THE REVISIONING OF THE REAL: FILM DIRECTOR SHINODA MASAHIRO'S EMPHATIC USE OF KUROGO IN SHINJ? TEN NO AMIJIMA

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English

Abstract: As argued in my previous paper ("Terayama Shûji's Theatre work: His Experimental Use of the Traditional Kurogo"), a new type of *kurogo* stagehand emerged in the late 1960s alternative theatre of Japan. Unlike the traditional type, these kurogo were so conspicuous as to impress an audience with their strong presence. The similar experimentation that Terayama carried out in Inugami (Dog God) was done by film director Shinoda Masahiro in Shinjû ten no amijima (Love Suicide at Amijima) independently but almost at the same time (1969). Shinoda brings to the fore kurogo puppeteers who viciously pave the way to the central characters' tragic end.

This paper inquires into the ways in which Shinoda's filmic depiction of kurogo emphasizes the kurogo's interference in the couple's life, even their manipulation of it. It also clarifies what his provocative treatment of the kurogo suggests. By doing so, it shows that like Terayama, Shinoda disapproves of a realistic representation of life and acutely aware that life needs art to delve behind the façade of real life.

Key words: kurogo, film, bunraku, *kekkai* (sacred barrier), Shinoda Masahiro

The tradition of kurogo in classical Japanese theatre actually remained intact up until the late 1960s, an era of worldwide cultural rebellions, especially in the fields of philosophy and art, born of the counterculture movement in the advanced nations such as France and the United States. Japan was one of those which were acutely responsive to the cultural new wave. As far as theatrical forms that included stage plays, dance and films, were concerned, there were some leading avant-garde experimentalists--to name a few, dramatists Terayama and Suzuki Tadashi, butô dancers Ôno Kazuo and Hijikata Tatsumi, and film directors Ôshima Nagisa and Shinoda Masahiro. In the late 1960s many of these artists were nearly in their forties or over. Their mentality and world views differed from those of the revolt-leading baby boomers in their twenties. This difference primarily derived from whether or not they lived through World War II. And yet the middle-aged cultural dissenters felt a strong spiritual affinity for the rebellion and gave voice to it each in their own artistic outlets. Some spoke up outside their arenas as well. Shinoda, for instance, gave his enthusiastic support to the youth-led revolution. He wrote:

> I would say it is this current worldwide cultural change that now we Japanese are experiencing. So if the Japanese film obstinately continued to stick to its own alleged particularity, it would no longer be excusable. Just as the Vietnam War and the 1968 May Cartier-Latin Revolution have heatedly been discussed worldwide, so too need be the opposition movement in Japan against the extension of the1960 Japan-US security treaty and the ongoing student revolt against Japan's educational system involving them.[1]

The growing revolution at that time was generating great intellectual excitement that persuaded academics, intellectuals and artists to re-examine established philosophical and aesthetic paradigms and pursue new ones.

In Japan this vigorous activity worldwide helped pave the way for innovative explorations into new theatrical forms. Such a pioneering cultural background also encouraged Terayama to not only present as part of his theatre work the traditional kurogo in the modern theatre scene but provide them with a more active function than working as mere stagehands. His creative idea of kurogo developed into Inugami [Dog God] in 1969, which I will examine in Chapter Three.

Interestingly, Terayama was far from being alone in experimenting with the emphatic use of kurogo around the end of the1960s in Japan. Almost at the same time, film director Shinoda Masahiro, who was one of the most important personages of Japanese film's Nouvelle Vague in the late 1950s and early1960s, demonstrated a forceful use of kurogo in his film adaptation of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's puppet play, Shinjû ten no Amijima [The Love Suicides at Amijima; a. k. a. Double Suicide] (1969). Through this film, Shinoda's shared interest in the kabuki/bunraku convention of kurogo with Terayama became known to the public. While Terayama's Inugami was first produced in Germany in early June, 1969, Shinoda's Shinjû ten no Amijima was released late in May of the same year. Both might have been aware of each other's interest in the kurogo convention because their friendship began nearly a decade earlier when Shinoda invited him to collaborate with Terayama as the scriptwriter of the film called Kawaita mizu-umi [The Dry Lake](1960). At Shinoda's request, Terayama continued to adapt novels and other source matrials for Shinda's other works: Yûhi ni akai ore no Kao [The Sunset Tints My Face] (1961), Waga koi no tabiji

[The Story about My Love] (1961), and Namida wo shishi no tategami ni [We Shed Bitter Tears onto the Lion's Mane] (1962). In addition, Terayama supported Shinoda by having members of his troupe, Tenjô-sajiki, play a party of kurogo and supenmeraries in Shinjû ten no Amijima. This suggests that they were communicating with each other very well. Not that they necessarily exchanged their detailed ideas about kurogo, for, as will be argued, each needed his unique concept of kurogo in order to demonstrate his own philosophical and aesthetic view of the world. As Terayama explored a variety of means to grasp a special kind of reality more real than the generally accepted reality in his own way, so too did Shinoda. While Terayama continued to refine his own idea of kurogo as well as other theatrical issues, in the late 1960s Shinoda concentrated by himself on his ambitious film adaptation of a puppet play by Chikamatsu about a man's extra-marital affair with a courtesan that ends up in the lovers' double suicide.

Shinoda's interest in kurogo originated from a class on kabuki he took while studying at a university in the early 1950s.[2] The class in kabuki led him to learn Chikamatsu's argument for a delicate mixture of fiction and reality in theatre arts. This great dramatist contended that artistic truth is to be found somewhere between illusion and reality. Although Chikamatsu did not argue in writing by himself, Confucian Hozumi Koretsura who greatly admired him and was the father of Chikamatsu's disciple, Chikamatsu Hanji, recorded in Naniwa miyage [The Best Things of Osaka] his words on the art of the puppet theatre. In the book Chikamatsu says:

> Art is something which lies in the slender margin between the real and the unreal. [….] It is unreal, and yet it is not unreal; it is real, and yet it is not real. Entertainment lies between the two.[3]

The young Shinoda was intrigued by this interpretation of theatrical reality. Very likely his fascination with the in-between-ness of reality originated from his personal background, that is, his boyhood in Japan's militaristic 1930s and 1940s, its defeat in WWII, and his young adulthood in its growing TV commercialism which began to compete fiercely with film. The nation's turbulent years as such helped shape his thinking and feelings about life. In an interview a year or so after Shinjû ten no Amijima had been released, he explained why Chikamatsu's interpretation of art was important to him as both a person and film-maker. Shinoda says:

> I was born when the Manchurian Incident occurred [in 1931] and entered an elementary school when the China Incident broke out [in 1937], a middle school when the Pacific War began, a university soon after Japan was lost in the war, was employed [as an assistant director] by a film-making company [in 1953] during the Korean War, and was promoted to film director [in 1960] when film's new but formidable rival, TV broadcasting became popular nationwide. Although I am sure that I keep my footing, something irresistible forces me to lose it. Which I've repeatedly experienced in my life. Given this, I cannot help realizing that life is a dream, so much so that there's nothing real in life. [….] Man can only live an illusory life. So I gradually felt an interest in this illusion growing on me. This kind of life neither seems to develop out of the unreal nor the real. In brief, my life is most likely halfway between life and illusion. In other words, this view of life corresponds to Chikamatsu's idea of art that truth can

be found somewhere between fiction and reality, doesn't it?[4]

By experiencing the changeability of society and life, the film director Shinoda sought a truly secure foothold in life and art (filmmaking). Chikamatsu's idea of art is one of the most useful tools with which to tackle life and art in the way he pursued the truth of life and that of art by making films.

Inspired by Chikamatsu Shinoda developed his own notion of life (the real) mixed with illusion (the unreal). Perhaps his initial awareness of Chikamatsu's theory of reality and fiction in his college days (in the early 1950s) did not lead to a specific idea of kurogo both in kabuki and bunraku. After he had officially been appointed as a film director, he did not choose to incorporate his theory of kurogo until his 1969 adaptation of Chikamatsu's Shinjû ten no Amijima. While pursuing an artistic mixture of life and illusion throughout the1960s, he became aware that it was necessary to experiment with the use of kurogo in the play by Chikamatsu. By introducing the kurogo into his adaptation of the play, he tried to explore an artistic truth that lies between the real and the unreal. In the film his kurogo manipulate live actors instead of puppets. His experimental use of kurogo was intended to visualize some kind of impalpable force which controls the principal characters. Although he describes this force as something like fate, he seems to imply something more metaphysical or spiritual than the cliché "fate" because he argues that his kurogo help the audience to perceive human spirits helplessly leaving or wandering away from real life in pursuit of salvation in the afterlife.[5]

Shinoda's interest in the experimental use of kurogo in this particular film, Shinoda argues, is also derived from his individualistic interpretation of a concept of savagery supported by the medieval public's subconscious, postulated by literary scholar Hirosue Tamotsu. In the book on vice and death of premodern Japan (published in1965), Hirosue argues that in the medieval tradition of chanting-storytelling by itinerant performers, retaliation-based extremely ruthless acts such as executing a vicious criminal with a saw, awakened the anonymous audience's religious zeal originating in contemporary shamanist-cum-Buddhist popular beliefs. While the storyteller was narrating an episode of savagery, the audience became so ecstatic that they were united as one. In this enthusiastic oneness, they moved their earthly blame and responsibility away from themselves and towards the criminal being fatally punished.[6] In so doing the enchanted audience prayed for the salvation of both the criminal and themselves. Hirosue's interpretation of brutality in the medieval storytelling inspired Shinoda to conceive his own idea of kurogo for it occurred to him that the presence of a certain kind of kurogo can make visible what he perceived as something unknown that deeply influences people's lives in ways which are unpredictable.

He has referred to his idea of kurogo as "the invisible hand."[7] By the invisible hand, he meant a kind of spiritual force that strongly influences the popular mind; perhaps he merely borrowed the term from the eighteenth-century economist Adam Smith's theory of trade in a free market in which the invisible hand anonymously supports the interests of both merchants and consumers. Unlike Smith's concept, Shinoda's "invisible hand" has nothing to do with practical interactions in society. As one of his attempts to portray men and women, Shinoda employed a theatrical device that strongly suggests an indescribable dynamics working in the relationship between man and society, the issue of which, however, lies beyond any sociological analysis. The issue here falls within art, especially theatre and cinema because of their strength in

the visual presentation of kurogo. The use of kurogo in the film, he argues, is essential to visualizing his approval of Chikamatsu's theory that art and truth remain somewhere between life and illusion.

Hirosue's interpretation of communal religious zeal in support of fictive brutality might be related to the actual practice of scapegoating observed in various times and spaces of the world history, even today. And yet Hirosue did not mean to approve of this atrocious practice in real life; rather he attempted to examine how the medieval performing art by itinerant storytellers had interacted with the popular beliefs of contemporary audiences in the way that appealed to the illiterate commoners.

His absorption in Chikamatsu's and Hirosue's interpretations of metaphysical truths about life continued to develop over several years. In the late 1960s he came to revision the traditional kurogo that not only mediate between life and illusion but also control life. Although the puppet play by Chikamatsu incorporated the black-clad puppeteers in itself, Shinoda found it necessary to visualize his idea of kurogo exclusively as a theatrical device. To underscore his own idea of kurogo, he borrowed both concepts of kurogo: the black-clad stagehand of kabuki and the black-clad puppeteer of bunraku. To briefly discuss his film adaptation of the traditional kurogo, Shinoda writes:

> Chikamatsu's Shinjû ten no Amijima is a puppet play that portrays a love triangle in which paper merchant Jihei abandons his wife Osan and children in order to commit love suicides with his beloved courtesan Koharu. Traditionally [Chikamatsu Monzaemon's best disciple and successor] Chikamatsu Hanji's adaptation of the original play has been considered the standard version of it and staged in both kabuki and bunraku. However, I've wanted to revive Monzaemon's original version and visualize in the film his idea of an artistic mixture of life and illusion. To achieve this aim, I needed the invisible hand which engineers the characters' actions. [….] Having arranged everything from props to the set, a group of kurogo waits for the merchant Jihei and courtesan Koharu on their way to double suicide to come. When the two enter the scene, the kurogo do not allow them to hesitate even for a moment about their suicide and begin guiding them straight into the center of their tragedy. […] the kurogo have the man grab the sword and stab the woman to death and assist him to hang himself.[8]

In the film his kurogo demonstrate their initiative unlike the kabuki kurogo and manipulate the characters' lives irresistibly and menacingly.

The film repeatedly shows that though sometimes serving as stagehands, Shinoda's kurogo forcibly manipulate, among other characters, the lives of the two main characters, the merchant and his courtesan lover, both played by live actors. While the traditional kurogo of bunraku are supposed to efface themselves as much as possible, the kurogo in the film are so obtrusive that they dare control the characters' fate as prescribed. One might say that figure (characters) and ground (kurogo) have been reversed. This reversal of figure and ground helped the director demonstrate his insight into invisible reality submerged in everyday life. To emphasize the kurogo's control of the characters, Beverley Bare Buehrer writes:

> The *kuro[g]os* are constantly in the background, watching the story evolve, facilitating or controlling a character's actions. They hover about scenes helping [a moralistic merchant who tries to punish his immorally love-obsessed brother] tie his hands together, blowing out candles,

> removing the children from the stage, and eventually helping [the love-stricken protagonist] hang himself [in order to commit double suicide]. In effect, the actors have become puppets, and their actions and destiny are fatalistically out of their own control.[9]

By bringing themselves to the fore at crucial moments, Shinoda's kurogo are much more active and forceful than the traditional puppet operators of bunraku.

Apart from the function of his kurogo, argued above, it is worth examining what drove Shinoda to emphatically use the kurogo in his own experimental way. It is not that the kurogo are already there in the play by Chikamatsu. Rather, while Chikamatsu was aware of his own philosophy and aesthetic and accordingly used the kurogo as a generally accepted stage convention, Shinoda was interested in the presentation of his own view of life which he saw as inseparable from illusion because his personal experiences when young influenced him to find life extremely unpredictable. Despite his apparent fascination with Chikamatsu's idea of the relationship between artifice and reality, Shinoda reinterpreted Chikamatsu in a way that reflects his perception life as unforeseeable. For this purpose he recast the stage convention of kurogo and presented them as a different kind of character from Chikamatsu's original puppet play. It is helpful here to refer to the critical comment on Shinoda's film version of the play by woman poet/writer Tomioka Taeko who adapted Chikamatsu's original text for the film.

> Unlike paper merchant Jihei of the play, Mr. Shinoda is an intellectual , so much so that he needs flawless reasoning [for Jihei to leave his family and commit love suicides with his lover]. He seems to have the kurogo act as the agents for [Sartrean concept of] absurdity. As you know, in the puppet theatre the unnamable dressed in black who manipulate their puppets, behave like the fates or demons in a way that forces the puppets to murder other puppets or kill themselves. Having heard him talk about his idea of kurogo, I said to myself, "Mr. Shinoda, your kurogo make the world too neat a place for me to accept it." Men like to make themselves sound philosophical, which I don't appreciate. But he has every reason to make his kurogo represent something like abusudity.
>
> Chikamatsu's Jihei doesn't need the kurogo as guides because he is fully motivated to commit double suicide with a courtesan. But Mr. Shinoda's Jihei desperately wants the kurogo to forcibly lead him to his doom.[10]

It is debatable whether Shinoda factually mentioned the so-called existentialist concept of "absurdity." It may be that he used the term in his personal conversation with Tomioka, however, literature on Shinoda available to the present author does not include it. The term was one of the most popular philosophical terms during the 1960s in Japan. Unfortunately, Japanese young people on campus used it often in an inaccurate or loose way. Some of the older generation, over thirty years of age at that time, and especially women like Tomioka, seemed to be critical of this trend. Although Shinoda was in his late thirties, however, his socially and politically turbulent childhood and young adulthood are likely to have influenced him to see the concept of absurdity as not only interesting but convincing. While Chikamatsu conceived as a dramatist his idea of art lying in between reality and fiction, Shinoda incorporated his view of art as a film-maker into his view of life as a person.

Shinoda's emphatic use in the main section of the film of kurogo who drive the two lovers into a predestined tragic ending requires a technique of metatheatre: the awareness of double reality in which theatre's claim to be simply realistic is questioned. By means of this technique Shinoda can, as it were, give his kurogo a free hand, though under his direction. The structure of the film itself has a metatheatrical feature in that the viewers see double: a reality on the part of the film director Shinoda that the prologue of the film reveals and the other reality of Shinoda's adaptation of Chikamatsu's puppet play. According to Richard Hornby, who has replaced "metatheatre" with "metadrama" to elaborate Lionel Abel's concept of metatheatre, "this 'seeing double' is the true source of the significance of metadrama."[11] To make the viewers aware of the metatheatrical nature of the film, the prologue shows an actual bunraku troupe including black-robed puppeteers having a rehearsal of the original puppet play, and part of the backstage in which craftsmen are readjusting and repairing puppets. The viewers also hear Shinoda (a voiceover) on the telephone talking to the film's leading scriptwriter Tomioka Taeko. In the conversation with Tomioka, Shinoda obviously refers to a part of the process of his filmmaking, that is, location hunting for the final suicide scene. This emphasis of seeing double reality in these portions of the prologue leads the viewers to realize the film's self awareness that the film primarily is intended to show a film adaptation of Chikamatsu's puppet play with the same title. Hornby states:

> Unlike literary or real-life reference, self-reference is always strongly metadramatic. With self-reference, the play directly calls attention to itself as a play, an imaginative fiction.[12]

The film's self-referentiality presented in the prologue helps the viewers not to emotionally identify with the protagonists but remain aware of the doubleness of reality that the prologue points out and that continues to involve the film's main section (based on Chikamatsu's play).

The prologue also shows that Shinoda's use of kurogo is closely related to what is termed "metatheatre." The camera-eye reveals that in a part of the backstage a professional film actor, who will play the chief kurogo in the main section of the film, is looking into the mirror to don a black hood and that in another part of the backstage, a member of Terayama's theatre troupe who will play one of the kurogo group, is watching real kurogo puppeteers in the rehearsal. These two actors are shown seeing their doubles in the mirror and on the stage respectively. These shots suggest that both are aware of being actors. Self-consciousness that characterizes the kurogo actors in the prologue is an aspect of metatheatrre. Lionel Abel argues:

> …the plays I am pointing at do have a common character: all of them are theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized. By this I mean that the persons appearing on the stage in these plays are there not simply because they were caught by the playwright in dramatic postures as a camera might catch them, but because they themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them.[13]

By showing the kurogo looking at their double in the mirror or on the stage, Shinoda purposefully leads the viewers to perceive the kurogo's self-consciousness. In the film this self-referentiality serves to separate the kurogo from the characters of Chikamatsu's text and to appoint the former as the characters' manipulators.

The prologue argued above is an indispensable component of the film because without it, the film would most likely be seen as a film version of the kabuki Shinjû ten no Amijima in which, when called upon, the traditional kurogo assist live actors onstage. Unlike the conventional notion of kurogo who merely serve as invisible stagehands, Shinoda's kurogo are emphatically intended to be visible and obtrusive. Characterized thus, his kurogo forcibly intrude into the fictive characters' world. The presence throughout the film strongly suggests that the film is a version of metatheatre since their presence leads the viewers to see double in the way they become aware of life on the part of Chikamatsu's characters as artifice. Shinoda's use of his kurogo in a metathetrical way most likely derived from his fascination since his college days with Chikamatsu's idea of theatrical reality intertwined with fiction: truth can be found in between real and unreal.

The prologue helps prepare the viewers to expect that while serving as mere stagehands, Shinoda's kurogo played by professional actors, who are not affiliated with kabuki and bunraku, are to intrude into the play and manipulate the characters. His kurogo are intended to cross the barrier between the two incompatible realms, such as fiction and reality, life and death, and physicality and spirituality. By exercising this privilege, the kurogo smoothly lead the two lovers to their tragic fate. Shinoda recast the traditional kurogo into his own concept in order to demonstrate his tentative approach to artistic truth which he believes is made of the real and the unreal.

Between the real and the unreal, the two incompatible realms mentioned above, lies an inviolable barrier which is usually forbidden to cross. Japanese Buddhist terminology includes a word "kekkai." Architecture critic Itô Teiji writes:

A *kekkai*-- a marker which separates the spaces on both sides of it […]—can be a fence, a screen, a rope, a shadow on a paper door, a light beam, even a sound. [….]

Kekkai, which originated in primitive Shinto and were systematized in esoteric Buddhist philosophy, are deeply rooted in Japanese traditions not only as simple markers that symbolize boundaries, but also in the special architectural devices that physically partition space.

> For example, the L-shaped or U-shaped low wooden gridwork screens used in mercantile premises of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries to partition off the workplace around the head clerk's seat at the accounting table were referred to as kekkai. In chashitsu [tea-ceremony room], the *tsuitate* (partition or screen)—an upright board or horizontal length of bamboo which designates the area in which the host prepares the tea—are a kind of kekkai. These tsuitate are no more than fifty centimeters high and are completely portable.
>
> Crossing over such kekkai, as well as well as watching and conversing with people on the other side, would be an easy matter. In spite of this, they are sufficient dividers. Spaces can be made to appear and disappear almost immediately, or can be made larger or smaller as the situation dictates. If the need arises to identify just how the space is being divided, one has only to watch the patterns of activity of those who understand the symbolic import of the placement of these kekkai.[14]

According to anthropologist Itô Nobuhiro, traditional boundaries of Japan are exemplified by a political

border established by the ruler of a feudalistic domain, a border of a shôen [manor] (land reclaimed and owned by the emperor, a local ruler or the priesthood in the 8th-15th centuries), a footpath between rice paddies, a road, a bridge, a mountain, a hill, a valley, a reed marsh, the waters, a shrine, a cemetery.[15] In addition, the accepted usage covers both kekkai as a barrier and kekkai as an area. Essentially, the kekkai divides the clean area from the polluted one in order to consecrate the former.

One might want to ask how strict the prohibition against the crossing over, or intruding into, the kekkai is. There are differing views of this matter. By emphasizing the aesthetic aspect of the architectural tradition and culture of Japan, Itô Teiji argues that the gap between two sides of the kekkai can be bridged. In the conclusion of the article mentioned above he observes:

> The true beauty of kekkai lies in their ability to join rather than divide; their true significance lies in their flexibility. The partitioning of space is never complete or permanent. A kekkai can be placed or removed as desired, or even totally ignored by those on either side of it. In kekkai one finds a fluid concept of space that goes beyond fixed boundaries, and it is this concept of space that ultimately reflects the impermanence not only of space, but of all that is within it.[16]

But it should also be noted that traditionally the Japanese have a strong sense of taboo against the breaching of kekkai. One of the best examples is the prohibition against women entering sacred areas(*nyonin kekkai*), which often refer to religious mountains such as Mt. Ômine (a mecca of Shugendô, a sect of Buddhism mingled with an ancient Shamanism) in Nara southeast of Osaka. This taboo has been observed even today. Although Itô Teiji's argument for the flexibility of kekkai is noteworthy, the general public's persistent sense of awe of kekkai cannot be slighted. It is still true that the kekkai generates tension on the part of those nearing it.

Shinoda himself was acutely aware of the concept of the kekkai. As a matter of fact, the main body of the film abounds with things that can symbolize the kekkai/ boundaries. Some are easily movable barriers or partitions such as compact household furniture and indoor pillars and walls, and others are bridges and a gateway to a Shinto shrine. In the prologue, we hear him referring to this term. To propose to writer Tomioka the final scene of the film in which the ill-starred couple are hurrying on their way to commit their double suicide, Shinoda (voiceover) argues that one of the oldest graveyards of Japan, Mt. Toribe located in the eastern part of Kyoto, is the best locale for their death-bound travel. He needs this locale because he believes that its rows of tombstones can represent the perfect kekkai for the lovers to cross and move into the nether world so as to be spiritually united. Although he displays a great interest in the Mt. Toribe graveyard, the actual scene of their deaths is an amalgamation of various locales, such as the graveyard, a bridge, a riverbank, and a reed marsh.

Subsequent to the prologue, Shinoda's adaptation of Chikamatsu begins with the scene in which male protagonist Jihei who is extremely obsessed with double suicide with his lover, crossed the bridge, and he and a group of white-clad traveling monks of the Nichiren-sect passed each other. As historical documents of Japanese culture show, the color white, as well as black, traditionally signifies death and mourning. The issue of color symbolism has been discussed in detail in chapter one. For the Japanese, their encounter on the bridge suggests that the love-stricken man of the well-known story is thinking of death

by love suicides because traditionally crossing a bridge often signifies the transition from this world to the next. This implication is illustrated by the structure of the stage in nô and kabuki. Nô uses the hashigakari "bridge" as a pathway between the world of the living and that of the dead, and kabuki has the hanamichi "bridge" for actors to travel from the real world of the audience (and of themselves) and the illusory world of the stage (and of them in the guise of characters). It also should be noted that various sacred areas, often in the mountains, related to shamanism, Shinto, Buddhism, mountain asceticism and other popular beliefs--such as Mt. Osore in Aomori, Terayama's home province used by Terayama especially in Den'en ni shisu [Death in the Countryside]--have sanctified bridges that are believed to symbolically divide life and death.

At the next moment he looks down at the riverbank and finds a couple of love-suicide victims surrounded by a group of black-clad kurogo. This sequence includes symbols of the kekkai, that is, a bridge and a riverbank that separate life and death. The notion of a bridge seems to serve internationally as a boundary marker. For example, to describe this image of a bridge in the film, David Desser notes:

> A bridge often signifies the passage from one realm to another, typically the realm between life and death….[17]

By utilizing this traditional notion of a bridge as kekkai, Shinoda places the kurogo beside the bodies of the dead couple on the riverbank under the bridge, which also symbolizes the kekkai lying between the here and there. Thus, at the beginning of the section of the double suicide, he impressively present the kurogo so as to suggest that the kurogo often appear at various sites of kekkai and guide the suicide-obsessed lovers, the married man (Jihei) and courtesan (Koharu) to the prearranged end of their tragic love.

Historians have argued about the historical, social, political and cultural implications of the bridge. The space under the bridge was one of the traditional liminal spaces of sanctuary where outcasts, including actors, shamans, and certainly runaways, might live. Even today such space is seen as a haven for the homeless. Among other historians, Amino Yoshihiko is an acclaimed specialist in this issue. He has theorized about those socially ostracized or expelled from their local communities and argued that in medieval Japan some temples gave food and shelter to runaways and criminals often in exchange for some sacrifice and that various kinds of outcast were allowed to live in border-related locales such as a slope (often in urban areas) or the spaces under bridges.[18]

The introductory scene that foretells how the ill-fated love ends up, is followed by the two episodes that portray the two lovers offending against socially acceptable manners: courtesans must not fall in love with patrons and merchants must be thrifty and faithful in both business and family life. The first episode shows the merchant has been romantically involved with the courtesan, but their amorous relationship is reaching a dead end because the naturally honest and serious man feel somewhat ashamed of his won immoral behavior and because the naturally gentle-hearted woman feels guilty for hurting his wife with their secret affair. The second episode reveals that Jihei's brother attempts to castigate and help him out of the worldly crisis.

In both episodes, the kekkai and the kurogo play a crucial role in order that, while feeling guilty for

their ill-conduct, the couple continue to seek double suicide for the sake of shedding their worldly responsibilities. To show the viewers how the lovers are in love with each other, the kurogo lead Jihei, as if they manipulated a puppet amidst other motionless, puppet-like supernumeraries on the street, through the gay quarters into Koharu's room. Again, the kurogo here are inseparably connected with the image of kekkai. While catching occasional glimpses of the kurogo who guide Jihei to Koharu, the viewers often see the wooden gridwork of a brothel which separates from the lane the area in which girls are on display. Symbolically the gridwork serves as kekkai because it lies in between erotic illusion and monotonous everyday life. This kekkai of the pleasure quarters stands for a protective barrier which is open exclusively for those who have enough money to pay for sex. The kurogo and the symbol of kekkai stand out to demonstrate their close connection.

In the second episode, Jihei's brother, Magoemon, visits Koharu to persuade her to part with Jihei. Although he is a merchant, Magoemon disguises himself as a socially superior samurai so that he can be more successful in his efforts to separate his brother from her than a mere merchant could. While Magoemon talks to Koharu, the love-sick Jihei comes to see her. Jihei finds her with a new patron whom he cannot recognize as his brother. Although he is driven mad by jealousy and tries in vain to thrust at her with a sword through the grid-shaped woodwork the façade of the teahouse, his brother prevents him doing so and ties his arm to the woodwork　It is important to note that one of the kurogo helps Magoemon tie his brother up. The viewers see a close-up of Jihei's and the kurogo's arms to the grid of the façade. This sequence suggests that in terms of everyday life, Jihei and Koharu live separately in two different realms, life and illusion, so that their affair is doomed.

After this trouble, Moagoemon allows Jihei to enter the house, and Magoemon tries to talk the couple out of their amorous relationship. Initially Jihei resists his brother's persuasion. But later it turns out that having a lingering attachment to Koharu, Jihei decides to leave her, while she, who does not want to hurt his wife Osan but still loves him, keeps crying. They remain accompanied by the kurogo, who can be seen once in a while in this sequence. The second episode comes to an end when Magoemon forcibly separates Jihei from Koharu and the kurogo coerce the man to leave her room. The kurogo take Jihei out through a revolving wall. This wall serves as kekkai that separates the pleasure quarters (illusory life) and the merchant's daily life (real life). But this does not mean that the kurogo help Jihei out of a crisis; rather, they continue to drive him to the tragic climax, in which the lovers commit double suicide.

The scene of the film now shifts to the merchant Jihei's home-cum-store. The storefront has a large grid of woodwork. It is a kind of protective barrier, that is, kekkai, for his family, that prevents that which is foreign and harmful coming in. Beside the gridwork stands the entrance, or gateway, which is traditionally considered "kekkai" as well. While seeming to welcome any visitor, the entrance is a special structure that demands that those who enter it be watchful because they may encounter an unfamiliar mode of order. It is unfortunate, however, that this kekkai does not protect Jihei and his family against the danger lurking outside. This is partly because Jihei is still obsessed with his affair with Koharu and partly because the kurogo are already inside the house and keep the household under control in order to realize the predestined tragedy of the lovers.　Through the entrance comes Jihei's aunt, who is also his mother-in-

law, accompanied by his moralist brother, to admonish her wayward nephew. But she is so good-natured that when he promises to break with his lover, she chooses to trust him and forgive him. Satisfied with that, both visitors leave. Actually, the irresolute Jihei is not determined to leave her for good. He has already attempted to redeem her debt to keep her for himself, which is unsuccessful because he cannot afford it. A wealthy merchant is going to get her by paying the debt. Unaware of his responsibilities in life, he repeatedly concocts a makeshift excuse to get himself off the hook for the moment. Even so, his wife Osan, who loves him so much as to accept contemporary male-centered social customs, wants to give him top priority in life and business. She also cares about his lover Koharu because of her gender comradeship and encourages him to redeem her in order to save her from marrying the other merchant whom Koharu hates. Show knows that Koharu loves her husband and that if the other man redeems her, she will kill herself from despair. The good-natured but immature Jihei accepts her advice.

But when his uncle/father-in-law comes to see him, he has to face another crisis. The old man is so angry that he not only harshly reproaches him but also takes Jihei's wife away from him, leaving his grandchildren behind. Jihei's wife Osan, who is being dragged away by her father, is seen behind the wooden grid at the storefront, which was her kekkai. Osan now does not belong in Jihei's family. Divided by the kekkai, Jihei and Osan begin to live in the separate realms. While Jihei is thus being driven further into a corner, the kurogo are not directly involved in his critical situation. They only stand nearby and watching the characters in danger. However, they carefully try to make sure that the lover's tragedy is developing as prearranged in Chikamatsu's text and Shinoda/Tomioka's script. These parents-in-law behave as if to help the kurogo to pursue their task of manipulating the lover's fate. Because his brother forbade him to see his lover and he himself could not pay to redeem her, the love-stricken Jihei has already been banished from the gay quarters whose kekkai secludes them from real life. Terribly depressed, he returns to his home, but the kekkai of his home and business does not protect him from social persecution for financial and sexual misconduct. The kurogo silently prepare Jihei's self-destruction as well as Koharu's.

Left alone with his little children, Jihei is completely helpless, while the kurogo remain beside these characters. Jihei has lost his wife and does not know what to do with or for Koharu. Now he has nothing but Koharu on his mind. All he can do is demolish anything that represents earthly kekkai. The kekkai here includes the wooden gridwork both inside and at the storefront, a wall, a pillar, a sliding door (fusuma), and a portable paper screen. The kurogo gather to kneel around Jihei who stands upright in despair. It seems as if the man were a puppet operated by five members of the kurogo. The puppet-like Jihei begins to dash himself against the large wooden gridwork, the pillar, and other symbols of kekkai. He also runs at the desk on which piles of paper are on display. He scatters and lets fly in the air the myriad pieces of paper which are the most valuable things for the paper dealer, that is, the desk piled with paper signifies the sacred kekkai for this merchant. In this section of the film, the viewers are impressed by the helpless man's violent acts. Since he has become aware that he belongs nowhere both at home and society, he cannot but defy the worldly kekkai. Finally, with the kurogo's help, the extremely love-obsessed Jihei gets over the kekkai, or visually goes through the revolving wall into the *michiyuki* scene, in which they make the journey to the locale for their double suicide.

To take Jihei out of the scene at home, the kurogo turn the revolving wall, and the other side of it is covered with something like a large sheet of rippled aluminum foil. This wall leads the viewers to a river with a bridge in the next moment. On the bridge stands a member of the kurogo who seems to wait for, or watch, Jihei. From now on, the two lovers lost in this world begin to cross a number of bridges (as kekkai), by which they believe in the netherworld they will peacefully be united by love. Since Jihei has already crossed the earthly kekkai and, though not physically depicted, Koharu has decided to follow him, the subsequent section of the film is a transition from life to death, or this life to the next. The viewers can imagine that they now are involved in death-bound elopement. In this scene the kurogo and another symbol of kekkai, the wooden gridwork, overlap to suggest the kurogo assist, or rather force, the protagonists to cross the kekkai and die a tragic death. Jihei's conversation with the owner of an inn reveals that the couple seeks shelter there, outside of which one of the kurogo crouches in such a way as to watch the couple.

The screen image of the interior of the inn shows a few wall-like wooden gridwork screens. Unlike the one at Jihei's storefront, this screen favorably serves as a protective barrier (kekkai) for the couple to have some rest and prepare for their last journey to death.

Taking advantage of the darkness of a night, Jihei and Koharu set out secretly. The chief kurogo appears in a close-up citing a number of bridges the couple will cross. As pointed out earlier, bridges can be seen as transition and connection to death or the next life. In the introduction to "Celluloid Connections: The Bridge in Cinema," Chale Nafus writes:

> Throughout world cultures and history, the bridge has served as a useful metaphor for the rites of passage: birth, puberty, marriage, governance, mystical ecstasy, and death. Folktales and rituals sometimes incorporate the motif of the bridge, which is defined as a dangerous passageway, similar to the necessary terrors of rites of passage. But such a death is meant to be a destruction of the previous, less enlightened self. To cross the bridge, the initiate must break with the past in order to move on to the next stage of his/her journey. Once on "the other side" of the ritual, the initiate is "born again." (Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*.) Thus, the image of the bridge is an essential element in the human psyche and consequently has appeared in a wide variety of films.[19]

Although Nafus takes an optimistic view of the crossing of a bridge, Shinoda has so far not done so in the film. As Nafus puts it, the religious/cultural concept of crossing a bridge can universally be linked with the rites of passage. But while this universalized idea of the bridge is significantly influenced by Eliade's theory of "death and rebirth," the bridge as kekkai in Japanese culture can often be related to a sense of taboo. As the case of the prohibition of women's entering the sacred mountains (nyonin kekkai) testifies, once one chooses to cross the bridge, one has to prepare to experience anything horrendous. The bridge seen as kekkai is the "bridge of no return."

Driven by the kurogo, Jihei and Koharu leave for the place of suicide. While the couple are coming across the wavy bridge, their figures move up and down. Although they have decided to commit love suicides, they are still struggling with a lingering attachment with this earthly life. This screen image of

the wavy bridge reminds the viewers of a similar one at the beginning of the main body of the film subsequent to the semi-documentary prologue. In that section, Jiehi is crossing the wavy bridge by himself, gloomily thinking that because he does not have enough money to redeem Koharu's debt, there is no uniting with her in this world. But he has not yet determined to choose double suicide. His going up and down over the wavy bride suggests his indecisiveness. Like Jihei in the opening scene, Jihei and Koharu, though having decided to leave this world, remain more or less indecisive. They cross two more bridges which are not wavy, but have yet to struggle to sever their earthly attachment to this life. As if to hasten them along to keep going, the chief kurogo continues to follow the two. While they are hurrying along the lane, the kurogo's shadow stretches out over the huge wall of a building, which is ominous like the shadow of death.

They arrive at a cemetery, in which while the chief kurogo watches them, they make love in the dark of a chilly night. On the one hand, their love-making in the cemetery suggests that they are more closer to death than before for the cemetery directly refers to death and it traditionally symbolizes the kekkai area that divides life and death. On the other, it is obvious that while Jihei is obsessed more with double suicide than with his family, Koharu still concerns herself about his wife Osan, whom she has promised not to commit double suicide with him. She has a strong sense of giri (social responsibility) for the sake of his wife, which is a kind of gender comradeship. Apart from their mentality, Chikamatsu portrays the two lovers wavering between caring about this life and heading straight into death in this *michiyuki* (the eloping couple's journey bound for double suicide) scene so that the audience remains intrigued by the play and the two protagonists. Finally Jihei and Koharu undo the knot of their hair, which symbolizes being a priest and a nun, respectively, so that they can break off an earthly relationship.

Soon the viewers see a group of kurogo ring the temple bell. As Itô Teiji has argued, a sound can serve as kekkai. The kurogo encourage the two lovers to go deeper into the realm of death by crossing kekkai barriers one by one. The image of the ringing bell leads to that of the chief kurogo motioning Jihei and Koharu with his hand to finish crossing a bridge and follow him. The lovers hurry along the reed marsh, which is another traditional symbol of kekkai that separates land and water. While on the marsh, Jihei stabs Koharu to death. Now Jihei is alone on his way to death. After going through the marsh, he climbs up the riverbank, and the viewers see a *torii* [the entrance to a Shinto shrine], which obviously resembles a gallows and serves as one when Jihei hangs himself with the help of the kurogo. In this most crucial moment of the film, the religious-cultural concept of the *torii* is important because it is traditionally believed to signify a barrier or area that can cleanse sin or pollution of those passing through or entering it. At the final moment of his suicide, one member of the kurogo kicks over a kind of steppingstone on which Jihei stands with a makeshift noose around his neck. This stone is also important to understand Shinoda's consistent use of the concept of kekkai. Traditionally the stone as kekkai is found at the boundary of a community or the crossroad. Some of the stones are statues. In this suicide scene, the torii is accompanied by a small statue of Buddha (jizô) at its foot. Shinoda's kurogo have successfully seen Jihei off so that after crossing a series of kekkai, he may go with Koharu into the netherworld. Thereafter, that is, after Chikamatsu-based story ends, the kurogo no longer appear because the kurogo have achieved

what Shinoda assigned them to do.

The final scene that follows the couple's love suicides shows that under the bridge, Jihei's and Koharu's bodies are seen abandoned lying side by side. This makes an interesting contrast with a similar shot in the first scene (of the film's main section based on Chikamatsu's play), in which an anonymous double-suicide couple are laid with their heads close to each other and appear to be at peace in the afterworld. However, the positions of Jihei's and Koharu's bodies are inverted in the way that one's head is next to the other's legs. This difference is crucial because it indicates that unlike the first couple, the film's two protagonists are not spiritually united in the after life. This very shot faithfully reflects Shinoda's judgemental view of the lovers' double suicide in the social context of the late 1960's Japan. In his film adaptation of the play by Chikamatsu, Shinoda demonstrates that life is irresistibly influenced by some unnamable force in the guise of kurogo. He disapproves of Chikamatsu's support of the Buddhist belief in salvation in the next life. Hirosue Tamotsu has also noted this idea of Buddhist salvation seen in Chikamatsu's plays.[20] In the original text by Chikamatsu, fishermen find Jiehi's body caught in their net. The Narrator's concluding words read:

> People say that they who were caught in the net of Buddha's vow immediately gained salvation and deliverance, and all who hear the tale of the Love Suicides at Amijima are moved to tears.

According to translator Donald Keene's note on the pun on a fishing net:

> "'Net' (*ami*) is mentioned because of the connection with the fishermen. It is echoed in the few lines later in the mention of the name *Amijima*. The vow of the Buddha to save all living creatures is likened to a net which catches people in its meshes.[21]

By showing the ironical contrast between the two couples, Shinoda argues against the old idea of the helping hand of the Buddha.

Originally the religious concept of kekkai was closely related to both physical and spiritual salvation in the way that provides shelter to those who are destitute, persecuted or ostracized. On the one hand, the kurogo encourage the doomed lovers, Jihei and Koharu, to cross the kekkai one after the other and thus help them to seek a peaceful otherworldly union. On the other, as the final scene suggests, the kurogo ruthlessly drive the couple into a mere tragic end that separates them eternally and deprives them of any salvation.

Shinoda's kurogo are dressed just like the traditional kurogo of kabuki and bunraku so that they are artistically refined in appearance. With that they serve the aesthetic quality of the film. They also contribute to its metaphysical aesthetic because by underscoring the kekkai-related images of the wooden gridwork, graves, bridges, and so on, they, as it were, make visible the aesthetic aspect of the religious kekkai. His use of kurogo for an aesthetic purpose suggests that he has a strong leaning toward aestheticism. But at the same time, the film impresses the viewers with his liking for a certain kind of nihilism. Among other parts of the film, the sequence of the double suicide near the end, in which Jihei first stabs Koharu to death and then hangs himself, is strikingly characterized by its desolateness and bleakness. In this very sequence the kurogo are seen to drive the couple into the bloody end of their lives. The kurogo seem as if they were Hell's dark angels or the agents of absurd, meaningless death. Film critic Tayama Rikiya has

pointed out the coexistence of the conflicting elements of aestheticism and nihilism that contributes to the formation of Shinoda's own cinematic aesthetics. Tayama attributes this characteristic of Shinoda's work to his view of life in Japan's socially and politically agitated prewar 1930s through to the postwar 1950s. He characterizes Shinoda's films in the 1960s, prior to Shinjû ten no Amijima, by nihilism and aestheticism. These films are Kawaita hana [The Dry Flower] (1964) portraying a loner yakuza who sees life as transient, Ansatsu [Assacination] (1965) dealing with a death-oriented samurai around the tempestuous end of the Tokugawa era, and Utsukushisa to kanashimi to [The Beauty and Sadness] (1965) focusing on lesbianism. Tayama remarks:

> The view of life as a mere empty dream that underlies [Kawaita hana], it seems, can be traced back to the sorrowful situation in which when very young and innocent, the sensitive Shinoda keenly realized again and again that death is cruel, so that he became aware that life is vain, as if he had already lived a transient life. His view of life as ever-changing developed into the political nihilism in the next work Ansatsu on the one hand, and bloomed in the aestheticistic eroticism in Utsukushisa to kanashimi to on the other.[22]

Shinoda's view of life based on his personal experiences delicately corresponds with that of art (filmmaking). His idea of kurogo which he adopted in Shinjû ten no Amijima is not an exception. It is intended to function as a statement of both his theatrical-cinematic aesthetics and philosophy of life.

In Shinjû Ten no Amijima, Shinoda tried successfully to seek out a possibility (perhaps more untapped than ignored) of creating agency for both black-clad puppeteers and stage assistants whose black costume represents the convention for invisibility. His one and only film experiment with the kurogo as puppeteers/stage assistants was so provocative and intriguing that at the time of its release it stood out, and still does, as one of the most strikingly persuasive adaptations of the original play outside the kabuki/bunraku genre. Shinoda, of course, did not intend to scholastically analyze the play by Chikamatsu but looked into the moral, social and political implications of the late 1960s society of Japan that apparently succeeded in rebuilding itself after the devastation of WWII. He was enraged by the unseen hands in the guise of the kurogo which forcibly prevented human social actors from choosing their own course of action and prompted them to be controlled by the invisible manipulators. Given this, it can be said that as an objective of his filmmaking, he developed a critique of Japan's postwar oppressive politics. Even so, what led him to use this classic work about a loving couple's double suicide was at least partly Shinoda's interest in the issue of death that serves not only to annihilate the importance of life but imply the daunting but rich complexity of life. To challenge any forms of spiritual oppression Shinoda portrayed the kurogo as visible, even fiercely manipulative. He also suggested that the kurogo represent an unseen, unnamable force that may interfere with any situation that involves death. Shinoda's striking reinterpretation of one of the most inconspicuous kabuki/bunraku conventions led the traditionally silent kurogo to turn out to be so brutal and vicious that they may drive characters to death.

[1] Shinoda Masahiro, “Nihon eiga no kaihô [The Liberation of Japanese Film],” Yomiuri Shimbun 18 Sep. 1969: 7.

[2] Shinoda Masahiro, “Watashi no Hirosue Tamotsu taiken [How I Became Aware of Great Literary Aesthete Hirosue Tamatosu], ” a leaflet attached to Hirosue Tamotsu zenshû [The Works of Hirosue Tamotsu], eds. Fujita Shozô et al, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Kage Shobô, 2000) 1-2.

[3] Hozumi Koretsura, “Naniwa Miyage,” Nihon koten bungaku taikei [The Collected Works of Japanese Literature], vol. 50 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1959) 358-359. An English translation in “Chikamatsu on the Art of the Puppet Stage,” Anthology of Japanese Literature, from the Earliest Era to the Mid-Nineteenth Century, ed. and trans. Donald Keene (New York: Grove Pr., 1955) 389.

[4] Sekai no eiga-sakka [The Film-makers of the World] vol. 10 (Tokyo: Kinema junpôsha, 1971) 99-100.

[5] Shinoda Masahiro, Nihongo no gohô de toritai [I Want to Shoot Films by Employing Japanese Philosophical Thinking and Aesthetic Sensibilities] (Tokyo: Nihon hôsô shuppan kyôkai, 1995) 155.

[6] Hirosue Tamotsu, Môhitotsu no nihon bi [The Other Type of Japanese Aesthetic] in Hirosue Tamotsu zenshû vol. 5, 39-41.

[7] “Watashi no Hirosue Tamotsu taiken” 2.

[8] “Watashi no Hirosue Tamotsu taiken” 2.

[9] Beverley Bare Buehrer, Japanese Films* A Filmography and commentary, 1921-1989 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland) 209.

[10] Sekai no eiga-sakka vol. 10, 62.

[11] Richard Hornby, Drama, Metadrama, and Perception (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1986) 32.

[12] Hornby 103.

[13] Lionel Abel, Metatheatre (New York: Hill & Wang, 1963) 60.

[14] Itô Teiji, “The Aesthetics of Partitions,” trans. Alfred Birnbaum, Chanoyu Quarterly 32 (1982): 47.

[15] Itô Nobuhiro, “Kegare to kekkai ni kansuru iti-kôsatsu [A Study of Pollution and Kekkai],” Nagoya daigaku gengo bunka ronshû [Treatises of on Language and Culture, University of Nagoya] 24.1 (2002): 14.

[16] Itô Teiji, 57.

[17] David Desser, Eros Plus Massacre (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988) 176.

[18] Amino Yoshihiko, Muen, kugai, raku [The Havens for Outcasts] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1978).

[19] Chale Nafus, “Celluloid Connections: The Bridge in Cinema” (Austin: Historic Bridge Foundation, 2003) <http://www.historicbridgefoundation.com/ipages/film/1intro.html.>.

[20] Hirosue Tamotsu, Môhitotsu no nihon bi 45.

[21] Four Major Plays of Chikamatsu, trans. Donald Keene (New York: Columbia UP, 1961) 208.

[22] Sekai no eiga-sakka [The Film-makers of the World] vol. 10, 54.