



REMAKING KUROSAWA

TRANSLATIONS AND PERMUTATIONS
IN GLOBAL CINEMA

D. P. MARTINEZ



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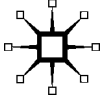
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D. P. Martinez

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A Note on Japanese Usage

The Japanese terms in this book have been Romanized according to the modified Hepburn system, where long vowels are marked with the macron [^]. I have used English spellings for commonly used Japanese terms, as well as for the repeated use of film titles. The names of Japanese actors, writers and others have been written with the surname followed by the given name, except in the cases of well-known figures such as Akira Kurosawa, Toshiro Mifune, and Takeshi Kitano.

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Acknowledgments

The seeds for this book were planted many years ago when I was a student at the University of Chicago and a member of the European film society. As one of the society's projectionists, I showed anything and everything that fell into that category. Life became more exciting when we merged with Doc Films and all "foreign" films became part of my projecting remit. It was during those years that I rediscovered Akira Kurosawa, whose films I previously had seen only on television. In 1982 Doc Films held a Kurosawa film festival and I then had the opportunity to meet Audie Bock and Donald Richie, whose own critical engagement with the Japanese filmmaker inspired my continued interest. Donald Richie, over the years, has been a supportive mentor, always making time to see me when I am in Tokyo.

Nearly two decades later, in 1997, when I was asked to put together a film course for the new Anthropology of Media Masters degree in my department (SOAS), I immediately thought of Kurosawa and how I might approach his work anthropologically. Thus was born *Translations and Permutations, Towards an Anthropology of Film* (the final course title suggested by Ronald Inden in a passing conversation). I taught this course until 2005 when, after a sabbatical year at the University of Tokyo supported by the British Academy and Japanese Society for the Promotion of the Sciences, I was ready to pull together my thinking on the topic, reworking a draft manuscript I had written in 2003–2004.

My analyses of the films discussed in this book benefited from the involvement of the many Masters students who took the course over the years. Their discussions, insights, and original research into films and filmmakers enhanced my own thinking. I owe an immeasurable debt to all those students, but it was, oddly enough, some of my non-media students who offered very concrete support. Charmaine Chan interviewed Christopher Doyle for me in Hong Kong; Fumie Nakano photocopied the Japanese reviews of many films for me in Tokyo; and Silke Niehausman endlessly discussed translation as a process and concept with me. During 2003–2004, discussions with Donald Richie, and my dear friend Noriyo

Hayakawa, as well as with any Japanese academic willing to lend an ear were always fruitful. Mark Nornes also gave me some interesting insights into translating films when we met in Tokyo in 2004. Critical engagement with seminar audiences in the United Kingdom (SOAS, Oxford and Nottingham), Germany, Japan, Hong Kong, and New Zealand led me to further develop my ideas. Along the way, Louella Matsunaga, Hidetaka Matsunaga, and Yuka Kodama-Pomfret helped double-check crucial Japanese dialogue.

A long ago summer spent working for Clark Productions preparing and translating Japanese television programs for transmission on Channel 4 in the United Kingdom taught me a great deal about the processes of editing and subtitling. But it is the filmmakers I know well from my involvement with the Royal Anthropological Institute's Film committee who set me on the path to considering how directors look at film. Over a decade of preselecting films for the RAI Ethnographic film festival with Peter Getzel, Paul Henley, Michael Yorke, Howard Reid, Felicia Hughes-Freeland, Tom Sheahan, and Marcus Banks, among others, have changed how I look at any film: I now think more about technologies and techniques. Of course, it is the filmmakers that I know only through their work to whom I owe the greatest debt, but I must signal in particular Tom Tykwer and George Lucas, both of whom took the time to read what I had to say about them. I did contact the other directors mentioned in these pages, but they showed no interest in responding (or were puzzled at being contacted by an anthropologist).

I must thank my usual two sounding boards at SOAS: Kit Davis, the colleague who always asks the right questions, and Stephen Hughes, who reminds me of what anthropologists have written on film, providing essential mini-tutorials. The SOAS IT department has cheerfully worked on solving my problems with visual material; while Jens Franz, anthropologist and media expert extraordinaire, always came to the rescue.

Finally, my deepest gratitude is to my husband, David Gellner, fellow anthropologist, my toughest critic, and expert proof-reader. This book is dedicated to him and our three children, Nicolás, Martín, and Sofía, who along with having to bear Spanish names in England, have also learned to ask "Now which film does this remind me of?" whenever they see a movie.

Prologue

Films Are Good to Think (With)

That films are good to think with has not escaped many modern cultural theorists. Scholars as diverse as literary critics, Marxist writers, social geographers, philosophers, sociologists, and feminists—often overlapping categories—have all used a film or discussed film genres in order to illustrate the ways in which cinema can reveal aspects of lived reality. Films have been used to discuss the way in which all narratives are political (Jameson 1992, 2006), to illustrate the condition of postmodernity (Harvey 1990), to reveal the human unconscious (Deleuze 2005a, 2005b; Žižek 1991, 2001), or to raise issues about the continued subjugation and future potential of women (Braidotti and Lykke 1996; Haraway 1991). Rare amongst the ranks of serious thinkers who have tackled the subject of films as good to think (with) have been social anthropologists. If anything, when anthropologists have studied film, they have tended to think “around” the subject, looking at the processes of filmmaking (Powdermaker 1950), social contexts (Varzi 2006), audience reactions (Caton 1999), or the experience of seeing a film (cf. Wilkes and Askew 2002, for examples of all these approaches)—they have not used films to think about broader issues to be found within the discipline of social anthropology. This book, however, is an anthropological attempt to think *with* films about globalization.

The core of this book is an analysis of four of Akira Kurosawa's¹ films that have been remade, in most cases more than once, and mainly by non-Japanese directors. Film remakes are a subject even less associated with the discipline of social anthropology than straightforward film analyses; however, since they raise issues of cultural context, transcultural translation, and the knotty problem of narrative creativity, remakes should be seen to lie firmly within anthropology's remit. In order to make this argument, I will be examining issues to do with narratives as they move around the globe and, while written from an anthropological point

of view, I also will deal with the issues that are deemed important to scholars from both film and Japanese studies.

So what does anthropology bring to an analysis of films and globalization? Encroaching on the domain of film studies, which is highly reliant on textual analysis, would seem to land the anthropologist firmly in territory that has been well mined by others. Do we need to add an anthropological approach to film studies? This is a fair question to ask of a discipline that has built its methods on the foundations of fieldwork, participant observation, and comparison, that are normally done in small-scale societies. We could also ask: how can something as large as “the global” be the subject of a single study? Moreover, the most interesting aspect of the global for anthropologists has been how to locate it within the local (Lal 2002) or how to trace its effects through diasporas, as much current research on Bollywood is aiming to do. However this is not a book based on diaspora as global flow, local resistance or acculturation (Tobin 1992), frictions (Tsing 2005) or accommodations, nor is it based on audience studies, although I do talk about and have talked to a fairly small group of people who can be said to constitute *an* audience; that is, I have talked to filmmakers about their responses to seeing a film. What I am interested in is the fact that a filmmaker’s response to seeing a film is often to make their own film. It is striking that interviews with or biographies about any contemporary filmmaker will mention some film-viewing experience that propelled them toward becoming a director.

It is this impulse to make a film, inspired by watching films, which is part of what this book is about. In short, I want to explore, in a Lévi-Straussian sense, how “films are good to think (with),” in the first instance for filmmakers and, in the second, for anthropologists. For Lévi-Strauss (1962) it was “animals” that were good to think, in relation particularly to totems and taboos, in order for us to understand how distinguishing between animals provides “a natural model of differentiation for human beings to create differences among themselves” (Tambiah 1985:207). I would like, in a structural inversion, to argue that films, especially remade films, are good to think with in order to understand the ways in which humans ignore perceived differences and assume the possibility of similarity across cultures. When directors decide to remake a foreign film they may be attempting to erase difference, to restore the film to “the seamlessness of a coherent, intact, and consumable image (and sound)” (Wills 1998:150), but they do this assuming that something about the film, generally its story, will appeal to a new audience. These assumptions about translatability, the possibility of understanding, the making of conceptual bridges to bring the translation about, are crucial to understanding this book (Ricoeur 2006:4).

My approach also owes something to Deleuze's point that

a theory of cinema is not "about" cinema, but about the concepts that cinema gives rise to and which are themselves related to other concepts corresponding to other practices, the practice of concepts in general having no privilege over others, any more than one object has over others. (2005b:268)

Within this book I want to expand this point to include the idea that what people *make* of films—as opposed to specialists' theorizing—is a subject in and of itself. At one level, the way in which watching the films of others inspires a new film is easy enough to trace through the process of translation, remaking and referencing (that is alluding to, paying homage, parodying, adopting visual techniques, or even resisting), and this book will follow some examples of this for selected Kurosawa films. At another level, it is the problem of meaning—that is, what does it mean that films seem to flow around the world endlessly being made, watched, remade, and acting as sources of inspiration—that lies at the core of my analysis. While it is correct to say that anthropology is the study of human beings, their activities and societies, we social anthropologists make not only human bodies and societies our core subject, but also, in the most complex of ways, it is the human mind that interests us.

Anthropologists study the ways in which human beings construct a sense of relatedness out of biological functions, build economies on ideologies, make the abstract into something concrete, give meaning to symbols, and tell stories that reveal how we think. As postmodernists, we often forget or chose to ignore Lévi-Strauss' (1963) work in this last area because, in the end, his analyses of myth always ended as a discussion of binary oppositions; yet it was his combination of Freudian analysis and deconstruction that laid the foundations of much of post-1960s literary and film analyses. Jameson (1992), in his attempt to understand mass culture as reiteration, how all art has become commodity, falls back on Freud as well in order to understand the "desire" to repeat that seems central to modernity. It seems that if anthropologists want to reclaim their position as students of the human imagination—that creativity that makes humans *human*, the ability to see and make difference where, biologically, there is a large tendency to genetic similarity—we need to reclaim some of these techniques and not be afraid of the paths they lead us down. Thus the short answer to the question "What is this book about?" is: The human imagination on a global level.

As Crapanzano notes: "Although anthropologists have treated the imagination in one manner or another in much of what they have written, they have done so largely by indirection" (2004:15). It could be

argued that it is by indirection only that we can study the human imagination—"imagination" tends to exist inside individuals and normally we can only trace it through its products. To study it globally adds to the conceptual difficulties. For example, a recent anthropological attempt at charting the global imagination, Allison's *Millennial Monsters* (2006), argues that the world's soft power center has shifted from the United States to Japan. Allison makes her argument by tracing the global imagination through its material manifestations, the toys and games from Japan that now are marketed throughout the world, but with a key focus on the US-Japan relationship, ignoring much of the globe in her "global." This fusion of material culture with an acknowledgment of global economy (the subject of another recent attempt to look at Japan and global flows by Bestor 2004) owes much to Appadurai's (1996) seminal article "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" and this deserves some discussion here.

Appadurai argues that we exist in an era of disjunctures, which, if we examine the areas that he labels "scapes"—ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes—we can see how global culture is neither worldwide nor a single culture.² What I find interesting about his various 'scapes is how each is implicated in the other: films, part of his mediascapes, for example, cannot be understood as objects without also considering the financial, ideological, technological, and cultural aspects involved. We may chose to ignore the way money was raised to make the film (although is becoming more and more important for some),³ but film criticism and analysis, in the end, focus on the ideological, cultural/historical and even the technological. By examining how all the various 'scapes come together, we also get the sense of how something like a global culture and a global imagination might exist not as centers or separate poles that represent monolithic hegemonies, but as continuous processes that are constantly changing: last year *Pokémon* (1999), today *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003, 2006, 2007), tomorrow *Harry Potter* (2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007), next week a Simpson's episode or Bollywood production that fuses elements of all three. Thus the concepts of soft or hard power seem irrelevant to me, since the complexities of the relationships between culture, technology, politics, ideologies, and economics are too intricate to be reduced to these terms. Napier, in a recent analysis of the history of Western artists' engagement with Japan, takes a similar stance (2007:8, 18–19). In short, we should not assume that global culture is static, singular, or firmly centered in one place, and yet, many writers on the topic of globalization begin precisely from this premise or provide an analysis that looks at two poles on a continuum as does Allison. For anthropologists such an approach comes from their practice of documenting the experiences of others

through participant observation, the experience of globalization may feel as if it is singular, hegemonic, and occurring at the cost of local culture and identity and it is only fair to analyze this experience. However, in order to provide a more nuanced analysis in this book, I look at the process by beginning with Kurosawa's work rather than vice versa and including non-Hollywood films.

In chapter one, I begin by assuming that the film business is global, but the caveat is, of course, that some countries' film industries are more global than others. Outside of the United States and Europe, Japanese and, more recently, Chinese films enjoy the industry's recognition while Korea, Iran, Mexico, Brazil, and Thailand are not far behind. Canadian films are often seen as just an inexpensive way to make a Hollywood film. India's films are famous for being spectacles of a postmodern sort, but do not necessarily enjoy completely global success, while some countries have only sporadic recognition: Egypt, Taiwan, Vietnam, or Turkey fall into this category. Aside from hardcore film buffs, immigrant communities, and cultural studies experts, global recognition has escaped Indonesian, Nigerian, or Ghanaian films (and yet Africa hosts one of the largest film festivals in the world, FESPACO). The global, as Hannerz (1992), amongst others, would have it, always appears to fracture along lines of politics, economics, and more ephemerally, because of what I would call "perceived cultural similarity." Perceived cultural similarity can be explained through a simple example: when in 1983 I asked Japanese friends why I had never heard of the hugely popular Jackie Chan before, I was told that since Hong Kong was an East Asian society, Chan's films translated more readily for Japanese audiences than they did for Westerners, so it was obvious that he would be well known only in East Asia. While time has knocked that theory a bit, the fact remains that Jackie Chan's Hollywood films never wowed audiences in the West as much as his early Hong Kong films did audiences in the East. The global is relative and it is on this premise that much of current anthropological theory rests.

And yet...

There are always subcultures and through their fandoms there is a seepage, a process of osmosis, that brings the foreign film into mainstream culture: the film festivals in the United Kingdom or United States that show African or East Asian or Middle Eastern films; the martial arts fans who know all the new stars before they have a crossover hit in the West; the shops that specialize in films for immigrant communities that might be visited by others; the intelligentsia who prefer "foreign films"; the Internet communities that download and share films across the globe; and, most importantly for my purposes, filmmakers, producers, scholars, and critics who watch everything they can get their hands on. Slowly,

then, some films—in the past, mainly the foreign “art” film, more recently, the horror film—cross over into the mainstream. Thus while Appadurai wants anthropologists to think about the disjunctures that make the global, the differences that make poverty, reinforce national identities and religious affiliation while fuelling adherence to the local, what interests me about the creative aspect of films/narratives that travel is how they bridge disjunctures. We can think of this seepage, the cross-over, as an example of “desire lines”—the lines made by humans as they traverse the countryside, connecting points outside of established paths because that is the way people *want* to travel.

Desire as an expression of human imagination, rather than something that must be managed or repressed, is also important in understanding how narratives are made, and how they make and unmake human connectiveness. Why do we tell stories? It is useful to think here of the place narrative holds in the study of human beings. For scientists such as Dennett (2004), it is the human ability to narrate that creates human consciousness, it is what makes us human and unlike our fellow primates. For psychologists, such as Bruner,⁴ narratives are a way of *knowing* the world and he divides the forms of narrative into two: that of “action” and that of “consciousness” (1986:14); or the rational/scientific and the imaginative that includes fiction. Each form makes different sorts of knowledge: both make our social realities. It is precisely here that science, psychology, literary, and film analyses venture into the terrain of anthropology, which is concerned with how human societies make their own realities. The modern world of filmmaking is an important part of this and yet, as I have noted, we anthropologists have—by and large—ignored films and the stories they tell.

I also am curious about how it is that the stories that human beings tell become narratives that not only make social reality, but also form bridges across societies, moving in time and space. The post-1980s anthropological notion that anthropology should avoid universalizing or generalizing (Marcus and Fischer 1986), that it should eschew grand theory-making strikes me as too parochial in the face of empirical evidence that human beings spend a great deal of time essentializing *and* generalizing; communicating despite the “impossibility” of translation (cf. Ricoeur 2004), *while* continuing to make borders, to create barriers that insist on difference. I do not agree with Iwabuchi (2002), for example, who argues that a local media becomes global only if it is “odorless,” that is, if it has so few discernable foreign elements in it that it can travel because it fits into what is a homogenized, and thus by implication, second-rate, global culture. I would rather argue the converse: that if we look carefully at what looks like a homogenized narrative, we will find points being made about cultural and social similarities that should give us pause to think; that if

we examine in detail, as this book does, the narratives that both build bridges and then proceed to burn them while retaining some memory of the connection, we will understand something about human nature.

It was Simmel, prescient in so many ways, who had some interesting observations to make on these processes in his “Bridge and Door”:

Because the human being is the connecting creature who must always separate and cannot connect without separating...and the human being is likewise the bordering creature who has no border. The enclosure of his or her domestic being by the door means, to be sure, that they have separated out a piece from the uninterrupted unity of natural being. But just as the formless limitation takes on a shape, its limitedness finds its significance and dignity only in that which the mobility of the door illustrates: in the possibility at any moment of stepping out of this limitation into freedom. (1997:174)

This book also attempts to trace the tension between making connections, seeing similarity, and then asserting difference. It is, in itself, an effort to build a bridge out of diverse materials: anthropology, film studies, postmodern theory, and my understanding of Japanese society. It traces, from the “authentic” remake through to the way-out-there-permutations, the desire lines of the human imagination. I have had to set some limits to its scope, but even a focus on four films has led me down interesting paths. To begin with, in chapter one, I want to make some more detailed points about films and narratives in the global before examining some aspects of Kurosawa’s life and work in chapter two. Chapter three begins the analysis of *Rashomon* (*Rashômon*, 1950), not only the first film to bring the Japanese director to Western attention, but also a film that raises many interesting issues in relation to subjectivity, social reality, and a postmodern take on “the” truth. Chapters eight to ten look at *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*, 1954), *Yojimbo* (*Yôjinbo*, 1961), and *Hidden Fortress* (*Kakushi-toride no san-akunin*, 1958), picking up and elaborating on various aspects of the analysis developed in relation to *Rashomon*, concluding in a discussion of the ways in which humans come to know and understand their world.

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Setting the Scene

*In order to write scripts, you must first study
The great novels and dramas of the world. You
must consider why they are great. Where does
the emotion come from that you feel as you read
them?... You must also see the great films. You
must read the great screenplays and study the film
theories of the great directors. If your goal is to
become a film director, you must master
screenwriting.*

—Kurosawa 1982:193

The course on which this book is based began with a simple premise: that Japan, so often called a nation of copiers, was also a nation copied from and that one of the best examples of this was the way in which the films of Akira Kurosawa had influenced non-Japanese filmmakers. As an anthropologist, I soon realized that such a simple thesis required discussion of a much more complex series of conceptual issues. First, copying in the eras of modernity and postmodernity has been considered to be an inferior art, the poor man's craft next to the original artist's creativity. That the film industry has long remade films is seen as an indication of the fact that it is popular culture and opposed to the realm of high art. This is certainly one of the lines offered by the adherents of the Frankfurt school such as Adorno (1991) when considering popular culture.

This negative view of the copying relies on a misreading of Benjamin's seminal essay "The work of art in the age of mechanical

reproduction” (1973). A careful reading of the essay reveals that Benjamin saw film as having the power to reach into the viewer, like a surgeon, and my reading of this is that films, through such incorporations, acquire different meanings both between the filmmaker and audience as well as for different members of the audience. Films are not straightforward bearers of dominant ideologies that brain-wash the audiences, but are something else altogether. They are, in Bakhtin’s (1981) terms, dialogic: they engage us in conversations. For most members of the audience, the dialogue is between them and friends: “What did you think of the film?” In this age of easy Internet access, some audience members go online in order to discuss, debate, critique, ask questions, provide answers, and ponder the meaning of films they have just watched or have become obsessed with. For other audience members, the dialogue is a conversation with the medium itself that fuels their own creativity. To “copy” a film then, reveals the impulse this process seems to spark in some people: the desire to somehow make art of one’s own. Thus, in looking at remakes of Kurosawa’s films I have had to consider the issue of copying, and have had to look at the process of transformation that is involved in remaking as well. I will be discussing these issues in detail as we consider the films.

Kurosawa’s work also raises a second issue: that of cultural translation. It is currently assumed that translating stories, customs, ideas, attitudes, religions—anything—is problematic. As mentioned in the prologue, the anthropologist Appadurai (1996) argues that we exist in an era of disjunctures, which, if we examine the areas that he labels ‘scapes, we can see how global culture can never be a single culture, but always produces local responses. The implications of these disjunctures are various: the realization that the future might exist elsewhere—if you are poor in Africa, for example—; the slipperiness of identity for migrants; and the relegation of certain parts of the world to theme park status, quaint places for the wealthier Northern Hemisphere tourist to visit. The world might be full of commodities we can buy from just about everywhere, but that does not mean we understand anything about the people who produce them.

I also noted in the prologue that I think it important to consider the way in which disjunctures are constantly being bridged by human activity. We need to think about the way in which people use slipperiness (Carrithers 1992) to communicate or construct new identities and how these processes seem to inspire creativity. What theorists who follow Appadurai do not consider is the way in which humans

make “bridges” that become conceptual “places”—locations from which something new can be generated.¹ In this book I want to consider how it is that the film industry in general and films in particular do this.

Films may well be mere representations of reality, shadows on a screen, but they have a material existence; they are made, bought, sold, consumed, regurgitated, and so on, and all by real people. As Jameson argues, this “*materialisation*” is “woefully misunderstood by much contemporary Marxist theory,” which negatively relates materiality to the “false problem of value” (italics in the original, 1992:16). What really matters is how “materialization is a key structural feature of both modernism and mass culture” (Jameson 1992:17). A second point then is that this concern with the materiality of moving images—illusions made concrete by their continued existence both in the popular imagination and in the work of filmmakers—should be of greater interest to anthropologists especially. I have discussed elsewhere (Martinez 1998), how I think that the mass media should be incorporated into anthropology and will only briefly restate my position here in relation to films: it is precisely because films are open to both symbolic analysis and concrete contextualizing that they constitute the stuff of anthropology. To make the point clear, before examining the case of Kurosawa’s films, I need to discuss some basic issues to do with the film industry as global, the identity of artists as local, the question of retelling stories, and the problems inherent in translation.

The Local and the Global

In the early twentieth century, the film industry became global long before globalization became a buzzword. While the first fifty years of the twentieth century saw the world divided into economic and cultural blocs—the British Empire, German—dominated middle Europe, the French Empire, the Hispanic world, the growing imperialism of the USSR, East Asia and, on the margins, the Americans—almost from the moment movies began to be made, silent, and later sound, films crossed borders and traveled to wherever it was possible to set up a screen and crank a projector.² It may have well been people in Hollywood who immediately recognized the implications of this: cinema was, after all, an immigrant business in the United States. So while in France, Japan, Shanghai, Bengal, Bombay, the United Kingdom—to name just a few places where local filmmaking has

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