

Citation for published version

© Duke University Press. The definitive, peer reviewed and edited version of this article is published in:

de Vargas, F. [Ferran] (2022). Japanese New Left's Political Theories of Subjectivity and Oshima Nagisa's Practice of Cinema. *Positions: Asia critique*, 30(4), 679-703. doi: 10.1215/10679847-9967305

DOI

<http://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-9967305>

Document Version

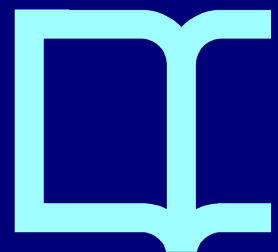
This is the Accepted Manuscript version.
The version in the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya institutional repository, O2 may differ from the final published version.

Copyright and Reuse

© Duke University Press

Enquiries

If you believe this document infringes copyright, please contact the Research Team at: repositori@uoc.edu



Japanese New Left's Political Theories of Subjectivity and Ōshima Nagisa's

Practice of Cinema

Ferran de Vargas

Abstract

Although much has been written about the political theories of several thinkers associated with the Japanese New Left, to gain a better understanding of those theories a perspective that conceives them as a conversation within a unitary ideology is needed. Likewise, we know little about how media forms other than the written word contributed to this conversation. To address these gaps in our understanding, this article investigates how the practice of cinema, through the paradigmatic example of Ōshima Nagisa's film *Kōshikei* 絞死刑 (*Death by Hanging*, 1968), intervened in the Japanese New Left's conception of *shutaisei* 主体性 (subjectivity). This article first presents the theories of subjectivity of some of the most influential thinkers in the shaping of the Japanese New Left ideology (Umemoto Katsumi, Nakai Masakazu, Yoshimoto Takaaki, Tanigawa Gan, Tokoro Mitsuko), and then explores the contribution of Ōshima's *Kōshikei* to them, showing the limitations of some previous lines of interpretation of the film. Relating the different dimensions of an ideology, in this case the political theory and the practice of cinema of the Japanese New Left, will help us to gain a better understanding of both the ideology as a whole and the dimensions comprising it.

Keywords: Japanese cinema, Koshikei, New Left, Oshima Nagisa, shutaisei

Although much has been written about the political theories of several thinkers associated with the Japanese New Left, to gain a better understanding of those theories a perspective that conceives them as a conversation within a unitary (but sometimes contradictory) ideology is needed. Likewise, we know little about how media forms other than the written word contributed to this conversation. To address these gaps in our understanding, this article investigates how the practice of cinema, through the paradigmatic example of Ōshima Nagisa's film *Kōshikei* 絞死刑 (*Death by Hanging*, 1968), intervened in the important debate within the Japanese New Left on the notion of *shutaisei* 主体性 (subjectivity). Relating the different dimensions of an ideology, in this case the political theory and the practice of cinema of the Japanese New Left, will help us to gain a better understanding of both the ideology as a whole and the dimensions comprising it.

In this regard, situating *Kōshikei* within the subjectivity debate of the Japanese New Left helps us address the limitations of two of the most recent lines of interpretation of the film: one that considers the film's central axis to be the political domination by ideological state apparatuses, and another that considers the central axis to lie in the oppression of the Korean minority in Japan. Ogawa (2015) and Ward (2015) argue, as I will, that the problem of subjectivation lies at the core of *Kōshikei*, but they do so by embracing an Althusserian perspective, which is disconnected from the ideological context of Ōshima's cinema and is removed from the postulates of the Japanese New Left reflected in the film (except for the deconstruction of the subject as the starting point). In contrast, through an ideological analysis of *Kōshikei*, I show that the perspective of Ōshima's cinema is removed from Althusser as it considers the subject to exist prior to its subjection to ideological state apparatuses. On the other hand, in the same vein as previous works such as Mellen 1976 and McDonald 1983, Desser (2018) concludes that the discrimination against *Zainichi* 在日 (Korean residents in Japan) is the core of

Kōshikei. I argue that this is also a misinterpretation resulting from a lack of ideological contextualization, which moves the focus away from the fundamental problem addressed in the film: human subjectivity.

To understand how *Kōshikei* interacts with and contributes to the subjectivity conversation within the Japanese New Left, I first present the theories of subjectivity of some of the most influential thinkers in the shaping of the Japanese New Left ideology, starting with Umemoto Katsumi (1912-1974), who introduced the concept of *shutaisei* in the Marxist philosophy of post-war Japan, and ending with Tokoro Mitsuko (1939-1968), who attacked efficiency and quantification as values that alienated the subject and thus maintained the left at a distance from a true revolution. The presentation of these theories of subjectivity enables an exploration, in the second part of the article, of the contribution of the practice of cinema to them.

Theories of Subjectivity in the Shaping of the Japanese New Left

The Japanese New Left's symbolic starting point as a political movement was the foundation in 1958 of the Communist League or Bund, resulting from the rupture with the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). This movement broke into the public scene in 1959-1960 through its leading role during the struggle against the renewal of the *Anpo*¹ and blossomed between 1966 and 1970 with the Vietnam War as a backdrop. However, the political thought behind the New Left had already been in development since the immediate post-war period, and a differentiated ideological space was being created. Within that space, a debate developed between different ways of claiming the importance of subjectivity, with the idea of *jikohitei* 自己否定 (self-negation) at its center.

From the first years of the post-war period, discordant voices emerged that criticized the historical determinism of the JCP's official line, which insisted that it was

necessary to wait for the objective conditions of capitalism to mature before the socialist revolution could be channeled. Umemoto Katsumi was one of the most prominent of those critical voices from within the party, introducing the concept of *shutaisei* to philosophy debates of the postwar Marxist Left. Influenced by his experience in the pre-war Kyoto School, Umemoto sought to fill what he considered to be a gap in Marxism regarding the dimension of human subjectivity. At the end of 1947 he joined the JCP after opening the philosophical debate on *shutaisei* with his essay “Ningenteki jiyū no genkai” 人間的自由の限界 (“The Limits of Human Freedom”). But in 1960 he would leave the party, and from that point on he would be considered part of the Japanese New Left (Koschmann 1996: 96).

In “The Limits of Human Freedom” Umemoto was critical of the fact that orthodox Marxism was considered a science and, as such, it observed history as a set of objects moved according to objective laws. Instead, for Umemoto Marxism was a worldview, a philosophy of praxis that addressed the dialectics between the subjective and the objective. Despite assuming as a Marxist that history moves through class antagonisms, Umemoto wondered why, faced with the same antagonisms, there were people who were committed to socialism and people who were not; why, in fact, the communist militants who saw Marxism as just a science devoted their lives to the attainment of a new society. Faced with those questions, Umemoto considered that class antagonisms did not offer explanations to all the dimensions of human action, and that science and pure reason could not explain the capability of the human being to decide. Instead, he saw a gap in the chain of historical causalities, and it was in that non-objectifiable space where free human subjectivity lay, the individual’s autonomy from totality. Using the vocabulary of the Kyoto School, Umemoto ([1947] 1977: 18) referred to that gap from which human subjectivity arose as ‘*mu*’ 無 (‘nothingness’).

But although Umemoto claimed that subjectivity is ultimately inexplicable and thus ultimately indeterminable, what he thought could be explained were the material conditions that shape the human being's choice options, without which subjective election itself, that is, creative nothingness, would not exist (since subjective choosing would not exist without choices to choose). These conditions are given by human relations, in a dialectic between tension and union in every society between the individual and the totality, defined by the productive forces and the relations of production in each historical moment (Umemoto [1965] 1977: 43-45). Through this conception, Umemoto distanced subjective nothingness from idealism, placing it in the field of materialism.

In the structure of human relations, a phenomenon occurs that, according to Umemoto (1964: 129-31), is key to understanding the possibility of rebellion: the social alienation generated in class society. For Umemoto, social alienation arises from the historical moment in which the private property of the means of production appears and human beings cease to have control over their work. From his Marxist point of view, the ontology of the human being as a social being is the ability to produce their means of subsistence, and therefore, by being alienated from production, people are alienated from themselves and from society. In class society the totality is dominated by a part (a class) and therefore an alienation of the individual from that totality occurs. According to Umemoto, the origin of the consciousness of class antagonism comes from the individual experience of this alienation, an experience that generates at the same time a drive to subvert alienation itself. This drive increases as consciousness matures, and it contains the potential for rebellion against the social totality.

Inspired by Marx, Umemoto ([1965] 1977: 47-49) pointed out that the proletariat is the part of the capitalist totality that holds the historical potential for a new totality without classes and thus without social alienation. But he wondered why an individual

would be willing, beyond their consciousness and drive for rebellion, to leap towards the nothingness that is the historical transition from one totality to another, and risk their life for the attainment of a new society that they probably would not even see. Influenced by the Buddhist thinking of Shinran² (1173-1263) (Umemoto had written his graduation thesis on this historical figure in 1936), he found the answer in the ethics of self-negation (Umemoto [1948] 1977: 166-75). According to him, to produce a revolution that leads to socialism, the individual needs to provide themselves with ethics that, in the face of the human desire of permanence, lead them to deny themselves as a member of the current bourgeois totality, which is based on selfish interest, and to sacrifice themselves without expecting reward in order for the proletariat to complete the historical mission of establishing a classless society for future generations. In this way there is the paradox that the human being “can accomplish oneself through negating oneself” (Umemoto [1966] 1977: 371).

Just as Umemoto was developing his conception of Marxism in the immediate post-war period, Nakai Masakazu (1900-1952), another Kyoto School philosopher influenced by Shinran’s Buddhism (he was born into a family belonging to the Pure Land sect, and he even spent a year of his youth in a monastery) but less influenced by Marxism, was developing his own perspective on subjectivity, which had an impact on the subsequent ideological development of the Japanese New Left.

Nakai’s ([1943] 1981: 102-110) main contribution to the debate was his focus on the Japanese concept of *ki* 気 (‘life force’). From his point of view, *ki* denoted the subjective, creative and spontaneous potential energy of the masses, able to transform the concrete reality, and arising from the changing practices, sensations and feelings of everyday life. It is not a timeless and abstract spiritual energy, but arises from a reaction to the forces escaping the control of the subject in their concrete daily environment

(related to the wider movement of history) and urging them to act. According to Nakai, freedom is the capability of the subject to channel this spontaneous reaction through a democratically organized practice. Since *ki* is the qualitative basis of relations, the subject cannot observe objects from a purely objective, rational or scientific standpoint; the subject takes part in the observed reality through practice, which is inseparable from their daily sensations and feelings. The importance of ever-changing everydayness leads to Nakai's denying, unlike Umemoto, the possibility of objectively defining any teleology, that is, any specific direction toward which the human being heads through history. According to Lucken (2018: 607), Nakai's tendency to see history as a time without end (or origin) was the result of the influence of Shinran's doctrine, in which the constant repetition of mantras was the most immediate access to sacredness.

From this point of view, the basis of the subject must be under constant self-critical transformation. *Ki* is liberating when the subject acts through constant self-negation (Nakai [1936] 1981: 107). That is, the channeling of the potential energy of the masses must be carried out through an organized subject that works as a mediation to foster critical subjectivity, by renouncing the survival and unquestionability of any given organizational pattern, ideology, political subject or historical mission. Self-negation would be a revolution of the consciousness through which thought questions everything the subject takes for granted (Nakai [1951] 1981: 150-154).

In the mid-1950s, the growing disenchantment of sectors of the Left regarding post-war experiences of elitism and authoritarianism cloaked in the discourse of emancipation, gave notoriety to thinkers who were suspicious of Enlightenment values, and especially of the figure of the intellectual. One of these voices was Yoshimoto Takaaki (1924-2012), who is now considered the most influential figure in the formation of the most libertarian sectors of the Japanese New Left. Yoshimoto's work coincided

with some of Nakai's ideas, and despite following the path opened by Umemoto, he thought Umemoto had not gone far enough in his criticism of Marxism.

Yoshimoto was also inspired by the Buddhist monk Shinran, but from his point of view, what Shinran did was break radically with the prevailing Buddhism of his time, which he considered to be a set of dogmas removed from the people. Shinran intended to base his thinking on the real and concrete experience of the masses, their daily feelings and needs. However, his doctrine became dogma over time and was used to prevent the liberation of the masses on which that discourse was construed. Yoshimoto thought that in the nineteenth century Marx played a role similar to that of Shinran. Similarly, Yoshimoto argued that Marxism also became dogma at the service of power struggles resorting to an idealization of the masses that prevented their true liberation (Yang 2005: 193-194).

According to Yoshimoto, what is really important is not that a given subject discursively expresses their ethical sympathy for the oppressed, but the position the subject occupies in the whole of power relations in everyday life; when a subject advocates for the liberation of the masses from a position of power, that very position itself limits liberation, which remains only in the discursive dimension (Yoshimoto [1954] 1969: 105-6). While for Umemoto and Nakai liberation necessarily implied a subjective commitment from the masses, for Yoshimoto true subjectivity of the masses cannot exist without *jiritsu* 自立 (autonomy) from any intelligentsia or vanguard. The alternative he proposes is the intellectual's self-negation for the masses to be autonomous and free all their revolutionary energy based on their daily motivations (Yoshimoto [1960] 1962: 96-104). The intellectual's function must be more centripetal than centrifugal: it should consist of permanent self-questioning of their own position as a subject (not only their thought or behavior), interiorizing the original image of the masses

(the masses just as they are and not as they should be), and developing a liberating action in everyday life instead of construing a discourse from above to mobilize the people toward a direction.

Yoshimoto shared many ideas with Tanigawa Gan (1923-1995), who was affiliated with the JCP in 1949 and expelled from it in 1960. For Tanigawa, the other side of the coin of alienation as a drive for political action was the communal longing of the masses, increasingly intense as the modernization process deepens, which alienates human beings from their communities. This communal sensitivity and not an ideology or historical mission prescribed from above had to lead to revolution: a revolution without a worldview.

But Tanigawa was aware that, to fight against the system, something more than the daily experience of communal sensations was necessary. Some degree of organization acting as a counter power was needed. On the other hand, he stated that the more organization, the less energy of the masses (Tanigawa [1957] 1996: 268). However, he made this contradiction the dialectical tension that should constitute the starting point of revolutionary action, and not a contradiction to solve. It is for this reason that he defined himself as someone who belongs to an “anti-political political faction” (Tanigawa [1956] 1996: 84), and rather than the need for organizers he talked about the importance of facilitators who would fight against the homogenizing elimination of contradictions and battle attempts by elites (the leftists too) to exert ideological control over the masses, but who at the same time were able to rouse the very same masses when they were passive.

Moreover, Tanigawa ([1963] 1984: 235-46) talks about the fundamental role the discrimination against marginalized social groups plays in Japan (where, unlike in countries such as the United States, the main discrimination is against groups with no physical differences from the dominant one) in the construction and stabilization of the

nation. According to him, discrimination in Japan is a way to project onto others one's own putatively negative characteristics, thereby avoiding self-criticism and keeping social privileges. Through this exercise, the discriminator becomes less free than the discriminated, since the former's social position is supported by their own fears. Tanigawa claims that all those in a position of social privilege in Japan, himself included, benefit from the discriminations network, and that with this acknowledgment one must be able to overcome and free oneself.

Both Tanigawa's and Yoshimoto's lines of thought influenced the ideas of the thinker Tokoro Mitsuko. In 1966 she published an essay titled "Yokan sareru soshiki ni yosete" 予感される組織に寄せて ("The Organization to Come"), which had a great impact on the Japanese student movement of the late 1960s. According to her, a revolutionary organization could only be one that broke with capitalist alienation, which was based not only on private property but also on the supremacy of efficiency and quantification. From her point of view, leftist political parties reproduced capitalist alienation in their struggle against capitalism itself, since their hierarchical and centralized structure deprived the rank and file of control causing apathy, and they applied the principle of efficiency in eliminating excesses considered to be useless for their objectives through the limitation of internal contradictions. Overcoming capitalism had to go through the primacy of a clearly anti-capitalist process (and not just an objective), which meant fostering a permanent discussion among subjects with different views on an equal footing. This was possible only if each subject denied themselves in terms of resisting the imposition of their own egos, to generate a void in which the other subjectivities could fit. With this assembly idea in mind, Tokoro criticized the fact that political parties saw democracy as a process of quantitative and abstract aggregation (whether it was votes, party members, number of demonstrators, number of sold

newspapers, energies or salary increases) instead of a process of individual empowerment and transformation.

In addition, in the student movement of the late 1960s Tokoro established the basis for the development of a new notion of self-negation (Yasko 1997: 37) based on a victimizer consciousness. This self-negation began with the acknowledgment that one indirectly oppresses other subjects by being part of certain privileged collectives, or by performing actions (or non-actions) that reproduce those privileges. From this point of view, the individual must transform themselves through revolutionary action in everyday life and within the context of a movement of political opposition, achieving a cycle in which the transformation of the ego causes the transformation of the network of social relations and vice versa.

As I have shown, the notion of self-negation weaves a thread of continuity in the theorization of subjectivity by different thinkers of the Japanese New Left, although each one of them provides their own approach. Umemoto sowed the seed of Japanese New Left's subjectivism, based on the idea that it is from the experience of the individual's alienation, and not through the guidelines of a vanguard or an intelligentsia, that the individual's political action originates. Even so, Umemoto advocated for the existence of a vanguard party that was aware of the teleology of history, although he introduced the idea of self-negation of the subject (which included the party) to the post-war Left. For Umemoto, self-negation meant both the moral component of sacrifice by the subject for humanity, and the idea that in order to overcome the bourgeois species one had to negate oneself as an integral part of this species. By placing the component of everydayness at the center of his philosophy, Nakai took the idea of self-negation to another plane in which teleology is questioned, a path that was followed by Yoshimoto, Tanigawa and Tokoro. In the case of Tokoro, besides her idea of self-negation as a refusal of efficiency

and as an embrace of assembly, we find a marked moral component in line with Umemoto, but this time in the idea of the subject as victimizer of other subjects, the origin of which lies in the opposition to the complicity of Japan with the imperialism of the United States in Vietnam. In Tanigawa we find a similar notion of victimizer with respect to marginalized minorities within Japanese society, although the self-questioning he proposed was less moral and more conceived as a requisite for the self-liberation of the subject. As for Yoshimoto's self-negation, it was fundamentally based on the idea that one must question the position of power from which one becomes a subject, to foster the autonomy of the masses, an idea shared to a certain extent both by Tanigawa and Tokoro with their respective ideas of the commune and the assembly.

Nonetheless, the conversation about subjectivity within the Japanese New Left was not limited to the theoretical sphere, but expanded to practical fields such as cinema. Despite some divergences between directors such as Yoshida Kijū, Matsumoto Toshio and Ōshima Nagisa in the field of film theory, their film practice contained a sufficient number of similar elements for a set of their films to be considered part of the same cinematographic and ideological New Left movement. For instance, although Matsumoto was critical of the concept of *shutaisei* explicitly used by filmmakers such as Ōshima and Yoshida (Raine 2012: 146-47), one notices a similar display of subjectivity in films such as Matsumoto's *Bara no sōretsu* 薔薇の葬列 (*Funeral Parade of Roses*, 1969), Yoshida's *Erosu purasu gyakusatsu* エロス+虐殺 (*Eros Plus Massacre*, 1969), and Ōshima's *Kōshikei*. This sense of subjectivity was displayed through the self-negation of the director, namely, the refusal to impose one's own self on the spectator, by employing distancing resources such as theatricality, experimental music and sounds disconnected from images, camera instability, the inclusion of photographs and text on screen, and anti-narrative disorder of scenes.

Beyond the textual features of these directors' cinema, many of their films released in the late 1960s and early 1970s were produced through joint funding from the director's own production company and the independent film production company Art Theatre Guild (ATG). These material conditions facilitated the directors' subjective freedom to experiment with the film medium to the fullest.

In the next part of the article, I will take Ōshima's *Kōshikei* (the first film to be produced under ATG's co-funding system) as a paradigmatic example of what can be called a Japanese New Left cinematographic movement, and I will explore how this director provided his own perspective on subjectivity as self-negation through his film practice. The contribution of a film such as *Kōshikei* to the ideas of subjectivity circulating among the Japanese New Left cannot be assessed based on a purely empirical perspective, since the activists of this movement's strictly political branch were more likely to watch *yakuza* films (Oguma 2015: 16); and this habit of film consumption does not mean that *yakuza* films were contributions to the New Left ideology beyond their romantic emphasis on action and self-sacrifice. Likewise, directors such as Ōshima were more concerned about making films as tools of subjective expression and viewer subjectivation than about connecting with the masses,³ just as the activists of the political movement claimed: "We seek solidarity, but don't fear isolation." (Muto and Inoue 1985: 68) Thus, such a contribution should be assessed mainly from the analysis of the discourse involved in film practice, that is, by considering how the textual features of the film in question are on the same plane as those of the ideology to which it belongs. Although empirical questions, such as audience behavior and explicit statements by directors, can strengthen the observed links between cinema and a given ideology, the basis of these links is the discourse the films themselves constitute.

The Contribution of *Kōshikei* to the Japanese New Left's Subjectivity Debate

Through an ideological analysis of *Kōshikei*, I will show that the central problem of the film is the configuration of human subjectivity, which is also the element whose appreciation constitutes the genesis of the Japanese New Left and the main split from the orthodox Left led by the JCP. However, my ideological analysis of *Kōshikei* aims to show not only how the film places the problem of subjectivity at its core, but also how it contributes to the debate on subjectivity of the Japanese New Left's thinkers I have presented above.

Ōshima largely follows the line of those thinkers, in the focus on the individuals' alienation and the importance of subjectivity as self-negation. However, he incorporates two main approaches. First, his cinema shows crime and sex as forms close to pure subjectivity, since they transgress social totality through alienation and the body, and not through idealizations (such as romantic love) or ideological guidelines set by social agents. By starting with crime and sex Ōshima avoided imposing as a director the idealizations and ideological guidelines that limit the viewer's autonomy to think about the film.

And second, Ōshima incorporated the centrality of imagination as one of the main manifestations of the creative nothingness that, from an Umemotian-rooted philosophy, constitutes human subjectivity. According to Heath (1976: 59), the power of imagination in *Kōshikei* is linked to an extreme subjectivity with echoes of existentialism. It is no coincidence that Ōshima claimed in an interview about *Kōshikei* that the philosopher he admired most was Sartre (Müller 2009: 192), which was common in the circles of the Japanese New Left, where it became virtually *de jure* for activists to carry and read his books along with those of Yoshimoto (whom Ōshima also mentioned as an influence)⁴ and Marcuse (Yang 2008: 126). The Umemotian nothingness (*mu*) is on a similar plane to Sartrean existentialism, inasmuch as it is based on the notion that there is a gap in the

chain of causalities from which the capability of the human being to take decisions emerges, holding the subject fully responsible for their actions, outside superior determinations. In this regard, imagination is a manifestation of this subjective nothingness since it is a projection of alternative realities emerged from the subject's mind, however much their environment pushes them into a supposedly objective reality.

Kōshikei is based on the 1958 Komatsugawa Incident. Ri Chin'u, a young Korean resident in Japan, made an anonymous call to the Yomiuri newspaper giving details about the death of a Japanese girl who had been raped and murdered some days before. The call was recorded, and the police broadcasted it on the radio in case someone identified the voice. This caused public opinion to become particularly involved in the case. Ri Chin'u was eventually arrested, tried, sentenced to death, and executed in 1962.

Ōshima was inspired by those events, among other reasons, because a sexual crime allowed him to display his own approach to *shutaisei*, and because the intense media debate that was incited between different ideological agents provided an opportunity to reflect on the clash between collective discourses and the subjective consciousness of reality. Several social agents made public their own views on why the boy committed the crime, some to reinforce his culpability, and others to exonerate him. In contrast, Ōshima, in the philosophical line of Yoshimoto presented above, claims in *Kōshikei* the autonomy (*jiritsu*) of the subject with respect to discourses that fit the crime with the preconceived ideological view of the criminal.

The starting point of *Kōshikei* moves away from the actual case to give the film a tone of absurdity: the convicted is hanged but does not die; instead he completely loses his memory, after which the prison officers conclude that to be legally able to hang him again they must make him recover his self-awareness. The whole film is about how the execution witnesses try to make the condemned remember who he is and the crime he

committed, bringing to stage, like in a play, the official narrative of his past. The increasingly theatrical and absurd tone of *Kōshikei* makes it one of Ōshima's most Brechtian films, in his quest to generate a distancing that fosters the subjective reflection of the viewer.

Each execution witness symbolizes a social agent that tries to rebuild the convict's subjectivity by offering their own explanation of why he committed the crime. The fact the convict is known simply as 'R' reinforces the feeling that he is an empty subject, like a container into which the agents surrounding him try to pour their respective ideologies to make him fit what he *should be* according to their preconceptions. The prison officers and the prosecutors represent the bourgeois state, which bases the explanation of R's crime on the stereotyped narrative of his past in a poor immigrant family in which, from their point of view, only misery and unhappiness leading necessarily to the crime are possible. R's imaginary sister (the first of them, since two different ones appear in the film) represents the Japanese old Left and Korean nationalism, and she explains her brother's crime as an act of revenge by the oppressed Korean nation against Japanese imperialism. The Catholic priest represents religion, and he explains R's crime as a carnal sin against God; he disagrees with the execution, not on his own initiative but because it is against Christian morality. The doctor, who explains the rape and murder committed by R by his repressed sexual drive, represents science.

Although at first there seems to be a contraposition between an R without subjectivity and social agents with subjectivity, as the film goes on this impression is in fact reversed, and the feeling is increasingly transmitted that it is R who, through experience, reaches a high degree of individual autonomy, whereas the other characters assume the function of mere gears. While R ends up assuming responsibility for the crime he committed, the execution witnesses never assume their responsibility for R's hanging,

hiding behind duty and the law (as when some of them justify their crimes during the Second World War), which reveals their deficit of subjectivity.

As noted in the introduction of this article, two of the most interesting analyses of *Kōshikei* so far, by Ogawa (2015) and Ward (2015), also start with the focus on subjectivation as the central problem. However, both authors place excessive emphasis on the dual relationship of state-individual subjection in the configuration of subjectivity. Ogawa (2015: 314) claims that “R’s sole function is to represent the sovereign power through its dejected, passive and vulnerable existence”, and Ward (2015: 57) states that “R merely functions as a fictional presumption from which Ōshima is able to develop the mechanisms of state subjection”. By using Althusserian approaches to analyze the film, Ogawa and Ward see R’s subjectivation as a product of the ideological state apparatuses that address him. According to the Althusserian perspective, the fact that R’s subjectivation succeeded would mean that the state apparatuses would have made him interiorize ideology until he reproduced it autonomously (or, rather, believing he is acting autonomously); otherwise, subjectivation would be considered unsuccessful, and we would be talking about a non-subject.

However, the development of R’s subjectivity does not come from outside himself, in the subjection to external powers, but develops from within the individual in his relationship with the social totality. In this regard, Ōshima displays in *Kōshikei* an outlook more in line with the materialist subjectivism of Umemoto, by placing at the core of subjectivity an ultimately indefinable nothingness (*mu*). In fact, with the hanging at the beginning of the film, R does not become, as Ogawa (2015: 310) and Ward (2015: 41) define him, a non-subject: his subjectivity does not get annulled, but rather his self-identity. R exists as an empty subject, but as a subject after all. His subjectivity develops through contact with the ideologies addressing him: not through the subjection to those

ideologies, but through the response to them. From an Umemotian perspective, it is through the experience of alienation, of the denial of control over his own being by external social powers, that a rebel subjectivity arises in R in relation to those powers. On this matter it is worth quoting Eagleton (1991: 146) regarding the word 'subject' in the Althusserian vocabulary: "It is possible by a play on words to make 'what lies beneath' mean 'what is kept down', and part of the Althusserian theory of ideology turns on this convenient verbal slide." That is, in fact, the individual is a subject because they have a dialectical relationship with a superior social totality, but not because they are subjected to it.

Further from the focus on the problem of subjectivity, Desser (2018: 172-73) argues that the film focuses on the discrimination against *Zainichi* (Korean residents in Japan) and the death penalty imposed on a member of this minority. However, although there is little doubt that Ōshima was very concerned about the *Zainichi* problem, I consider it to be a resource through which he deploys a more general reflection on the configuration of human subjectivity, transcending the denunciation of specific cases. It reminds us of how Tanigawa ([1963] 1984: 235-246) was concerned about the oppression against marginalized minorities in Japan not from the humanist perspective consisting of denouncing human evil, but from a cooler analysis of the function this oppression has in the configuration of the social network of subjectivities.

Desser seems to follow the line of previous works such as Mellen 1976 and McDonald 1983 by placing the Korean issue at the center, although these two authors show signs of a greater lack of ideological analysis by making deterministic conclusions about *Kōshikei*. Mellen (1976: 421) states that the re-enactment of past circumstances "serves finally only to repoliticize R, to reawaken his consciousness of himself as a Korean, and to inspire him to rebel -the *inevitable* response of the oppressed minority to

those in authority” (emphasis mine). As for McDonald (1983: 148), she says that through the film “we recognize the *deterministic forces* that shaped R’s existence and *led him* to commit murder” (emphasis mine), referring to the oppression against Koreans by the Japanese nation. But, in fact, I consider *Kōshikei* to be based on a position opposite to this interpretative line. To understand Ōshima’s true intention, it is appropriate to start from the criticism he wrote on *La Battaglia di Algeri* (*The Battle of Algiers*, 1966), one of the most influential films of the 1960s worldwide:

Films can’t be used for political purposes. A film can be truly political only when it deeply moves the individual spectator. A film speaks only to the individual. In Japan today, cheers -whether for racial independence or for terrorism- are nothing more than emotions that are already at hand. There are already many kinds of melodrama that appeal to these emotions. Nevertheless, the fact that Japanese film critics as a whole are praising *The Battle of Algiers*, -which is for the most part merely a melodrama- to this extent is enough to convince one that they are experiencing a temporary stoppage of thinking. (Ōshima [1967] 1992a: 140)

On this matter, Ōshima ([1967] 1992a: 142) added a criticism of the “foolish Japanese intelligentsia, who thought, like the Italians, that as long as it was a people’s struggle for racial independence it was a good thing, no matter where or how it was portrayed”. What Ōshima intended with *Kōshikei* was not to impose a closed message on the viewer based on empathy towards a nationally or racially oppressed minority, but to make them think about the various issues of the film. When Ōshima claims that a film, to be political, should not have political ends, he means it is in the means of expression, and

not in the meaning of the message, where the most political of cinema lies. This emphasis on means above any teleology recalls the ideas of Japanese New Left thinkers.

For example, it is worth remembering that Nakai stated that, since practice makes a stable observation of the object impossible, it was not legitimate to claim an objective view of reality that helps to establish a teleology. As such Nakai proposed a mediating subject (in the case at hand, it would be the film director) that started from a permanent self-questioning in order to free the subjective energy (*ki*) of the masses (or here, the spectators). But the refusal of Ōshima to impose a message is based not only on the refusal of an objective position and a teleology, but also of any position of power. Ōshima, just as Yoshimoto conceived intellectuals' activism, saw mainstream cinema as a means that ultimately limits the spectator's autonomy, since it expresses itself from a position of power. Therefore, Ōshima filmed as if the only way to promote subjectivity was by using cinema as a medium that self-denies and makes the viewer feel uncomfortable in their passivity. In this regard, cinema was for Ōshima similar to what an assembly was for Tokoro: a space where the activist (in this case the director) negates themselves so that other subjectivities (the spectators) fit, and where the efficiency of results (in this case the efficiency of message generation) is replaced by a process of non-conclusive discussion (here between the film and the viewers). In all these cases, the contradiction underlying self-negation is not something to be overcome, but the starting point of action. Thus, just as Tanigawa defined himself as a member of an anti-political political faction, Ōshima could be defined as a member of an anti-cinematographic cinematographic faction.

It should be noted that Ōshima's self-negation is made up of two sides of the same coin: the director's self-negation in relation to the spectator, and the director's self-negation in relation to the characters. In the case of *Kōshikei*, in order not to impose an ideology on the viewer, Ōshima refuses to impose an ideology on the main character.

This means refusing to portray the main character as he *is* or as he *should be*, which is in line with the ‘original image’ of the masses advanced by Yoshimoto and presented in the previous section. It is decided, instead, to show a character that *becomes* through experience, and is not determined by ideas, circumstances, and the chain of causalities.

From this point of view, interpreting R’s action as explained by his oppression as a member of the Korean collective entity, means ignoring his individual subjectivity. The fact that Ōshima believes that personal acts have political and thus social signification, does not mean that social circumstances explain those acts, much less determine them. In the same vein as Umemoto’s existentialist thinking, Ōshima shows in *Kōshikei* that circumstances enable the choice options of the main character, but the one who decides is him. The core of R’s action is his subjectivity, ultimately undefinable and inexplicable, and thus free. There is nothing better to cinematographically portray the nothingness (*mu*) constituting the core of human subjectivity, than using as the starting point the total loss of memory and identity of the main character. On this matter, one can agree with McDonald (1983: 149) that *Kōshikei* has a noticeable Marxist quality, but not in fact because it offers a deterministic view but quite the opposite, because of its Umemotian-rooted subjectivism, based on a non-deterministic dialectic between the subjective and the objective.

From an Umemotian-rooted conception of subjectivity, R’s crime has the political and social significance of being committed by a subject from an oppressed minority (a *Zainichi*) against a subject from an oppressor majority (a Japanese), but this significance does not itself constitute an explanation or determination of the crime. In this regard, the following dialogue between R’s (first) imaginary sister and the doctor about the reasons for the crime is illustrative:

SISTER: He did not want to be born in Japan. No Korean does. R's father was brought to Japan as a serf. You never understand how we Koreans feel. R's crime was caused by Japanese imperialism. (...)

DOCTOR: If we follow your logic, 600,000 Koreans living in Japan must all commit murder.

Likewise, a very revealing conversation happens between R and his (second) imaginary sister about the reason why he used to imagine himself committing crimes:

SISTER: But why imagine crimes... things that lead to no better future? When people are most oppressed, they long for the brightest of lights.

R: Such people may exist. But I was different.

These dialogues suggest that, ultimately, it is up to each subject to respond in one way or another to the social circumstances they experience. Here imagination is presented as a subjective contraposition to deterministic narratives of reality. There is a turning point around the middle of the film from which this contraposition clearly surfaces and starts to have an active subjective function. While the prison officers, to make R remember who he is, urge him to re-enact his past in a theatrical scene by following the stereotypical depiction of a poor immigrant family, R moves away from the official portrait and starts to imagine a utopian and happy walk with his siblings. But after a while one of the prison officers cuts the scene by saying: "This is all beside the point."

Right then, to limit the increasingly more developed subjectivity of R and make him fit more strongly into the official narrative, the film goes abruptly from the theatrically decorated execution room to the real scenery of the city. However, while one

of the officers does his best to implant in R the thoughts that, according to the official narrative, led him to commit the crime, R instead focuses his attention on a cat. The cat, as Heath ([1976] 1981: 64-69) points out, occupies an 'impossible' space considering the perspective angle. Therefore, it can only be the product of his imagination. This cat functions, through its space disruption, as a deconstructive criticism of the spectator's omniscient gaze in the narration of classic cinema, a narrative symbolized by the officer's voice-over, which is intended to teleologically guide R just as a conventional film would guide the viewer. Moreover, the cat plays the same function as the imaginary walk with R's siblings shortly beforehand and reaffirms his subjectivity in opposition to the narrative being imposed on him. From this scene on there is no longer a point of return in the film: R will become increasingly detached from external narratives and simultaneously more active.

R reaches a full degree of subjective autonomy when the first imaginary sister, who symbolized the old Left, becomes the second one, who can be considered a representation of the New Left's ethos. The second sister symbolizes the self-negating role that, from Yoshimoto's perspective presented in the previous section, the activist intellectual must play to foster the autonomy of the masses. Unlike the first sister, the second one does not interact with R from an external position or try to instil in him a discourse to subjectivize him from above. The second sister is no longer wearing a traditional Korean dress (which symbolizes nationalism) but she is naked next to R, who now also appears naked, both under the same Japanese flag (which symbolizes state oppression) and on the same level. Likewise, unlike the first sister, the second one talks *with* R (letting him speak mainly) instead of talking *to* R (almost without listening to him).

An observation should be made here about the role of the female figure in *Kōshikei*. Although the imaginary sisters are depicted as empowered women, both constitute a

mediation for the subjective development of the man (R) and, ultimately, for his salvation. The most powerful symbol of this man's salvation by a woman is the image, in the last section of the film, of R in his sister's arms, similar to the biblical motif of the *Pietà*. This contradiction, added to the fact that the sister saving R is a product of his imagination unlike the other characters surrounding him, all of whom are men, can be considered an unconscious reflection of the Japanese New Left reality: it was a political space where, although female figures such as Kanba Michiko (killed in a demonstration in 1960 and made into a martyr by the movement), Tokoro Mitsuko (who died right before the 1968 student uprising in the campuses leaving the movement's leadership in the hands of a man, Yamamoto Yoshitaka) and later Shigenobu Fusako (who would take center stage far from Japan, in the Middle East) were extolled in the collective imaginary, they were no more than mere symbols while, in practice, men dominated the movement.

Finally, I want to focus on the ending of the film, which is highly open to interpretation. The prosecutor, the highest representative of the state in the execution room, points to the door and says to R that if he does not feel guilty of his crime, he is free to leave. R heads towards the door, and when he opens it, he is dazzled by a blinding light that prevents him from leaving. How can this apparent rejection of freedom be explained? According to Ogawa (2015: 310) and Ward (2015: 49), this blinding light expresses the omnipresence of the state's power of subjection. However, my analysis suggests the interpretation that the light is R's own subjective consciousness. The priest says to R that the light preventing him from leaving is God, who makes him feel guilty for his sin. As for the prosecutor, he states that the light is the nation, in the presence of which R feels guilty for his crime. But R fully rejects both explanations. He still does not feel guilty. Nevertheless, if R escaped the death penalty just because the state has allowed

to do so, he would in fact be renouncing his subjectivity; it would be a state victory over the subject.

Unlike the execution witnesses, shaped by guilt (a feeling externally inspired, either by the law or by Christian morality) but not by responsibility (they do not feel individually responsible for the hanging), R rejects guilt but not responsibility. He rejects an external power as that which condemns or frees him, and he assumes his responsibility as a way to defend his autonomy in the face of the state. Finally, after claiming that he is doing it for every R, he is hanged by his own will. The final hanging is, thus, the most powerful symbol of self-negation in the film. Once the trapdoor has opened, the last shot shows the rope empty, without R's body. Since Ogawa (2015) considers that in *Kōshikei* the centrality of the theoretical problem of state apparatuses is inseparable from the thematic question of the *Zainichi* (309), he denies the possibility that the disappearance of R's body expressed a utopian scape, because that would involve adopting the view that Korean freedom can only be found outside Japanese sovereign territory (312). However, in light of the Japanese New Left political theories of subjectivity and beyond specific national problems, the empty rope symbolizes the impossibility of the state to constrain the rebel subject, calling into question the state's *raison d'être*.

With this image on screen, a voice-over thanks the execution witnesses for having taken part in the hanging, and then directly addresses the spectators and thanks them as well. *Kōshikei* is, thus, a call for the responsibility of the subject in the face of the reality in which it lives. The final voice-over is in line with the self-negation advanced by the thought of Tokoro, insofar as it urges the viewers to recognize themselves as victimizers, namely, to assume that they indirectly take part in the execution of the death penalty through their passivity in real life. This standpoint is in

line with Ōshima's ([1969] 1992: 198) statement that every Japanese person is responsible for the political situation in Japan.

Conclusion

Both the political theories of subjectivity and the films of the Japanese New Left ideology of which *Kōshikei* is a paradigmatic example, constitute an interesting philosophical exercise, but at the same time they have great limitations in practice. On the one hand, this ideology managed to break into the Japan of the 1960s with a powerful energy emanating from the critical and conscious, not accidental, contradiction of the subject's self-negation. But on the other hand, that contradiction had two main problems in terms of political pragmatism.

First, the instability generated by a subject on a constant search for self-negation impeded the stability and survival of the movement (in this case, both its strictly political variant and its cinematographic one), which quickly collapsed at the beginning of the 1970s (although also for reasons exogenous to the thinking system itself). And second, despite being an ideology concerned with the revolution, it had serious difficulties taking root among the masses in Japan. In the case of cinema, the high complexity of films ended up having a distancing effect with respect to majorities. Something similar happened with the strictly political movement, more focused on the self-transformation of its members than on organizing an effective tool to add majorities together and transform the structures of the post-war Japanese system.

All the same, it is still an ideology of great interest, and its special concern for reflecting on the autonomy of the human being to think and act by itself outside of influences from superior social agents, even those expected to question the status quo (just as the Japanese old left defined itself), prevails.

References

- Desser, David. 2018. "Oshima, Korea, and 1968. *Death by Hanging and Three Resurrected Drunkards.*" In *1968 and Global Cinema*, edited by Christina Gerhardt and Sara Saljoughi, 165-83. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1991. *Ideology. An Introduction.* London and New York: Verso.
- Heath, Stephen. (1976) 1981. "Narrative Space." In *Questions of Cinema*, 19-75. Hong Kong: Indiana University Press.
- Heath, Stephen. 1976. "Anata mo." *Screen* 17, no. 4: 49-66.
- Koschmann, J. Victor. 1996. *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lucken, Michael. 2018. "On the Origins of New Left and Counterculture Movements in Japan: Nakai Masakazu and Contemporary Thought." *positions: asia critique* 26, no. 4: 593-618.
- McDonald, Keiko. 1983. *Cinema East. A Critical Study of Major Japanese Films.* Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Mellen, Joan. 1976. *The Waves at Genji's Door. Japan Through Its Cinema.* New York: Pantheon Books.
- Müller, Simone. 2009. "Existentialist Impact on the Writings and Movies of Ôshima Nagisa." In *Sartre's Second Century*, edited by Benedict O'Donohoe, and Roy Elveton, 191-201. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Muto, Ichiyo and Reiko Inoue. 1985. "Beyond the New Left (Part 2). In Search of a Radical Base in Japan." *AMPO Japan-Asia Quarterly Review* 17, no. 3: 54-73.

- Nakai Masakazu 中井正一. (1936) 1981. "Iinkai no ronri" 委員会の論理 ("The Logic of Committee"). In *Nakai Masakazu zenshū* 中井正一全集 (*The Complete Works of Nakai Masakazu*) 1. Tokyo: Bijutsu Suppansha.
- Nakai Masakazu 中井正一. (1943) 1981. "Katagi" 気質 ("Temperament"). In *Nakai Masakazu zenshū* 中井正一全集 (*The Complete Works of Nakai Masakazu*) 2. Tokyo: Bijutsu Suppansha.
- Nakai Masakazu 中井正一. (1951) 1981. "Nōson no shisō" 農村の思想 ("Thought in the Farming Villages"). In *Nakai Masakazu zenshū* 中井正一全集 (*The Complete Works of Nakai Masakazu*) 4. Tokyo: Bijutsu Suppansha.
- Ogawa, Shota T. 2015. "Reinhabiting the Mock-up Gallows: The Place of Koreans in Oshima Nagisa's Films in the 1960s." *Screen* 56, no. 3: 303-318.
- Oguma, Eiji. 2015. "Japan's 1968: A Collective Reaction to Rapid Economic Growth in an Age of Turmoil." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, issue 12, no. 1: 1-27. <https://apjjf.org/2015/13/11/Oguma-Eiji/4300.html>
- Ōshima, Nagisa. (1967) 1992a. "On the Attitude of Film Theorists." In *Cinema, Censorship, and the State. The Writings of Nagisa Oshima*, edited by Annette Michelson, 133-143. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press.
- Ōshima, Nagisa. (1967) 1992b. "The Error of Mere Theorization of Technique." In *Cinema, Censorship, and the State. The Writings of Nagisa Oshima*, edited by Annette Michelson, 144-158. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press.
- Ōshima, Nagisa. (1969) 1992. "My Adolescence Began with Defeat." In *Cinema, Censorship, and the State. The Writings of Nagisa Oshima*, edited by Annette Michelson, 195-200. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press.
- Raine, Michael. 2012. "Introduction to Matsumoto Toshio: A Theory of Avant-Garde Documentary." *Cinema Journal* 51, no. 4: 144-154.

- Standish, Isolde. 2011. *Politics, Porn and Protest. Japanese Avant-Garde Cinema in the 1960s and 1970s*. New York: Continuum.
- Tanigawa Gan 谷川雁. (1956) 1996. “Shi to seiji no kankei” 詩と政治の関係 (“The Relation of Poetry and Politics”). In *Tanigawa Gan no shigoto 谷川雁の仕事 (The Work of Tanigawa Gan)* 1. Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha.
- Tanigawa Gan 谷川雁. (1957) 1996. “Soshiki to enerugii” 組織とエネルギー (“Organization and Energy”). In *Tanigawa Gan no shigoto 谷川雁の仕事 (The Work of Tanigawa Gan)* 1. Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha.
- Tanigawa Gan 谷川雁. (1963) 1984. “Mu (purazuma) no zōkei” 無(プラズマ)の造型 [“The Structure of Nothingness (Plasma)”]. In *Mu no zōkei: rokujū nendai ronsō hoi 無の造型: 60年代論草補遺 (The Structure of Nothingness: Supplement to the Theories of the 1960s)*. Tokyo: Ushio Shuppansha.
- Tokoro Mitsuko 所美都子. (1966) 1969. “Yokan sareru soshiki ni yosete” 予感される組織に寄せて (“The Organization to Come”). In *Waga ai to hangyaku わが愛と叛逆 (My Love and My Rebellion)*. Tokyo: Zen’eisha.
- Turim, Maureen. 1998. *The Films of Oshima Nagisa. Images of a Japanese Iconoclast*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.
- Umemoto Katsumi 梅本克己. (1947) 1977. “Ningenteki jiyū no genkai” 人間的自由の限界 (“The Limits of Human Freedom”). In *Umemoto Katsumi chosakushū 梅本克己著作集 (Selected Works of Umemoto Katsumi)* 1. Tokyo: San’ichi Shobō.
- Umemoto Katsumi 梅本克己. (1948) 1977: “Shutaisei to kaikyūsei: Matsumura Kazuto no hihyō ni kotaete” 主体性と階級性: 松村一人氏の批評にこえて (“Subjectivity and Class: In Response to Matsumura Kazuto’s Critique”). In

- Umemoto Katsumi chosakushū* 梅本克己著作集 (*Selected Works of Umemoto Katsumi*) 1. Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō.
- Umemoto Katsumi 梅本克己. 1964. *Marukusu-shugi ni okeru shisō to kagaku* マルクス主義における思想と科学 (*Thought and Science in Marxism*). Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō.
- Umemoto Katsumi 梅本克己. (1965) 1977. “Yuibutsuron to ningen” 唯物論と人間 (“Materialism and Humanity”). In *Umemoto Katsumi chosakushū* 梅本克己著作集 (*Selected Works of Umemoto Katsumi*) 1. Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō.
- Umemoto Katsumi 梅本克己. (1966) 1977. “Kokka, minzoku, kaikyū, kojīn” 国家、民族、階級、個人 (“State, People, Class, Individual”). In *Umemoto Katsumi chosakushū* 梅本克己著作集 (*Selected Works of Umemoto Katsumi*) 3. Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō.
- Ward, Max. 2015. “Ideology and Subjection in Ōshima Nagisa’s *Kōshikei* (1968).” In *Perspectives on Oshima Nagisa*, edited by M. Downing Roberts, 33-62. Tokyo: UTCP.
- Yang, Manuel. 2005. “Yoshimoto Taka’aki, Communal Illusion, and the Japanese New Left.” Master’s thesis, University of Toledo.
- Yang, Manuel. 2008. “Yoshimoto Taka’aki’s Karl Marx: Translation and Commentary.” PhD. diss., University of Toledo.
- Yasko, Guy Thomas. 1997. “The Japanese Student Movement 1968-70: The Zenkyoto Uprising.” PhD. diss., Cornell University.
- Yoshimoto Takaaki 吉本隆明. (1954) 1969. “Machiu sho shiron” マチウ書試論 (“An Essay on the Gospel According to Matthew”). In *Yoshimoto Takaaki zenchosakushū* 吉本隆明全著作集 (*Complete Works of Yoshimoto Takaaki*) 4. Tokyo: Keiso Shobō.

Yoshimoto Takaaki 吉本隆明. (1960) 1962. *Gisei no shūen* 擬制の終焉 (*The End of Fiction*). Tokyo: Gendai Shichosha.

I am publishing this article as a Juan de la Cierva-Formación postdoctoral fellow (FJC2020-042854-I, Ministry of Science and Innovation, Spanish Government) at the ALTER Research Group within the Arts and Humanities Department, Universitat Oberta

de Catalunya. The project was supported by the GREGAL Research Group (2017SGR1596, AGAUR, Catalan Government) and by the GETCC Research Group (FFI2014-52989-C2-1-P, Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, Spanish Government), both at the Department of Translation, Interpreting and East Asian Studies, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. I am grateful to Dr Chris Perkins from the University of Edinburgh for his interest in the project and his invaluable advice during its completion. I also thank the journal's reviewers for their insight and generosity.

¹ 'Anpo' 安保 is the abbreviation by which the Security Treaty between the United States and Japan of 1952 is popularly known, which put Japan's territory at the disposal of the US army with the objective of protecting the interests of the capitalist block within the context of the cold war.

² Shinran was a Buddhist monk considered to be the founder of the Jōdo Shinshū 浄土真宗 (True Pure Land) doctrine. He tried to bring Buddhism closer to ordinary people. He maintained that it was faith rather than the Buddhist practices carried out by monks, which led to salvation. According to Shinran, the impossibility of achieving salvation through moral practice led the subject to self-negation or resolution toward death, and it was this self-negation that led to the death of one's former self and the birth of a new self released from *karma* (Koschmann 1996: 117-118).

³ ATG's model fostered the focus on artistic experimentation above mass consumption. The Shinjuku Art Theatre, the official venue of the ATG, reduced its seating capacity from 600 to 400 seats, and in opposition to the big commercial cinemas, prohibited standing or entering late during the screening; moreover, its target was the politically conscious and middle-class intellectual youth (Standish 2011: 6-9).

⁴ Ōshima ([1967] 1992b: 150-153), who had been collaborating with the Shin Nihon Bungaku 新日本文学 (New Japanese Literature) group (which advocated for the

formation of a cultural intelligentsia to guide the masses towards a social revolution), acknowledged the influence of the anti-avant-garde criticism by Yoshimoto on his decision to leave this movement; likewise, Ōshima acknowledged his affinity with the decentralized model of the student movement in the late 1960s.