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KUROSAWA'S HEROES

Dennis Giles

PREFACE

The speech of criticism is never the speech of the object/experience it tries to represent. Criticism, like translation, always transforms its object into a second text, modeled on the original object/experience yet presenting a different reality. In a similar way, the artwork itself transforms its text—the lived world—while attempting to represent it. The criticism of a film involves a more radical translation. The truth of film criticism seems suspect because its discourse is considerably different from the speech of the film image. Literary criticism speaks in words of a critical object which is also words. Even in theatrical criticism one writes of an experience which communicates chiefly through verbal speech. Yes, the actors in film speak dialogue, but the film *also* speaks in what Ortega somewhere called “the barbarous, brutal, mute meaningless reality of things.” These “things” are present at one moment on the screen and at the next absent. They appear in all their ambiguous facticity to be immediately replaced by yet another image, leaving only a residue in the memory, more mood than thought. This speech of things, of bodies in motion, is always ephemeral; it is, after all, the speech of a *movie*, dissolving meanings as it yields them. There comes a time when every film critic yearns to stop the flow, and allow the intellect time to seize what seems significant, time to conceptualize the evanescent moods, time to *write it all down* where it can be reviewed at leisure. The critic of film must in a sense transform *physis* to *logos*. And when he returns, with his pitiful notes, his faulty memory, he must realize in all humility that these thoughts and words are not the movie—they speak a different language. What he has done, what I do in this critique, is make an

abstraction from experience through the act of naming which is fundamental to all *poesis*. In the film, one recovers the fugitive speech of things, but through the critical act the thing becomes intelligible, significant—loses its “thingly” character. Such is the risk of film criticism, which must mask what it seeks to uncover. Let us hope only that in speaking of the film, I have allowed the films to speak.

IKIRU

The titles of the film are joined to an X-ray negative of a cancerous stomach. The word *Ikiru* is a verb, meaning “to live.” Yet the first image is an image of death.

The scene which follows the X-ray exposes the life of the hero as a tedious routine. He is a bureaucrat, sitting at a desk piled with paperwork. He methodically stamps these papers, ignoring the complaints of a group of citizens at the front desk who demand the drainage of a pool of contaminated water. The narrator informs us that Watanabe is a living corpse: “actually he has been dead for the past twenty-five years.” There follows a series of “wipes” in which one image is pushed laterally off the screen by the following image. Yet the successive images do not progress. They all detail the same event: the citizens’ committee appears at various city desks and offices—Public Works, Parks, Sanitation, Health, Anti-Epidemics, Pest Control—and at each is referred to still another office. No clerk will take responsibility—the citizens are brushed off by this bureaucracy as effectively as they are wiped away by the push of the succeeding shot. Finally gaining an audience with the Deputy Mayor, the petitioners are referred once more to the Citizens’ Section where Watanabe “works.” The clerk again directs them to go to Public Works! This bureaucracy refers only to itself. At no point does it engage, or

even recognize, the social world with which it was designed to cope.

Watanabe is not yet a hero. The narrator admits that he "is not very interesting, yet." Kurosawa finds his protagonist enmeshed in the everyday world of his concern, a repetitive world which he takes for granted. Like Heidegger, like Sartre, Kurosawa begins his study of human possibility by considering man in his most ordinary manifestation—in *situation* within the banalities of normal existence. The protagonist is defined by what he does, by his job. As we will see in other films, Kurosawa's man is constituted by his objectified actions in relation to the world, and not by his intentions. In *Ikiru*, however, Watanabe's doings, so far, can scarcely be termed actions, since they have no goal other than movement itself and they evade any grasping of the material world outside the bureaucracy. The hero has not yet awakened to the exterior world, nor has he begun the double movement "outside" his customary reality to the "inside" of his isolate, death-bound self.

At present, Watanabe is inactive, "like a corpse," says the narrator. "He's busy—oh, very busy." But, "he's just passing the time, wasting it, rather." Once, however, "he had some life in him. He even tried to work." Watanabe has somehow fallen prey to the world. This protagonist's existence was once linear, purposeful, but now he is head of the Citizens' Section—a petty chieftain in a circular structure of evasion. Yet the very fact that Watanabe once worked, that he has fallen from activity into this corpse-like state, informs us that the self is not in essence a state or permanent stamp but is at least fluid enough to fall. The steady-state self is not yet heroic insofar as it is merged with a world which is ultimately static in its repetitious movement. Watanabe can recover his fluidity only if he is shocked out of the round of daily existence by an event which shatters his habitual self and renders it linear—projected towards a future. For Kurosawa, as for Hegel, the spirit "attains its truth only when it finds itself in the midst of being utterly rent apart" (*Phenomenology of Spirit*). Death is the event which

tears apart the static self and dissolves its accustomed world. The spectacle of his cancer—the X-ray—is for Watanabe the equivalent of Sartre's nausea, or Jasper's shipwreck—the event which discloses the self as nothing but possibility. The event of death is the advent of a temporal self.

The second scene of *Ikiru* finds Watanabe waiting in a doctor's office. A garrulous patient graphically details the symptoms of cancer.

The doctors always tell you it's ulcers, that an operation's unnecessary. They tell you to go on and eat anything--and when you hear that, you know you've got a year left, at the most. Your stomach always feels heavy, and it hurts; you belch a lot and you're always thirsty; either you're constipated or else you have diarrhea, and in either case your stool is always black. And you won't be able to eat meat, or anything you really like, then you'll vomit up something you ate a week ago; and when that happens you have about three months left to live.

Watanabe goes in to confront the doctor, asking point-blank if it's cancer.

"Not at all. It's just a light case of ulcers." He can eat anything he likes, "so long as it's digestible."

If the doctor's stratagem were successful, Watanabe would never awaken from the stupor of his daily routine. But despite the "kind" lie Watanabe knows it is cancer. Evasion is no longer possible.

Outside the doctor's office, Watanabe moves in a daze. The street is crowded with traffic. He walks oblivious, his isolation emphasized by an absolutely silent soundtrack. He attempts to cross the street; a truck bears down on him. At the last moment, the deafening sound bursts on. Watanabe sees the truck, is suddenly immersed in a roaring, buzzing world. He retreats to the curb to stare dully at the endless swarming of *their* world—a world that is no longer his *own*.

What has happened here? No less an event than the sudden disclosure of a private self which has nothing in common with the familiar Watanabe of the bureaucracy. The hero, in one shocking leap, has passed from the general proposition "men die" to the terrifying certainty that "I am to die." The public Watanabe has been shattered by the knowledge that his death is purely his own, cannot be shared by his fellows. No one else can die for him. A barrier now separates him from all other men; his everyday world seems but a phantom. An isolate self--and the possibility of self-determination--is born at the very moment the world-bound self knows that it is soon to be nothing, no one. Watanabe's brutal discovery of death as "my" death has stripped his existence of its habitual public cover and revealed him as nothing *but* death. The mortal self which is disclosed is thus essentially negative. But in its very negativity lies freedom. Watanabe must die, is constrained to die, but is simultaneously freed to give his suddenly empty existence a content. At this moment of the film, however, Watanabe is still in shock, blinded and deafened by the dread of certain death. He does not yet see the freedom to which he is released.

The story, thus far, recalls Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* in its paradoxical insistence that only through dying can one begin really to live. In each, the hero is born through the negation of his customary realities. As Plato insists in his cave analogy, the individual must be forced to freedom—he will not turn to see the truth of his own accord.

Plato's everyman is chained to a parapet, watching the shadows of objects on the cave wall, as though fastened to a theatre-seat, watching an endless movie which he believes to be real. His situation is analogous to that of Watanabe, who knows the outside world—its stagnant pools—only through the "stories" of the complaining citizens. He disregards these myths, turns back to the "real" task of stamping papers.

Then, says Plato, "suppose one [of the prisoners] were set free and forced suddenly to stand up, turn his head,

and walk with his eyes lifted to the light; all these movements would be painful, and he would be too dazzled to make out the objects whose shadows he had been used to seeing." To see the light of his death is a most unpleasant experience for Watanabe. It kills the habitual world before he can adjust to the reality of the discovered world. He is blinded, "dazzled" (and in this case deafened) and yearns to turn back to the familiar world even as that world is discredited. A dim, habitual instinct of self-preservation moves Watanabe out of the path of the truck, even though events have rendered this instinct meaningless. Having lost his everyday world, he cannot yet comprehend the new one. At this moment of passage, Watanabe is shipwrecked in uncharted seas. He feels himself sinking; he panics, grabs wildly for anything solid, familiar, but all these things have vanished. He is utterly alone—and dying fast. Is it any wonder that Watanabe's expression during most of *Ikiru* is one of sheer misery? It will take time for him to see anything but his pain. He knows only that he is negated, dying; he has not yet begun to live.

The hero of *Ikiru*, suddenly mortal, is now awake, but miserably so. He is free, but free to do what? To give a content to his freedom, Watanabe must, like Plato's man, climb through various levels of reality until he reaches the "truth." But here the Platonic analogy breaks down, for Kurosawa's reality is considerably different from Plato's *eidōs*. The point for Kurosawa, as for Marx, is not to contemplate the world but to change it. The world of men and materials is the only real world to Kurosawa. The hero must return to this social/physical world in order to work within it and upon it. One who turns his back on the existing world to contemplate an ideal is no hero, but only a visionary. At this point in the plot, Watanabe has withdrawn from his customary world, or rather, it has withdrawn its reality. His mode of being has become quite subjective; he is alone with himself. To retreat into subjectivity is for Kurosawa to recover the self previously lost in the public world, and this necessitates a corresponding devaluation of that world. Once

Watanabe has withdrawn from it he is able to see its disease from his new-found distance and can determine a strategy for acting upon it. The withdrawal prepares the return. The two movements are inseparably paired in Kurosawa's conception of heroism. Simply being cut loose from the habitual world, discovering its "fictitious" character, is not real freedom. It is rather a freedom without objective content, i.e., without projects.

The first stage of Watanabe's death-bound life is still an attempted evasion. He declines to go to the office, withdraws fifty thousand yen from the bank, and tries to forget death through liquor. On one of his lonely drinking bouts, Watanabe meets a third-rate writer, and when questioned, reveals the fact of his cancer. In this conversation, he reveals the pathetic truth that he doesn't really know how to enjoy himself. The writer offers to guide him to "good times."

Let's find that life you've thrown away. Tonight
I'll be your Mephistopheles, but a good one, who
won't ask to be paid.

There follows a night of hedonism. Watanabe drinks, dances, sings, buys a new hat, watches a strip-tease. But on the way home, he must stop the car to vomit. The disease ceaselessly asserts itself.

In the next stage of his withdrawal Watanabe meets a young girl. She works at his office, is bored with the job. She refuses to adopt social masks, is direct in her speech and actions. Toyo confesses she knows Watanabe by a nickname—"The Mummy." Although Watanabe's relatives prefer to believe he has taken a mistress, his interest in Toyo is not primarily sexual. "The Mummy" wants not her body, but rather her soul. The girl becomes irritated by his endless attentions. She demands an explanation. Why is he always following her? What does he want? He tries to explain. She is so "full of life . . . young and healthy . . . I'm envious of that." Through watching her eat, drink and live, Watanabe is living vicariously. But Toyo feels, with some justice, that she

is but a victim/host to a parasitical Watanabe. He drains her; she lives his suffering as much as he lives her healthiness. Her sympathy becomes mingled with horror. The relationship is an unnatural one; she wants to end it, even if it means leaving Watanabe once more with his death—the mummy who cannot live. Watanabe pleads with her to push him to life:

Watanabe: I don't know what to do. I don't know how to do it . . . please, if you can, show me how to be like you . . .

Toyo: But all I do is work and eat—that's all.

Watanabe: Really?

Toyo: Really. That and make toys like this one.

She shows him a toy rabbit. She winds it up. The rabbit hops. Suddenly a decision is born. Watanabe's eyes light up; he even smiles. Toyo shrinks back in fear of this maniac. He picks up the rabbit and rushes down the stairs, leaving her alone.

The next scene finds two bureaucrats entering the office in the midst of discussing who will succeed Watanabe as Chief. They stop, transfixed at the sight of Watanabe's new hat on the coatrack. He interrupts their amazed silence, tears off the notice on the citizen's petition which says, "Forward to Public Works." "Take care of this," he says. "Call me a car." In amazement, the bureaucrats follow their chief—the late mummy—into battle. The first movement of the film is finished by this call to action.

The remainder of *Ikiru* details Watanabe's active heroism through a series of flashbacks "narrated" by the puzzled mourners at the hero's funeral. Through dogged insistence, Watanabe has coerced the bureaucracy into building a playground on the scene of the open sewer. He has built the playground in spite of the bureaucracy and yet through it. He has rendered a broken tool temporarily functional, forcibly turning it around to face

the material world it so long ignored. The self-referential circle has been straightened in accordance to Watanabe's new-found linear existence.

The mourners understand that something extraordinary has happened, but it seems to them to be a freak occurrence in an otherwise placid existence. Was the playground caused by Watanabe? What nonsense, they say. The park was built "despite" his interference. Watanabe interfered with the normal workings of the official machine. He was a troublemaker, some of them decide, well intentioned, but . . . maybe he was insane, or merely stupid?

As they drink, Watanabe's office-mates continue to discuss his strange behavior—each memory visualized by a flashback. They marvel at his persistent disregard for bureaucratic channels. As the saki is consumed, Watanabe's stature rises in a babble of talk. Emotions run high—the chief has become a martyr! The wake ends with a drunken orgy of accusations, self-recrimination and hysterical vows to "turn over a new leaf," to "work for the public good."

Comes the dawn, and the bureaucrats are back at their accustomed task; the resolve of the night before is only a memory. Sewage water has overflowed in Kizaki-cho. The complaining citizens are referred to the Public Works Section. One man starts to protest. He rises from his chair, then thinks better of it. He slowly sits down again as the camera also descends, until the whole screen is filled with the immense piles of paper on his desk.

The last scene is ambiguous. The man who began to protest stops on his way home to gaze at the park Watanabe has built, his face somber but ultimately unreadable. This is the end of *Ikiru*. There is a possibility that Watanabe's heroism will be relayed to a second bureaucrat, but such an event is far from assured. It seems more likely that the hero will have no heir and that the bureaucratic inertia will reassert itself. Indeed, it has already done so. A "survivor" has been shaken by the heroic example, but is not yet ready to negate his habitual existence. He is unwilling to act—unable to "live."

ACTION

"I want to *do* something," cries Watanabe to the girl from his office. He speaks out of his cancer, from a self he now sees as negative, in need of an act by which he can regain control over his own existence. He is caught wide-awake in the deathflow, knows himself to be merely treading water on his way to the abyss. To *do* something is imperative to the dying bureaucrat. But what? And how? He knows only doing nothing, has done nothing all his life, yet only now knows it to be precisely nothing.

To do nothing is, for Kurosawa, to perform all the movements of the daily routine which confirm the *status quo*, i.e., most of the "acts" of life. The movement is circular, repetitive. One does not stop to think the "why" of these movements; the habitual man is moved at every moment by the expectations of the world that he will continue to repeat himself. Kurosawa's world is this endless round of habits. In *Ikiru* it is given concrete form by the futile cycle of the petitioners through the various offices of the bureaucracy. Society seems but a worm of autonomous segments which blindly devours its own tail, growing fat on its cannibalism. The Citizens' Section does not remember that the petition referred to them by the Deputy Mayor was formerly disgorged by their office—they merely pass it on.

Normal life in the rural society of *The Seven Samurai* is as circular as the bureaucratic wheel. Each year the farmers labor in their fields to grow food for the winter. And each autumn the bandits descend from the hills to rob the harvest.

You can't bargain with them. You reason with them now [summer], give them something, and they'll be here in the autumn just the same.

The hired samurai break the cycle of growth-harvest-plunder by killing the predators. These masterless samurai no longer have a stake in the given world—they are

unemployed *ronin*, whose profession is rapidly becoming obsolete through the introduction of fire-arms and the break-up of the feudal hegemony. They perceive the inevitable extinction of their class, and are thus freed from the traditional samurai task of defending the static power of their feudal lord. Into the repetitive circle of rural existence come these suddenly temporal beings—"wild" agents from outside the round. Their interruption of the cycle is more spectacular by far than Watanabe's translation of a piece of paper into a playground. Yet each act renders the a-temporal world productive, historical, in accordance with the hero's perception of his personal existence as a linear movement towards nothing but death.

The hero who understands that death is in every case "my own," is able to regard the world in terms of ends. He moves in a straight line towards death in contrast to those who flee in the face of mortality, who defer it to sometime later or someone else. In this everyday life there is no effective terminus, since everything can be deferred to a receding tomorrow. One feels at home in this world of endless re-statement. Its movement can always be predicted; one always knows one's place in the pattern. Enmeshed in redundancy, existence is rendered static, becoming only what it *was*. This world is effectively a-temporal. Habitual man, having fallen prey to the repetitive world in which he is distracted, preoccupied, assumes that what *could be* is only what is. "To be" is a state, not an activity. Unaware, with any real consciousness, that his life must end, this man is a stranger to ends. He acts only insofar as he acts again, i.e., re-acts. But because the hero knows the goal of his life to be death, he is able to project a goal to each of his movements. Insofar as they are terminal, these movements become acts—projects which constitute the self. The hero is "already" dead, so he can risk dying by every act.

The stability of normal existence—guaranteed by the time-honored procedures of Watanabe's bureaucracy—is disclosed to the death-bound hero as a fiction upheld

only by the *belief* of the world-bound that self and world are indeed static. The hero who sees life as a movement *towards*, loses faith, as it were, in the givens of the circular world. He sees it from the new-found distance of the dying self to be no longer in agreement with his linear existence. The world, for Watanabe, is suddenly "other." By his awareness of death the hero has separated a private self from a public world, thus de-realizing the world, converting it into *mythos*, a mere ideology of stability. In order to act in it and upon it, the hero must believe that the world is not, in essence, this repetition of givens. His action destroys the fiction of the world's stability, proves that bandits are not "fated" like weather conditions, that open sewers need not be a permanent condition of life. It is thus an act of negation. The hero creates through first destroying the habitual world and uncovering, beneath a world moving towards death. One can thus assert that the Kurosawa hero institutes death in the world, and with it, the possibility of action.

Given the necessity that the Kurosawa hero must first negate an a-temporal world and render it mortal, it is hardly surprising to find him dealing death to the world-bound. In *Drunken Angel*, *The Silent Duel* and *Red-beard* the hero is a healing physician. But the logically prior aspect of the Kurosawa hero is presented in *The Seven Samurai*, *Sanjuro* and *Yojimbo*—he is here the professional killer.

The hero of *Yojimbo* strides into a town ruled by two warring families, each seeking to break the power of the other with its army of toughs. The toughs are cowardly; they threaten then retreat, in a parody of actual combat. The situation remains stagnant.

Into the midst of this static corruption moves the catalytic hero—Sanjuro, who calls himself "Mulberry Field," meaning "no-man" or "no one." He diagnoses the situation, exclaims "better if all these men were dead," then proceeds to take action. He demonstrates his murderous skills by dispatching several of the toughs, then awaits the highest bid for his services. Sanjuro allies himself

with each side in turn, then both sides at once in an attempt to provoke a fight to the finish. His is the ironical stance of the trickster in American Indian mythologies, adept and guiltless in his double-dealings, informing and betraying with comic impartiality. An onlooker at one point wonders if the action so far is but a script written by Sanjuro. The comedy ceases, however, when the hero's role as director of the play is discovered by those he has betrayed. The catalytic action has failed, and the hero nearly pays with his life for the jokes he has perpetrated. He loses his grip on the world he attempted to negate. And yet he has moved it. By tipping the balance of forces, Sanjuro makes it possible for one family to annihilate the other. He then returns to destroy the victors, ending his death-work with the ironic exclamation "now it will be quiet in this town." As quiet as a grave. Only three old men remain alive and one is a coffin-maker. In *Yojimbo* Kurosawa has presented the hero as a purely destructive force; Sanjuro is apocalypse personified.

Sanjuro is not "of" the world against which he fights—the prototypical "stranger in town." More common in Kurosawa's *oeuvre* is the hero who was once "at home" in his world and only later sees it in opposition to himself. The boundaries of the ego are not constant. Freud and Piaget theorize that the infantile ego originally includes everything in itself, draws no boundaries between itself and the enviroing world. Only later does the ego separate itself from the world and become a subjective "self" facing the objective "other." It is after the child makes this fundamental distinction that he is able to act with purpose. The adult ego, then, is but a shrunken vestige of a previously all-inclusive world-self. In Kurosawa's films the habitual man is, in this psychoanalytic sense, infantile—united with his world. To become a hero is to lose this unity, to fall into an isolate selfhood. The split of ego from world is a precondition of heroism for Kurosawa. It is accomplished by the knowledge of death as "my" death—the death of the ego. Thus the ego constitutes itself as ego by facing its future negation, becomes

present only by knowing itself as soon to be absent. Indeed, the ego which knows itself to be linear is already negative, absent as soon as it is present, insofar as it is always ahead of itself—projected towards its future death. The hero—no longer infantile but adult—now lacks the world with which he was previously co-extensive. He acts out of his negativity to grasp and mold what was once his prelapsarian self. In short, the hero can act upon the world only insofar as he considers it to be “other” than himself—antagonist to his protagonist. When the separation of ego and world is not fully accomplished, the hero tends to become confused in his aims. In *The Bad Sleep Well* and *Throne of Blood* (Kurosawa’s translation of *Macbeth*) the *agon* becomes interiorized because to the extent that he remains immersed in the world the hero fights himself.

In contrast to the hero who has separated himself from the world, the Kurosawa villain is unified with a world he believes to be his own. The hero’s antagonists are, of course, those who wish to maintain the cyclical world as such. These are not only the sleepwalkers—cogs in the wheel—but also the powerful, in whose interest the world is maintained as it is. To one who has already achieved his aims all change threatens loss of the accomplished state of being. Kurosawa’s villains seek to defuse all acts which might disrupt the *status quo*. Their acts are defensive in character; indeed the villain never initiates an act *per se*, but always *reacts* to the threat of a temporal world. Thus the corrupt families of *Yojimbo* prefer not to risk the power they already possess by an all out fight which would either extend or negate that power. Like their hired toughs, they choose to threaten, not to act.

The “Bad” of *The Bad Sleep Well* are corrupt officials of a government housing corporation, who casually murder or drive to suicide all reformers who threaten to expose them. This is modern, impersonal evil, disguised always as “business as usual”—a phrase which might well be the motto of every Kurosawa antagonist. For to enjoy busi-

ness as usual, the world must remain always predictable; its optimal movement will be circular. All confrontations will then be with past realities which can be and have been controlled. When Nishi—the hero of *The Bad Sleep Well*—attacks the corporation by impersonating his murdered father the highest officials are only slightly disturbed. They deal with him as they dealt with the father, merely repeating the cyclical pattern. Nishi is so easily murdered, among other reasons, because he mistakenly chose to attempt to repeat the past, hoping to succeed where his father had failed. He accepted the corporate routine as his personal reality, effectively permitting his enemies to choose their preferred field of battle. As we have seen the heroic act is necessarily linear. Nishi's circular heroism was doomed at the outset—it merely repeated what had already occurred.

Wherever it turns, the bureaucracy of *Ikiru* meets and refers to itself, refusing to posit a world *outside* its cycle. Likewise, the corporation president in *The Bad Sleep Well* views the world as an extension of the corporation, i.e., co-extensive with his own ego. He possesses the world in the same way he possesses his own thoughts, his body. Insofar as he is unified with the world he is able to control it as if it were his corporeal self. The powerful must feel “at home” in their world in order to keep it circular, in order to wish to repeat it. A separation of self from the homogeneous world-self necessarily entails a fall from power. Thus the man who seeks to maintain his power must be blind to the “otherness” of the world lest he become a stranger in it.

In *I Live in Fear*, the autocratic head of a family becomes convinced that the previously stable world is moving towards nuclear disaster. He tries to convince his family to move to Brazil, out of the path of the radioactive winds. His sons and daughters prefer to remain immobile, refusing to admit the possibility of a changing world; after all, they have a prosperous business to maintain, a small foundry. They defend the *status quo* against the autocrat. They view him as senile, no longer fit to run the foundry. To the old man business as usual

is impossible in a world careening towards apocalypse. When the father persists in his attempt at removal the family asks the courts to declare him incapable, insane. And they are quite right from the point of view of their static world. In his perception of imminent death, the old man is quite unsuited for the repetitive chores of normal life.

It makes no difference in this particular plot whether the earth is really threatened with nuclear death. The point is rather that the hero has begun to see the entire world as terrifyingly mortal. This awakening costs him the love of his family and isolates him from all those who live habitual lives. The world he sees is so "other" that the old man is judged mad, and he is deprived of all power over the world he once controlled. Unlike Watanabe, this hero is unable to break the world of its repetitive patterns. Rather, the world he tries to change withdraws from him and condemns him. He is "unrealistic," the family tells him. Frustrated in all his acts, he must finally judge the resisting world to be itself "unreal." In the last scene of the film, the old man stares from a mad-house cell at a swollen sun, believing it to be the earth ablaze with atomic holocaust. Like Sanjuro—the killer in *Yojimbo*—the hero who cannot move the static world can and must destroy it.

In *Yojimbo* heroism was a spectacular world-negating fantasy; in *Ikiru* the achievement was limited but creative, emphasis being placed on the process of *becoming* a hero. *Seven Samurai* seems to stand between these two films yet places creation of a "new world" clearly posterior to the negation of the old one. The heroic acts in each film are successful. In *The Bad Sleep Well*, and *I Live in Fear*, however, heroism is an act which fails. These films are problematic, cautionary tales which have not achieved the popular success of the heroic films *per se*. Yet, in their very failure to articulate a successful heroism, they achieve complexity which plainly contradicts the common assertions that Kurosawa films superman, rarely man.

WITHDRAWAL/RETURN

I have spoken of the hero's withdrawal from the world as a preparation for his active return. The time of withdrawal is creative, for during his absence the hero reflects on his own mortality and his capacities vis-à-vis the world. The world is now seen in opposition to the death-bound self, and also as the material to be worked by it. The project is formulated, strategies and tactics are perfected. For the first time his self is consciously defined in relation to a world which is other than the hero. Without the world as object, as antagonist, as the arena and the material of the heroic action, the self would remain purely negative.

In withdrawal the hero seems dead to the world. Since the dying Watanabe no longer bothers to go to the office, he is for all practical purposes regarded as non-existent by his fellow bureaucrats, who argue over which one of them will fill the power vacuum. The hero of *The Bad Sleep Well* is quite literally a phantom from the point of view of the housing corporation he seeks to destroy. Nishi poses as the ghost of his father—murdered by the corporation—in order to frighten the officials into self-betrayal. The headquarters of this ghost is an “underworld” bomb shelter from the previous war. The motives of the hero are, however, impure—personal revenge outweighs the exposure of corporate corruption. The hero's tactics are as cold-blooded as those of the defensive powers. Like the protagonist in Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*, Nishi is himself contaminated by the evil he hopes to destroy. It has entered his bloodstream and corrupts the heroic project. Becoming ever more ruthless in his methods, he loses himself in the shadowy combat, never able to become more than a half-material presence. He does not return to fight the world head on in the manner of Sanjuro or Watanabe, but maintains his withdrawal until it becomes a permanent condition of negativity. Thus when Nishi is himself murdered by the

corporation it is but a negation of a hero who never fully existed.

Avenging ghosts are quite common in Japanese cinema, but Kurosawa transforms the theme into an expression of the withdrawal phase of the heroic movement. During his withdrawal from the world, the hero is quite literally dead to all but himself. He has negated the everyday world and with it himself. He has yet to objectify himself in his heroic dealings with it. Alone with himself in his subjectivity and negativity, he is seen by Kurosawa to be without being (yet), i.e., a ghost.

The idea is most clearly specified in *Yojimbo*. The hero's catalytic action has failed, his double-dealing has been discovered. He is beaten severely and his torturers threaten that he will soon reside in the Japanese version of Hades. When they momentarily leave, Sanjuro vanishes into a wooden chest, then emerges from his prison to begin a flopping crawl under the wooden sidewalks to the shop of a friend. Close-ups reveal him to have the exact appearance of a Japanese ghost—loose hair, bloody face, rolling eyes. He secretes himself in a coffin and is carried through the night streets of the town, which now seems the very image of hell. A massacre is in progress—villains/victims emerge screaming from clouds of smoke to be cut down by the sneering victors. Sanjuro is conveyed to the cemetery amid much talk of ghosts, then rises monstrous and grinning from the coffin to panic his friends. The hero recuperates in the no-man's-land of a nearby temple, geographically unlinked to the rest of the film. Here Sanjuro devises new strategies, since his previous attack has backfired. Equipped with a knife and the sword "from a corpse" he leaves for town to finish the fight, knowing full well that his chief adversary is equipped with a pistol.

The return is filled with portents; it seems more a supernatural event than a fight between men. Kurosawa cuts from the temple to the town, where the wind has reached gale-force. Huge clouds of dust swirl skyward, obscuring this apparition from the grave. The villains are stunned, yet gather to meet this samurai whose skills

have been technologically outmoded. A samurai must come to grips with his opponent, but a pistol is murderous at a distance. Efficient swordplay is restricted to a professional elite, yet any young tough can kill with a bullet. The gunman smiles, takes aim as Sanjuro begins a weaving run. The pistol fires, but misses. Sanjuro throws the knife, impales the wrist of his would-be assassin. He finishes the fight with his sword. Cocky to the last, the dying gunfighter calls, "See you in hell," as a surviving villain, gone mad, beats out fierce messages to the underworld on his prayer-drum.

Within the context of this scene, the gunman's call seems entirely appropriate. Representing a class which has been "killed" by superior weaponry, conveyed out of town in a coffin, and winning this irrational fight by a near-miracle, the hero proves himself to be of an "other" world. Ghost or god, he has returned from a dead place and time, filled with power.

This "supernatural" return might easily be dismissed as a fantasy were it not that the Sanjuro who returns is still the man who withdrew from the world in every concrete sense except that now he is more powerful, more heroic. As long as he is "of" the world, Sanjuro can have little effect upon it. Each Kurosawa hero effects a similar withdrawal—a dying to the world—and a similar return. In *Yojimbo*, the hero is metaphorically killed, but so is the "mummy" Watanabe killed in *Ikiru* when he learns of the fact of his cancer. Each of these heroes returns to combat the everyday world and the powers which keep it static. But not everyone can move the given world. The old man of *I Live in Fear* is frustrated in every act, and must finally withdraw permanently into a private world of madness. Nishi is unable to accomplish his project of revenge, perhaps because revenge attempts to negate a past event rather than accomplishing a future world. The withdrawal does not necessarily result in a realistic appraisal of one's self vis-à-vis the world. It prepares a successful heroism only if the hero is ready to constitute an isolate self—negative and death-bound—for future objectification in the "real" world of

men and materials. Some potential heroes are unable to effectively withdraw from the everyday world of their habitual concern, others are unable to make a return. It would be better for them had they never attempted heroism—the old man of *I Live in Fear* would still retain family and factory, Nishi would avoid being killed by the world he attempted to move. It is not that they are born unfit for heroism, but rather that they derail their own heroic project through an insufficient grasp of self or world. Far better than such mishapen heroism is “a life spent eating mush,” as Sanjuro tells a would-be warrior before he kills him.

The material needs of life—food, sex—drag down the possible hero that is man. One is unable to envisage a future world because existence is too closely bound to present realities or to past wounds which have shattered the self beyond all hope of reconstitution. This is the world of *The Lower Depths* and *Dodes' Ka-den*, where men cannot begin to rise above their suffering and their whole lives are spent in scrambling for partial satisfaction of a hunger that gnaws both mind and body. There is neither time nor energy to discover a self apart from the world. Visions of other worlds, in such an existence, are counter-productive at best, because they can never be achieved with these limited resources.

The visionary in *Dodes' Ka-den* (*The Sound of the Trolley*) compensates for the miseries of a slum existence by building a dream-house in his mind. The construction of this ideal mansion is more real to him than the needs of his physical body; the food which his son begs at the back doors of restaurants is eaten unconsciously—mere fuel for the mental construction project. In the grips of his vision, the idealist declines to cook a piece of semi-rotten fish, despite his son's instructions. The child dies in agony while the dreamer rearranges the details of the house in his mind. In a life where physical needs can only barely be satisfied, idealism is not only mendacious—it kills.

In *The Lower Depths* (adapted from Gorky) a transient pilgrim dispenses futures with every cheerful word.

The inhabitants of this slum endure their present miseries by endlessly boasting of former lives in which they were "somebody." To the memory of this mythical past, the pilgrim adds the promise of an idealized future. But what is the practical result of this sudden optimism, this striving for heaven? A former actor is seduced by the promise of a miraculous cure for his alcoholism, then realizing the goal is quite beyond his reach, ends by hanging himself. The ideals the pilgrim promotes are in this case the cruellest of deceptions. A goal, an act in a straight line towards all that one loves—these are the necessary ingredients for heroism. But what if the world can not be moved, if the hero's weapons are ever inadequate to the task? What happens when the warrior's disease has gone too far, when he no longer has the strength to lift his sword in the combat? In such cases, to the heroic negation, Kurosawa opposes the passionate acceptance of life as it is lived. "Accepting oneself as if fated, not wishing oneself different—that, in such cases, is *great reason itself*."

In *The Lower Depths* and *Dodes' Ka-den*, Kurosawa seems to echo these lines from *Ecce Homo*. For it is not only the "elite" whom he films; Kurosawa's concern is present humanity as well as possible man. Heroism is certainly more exciting, more spectacular than "a life spent eating mush," yet sometimes to develop a taste for mush is the only rational act. When the world refuses to be changed, when man is defined by hunger, Kurosawa agrees with Nietzsche—there is nothing one can *do* except endure life in all its banal squalor, its fleeting physical pleasures. Getting drunk, seducing or being seduced is not in such cases evasion, but an affirmation of life on the physical level. To wish oneself different is in such cases insanity. The cyclical repetition elsewhere broken by the strength of the hero is in these films actually welcomed. One cannot take possession of oneself because one is already possessed by the world. To accept the endless wheel, to turn one's back on visions of heaven, to say "yes" to life as it is—this is a primitive but fundamental aspect of all we have previously defined

as heroism. Accepting the givens of his situation—the physical pain, the death sentence—are even for Watanabe *prior* to the heroic negation.

To love one's fate is the only realistic stance for those who can never straighten the circle of existence or force it to progress. They are always a lap behind the world, which runs contemptuously ahead of them, ignoring their needs of here and now. Only when they forget their past and future glories and accept their common misery as given irretrievably can the inhabitants of *The Lower Depths* begin really to live. In repudiation of all visions—all otherworldly ideals—they begin an awkward dance which builds into an intricate and graceful expression of euphoria. Knowing themselves to be damned, without futures, they are happy only when they have banished all hope of Heaven. With this ecstatic affirmation Kurosawa ends the film in a spectacular physical translation of Nietzsche's *amor fati*: "one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less to conceal it . . . but *love it*."

PHYSICAL EXISTENCE

There is a scene in *The Hidden Fortress* which seems pointless from the point of view of telling a story. Indeed, it seems to stop all movement of the plot. Two disheveled soldiers of fortune must climb a steep hill composed largely of rubble—loose rock and pebbles—impelled by the lure of hidden treasure and the mysterious summons of one who carries himself proudly—Toshiro Mifune, the hero. As they climb, the sun beats down, the rock slides beneath their weight. They sweat, curse, fall back, flop forward on the gravel slope. The narrative point of the scene has been made—the climb is a difficult and humiliating experience. But still the scene fills the screen. The crawling, sliding pair continue their wretched progress

upward. Whole minutes later the summit is finally reached.

Why does Kurosawa so extend this painful climb? Where is his sense of narrative economy? In other scenes within the same film he moves the action along as fast as the eye and mind can follow. One is led to conclude that the point of the hill-climb is not merely to get the two characters to the top of the hill so that they might rejoin the plot *per se*. The function of this scene is rather to communicate the physical act of climbing in such a way that we not only see but feel the repetitive agony of slipping backwards with each step, as a small task stretches towards eternity and yet remains undone.

The film *Sanjuro* ends with the hero's sword thrust into the heart of his antagonist. A whooshing geyser of blood sprays from his breast as he instantaneously dies. Is this realism? Not exactly. The youthful samurai who are the hero's audience have throughout the film regarded fighting as a stylish, exciting game. In this climactic scene, however, with no aesthetic preliminaries, the hero demonstrates that the aim of the fight is the physical act of killing one's opponent. Death is no longer a mental abstraction but has been rendered a brute fact.

Heroism, villainy and even the banality of everyday existence are never states of mind for Kurosawa, but always physical events. His is certainly a cinema of ideas, but these ideas are rooted in *spectacle*. That aspect of art which Aristotle called the least important is for Kurosawa primary. The spectacle integrates material and conceptual levels of reality, speaking with and through the stuff of existence and rendering it intelligible. Kurosawa's film image shows a consciousness which grasps the physical world in its concreteness; the speech of the image is not a symbolic or intellectualized representation of the world's material already mediated by consciousness but rather presents the consciousness in confrontation with a raw world which can only achieve meaning through being "worked" by physical acts. A mind, a body and a world of things are always, for Kurosawa, in interaction. The mind can motivate an act which materially changes

the world, but so does a corporeal event such as cancer or syphilis motivate the mind. Man, in such a conception of film, is always given the constraints and possibilities of his physical body, which is itself "thrown," in Heidegger's phrase, into a given material world.

Insofar as man realizes this essential interaction—the unity of mind, body and world—he is potentially heroic. For Kurosawa the hero is his relations with the material world, and this relationship is best expressed in the spectacle of the physical dealings of the hero with the world's material. It is not what man says or intends that is real to Kurosawa. The hero is authentic in his relations with the world only when he acts in it and upon it. Fighting, healing, farming, even vomiting are all affirmations of the physical base of man's existence. Kurosawa must be understood as both an "action director" and a maker of "spectacle" if one is to come to grips with his cinema.

Kurosawa films, at bottom, his conception of what is, as well as the *should be* which motivates the heroic act. This in itself does not separate him from other directors of his stature—Antonioni, Bergman, Ford, Godard, Welles. Indeed any film, whether made by artist or hack, communicates some conception of the way the world works, however consistent or anarchic, complex or simplistic the statement may be. If Bergman's camera were smashed, however, one would yet expect him to be able to express his ideas with some precision, while if Kurosawa were deprived of the speech of dust-storms and rain-storms, the hitch of Mifune's shoulders or the neighing and stamping of horses one feels the artist would be mute. Like the late John Ford—the Hollywood director he so much admired—Kurosawa does not interview well. His words are never what he "means"; they leave unsaid the thrust of the hero's sword, the gangster's sneering swagger, the epileptic's fit, the rhythm of work in the fields. The world which he films is so unified that speech can never be separated from things. His *logos* is first a *physis*; the *cogito* of Descartes, which defines the self as he who thinks, is for Kurosawa only the tip of the iceberg. The body is always as real as the soul, never

merely a husk for its kernel. The social and material world in which his heroes move is no mere set or framing context of the action (as in so many films), but is rather the material to be worked by the hero. And when the hero works the world, he molds and constitutes his very self.

Kurosawa most pointedly insists upon the unity of the body and psyche in films like *The Silent Duel*, *Drunken Angel* and *Ikiru* in which the hero is diseased and dying. The act which changes the world is surgical or therapeutic insofar as the world is also seen as diseased and dying. The world repeats itself, but every repetition is moving towards greater randomness. The heroic act arrests the entropic movement. In *Yojimbo* the hero cures the social malady by killing those who are irretrievably diseased, which in *I Live in Fear* the mad hero purifies the diseased world with the fire of atomic holocaust. In contrast to these ruthless negations of a sickness which cannot be remedied, the hero of *Ikiru* is able to heal a local sore by transforming an open sewer into a playground.

As befits a surgeon, each of these heroes—destructive or curative—knows death to be his personal end. The therapeutic project is informed always by death as a lived reality. Each hero withdraws to a death-world, then returns to do combat. Witness the failure of Sanjuro's catalytic action before his withdrawal from the town in *Yojimbo* in contrast to his extraordinary powers after he has been healed.

Upon his return from the death-world the hero must meet the world on its own terms, as Sanjuro meets projectile (bullet) with projectile (knife) and learns to kill from a distance. Yet by adapting himself to the realities of power, the hero may become contaminated to the extent that the heroic act merely echoes the world—no longer active or heroic in its character. We here face the constant dilemma of a heroism which is always in danger of losing itself (again) in the world. For example, a doctor must heal people if he is to remain truly a doctor, yet the medical hero of *Redbeard* finds himself in combat, breaking the arms of some toughs who wish

to prevent him from practicing his profession. After the carnage, when the toughs lie moaning in agony, Redbeard is enraged, filled with self-contempt. His anger seems excessive, even comical to an audience who has waited patiently for such heroic destruction, but to Kurosawa the self-abuse is utterly justified. The hero who confuses himself with the world by adopting its means and some of its ends is in danger of losing his heroism; in this scene Redbeard is close to being just another tough, though an extremely efficient one.

The hero must always remain distinct from the world, must in a sense remain withdrawn even as he returns. The attempt to remain outside the world and yet within it (in a subject-to-object relationship) explains the so-called "elitist" attitude of the Kurosawa hero. "I can't stand pitiful people," says Sanjuro, and indeed his weakness in saving those who cannot save themselves virtually leads to the ruin of the heroic project. If the hero is aloof, however, it is not by nature but by a supreme effort of will. He must always be on his guard, in his intercourse with worldly men, that he does not give in to the world and its ways. He must instead maintain his distance patiently (*Ikiru*), or ironically (*Yojimbo*), and the price of this distance is utter loneliness. The "people" neither understand nor envy the hero because they do not know themselves to be death-bound, linear, because they are still at one with their given world. At the end of the *Seven Samurai* the surviving heroes seem to yearn to become members of the peasant community, yet know that they cannot. They are cut off, estranged by their heroism and the world-view it entails.

The hero is deprived of normal relations with these world-bound individuals if he is to keep himself "purely" heroic. Thus Watanabe in *Ikiru* finds his own son a virtual stranger once this hero has awakened to death, the old man in *I Live in Fear* makes enemies of his family even as he attempts to save them, and Nishi of *The Bad Sleep Well* is forced to sacrifice sexual activity with his wife in order to consummate his hatred of her father—the boss of the housing corporation. Despite the in-

instincts he shares with the rest of humanity—the need for love, companionship, reassurance—the hero must enforce his separation against the seduction of normal life.

In *The Silent Duel*, for example, the hero is a doctor who contracts syphilis (through a cut finger) while operating. He is forced to resist the attentions of his fiancée and must cancel the proposed marriage. The effects of the disease are graphically illustrated by the sufferings and eventual madness of the hero's *alter ego*—the syphilitic who originally infected him. This rootless man is the “stray dog” figure who so often writhes spasmodically through Kurosawa's immediate post-war films. Alternately strutting and self-piteous, cynical and bewildered, this figure represents the wayward self too closely caught in the world which the hero strives to overcome. The stray dog not only lounges threateningly on street corners outside Americanized bars, but also resides within the hero himself. The stray dog is both the destructive id-force which must be repressed lest it tear the hero apart and also the normal impulsive humanity which the hero must unhappily deny himself. The hero thus recognizes himself in these undisciplined strays, envies their freedom, yet despises their random and irresponsible acts. The syphilitic of *The Silent Duel*, for example, not only refuses treatment for his disease, but carelessly infects his pregnant wife, thereby causing a monstrous birth.

Heroism and bestiality are each human possibilities; hero and stray dog are equally *man*. They are both of the same substance—they even suffer from the same disease. There is no question, for Kurosawa, of a super-man radically distinguished by nature from a mass of sub-men. The hero could easily become slack, could stray and lose himself within the world, succumb to the disease. In fact, disease seems often a pre-condition for heroism. The hero arises not in spite of but rather because of the disease he shares with humanity. The doctor in *The Silent Duel*, the bureaucrat in *Ikiru* are unable to cure themselves physically but become heroic by diagnosing, then combatting the moral sickness of their given world.

Only if he has first been sick can the hero say, with Nietzsche "I took myself in hand, I made myself healthy again." (*Ecce Homo*)

Although *The Silent Duel* is often considered to be one of Kurosawa's lesser films—the hero seems too pure, and his heroism seems more an effort of will than action—I discuss it here at length because the image of syphilis is a striking condensation of mental, physical and social levels of reality, and is central to Kurosawa's conception of the unity of heroic existence. The image of the mad syphilitic serves also to demonstrate my contention that Kurosawa speaks his ideas through physical realities, that this material discourse is prior to conceptual speech *per se*. The disease in its physical manifestations is *the* problem with which the hero of *The Silent Duel* must deal, but the confrontation with this brutal facticity spawns associated problems which are not primarily physical. The patient goes mad; the doctor turns cold towards his beloved, i.e., the physical disease moves or motivates the mind, causing in the patient a decay of will, a disintegration of the self, while the doctor, in contrast, awakens his will, discovers an isolate self apart from the disease yet defined by it. One suspects that Kurosawa specifies syphilis as his disease precisely because it eats the mind as well as the body, thus emphasizing their mutual dependency. Kurosawa's psychology, like Nietzsche's, is first a physiology.

In *The Silent Duel*, the mental disorder of the syphilitic not only represents his physical disease but also reflects the social malady of defeated Japan (gangsters, black markets, spiritual malaise) which is itself materialized in polluted pools of water, ramshackle housing, piles of garbage, etc. In *The Drunken Angel* the gangster's disease—tuberculosis—is also closely linked to these unhealthy living conditions. A stagnant pond, surrounded by slum housing, is again a central image in the film.

To see the filthy pond as symbolic is to ignore the spectator's physical encounter with the scummy surface of this water. The image is pre-rational, seeking to attune the mind to an opaque aspect of being which can only be

communicated in its material reality. The pond does not just "stand for" the gangster's tuberculosis, his diseased state of mind or the malfunctions of Japanese society. It is a concrete polluted presence, *not* the idea of pollution. Yet the image, bubbling and stagnant, refers to "something else" beyond the water. As the gangster stares dully at the pond he is confronting the physical reality of his own disease, is suddenly aware that he is defined in his limits and possibilities by his tubercular body. As the later plot makes clear, at this moment the gangster isolates and uncovers himself in his specific being apart from the gang. He then turns to destroy the gang--the static reality which formerly defined him.

We can now begin to see how complex is the speech of "things" in the films of Kurosawa. The pond resonates dramatically in the action of the film as if it were a musical chord signalling overtones of a whole complex of disease and decay while yet remaining concretely a pond. This kind of communication is, in Heidegger's phrase, *moodful*. Hero and spectator find themselves confronted by mere matter factually "there" in the world into which we are thrown. Nonconceptually, it speaks to a hero attuned to its message; it is the "other" to which the self relates. There comes a moment in every Kurosawa film when the hero stands open to things. He stares at the fetid pool or the sparks of the passing streetcar, watches the death agony of a friend or antagonist. At such moments the whole being of the hero is terribly vulnerable to the material speech of the "other." Yet it is at these times, when he falls into a mood, that the hero is most subjective, most truly himself. He is now a subject in relation to this objective other. But the relation given in mood is pre-active. As a subjectivity whose only content can be the world, the hero must realize or objectify himself through physical acts in and on the world. For without the material world, the hero is only an empty subjectivity, not yet heroic.

KUROSAWA FILMOGRAPHY

1. 1943 *Sanshiro Sugata*
2. 1944 *The Most Beautiful (Ichiban Utsukushiku)*
3. 1945 *Sanshiro Sugata, Part Two (Zoku Sugata Sanshiro)*
4. 1945 *Men Who Tread on Tiger's Tail (Tora no O o Fumu Otokotachi)*
5. 1946 *Those Who Make Tomorrow (Asu o Tsukuru Hitobito)*
6. 1946 *No Regrets for Our Youth (Waga Seishun ni Kuinashi)*
7. 1947 *One Wonderful Sunday (Subarashiki Nichi yobi)*
8. 1948 *Drunken Angel (Yoidore Tenshi)*
9. 1949 *The Silent Duel (Shizukanaru Ketto)*
10. 1949 *Stray Dog (Nora Inu)*
11. 1950 *Scandal (Shubun)*
12. 1950 *Rashoman*
13. 1951 *The Idiot (Hakuchi)*
14. 1952 *Ikiru*
15. 1954 *Seven Samurai (Shichinin no Samurai)*
16. 1955 *I Live in Fear (Ikimono no Kiroku)*
17. 1957 *The Throne of Blood (Kumonosu-jo)*
18. 1957 *The Lower Depths (Donzoko)*
19. 1958 *The Hidden Fortress (Kakushi Toride no San-Akunin)*
20. 1960 *The Bad Sleep Well (Warui Yatsu Hodo Yoku Nemuru)*
21. 1961 *Yojimbo*
22. 1962 *Sanjuro (Tsubaki Sanjuro)*
23. 1963 *High and Low (Tengoku to Jigoku)*
24. 1965 *Red Beard (Akahige)*
25. 1970 *Dodes' Ka-den*

NOTES

Donald Richie's book *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965, remains the definitive work on the director.

All Nietzsche translations are by Walter Kaufmann. The translations from Hegel and Plato are taken from W. B. Macomber's excellent study of Heidegger, *The Anatomy of Disillusion*.

The scripts of *Ikiru* and *Seven Samurai* have been published by Simon and Schuster; *Rashoman* has been translated by Grove Press. All are in paperback.