

Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu¹

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The surviving films of Ozu Yasujiro, being only gradually introduced to Western audiences, are already being comfortably assimilated as noble, conservative works. Young Japanese directors seem to consider Ozu's films old-fashioned, while English-language critics praise their 'beautiful' stories of traditional Japanese family situations. Yet Ozu's films can most productively be read as modernist, innovative works. Because no rigorous critical analysis has been performed upon Ozu's films (in English), we propose to make a first step by using a method adapted from Russian Formalist poetics. In 'On Literary Evolution', Tynyanov writes, 'A work is correlated with a particular literary system depending on its deviation, its "difference" as compared with the literary system with which it is confronted' (L Matejka and K Pomorska, eds: *Readings in Russian Poetics*, Cambridge, Mass 1971, p 72). In this article we shall situate Ozu's work against a paradigm of 'classical Hollywood cinema'. We have chosen to utilise the paradigm for several reasons: the entity it names coincides intuitively with our familiar sense of what 'a film' is; the paradigm has been explicitly codified by many of its practitioners (eg the host of 'rule-books' on 'technique'); and the style of the paradigm has, historically, become a pervasive 'ordinary usage' of the cinema. A background set consisting of this paradigm throws into relief certain stylistic alternatives present in Ozu's films. Though we plan in subsequent

1. Many of the ideas in this article were first presented in several courses at the University of Wisconsin between Summer 1974 and Summer 1975. The authors wish to thank Maureen Turim, David Van Dyck and others for suggestions and information which aided in this research, and also New Yorker Films, and especially Jose Lopez and Sandra Kohlenberg, for enabling us to study many of Ozu's films.

42 research to examine other stylistic aspects, we shall in this essay concentrate upon the relation between space and narrative logic (considered as the cause-effect chain and any parallels or transformations which may be present). Seen against the background of the classical paradigm, the modernity of Ozu's work involves the use of specific spatial devices which challenge the supremacy of narrative causality.

I

In the classical paradigm, the system for constructing space (the 'continuity style') has as its aim the subordination of spatial (and temporal) structures to the logic of the narrative, especially to the cause/effect chain. Negatively, the space is presented so as not to distract attention from the dominant actions; positively, the space is 'used up' by the presentation of narratively important settings, character traits ('psychology'), or other causal agents. Space as *space* is rendered subordinate to space as a *site for action* through several specific procedures, four of which are pertinent to this study.

1. Concentration on specific spatial points seen as the *loci of the drama*

In the classical paradigm, such points are usually the characters themselves; less often, significant features of décor or objects. In both cases, the positioning of the camera is motivated wholly by the narrative dominant. In addition, to heighten the concentration upon the speaking character or the significant object, backgrounds will be thrown out of focus.

2. The 180-degree rule

This minimises the spatial disorientation over cuts; if the spectator's position vis-à-vis the action is always clear, he or she will be able to follow the action in a continuous flow, without pausing to search the screen for clues as to the new spatial relations of the shot. Maintaining the 180-degree rule guarantees that the background space of the scene will not change to any great extent; shots 1 and 2 will share a roughly common background – that area which is on the other side of the axis of action from the camera. Thus the cut will not provide a new space to be examined, which might then distract from the scene's action. (Similarly, the thirty-degree rule avoids 'jumps' at the cuts resulting from too little change in the camera position; such jumps create unwarranted intrusions by space into the smooth flow of action.) In the 180-degree system, the match on action makes the cut virtually 'invisible' and guarantees the greatest link between the action from shot to shot, since there is no break at all; here space is reduced

to its minimum significance, and the dominant action retains all attention. By a combination of these spatial rules for cutting, the films of the classical paradigm create a space which is almost 'unnoticeable' – ie easily 'legible' – because it is always motivated by the ongoing cause/effect chain of the narrative.

3. *Space and objects as externalisation of character traits*

Objects will not be present unless: (a) they will be 'used' for verisimilitude or as 'props', or (b) they reveal something about the characters. The opening scene of *The Maltese Falcon* provides a brief example. Spade is identified by the 'Spade and Archer' sign on his window; this sign is important because it will be changed to 'Samuel Spade' on the death of Archer. Spade is characterised by his tobacco ('Dependable' brand) as soon as we see him. The second desk exists to emphasise Archer and later Spade's responsibility to avenge him; the sofa is there for the captain who delivers the falcon to die upon and the filing cabinets for Joel Cairo to search. Every object presented is 'used up' by the narrative by the time the film is over (the 'Falcon' itself being the most obvious example).

4. *General but not exact continuity of graphic configurations*

The lighting levels of a scene will tend to remain roughly the same throughout, so that the scene will not create abrupt contrasts. Compositions are varied within a few basic patterns. The dominant action will tend to occur centre screen (hence the frequent reframings in films of the classical paradigm). The spectator is certainly not asked to scan the screen to discover the action; space would then come to the foreground, overwhelming the dominant action (as happens, say, in the films of Tati). If two or more characters or actions are present, they will be carefully balanced in the frame. Above all, attention is not called to the screen surface *as such*, as excessively precise graphic continuity would.

These codes within the Hollywood paradigm create a 'closed' space which is subordinate to the narrative. In *Theory of Film Practice* (London 1973, p 11), Noël Burch calls this procedure the 'zero point of cinematic style', because the film-maker declines to use spatial (and temporal) elements as parameters in themselves. Instead space (like time) is deployed to lay out the causal connections of the story, which remain paramount at all times.

II

Given the classical paradigm as a background comparison, we may see how Ozu's films construct a very different system for handling space and narrative logic. As in the films of most directors who

44 have refused the continuity style, the devices Ozu consistently employs form as rigorous an approach as that of Hollywood.

First, however, it is necessary to suggest the limitations of our study. General opinion to the contrary, all Ozu films are not 'the same'. While certain general stylistic principles seem to recur throughout Ozu's career, each film also works on a distinct formal system which cannot be accounted for by generalisations. Close analyses of the individual films are still needed to discover the unique aspects of each. We do not here attempt to characterise Ozu's works exhaustively; rather we hope to lay out several general principles that do carry over consistently through his films, thereby preparing the way for more detailed study. This article is based upon multiple viewings of the following films: *I Was Born, But . . .* (1932), *Passing Fancy* (1933), *A Story of Floating Weeds* (1934), *The Only Son* (1936), *There was a Father* (1942), *The Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (1947), *Late Spring* (1949), *Early Summer* (1951), *The Flavour of Green Tea over Rice* (1952), *Tokyo Story* (1953), *Early Spring* (1956), *Tokyo Twilight* (1957), *Equinox Flower* (1958), *Good Morning* (1959), *Floating Weeds* (1959), *Late Autumn* (1960), *The End of Summer* (1961) and *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962).

The most common description of Ozu's construction of space is the erroneous claim that his shots are always from a low camera angle. In fact, his films *usually* use a low camera *height* (that is, lower than the subject photographed). When the subject is a baby, as in *The Only Son*, the camera may rest on the ground. With seated adults, the camera tends to be at chest height; with standing adults, at about waist height or lower. Long shots of interiors are typically from a lower height than medium shots; long shots of exteriors (buildings, landscapes) are frequently filmed from an indeterminate height that usually remains low in relation to the subject. But in all these cases, the camera is seldom tilted more than a few degrees out of the horizontal plane, yielding an almost straight-on angle in most shots; the floor in most long shots is quite as visible as the ceiling and upper walls. Yet even though most of Ozu's shots can be characterised in this way, his camera position is not invariable. He has many low and high angles in his films. The telephone pole in *I Was Born, But . . .*, the baseball stadium lights in *An Autumn Afternoon*, and the shots of Tokyo taken from the cab fender in *The Only Son* are a few examples of low angles. Similarly, the high angles down on the harbour that open and close *Tokyo Story* are by no means unique in Ozu's work; high angles are used occasionally in long shots over landscapes. Most important, what must be noticed is the 'background' function of Ozu's dominant camera position. Precisely because they are so readily apparent and so consistent, the low camera height and straight-on angle act as a stylistic norm. Against these extremely limited variables, the film 'foregrounds' other aspects of space. As we shall see, certain

spatial devices are made more emphatic when camera angle and height remain constant. 45

Speaking generally, Ozu's films diverge from the Hollywood paradigm in that they generate spatial structures which are not motivated by the cause/effect chain of the narrative. In the terms of Boris Tomashevsky's 'Thematics' (*Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Lincoln, Nebraska 1965, pp 78-87), Ozu's most radical uses of space lack both 'compositional' motivation (ie motivation according to narrative economy) and 'realistic' motivation (ie motivation according to canons of verisimilitude); the motivation is purely 'artistic'. Space, constructed alongside and sometimes against the cause/effect sequence, becomes 'foregrounded' to a degree that renders it at times the primary structural level of the film (as in opera, when the text is superseded, overridden by autonomous musical structures). More specifically, in all the films we have seen, such 'foregrounded' spatial structures are generated through an interplay of dominants and overtones (in Eisenstein's sense – see David Bordwell: 'Eisenstein's Epistemological Shift', *Screen* v 15 n 4, Winter 1974/5, pp 36-7). At times spaces with only the most tenuous narrative associations (and no place in the cause/effect chain) are dominant (ie compositionally salient); narrative elements may enter these spaces as overtones. At other times the narrative may be the dominant, as in a dialogue scene, but spatial elements continue to function as overtones. For example, the first shot of *Good Morning* shows several electrical towers dominating the composition; behind them the roofs of the apartment houses are visible at the bottom of the frame (an overtone of narrative significance, since this is the locale for most of the action). The second shot presents the apartment houses now filling two-thirds of the screen, with the towers visible against the sky beyond them; the apartments have become the dominant and the towers recede into the position of an overtone. But this does not mark the beginning of the narrative action. Ozu then cuts to a shot down the passageway between several rows of apartment buildings; the towers are no longer visible – just the grassy hill at the end of the passage. There follows a cut to a position closer to the end. The apartments are still dominant, but the grass has become somewhat more prominent. Finally, Ozu cuts to a shot with the grass filling the lower half of the screen and four schoolboys walking along it, silhouetted against the sky that fills the top half. The dialogue among these boys will comprise the first scene, which begins after a cut in closer. Space is moved through by means of an interweaving of dominant elements and overtones, coming to prominence or receding from shot to shot. Given the possibility of such spatial play, narrative linearity need no longer provide the core of the film's structure. Narrative causality is relegated to the status of only one 'voice' in a polyphony that gives an equal role to purely spatial manipulations. Let us outline several principles

46 whereby space is constructed in Ozu's films. We shall then have the means to consider more specifically how these devices, in this sometimes dissonant polyphony, contest narrative supremacy.

1. *Intermediate spaces*

Again and again in Ozu's films we find a short series of shots of landscapes, empty rooms, or other actionless spaces, usually between scenes of characters' actions. We can hardly consider these mere 'establishing shots' in the classical Hollywood usage, since many of them are more confusing than orienting; using as many as six, seven, or more shots to establish a locale hardly accords with the classical conception of narrative economy.

Instead, these shots may be seen as one aspect of Ozu's interest in the *spaces between parts of narrative action* – intermediate spaces. John Huston would not think of cutting away from Sam Spade and Brigid O'Shaughnessey to a shot of the coat-rack in the corner of the office unless the hats on it had some significance (eg in the unravelling of the enigma). Yet in *There Was a Father*, Ozu does cut to a coat-rack to begin a sequence in a go-parlour, without ever drawing the hats or the space of the rack into the narrative action. What are the techniques Ozu uses to construct these intermediate spaces?

A common device until his late period was a play with *focus*. The dramatic dominant will sometimes be thrown out of focus; while an overtone of the space of the shot will be quite sharply visible. Several striking examples occur in the films of the mid-1930's. After the father has brought Harue to the café in *Passing Fancy*, there is a title as a character asks, 'She can stay, but will there be any trouble?' A medium shot of Harue seated in the café follows, then a medium shot of the father, with a wooden barrel to the right of the screen. The next cut shifts the camera with the barrel acting as a pivot: the barrel remains in almost the same position in the frame, but now Harue is visible, out of focus, in the background. The father passes in front of the camera from behind the barrel and goes out of frame left. Ozu then holds the shot for several seconds, with the barrel at the right in perfect focus and all the background elements, including Harue, out of focus. Similarly in *The Only Son*, the son and his wife sit talking about how to entertain his mother in Tokyo; they are in the background, out of focus, framed by a doorway. In the room in the foreground, the mother's pillow and bed are in sharp focus. Several shots later Ozu cuts back to a similar but not identical set-up, and now the pillow, still prominent in the foreground, has become an out-of-focus overtone, and the couple is in focus.² *The Record of a*

2. Noël Burch has astutely pointed this out in *Theory of Film Practice*, op cit, p 54. We expect his forthcoming book on Japanese cinema will complement our argument in this essay.

Tenement Gentleman achieves a similar effect with rack focus. The fortune teller and his friend come back from a neighbourhood gathering; the shot shows the interior of their house, the door in the background out of focus, a tea-kettle in the foreground in focus. The men are seen through the window and door, but it is only after they have come into the house (several seconds after they have entered the frame) before refocussing brings the action into sharp view. Although Ozu used this technique less in his later films, there is still an example of rack focus in *Tokyo Twilight*, and the man who introduces Hirayama at the wedding in *Equinox Flower* is seen out of focus in the background of the subsequent medium shot of Hirayama. But for the most part the long shots of Ozu's late films keep all sections of even the most cluttered sets in focus; here colour largely assumes the function of calling attention to spaces away from the dominant action.

Ozu's Agfacolor stock in these films allows him to create a subtle range of colours against which certain bright elements stand out markedly. Sometimes these foregrounded colours relate to the narrative events of the scene, but just as often they function to draw the eye to narratively insignificant space. Reds particularly function in this way; the repeated use of red objects in *Equinox Flower* provides an illustration. Several times the appearance of a red sweater outside the Hirayamas' home is linked by association to the marriage motif. The young lady from Kyoto speaks to Hirayama about her mother's determination to marry her off. The colours are rather muted until she asks, 'Did she speak about my marriage?' Just before the line, Ozu cuts to a set-up of her not previously used in the scene; now a red sweater hanging on a line outside is just visible in the upper right-hand section of the screen. This sets up an overtone which returns later at a key point in the narrative when the wife discovers her husband will go to visit his daughter, whose marriage he had objected to. As the wife sits happily on a chair in the hallway, Ozu cuts to a medium shot of her, and again a red shirt is barely visible hanging on a line in the upper left section of the screen. As the music swells for a transition, Ozu cuts to a line of flapping clothes with a red shirt in the centre. A coloured object, repeated as an overtone, finally comes forward as a dominant; in every instance the space the object occupies is removed from the space of the action, until, in the last shot described, the action is no longer present – non-narrative space has come forward. In other scenes in the film, however, red sweaters are used without relating to the narrative action. Several transitional series contain shots in which young women (not characters) walk past in red sweaters. The Hirayamas' bright red teapot also figures prominently in the *mise-en-scène*. During several transitions into the house it is the dominant visual element, while in several conversation scenes its presence serves partially to distract the eye from the action and lead it to space insignificant to the cause-

48 effect chain. (For a more detailed analysis of the spatial uses of the colour red in *Equinox Flower*, see Edward Branigan's article elsewhere in this issue.) Similar examples of colour used to draw attention to intermediate spaces can be found in all Ozu's late films: variously coloured teapots, plastic tubs, towels, and bottles are among the objects that repeatedly perform this function.

Focus and colour act within shots, but various editing devices also construct space between points. Within scenes Ozu sometimes employs *cutaways* – not to significant narrative elements as in films of the classical paradigm, but to spaces just beyond the periphery of the action. From the funeral dinner in *Tokyo Story* there is a cut to a shot from the porch overlooking the water to the town beyond; two large paper lanterns hang at the top of the frame. In the reunion scene in *Equinox Flower*, Ozu shows a series of medium shots of the assembled men as one of them, Mikami, chants an old military prayer. In the middle of the chanting, the following series of four shots occurs: 1. Medium shots of Mikami, chanting; 2. Medium shot of Hirayama, listening; 3. Long shot of the exterior of the inn (chanting continues off); and 4. Medium shot as 1 of Mikami chanting. From here the scene goes on a few minutes before it ends. The cutaway is the only one of its kind in the film and provokes the expectation of a transition until the cut back inside.

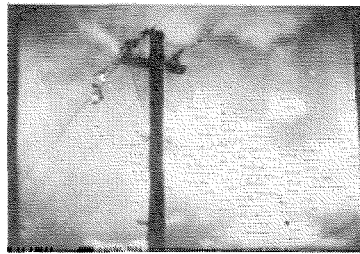
Although this passage from *Equinox Flower* simply moves to a space away from the dominant action, many of Ozu's cutaways function as ellipses within a scene. One such cutaway which demonstrates a daring play with space (and time) occurs in *The Only Son*. The mother and son go to visit the latter's former teacher, who now runs a café in Tokyo. He washes his face as he prepares to talk with them. As he finishes he asks, 'Isn't there a towel around?' Ozu then cuts to an exterior shot of a working-class neighbourhood with hanging laundry. This is followed by a shot across a field to two large storage tanks (one of the shirts from the previous shot just visible as an overtone in the upper left corner), then a low-angle shot of the flapping sign of the café (which we have already seen as the mother and son arrived). The next shot is an interior, showing kitchen utensils and bottles; cut from this to a long shot of the three people seated in another room talking. The former teacher has now changed clothes, indicating that an ellipsis of a few minutes has been covered by the series of cutaway shots outside the building. Other examples of cutting to 'empty' locales to cover time lapses can be found in *Early Spring*, where Ozu cuts to empty rooms or shots of the husband's suits hanging on hooks, and in *Tokyo Story*, in which Ozu cuts together series of shots of unoccupied rooms where action will occur *later* (note the shot of the desk where the boy is *not* studying, but will study in a subsequent shot).

Between scenes, Ozu often employs his famous *transitional*

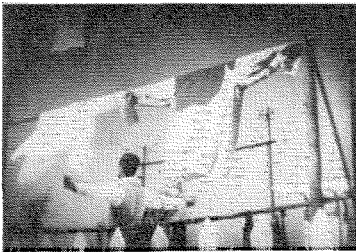
series of shots. The great variety Ozu achieves in these transitions cannot be detailed here, but a careful observation of these devices reveals that Ozu can use anything from a straight cut without music to a lengthy series of six or more shots with extended music over, in moving from scene to scene. It is not the case, however, that the intermediate spaces in such transitions are wholly alien to the sites of the narrative action. Usually the transitional spaces are contiguous with scenographic space, presenting locales near or adjacent to the area of the upcoming scene. The productive features of these spaces are their quantity and patterning. Such shots present, first of all, a surplus; their number exceeds the rules of economy which the classical paradigm assigns to the establishing shot. Secondly the succession of these shots makes the spatial elements of the



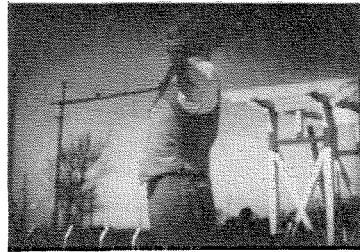
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transition ‘bleed’ gradually into the scene through the interplay of dominants and overtones. Here we will deal with those transitions which move into and out of the scenes through spaces contiguous to or distinct from the cause-effect chain.

An example typical of the ‘trick’ transitions Ozu seems to have employed often in his early films occurs in *I Was Born, But...* . . . As one scene ends, the boys and their father are walking along a road, the camera tracking with them. As they pass the base of a telephone pole (Still 1), Ozu cuts to a low angle shot of the top of what is presumably the same pole (Still 2). After a title, ‘Morning’, the next shot (Still 3) shows several shirts stretched out on a line to dry, with a number of telephone poles visible in the rear. The father is seen between the shirts, stretching his arms out in his exercises; his posture echoes the shape of the shirts. A cut takes

50 us to a medium shot of the father, with telephone poles still in the background (Still 4), and the action of the scene begins. The indirectness of such cutting arises from the overlapping of dominants and overtones from shot to shot; though the spaces so linked may or may not be shown as contiguous, the presence of at least one similar element from shot to shot creates the 'oblique' entry to the scene's space. (Note that the title interrupts this overlap of dominants and overtones. This device is an unsure one; in later films, such transitions are handled without expository indicators of this type. Without the title, it would be unclear whether the telephone pole top seen in the low angle shot is that of the earlier scene or one of those in the subsequent scene. As we shall see in other examples, an ambiguous, 'open' cutting pattern in the transitions is more typical of Ozu's films.)

Several years later Ozu used an even more indirect cutting pattern to arrive at the narrative space in the opening scene of *The Only Son*. The film's first shot is taken from inside an unidentified building which is never established as functioning in the narrative of the film; the camera faces out of a window onto the street, with an oil lamp hanging prominently in the window. Cut to a shot along the street, a lantern in close-up hanging into the frame from the upper right (either another identical lantern or the same one cheated away from the window frame); women carrying bundles enter frame left and move down the street away from the camera. In the next shot the visual elements divide the screen in half vertically: to the left, the women can still be seen moving in the same screen direction, now out of focus, and to the right is a wall with a sign establishing the silk factory the mother works in. The next shot shows the interior of the factory with women at work; cut to a medium shot of the mother at work, her face almost obscured by the steam. But the action does not begin here; after another shot along the turning wheels of the factory, Ozu cuts to a countryside with trees and a house in extreme long shot. This is followed by an interior shot of a cluster of vases, plants, chicks, and another oil lamp. Cut from this to a medium shot of the mother turning a grindstone, and the scene begins. In the classical paradigm, a sign would immediately establish the factory, followed by at least a short dialogue inside the factory. Ozu's approach brings in causally insignificant space and leaves the relations between the locales unclear.

The transition into the scene in which the grandparents wait at the train station to return home in *Tokyo Story* is typical of Ozu's later films. The scene begins with a low-angle shot of a flip-over train schedule-board above a door. Ozu then cuts back to a longer shot with several clocks and schedule-boards visible, including the one already seen; now a rectangular light fixture in the ceiling is visible; cut to another part of the station, with a similar light fixture and clocks in the background – but now the dominant

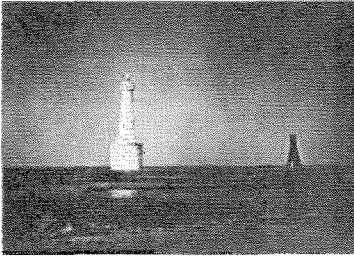
element is a group of people waiting in the foreground. These people are not the characters of the story; however; the *next* shot presents the characters but now eliminates the clocks and lights.

The most transgressive transition we have seen occurs in *An Autumn Afternoon*. The first scene is a dialogue in which the protagonist, Hirayama, tries to persuade his friend Kawai to have dinner with him and a third friend. Kawai persistently declines, insisting he must go to a baseball game. Their dialogue continues off, over a shot of Hirayama's desk and the windows beyond. The typical transition music of the late films comes up before the cut, which reveals the huge floodlights of a baseball stadium at twilight. The baseball announcer's voice is heard over a loudspeaker, which continues over two other shots of other floodlight fixtures. Then Ozu cuts to a straight-on medium shot of a television in an interior, the baseball game being broadcast and the announcer's voice continuing. Cut from this to a shot of four unknown men watching the TV, now visible at the extreme right of the frame. The next shot is taken from down a corridor of the restaurant; the men are now seen at the end of the corridor, while at the extreme left several sets of shoes and hats are visible. Cut to a shot of Hirayama, Kawai, and their friend Professor Horie having dinner, Kawai listening carefully to the progress of the game still audible from the bar. He has in fact abandoned his plan to attend the game, but Ozu's transition goes first to the place the character is *not*, then to the place where he actually is. This sequence is one of the culminations of Ozu's exercises in moving through spaces between scenes independently of any narrative demands.

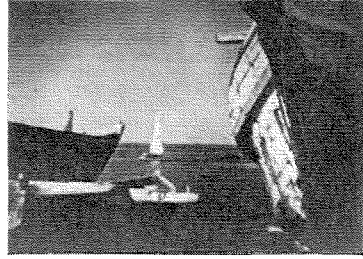
A similar example can be found in the scene in *The End of Summer* when the daughter Noriko calls the Hirayama Clinic just after the old man has his first attack. From a profile shot of her, there is a cut to several shots of the *empty* clinic, then to a series of shots of empty rooms of the family's home. Finally there is a shot of the sickbed with doctor and nurse attending. The initial cut to the clinic seems at first to imply either that we will see the other end of the phone conversation or that the old man has been moved and the next scene will take place in the clinic; Ozu then delays the revelation of the continuation of the plot events for a brief interval. (*The End of Summer* in general has some of the most lengthy, indirect transitions through intermediate spaces we have seen in Ozu's work; note particularly the long series of shots leading into the brief dialogue scene at the bicycle races.)

Two final examples may serve to show how varied such transitions may be. In *Early Summer*, Ozu sets up two simultaneous actions: while several members of the family take the visiting uncle to the theatre, Noriko visits the restaurant of her friend Akiko. As the scene ends, Noriko exits down a stairway at the end of a corridor at the restaurant. The camera, situated at the other end of the corridor, starts to dolly forward *after* she has disap-

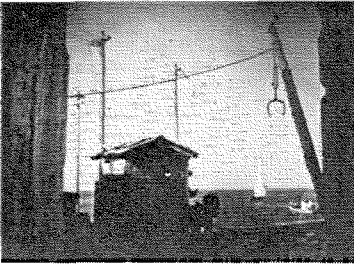
52 peared. Midway through this movement, there is a cut to an oblique dolly through the empty, darkened theatre in which we had earlier seen the family. Again the cut interrupts the movement, and there follows a shot of Noriko and the rest of the family assembled around the table at home. It should be evident by now that Ozu's films include not only the spaces between points but also spaces *before* and *after* actions occur there – after characters have left or before they have come. (This is also reflected in the



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frequent pattern of cutting to a space several seconds before anyone is present, or lingering on a space for sometimes considerable intervals after the characters exit. *The Flavour of Green Tea Over Rice* is in fact partly structured around tracking movements of the camera which take place in these actionless moments.)

One of the most striking transitions occurs in *Floating Weeds*, which presents the acting troupe's arrival by means of a host of intermediate spaces. The first four shots of the film (Stills 5-9) all show a white lighthouse in the background, juxtaposed with a

series of different objects in the foreground: a bottle, several old ships' hulls, telephone poles and sheds, and finally a red letter box. Over this series, the lighthouse progressively appears smaller, gradually shifting from the dominant position to that of an overtone. From the lighthouse and letter box, there is a cut to the interior of a building, with the box still visible through the window. A dialogue scene follows in which several people unimportant to the plot discuss the coming visit of the troupe; one of them puts a poster for the troupe on the interior wall. From a medium shot of this man sitting resting, there is a cut to the lighthouse, this time juxtaposed to a single telephone pole in the foreground. Cut to a shot along the deck of a ship; the water is not visible, so it is difficult to say where this ship is; the next shot reveals several members of the troupe inside the ship. A series of shots of small groups of actors follows, then Ozu cuts back to the shot down the ship's deck. This is followed by an extremely disorienting shot over the side railing of the moving ship: the wooden railing is visible at the bottom of the frame, the sky fills the top portion, and the lighthouse is seen, so placed as to appear to slide along the top of the railing. Again, because of the elimination of the water from the shot, we have no reference point to give a sense of depth which would allow us to see the lighthouse as being fixed in the distance. Cut to a slightly different set-up on the lighthouse and telephone pole, with the ship sailing in past the lighthouse. Finally there is a cut to a variant on an earlier shot: the lighthouse is still seen in the background with poles and sheds in the foreground, but one of the sheds now has one of the troupe's posters on its wall. Characteristically, Ozu has presented the wall before and after being postered without showing the act itself; one bit of the original intermediate space has now been taken up into the narrative, though most remain separate. (In films of the Hollywood paradigm, such emphasis would never be put upon a locale like the lighthouse, unless, say, the lives of the main characters would depend upon that lighthouse in the climactic scene of the film.) Again, this is an extremely 'uneconomical' and oblique way to present narrative; the result is to make certain spaces independently dominant.

Any number of other examples can be found in Ozu's films, all with minute variations and unique characteristics: the transitions from the reunion to the inn at Kyoto in *Equinox Flower*, from Onomichi to Tokyo early in *Tokyo Story*, into the mah-jongg parlour in the initial, hesitating approach to it in *Tokyo Twilight*, and into the many bars and restaurants of *An Autumn Afternoon*.

Through all these stylistic figures – focus, colour, cutaways, and transitions – space becomes foregrounded. Though still usually related to the narrative, space is no longer motivated solely by it. The interplay of dominants and overtones of focus or colour build a space immediately around the narrative chain, more or less con-

54 tiguous but not necessarily subordinate to it. More radically, the cutaways and transitions, being syntagmatically successive rather than simultaneous, interrupt causal continuity by 'wedging in' spaces which do not contribute to the unfolding narrative. What Roland Barthes calls the proairetic and hermeneutic chains, ie the sequences of events and attributes linked in the narrative causally or by their contribution to the establishment and uncovering of an enigma, are forged in part by space in the classical paradigm. In Ozu's films they are thus weakened, 'opened up' to various degrees.

In thus impeding causal continuity – sometimes only for momentary disorientation, sometimes with permanently unsettling effect – the film creates levels 'alongside' and 'against' the narrative. At one level, cutaways and transitions mark temporal ellipses: instead of drawing on non-spatial devices like dissolves or of subordinating space to an adumbrated temporal chain (as in the classical montage sequence), Ozu's films present duration through *spatial* configurations. At a more subtle level, the cutaways and transitions are usually not 'symbolic' of characters' traits, other causal forces, or narrative parallelisms. (Even the vaguely 'Ozu-like' still-life shots at the end of *Tobacco Road* yield specific meanings about the departing couple.) Rather, Ozu's cutaways and transitions usually present spaces distinct from the characters' personal projects. Finally, at the most radical level, in presenting space empty of characters – spaces around characters, locales seen before characters arrive or after they leave, or even spaces which they never traverse – Ozu's films displace the illusion of narrative presence and plenitude. A scene in *The Maltese Falcon* without Sam Spade is possible, but not a scene without any of the characters, without any causal or parallel function in the narrative. Ozu's cutaways contest the imaginary presence of 'human nature' and 'character psychology' in the system of narrative causality by structuring sections of the film around what the classical paradigm can only consider absences.

As a summary example of the disorienting potential of narrative displaced by such absences, consider the opening sequence of *Late Spring*, which involves the arrival of Noriko and then of the widow, Mrs Miwa, at a ceremony connected with the wedding of a friend; the scene ends just after the beginning of the ceremony. The sequence opens with three shots of the Kitakamakura station, where a train is about to come in, as indicated by a bell which begins to ring just before the next cut. The fourth shot is a long view of the roof of a large traditional Japanese building surrounded by trees. Cut inside to a corridor ending in the background at a room where several women are seen sitting. Noriko then enters from a door at the left and all the women bow to her and she to them. She has presumably arrived on the train heralded by the bell, but no one is seen in the shots of the station. and the time of her

walk to the building is elided by the shot of the roof. There now follows a series of eight shots in which Noriko and her aunt talk, Mrs Miwa arrives and the beginning of the ceremony is announced. The next shot shows the exterior of the building with flowers and trees seen in the background; using a progressive overlap of dominant and overtones, there is a cut to a closer shot of the flowers, now with the building in the background out of focus. A shot of a smaller building in the grounds follows, then the next shot (the seventeenth) returns inside to take up the ceremony, which is now under way. Five shots comprise this particular series inside the building, following the ceremony and the onlookers' reactions. The scene ends by returning outside for another set-up on the flowers and building and then a long shot of a hillside with several tall dead trees prominent against the sky. This is followed by a medium-long shot of Noriko's father and his assistant Hattori at home working.

There are several disorienting aspects to this scene. The logical connection of the railway station to the scene that follows is kept out of sight by cutting away from Noriko's (presumed) arrival until she is in the building already. What appears to be the key moment of the scene – the ceremony everyone is gathered for – begins offscreen. Finally, the 'last' shot of the scene, the hillside, is actually the first shot of the next, for the hill is near Noriko's home, not near the building where the ceremony is taking place. (This is made clear only by the repetition of shots of the hillside later in the film, always in transitions involving Noriko's home.) Yet the hillside also appears to be part of the first building's surroundings, yielding an abrupt and ambiguous transition into the space of the second scene.

Of the 23 shots in the scene, nine present exteriors when no one is present. The cutaways and transitions not only elide time and 'spread out' the cause/effect chain but also, by means of the dominant/overtone structure, present a 'scene' constructed as much by relations among 'empty' spaces as by the logic of the narrative. In such ways, all the stylistic figures for presenting intermediate spaces enter into a formal dialectic with the narrative logic.

2. *360-degree shooting space*

The key to an understanding of Ozu's cutting patterns within scenes is his eschewal of 180-degree space. Hollywood's creation of an imaginary axis of action in each scene places the camera within a semi-circular area; often the camera never does move to the other semi-circle, leaving much of the space of the scene invisible, and limiting our vantage point on what is shown. Ozu's space conceives of the shooting area as consisting of *360 degrees* – circular rather than semi-circular. Four shots may show the four walls of a room with no attention to screen direction. We should emphasise that

56 Ozu is not *breaking* an existing line; he has constructed a spatial system which is a complete alternative to the continuity style.

The absence of an axis of action is so pervasive in Ozu's films that virtually any 'action' scene provides examples. In *Early Summer*, one medium shot shows Mamiya, the doctor, and his assistant at a worktable: the shot is almost a profile view, with the men facing screen right; in the background is a door which is to their left. Ozu then cuts to a long shot of a nurse entering and standing in front of a door which is to their *right*; the men are now partially visible on the left, facing left. The camera has been placed on the other side of the men for the second shot, at a position facing almost 180 degrees from the previous set-up. In *An Autumn Afternoon*, after Kawai and Hirayama have brought their old teacher 'the Gourd' home drunk, Ozu presents several shots of 'the Gourd' and his daughter. One is a long shot, with 'the Gourd' in profile at the left, seated bent over on a stool, facing right. His daughter stands just to the right of centre, facing front; the entrance to the shop can be seen behind her. There follows a 180-degree cut to a medium shot of the old man, now seen in profile facing left. The back of the shop is now visible behind him. Clearly this is a situation in which any continuity-oriented director would use shot-reverse-shot.

I Was Born, But . . . offers a more complex instance in the first scene, where the father stands waiting for a train to pass. One medium shot shows a frontal view of the father from the waist up; the striped train guard post is being lowered in front of him and slants from upper left to lower right. The next shot is a medium shot from behind the father, from the waist to the knees; the guard rail now slants slightly up towards the right as it comes down. Later in the scene, we see a low-angle shot of the guard rails up, slanting from lower left to upper right. The father is no longer visible. Next Ozu cuts about ninety degrees to a long shot of the train, which is disappearing down the track. The cuts create a different background in each shot and thus a certain degree of discontinuity.

But such cutting is not completely disorienting; if it were, space would wholly overwhelm the narrative. Typically the films provide *spatial anchors* which situate the audience in relation to the constantly shifting backgrounds. One favourite Ozu device is to have one character's feet protruding into the frame. In *I Was Born, But . . .*, the boys eat their lunch seated in a field. One series of four shots alternates medium views of the two boys, and each shot has the feet of the offscreen boy in a lower corner. A similar device is used in *Floating Weeds*; the actors are sitting about in the upper room of the theatre. One long shot (Still 10) presents an old actor seated to the left of the frame, his legs stretched out towards the right; the boy and the troupe leader's mistress are seen beyond him. Cut to a shot (Still 11) of three actors playing a

game in front of an open window, with the old actor's legs still visible, now stretching into the frame from the right. These legs cue us that the actors are on the other side of the same room. The 57

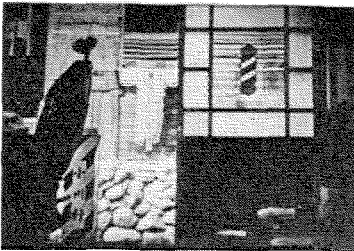


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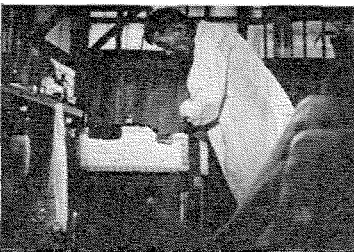
same film provides another, more extended example of spatial anchoring; it opens with a shot (Still 12) looking towards the door or a barber's shop, identified by a little striped emblem on the window; a barber's chair is visible at the left. Cut to a medium shot (Still 13) of the barber's daughter shaving a customer who faces right; the rear wall of the shop is now visible, and the empty



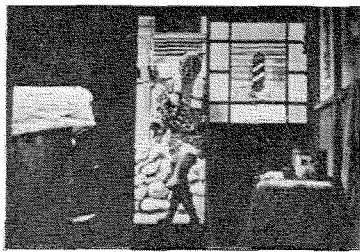
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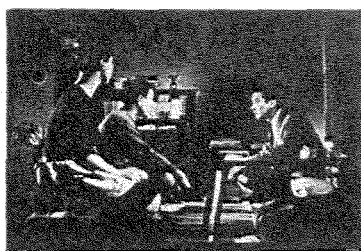
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chair we had seen in the previous shot is now to the right in the foreground. Ozu then cuts to a medium-long shot (Still 14) of the barber himself, seen against another front window of the shop. The legs of the customer being shaved are now in the foreground; he faces left. Finally Ozu cuts back to a shot (Still 15) similar to the first, but now the chair is behind a wall; only the barber's-shop emblem is visible. An actor comes in and the scene begins. This

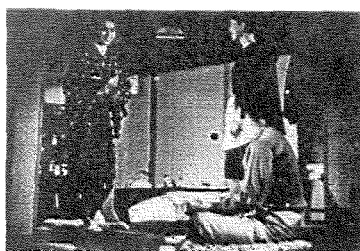
58 complex sequence, each shot with the camera facing in exactly the opposite direction from adjoining shots, forces the spectator to pay attention to space itself or become lost.

Ozu also frequently uses signs as pivots to move about in space. Many restaurant and bar scenes begin with one or more shots of a sign-filled street, then cut to interior shots, matching one sign through a window or door to orient us in terms of the street we have just seen. The red sign outside the café in *Good Morning* is seen through the window after a cut inside. In *An Autumn Afternoon*, the approach to 'the Gourd's' noodle shop is handled similarly by means of the little red-and-white sign just outside the door.

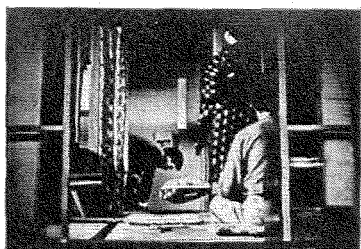
Such 360-degree space does not generate a random pattern which



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simply permits cutting anywhere within the scene. On the contrary, Ozu's scenic space is systematically built up, modified by subtle repetitions and variations within the limits he has set for himself. If Hollywood builds upon spatial patterns bounded by 180 degrees and thirty degrees, Ozu's films use limits of 360 degrees and ninety degrees. As the examples given above imply, Ozu often cuts on multiples of ninety degrees. Thus he may move through an entire circular pattern in laying out the space of a scene, but he will do so in fairly precise ninety-degree segments. The scene of the boys' lunch in *I Was Born, But . . .* is a series of ninety-degree cuts.

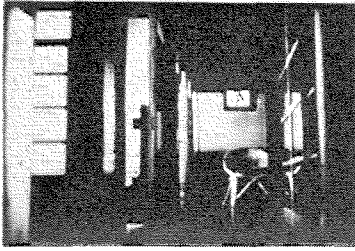
The major set-ups from a scene in *An Autumn Afternoon* demonstrate how Ozu moves through 360 degrees by cutting from one camera position ninety degrees or 180 degrees to a new one; the scene is that in which Koichi's wife finally buys him the golf

clubs. There is a long shot (Still 16) of the four characters present: the wife in the left foreground, Koichi beyond, visible screen right of her, both facing right; his friend is facing him at the right, and Michiko's knees are visible in the lower right foreground. After some inserted medium shots, there is a cut of 180 degrees as the friend and Michiko rise to leave. The wife also gets up, but Koichi remains seated throughout, acting as a spatial anchor. Because of the 180-degree shift, Koichi is now facing left and the wife is in the background (Still 17). There follows a ninety-degree cut to a position behind Koichi, with the friend and Michiko beyond him going to the door (Still 18). After they have gone, Ozu cuts ninety degrees once more. Koichi is now seen in medium shot, again facing right. The sequence has gone through a full circle and the camera is now facing in the same direction as it had been in the first shot described (Still 19). With the next cut, the camera remains in the same spot but has simply been turned 180 degrees; the wife, who is again seated near Koichi, is now seen in medium shot. Cut to a longer shot of the two from the same direction (the wife facing left in each shot) with Koichi in the foreground. Through the entire scene the camera has been shifted 360 degrees, then another 180 degrees, to end facing in the opposite direction from that in which it had begun.

Notice there are two types of circular space involved here. One places the characters or objects at the centre, with the camera situated at points along the edge of the circle. This will often be used when there are several people present, when there is narrative action in the scene, or at the beginnings and endings of dialogue scenes between two people. The second type of circular space places the camera at the centre of the circle, with the characters on the circle itself. (See the diagrams in Edward Branigan's article below p 92.) This is typical of the dialogue scenes, especially when characters are seated; the camera will be between the characters, cutting to frontal shots of each. This circular approach to dialogue scenes is Ozu's alternative to the classic shot-reverse-shot pattern. (Ozu does also use a variant of shot-reverse-shot, but does not stay on the same side of the characters, as we shall see.)

One final variation within this circular pattern should be mentioned. When the spatial lay-out of the scene demands a cut from a straight-on shot of something (whether frontal or from the sides or rear) to a three-quarters view of it, Ozu will cut approximately 135 degrees. Thus he shifts the camera through his circular space in a segment that lies directly between being a ninety-degree or a 180-degree cut. The transition into the scene of the wife sitting listening to the radio in *Equinox Flower* provides one instance. After a shot (Still 20) down the hallway beside the room she is in, there is a ninety-degree cut to a long shot (Still 21) of the wife seen facing right in profile. Ozu cuts 135 degrees to a medium shot (Still 22), a three-quarters view of her face; she is now facing left. Such

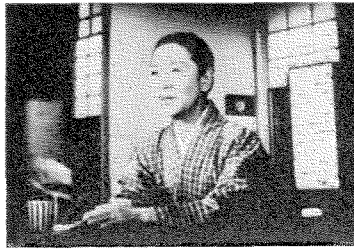
60 135-degree cuts (frequent in Ozu's films) provide a way of moving spatially from the intermediate spaces of the transitions into scenes with one or more people present.



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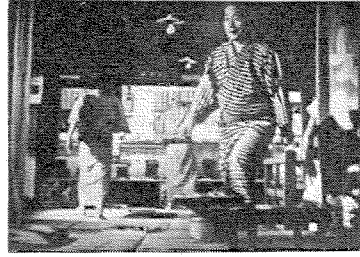
Once this pattern of circular space is established, Ozu's films use the same devices Hollywood does, but without the axis of action. Thus the films also employ *matched action*, but matches occur *across* the 'axis' as effectively as when screen direction is maintained. In the opening sequence of *Early Summer*, there is a long shot of members of the family seated at breakfast; the grandfather is at the left, facing right. He raises a cup to his lips, and on the gesture of him drinking Ozu cuts 180 degrees to a profile shot of the grandfather, now facing left. In *An Autumn Afternoon*, there is a shot of Hirayama, seen waist down and facing left, beginning to take off his coat; his son is in the background. Cut 180 degrees, so that Kazuo is now in the foreground, with Hirayama, now facing right, continuing the gesture of taking off his coat. In *Floating Weeds*, the troupe manager is seen walking across the loft of the theatre; he moves left to right away from the camera (Still 23). As he raises his leg to step up on to a slightly raised platform, cut 180 degrees to match on the movement; now he is moving right to left, facing the camera (Still 24). Earlier in the same film, the manager visits his former mistress. One shot is framed looking from the kitchen to the room beyond where he is sitting. The woman puts a sake bottle on to warm, then goes into the next room and begins to sit, facing directly away from the camera; a 180-degree cut matches on her sitting movement, with the camera now placed directly in front of the woman in medium shot, ready

to begin the pattern of 180-degree pivots in the following dialogue scene. 61

Again, as in the classical paradigm, Ozu's films make extensive use of eyelines to create space. But the continuity style presupposes



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that the intelligibility of eyeline matches depends upon sticking to the 180-degree rule. If you cannot tell what direction a character is looking in, how can there be a match? Yet Ozu employs eyelines while continuing to make 180-degree cuts, thus creating 'discontinuous', but true, eyeline matches. In one of the bar scenes in *Tokyo Twilight*, the bartender and barmaid are on opposite sides of a bar looking diagonally across it at each other. Ozu cuts from a medium shot of the barmaid looking off left at the bartender (Still 25) to a similar shot of him looking off left at her (Still 26).



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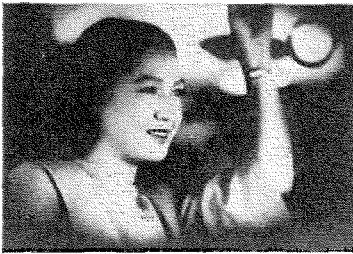


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Hollywood continuity rules imply that the result of such a cut would be to give the impression that the two are situated next to each other looking off at the same thing. Yet, since Ozu has previously shown their relative positions, this is not the effect. Rather, the disorienting but still 'legible' spatial cues once more bring space forward and force the spectator to an active perceptual play with it.

A similar example occurs in *Late Spring*, but here the relative positions of the characters are shown only *after* the discontinuous eyeline match has occurred. Father and daughter are riding the train into Tokyo together. After a shot of the train going along the track, Ozu returns for the second of the series of short scenes inside the train. The four shots of this scene are all medium close-

62 ups: 1. Noriko holding onto a swinging handgrip, facing right (Still 27); 2. her father seated reading, facing right. He looks up and off towards the upper right corner of the frame, saying, 'Want to change places?' (Still 28); 3. Noriko, as before; she glances down and off towards the lower right corner of the frame: 'No . . . I'm all right' (Still 29); and 4. her father as before; he returns to his reading. The next shot returns to an exterior view of the train. In this series of four shots, space is left ambiguous until the end of the third shot; in the classical continuity system, the eyelines would seem to indicate that Noriko is standing facing away from her father, since they both face right. Yet in looking at her father to reply to his question, her eyeline indicates she is indeed facing him, and Ozu has changed screen direction with each cut. This



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scene is typical in that Ozu often has scenes in which every cut will 'break continuity'; also it is indicative of his use of minimal cues to establish space and the high degree of responsibility he places upon the spectator to 'work out' the space in his or her own perception. (Compare the redundant establishing and re-establishing of space in the classical paradigm.)

During dialogue scenes Ozu's films will sometimes include both characters in the shot, then cut back and forth from one side of the pair to the other. Thus the elbow of the listener will be seen in a shot of the speaker; then the cut will cross the line formed by the two, and the new listener's elbow will appear on the *same* side of the frame as the other person's had in the previous shot. Examples of this can be found in the scene in *Tokyo Twilight* where the father talks with his brother in a pinball establishment, or in

There Was a Father in a similar scene where the father meets an old colleague in a *go-parlour*. In such series of shots, the characters will both be shown looking offscreen in the same direction even though we must 'read' the space as if they are looking directly at each other. (The 'graphic match' in a scene from *Passing Fancy*, to be discussed later, offers another, more spectacular example of the across-the-line dialogue scene.)

Analogous to this device are the *ambiguous* eyeline matches Ozu occasionally uses. In such cases, there is a shot of a character or characters looking off, then a cut to a shot which may or may not present what they see. In *Early Summer*, the old grandparents are discussing their missing son with their neighbour; they both pause, and there are medium shots of each looking off right. Cut to a long shot of a pole with three fish-shaped kites tied to it (celebrating 'Boys' Day'). The next shot shows children in the street, followed by a medium shot of Kamiya and his friend playing *go* inside the friend's house. It is not clear whether the kites are something the grandparents can see or not.

Finally, Ozu uses *false* eyeline matches. In this device, a character looks off and there is a cut to something which may at first appear to be what that character sees, but is later revealed to be something else. The provocative cut in *Early Summer* from the tracking shot of Noriko and her friend in the restaurant is an example. As they walk down the corridor to peek at the man Noriko almost agreed to marry, the camera tracks back from them; cut to a track forward, at the same speed, down a corridor. But this is not, as we might at first think, what the two women see; the empty corridor is at Noriko's home and the scene involves the family's concerned discussion of her impending marriage. (In *Ozu: His Life and Films*, Berkeley 1974, p 112, Donald Richie dismisses this cut as 'simple sloppiness'.)

These 360-degree devices have several consequences. They tend to bring the space on all sides of the character into play, making the characters constant but the surroundings and background spaces different from shot to shot. (Cf the classical paradigm, which strives to stabilise the backgrounds while the characters reposition themselves within and between shots.) If, moreover, current hypotheses about the 'suturing' effect of the 180-degree rule and the shot-reverse-shot figure are valid, then Ozu's construction of space can be seen as an alternative to the classical paradigm in that it refuses to inscribe the spectator in a fixed 'relaying' position with respect to spatial and diegetic closure. The viewer must frequently reorient him- or herself in the spatial framework of the scene. (We suggest that Ozu's films provide far more radical examples of the refusal of 'suture' than does *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* – Serge Oudart's chief example in 'La suture', *Cahiers du cinéma* n 211, April 1969, pp 36-9 and n 212, May 1969, pp 50-5.) Finally, in conjunction with the device of intermediate spaces, this shooting

64 space takes on yet another function; the spatial elements around the characters – foregrounded through focus, colour, transitions, and cutaways – are carried through scenes of narrative action as overtones in surroundings activated by the 360-degree system.

3. The 'hypersituated' object

Ozu's treatment of *mise-en-scène* is also important in structuring how we perceive space in the films. Objects are treated in such a way that they become much more noticeable than their narrative function would seem to warrant in traditional terms.

In applying standard critical approaches to Ozu's films, the temptation is to force the objects he uses into symbolic functions. Like the cutaways, there is no doubt that such objects are *sometimes* symbolic. The child's rattle in *Tokyo Twilight* or the grave-stones in *The End of Summer* have fairly clear-cut implications in terms of the narrative. Yet it is difficult, on the procedures of reading learned from the classical paradigm, to 'interpret' the numerous tea kettles, neon signs, fire extinguishers, beer bottles, vases, striped towels, and similar items that are given such prominence in Ozu's *mise-en-scène*. Often too these elements reappear in the intermediate spaces.

To a large extent objects are divorced from function in Ozu's films. They become pure spatial elements, parts of still-life compositions; they are separated from any function in the flow of the narrative. Barthes's discussion of the 'hypersituated' objects of Robbe-Grillet is strikingly relevant to Ozu's *mise-en-scène*:

'Robbe-Grillet's object has neither function nor substance. Or, more precisely, both are absorbed by the object's optical nature . . . function is cunningly usurped by the very existence of the object: thinness, position, colour, establish . . . a complex space; and if the object is here the function of something, it is not the function of its natural destination . . . but of a visual itinerary. . . . The object is never unfamiliar, it belongs, by its obvious function, to an urban or everyday setting. But the description persists beyond – just when we expect it to stop, having fulfilled the object's instrumentality, it *holds* like an inopportune pedal point and transforms the tool into space: its function was only illusory, it is its optical circuit which is real' (*Critical Essays*, Evanston, Illinois 1972, pp 15-16).

It is easy to apply this to Ozu if one substitutes for 'description' the myriad tactics of colour, positioning, timing, etc, by which his shots emphasise an object's visual nature. In Hollywood, any objects which are not used as props or externalisations of character traits are simply there to be minimally noticeable as part of a general verisimilitude – a background for the narrative, an atmosphere of *vraisemblance*. But in many Ozu scenes, the objects in

the space of the scene vie successfully with the narrative action for attention. 65

Let us look, for example, at the famous vase in the scene during the outing at Kyoto in *Late Spring*. Noriko and her father talk while preparing to sleep; she tells him that the idea of his remarrying had been distasteful to her. The shots of the scene leading up to this have been a series of medium close-ups of each, taken from a point approximately between the shoulders of each as they lie side by side in their hotel room. After a medium close-up of the father beginning to snore, there is a cut back to a similar shot of Noriko looking at him, then beginning to turn her head slightly on her pillow, looking abstractedly at the ceiling. Cut to a medium-long shot of a vase in another part of the room, in front of a translucent window covered with silhouettes of the leaves outside. Cut back to Noriko, still moving her head slightly and looking at the ceiling; cut to another, identical shot of the vase, which ends the scene.

Richie (op cit, pp 174-5) implies that the shots of the vase are taken from Noriko's point-of-view. This is not the case, for several reasons. Noriko is looking up in the general direction of the ceiling just before each cut to the vase. Also, the vase is clearly seen in several earlier shots as being in a corner of the room *behind* and to the left of the two beds; if Noriko were to look at the vase, she would have either to raise her head from the pillow or to crane her neck considerably. Richie also interprets the vase as something we as spectators 'pour' our emotions into. He also agrees with Paul Schrader that the vase functions to transform the emotion of the scene into something 'transcendent'. Needless to say, this reading struggles to make the vase 'realistically' and 'compositionally' motivated by the narrative, while we suggest that the vase works against, *brakes* the narrative flow because of its indifference to Noriko's emotional situation. The object's lack of function creates a second formal level alongside the narrative; its motivation is purely 'artistic'.

Such hypersituated objects become particularly prominent during the transitions, when they are often central in one or more shots (and participate in the dominant/overtone interplay, as in examples already discussed). An example from *Equinox Flower* virtually 'bares the device' of the objects' lack of narrative motivation. This is the shot of the large building with a neon advertisement for RCA; the previous scene is an argument between Hirayama and his daughter Setsuko over whom she should marry. Ozu cuts from a long shot of Hirayama to the shot of the RCA building, then to a shot of the street where the Luna Bar is located; the next scene takes place in the Luna Bar. Why the shot of the RCA building? Not to establish the locale: we have been to the Luna Bar previously in the film, and at that point it was established simply with two shots of the street outside the bar with its lighted sign visible. Even if the RCA building is a prominent Tokyo landmark, its estab-

66 lishing function is negated by showing it only the *second* time we see the bar. In fact, its inclusion works against a sense of place; if Ozu had cut directly from Hirayama to the Luna Bar, we would have recognised it at once. As it is, we are delayed and given a 'false start' into the scene by being momentarily disoriented during the RCA-building shot. Although the inclusion of the building is not arbitrary, it does not participate in furthering the narrative, even by carrying symbolic meaning. Like the intermediate spaces, such 'inscrutable' objects (and it may be that their only signification is just this inscrutability) drive wedges into the cause/effect chain.

4. *Graphic configurations*

One result of Ozu's interest in space as an element apart from narrative is that graphic configurations take on a major structuring role. Often the only governing factor in a cut from one space to another will be the resulting juxtaposition of pictorial elements.

Although Ozu does sometimes use strong visual contrast from shot to shot (as in the strong lights and darks of some *Tokyo Twilight* conversation scenes), one of his films' most notable features is the use of what we might call the *graphic match*. In other words, one or more objects, shapes, and/or colours will be positioned within the frame in one shot in such a way that the element will be matched by a similar element in the next shot. Ozu thus seeks a *stronger graphic* continuity from shot to shot than the classical paradigm permits. This technique appears in Ozu's early films, but there it is often tied fairly closely to the narrative line. In *Passing Fancy*, for example, there are two transitions accomplished by a straight cut from a shot of the father shaking out his coat in the street to one of him shaking it out and hanging it up at home. This *Marienbad*-style device allows Ozu to change the time and space at the cut by matching only visual aspects. A similar transition in the same film cuts from the boy's hands discovering a tear in his coat to the café-owner's hands mending the tear. Most dramatically, in the scene in which the hero's friend Jiro finally tells Harue he is in love with her, Jiro is standing just to the left of centre screen; with his left hand he grasps Harue's hand, which is visible in the lower left corner of the frame, while she is offscreen (Still 30). Ozu then cuts 'across the axis' to achieve an extremely close match on their screen positions and gestures: Harue stands just left of centre, her left hand extended to the lower left corner of the frame, where Jiro's hand is extended in from offscreen grasping it (Still 31). The impact of this key moment of Jiro's declaration is marked not-so much by the banal actions or words of the dialogue, but by this strong visual device; it is a completely different technique for presenting characters than has been used in the film to this point.

In subsequent films, the graphic match becomes divorced from clear-cut narrative significance. In the scene in *There Was a Father* where the father visits the home of a former colleague, Ozu plays with matching the position of his cup on the table from shot to



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shot. (This prefigures the elaborate interplay of shifting objects upon which Ozu will match in his colour films, especially during eating scenes.) In *Early Summer* there are two shots of Noriko's future mother-in-law, Mrs Yabe, hurrying down the street to visit Noriko's office. The first is a long shot of Mrs Yabe on the sidewalk, with the rear fender of a parked car thrust prominently into the right foreground of the frame. As Mrs Yabe begins to cross the street, Ozu cuts to a set-up across the street from her; her position in the frame is fairly closely matched, but Ozu also has an almost identically shaped car's fender in the right foreground.



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In most of his post-war films, Ozu also constructs overall visual configurations which allow him to keep a graphic interplay. The strong verticals of the Japanese doorways are often placed to either side of the frame, carrying over from shot to shot. Also, by placing people in the centre of the frame, facing the camera during the dialogue scenes (instead of alternating three-quarter views as in Hollywood shot-reverse-shot), he matches the people graphically. A number of the conversations between Akiko and her mother and Akiko and her sister in *Tokyo Twilight* use this device with particularly close matching (Stills 32, 33), but it can be observed in virtually any Ozu film.

The device of the graphic match comes to its culmination in

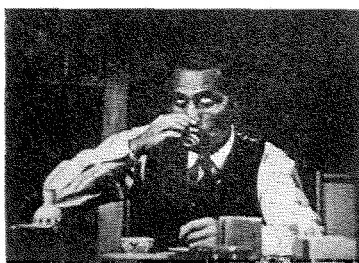
68 Ozu's colour films. In *Good Morning* there is one transition almost purely on colour: one shot of intermediate space shows the outside of the apartment houses, with a bright red sweater stretched out to dry on a line in the upper left; Ozu then cuts to a shot inside the apartment where the 'disreputable' couple are packing to leave, with their bright red lamp in the precise position in the upper-left corner the sweater had occupied. Here the 'logic' of the cut is almost wholly graphic, divorced from the causal structure of the narrative.

Like the other devices, the graphic match abounds in Ozu's films; a few additional examples must suffice to point out the pattern of usage. In *Floating Weeds* Ozu cuts from a shot through a door to a grassy field with red flowers to a medium shot of a bald man seated working in a yard by a rock wall. The red flowers are repeated in the second shot, but the primary visual element that is matched is a red fish-design awning which hangs into the top of the frame in each shot. In *Good Morning*, the sequence where the boys have run away contains a transition between two different interiors with a passage of time: in the first shot, a lamp hangs in the upper left quarter of the frame, with a clock to its right; Ozu cuts to another hanging lamp and clock in almost identical positions.

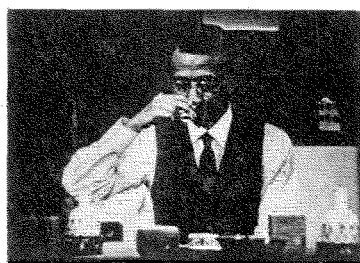
An Autumn Afternoon contains several graphic series which exemplify perfectly some of the typical ways Ozu uses these matches. One way is to move through different spaces keeping a general graphic continuity and matching specific small elements within the frame. In the transition into the second scene in Koichi's apartment, one shot shows the exterior of the building, with an unknown woman walking by; the next is down the corridor outside the apartment, with Koichi's wife walking along it towards the camera. As she opens the door, Ozu cuts ninety degrees to a long shot of the room facing the door. The strong vertical lines of the drain pipes in the first shot, the corridor doors and walls in the second, and the window frame in the foreground of the third generally match. But there are also one or two plastic pails in the right foreground of each shot, giving an additional, very specific graphic carry-over.

Ozu also matches objects and actions within scenes. A little later in the film there is a scene in a restaurant where Koichi is dining with his friend Miura. After a transition consisting of shots in other parts of the restaurant, the action begins with a long shot of the two men at a table; the scene then continues with a series of medium frontal shots of the two men. Each has a beer bottle on the table to his right, and these bottles are precisely matched in their position on the screen from shot to shot; Ozu has even turned the labels partially towards the camera to the same degree so that the bottles look exactly the same. The men's faces and body positions are also closely matched. A similar device is used in *Late Autumn* as the daughter Aya sits in a restaurant with a friend of

the family who is trying to persuade her to marry; as we cut back and forth to frontal shots of them, the white chopsticks laid on the table in front of them are exactly matched in screen position. Almost any eating scene in the colour films will yield a similar play with matches and near-matches of the variously coloured objects on the table. The most precise match in the Ozu films we have seen occurs in the first restaurant scene of *An Autumn Afternoon*. After Horie leaves, Kawai and Hirayama remain to eat and drink alone. In one frontal medium shot (Still 34), Hirayama raises his sake cup to his lips; as he drinks, there is a cut to Kawai in exactly the same posture drinking (Still 35). The two men are dressed identically in white shirts and dark vests. The graphic match is so exact as to create almost the effect of a jump cut.



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This concern with graphic play distinctly separated from the action of the narrative is perhaps carried to its most radical degree (at least of all the films we have seen) in one scene in *The Record of a Tenement Gentleman*, which contains a device so idiosyncratic that it cannot be situated within any of the categories we have discussed so far. It occurs during the scene at the photographer's studio fairly late in the film. The old woman is sitting for a portrait with the little boy she has decided to adopt. After the preparations, there is a long shot of the scene, with the photographer at his camera in the left foreground; as he clicks the shutter, there is a moment of darkness, then the darkness 'wipes' upward to reveal a 'camera's point-of-view', a medium shot, *upside-down*, of the pair. This image remains on the screen briefly then the entire screen goes black again, and the rest of the dialogue of the scene is given over this blackness. Again the darkness wipes away upwards, but now what is revealed is the empty studio in long shot, including the still camera we have supposedly been looking through; the action is over – an ellipsis has occurred during the last instant of darkness. Later films, particularly those of Bresson, have approached the blank screen to varying degrees (usually with a 'realistic' motivation), but in 1947 *The Report of a Tenement Gentleman* went so far as to continue an action scene while keeping the frame blank through a device (the still camera in the scene) only peripheral to the action. By making an impossible conjunction

70 between the camera eye view at the beginning of the shot and the view of the camera itself at the end of the shot, the blackened screen surface exposes the artistic motivation behind its purely transitional function.

Such graphic play is, then, central to Ozu's modernity because the screen surface itself and the configurations that traverse it are treated as independent of the scenographic space of the narrative. That such screen space may be a powerful source of non-narrative structures is suggested not only by such films as *Ballet Mécanique* (which, like many abstract films, uses graphic parameters structurally) but also by Barthes's comments on the 'obtuse meaning' – the graphic patterns we have been discussing – in a non-abstract film like *Ivan the Terrible*:

'The obtuse meaning is clearly counter-narrative itself. Diffused, reversible, caught up in its own time, it can if one follows it, establish only another script that is distinct from the shots, sequences and syntagmas (both technical and narrative), an entirely different script, counter-logical but "true". . . . The story (diegesis) is no longer merely a powerful system (an age-old narrative system), but also and contradictorily a simple space, a field of permanences and permutations. It is that configuration, that stage whose false limits multiply the signifier's permutative function. It is that vast outline which compels a *vertical* reading (the expression is Eisenstein's); it is that *false* order which makes it possible to avoid pure series, aleatoric combination (chance is merely a cheap signifier) and to achieve a structuring *which leaks from the inside*. We can say, then, that in Eisenstein's case we must reverse the cliché which holds that the more gratuitous the meaning, the more it appears to be simply parasitic in relation to the story as told: on the contrary it is this story which becomes "parametric" to the signifier, of which it is now merely the field of displacement, the constitutive negativity, or even the fellow traveller' ('The Third Meaning', *Art Forum* Vol XI, No 5, January 1973, pp 49-50).

The graphic configurations which Ozu, like Eisenstein, forces on our attention, represent simply the most radical of those strategies by which space becomes a signifier to which the narrative becomes 'parametric'. The indifference of the films' spatial structures to the temporal and causal chain of the narrative is precisely what demands a vertical, contrapuntal, active reading of Ozu's films.

III

Few critics have, however, been willing to perform such a reading. They have instead set about repressing the potentially disruptive force of such spatial structures. Donald Richie has thematised them,

insisting that all of Ozu's films revolve around 'the revelation of character'. He thus reads transitions and intermediate spaces as barometers of the characters' psychology and hypostatized point-of-view patterns.³ In effect, Richie makes Ozu's work part of the classical paradigm. When he cannot read a shot as realistically motivated, he falls back on claims about 'pleasing compositions' and suggestions that Ozu was so interested in the characters that he was 'cavalier about continuity' (p 127). Paul Schrader's *Transcendental Style in Cinema: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley 1972) mounts an interpretation that, in effect, seeks to fill the narratively empty spaces of Ozu's films with a transcendent presence (eg the Zen concept of *mu*) and released emotions, thus naturalising the films as traditional religious art (see especially pp 17-18, 47-55). Jonathan Rosenbaum, far more subtle than Richie and Schrader, nonetheless reverts in 'Richie's Ozu: Our Prehistoric Present' (*Sight and Sound* v 44 n 3, Summer 1973), to a model of audience identification and detachment: the spatial structuring in one scene from *Woman of Tokyo* is seen as a '*distanctiation* from the characters' that 'constituted a very special kind of intimacy' (p 179). Though Rosenbaum does not explain further, the vestiges of psychological motivation for such spaces hover over his argument.

Clearly these readings, especially Richie's, are excessively conservative in that they naturalise and thus foreclose the multiplicity of Ozu's spatial structures. True, to see Ozu's films as 'open' modernist works is to discard the clichés about their 'static', 'traditional' qualities and yield oneself to a dangerous freedom; the old Ozu is far more comforting. But naturalisation pays the price of insipidity, as Jonathan Culler has pointed out:

'What [the writer] must do is to create a text which continually makes us aware of the cost at which we naturalise, which flaunts the difference between verbal surface and naturalising interpretation so that we see how much richer and less banal the former is than the latter. . . . The poet or novelist succeeds in challenging naturalisation not by going beyond the bounds of sense but by creating a verbal surface whose fascination is greater than that of any possible naturalisation and which thereby challenges the models by which we attempt to comprehend and circumscribe it' ('Making Sense', *Twentieth Century Studies*, n 12, December 1974, p 33).

In such a way, the complexity of Ozu's films rebukes attempts to confine it within expressionistic or simple Brechtian models.

3. Op cit pp 57-8, 138, 164-76. Unfortunately we cannot here enter into detailed discussion of the methodological difficulties and sheer factual errors of Richie's book. Interested readers are referred to reviews by Kristin Thompson, *Velvet Light Trap* n 16, Winter 1975-6, and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Sight and Sound* v 44 n 3, Summer 1975.

Such complexity may be seen in summary form in a scene which bares Ozu's spatial devices – the hide-and-seek game in *The End of Summer*. This sequence consists of nineteen shots, starting at the point where the boy gets up to hide and ending as he emerges from his hiding place and wanders off calling his grandfather. During the scene, many of the devices we have examined here are used in their usual fashion to play with the perception of the audience, but here they present a literal game among the characters as well. If such disorienting space were to appear in the films of the classically coded paradigm, this tacit acknowledgement of the devices as play would itself be motivated by the narrative, the game itself; but in this film, the diegetic instance becomes motivated by the spatial devices, 'baring' them.

The first four shots begin the game simply enough, as the boy begins to leave and comes back to warn the grandfather not to peek. The camera is facing the garden courtyard of the house as the boy goes out left in shot 3; the front door is behind the camera. The action, complex as it appears, takes place primarily in two rooms, each divided into three equal sections by short protruding walls. After the boy leaves, the camera shifts 180 degrees to a medium shot of the grandfather beginning to rise; the garden is now behind the camera, the door in the background. Cut to a long shot from the same side, as the grandfather completes his action of rising; he goes out left, glancing off right where the boy had gone. After the old man has disappeared off left, cut to a long shot of the next three-part room; the camera has turned 180 degrees again – we now see the garden in the background, and the old man, who has not changed the direction of his movement, comes in from the left. He opens a drawer, then closes it as his daughter comes in from the left on a walkway that runs around the garden. The remainder of the scene (too long to describe in detail here) consists of a complex orchestration of movements in and out of rooms, glances towards offscreen sounds, and cries of 'Are you ready' from the grandfather and 'Come and find me' from the boy. Let us look briefly at how the devices we have discussed are used.

In addition to the 180-degree cuts already mentioned, there is another between shots 16 and 17 as the old man finishes dressing and leaves the room with the bureau to go to the front door. The camera is facing the garden in shot 16, and the old man goes out left; the cut moves us to the original room, now facing away from the garden again, as the old man comes in from the left. By not maintaining screen direction, Ozu keeps us in confusion in many shots as to where the characters will come from.

There is also a false eyeline match in the scene. In shot 11, the old man comes into a doorway between the two rooms, staring towards the camera, calling 'Are you ready?' Cut to a shot of his daughter, who had passed through along the garden walkway in

shot 10, continuing to walk along another side of it; she glances back in the direction of the camera, then goes out into another part of the house. This might appear to be a 180-degree cut (from shot 11 to shot 12), from the old man looking to what he sees. Yet the garden is visible in the background of shot 11 and is still seen in shot 12. Also, a table corner visible in the lower left corner of the frame in shot 11 is graphically matched in the same position in shot 12. Thus the cut is ninety degrees and cannot reveal what the old man is looking at. He is presumably watching to make sure the boy doesn't see him preparing to leave.

Shot 16 is the most complex of the series; it is a long shot of the room with the bureau, facing the garden. The old man is dressing as the shot begins; from offscreen we hear the boy's voice: 'Come and find me'. He glances off left, apparently in the direction of the voice, then hurries off left in the section of the room closest to the garden. Immediately his daughter comes in from the left in the centre section of the room; it was at her rather than the boy that the old man glanced. As she exits right along the garden walkway, another 'Come and find me' is heard. The old man re-enters, but from the door at the left through which his daughter had entered. He gets something from the bureau, calling, 'Are you ready?' The reply, 'Come and find me', is heard again, and the old man re-crosses and goes out left, from where he had entered. In the scene as a whole, characters are kept offscreen so long that we are never sure where they are. Ozu adds to this uncertainty by 'crossing the line', holding on empty rooms, and confusing us about what is seen by characters who glance offscreen.

Such perceptual play cannot be read, à la Richie and Schrader, as 'objectifications' of the characters' states; here, as elsewhere, the devices render the film radically a-psychological. Ozu's films open a gap between narrative and various spatial structures, and within this gap we can glimpse the work of a cinema which (like Eisenstein's and Tati's) permits space to contest the primacy of the cause-effect chain. Ozu does not eliminate narrative; as Barthes writes in 'The Third Meaning': 'The present problem is not to destroy narrative but to subvert it' (p 50). In such working upon the narrative, Ozu's spaces demand to be read plurally, for their own sakes, challenging us to play, however vertiginously, within them.