

Shall We F***?: Notes on Parody in the Pink

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My intention in this paper is to make a number of comments concerning parody in Japanese pornographic cinema. Utilising Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody as "repetition with critical distance" (Hutcheon, 1991: 6), I shall attempt to illustrate the value of a critical impulse that pulls out of prior texts elements that may previously have been ignored or repressed. My starting point is that parody has two faces. It is never simply critical or destructive of its object of attention, but also expressive of a certain affection for the very thing it mocks.

The focus of my analysis is a film made at Nikkatsu Studios in 1984 called *Abnormal Family: My Brother's Wife*, or *Pervert Family: My Brother's Wife* (*Hentai Kazoku: Aniki no Yome-san.*) (See Appendix One.) This sixty minute porn parody in the style of the great Japanese director, Ozu Yasujiro, is the debut effort of Suo Masayuki, now famous both domestically and internationally for his successful feature-length hit comedies *Sumo Do, Sumo Don't* (*Shiko Hunzyatta*, 1992 -- winner of the Japanese Academy Award for Best Film), *Fancy Dance* (1989), and especially *Shall We Dance?* (*Shall we Dansu?*, 1996), which has been the recipient of numerous major film festival awards and is one of the most successful foreign box-office hits to date in the United States. Although Suo is a major contemporary director, I am not at this stage primarily interested in making auteurist claims for his work. (Indeed, in a recent interview with a Japanese newspaper Suo himself talks of his films strictly as commodities: see Yasuyuki, 1997: 9) Instead, I have two other reasons for seeking to investigate the parodic pleasures of *Abnormal Family*. First, I am interested in the film because of what it does to Ozu, a director whose work I love and value very much; more specifically, I want to suggest how the film works as a critical re-evaluation of the Ozu canon, a canon in desperate need of re-consideration by Western critics. Second, I am drawn to the film because of my interest in Japanese porno (poruno) films, particularly the genre known as *pinku eiga*, or the pink film. This cycle of movies has attracted some recent cult and journalistic attention (Hunter, 1998; Rayns, 1995; Weisser and Weisser, 1998), but little scholarly analysis in English to date (for a notable exception, see Desser, 1988: 98-107).

Nikkatsu turned to the production of pink films in the early 1970s so as to help stave off the effects of economic recession. Colonising the market for movie erotica opened up during the previous decade by independents turning out low-budget product (cf. Kanto, Million, Okra, Shintocho, and Wakamatsu), this major mainstream studio initiated its successful *roman poruno* (romantic pornography) cycle. While the pink film has never quite shaken off its low-brow associations, filmed pornography appears to have remained generally more accepted and vibrant in Japan than in comparable nations like the United States and Britain. Consisting of short, hour-long narratives that play in double or triple bills, pink movies have over the last two or three decades constituted a large percentage of Japan's total film output, as a casual glance through the pages of any issue of *Kinema Jumpo* (Japan's most influential film magazine) from the 1970s or 1980s will testify. Moreover, the genre has enabled radical young directors, including Wakamatsu Koji, Morita Yoshimitsu, and Kaneko Shusuke, to

experiment by working within its aesthetic and thematic norms and constraints. Indeed, the most famous exponent of the pink film, Oshima Nagisa -- director of the infamous *In the Realm of the Senses* (*Ai no Koriida*, 1976) and its sequel, *In the Realm of Passion* (*Ai no Borei*, 1978) -- wrote a celebrated article arguing for its revolutionary and liberatory potential (Oshima, 1994: 251-286). Suo Masayuki, then, is only one of a veritable throng of first-time and established filmmakers who have toyed with the creative possibilities opened by the genre's one golden rule; provide the requisite sex scenes every ten or twelve minutes and you can do what you like with the rest of the narrative.

In the early 1980s, according to Thomas Weisser and Yuko Mihara Weisser, the advent of home video hit the Nikkatsu pink and roman porno production lines hard ("Fogging, Editing and Censorship," in Weisser and Weisser, 1998: 27-28). So too did continuing struggles over censorship. After the 1984 Ice Age Summit -- a high-level conference on the future of sex films held between film producers, legislative bodies, and the police -- the industry suffered numerous crackdowns forcing it to seek new methods of survival. Producing "scandalous" parodies of prestigious non-porn texts was one such tactic. After working as a pink scriptwriter (*Scanty-Panty Doll: Pungent Aroma* [*Scanty Doll: Nugitate no Kaori*], 1984) and a pink actor (*Kanda River Pervert War* [*Kanda-gawa Inran Senso*], 1983), Suo was given his first opportunity to direct. For his debut effort he chose to wrap a parodic remake of an Ozu-style film around the obligatory moments of eroticism and nudity. (Suo readily acknowledges the influence on his artistic practice of cinema scholar Hasumi Shigehiko, author of *Kantoku Ozu Yasujiro* [*Director Ozu Yasujiro*], and now president of the University of Tokyo, who taught at Rikkyo University when Suo was a student there. cf. Hasumi, 1984)

Abnormal Family -- which "because of the director's lofty cinematic intentions" Weisser and Weisser dismiss as "*pink light*" (309; emphasis in original) -- can be said to exist only on the margins of the remake. Suo's film does not rework any one prior text so much as a generic product identifiable as the "Ozu text." The specific target of parody's habitual critical scrutiny is here highly significant. Over a thirty-five year period between 1927 and 1962, Ozu made more than fifty films and established himself as one of Japan's great populist directors. Not only did Ozu work consistently throughout the most wrenching times of Japan's recent history, from the rise of mass culture, the spread of fascism and World War Two, to the American Occupation and the nation's emergence as a world superpower, but the genre he chose to work within, the *hoomudorama* (homedrama), or family melodrama, has now become institutionalised on Japanese television. *Abnormal Family* plays with its audience's prior knowledge of what may be termed "Ozu-ness" (or what Weisser and Weisser [308] term "Ozu-isms") by collapsing together thematic and visual quotes from several specific titles, most obviously *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, 1949), *Early Summer* (*Bakushu*, 1951), and *Tokyo Story* (*Tokyo Monogatari*, 1953). In particular, the film makes sustained and highly suggestive use of several formal strategies familiar from a viewing of the six colour titles Ozu made before his death, from *Equinox Flower* (*Higanbana*, 1958) to *An Autumn Afternoon* (*Samma no Aji*, 1962).

A brief plot synopsis of *Abnormal Family* should be enough to illustrate how the film recycles aspects of such prior texts. Set in Tokyo in the present (the mid-1980s), it opens after the wedding of an elder son, Koichi, and his new middle class wife, Yuriko. In the family house, the newlyweds make loud passionate love in an upstairs bedroom as Koichi's widowed Father, together with his younger brother, Kazuo, and younger sister, Akiko, listen while seated around a downstairs dining table. After Kazuo complains that the newlyweds should go somewhere else so as not to disturb the family, Akiko says that she does not want to be an

office lady for the rest of her life -- she will find a nice man and marry him. Father goes to the local bar and then comes home drunk, muttering under his breath how "Mama," the bar hostess, looks just like his dead wife. On a fine sunny day, Kazuo is caught stealing pornographic magazines from a bookseller. Father then tells Yuriko that she looks just like his dead wife.

In the meantime, Koichi has started an affair with Mama, who ties him up, whips him and calls him *buta* (swine). Before long the family, not knowing that Akiko has now started working at a Turkish baths, suddenly notices how radiant she is looking. Father tells Akiko that she reminds him of his dead wife. After Yuriko finds out about Koichi's affair, she takes revenge by comforting the now-humiliated Kazuo by letting him have sex with her. Akiko marries the manager of the Turkish baths and moves out of the house. Yuriko tells Father that she will live with him while she waits for Koichi to return home. After masturbating in the lonely house, Yuriko looks longingly at Father, who as the sun comes up is heard muttering to the memory of his dead wife, "Yuriko's a good wife, mother. She is too good for Koichi. She is a good wife" (See Appendix Two.)

On one level, *Abnormal Family* works as a brilliant technical exercise -- it is quite simply difficult to imagine what a cleverer parody of Ozu's formal concerns may look like. The parody obviously consists in using "traditional" themes for porno ends, which Suo achieves by making repeated connections between the homedrama and the pink film. In other words, Suo's film retains all the appearances of a family melodrama but turns its generic conventions completely around. The music, used as sparingly here as in Ozu, is cheerfully innocent, and the presence on the soundtrack of an electric organ (by sheer serendipity this instrument is called an *erekuton*) recalls not only memories of numerous scenes in Ozu but is the favoured instrument of many porn soundtracks as well. In addition, the family's outrageous sex lives are nicely juxtaposed with their seemingly conventional home lives. Suo also makes sly use of a range of porn actors cast for their physical resemblance to such famed Ozu stars as Ryu Chishu and Hara Setsuko.

Not surprisingly, *Abnormal Family* also approximates all the distinct editing and camerawork techniques found in Ozu films as explicated by such critics as Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell (Thompson and Bordwell, 1976; Bordwell, 1988), Noel Burch (Burch, 1979), and Donald Richie (Richie, 1974). Suo constantly violates the 180 degree line, uses an abundance of match-on-actions to depict minute character movement (most inventively during the sex scenes), utilises low camera angles, static compositions, and an understated style of performance, and emphasises graphic and other compositional relationships over narrative space-time connections.

To illustrate how these formal techniques are recycled to serve specific parodic ends, it is worth looking in detail at the very first scene of the film. *Abnormal Family* opens with a series of spatially disorientating long shots of the Tokyo Tower which, nevertheless, work to establish where the following action is to take place. Through a transitional cut to the interior of a "traditional" Japanese-style house (itself an anomaly, as the settings for the rest of the film are decidedly modern), we see the brother's wife of the title, Yuriko, bow to her new husband before getting into bed alongside him. As Koichi starts to penetrate Yuriko, and so initiate the first of the film's sex numbers, a sudden cut takes us downstairs, where Father, Kazuo, and Akiko are depicted in long shot seated around a small dining table. Each is posed perfectly still and gazes vacantly off into a different corner of the room. When the sounds of Koichi and Yuriko's lovemaking waft downstairs, the three family members look awkward

and make slight embarrassed movements. The 360 degree space of the room is then established through closer dialogue shots: Kazuo: "They should go away for their honeymoon." Akiko: "They're very busy." Kazuo: "Yes, they're very hard working." Akiko: "Hard at work fucking." (See Appendix Three.) After a few more seconds, Father gets up to leave as a match on action takes him to the front door.

After an exterior establishing shot locates the street and the bar Father habitually frequents, an interior medium shot of Mama depicts her saying, "You're late today" (*Kyoo wa osoi n desu nee*) almost straight to camera. Father nods and replies simply, "Hmmm." Suo then cuts back to Yuriko and Koichi having sex doggie-style, an "empty shot" of father's jacket hanging on the wall, and then to a strange elliptical conversation between Kazuo and Akiko. "I'm sorry. Don't cry," says the former. "I'm not crying because you were mean to me," Akiko replies. "I don't know why. Suddenly I felt sad. I'm going to be an office lady for a while, and if I find someone nice I'll get married and that's it" (See Appendix Four.)

The implication here is that the lovemaking upstairs in the family house has emotionally upset Akiko, and that Kazuo for his part now has sex on the brain as well. As Akiko talks to Kazuo, a characteristically Ozu-like low angle shot hilariously depicts her side of the conversation from Kazuo's optical point of view -- as he is crouching down slightly above Akiko, who is seated on the floor wearing a short dress, her brother is excellently placed to observe her exposed panties. Akiko quickly notices this attention, and pulls her dress down as she chastises Kazuo. The latter then looks offscreen, in the direction of the upstairs bedroom, and thus motivates a cut back to the newlyweds in action. By juxtaposing these three locations (bedroom, dining room, bar), a number of associations common to the Ozu text have been set up and then exposed as sexually interrelated. The sound of the daughter-in-law's lovemaking stimulates Father to think of his dead wife; the same sounds make Akiko resolve to work as a Turkish girl (*Toruko-jo*) in a Turkish baths; Koichi is having sex with a woman who may or may not physically resemble his own mother; the fleeting glimpse of his sister's panties motivates Kazuo's later theft of a pornographic magazine.

What the use of such characteristic devices as low camera angles and "empty shots" suggest, then, is that there is always more to an Ozu film than purely formal delights. Suo's parodic approach points towards the interrogation of the ideological assumptions upon which Ozu movies and the genre of the homedrama are built. While the vast majority of the most influential English-language criticism of Ozu's work is formalist-oriented, the transformations worked by *Abnormal Family* raise a number of questions concerning a different approach to critical method. What is this porno film saying about the constituent features of Ozu-ness? How and why does it call for a "sexing" of Ozu? How does it affectionately draw out of prior Ozu texts elements that may previously have been ignored or repressed?

It seems to me that it is worth pursuing two approaches to these questions. First, it is important to consider how the time-lag between the production context of Ozu films and the production context of Suo's *pinku eiga* allows for a certain critical revisionism, or for repetition with critical distance. There are a number of important questions in this regard. For example, what can a parodic remake of prior texts do that the precursors could not (and vice versa)? How does this time-lag allow for the expression of new or different subject matter? One model for this kind of thinking is offered by Brian McFarlane in his discussion of Martin Scorsese's 1991 remake of J. Lee Thompson's 1961 *Cape Fear* (McFarlane, 1996), wherein

McFarlane considers how the thirty year time-lag between the two films has allowed for processes of critical revision.

Second, as I have already suggested, it is possible to take the parodic remake as the jumping-off point for an interrogation of the prior generic texts themselves. This raises the question of how the new text reveals what is repressed or hidden in both the prior texts and, crucially, the critical discourses that circulate around them.

As far as updating goes, *Abnormal Family* can clearly do things that Ozu could not. Although Suo reframes the homedrama as a porn text -- thus highlighting the similarities between the two genres -- the pink film is a product of the 1970s whereas Ozu himself died in 1963. Suo's 1984 narrative is tied very closely to the fashions prevalent in the sex subcultures associated with pink productions at this particular time. However, these contemporary links have been made in ways that are both surprising and intriguing, in that the film remains modern while simultaneously aspiring to the status of an "impossible," post-1963 Ozu movie.

For example, consider the issue of performance. Part of the unusual effect of *Abnormal Family* is caused by having the actors present the sex scenes in mechanical, undramatic fashion, thus mimicking the performance technique Ozu sought from his own actors. Lines are spoken very flatly, facial expressions are blank, body movements are restricted and seemingly unspontaneous, especially during the most erotic moments. In short, the film appears to say, "This is what sex, Ozu-style, must look like." The question raised by such performance styles, though, is one of cultural realism. If Ozu is so "Japanese," and movie sexuality subject, in 1984, to so much contestation around the Ice Age Summit and resulting legislature (cf. consult the 1984 Pink Commandment as described in Weisser and Weisser, 1998: 28), how can such unnatural-looking sex be remotely indicative of how Japanese people really behave in bed? What is so Japanese about any of this? And by extension, don't Ozu's films offer a cultural fantasy concerning "Japanese-ness"?

In a similar fashion, Kathe Geist (Geist, 1991) points out that many Ozu narratives revolve around the problems caused to the middle class family when a young daughter leaves home, either to marry a man or to become an office lady and live a semi-independent life in Tokyo. In Suo's film, the young unmarried daughter, Akiko, leaves home to take up a part-time job in a Turkish baths sexually servicing male clients. This act may be considered a transposition of a crucial plot point from *Early Summer*, wherein Noriko (Hara Setsuko) also leaves the bosom of her family (and also has an older brother named Koichi). Yet it also suggests a further historical logic. In a controversial claim that needs careful handling, Peter Constantine (Constantine, 1993: 39) reports that one of the options open to young middle class women and students who wanted to earn a little extra money in the early 1980s was to work at establishments like Turkish baths and massage parlours. In other words, it is not outside the realm of possibility that the Noriko of *Late Spring* or *Early Summer*, or the Michiko (Iwashita Shima) of *An Autumn Afternoon*, or especially the latter's mischievous Akiko (Okada Mariko), would moonlight as a Turkish girl were she to find herself in Tokyo in 1984 (See Appendix Five.) Similarly, through such contemporary references, the film opens up for inspection the curious relationships that exist in many Ozu narratives between older men and younger girls (cf. *An Autumn Afternoon* is once again of crucial significance in this regard.)

It may be, too, that such generic updateings enable us to locate the repressed in Ozu films and Ozu criticism. Parody can reproduce the pleasures of a prior text while simultaneously interrogating the assumptions upon which that pleasure is based. Indeed, I would argue that

this act of interrogation is a necessary step in Ozu criticism, because writers habitually treat his works as though they were purely formal exercises devoid of popular cultural content. *Abnormal Family*, then, can be read as a piece of audio-visual film criticism, a revisionist piece of Ozu scholarship.

One important observation to make here is that the fact that Suo's movie is a comedy is significant. Reading Ozu as comic contradicts the normative reading of him as a "Transcendental" master of Zen contemplation and spirituality, and it highlights how Japanese comedy often goes against our Western stereotypes of what Japanese cinema ought to be (Barrett, 1992; Bock, 1983; Buruma, 1987). Certainly, the critical cliché about Ozu among Western critics invests heavily in the notion of *mono no aware*, or the pathos of things, which writers tend to read as evidence of the director's "typically Japanese" awareness of the beauty of life's transient, impermanent qualities. (While it would be absurd to deny this quality in movies like *Equinox Flower* and *Tokyo Story*, it would be equally absurd to concentrate on it to the exclusion of all else.) Yet viewing Ozu through the lens of comedy and parody tends to place the emphasis on other matters, such as the director's habitual engagement with popular culture and its social contexts, not to mention the relish he takes in the pleasures of the senses. If in *Late Spring*, *Early Summer*, and countless other titles, such pleasures include walking, appreciating nature, eating, and drinking (not to mention farting in *Good Morning [Ohayo]* 1959), *Abnormal Family* suggests that the list should now be broadened out to include fucking and sucking as well.

Consider how the second scene of Suo's film makes some sharp observations on the ritual drinking of alcohol in Ozu. This subject is occasionally alluded to by critics, but it has seldom been subject to any kind of sociological analysis. (This is somewhat surprising -- after all, if the drinking scenes were taken out of, say, *An Autumn Afternoon*, the film would fall apart. See Appendix Six.) In Suo's film, when Father returns home from seeing Mama at the bar he is met by Kazuo, who confronts him with a question:

Kazuo: You've been there again haven't you?

Father: Oh, yes.

Kazuo: She doesn't look like her.

Father: Oh, yes.

Kazuo: She looks nothing like her.

Father: She doesn't look anything like her? Oh.

Kazuo: Hey, Father, don't drink too much sake. Please take care of your health.

Father: What's this? So suddenly?

Kazuo: It doesn't matter. Go to bed (See Appendix Seven.)

The point of this short exchange -- apart from highlighting the stilted nature of so many dialogue scenes in Ozu, and of showing a son's disrespectful treatment of his father -- might

be said to be to highlight the abrupt nature of Father's question ("So suddenly?"). Within the diegesis itself, the comment makes little sense; this is the very start of the film, and so the back-story to the conversation has not yet been fully established. Yet taken within the context of the discursive meanings that surround "Ozu-ness," it could refer to the striking, if critically unacknowledged fact that in classics like *Tokyo Story* and *An Autumn Afternoon*, children of all ages watch as their fathers (and husbands and brothers) drink themselves silly. Reading between the lines, the unspoken implication behind Kazuo's demand that his father not drink too much might be something like, "What's this? So suddenly? (This is only the second scene and already you're complaining about how the father drinks too much?)," or "What's this? So suddenly? (Fathers always get drunk in Ozu movies and it is only now that this is being pointed out?)"

It could further be suggested that parody, as repetition with critical distance, fulfils a particular function within the cinema industries of strongly consensual national cultures (cf. Suo's spoof short film on the contemporary "salaryman" mentality, *A Classroom for Businessmen* [*Sarariman Kyoshitsu*], 1986). Here, what is repressed by "official culture" will return in playful, often disrespectful "unofficial" form (Buruma, 1984.) So while Japan has some of the strongest censorship laws of all "democratised" societies, it also produces some of the most extreme and violent pornography. In *Abnormal Family*, alcohol consumption and sexual abandon are the mirror-images of restraint and repression, forcing one to ask the question: What happens to all the sexual energy that is generated, deferred, and left unconsummated by Ozu's stories of marriage and remarriage, young women leaving home and moving to the modern city, and older men pursuing younger women?

In his influential formalist reading of Japanese cinema, *To the Distant Observer*, Noel Burch (Burch, 1979: 160) suggests that Ozu films offer a unique form of narrative articulation and disruption in the shape of what he terms "pillow shots." This phrase has been adapted by Burch from:

"*Makurakotoba*, or pillow-word: a conventional epithet or attribute for a word; it usually occupies a short, five-syllable line and modifies a word, usually the first in the next line. Some pillow-words are unclear in meaning; those whose meanings are known function rhetorically to raise the tone and to some degree also function as images."

In other words, pillow shots are "empty shots" seemingly devoid of narrative action or significance (cf. the famous empty shot of the vase at the end of *Late Spring*.) Such shots are somewhat similar to free-frames, except that they always imply a sense of narrative duration, and that they remove the human figure and human movement from the screen. Pillow shots exist, as Burch writes elsewhere (Burch, 1982: 22) on the threshold of the diegesis, on the "outer limits of diegetic production."

Taking my inspiration from *Abnormal Family*, I would like to reappropriate Burch's concept of the "pillow shot" so as to give it (restore?) a more sexualised meaning. In Suo Masayuki's film, the Ozu-style pillow shots are not just "empty shots," they are *also literally pillow shots* -- that is, shots of pillows and beds. They show the empty bed waiting to be filled, the pillows sitting on top of the sheets as if in anticipation, they suggest the memory of an erotic encounter, or they promise the thrill of sexual action yet to come. Even a direct quote from an Ozu "pillow shot" -- such as a male jacket hanging on the wall -- will in Suo's hands both suspend the diegetic flow and also set up the expectation that the rest of the character's clothes may soon be coming off as well.

In a similar fashion, Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell's influential 1976 reading of Ozu emphasises the director's sense of narrative dislocation. For Thompson and Bordwell, there is in Ozu a "disruption of narrative linearity" (Thompson and Bordwell, 1976: 51), meaning that Ozu's interest is in "the spaces between points of narrative action." Ozu uses pillow shots, or what Thompson and Bordwell refer to as "cutaways," "not to signify narrative elements but to spaces just beyond the periphery of the action" (57).

It should be pointed out that the kind of porn films commissioned by Nikkatsu throughout the 1970s and 1980s work in a way analogous to this kind of reading of Ozu's narratives. In other words, they too "disrupt narrative linearity" by taking an interest in "the spaces between points of narrative action" -- simply put, those five or six sex scenes every ten minutes are what count in terms of subject matter. And yet, paradoxically, the sex scenes are themselves always peripheral to the narrative action: while they are the main focus of narrative interest, they do not necessarily advance the key storyline. Moreover, to return to Burch once more, those empty shots, the pillow shots, can themselves be read in a sexualised manner; as a form of wilful self-censorship, or alternatively a sign of radical potentiality in the Ozu textual system. Why cut away at crucial narrative and emotional moments? What kind of emotional or sensual feelings do the pillow shots embody? What do they cut away from? What exactly do they seek to disrupt?

Two themes suggest themselves here. The first is alluded to by Robin Wood in a characteristically perceptive, if methodologically frustrating article on the "Noriko trilogy": *Early Summer, Late Spring, and Tokyo Story*. (Wood and Suo are clearly on the same wavelength in their desire to herald the necessary next step in Ozu criticism -- the sexing of the texts themselves. Suo does this by collapsing the above three texts into one and renaming his heroine Yuriko.) Wood suggests, on the basis of a story from Ozu's childhood reported in Donald Richie's 1974 critical study (Richie, 1974: 124) that Ozu was, if not gay, at least "able to remain in touch with his innate bisexuality" (Wood, 1992: 73). This sensibility, according to Wood, is behind Ozu's great empathy for, nay identification with his female characters like Noriko. Accordingly, rather than being hopelessly repressed films, Wood reads Ozu texts as poignantly *about* the repression of male and female sexuality within patriarchal capitalism. Another way of putting this is to say that pursuing a reading of Ozu through the sexual political terms opened up by Robin Wood and Suo Masayuki exposes members of the Japanese (and by extension other patriarchal capitalist) families as dysfunctional, equipped with sexually ambiguous drives, prone to make "unacceptable" object choices, and vulnerable to the kind of incongruous new meanings opened up through parodic and/or camp re-contextualisation.

The second theme is a little more difficult to handle. Suo's very title, *Abnormal Family*, suggests the concept of incest, a trope that has been very important to Oshima Nagisa's reading of Japanese cinema (see also Allison, 1994). In his *nuberu bagu* (New Wave) films and written manifestos of the 1960s, Oshima rejected Ozu as too "traditional" and repressive (in short, too politically "incorrect" -- a stance shared by other young directors of the time such as Shinoda Masahiro and Yoshida Yoshishige). Yet Oshima simultaneously deployed the incest thematic so as to raise questions concerning the perceived homogeneity and specificities of Japanese culture, especially the perceived monochromatic nature of its citizens' ethnicity. As such, Oshima has played his part in debates over the definition and meaning of *nihonjinron* (literally "theory of Japanese people"), or the discourse of Japanese uniqueness. Contributing to this discourse has been almost a national pastime since the end of World War Two, even if discussion has sometimes been framed in a culturally retrograde, not

to say racist manner. According to Harumi Befu, for example, one of the prime components of *nihonjinron* discourse is "racial homogeneity," or rather "'perceived homogeneity' -- that is, a belief in homogeneity regardless of how heterogeneous the reality of Japanese racial makeup may be" (Befu, 1993: 114).

Abnormal Family contributes to the terms of this discussion by doing two things. First, it marks a step beyond Oshima's critical project in that it retains the 1960s New Wave attention to sexuality while also reclaiming the incest trope from Ozu's family melodramas. Second, it reframes Ozu's perceived concern for the "unique" nature of post-war Japaneseness around sexual and social material, rather than around quasi-mystical, abstract qualities like Zen spiritualism and *mono no aware*. In short, Ozu's work has now become located rather than transcendental.

This happens in Suo's film through the concept of the lookalike. In the world of "Ozu-isms," the lookalike may be considered a paradigm of perceived racial purity. (One of the strangest moments in *Late Spring* occurs when Noriko claims that her [Japanese] suitor resembles American actor Gary Cooper.) In *Abnormal Family* there is an almost literal illustration of Befu's point that the discourse of Japanese uniqueness only has to *perceive* of racial homogeneity. Taking a turn from a similar plot point in *An Autumn Afternoon*, Father is convinced that every woman he meets looks just like his dead wife, even though other characters repeatedly tell him they don't resemble her in the slightest. Similarly, the porn film industry is implicated in the concept of family resemblances in its habitual desire to remake, and so parody, both prior cultural texts and famous national icons (See Appendix Eight.) The lookalikes of Ryu Chishu and other Ozu performers turn star images that are already in mass circulation inside out. So, while Hara Setsuko may be known in Japan as the "Eternal Virgin" (Richie, 1987: 12), the very first scene of *Abnormal Family* depicts Yuriko being penetrated from behind. At the same time, while the actress who plays the Noriko character in Suo's film is recognisable as a Hara Setsuko substitute, she doesn't in truth actually look *that* much like her famous predecessor.

To sum up, I have been arguing that *Abnormal Family* is of value for the ways in which it highlights aspects of the Ozu text that critics have on the whole not been interested in picking up on. The film adopts a critical position that has not been presented elsewhere. As parody Suo's movie embodies the principle of what Linda Hutcheon calls "ironic inversion" (Hutcheon, 1991: 63); that is, it repeats through critical distance, and it does so in a way that subverts some of the concepts so valued by modern artistic cultures, namely originality and individuality. Suo is obviously fond enough of Ozu to willingly subsume his own identity under that of the memory of his mentor's numerous prior texts.

Yet it is also important to remember that the associations that cohere around the notions of irony and repetition in this revisionist treatment of Ozu are themselves encouraged by the playfulness of the great director himself. It may be that Suo's film is so satisfying partly because much of the pleasure of "Ozu-ness" lies in the simple repetition of a good thing. Significantly, Ozu himself remade his own films on numerous occasions -- *A Story of Floating Weeds* (*Ukigusa Monogatari*, 1934) as *Floating Weeds* (*Ukigusa*, 1959); *I Was Born, But...* (*Umarete wa Mita Keredo*, 1932) as *Ohayo* -- and he used immediately identifiable stylistic traits. More than that, he retained his favoured actors across a range of films. In other words, repetition with critical distance was itself a positive factor in Ozu's work, not a sign of cultural regression as it could easily have been.

Abnormal Family updates the fantasy Japan of Ozu Yasujiro into the *demi-monde* of postmodern pornographic parody without sacrificing any of the pleasures of prior Ozu texts. The film encourages a radical re-reading of some of the country's most celebrated and brilliant movies. The critical enumeration of those re-readings shall have to wait for another day, as shall a comparative analysis of the "sexual numbers" in *Abnormal Family* and the "musical numbers" in *Shall We Dance?* (See Appendix Nine.) In the meantime, I hope to have demonstrated the interest of Suo Masayuki's debut feature film. *Abnormal Family* deserves full international distribution and further critical consideration.

Appendices

1. Transliterations from Japanese are given according to the spelling conventions outlined in Jordan and Noda (1987). All Japanese names in this essay are presented according to Japanese convention: i.e. surname first, given name last.

2. "Okaasan. Ii yome zyanai. Koichi ni ha mottai nai. Ii yome zyanai."

All quotes are from an English-language transcript of the film's dialogue prepared by Kimijima Megumi and myself. The screenplay of *Abnormal Family: My Brother's Wife* has been published in Japanese (Yokomori and Nagano, 1996).

3. Kazuo: "Ryokoo ikebaii no ni." Akiko: "Kaisya isogasioi n dattte." Kazuo: "Mazime da naa." Akiko: "Honto. Kusomazime."

4. Kazuo: "Gomen yo. Naku na yo." Akiko: "Anata ni iziwaru sarete nai tenzyana wa yo. Nan da ka. Kyuu ni kanasiku natyata no yo. Kono ma ma sibiraku OL yatte dare ka ii hito mitsu kete kekkon sitara sore de osimai nan te kanasioi zya nai, nan da ka, totemo kanasioi zya nai. Nani yo."

5. Peter Constantine's fascinating book reports on other aspects of Japan's early 1980s sex scene that find their correspondence in *Abnormal Family*. For example, when Koichi takes up with Mama she subjects him to a *sofuto rosoku zeme*, or soft candle attack (99), before offering the *kogane mizu sabisu*, or golden water service (115).

6. One of the observations made in the British Film Institute monograph *Images of Alcoholism* (Cook and Lewington, 1979) is that alcoholics, both onscreen and off, rarely perceive themselves to be alcoholics. It seems to me that Ozu's characters embody all the traits of such a denial.

7. Kazuo: "Mata asoko itte ta no?" Father: "Aa soo ka." Kazuo: "Nite nai yo."

Father: "Soo ka." Kazuo: "Nite nai yo. Zenzen." Father: "Nite nai ka? Soo ka. Nite nai ka?" Kazuo: "Otoosan. Anmari sake nomu na yo. Karada daizi ni site kure yo na." Father: "Nan da? Totsuzen." Kazuo: "Ii zya nai ka. Neroyo."

8. In their generally invaluable book, Weisser and Weisser (1998: 174-175) provide a double-page picture spread of "pink girls who became popular because they resembled a well-known star." Their examples are Kazamatsuri Yuki (who resembles Matsusaka Keiko), Terashima Mayumi (posing as Matsuda Seiko), Hyuga Akiko (Momoe) and Nohira Yuki (Kurihara Komaki). (It might be interesting to consider whether this penchant for lookalikes extends to

the rise of the gay male pink film in the 1990s.) The relation between the porn actress' image and the cultural significance and status of the non-porn icon being impersonated is a subject worth further consideration.

9. See Linda Williams' (Williams, 1989: 120-152) brilliant study of film pornography for the analogy between "numbers" in the porn and musical genres. It may be that future work on Japanese sex films will need to pay greater attention to the differences between soft-core pink films, censored and uncensored "AV" (audio video) titles currently widely available on video, VCD and DVD, and the kind of hard-core sado-masochism fetishised by some Western critics (Hunter, 1998).

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