A Page of Madness: A Neglected Masterpiece of the Silent Cinema

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The history of cinema as a means of artistic expression is a comparatively short one, yet there are many important works--particularly those produced in the silent era--which have been lost forever, preserved in a mutilated version, or not yet properly appreciated. One of the most significant recent discoveries occurred a decade ago in Japan when the renowned Japanese director, Teinosuke Kinugasa (1896-1980), found the negative of his avant-garde film, *Kurutta Ippeiji (A Page of Madness)*, produced in 1926 and considered lost for nearly half a century. Although the film has been shown worldwide since its rediscovery, it still remains oddly neglected and insufficiently analyzed by cinema historians.

In his "newly revised and updated edition" of *The Liveliest Art* (1979), which unfortunately continues to be widely used as a textbook in undergraduate film courses, Arthur Knight appears totally unaware of Kinugasa's masterpiece. On the other hand, Richard Roud, in his recent *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary* (1980), irresponsibly dismisses the film as "in any case an overrated curiosity" (p. 551). With the exception of Nöel Burch's *To a Distant Observer* (1979), which provides a substantial analysis of the film, even the most recent books dedicated to Japanese cinema (Mellen, Bock) mention *A Page of Madness* only briefly, if at all.

The fact remains that historically Kinugasa made the first full feature film whose plot development is radically subverted, while its cinematic structure includes virtually every film device known at the time. These

devices, moreover, are used not for their own sake but to convey complex psychological content without the aid of titles. Thus, the unique cinematic impact and thematic complexity of *A Page of Madness* matches the most avant-garde narrative films of the silent era, including Clair's *Paris qui dort* (1923), Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925), Kirsanov's *Ménilmontant* (1926), Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1926), Gance's *Napoleon* (1927), and Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). Even more than any of these films, *A Page of Madness* employs specific cinematic devices appropriately related to the thematic content *throughout* the film, not merely in isolated sequences.

The story develops in a non-linear fashion, and is concerned with an elderly man (Masuo Inoue), a former steam ship officer who has become the Custodian of the insane asylum where his wife (Yoshie Nagakawa) has been committed after suffering a nervous breakdown. During that breakdown she drowned their infant son and then attempted to drown herself, but her Daughter (Ayako Iijima) prevented her from doing so. In the course of several unsuccessful efforts at rescuing the Wife from the asylum, the Custodian himself becomes depressed, experiencing growing paranoia, accompanied by delusions, hallucinatory images, and a distorted perception of reality. In the end, he emerges a mindlessly optimistic personality, impervious to psychological pain and resigned to continuing his menial job at the asylum where the Wife remains incarcerated.

A mere description of the narrative events in *A Page of Madness* conveys as much of the film's true cinematic value as would a summary of Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. Like Joyce's use of stream of consciousness, Kinugasa's cinematic strategy becomes a seamless whole, the ultimate meaning of which is more than a matter of the sum of its parts; moreover, these parts (shots, sequences, and segments) have their full impact and meaning only when perceived in the course of a film screening.

For the purpose of close analysis, the film's narrative continuity will be divided into 24 segments. Not surprisingly, a film like *A Page of Madness* does not easily divide itself into discrete cinematic units: it is often difficult to determine where one passage ends and the next begins, especially when there are transitional passages which equally belong to both the previous and subsequent segment. But in a general sense, it is possible to establish comprehensive units which differentiate various stages of the narrative development.

Narrative Segmentation of the Film

1. Introduction: a heavy night time storm. Dynamic exchange of details (some of them shown upside down, while most contain only a few frames): street lamp, window, trees, pavement, sewage, car, gust of rain, pedestrian's feet, gutter with water pouring from it. (Dissolve.)

2. A female Kabuki actor in an exotic costume dances in front of an enormous striped ball on a decorated stage. The segment consists of three shots connected by dissolves: the camera slowly dollies back to reveal silhouetted prison bars behind which the Dancer moves. (Dissolve.)

3. The Dancer, now dressed in a torn, black dress, rhythmically moves behind the bars of a cell of the insane asylum. Parallel editing: shots of other inmates in their cells. While moving, the Dancer looks at a photograph of herself torn into three pieces and pinned to the wall of the cell. She falls on the floor.

4. The storm reaches its peak. The Dancer resumes dancing. Dynamic parallel montage: rushing water, Dancer's feet, drums, trombones, bars of the cell over which are superimposed stark white musical notes. The Dancer falls on the floor, her feet covered with blood. The Custodian appears below the window of the asylum in the night.

5. The Custodian walks through the corridor of the asylum, stops in front of cell no. 25 and watches his wife through the bars. She lies on the floor and stares at the drain on the cell's wall, which suddenly transforms into a close up of a baby boy. She falls on the floor.

6. The Custodian speaks to the Wife; she rises from the floor, comes to the bars, and pulls a button from his jacket. As she shakes it in her palm, it slowly transforms into a crystal ball. She sees the Custodian in a distorted image, as she recollects his past--his service as an officer at the time she drowned her baby son, then attempted suicide, only to be prevented by her daughter.

The Custodian: vertical bars and the halo effect

7. Inmates sitting on the floor of their cells while others walk in the garden; a boy chases a runaway dog along the alley; doctors and nurses converse in a hallway; the Dancer stares at the torn photograph on the wall. (She moves aggressively toward the camera).

8. The Custodian's daughter, dressed in a white kimono, visits her father: they walk to the cell of the Wife, who ignores their presence. Suddenly, all of the inmates appear in the corridor and try to attack the Daughter, who runs away in fright. The Custodian looks out the window into the garden.

9. The Doctor (Hiroshi Nemoto), assisted by nurses, examines the inmates. A series of shots in which the camera sweeps over the walls and bars. The Doctor examines the Wife in her cell; the Custodian walks through the corridor, comes to cell no. 25, and watches the examination.

10. The Wife places a button on her head, imagining herself a well-dressed lady (she is reflected upside down in an imaginary mirror). The Dancer (in the adjoining cell) lies prone on the floor, yelling at nurses who pass behind the bars of the cell. Inmates fill the corridor, milling to and fro.

11. The nurses and attendants take the inmates (including several children) for a stroll in the garden where the Daughter visits the Custodian. A group of inmates listen to the ravings of the bearded Madman. The Wife stands below a tree staring into the branches which suddenly transform into a distorted, semi-abstract arabesque. While the Custodian and the Daughter watch her, the bearded Madman attacks the Daughter. The attendants restrain him, and the Daughter runs away in fright.

12. Inmates reposing in their cells; the Dancer dances in her cell; a group of female inmates gather around the Dancer's cell and applaud her performance; another group of male inmates appear in the corridor and walk to the Dancer's cell. A dynamic exchange of the inmates' medium shots and the Dancer's body in motion. A fight erupts in the corridor, the inmates attack each other while the attendants and nurses try to disperse them. The Custodian enters the corridor through the gateway to help dissipate the riot. The bearded Madman attacks him, trying to strangle him. Aided by an assistant, the Doctor separates them; the Custodian thanks him, as the Wife stands near by. A nurse escorts her to her cell, while other inmates are placed in their cells.

13. The Custodian coverses with the Doctor in his office (laboratory). Insert: the Wife stands against the window as if attending to the conversation.

14. The Daughter spins a tall wooden cylinder that contains railroad tickets. A series of dissolving shots of a moving train and wheel. The Daughter meets her boyfriend in his apartment.

15. Transition: several shots of inmates in their cells and the Wife lying on the floor. The Custodian feeds his birds in the cage. A boy enters the room to inform the Custodian about the parade on the street. From his window the Custodian watches. The images of the parade transform into images of the Custodian's past (indicated by the decorative titles, "Lottery...

Lot of big prizes"). At a carnival, the Custodian and the Daughter win a large travelling trunk, which he happily carries off on his back. In his room the Custodian stands at the window and laughs.

16. Inmates in their cells. Custodian walks through the corridor: he enters the Wife's cell and dangles a key in front of her. She taps childishly at the key with a chopstick as if it were a plaything. He gives her some bread to eat. The Doctor appears and the Custodian leaves.

17. In the kitchen, the Custodian washes the dishes. Disturbed, he knocks a pair of bowls from the edge of the table. The shattered fragments, lying on the floor, provoke a memory of his first trip to the asylum, including the fight he had with his wife, in which he held her down forcibly on the car seat.

18. The Custodian relaxes in his bedroom: he goes to the window and looks at the garden where children run along the alley. The Daughter enters the room and talks with him: the emphasized details (an engagement ring on her finger and several shots of her visitng her boyfriend) make it clear that she is engaged. At the same time the Custodian is preoccupied with the images of the past riot in the asylum, especially the bearded Madman who assaulted the Wife. Confused by the Custodian's response, the Daughter leaves disturbed as he looks after her despondently. Insert: a close-up of the broken dishes scattered on the floor.

19. At night the Custodian walks through the corridor (the camera assumes his position and tracks through the corridor, panning left and right). The Wife lies on the floor reaching for the branches which she "sees" above her (the actual shot of the branches is inserted); the Custodian drags her through the gateway, but she does not want to step out of the corridor. They struggle at the exit, as the Wife looks with horror at the outside world. Inserts: a dark tree in the night, a dog howling. The Wife collapses on the floor, and the Custodian runs to find help. She gets up and returns to her cell. Walking through the corridor, the Custodian drops his keys, which an assistant--who appears to follow him--picks up.

20. In his bedroom, the Custodian contemplates: the face of the Daughter appears in the upper left corner of the shot (in double exposure). Another series of images indicate that he is recalling yet another of his attempts to rescue the Wife from the asylum. Three ominous looking inmates (including the bearded Madman and the Doctor) prevent him from taking his Wife out of the corridor. Some female inmates take hold of the Wife, surrounding her. The Custodian attacks the Doctor, who grabs him by the neck; they struggle, but the Custodian knocks the Doctor down and begins to beat him with a map. Three menacing inmates try to stop him; he escapes from them, defending himself with the mop. Suddenly, he sees the Daughter, set upon by the three inmates. She appeals to him. He looks at her helplessly.

21. The Custodian, leaning against the door, looks contemplatively: images of a ghastly procession appear in double exposure over the bodies lying strewn all over the corridor. A series of vertical lines (bars) pass over

his face; as he turns his head to the left, the image of the Daughter appears in double exposure. Dressed as if just married and escorted by the bearded Madman, she is driven in an elegant automobile. In a hysterical outburst, the Wife tries to separate the Daughter from the bearded Madman. The Custodian restrains her with difficulty, and the couple leaves in the car. The Custodian continues to struggle with the Wife as an ambulance (in double exposure) arrives at the spot. Numerous rotating wheels are superimposed over the Custodian dragging the Wife, who tries to get free of him. The ambulance finally takes her away, as the circular wheels are replaced by the square bars of the asylum.

22. The Custodian continues to contemplate while sitting in his bedroom. Insert: the light in the lamp hanging from the ceiling goes out on its own. There follows a set of details depicting ouside reality: flowers, water reflections, empty streets, store windows, houses, and roof tops of a town (apparently the one in which the Custodian worked as a young officer).

The Disturbed Mind: concentric circles and diagonal lines.

23. Three male inmates (the bearded Madman among them) sit on the floor of the asylum corridor, gesticulating angrily in a stiff theatrical manner. The Custodian carries a basket filled with painted Kabuki masks and puts them on their faces. The moment the masks cover their faces, they stop gesticulating. He does the same to a group of female inmates (his wife among them) who sit and gesticulate in the opposite corner of the corridor. Double exposure: the Dancer, wearing a mask, dances in her cell. Finally, the Custodian puts a mask on his own face and embraces the Wife, who also wears a mask: the two of them sway quietly left and right, as the camera pans down to focus on two other masked faces below them. (Dissolve.)

24. The Custodian mops the floor in the corridor. The Doctor and a nurse pass by him, as he bows to them obediently. He watches them: they close the gateway, dividing the corridor into two areas. They stop in front of the Dancer's cell: without the mask on her face, she moves restlessly and gestures angrily at them. The Custodian continues watching: behind the glass door he sees a group of inmates escorted by an attendant. The last among them is the bearded Madman, who stops for a moment and bows humbly. The Custodian pours some cleansing liquid on the floor and continues to mop resignedly. The shot fades out.

Thematic Meaning and Point of View

On a first viewing of *A Page of Madness*, the spectator may find the plot hard to follow and the relationship between characters difficult to understand. The film's fragmented, elliptical narrative and unconventional style of cinematic expression challenge the audience to participate *intellectually* both during and after the screening. Actually, one has to see the film several times to take each sequence, even each shot, as associative material from which a more profound narrative structure will emerge by the end of its reconstruction. But once the viewer becomes familiar with the pattern of the film's evocative juxtaposition of shots and sequences, its symbolism becomes not only clear but richer in its complexity.

As a whole, *A Page of Madness* can be considered an amalgamation of fantasy and reality characteristic of a deranged mind. This is why the relationships between characters are only sketched and left undeveloped: they are meant to instigate in the viewers a mood that will merge with their own feelings for these characters. In this sense, it is never explained why the Wife suffered a nervous breakdown, although it is evident that she has a strong aversion to her husband, whose behavior reveals a certain degree of remorse. As a corollary, it is not clear whether the Wife had an hysterical outburst because she did not approve of the Daughter's wedding, or whether she attacked her and her fiancé because she was already mentally ill. Indeed, the appearance of the bearded Madman in the role of the Daughter's fiance--a typical Freudian combination-replacement of actual events and daily residues--implies that what we see on the screen is entirely the product of the given character's distorted mind. Consequently, though a minor character, the bearded Madman assumes an important role within

the Custodian's recollection, clearly suggesting a mind that is losing touch with reality and the past.

The most puzzling element of the film, however, is the character of the Dancer, with whom the film begins and who reappears eight times as a leitmotif. Most of the Dancer's appearances are brief and are inserted (crosscut) at peak moments of the action. Apparently the Dancer is directly juxtaposed to the Wife's behavior, thus functioning as a kind of "Alter Ego," the external manifestation of a depressed character. Often, due to the short duration of the shots and rapid gestures, it is difficult to distinguish between the Wife and the Dancer.

At the beginning, the Dancer is seen performing a spectacular dance on the stage, while at the end she is seen pacified with a mask on her face, then finally without the mask, dancing as furiously as she did before. The question is why the narrative part of the film begins with the Dancer, and how her initial appearance is related to later ones. The stage dance, in fact, is the only event outside the diegetic structure of the film: the introductory "Storm Sequence" (segment #1) is part of the atmosphere surrounding the asylum (in which the action takes place), while several realistic shots of the parade and carnival (segment #15), and the provincial town (segment #22) are also part of the Custodian's recollections. Thus the Dancer's first appearance (in the theatre) implies the event that occurred in the past, as opposed to the fantasy world constituting the present in which the inmates exist. At the end, the Dancer remains the only inmate who continues to be aggressive and disturbed (segment #24). As such, she is a metaphorical figure: like a recurrent dream image, she appears many times under different guises, illustrating--contrapuntally--the overwrought psychic state of both the Custodian and his Wife.

Kinugasa, however, also uses three kinds of point of view (POV) shots to convey the mental state of his characters and to intensify the overall nightmarish feeling of the film. They are (1) objective shots (i.e., shots representing the author's POV); (2) personal shots (those associated with a given character's POV); and (3) subjective shots (those presenting the actual perception of a character). The initial shot that follows the opening montage provides the viewer with the first readily identifiable point of view in the film: as the camera withdraws from the Dancer, silhouetted bars appear in the foreground. Immediately we try to establish who is "watching" this character. The inclusion of these bars (through which the camera shoots the Dancer) interrupts the linear flow of the narrative, bringing into the diegesis both the character and the author. The next shot is also the author's POV. Once again the shot includes the bars, but now Kinugasa's camera is stationary and remains so in the several shots of the inmates in their cells that follow. The author's POV, however, is disrupted by the perpendicular movement of the camera which withdraws from the nurse as she walks down the corridor, looking off to the right at the celled inmates. Then we see the Custodian for the first time, peering at the window of the asylum in the night.

The next few shots shift to a highly direct, personal POV: the Wife, lying on the floor of her cell, looks up and talks to the Custodian, who is seen from below as he in turn converses with her from the other side of the bars. While here the exchange of the low and high angle emphasizes the spatial relationship between the two characters, the bars superimposed over the Custodian's face indicate something unreal--a notion further enhanced by the fact that he is dressed in a uniform and hat instead of in the civilian suit which he wore in the previous shots as he peered at the window.

The first pronounced subjective POV is the Wife's staring at the drain on the cell's wall with a close up of her child superimposed over it. When the Custodian actually enters the corridor, however, we suddenly realize that his previous conversation with the Wife was her hallucination. (Also, he is no longer wearing his uniform). Then comes the most enhanced of all the Custodian's subjective POV shots: following a shot of him looking down, Kinugasa gives us a high angle shot of the bars as the camera tracks forward to focus on the Wife lying on the floor. This POV is intensified by several shot-reverse-shots that clearly imply the Custodian's perceptual concentration on the Wife.

The pattern of alternation of points of view continues throughout the film, especially in segments #20, 21, and 22 in which the Custodian experiences his own hallucinations. Since these varying points of view are organically integrated into the psychological connotations of events from beginning to end, they will be discussed in the context of particular sequences, along with the interpretation of the relationship between the characters.

Mise-en-Scène and Physical Movement

If we exclude the introductory "Storm Sequence" (meant to provide the atmosphere of the environment), the narrative portion of the film begins with a highly stylized mise-en-scene typical of the theatre. The stylization of the Dancer's movement in front of the striped ball, as explained above, has a symbolic connotation of psychic imprisonment. This fact is reiterated stylistically throughout the film: whenever the Dancer appears on the screen, she is photographed from the frontal ("stagey") camera position, parallel to the point of the view of the inmates who watch her. Similarly, though to a lesser degree, the shots of the Wife are often composed in a "stagey" position, with the camera placed behind the bars that appear in the foreground.

In contrast, the Custodian is photographed from the most diverse angles, which makes him more natural and less theatrical. Even in the penultimate "Mask Sequence" (segment #23), which refers to the theatre, the camera is extremely mobile, while the double exposure of the bars and windows creates a dynamic cinematic abstraction on the screen. This strategy is typical of Kinugasa who always achieves the visual stylization of his mise-en-scene through an interaction between the movement that occurs in front of the camera and the movement of the camera itself. In

addition, almost every shot of the key sequences is "burdened" by a graphic element that dominates its pictorial composition, thus paralleling the tension in the inmates' psyches. The one exception is the first segment with the Dancer, which departs visually from the rest of the film and becomes symbolic of the psychological context of the entire narrative.

Further contributing to the overall pictorial composition of the shot are the actors' gestures and facial expressions, which do more than only reflect the psycho-emotional occurrences within the characters. At the beginning of the major "Riot Sequence" (segment #20), ominous grins cross the faces of the three menacing inmates, accompanied by their histrionic gestures which match with the "anarchistic" mise-en-scène of the entire sequence. In contrast, the Custodian's gestures are for the most part timid and subdued, while his hunched posture (instantly recognizable even in silhouette), his hesitant walk, and constant, obsequious bowing to the Doctor (while at the same time glancing over his right shoulder) enhance the narrative tension in a contrapuntal way. In addition, the Custodian's restrained facial expression functions as a counterbalance to the painfully distressed expression of the Wife. On the narrative level, his expression further indicates the guilt he may feel for her current state of mind.

The sense of claustrophobia which oppresses the inmates is intensified by the visual predominance of cell bars appearing both in the foreground and background of the action. Yet the clear geography of the environment is never revealed: a careful examination of the shots proves that the viewers are never shown the other end of the corridor opposite the gateway (made of bars). This limits their perception and anticipation of a possible escape. On one occasion, in fact, the Custodian drags the Wife toward the opposite end of the corridor (segment #19), but then promptly changes his mind and drags her back. Only at the very close of the film (segment #24) do we see the space behind the gateway at the end of the corridor, this time separating the Custodian from the rest of the corridor where inmates are incarcerated in their cells. Similarly, the asylum building as a whole is never shown; nor is its physical relationship to the outside world (including the garden that seems to surround it) made clear. All this intensifies the viewers' spatial disorientation, restricting their perception exclusively to the interior space--the corridor, several cells, the kitchen, and the Custodian's bedroom. Thus the environmental (interior) claustrophobia is transposed into a metaphor of psychic depression, an introspective yet disturbed world of the inmates.

Lighting

Most of the interior shots in *A Page of Madness* are reminiscent of the technique characteristic of German Expressionism. (Kinugasa, however, claimed to have no recollection of ever having seen any German Expressionist films, though Japanese historians feel that he must have seen some of them.) In particular, the lighting of the corridor is sharply contrasting, emphasizing the harsh verticality of the asylum's construction while

reducing the spatial depth (perspective) of the ambience. Above all, Kinugasa and his cameramen, Kohei Sugiyama, light their actors in such a way that the visual effects obtained on the screen correspond to the emotional "tone" of the characters and their interaction, without respect to the demands of the linear narrative continuity and "objective logic" of the given event. Consequently, the lighting, in an attempt to adjust itself to the shifting emotional connotation of the given dramatic situation, is quite inconsistent from one shot to the next. The segments of the corridor wall between the cells, for example, are never lit the same way twice, so that visually they seem to belong to different environments. In one instance, the lighting of the wall actually changes within the same shot (segment #8) as the Daughter walks out of the corridor. The shot begins with the camera dollying sideways to the left, with the greyish walls behind her; unexpectedly she is stopped by a gaping female inmate, while the camera halts abruptly and immediately pans towards the gateway, encompassing the Custodian in the background. Simultaneously the walls appear suddenly dark, while the characters become silhouetted, paralleling the shift from the Daughter's untainted innocence to her recognition of the harsh reality of the asylum.

The use of the incongruous Expressionistic lighting is emphasized from the beginning, soon after the Custodian's arrival at the asylum. This sequence (segment #15) begins as the camera dollies toward and away from the corridor entrance, concluding as a stationary long shot introducing the viewers to the environment in which the action takes place. Later (segment #19), the camera assumes the Custodian's point of view and pans along the corridor from the Dancer's cell to the Wife's cell, encompassing a stretch of wall that appears on the screen as complete blackness, thereby contributing to the "gloomy" atmosphere of the place of the inmates' state of mind.

Once the Custodian has succeeded in getting the Wife's attention, he is shown side-lighted (by the light coming from the cells, as the black corridor wall continues to loom ominously in the right half of the frame). After the Wife pulls the button from his jacket (segment #16), one of the most striking examples of inconsistent lighting occurs: in a medium shot photographed inside the cell with the Custodian looking off to the left and the Wife in the foreground, the corridor wall beyond is pitch black. But in the close up of the Custodian alone, photographed from the *same* position, the wall has turned light gray. When the Wife looks up at him again, he appears as a distorted (horizontally expanded) face in close up. As she cackles insanely to herself, the walls of her cell appear suddenly dark, lit only by two bright spots of light thrown on the floor. In the following sequences (segments #7 and 8), the corridor is lit in a highly Expressionist manner, each successive ceiling wedge cast with different light gradation and the walls divided horizontally by a strip of darkness that looks almost painted. This pictorial quality of the shot is intensified by double and multiple exposure of the corridor, windows, and bars to such an extent that some of the shots are completely deprived of perspective, thus turning into an expressionistic *painting*, as in the climactic moments of segments #18, 20, and 21.

Silhouettes and haloes, which appear throughout the film, also contribute to the Expressionistic *Einfühlung*. The movements of the inmates, especially those of the Dancer, are always reflected on the white wall in silhouette form. At the climactic moment of physical conflicts (segments #20 and 21), the close ups of the Custodian, the Doctor, and the Wife include bright haloes surrounding their faces. The Custodian's close ups in particular are presented in this way so that he often seems to be totally *estranged* from the environment and the action occurring in it. This further enhances the notion that in a general diegetic sense the depicted events represent a nightmarish world of a distorted mind incapable of separating reality from hallucinations and vice-versa.

Montage

The film begins with the montage, "Storm Sequence" (segment #1), composed of sixty brief shots of rain, a tall street lamp, the pavement, sewage, bars, lightning, drums, and trumpets. The montage structure of this sequence is based on the metrical principle, i.e., the length of the shot is reduced toward the end of the sequence. In addition, the shots are juxtaposed on the principle of their graphic diversity, i.e., the circular shapes (drums, trumpets, and faces are contrasted to the vertical and diagonal shapes (rain, the street lamp, and bars). The sequence is edited with remarkable precision: individual shots appear first as twenty-one frames apiece in length, and are gradually shortened stepwise, a single frame at a time. Yet they are carefully "staggered" through a technique of intermittent backtracing (e.g., 5,4,3,4,3, etc.) that lends the sequence a more jagged, thus kinesthetically energetic, impact. Near its conclusion, the sequence turns into a semi-abstract montage "coda" (composed of shots containing only one frame!), abruptly replaced by three long shots of the circulating striped ball (the circularity of which is emphasized by the dissolving of one shot into another).

If we neglect several brief montage passages (of the inmates sitting and brooding in their cells), the next pronounced montage sequence is associated with the Dancer's movement that irritates the inmates, causing the first riot in the corridor (segment #10). The montage rhythm is intensified here by the optical contrast between the shots in which white dresses dominate and shots which include most of the dark background. The ever increasing montage beat is stipulated by the constant parallel editing of close ups of the Dancer's face, her moving arms and feet, and the distorted faces of the excited inmates. To underscore the visual design of the sequence, Kinugasa includes animated graphics (lightning striking) superimposed over the photographed images. This, together with the connotation of the musical instruments, contributes to the "auditory" impact of this montage sequence.

In segment #18 the montage reiterates the Custodian's recollection of the inmates' riot, as if instigating the second riot and the Custodian's fight with the Doctor (segment #20). Here the montage is subordinated to the

action (mise-en-scene) while the "dialectical conflict between the shots," to use Eisensteinian terminology, is achieved by a constant alternation (not only reduction) of the shots' duration, the presence or absence of optical distortions and blurring camera panning/tilting, and the varying focal distance. The cut on movement is particularly effective in counteracting the limitation imposed on the narrow space (the corridor) in which the chaotic movement is compressed. Diagonally tilted and upside-down images are also used to magnify the scope of the conflict and to infuse the sequence with a kinesthetic intensity. This is how Kinugasa manages to convey a sense of the inmates' reckless energy, their wild behavior which stands for the physical and psychological obstacles that the Custodian has to overcome in order to rescue his wife.

Among the several brief montage passages meant to illustrate the Custodian's steam of consciousness, the most expressive are the ones that flash out his recollection of the Wife's drowning their son (segment #6) and the one of various facial expressions of the enraged Wife inserted within his conversation with the Daughter (segment #18). However, we need to discuss four other such montage passages here. In the Custodian's recollection of the fair (segment #15), the dynamically edited shots (which stylistically approach documentary footage) underscore the atmosphere of the crowded streets and the Custodian's joy. In the "Hallucination Sequence" (segment #21), the continuity editing which depicts the grappling among the Custodian, the Wife, the Daughter, and the bearded Madman is paralleled by a montage of symbolic details (tire, front-light, steering wheel, horn, and bars) superimposed over the ongoing mise-en-scene. The montage tempo is brought to the fore when the Custodian takes the Wife to the ambulance; again, as in segment #12, the montage is designed on the basis of a graphic pattern of the shots (circular shapes versus vertical and diagonal). In segment #22 the montage consists of numerous stationary shots of outside reality, and in segment #23 a series of montage passages (consisting of windows and bars) are superimposed over the Custodian walking through the corridor while distributing Kabuki masks to the inmates.

In short, the montage sequences in *A Page of Madness* generally function as kinesthetic accents that heighten the emotional impact of the key moments in the narrative continuity. Fully integrated within the compositional aspects of the shots, these sequences become an organic part of the formal structure of the film.

Composition of the Shot

The sense of pictorial composition displayed through *A Page of Madness* is remarkable and, like all other devices, is designed to enhance the dramatic conflicts and comment on them symbolically. The Expressionist principle of "painting with light" is used here with a concern for cinematic dynamism, in contrast to the stationary concept of the shot composition in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.*

On a purely graphic level, the most distinct forms that prevail on the screen are vertical and circular (the former related to the bars, the latter associated with the human psyche, head, and face). As one would expect of a film that takes place in an insane asylum, the vertical form is manifested in the shots depicting the increased inmates. However, the extent to which the film is saturated with vertical lines suggests that Kinugasa intended to create a cinematic abstraction that metaphorically reflects not only the tension occurring within the inmates' disordered psyches but also their frustration at being trapped in an inescapable physical situation (the asylum itself). When the Custodian attempts to drag the Wife to the exit (segment #19), his desperation is enhanced by the presence of intersecting bars and the ceiling wedges that surround him in the empty corridor with the gateway in the background. The inmates' uniforms, designed with vertical stripes (which in the same shot constantly change their position due to the inmates' restless behavior), are also part of the pictorial composition of the shot. Architecturally, the vertical design of the corridor, with its tall ceiling supports on each side, provides a general horizontal concept of the asylum as the central space in which the most dramatic events (both objective and oneiric) take place.

The use of verticality as a psychological symbol evolves in a cyclical pattern which parallels the Custodian's entry into the hallucinatory world of the insane. Early in the film (segment #7), there is a slow dissolve from a close up of the Custodian to a shot of the Wife's cell with bars cast forebodingly over his face. Later, as he watches the parade (segment #15), the Custodian appears confined within the framework of his bedroom window. Then just before the "Hallucination Sequence" (segment #20), the Custodian's deepening paranoia is enhanced by the superimposed vertical bars moving over his disturbed face, as if placing him in a psychological prison. The movement of the bars is neatly synchronized with the movement of his face, as the bars turn into silhouettes deprived of a concrete dimension, thus assuming a symbolic connotation.

Let us examine the sequence. First a set of dark, vertical bars, with brightly lit openings between them, enter the right side of the frame, bringing more light to it; these bars pass over the Custodian's face as he looks to the right; as they exit to the left, they become contracted (closer to each other), while the basic image (of the Custodian's face) dissolves into the shot of him lying on the floor with other images (including people's feet walking in a parade) superimposed simultaneously; then a closer view of the Custodian's profile reappears, with another set of dark, vertical bars passing over it; slowly he turns his head to the left, as the contracted bars exit to the left; there follows an abrupt cut to the square prison window with vertical bars on it; through the window a car with headlights approaches from the dark background; the next shot is the brightly lit Custodian's face positioned in the left side of the frame with curved (distorted) vertical bars superimposed over it; cut to a medium shot of the Daughter and the bearded Madman driven in an elegant car with a bright rotating wheel super-

imposed over them and placed in the lower left corner of the frame; this shot introduces a circular graphic form associated with the mental aberration of the Wife and her aggressive attitude toward the Daughter's wedding. Gradually the vertical composition of the shot loses its dominance, as the circular composition takes over due to new thematic elements appearing in the narrative development.

The circular form is generally associated with the Wife's state of mind: it first appears as a big striped ball behind the Dancer moving on the stage and is immediately juxtaposed to the vertical bars of the prison cell. Later it becomes a "frame" for the image of a drowned boy recollected by the Wife as she stares at the drain on the wall, which is part of her vision of the crystal sphere instigated by a button.

Perhaps the most expressive use of the circular form appears in the shots with a halo or spotlight around the characters' faces and inanimate objects in a manner similar to the Expressionist filmmakers' use of the iris-masking device, often without specific narrative significance. In the Custodian's hallucinations, the halo surrounding his face signifies the increasingly narrow limits of the reality within which he operates at a particular moment. Visually extrapolated from the rest of the action and environment, he is perceived as a character within the bounds of his inner world, so that one begins to question whether his attackers truly exist. In other instances, a halo indicates the subjective perception of the characters themselves, as in segment #18 when the Doctor walks forward threateningly to fill the screen, obliterating the Custodian's halo like a symbolic solar eclipse. This optical transformation of the shot's composition produces a highly emotional impact on the viewer who apparently identifies with the Custodian.

The vertical and circular graphic forms in *A Page of Madness* create a kinesthetic conflict from the outset of the film, a conflict that occurs both *between* connected shots and *within* the same shot, reaching an optical climax in the "Hallucination Sequence" (segment #20). At certain points the two forms amalgamate, rising to a new level of symbolic connotation. For example, in the Wife's fantasy of her crying child (segment #6), the boy's face is superimposed over a circular wall drain with a vertical bar gate that is surrounded by a bright halo, thus heightening the dreamlike quality of the image. Equally amalgamated on the graphic level is the recurring shot of the corridor: a square arch fuses with the vertical side wedges and windows as a stage on which reality and imagination work in unison. This idea is indicated at the very beginning when the circular ball dissolves into a silhouetted rectangular door with sharp vertical bars of the cell, suggesting both an entry into and exit from the realm of the insane.

Of course, it would be simplistic, if not misleading, to interpret this graphic conflict as a metaphorical struggle between "positive" and "negative" forces in the human psyche. Its essential purpose is to enhance the emotional and psychological mood of the characters, while at the same time raising that mood to a more symbolic level, that of the complexity of the

human soul and the existential confinement of social beings. But even if one discards such a direct interpretation of the graphic forms which suffuse *A Page of Madness*, their recurrent juxtaposition and overall cinematic integration produce a perceptual effect that the viewers remember long after screening. Actually, repetitive viewing of *A Page of Madness* "imprints" on the viewer's mind an "afterimage" of verticality and circularity, of darkness and light perceived as squares and circles, which makes the film a constructivist narrative film *par excellence*.

So far I have considered Kinugasa's compositional strategy only in the interiors; now some consideration must be given to the exterior setting of the garden. Here instead of the high contrast of the interiors, the photography is soft and saturated with diffused light. There are no foreground objects that preclude the camera view of the landscape, which is treated as an open environment with its elements (paths, fences, trees, lawns, buildings) extending outside the frame. In the major exterior sequence (segment #11), the photography of the garden is conceived in a typical Impressionist manner: its texture is greyish, while the depth of field is reduced, or rather "toned down" optically by an indistinct yet visible background. When the Daughter meets the Custodian, their conversation is presented in several medium shots with background (trees, buildings) exposed in a *sfumato* technique, as if photographed through a transparent veil. Similarly, the shots of the Wife standing below the large tree are photographed with soft focus and are reminiscent of old Japanese engravings. This "mood-setting" stands in contrast to the "graphic setting" of the interiors, thus creating a perfect balance between the two stylistic features of the photography.

Camera Movement and Optical Distortions

Except for the shots of the outside garden, *A Page of Madness* abounds with camera movement, the most "enervating" of which takes the form of swish-panning (*saccade*), i.e., the flick movement of the camera that transforms the objects, faces, and especially the environmental space into an indistinct, multishaped blur. This occurs eight or ten times, mostly to heighten the hectic movement of the inmates or to serve as a transition to the oneiric sequences. In the latter instances, it also signifies a traversal of psychological time, as at the conclusion of the Custodian's recollections of his son's death (segment #6), and in the "Hallucination Sequence" (segment #20). Other times it emphasizes a character's psychic attachment to another person who may not be in the same locale at a given moment. Hence the swish-pans to the left from a close up of the Daughter to a medium shot of her apparently distraught fiancé. When it flashes back to the right, the Daughter jerks her head as if struck by the force of the camera movement itself.

One of the most sensorial swish-pans occurs in segment #9: the stationary shot of a group of nurses and female inmates suddenly swish-pans to (1) a female inmate leaning against a wall while the Doctor smiles at her; (2) three nurses restraining a distraught woman; (3) a very young girl

(out of focus) looking nervously at the ceiling; (4) a tall, beautiful woman staring intently at her hand; (5) two female inmates leaning against each other; and (6) a group of nurses, doctors, and various inmates laughing at an apparent joke. At first, the camera lingers for a few moments on each of these faces, but soon begins to spin faster and faster around the room until the image becomes totally abstract--a vivid cinematic demonstration of how the act of merely perceiving an event (which denotes the atmosphere in the asylum) can turn into a kinesthetic experience of confusion characteristic of psychotic delirium.

The actual camera tracking through the corridor intensifies the uncanny atmosphere of the environment, providing the viewers with a palpable sensation of "being there" or exposing themselves to the unexpected aggression of the intemperate inmates. It occurs several times, mostly to prepare the ground for the imminent outburst of the inmates or to provide the viewer with a sensorial experience of space. After the Wife's vision of the image of her child (superimposed over the circular drain on the wall), there is a compound shot consisting of two similar perpendicular camera trackings through the corridor, one moving *forward* and the other *backward*, which creates a weird perception of an environment stretched in *opposite* directions. The idea of *stretching/straining* is carried out in all the distorted images, especially the close ups of the inmates' faces, with the obvious implication of the unbearable tension tormenting the inmates' psyche threatening to explode in a destructive breakdown.

The first camera travelling takes place in segment #5 when the Custodian approaches the Wife's cell. Here the camera moves both perpendicularly and laterally along the wall until it stops in front of the cell, revealing through its bars the Wife lying on the floor. Similarly, after the Daughter's visit (segment #8), there are two camera trackings inserted among the stationary shots as the Custodian walks toward the Wife's cell in order to take her out of the asylum (segment #19). These tracking shots are succeeded by a montage sequence of the Custodian's fight with the Doctor, at which moment the viewer's experience of the actual space turns into an abstracted (montage) confusion devoid of any spatial orientation.

Some of the brief camera trackings give psychological emphasis to the situation and the relationship between characters. The first meeting between the Custodian and the Daughter (segment #8) is underscored by a subjective perpendicular motion of the camera toward her face (which is first seen in medium shot and then in close up), as the Custodian approaches the Daughter with an unrestrained expression of happiness on his face. But when the Daughter leaves him dissatisfied after a brief conversation, the camera follows her laterally, corresponding to the Custodian's intention of stopping her physically. In this manner the camera enhances the Custodian's estrangement from the Daughter. Further, this proves that Kinugasa is not interested in cinematic devices for their own sake, but only as a means of enhancing the thematic content of his film, even when these devices mean a subtle--and barely visible--contribution to the photographed event.

The final camera movement through space accompanies the Custodian's distribution of the Kabuki masks to the inmates. However, this movement is perceived only partially because, over the tracking shots of the Custodian, there are superimposed several shots of vertical bars and square windows which move (swing) left and right, giving the impression that this is also one of the Custodian's imaginings. After a long dissolve in the introductory shot of the final segment (#24), the camera follows (from a high angle) the swishing mop as it moves over the floor that the Custodian is cleaning. The remaining are static shots of the restrained inmates, their cells and corridor, with a closing long view of the outside portion of the corridor (behind the gateway). For the first time, sunlight penetrates the windows on the right.

As for optical distortion, as I have mentioned above, it is regularly employed to externalize the unbearable psychic tension in the inmates or to represent their subjectively distorted perception of reality. The first of these shots appears immediately after the Wife, enraged by the Custodian's presence, tears the button from his jacket; she glances at his face and sees it horizontally stretched, surrounded by oblique bars (through which he observes her). The shots of decomposed faces are also inserted into sequences with the inmates watching the Dancer performing in her cell, as well as during the ensuing fight among them. Optical distortion reaches complete abstraction in the shots that are inserted at the peak of the Dancer's frenetic performance: a circular object (loosely reminiscent of the striped ball seen in the beginning) rotates in empty space; then it is joined by two banana-shaped objects that pulsate on both sides of the glittering ball. Repeated three times, these abstract shots stand for the inmates' subjective perception of the Dancer's movement, while on a cinematic level, they visually intensify the rhythm of the dance already enhanced by montage.

The distortion of the objective world which occurs in the exterior sequences is perhaps most exciting in a cinematic sense. Thus, when the Wife is shown obsessively staring at the branches in the garden, the following shot shows these branches reflected on the waving water surface: suddenly they begin to deform into a vibrating horizontal arabesque which she finds visually attractive. In the next shot the satisfied expression on her face begins to change tenuously, followed by a shot in which the abstract image of the branches "reconstructs" itself into a "normal" perception, clearly indicating the recurrent shift of the Wife's mind from reality to fantasy and *vice-versa*. The importance of this procedure is reiterated later in segment #9 when the Wife, lying on the floor of her cell, desperately tries to reach the branches by extending her hands toward the ceiling. To make the distinction between reality and fantasy ambiguous, Kinugasa inserts a brief shot here of the branches, but photographed with high contrast so that their predominantly dark look has both an otherworldly and a threatening impact.

Although the optical distortion in *A Page of Madness* is reminiscent of the famous "UFA" effects, here it reaches its full autonomy through both thematic justification and cinematic execution. Used with an absolutely

precise directorial concept of its function within the diegetic structure, this effect, like all other cinematic devices in the film, becomes the stylistic feature of an authentic cinematic *auteur*.

Cinematic Abstraction

Close cinematic analysis of *A Page of Madness* demonstrates that the individual sequences and numerous cinematic devices are successfully executed and justified on the thematic level; it does not, however, reveal the true cinematic impact that emanates from *A Page of Madness* perceived as a whole during an uninterrupted projection. This purely cinematic experience results from Kinugasa's capacity to integrate many and various cinematic devices and extra-cinematic elements into an organic, kinesthetic whole.

The feeling of visual unity and experience of an "overtonal impact" (the Eisensteinian term again seems to be most appropriate) is accompanied by the subtlety with which the various devices and components are brought together. Take, for example, the use of symbolic details, such as the close up of the broken dishes. First the shot appears as a montage accent within the diegetic development (i.e., the upset Custodian working in the asylum kitchen breaks the dishes). Then the same close up is inserted at the end of the sequence in which the Daughter leaves the Custodian's bedroom (segment #18), symbolizing the "failure" of his attempt to establish a relationship with her. (In addition, according to Japanese mythology, there is a custom of breaking dishes belonging to a deceased person.) Another example of Kinugasa's use of symbolic details is the choice of ambulance which takes the Wife to the lunatic asylum. That the car, in fact, is a decorated funeral carriage is not made immediately obvious because of the predominantly circular and vertical objects superimposed over the same shot. Dream symbolism is nevertheless obvious: in the Custodian's deranged mind, the image of ambulance and funeral carriage is identical.

Kinugasa also makes important use of the central corridor with its gateway, which he visually abstracts in a refined way. After the initial double exposure of the two tracking shots of the corridor (segment #3), its actual space (with a clear depth of field) is shown repetitively. Then it is lit differently, depending on the event taking place within it, the contrast being so heightened that the image turns into a flattened silhouetted design (almost a drawing). Gradually the actual environment reaches a complete visual abstraction through multiple exposure of various graphic forms obstructing the view of the corridor. Finally (in segment #24), the central corridor is again seen as an actual space, with clear geography of its location, i.e., being the inner (barred) part of a much longer corridor whose other, front section is mopped by the Custodian. The gateway (at the end of the corridor) is almost always brightly lit, with an indication of free space behind it, in contrast to the dark, claustrophobic depiction of the inner corridor. In fact, the light is materialized in the very last shot of the front corridor (behind the gateway), lit by the sunbeams penetrating

through the windows. This is the only presence of sunlight as a symbol of the hopeful side of human existence.

Similar symbolism can be read into the visual presentation of the bars, whether they are shown separately (in medium and close shots), or as part of the actual environment in which the action takes place. Kinugasa achieves a necessary equanimity between the abstracted (mostly silhouetted) shots of the bars and their physical presence in the environment (in most of the characters' close-ups, the bars occupy nearly equal parts of the frame). This also holds true for the circular form of the wheel that is first introduced as a real car wheel (segment #20), then slowly turned into a graphic ring, a rotating light, and finally a transparent and vibrating circle--a kind of shooting target or blurred roulette wheel (when the Custodian drags the Wife to the ambulance-funeral hearse).

Perhaps the most impressive feature of the film is Kinugasa's consistency in justifying the oneiric inserts, or stream-of-conscious flashes. For example, the Custodian's recollection of the Wife's drowning of their child is evoked not only by his helpless watching of her in her cell, but also by the close up of the button lying on the floor (which she tore from his jacket). The same button triggered the Wife's recollection of her baby (superimposed over the circular drain in the wall). Similarly, the first distorted image of the Custodian's face follows the shot of the Wife looking in the crystal glass. As she turns her head to the Custodian (seen in the background), there is a cut to his face stretched between the oblique bars. Also, the highly abstract distortion of the Dancer's body is fully justified by the maniacal expressions of the inmates who watch her performing in her cell, while retroactively, their faces are equally distorted, representing the Dancer's point of view.

Kinugasa's subtlety is further demonstrated in his capacity to raise montage over and beyond the immediate diegesis. For example, the ambiguous relationship between the Wife and the Dancer is presented in a most sophisticated manner. Through the use of associative montage, Kinugasa suggests a "mysterious" (psychic) relationship between the two women. Numerous shots of them (lying or sitting in their cells) are composed with the evident intention of preventing an instant distinction of the characters, which is even more difficult to perceive in the successive panning shots occurring in different cells. In these moments, the cut is practically seamless, providing the impression of a continuous motion which optically equates the Wife and the Dancer, fusing them into one *persona*.

When the Custodian visits the Wife's cell, a tracking shot discloses that the Dancer's cell is actually right next to the Wife's cell. But they are never shown together in the same shot. After the Daughter's visit with her fiance (segment #14), there is a cut to the Wife sitting on the floor against the wall of her cell; the camera comes closer to her face as she looks intensely upward and to the side; cut to a medium shot of the Dancer lying on the floor in manacles. The symbolic implication of the identification between the two women is clear, yet never imposed on the viewer. It has an

oneiric, I would say, Dreyerian connotation and, in many ways it affects the viewer as do Dreyer's silent films, conveying certain transcendental meanings by purely visual means and by the ambiguous gestures of the actors.

In conclusion, it seems that a comparison between Dreyer and Kinugasa is justified, especially in their concept of abstraction in cinema. Dreyer considered cinematic abstraction as the way in which the director breaks free from naturalism, thereby allowing the film to be not merely visual but spiritual ("Imagination and Color," in *Dreyer in Double Reflection*, ed. Donald Skoller, pp. 178-186). *A Page of Madness* achieves this kind of "spiritualism" through its radical cinematic integration of all the components included in the overall structure of the film. As such, this film rises far above its theme--life in a lunatic asylum--developing a cinematic metaphor about the human psyche and the sufferings it brings to individuals. But what makes Kinugasa's film outstanding in the historical context is the cinematic expression through which the narrative line is conveyed. The purpose of this essay has been to demonstrate by a close analysis of the key sequences that the cinematic devices are fully integrated among themselves and with the film's content. Such integration is difficult to find even in the greatest films of the silent era. Therefore, it is irresponsible and unjustifiable to claim that *A Page of Madness* is merely "an overrated curiousity," when an empirical examination of its structure proves that it cinematically challenges the most important films of the period.

One final comment: the rediscovered version of *A Page of Madness* has been released with a special musical score which Kinugasa approved. It is a chamber composition played by several bamboo instruments with the occasional inclusion of actual sounds and noises, as well as orchestral music (parade and carnival). However, from the first screening of the film in my course, it was clear that the film has a much stronger impact when projected without the sound track. Numerous comparative screenings testified to this fact: students always insisted on seeing the film without sound the third time. Kinugasa himself came to the conclusion that *A Page of Madness* should be totally silent, since only then does it reveal all the subtleties and complexities of its visual structure. This is also clear proof that *A Page of Madness*, like all great and truly silent films, does not depend on any dramatic support, especially from another medium, to convey its meaning and to affect the audience in a way that only silent cinema can.

P.S.: I am indebted to several of my students who actively participated in the close analysis of this film, especially to Daniel Michalek and William Johnson.

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