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ENTREVUES BELFORT
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INTERVIEW WITH KIYOSHI KUROSAWA
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ABOUT HIS DOUBLE FEATURE CHOICES
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Following the success of the Double Feature formula, initiated last year with John Carpenter, it is now Kiyoshi Kurosawa's turn to participate in the game and reveal the sources of his inspiration and cinephilia. With each of his films presented, Kiyoshi Kurosawa associated a movie chosen from his personal Pantheon.

1997: CURE (キュア, Kyua)

/ **THE BOSTON STRANGLER** (1968) by Richard Fleischer

1998: LICENSE TO LIVE (ニンゲン合格, Ningen gōkaku)

/ **THE BALLAD OF CABLE HOGUE** (1970) by Sam Peckinpah

1999: CHARISMA (カリスマ, Karisuma)

/ **EMPEROR OF THE NORTH POLE** (1973) by Robert Aldrich

1999: SEANCE (降霊, Kōrei)

/ **THE INNOCENTS** (1961) by Jack Clayton

2000: PULSE (回路, Kairo)

/ **LIFEFORCE** (1985) by Tobe Hooper

2003: BRIGHT FUTURE (アカルイ ミライ, Akarui Mirai)

/ **NENETTE AND BONI** (1996) by Claire Denis

2007: RETRIBUTION (叫, Sakebi)

/ **MR KLEIN** (1976) by Joseph Losey

2008: TOKYO SONATA (トウキョウソナタ, Tōkyō Sonata)

/ **A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE** (2005) by David Cronenberg

2012: PENANCE (贖罪, Shokuzai)

/ **THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS** (1990) by Jonathan Demme

Interview with Kiyoshi Kurosawa conducted by Diane Arnaud and Lili Hinstin and translated by Eléonore Mahmoudian on October 9, 2014 for the catalogue of the 29th edition of the Entrevues Belfort International Film Festival.

DOUBLE FEATURE # 1: CURE / THE BOSTON STRANGLER

DA We're going to start with *Cure*, which is the first of your films that was ever screened in Paris, fifteen years ago now. And I can say that the enigmatic Mamiya won't soon be forgotten. I would like to know why you chose to create a parallel between that film and Richard Fleisher's masterpiece. What is it exactly that you found compelling in the staging of this film about a serial killer?

KK I chose *The Boston Strangler* by Richard Fleisher, not only because it's related, to a certain extent, to *Cure*, but also because it's one of my favourite films within the history of cinema, and having the opportunity to present it means a lot to me. So, when I was shooting *Cure*—well actually even before that, when I was thinking up the film's plot line—*The Boston Strangler* came to my mind because of its very singular structure. The film opens with an investigation, a policeman looking for a culprit, seemingly searching in vain for a criminal. And then, after a while, perhaps around the middle of the film, when the criminal gets caught by the police, the whole narrative structure shifts and becomes an entirely different story. I have always found this very captivating and it's the reason why I adopted a similar form for *Cure*.

DA Is there something in particular that strikes you during the interrogation scenes?

KK There is one thing that I find compelling in these scenes, something that is very rare in Hollywood: the very long takes. The filmmaker doesn't show the interrogation through editing tricks. Rather, he conveys the context by filming these long shots, in which the situation of the interrogation can fully unfold. This is an approach that I have always found gripping and which I have also tried to re-enact while I was directing *Cure*.

DA Would you say that you were also influenced by the scenes in *The Boston Strangler* in which we can see the amnesiac killer as he is recovering some of his memories?

KK I'm not sure if it appears directly in *Cure*, but yes, these are scenes that I find extremely ambitious and audacious: the way in which, during the interrogation process, flashes and scenes from the past come to emerge. The policeman who is conducting the interrogation is encroaching, bursting into his interlocutor's past to ask for answers regarding the criminal's acts. This whole principle really made a mark on me.

DOUBLE FEATURE # 2: LICENSE TO LIVE / THE BALLAD OF CABLE HOGUE

DA We know that you are particularly fond of Sam Peckinpah's *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*. Peckinpah was more renowned for his crepuscular westerns, his action movies. Why did you choose to associate *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* with *License to Live*: do you sense certain similarities between the damaged lives of the two main characters?

KK There aren't only similarities, shared traits, between those two heroes. I directed *License to Live* with the intention, from the start, to completely draw my inspiration from *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*. Of course, the genre is different: *License to Live* is not a western. However, the structure is the following: a character arrives in a new place and he finds a way of attracting new characters close to where he now lives; people come, a community forms itself, it becomes like a 'station', a stop-over or a coaching inn if you like. But the main protagonist dies, and all that is left are that place and the people inhabiting it. In that sense, for me, *License to Live* and *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* are one and the same thing.

DA Would you qualify these two attempts at re-enactment or adaption as failures, as utopias? Can we still envisage a future for those that remain?

KK It's hard for me to say. I don't want to think about it as failure. I believe it is neither a failure nor a success. It's an attempt, and at the end, it's maybe simply life itself. I tried to do what I had planned and I succeeded to a certain extent, but of course, not everything turned out as I'd hoped it would.

DA Both films manage to overcome something along the lines of nostalgia and comedy.

KK I believe that concerning *License to Live*, this happened naturally. Because my intention from the start was to reproduce a work similar to *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* only set in contemporary Japan, the nostalgia and the comedic elements of *The Ballad of Cable Hogue* were transferred naturally into *License to Live*.

DOUBLE FEATURE # 3: CHARISMA / EMPEROR OF THE NORTH POLE

DA For *Charisma*, we might have expected a parallel with a Spielberg film, maybe *Jaws*, or *Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Yet you chose *The Emperor of the North Pole*, a late work by this other great action filmmaker, Robert Aldrich.

KK *The Emperor of the North* by Aldrich is a film that I really love, and I had always wondered whether it would be possible to find a way of creating a similar work within Japanese cinematography. Through various metamorphoses and after various digressions, I ended up with *Charisma*. *Charisma* was born from this thought process, although of course it was not influenced as directly by Aldrich's work as *License to Live* was influenced by *Cable Hogue*. The process here was far more winding. Actually, I remember what impressed me the most in that film. It was, once again, the general narrative structure. There are oppositions of forces represented, in a very frontal way. These two forces are pretty much equal but have opposing values. They're fighting for this reason. There is also the generation gap: two characters who share similar values and a same vision of life but who clash because of the age difference. These two axes have influenced me a lot. I thought Aldrich represented this in a very direct manner. I tried to reproduce this effect with *Charisma*, perhaps in a more blurred way.

DA Can we transpose what happens between Lee Marvin the vagabond and Shack, and inspector Yabuike and Kiriya the tree keeper?

KK Yes, I think one can make this comparison. I'd say the main difference is that in *Charisma*, things aren't represented in such a straightforward way as in Aldrich's film, where we really have two different conceptions that are constantly colliding. In *Charisma*, I tried to convey these ideas in a slightly more complicated way, in order to make the situation more disconcerting, harder to grasp. The two characters don't only confront themselves with two opposing conceptions, but these conceptions actually translate into genuine actions – we have these exchanged looks, these physical contrasts, and in the end, they kill each other. From this perspective absolutely, my film is similar to Aldrich's.

DA *Charisma* also seems to have an allegorical dimension.

KK When I directed *Charisma*, I definitely had in mind the fact that it was an end-of-the-century-film, a film being conceived in 1999. I was quite conscious of the fact that something was coming to an end.

DOUBLE FEATURE # 4: SEANCE / THE INNOCENTS

DA *Seance* was freely adapted from McShane's English novel, which you readjusted to Japanese society. Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* was itself adapted from Henry James's novel. This work is considered as one of the most beautiful Western fantasy films of all times. Did this film influence your work directly, or was it more like a counter-reference, precisely regarding the ghost apparitions?

KK Clayton's influence on me was very important. In fact, it wasn't important only for me, but for many filmmakers who belonged to what has been called the "Japanese Horror". When I saw *The Innocents* for the first time, I was deeply impressed by its way of representing phantoms, a way I had never seen before. This movie by Clayton was essential for me, not necessarily because of its beauty, not necessarily even because of its greatness, but simply because it is scary.

DA What frightened you the most in Clayton's film: the ghosts or the children?

KK It's really a superb film, the children are fantastic, Deborah Kerr is lovely, but, I think the ghost are definitely the scariest. I see *The Innocents* as the first film that managed to make visible a blurry, uncertain existence – to make that somehow real. It's the first film that shows ghosts as being *present*, existing truly, irrefutably.

DA Even if in the film, no one ever has to beat them with a baton...

KK Cinema has always had a tendency to portray ghosts as monsters, that is, beings whose existence is real yet who are monstrous, disfigured, or at least repulsive. Then, there is also the tendency that consists in bringing ghosts to life through the subjectivity or the perception of another character. What I find revolutionary in Clayton's film is that it is the first to show this ambivalent existence in an objective way. The cinematographer, Freddy Francis, created this unbelievable shot in which you can see Deborah Kerr in the foreground – so a very certain, unquestionable existence – and a ghost in the background. Freddy Francis presented these two beings in a single sequence, from an objective perspective. I don't think this had ever happened before in the history of cinema, and in that sense, it is a revolutionary and indeed a deeply moving moment.

DOUBLE FEATURE # 5: PULSE (KAIRO) / LIFEFORCE

DA You seem to enjoy crossing various genres in your work, and you do this mainly by diverting the film's 'original' genre. In *Pulse (Kairo)* you start with a ghost movie, and then, your film reveals the end of the world. Is this why you decided to couple *Pulse (Kairo)* with Tobe Hooper's *Lifeforce*? Tobe Hooper is a very important filmmaker for you.

KK Hooper is a filmmaker whom I truly admire and who is under-appreciated in the United States and in France. Whenever I get a chance, I try to show one of his films. *Lifeforce* is a wonderful work in which, as you've described, many genres intersect. But there is also something that we tend to forget about this film: it is an adaptation, and an extremely faithful of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Of course, in Hooper's story there are also aliens and zombies, but the gist of the narrative is completely faithful to the classic tale. And this is one of the reasons why this work is paramount.

LH Is *Pulse (Kairo)* a kind of ultra modern technologic vampire film?

KK I would love to make a vampire film, but that just isn't possible in the Japan of today. However, I didn't think about it while I was directing *Pulse (Kairo)*. But the contamination process going on in the film, this circle of friends becoming contaminated without really realizing it, this pertains to the vampire-film-genre.

DA In *Kairo* or in *Lifeforce*, there seem to be a striking emphasis on the visual rendition of agony, of slow deaths, and of the survival of protagonists.

KK It's true that in film, death is often confined to a few seconds, whereas in *Pulse (Kairo)* I tried to make it last, to turn death into a state. I tried to represent this passage from life to death in an enduring way. This tendency of stretching time during death scenes is recurrent in horror movies. Tobe Hooper does that too, but it's still relatively rare I believe, in the work of American filmmakers, to see characters taking time to die, although it's quite frequent in zombie films. In fact it's the specialty of zombie films. With Tobe Hooper, it's related to the affection he develops for his characters: he just won't let them die and disappear too quickly. This is the case for *Lifeforce* as well as for his following film, *Spontaneous Combustion*. At the very end, we understand that the film is in fact a love story: all along, a very violent kind of love was being represented. This is something that I also had in mind while filming *Pulse (Kairo)* and which I depicted in a more tender, or let's say less brutal way.

DA Between *Michi* and *Kawashima*?

KK Yes, at the end we understand that the two characters are trying to design, for themselves, an itinerary leading to love – and I inherited this intention directly from Tobe Hooper. For me, *Pulse (Kairo)* is an homage to Hooper's work.

DA I have the feeling that for the past ten years or more, the fear of the end of the world has been less present in your films. Has danger – precisely the kind that Tobe Hooper explored in *Spontaneous Combustion*, with the nuclear tests – has been feeding your imagination recently?

KK If we examine this a little further, at the end of *Spontaneous Combustion*, we can see a melting nuclear power plant. These images of destruction, of melt down, have stayed in my mind during the filming of *Charisma*, at the end of which a tragedy also occurs: in the background, a city is being demolished. Right there, that's the influence of Tobe Hooper. You're right about the fact that I used to be preoccupied about how the world might come to an end. Since the year 2000, these preoccupations have been erased from my mind, and I realized that this conception, according to which the film ends along with the end of the world, was rather romantic.

DOUBLE FEATURE # 6: BRIGHT FUTURE / NENETTE AND BONI

DA Fittingly, we're about to enter the new century with *Bright Future*. In this film, we can spot a poster of Godard's *La Chinoise*, and we know that Godard has greatly influenced your films about student life that you directed in the 1980s. Yet you chose *Nenette and Boni*, a film about a couple of young people, who also happen to be brother and sister. How come?

KK I'm not sure whether the link between *Nenette and Boni* and *Jellyfish* is to be found necessarily in the plotline. I directed *Bright Future* driven by the idea that I had to confront myself with something that I hadn't been facing so far: the representation of youth, of young people who feel oppressed by the society in which they live. Of course, young characters had appeared in my films in the past, in *Kairo* for example, but those characters weren't really questioning their environment, whereas in *Bright Future*, that's exactly what I was seeking to show. Since the 2000s, I've started to think that I should face something that I had perhaps neglected, despite my interest in the topic – having seen many films in the 1960s and 1970s that explored these matters. However, being born in the generation that came right after that, I hadn't personally experienced this sentiment and I hadn't represented it. *Bright Future* was a first step in that direction, and I had already starting to work on it when I watched Claire Denis's *Nenette and Boni*. Denis manages to represent, with such precision, these young people who are out of step with their environment. I was quite surprised by this film, and I thought to myself: 'Ah, interesting, in France they dare to actually do that!' To me, Denis's film was genuinely encouraging.

DA Shigehiko Hasumi¹ really loved *Bright Future*, and he even spoke of a miracle regarding the end of the film, with the scene of the embrace.

KK I remember that Hasumi's critique had made me really happy, and I even thought: It's worth making movies if it'll allow one to hear such words. Regarding the miracles, *Bright Future* can maybe be summarized to the following: a generational problem, kind of like what we discussed with Aldrich's work, in which an older generation represents society, and a younger generation arrives and comes to face the older one. The last scene of *Bright Future*, the cuddle and embrace scene, represents a kind of reconciliation, a moment during which mutual comprehension becomes possible. I can't say whether that is a miracle, given that obviously, it's a fiction, so anything is possible – but yes, I guess that's how I see it.

DA Were you sensitive to Claire Denis's staging, to the visual effects that she explored? *Bright Future* is a film in which you seemed to be experimenting a lot visually.

KK Claire Denis's films, and not only *Nenette and Boni*, have always impressed me because of the way they represent water. Denis is very talented and her depiction of aquatic elements is admirable. In most of my films, I have always more or less consciously used water as a theme, but in *Bright Future* I did it consciously, I really looked for ways to make the characters interact with water, for ways to explore what kind of relations water could develop with them, and finally, what kind of influence water could have on the story itself.

¹Famous Japanese film critic and professor.

DOUBLE FEATURE # 7: RETRIBUTION / MR KLEIN

DA *Retribution* is one of the films in which anxiety progresses in the most intense, destabilizing way, because it deals with obsessive fear and with vengeance. Why did you propose to create a parallel between this film and *Mr Klein*? It was quite unexpected.

KK There is a narrative relation between the two films, in the sense that the story of *Mr Klein* actually contains a pretty orthodox theme, one often explored in cinema. You have a character who is very sure of his own identity, he has certainties about himself. And slowly he begins to have doubts, he becomes unsure of who he is exactly. Then he ends up discovering what he has maybe always suspected. *Retribution* follows a similar path: a character, who seemingly harbours no doubt about his identity, begins to have doubts, ends up discovering who he is and, ultimately, what he has done. So in that sense, these films are comparable. I had never explored these kinds of scenarios before *Retribution*, but when I started thinking about it, the first film that came to my mind was Joseph Losey's *Mr Klein*. There's something else that really impressed me in Losey's film: every time the character begins to question his identity, on every occasion, these doubts are somehow caused by a woman. As the character increasingly calls his own identity into question, a woman always intervenes, confuses him, or plays with him. Sometimes, it's a very clearly delineated character, like Jeanne Moreau's, sometimes it is more unclear, like the scene in a factory where Klein goes looking for a woman whose name he ignores, whom he has never met. There's also the scene in which an unknown woman tears apart a photograph, and that just utterly disconcerts him. It's almost like a ladder, from woman to woman, from doubt to doubt, which was very memorable for me. In *Retribution*, I did that too, at a different scale and with a different level of intensity.

DA The culpability of Mr Klein seems all the more important given that we never see his homonym. Has this hide and seek game inspired the way you explore individual guilt, collective responsibility with regard to the meaning of History?

KK Actually in *Mr Klein*, the homonymous character appears twice, in two different shots! One is on the train where he appears at the bottom of the screen, from afar, so we can't really read his face, yet it's clearly him. As for your question about History, I'm not sure I'll be able to discuss it that well. When I began conceiving the *Retribution*'s plotline, I wanted to tackle the theme of war alongside the theme of guilt, because Japan participated in World War II, seventy years ago now. Because of the damage caused by all the bombings, Tokyo and Japan actually consider *themselves* as victims, to a certain extent. But at the same time, and according to an external perspective, it is a criminal country. Taken together, these standpoints yield a form of guilt. At first, I wanted to use the character played by Kōji Yakusho and have him embody this guilt, make him develop a reflection on History, on war, and on his guilt feelings. But this theme is rather heavy, a little difficult to tackle, at least for me at the time. So, as I was tweaking the scenario, these elements disappeared, but to this day, I still think that I would like to explore these subject matters. Many projects that would have examined them were not carried out, and perhaps never will be, but I do keep them in mind.

DOUBLE FEATURE # 8 : TOKYO SONATA / A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

DA Could you help us draw parallels between the two films, regarding certain themes that jump to the mind, such as the circulation of violence from the exterior to the interior and between members of a family, or concealment games, with those characters wearing masks, or any other theme at stake, within the film comparison that is.

KK Originally, *Tokyo Sonata* was not my own project, it was a scenario written by someone else and proposed to me. So I read the script, and it was the story of a family in which the father loses his job and hides it from other members of the family; from then on, the family unit is dismantled. I immediately thought of David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* – a film that I've always really appreciated. I borrowed many elements from *A History of Violence* while I was filming *Tokyo Sonata*. In my film, the theme of violence isn't as transparent and important as it is in *A History of Violence*, but regarding this dismantlement of a family, the approaches are relatively similar. There are these physical confrontations, one character beating another, a character falling down the staircase, and another character who ends up running away from home. By comparison, *License to Live* ends on a more nostalgic and sad note, with the death of the main character, which allows the film to find closure, whereas *Tokyo Sonata* has an open ending. Indeed, the viewer wonders how the members of this family will continue to live together, whether or not they will live together, and that is a direct influence of *A History of Violence*, which similarly ends with a series of questions. I don't think I'd ever seen anything like that until I saw Cronenberg's film.

DOUBLE FEATURE # 9 : PENANCE (SHOKUZAI) / THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

DA *The Silence of the Lambs* is a film that you have cared about for a long time now.

KK Yes, it's true that *The Silence of the Lambs* is a film that I enjoy enormously and that has influenced many of my films, not only *Penance (Shokuzai)*. Once again, I was drawn to the structure of the story. A woman is confronted to a terrifying man, and from then on, she begins to struggle, to fight against him in order to shed light on the truth. In *Penance (Shokuzai)*, there are many intertwined narratives, so it's a bit intricate, but in the end, it's finally the real heroine of the movie, Kyōko Koizumi, who finds herself in the same position as Clarisse in *The Silence of the Lambs*. She is the one who sheds light on the truth, who fights against the man who kills. What really stroke me in Jonathan Demme's film is how the heroine resolves the case which she had been studying for so long but in doing so, she finds herself burdened by an even heavier weight. Instead of a resolution, instead of the expected relief, she is weighed down. Perhaps I didn't go that far in *Penance (Shokuzai)*, yet it's a conception that I had in mind while I was directing the film. When the main character, played by Kyōko Koizumi, finds the man and resolves the crime that has been eating her for years, we soon realize that this doesn't yield relief, that it doesn't bring resolution.