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THROW AWAY YOUR BOOKS, RALLY IN THE STREETS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTELLECTUALS AND MASSES IN TERAYAMA SHŪJI'S CINEMA

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As Andrews (2016) points out, Terayama Shūji is as important counterculturally to the late 1960s and early 1970s as the philosopher Takaaki Yoshimoto was intellectually. Through the analysis of Terayama's film *Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets* (*Sho o Suteyo, Machi e Deyō*), in this paper I want to look into a premise little explored in publications in English so far: namely, that the existentialist emphasis of this director's cinema on the self-questioning subject, its transformation through action over circumstances and discourse, linked to its emancipatory spirit, allows him to connect his approaches with the ideology of the most libertarian sectors of the Japanese New Left, those most influenced by Yoshimoto's anti-avant-garde theory of *taishū* (autonomous masses) in spaces such as *Todai Zenkyōtō* or *Nichidai Zenkyōtō* during the student protests of 1968-69. The theory of *taishū* considers that to strengthen the subjectivity (*shutaisei*) of the masses, the subject must foster the autonomy (*jiritsu*) of the masses themselves from any intellectual vanguard.

Terayama's cinema can be seen in terms of an attack on discursive expressions of reality, a permanent effort to renounce exercising power on the viewer through the film in the same way that the Japanese libertarian New Left attempted to

avoid exercising power as a vanguard on the masses. He tried to make films that constituted a rebellion against cinema, even against avant-gardist cinema (Centeno, 2012). In fact, the critique of discourse inherent in Terayama's cinema is so extreme that it can often be confused with relativist positions, to the point that its subversive attitude has been defined as adaptive with respect to the prevailing system by authors (see Morita 2006, p. 58). A decisive contribution to this interpretation are the words of Terayama himself, namely that the intention of his work was "to revolutionise real life without resorting to politics" (in Sorgenfrei, 2005, p.270). However, one should avoid the conclusion that this emphasis on the critique of discourse means Terayama's stance is apolitical. Indeed, it is precisely this zeal to revolutionize real life, using art to transcend art itself and to make an impact on society, where Terayama's politics reside.

Intellectuals and masses in *Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets*

Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets was Terayama's first full-length film, released in 1971 at a time when the political convulsion led by the Japanese New Left had reached its peak and was heading for decline. The

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fact that Terayama didn't depend on a big production company, but co-produced his film with Art Theatre Guild (ATG), facilitated the radicality of his cinematographic approaches that challenged the viewer's complicity and instead provoked subjective involvement. To a certain degree this film can be seen as a correlate of the New Left political movement's ideology, especially the relationship between intellectual and the masses. This is reflected both in the explicit treatment of the masses in several scenes and in the implicit relationship between the director and the viewer, as well as in the self-abolishing standpoint of cinema and of discourse in general.

First, with regard to the explicit treatment of the masses made by Terayama in *Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets*, we should consider the role of the main character, Kitagawa Eimei and his relationship with the world around him. Kitagawa represents to some extent the director's intention to project an original image of the masses, uncontaminated by ideological discourse. He is an existentialist character, moved not by reason or ideas, but by desires and fears, immersed in a constant confusion and troubled by a deep identity crisis. Throughout the film there are several scenes with episodes of political performance and of revolutionary discourse mirroring that of the 1966-1971 'season of politics' (Furuhata, 2013) in Japan. Nonetheless, this portrait contrasts with the life of Kitagawa, who wanders without any clear aims, expressing no ideological conviction nor joining any political movement or action. Terayama doesn't project an ideal image of how the main character should be, but of his alienation, which is the driving force of his action. Just as the most libertarian Japanese New Left sectors emphasised alienation as a potentiality of political action over the ideologies inculcated by intellectuals or vanguards, Terayama tries to transmit the same autonomy (*jiritsu*) of the masses in his film through Kitagawa. With this aim, the film shows the stark alienated behaviour of Kitagawa as potentially subversive. Indeed, this potential becomes subversive action almost at the end of the film, and in a manner which is poorly channelled, individualist and apolitical: on a holiday, Kitagawa walks through a crowded street rebuking and shoving pedestrians.

The events in Kitagawa's life are the main thread of the film, providing some unity among the general fragmentation and also transmitting a conception of the masses which is similar to that of most libertarian sectors of the Japanese New Left.

Those events transmit a de-ideologized frustration that was beginning to take over Japanese social movements after the previous years of struggles and defeats, especially after the end of the major campus strikes of 1968-69, the second renewal of the Anpo Security Treaty with the United States in 1970, and the subsequent emergence of extremely violent armed groups. However, the disorientation transmitted in *Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets* can also be understood as a continuation of the *Nūberu Bāgu* cinema that Ōshima Nagisa, Yoshida Kijū or Shinoda Masahiro, among others, were already producing in the 1960s when the New Left struggles were at their peak. These film makers were motivated by a 'crisis of truth' (Standish 2011, p.50). As children during the war they had been instilled with the idea that they were servants of the emperor and they should dedicate their lives to him; when Japan lost the war the authorities then told them that the values they had grown up with were false and that peace and democracy were the most precious goods; when tensions rose during the Cold War, the very same authorities began to openly act against the democratic and pacifist principles they had been preaching; meanwhile the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), that had embodied hopes of democratic progress in Japan was demonstrating its inability to secure the future it promised.

But Terayama not only tries to transmit an uncontaminated image of the masses through the film's main character, but also through scenes where various facets of the working class are portrayed. In this sense, a particularly satirical scene stands out in which Japanese workers sing a homoerotic ode to action films starring Takakura Ken, one of the most popular actors in Japan at that time and a symbol of manhood. The image transmitted by Terayama is that of a working class that makes up for its lack of everyday action, its complexes, loneliness, lack of purpose, fears, cowardice and anonymity, with an appetite for witnessing extreme and violent action on screen performed by a hypermasculinized hero. A parallel needs to be pointed out here between this satire of the working class and what Žižek analyses in his *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012) on the early films by the Czech director Milos Forman in the 1960s. Žižek believes that Forman's mockery of common people, more than a sign of intellectual arrogance was defiance of the ideological pressure from the Soviet Union on Czechoslovakia, as Soviet power was held as a mystified image of popular classes that paradoxically was used to oppress them. In the same way, we can see that Terayama

satirizes the common people in rebellion to the idealized image of masses that satisfied the Japanese institutional left's interests.

One scene, in which an ordinary woman is interviewed about various matters, is particularly illustrative. The interviewer intersperses trivial questions with others of a more intellectual nature, putting all of them on the same level. On the one hand, we have the effect of relativizing the value and beliefs of the subject: an interview with a woman of apparently low intellectual ability being posed questions such as "what negative effects does literature have on people" and "what part do you hide when you are naked" as if they were of equal intellectual merit. Through this device all experience acquires the same value. On the other hand, to answers such as "what's the best book you have ever read" she answers "the Bible", to "what magazine do you think is the best" she answers "Playboy", and to "what do you think about Marx's 'Capital'" she replies that she doesn't know it. Once again the film moves away from an idealized image of the masses. Moreover, before answering any of the questions, the first thing she expresses is her desire to dance; she offers to teach the interviewer some dance steps and she expresses disappointment when he refuses. Likewise, she suggests that he should put more feeling in the questions he is asking her and not just read them out. This breaks the unilateral relation between observer subject (interviewer, intellectual) and observed subject (interviewee, masses), and sets the image of masses prone to action and spontaneity.

The film also relativizes the value of the subjects and of their experiences by portraying a football team, and especially its leader, Omi. He is presented as a man of the world, well versed in different subjects, able to develop transcendental reflections and is informed about other cultures. He is a man who has adopted values and customs from Europe and the United States, lives for himself without family ties, and he lectures Kitagawa about free love, communal life and the obsolete function of family. Nonetheless, it is precisely this modern and cosmopolitan man who has the most patriarchal behaviour, to the point of joining the rest of the team members in the gang rape of Kitagawa's sister. Instead, Kitagawa, lacking all Omi's knowledge and leadership skills, doesn't fit in with the football team's patriarchal culture, and just for this reason, in fact, he doesn't fit in with the football team itself. Terayama shows that intellectuality, modernity and Westernisation are elements without a positive value in

themselves, and that they can even mask different kinds of oppression.

There is a highly symbolic scene that condenses all these approaches. Kitagawa invites his sister to a Western restaurant to comfort her for the gang rape she has suffered. She has never been to a Western restaurant before and she is unsure about whether she will be able to eat with cutlery. He, on the other hand, has been to that restaurant a few times on the invitation of Omi. Shortly after Kitagawa and his sister sit down at the table, Omi shows up by chance and decides to sit with them. Omi seems to be completely at home with the Western customs and style of the restaurant, and he advises Kitagawa so that he can feel more comfortable in that atmosphere. Without being disturbed at all by the fact of sharing table with the girl he recently raped, Omi buries himself in a speech about how in Europe young men and women share everything freely in communes. Meanwhile, at another table a man with an erudite appearance reads to a woman a book "about the deep liberating influence that books can exercise on people". The woman seems uninterested in what he is reading, to the point that she is not able to stay awake. Between the dinner guests of both tables there is a relationship characterized by the maladjustment between intellectuals and masses, crossed with elements criticised by the Japanese New Left: the ideas claimed by a vanguard regardless of the action and concrete reality, progress as a simplified concept, and the uncritical Westernisation and universalism.

Secondly, besides the explicit portraits of intellectuals and masses, *Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets* also connects with the most libertarian sectors of the Japanese New Left in the relationship established between the film itself and the viewer. These sectors believed it was essential to foster the subjectivity (*shutaisei*) of the masses, and to do so it was necessary to defend its autonomy (*jiritsu*) in the face of intellectuals avoiding placing oneself in a position of power. In the same way, Terayama avoids as far as possible exercising power over the viewer and fosters his subjectivity and autonomy. In fact, this was common in Nūberu Bāgu cinema. In this sense, as another avant-garde director like Yoshida Kijū pointed out, what makes a political film is more the form, through which the filmmaker must grant subjectivity to the viewer, than the content (Noonan, 2010). Likewise, in Terayama's understanding, realist narration in cinema gives the viewer a false sensation of action by prompting the

viewer to identify and almost fuse themselves with the main character's experiences. But in fact the viewer is only sitting passively in an armchair. Therefore Terayama tries to invert that effect, making the viewer feel actively involved while watching the film, and thus highlighting the passivity in which they live their everyday life outside the cinema. The viewer is instead presented with a set of messy images that they have to complete with their own reflections, and as such they become involved to some degree as the film unfolds.

Besides the narrative disorder, the film also fosters the viewers' subjectivity by setting a distance between them and the film itself through the explication of the enunciation points typical of Nūberu Bāgu (Standish, 2011, pp.31-32). With the explication of the enunciation points the director attacks the comfortable position of the viewers as mere observers, constantly reminding them he is not presenting an objective portrait of reality but a subjective film construction. This distance between the work as a creation and the viewer is a film translation of the masses' autonomy in its relationship with the intellectual.

Terayama uses various means of artificialization in order to make the points of enunciation explicit. The film starts with an entire minute with nothing on the screen, during which several mixed sounds are heard: some whispers, the director's voice through a megaphone and, then, the sound of what seems to be the film running. Then, the main character appears, though at this point we do not know if he is the character Kitagawa Eimei, or the actor Sasaki Eimei; the fact that both have the same name is consistent with Terayama's aim to avoid passivity in the audience. Looking at the camera, 'Eimei' addresses the viewers with a defying demeanour, attacking their nonparticipation and invulnerability: "What the hell are you doing? All of you sitting there waiting around in a dark cinema. Nothing's gonna start." While he is speaking, the sound of the film running is still being heard, but since we cannot see the machine, we do not know if it's the camera, the projector, or both. So, viewing this scene one can feel in the position of someone who is filming with the camera, editing with the projector next to him, or projecting it in the cinema (Ridgely, 2011).

Other scenes in the film also play with the ambiguity between roles, achieving the same effect of explication of the enunciation points. For instance, in a scene in which the football team is filmed in the showers, the camera mists up and

suddenly the cameraman's hand bursts onto the screen to defog the lens with a cloth. Or another, when two young hippies are seen smoking marijuana on the street, and the man who is shooting leaves the camera on the ground and goes to sit with them and take a few drags. Yet again, at the end of film all those involved in the production appear and, from among them, the actor who played the main character addresses the viewers, and as in the first scene gives a speech about cinema.

Another means of artificialization is the use of different colour filters for the scenes of the film. Basically the film utilizes the following colours: green for filming scenes of Kitagawa's family relationships, magenta for scenes in which Kitagawa escapes from his real life through his imagination and fantasy and, in the case of the scenes that show events on the streets, life in restaurants and brothels, or the football team, these are filmed in full colour. But throughout the film there are also, to a lesser extent, black and white scenes that represent the past of Kitagawa's family before World War II, and scenes in red or blue that represent his own memories.

Another feature worth noting is theatricalization (use of masks, performances on the street, surrealistic settings, theatrical clothing and make-up, overacting, aesthetics full of symbolism), musical scenes, and insertion of photographs and texts on the screen. Terayama alternates several video clips throughout the film, some of which display a combination of all of these devices. A good example is the next-to-last video clip. It starts with a quote on the screen: "Even if I knew that the end of the world were to come tomorrow, I would plant an apple tree." Then, several surrealistic scenes appear in which elements of modern life and what seems a primitive life are juxtaposed, all this with theatrical aesthetics overlapped on real locations: a woman with her face painted white sitting on fabric, another almost naked and with her children; a man with his face painted white too and with very long hair, all of them sharing the rooftop of a city building with hens, wrapped in a reddish smoke. Likewise, there is an alternation of filmed images of cityscapes composed of concrete buildings and photographs of gravestones from a cemetery. Meanwhile, in the song playing in the background we can hear: "August 1970. I gave birth to a child. Nobody gave me permission. August 1970. I called him Jenla. Nobody gave me permission. August

1970. Another woman got pregnant. Nobody gave her permission.”

The formal combination in the video clip of the aforementioned elements of theatre, music, alternation of photographs and text inserts contribute to creating a distance between the film and viewer in order to keep the viewer’s autonomy. In contrast, the video clip content symbolically criticises the notion of linear progress and power. In some ways, it transmits the idea that, no matter how far history goes forward and lifestyles evolve, human beings are essentially the same: they are intrinsically connected with the natural development (birth, procreation, death) and the everyday life of family ties. And the lyrics of the song, which highlight the fact that no permission is requested to be born, reproduce and give identity to the child through a name, seem to express the fact that it’s in this interconnected field of nature and everyday life where it is most difficult for power to be imposed. However, we must not forget that Terayama was a lover of urban life at odds with nostalgic standpoints of reality and the search for an original past.

Finally, the self-abolishing nature of Terayama’s cinema should be mentioned. Despite Terayama’s aim to not exercise power as a director on viewers nor make his film a mere object of consumption that fosters passivity, this aim is ultimately unrealizable. It is just a philosophical-political attitude that uses cultural means from intellectuals or artists ultimately against the means themselves, so as to guarantee action and the maximum freedom of the viewers or the masses. It’s not that all kinds of discourse are avoided or delegitimized, but rather that discourse is seen not as something with a value in itself, but as a tool that acquires its maximum value if it denies itself in pursuit of actual experience. It is in this sense that we must read the following words from Terayama:

When I threw away books and rallied in the streets, I was thinking of turning the city into a book... By abandoning printed books in my study and walking into the streets of this city, books paradoxically begin to have greater and wider meaning in my thought (Terayama, in Morita, 2006, p.54).

It is because, from this point of view, discourse should be used fundamentally in pursuit of the actual experience of the masses, that Terayama plays with the possibility that texts become part of the city, to become integrated into it. That is why throughout the film not only the lyrics of several songs are heard, why also quotes from several

authors such as Majakovsky, Hughes, Marlaux and Terayama himself are shown in public places like pavements, a toilets, or the sand of a football field. At one point in the film, a girl on a ladder writes the following words on a wall with white chalk: “The city is an open book. Write in its infinite margins.” The action in the streets, and not the mere denial of discourse, is for Terayama what makes sense of art. This allows us to understand how the Terayama who was so critical of political movements, could at the same time through his cinema call to the students mobilized during the 1970s not to isolate themselves inside the occupied campuses but to spread their insurrection (Ridgely 2011).

The film’s title is a declaration of intentions along these lines. As Ridgely (2011) notes, this title is similar to the message that the narrator of André Gide’s novel *Les Nourritures Terrestres* (*Los Frutos de la Tierra*) tells the reader: “Throw away my book.” It’s a message that assumes the paradox of being launched as a precept from the authority of the author (the novelist or the director) through his means (the novel or the film), but precisely to suppress the preceptive value and the author’s authority and means, fostering the receptor’s autonomy.

For Terayama, watching a film cannot in any event be a substantial political act, however avant-garde the work may be and however it may encourage the viewers’ subjectivity. Going to the cinema consists after all of sitting in an armchair in the dark, momentarily suppressing the relationship with other people, shutting oneself up and isolating oneself from the streets. This view of cinema against cinema itself is expressed most explicitly in the following speech made by Kitagawa, the main character, at the end of the film:

If you think about it, a film can only exist within the darkness of a cinema. The world of the film ends the moment the lights come on; it just disappears. [...] Even the worlds of Polanski and Ōshima Nagisa and Antonioni, all of them disappears when you turn on the lights. Think you could show a film on the side of a building during daylight? [...] I loved Humphrey Bogart. I loved Cinemascope, town shooting, love scenes... I loved Mr. Sukita, the cameraman; Mr. Terayama, the director; Mr. Usui, the assistant. The whole of that world, but I don’t love the cinema. Goodbye. Goodbye, cinema.

During the film an element appears that, among other possible interpretations, can symbolize the

self-abolishing function of cinema as conceived by Terayama. This element is a rudimentary airplane powered without success by Kitagawa's body, who has to hold it with his arms and to run forward to make it take off. The human-powered airplane appears in the scenes filmed with a magenta monochrome filter, namely, those in which the main character tries to escape from reality. Likewise, the title letters of the film that appear at the beginning are also magenta, on a green monochrome background, the colour of the scenes of Kitagawa's family life. So, a link can be deduced between cinema and the human-powered airplane through the link between the title's colour and that of the filter of the scenes in which Kitagawa tries to fly and escape (Ridgely, 2011). Just as he uses his imaginary world, his human-powered airplane, to escape from the alienated reality of everyday life, from Terayama's point of view also cinema constitutes an imaginary world that ultimately escapes from reality. The symbol of self-abolition appears at the end of the film, just before Kitagawa makes the speech in which he says goodbye to cinema, when he contemplates how the human-powered airplane burns.

Conclusion

Despite its confusing content and absence of clear messages, as well as its implicit criticism of discourse and ideology, if one takes into account the historical context in which *Throw Away Your Books, Rally in the Streets* was made and its coexistence with relatively similar approaches emanating from the most libertarian currents of the Japanese New Left movement, it can be concluded that it is a political film and not merely artistic or experimental.

Just as the most libertarian Japanese New Left tended to deploy an existentialist political standpoint that put subjective action above discourse and considered alienation as the fundamental driving force of that action rather than the ideology infused into the masses by an avant-garde, Terayama also deployed a similar philosophical-political attitude through cinematographic means. Instead of offering the viewer an ideal image of how the political subject should be, Terayama shows through his characters the alienation that, from the point of view of this existentialist paradigm, moves the masses; he shows their desires, their fears, their disorientation and their frustrations, their experience regardless of convictions, well defined values and rational plans.

At the same time, Terayama renounces as far as possible the position of the intellectual

vanguard by pointing out throughout the film, via artificializing devices, that what the spectator is watching is not an objective and closed truth but a subjective construction opened to her/his reflection and imagination as an active subject.

Taking into account that from the point of view of this paradigm the discourse emanating from a vanguard is something that intrinsically and ultimately distances the masses from subjective action, the contradiction implied by the fact that Terayama seeks to foster the subjective action of the viewer precisely through a discursive means such as cinema, is confronted through the filmic means itself: it can be said that Terayama, as a director, makes cinema against cinema.

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