present in the film. The scene is lit with a single beam of light that follows along with the vibrator introducing a duality within the image between the lit “feeling” part of the frame and the dark “unfeeling” rest. The light is also inconsistent jumping from the orgasmic face of the victim

to her thighs following the cut between two close-ups indicating that it is not diegetic in provenance, but more a function of the desire (of the flux) of the film to accentuate her sensations (the light seems to caress her face at one point). The light also focuses the attention suggesting that her pleasure and pain is linked to her status as an image. The character and the viewer must see her for her to feel those sensations and vice-versa.

As a climax, the killer pours a white liquid in the girls mouth which makes her hyperventilate and spit up blood, the red liquid contrasting strongly against her porcelain skin in the intense glare. As she dies, the killer takes pictures, the flash providing a rhythmic mounting of tension that is only exacerbated by the mechanic clicking sounds of the camera and the girl's death wails. The gallons of blood that fill up the screen become physical, or, more accurately, pictorial, evidence of the depth of the body. The body is not merely an image (although it becomes one), but a feeling surface that can react and that possesses an interiority that can be reached, and more importantly, that can be seen. The bloodied, twitching female body, therefore becomes a visual embodiment of a signified seeking its signifier, of an alienated perception trying to tie itself to a feeling body. It becomes a physical manifestation of a broken psyche that needs to see suffering and pleasure to experience those emotions. In this moment of death, all fluxes are decoded and the killer can only try to capture a fraction of them, to feel a fraction of the emotions he craves and fears at the same time.

This idea of the body as proxy is exemplified by the way the body of a third party is used as a space of dialogue between the killer and his school girl apprentice. Here the unspoken, the repressed, can be projected onto the feeling canvas of the suffering body and a

dialogue of desire and control between the two characters is enacted in that mobile space. Kozue for example takes the vibrator over at one point establishing her control, while he takes pictures of the scene. She is the one giving pleasure, he is looking. There is a form of consummation at play here, of two people so alienated they need to resort to the shock of extreme violence to connect with one another. Read this way, Sato's use of extreme violence and abject sexuality works less as an attempt to pander to audiences (which it was not, audiences were reportedly put off by the "Four Devils" films and their extreme sexuality), but as an extreme representation of a form of modern malaise, of an inability to connect so profound that extreme experiences are the only way to generate a response.

The theme of alienation also weighs heavily in Sato's work, populated as it is with loners and people questioning their place in society. In effect, Sato presents characters that are unmoored from everything around them, from society to their own body. The killer of *Lolita Vibrator Torture* rationalizes his acts by saying he wanted to join the madness of modern Japanese society by becoming a criminal. This alienation is anchored in the cultural moment (Japan's lost decade where a recession led to massive layoffs and a questioning of the post-war narrative of the economic miracle), but also on a deeper philosophical level. We therefore often find Sato's characters mediating their relationship to the outside world with technology (the opening of 1988's *Brainsex (Lolita chijoku)* where a female character roller skates around asking questions with a microphone) or mind altering drugs (the plot of *Unfaithful Wife: Shameful Torture (Uwaki-zuma: Chijoku-zeme, 1992)*), literalizing their distance from reality. In effect, his characters seem to inhabit a postmodern condition where every part of their life is constantly shifting and changing its meaning whilst they observe from a distance provided by technologies of the gaze. It is as if the unleashed decoded fluxes

must be reordered, mediated by technologies that possess their own internal logic, their own system or program that can counteract the schizophrenia of modern reality. This is the mechanic vibrator against the foreign body, the camera against death, the computer screen immediately following a violent ecstatic death in *Lolita Vibrator Torture*.

This postmodern alienation finds its spatial embodiment in the globalized city with its transnational architecture, multicultural formations and constant barrage of images and sounds which seem designed as a space of “schizophrenic temporality” and “spatial pastiche”. Tokyo and its spaces, which are stripped of cultural markers in favour of anonymous capitalist architecture consisting only of “spatial pastiche”, is truly global and anonymous in Sato’s cinema. It seems to exist only to represent the idea of the postmodern city, as a sign of itself. This space which Sato’s characters inhabit daily contributes to their alienated and isolated nature, their lack of connection to any signifiers to reuse Lacan's term. This is how Kozue can believe she is underwater one second (the killer’s lair), then find out it is on the roof of a building and laugh at the absurdity of it all. This deterritorialization allows for this complex flux of feeling.

Sato’s cinema is in constant dialogue with the urban, his guerrilla shooting techniques allowing him to invade the spaces of the city. The camera will skulk around in first-person, its violent movements redefining the spatial make-up of the city with every step. It will capture a character walking around wildly down a populous street. Or it will film from afar, reminding viewers of the point-of-view of a security camera and problematizing urban spaces as political sites. It also captures unaware citizens reacting to the spectacles Sato devises, as in *Wife Collector* (1985) where a woman is left naked on a train platform. The invasion of the urban space and its cold anonymity by the filmic spectacle mirrors the invasion of the body

the characters engage in, trying to inject pockets of humanity in an alienated space. The roving camerawork and its jabbing, ragged movements attacking urban spaces like the vibrator attacks the body in *Lolita Vibrator Torture*. It's no coincidence that towards the end of the film Kozue leaves a vibrator in the middle of the street, the mechanic penis twisting limply on the ground. The city too is an exterior, unfeeling place that needs to be penetrated.

Lolita Vibrator Torture focuses on a male's character use of female bodies as a proxy space of feeling and affect, but Sato also allows for a female perspective by introducing the character of the school girl accomplice. Interestingly, the film starts from her perspective as she is the one who seeks out the killer and she is fascinated by the strange world of taboo experiences he represents. This follows the general quest of Sato's characters to search a way out of their alienating reality (the girl roams the city at night and is left alone at home by her overworking parents, she lashes out at her friends unexpectedly, etc.) by experiencing moments and sensations at the limit of sexuality and mortality. In effect, this extends the potential of desire from a gendered division anchored in the sexual act to a realm of experience that is made spatial (the killer's lair) and sharable (they can pass each other the vibrator). It's also what allows her to dominate and kill the rapist at the end with poisoned lipstick, an act captured by a flashing camera. The killer is supplanted by Kozue who overcomes him in this space of desire and is ultimately the one whose fantasies are accomplished since she does not recoil from the schizophrenic apocalypse but seeks it out.

But before this she too must be tested. First, the killer kidnaps her like another normal victim, but he finds a vibrator on her which piques his curiosity. He asks her to masturbate for him to watch but he quickly takes over, violating her with her vibrator. He then rubs the bloody instrument on her chest, perhaps as a way to show her she can still feel, that she can

still bleed. They slowly build a relationship together in this strange space of death and desire. They eat and talk as the walls, covered with pictures of the killer's deeds, watch them, the sound sometimes drowned out by TVs stuck on static.

They then bring in one of Kozue's friends, which he tortures by spray-painting her body, until Kozue takes over, violating her friend with the vibrator. The killer finishes it with his poison which he sprays in the girl's mouth using a similar instrument to the one he used to throw chemicals on the pictures on his wall, sealing the images forever. As he takes pictures of her, her blood-covered face contorted in a rictus between death and pleasure, the movie jumps to a shot of the blue-tinted city and black and white pictures of dead pigs at a slaughterhouse (his previous job, he informs us). The soundtrack moves from anxious drawn out chords to a religious choral and back again. The editing grows faster, jumping from the body being manipulated (eyes opened, lips pulled back), to the killer taking photos, his face completely covered by the camera, to his pictures on the wall, to Kozue watching as a picture of death watches her in the background. The effect is disorienting, schizophrenic, jumping between temporalities and diegesis seemingly at random. He finally turns the camera towards Kozue and she poses for him.

There is a sense of a test at play here, that the killer, who confesses to being unable to please women with his real appendage, must resort to the mechanical to bring women to a point of ecstasy and experience outside of reality. Bataille termed this state the *expérience extrême*, a form of transcendental loss of self within eroticism, which he sees as the meeting place between life and death. Under all this there is the revolutionary ideal of a transcendental state where any form of social order and difference between individuals is abolished (Bataille, 18). The killer's methods to reach this place are faulty, he recoils at the

true potential of his acts preferring to instigate a distance. When Kozue and the killer finally try to have sex, his body fails him. He cannot get an erection even with the help of Kozue, vibrator in hand. Later on, they once again try to have sex, but in a moment of true physical connection, Kozue kills him. She kisses him with poison on her lips, linking the transgressions of sex and death in a single act. She, however, seems to reject this transcendence, leaving her companion and saying she doesn't need him now that she has a vibrator. Kozue reneges the killer, perhaps for his inability to follow her past the limit of schizophrenia, but this would seem to go against Bataille's idea of the communion, of a "continuous" being beyond death.

Following this climax, Kozue leaves the room and seems to fall. The film then cuts to her waking up in the middle of the street, suggesting that she fell from a great height, that she left a sort of paradise. As she gets up, she leaves a vibrator in the middle of the street. The film ends on a shot of a missing poster for Kozue, implying that through this experience she has ascended to a different reality outside of the limits set up by society, that she has reached an *expérience extrême* outside of the self or perhaps totally within the self. But there is still an image of her, a sense that she is still anchored in this reality, unable to fully leave it.

Splatter: Naked Blood takes this idea of the *expérience extrême* in a different direction. The film has all the hallmarks of Sato's cinema in its story of a scientist who releases a chemical that turns pain into intense pleasure on three women living their own type of modern alienation (one is obsessed with beauty, one overeats, the third cannot sleep). The film, perhaps to fit its more suburban setting or to lure unknowing audiences, is much more sober in its direction early on, preferring brightly lit houses and more cohesive editing to Sato's usual seedy locales. Sato, however, rapidly returns to his preferred themes and visual

tics by mixing medias (computer text, 8mm and video make an appearance) and introducing a subplot where one of the characters uses an headset to telepathically communicate with a cactus.

The ending where each of the three characters are finally consumed by their hidden desires, however, brings the concept of the *expérience extrême* to a new dimension. Interestingly, in those scenes, women are both the agents and sites for this quest for the transcendental. Whereas in *Lolita Vibrator Torture*, female bodies are used as a proxy, an alienated space where the mind (ungendered as it may be) can play out its fantasies, in *Splatter: Naked Blood*, women are authors of this quest on their own bodies in acts of violent self-mutilation. This inquiry into the limits of their own physicality is initiated, or encouraged, by a man and his newly invented drug, but the ways in which these women play out these scenarios of self-torture comes to unsettle societal structures of power as well as spectatorial ones. This violent self-pleasure becomes anchored in the female body which in a constant state of production. They become, as Deleuze and Guattari would call them, “desiring machines” (1972, 8). They produce desires, pleasures. They produce “agencements”, multiplicities of singularities always changing, always becoming, rearranging. The body and desire becomes limitless, monstrous, carnivorous in its production.

Take, for example, Noriko, a normal housewife with a ravenous appetite. She is positioned as an archetype of the model Japanese housewife, cooking tempura in her suburban house, dressed in a motherly apron. However, as the drug takes effect, all that holds her to her defined life as an housewife, all the patriarchal structures of power start crumbling around her until there is only the pull of death/pleasure. She looks at her batter covered hand,

a smile creeps up her face, and she slowly brings her hand to the boiling grease. She dips it in, her face contorting in moans of ecstasy. She then eats her fried hand, her pleasure meshing with the contentment of satisfying her appetite. The scene is interesting in that the pleasure is given by a woman and is contained within her body. The transcendence of ultimate pleasure that is present in this consumption of the body is entirely feminine. As she is using the trappings of polite society and patriarchy (the kitchen) to destroy her own body, she gets pleasure from this process, reinjecting death and pleasure within a context that has done everything to banish the human, the living. There is a violent irony at play here, her search for pleasure proving too great, too unstable for the limiting spaces of women within patriarchal society. Her desire is forever producing, forever decoding fluxes.

She is alone, giving herself her own pleasure, but she is still being looked at, something Sato is acutely aware of given his career-long interest in the gaze (*Unfaithful Wife: Shameful Torture's* alternate title is *An Aria on Gazes*, to give but one example). Noriko's scene of violent ecstasy provides a fascinating deconstruction of the idea of the cinematic gaze. In her act of transcendence, she unsettles the gaze, questions it and even sublimates it within her all-consuming unstable desire. After eating her hand, she sets about eating her sexual organs, starting with her vagina and then eating her nipple with knife and fork. The choice of those organs is not innocent from Sato. It directly reminds us of the visual focus of the genre; the female form and its erogenous points. The way Noriko caresses her nipple with the utensils also recalls the "haptic visuality" at the heart of so much of the genre's erotic affectations, especially its focus on the mammary. Here that eternal focus of attention is redefined under the light of female desire and its unsettling instability of meaning. In eating the visual icons of femininity and its points of pleasure as it is understood

within the iconographic economy of Pink cinema, the female body regains control of them, digests them, makes them part of itself again except as internal dimension of pleasure no longer defined by the needs of the “frenzy of the visible”. There is a deconstruction of the icons of the genre, but also a consumption of them that is consecrated within and for female desire, all within the female body. This is what it looks like when a genre is eaten by its subject.

Finally, Noriko attacks the last dimension of power within the genre; the gaze. In a startling shot, Sato directly implicates the audience by framing his character’s eye inside a bloody knife pointed squarely at the lens. Is she looking at us or are we looking at ourselves? Then she plunges the knife in her left eye, the impressive special effects luxuriating in all the gory details. The shot holds for 13 seconds in a medium shot as she tries to pull the eye out, blood gushing over her face and thighs. When she finally succeeds, she stares at it for a moment and eats it in a few bites, the soundtrack dominated by wet squishy sounds and squeals of pleasure. Sato focuses on a close-up of the character’s mouth as she devours the eye, the embodiment of the viewing apparatus. Her evident glee is all the more disturbing juxtaposed with the intense physicality of the image. The viewer has no choice but to react in some visceral way to the abject images and Noriko relishes the pain she creates. In her body it is transcendental pleasure, but for us it is an eerily painful vision. Her carnivorous female desire consumes the gaze, whilst at the same time sending the viewer back to his own inadequate embodied experience. She feels pleasure, we feel pain. The normally scopophilic relationship at the base of cinema and the Pink genre is here turned on its head all within the immanence of the female body.

The female body in its ability to withstand and give the *expérience extrême* is therefore positioned as all powerful, capable of turning the most abject of experiences into potentially ecstatic one and of sublimating any structure of power in its ascension to the transcendental. The female body is limitless, it can swallow up anything, destroy anything. It is monstrous, abject and powerful, forever producing desires and fluxes that can unsettle any code or structure of power thrown at it. The end of the film where two of the characters, Mikami and her son, speed away on her bike towards a city, drug in tow, suggests the communion that Bataille searched for, an entire society engulfed in the *expérience extrême*. Pointedly, the son looks at the camera and says: “the dream has not ended yet”, leaving the possibility for the madness to spread to the viewer. It also opens up Sato’s cinema, which often gets marred in nihilism and encloses its transcendence to the solitary. But here we get a joyous, gluttonous loss of self, a continuous individual (there is continuity in this act of auto-cannibalism, an ouroboros of desire) and the promise of a system eating itself.

But, why the female body? Because it is always the female body, the killer of *Lolita* *Vibrator Torture* denies himself transcendence for example and the subject of the experiment in *Splatter: Naked Blood* are all women. The project of Sato seems to present madness and schizophrenia as an escape from alienated society, from Japan’s “Lost Decade”. For him, the madness of *expérience extrême* is the only way out, a way to transcend the limiting environments entrapping his characters. Those characters have to be women, because these are Pink films. Sex and violence must be enacted on women, because these are Pink films, but here sex and violence are what lead to transcendence. Genre trappings which were once limiting now allow for this transcendence, force it. Sato’s philosophy when confronted with the parameters of Pink cinema must present itself within the female body, because the female

body is doubly alienated. It exists within society, but also within genre logics that seeks to codify it, to limit its fluxes into iconography and conventions. Sato, to decode, to reach transcendence must invest his philosophy within that female body. Just as the characters are leaving a dying society (as Sato seems to present it), we can read these films as the subject leaving a dying genre, as the filmmaker twisting the knife in the gaping wound of Pink cinema. Kozue disappears from her own film and Noriko eats herself in an act of genre deconstruction. Pink would live on, but for a moment its subject escaped into a “durable orgasm”.

That escape isn't perfect. It still lacks connection, the promise of an unsettled subjectivity that can lose itself within fluxes of desire, but it does arrive at a continuous being, that continuity is however self-directed, immanent. It can still destroy systems, shake paradigms and decode society, but it remains singular, auto-sufficient. It forces the question, can a paradise be a kingdom of one?

Conclusion

“*In the Realm of Senses* became the perfect pornographic film in Japan because it cannot be seen there.” Oshima Nagisa (256)

As we’ve progressed through the Pink genre, seen its rise and its falls, witnessed its triumphs and missteps, a certain narrative started building itself around the figure of the female body. The story of a genre trying to impact society, to change things, morphed into a success story that crumbled under the weight of its own rules until the only chance to survive its fall was to transcend its limitations. If the tale seems a little grandiloquent, it fits with the massive ambitions and outsized personalities that populated these pages. Throughout all this, however, there has been one movie conspicuously absent from the discussion. Its presence in the background was always felt, acting like an unfollowed possibility, a road not taken. That film, in many ways, is a culmination of the genre. It deconstructs it, uses its bones to build its own structure, but in the process gestures to unexplored paths, possible answers to problems that have dogged *Pinku* over the years. It finds ways to resolve many of the problematics we’ve encountered; the political agitprop of Wakamatsu, the limiting genre trappings of *Roman porno* and the nihilism and ultimately solitary transcendence of Sato. It also scratches deeper at some of the central unresolved issues of Pink cinema like the question of censorship or the sometimes problematic relationship to the female body. That film, perhaps Pink cinema’s most famous creation, is Oshima Nagisa’s masterful Palme d’or winner *In the Realm of the Senses* (*Ai no koriida*, 1976).

In the Realm of the Senses tells the story of two lovers completely rejecting the outside world and creating their own paradise within the anarchy of love. A maid and her

boss begin a torrid love affair that sees them breaking every taboo, every code and every rule, hiding themselves away in a hotel room for weeks until they consecrate their love in an act of ultimate sacrifice. She strangles him at his behest and cuts his genitals which she carries in a pouch with her until she is apprehended by the authorities. Here sexuality acts as a release, a path to another conception of reality far from imperialism and patriarchy. Oshima's film shows a way in which the body and sexuality can serve as tools of rejection of ingrained social systems, in this case Japanese imperialism.

The film allows us to retrace a few of the questions we've explored so far, and to attack them from an entirely new perspective. First, Oshima's film tackles the nagging question of censorship with its undertones of governmental control over female bodies and the lingering effect of imposed American values on Japanese bodies (a form of visual castration if you will), by simply ignoring these rules. Much has been said of the making of the film; the closed set in Kyoto, the editing in Paris, and sadly when the film was released in its native country it had to be censored with dots of light, which paradoxically call more attention to the forbidden areas than otherwise. But the film was created freely, answering only to its own logic. It does not cutely hide behind a lamp or a mast, but shows for the first time in Japanese cinema, Japanese bodies in all their physical integrity, warts and all. It also shows these bodies, man and woman, dancing, loving, crying, in pain, bleeding, having sex, etc. There is no implied limiting gaze from the government or from a semi-colonial power, but a burst of life on the screen.

Sexual activity is also taken out of the realm of fantasy, and therefore male fantasy, and captured as is. This is not to say there is no male gaze in the film, although a longer thesis could be written on its challenges to the patriarchy, but that in its honest depiction of

unsimulated sex, the film negates the possibility of an entirely fake engagement with sexuality. Pornography has shown us that real sex does not necessarily mean honesty of depiction or lack of gendered constructions, but at least physically we know the film is not peddling pure fantasy. An erection cannot lie after all.

The film builds on this physical honesty by building a true relationship of equality between its two leads, a relationship that calls into question everything around them. The rejection, the rebellion against everything the characters enact in their self-destructive (destruction of the self) bacchanal. However juvenile or doomed their quest may be, it ultimately resolves some of the problems Wakamatsu (who was producer on this film) butted his head against. Wakamatsu's great sin was in mirroring the codes of power he was fighting against in his treatment of bodies as political symbols. Oshima deals with this by rejecting any form of oppression that could be imposed on the characters. He makes them fully human in their faults and joys, but he also refuses to limit them to symbols. He allows them moments of joy, moments of doubt, we see their reveries and nightmares. They are bodies, but they are also inhabited by complex networks of feelings, contradictory desires that ultimately commune in a sacrificial act of sex. The film has a political message (it is after all set during Japanese Imperialism), but it expresses it in its complete rejection of any political logic, not in its recreation of oppression or denouncement of it. Oshima instead places the characters in an apolitical space, a space of desire, of flux, and lets them redefine the world as they see fit.

Wakamatsu's intent is not wrong, if sometimes misguided, but in his revolutionary project, he forgets that in directly engaging with a logic of oppression another logic, however freeing or beneficial it may be, is needed, is created. A paradigm calls for a paradigm, a code

must be fought with another code. Oshima's genius is in rejecting any type of logic, of system of thought and starting fresh. Wakamatsu's curse was perhaps his timeliness, he needed to fight an enemy, to link himself to a movement that would come to also adopt oppressing codes and systems. Oshima made his film in a relatively apolitical period of Japanese history and set his gaze on the past. This does not make Oshima's project less brave, powerful or revolutionary, but it perhaps excuses some of the youthful foibles of Wakamatsu.

In that same reckless abandon, *In the Realm of the Senses* also overcomes the limitations of genre that had dogged *Roman Porno* and its more disreputable offspring *Violent Pink*. Following Oshima's chiding that Nikkatsu's oeuvre took sex as its subject, not as its theme, Oshima thinks about sex in this film, as opposed to pornography which he sees as a way to "avoid thinking about sex" (250). This serious inquiry into sex and its revolutionary dimensions allows the famed director to bypass the sometimes reactionary and sexist ideology the genre promulgates. Here sex is the central question, the act around which everything orbits, the centre from which large-scale decoding can occur. It is not "seasoning" or a mandate. It is also not an obligation that engenders its own reactionary logic where women have to perform a certain vision of sexuality, but a world in itself.

Here we don't get a total reversal with a woman in power (which would create its own set of issues to untangle), but a truly equal dialogue. The characters have sex because they want it, they mix pain with pleasure because they both want it. There is a communion, a loss of self that is present from the beginning. I use "loss of self" but I should perhaps say gaining of the other. There is the intermingling of the fluxes of desire, the creating of a space dedicated entirely to this communion, this communication, all done together. Sex loses its

ingrained gendering, its coded patriarchy. Both can penetrate, both can be penetrated. Castration is not taking, it is giving, sharing. It is the moment the individual becomes continuous. If there is jealousy or obsession at play here it is only in the sense of an innate need for the other, not from a lack, but for a need towards continuity. Continuity in the eyes of the other, but also continuity within ourselves. Here Oshima differs from Sato's self-continuous hero, someone who can eat himself to reach ecstasy, who reaches continuity within himself. Transcendence, for Oshima, must be reached in communion, as an act of giving, of sacrifice.

At the climax when he accepts the possibility of strangulation, it is a true act of giving from both parties. She gives death, but he also gives death, the gift of a continuous being. Just like she writes on his chest in blood, now they can really be together forever in a space of transcendence that no prison can threaten. In that sense, the death at the end of the film is a paradise lost, an impossible dream that burned out just like the film (just like Pink?) for the viewer not the characters. The tragic end is not in the murder, not in society catching up to them, but in the movie ending, in its spell being broken. The film after all cannot be anything else but a film that must end. It is perhaps the same tragic fate of the Pink genre, a genre cannot be anything else than a genre. A genre made up of contradictions and impossibilities, of grand ambitions and little means was perhaps bound to fail, to never completely resolve the dilemmas at its heart. But it was beautiful while it lasted.

But what of now, when we last left our intrepid Pink heroes, the genre was facing financial difficulties, finally overcome by the rise of easily accessible pornography (something which the internet has not diminished). The 2000s saw the emergence of a few singular voices like Imaoka Shinji or Meike Mitsuru as well as sporadic work in the genre

from the “Four Devils” splitting their time between more mainstream fare and the genre they helped build/destroy. The new directors’ work is distinguished by its proliferation of individual voices, with directors mixing genres like comedy and musicals with traditional Pink preoccupations or chasing their own muse in whatever way they see fit. Their work tends to be apolitical, or use the politic in an humorous way as in *The Glamorous Life of Sachiko Hanai* (*Hatsujo kateikyoshi: sensei no aijiru*, 2003), focusing on form and fiction over the engaged tone of some of their forebears. I’ve chosen not to discuss these films both for a reason of space, but also because I see them as lacking an uniting thread. They are movies made by individual artists who use the possibilities of the genre and its industrial practices to make their films.

The state of that industry is however, greatly diminished. A few independent companies still produce films for the remaining Pink theaters (Tokyo has a few like the *Ueno Okura Theater*, two remain in Kyoto). Those Pink theaters seem to have evolved into gay cruising spots for (by my anecdotal experience) an aging viewership, which repositions some questions around viewership and the male gaze which would be best explored elsewhere. There is still a Pink fandom and the Pink Grand Prix, an award hosted by PG; the premier magazine dedicated to Pink cinema, is still hosted every year in April.

A surprising recent development was the revival by Nikkatsu of its *Roman Porno* line. It first released a few new films in 2010, most notably a film by Nakahara Shun, followed by a more extensive five films project in 2016 and 2017. The company has stated a desire to reach out to female audiences, a viewership that has historically been ignored by the genre, but which has made its presence known in recent years. *Ueno Okura Theater* encourages women to come to screenings for example, and a Pink film festival in Seoul holds

female only screenings and discussions of Pink films. This is all in line with a recent revalorisation of this body of film both in Japan and abroad with retrospectives on masters of the form (many of which we've discussed here) travelling the world and a few contemporary films breaking out on the festival circuit (the aforementioned *The Glamorous Life of Sachiko Hanai* for example). Nikkatsu for its own 100 year anniversary in 2012 put together a special program of classic Pink films which caught the attention of young audiences and especially female audiences as Nikkatsu president Sato Naoki observed (Ishitobi).

The *Roman Porno* revival, giving free artistic reign to five famous directors (Yukisada Isao, Shiota Akihito, Shiraishi Kazuya, Sono Shion and Nakata Hideo) but urging a vision inclusive of female both behind the camera (female staff members and producers participated) and in front of the screen, has already bore fruit on the festival scene with fillms like Shiota's *Wet Woman in the Wind* (*Kaze ni nureta onna*, 2016) premiering at Locarno to acclaim.

The films I've been able to see indeed bear that out with Sono's *Anti-Porno* (2016) offering a complex, kaleidoscopic vision of a young woman's sexuality and deconstructing the phallogentric gaze of the genre in its constant breaking of the fourth wall. The film is even able to squeeze an arresting commentary on performance and gender in its short 70 minutes, leaving us with nothing short of a masterpiece and Sono's best film in years.

Shiota's *Wet Woman in the Wind* similarly tackles ideas of performance in this manic farce that harkens back to classic theatre. The film enchants with its sex positive tone and strong female characters boding well for the other entries in the series and a possible continuing of production.

This new blood has injected life into the Pink genre, proving that the old form can still surprise us. Its contradictions, faults and impossibilities are still in place. It is still predominantly a genre predicated on the idea of men watching women, but these new films and their more inclusive tone suggest a willingness to try to, if not resolve, at least engage with those issues. They are also simply excellent films possessed with a constant energy of reinvention and a youthful outlook on an old genre. Who knows, maybe the future really is Pink?

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