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Sustaining cultures through cinematic space – the historical continuance of art and architectural traditions in 20 C Film

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Abstract

This paper explores the idea of film as a medium that has been used to celebrate, develop and ultimately sustain cultural traditions in an age of globalization and technological and cultural change. It borrows ideas from the sector of heritage, namely intangible cultural heritage, and uses this to offer a framework for understanding the work of two key mid 20th century film directors, Jean Renoir and Yasujiro Ozu. Through a detailed analysis of the cinematography employed by both directors, their use of architectural space and the cultural traditions that they drew heavily upon, it explores examples how both directors used film as a medium for the reutilization of their particular cultural artistic traditions in a contemporary setting.

Keywords: architecture, film, art, culture, heritage

1. Introduction

In an age of globalization, it has become common currency today to consider sustainability and resilience as more than just questions related to our built environments. We now consider questions of cultures, communities and social traditions as phenomena that need 'sustaining' and support if it is to survive into the future. This is not only reflected in the establishment of the idea of social and cultural sustainability, but also in the very definitions used by organizations such as the United Nations in relation to our understanding of heritage. Indeed, 2023 marks the twentieth anniversary of the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Heritage through which the notion of Intangible Cultural Heritage was formally established as a universally applicable definition and mode of practice.

Under this banner, what we understand as heritage, and the way in which it is preserved and passed on from one generation to another, have morphed and changed. Not only today do we consider art objects, built structures or natural physical landscapes as objects of heritage in need of preservation, but we consider artistic practices, craft techniques developed and passed on through multiple generations, languages, regional festivals, and, as this paper will explore, culturally specific ways of seeing and thinking. In addition, the objects and modes of preservation we consider under the banner heritage have also changed. Today, it is perfectly normal to see digital technologies of the most advanced form being used in the heritage sector to document, explore and even recreate architecture and art works from the past.

Examples of this latter phenomenon include computer generated imagery to create 'life like' reconstructions of historic sites; laser scanning to give historians views of settlements long lost past; digital cataloguing to archive physical objects as data; and digital tools developed in geophysics

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used by archaeologists. Closer to the topic of this paper, we also see computer aided design being used in architectural models of buildings for tourists to visit virtually; projection mapping that allows artists to reinterpret old buildings as sites of contemporary art, and filmmakers (following a long tradition in their field) recreating and reinterpreting historical narratives over time and place. What follows in this paper represents a particular variation of this last example but, more in line with the notions of intangible cultural heritage with which we began, we will discuss films that document, explore and present specific artistic traditions and techniques from Europe and Asia.

In and of themselves, these films represent examples of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible but, of more interest here, they represent specific examples of how film as a medium can be, and has been, used to celebrate, and in the process sustain, their particular historical cultural and artistic traditions. The films in question are Le Grande Illusion, 1937, directed by Jean Renoir and Tokyo Story directed by Yasujiro Ozu in 1954.

2. Cultural Contexts: From Renoir's Europe to Ozu's Japan.

This section describes the structure and production processes of the mycelium material. Afterward, an overview of the usage areas and the existing examples are presented.

> *More than five centuries ago, a diminutive Florentine artisan in his late forties conducted a "modest" experiment near a doorway in a cobbled cathedral piazza. Modest? It marked an event which was ultimately to change the modes, if not the course, of Western history.* (Edgerton, 1975)

The modest experiment to which Samuel Y. Edgerton refers here was the demonstration by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1425 of what is generally recognised as the world's first documented perspective drawing; a panel painting that would set the trend for spatial representation in the Western world for the next five centuries. His now lost image of the Battistero di San Giovanni in Florence, is credited as marking a definitive step in Renaissance humanism; the world's first proportionally correct image in perspective. As such, it is attributed the status of the first mathematically explainable and reproducible image that optically reflects the spatial reality perceived by the human eye.

The influence of Brunelleschi's achievement would take at least one generation to be felt however; the publication of Leone Battista Alberti's Della Pittura, 1436, and its mentioning of Brunelleschi and Filarete's Treatise on Architecture 1460-1464, being key historical texts. (Damisch, 1994) They turned the undistinguished small and forgettable image by a regional architect into a drawing of international importance for the history of Western art. Alberti's explanation and mapping of the science and mathematical formula for the reproduction of this spatial reality ushered in a set of codifiable rules for artistic representation. It also laid down the grammar and syntax of a new Western visual language; a language which would give us a "window onto the reality of the world". (Kubovy, 1986) From this point onwards, the mastering of optical realism in Western art was just a matter of time. Maurice Merleau Ponty would refer to it as the invention of a world that is "dominated and possessed in an instantaneous synthesis". (Merleau-Ponty, 1964)

In accordance with this new language and its laws of representation, viewers were to be placed at the centre of what they observe; the world perceived would revolve around a single human point of view. From that privileged viewpoint, the mathematical space of perspective could be extruded and extended infinitely. Seen in the paintings of, amongst numerous others, Piero della Francesca and Antonello da Messina, and in the the single point perspective designs of Brunelleschi at the Churches of Santo Spiritu and Santa Croce, Florence, it gave rise to a period of painting and architecture dominated by a number of specific visual characteristics; deep space compositions, the use of architectural elements to unify or demark depth planes, believable optical foreshortening and a predominantly symmetrical arrangement of elements around a central viewing position.

However, the legacy of perspective was not simply a question of technological, pictorial or optical advances. Nor was it purely a story of the effect of such advances on questions of spatial

composition, pictorial arrangement and architectural planning. Treating space as a homogenous, unified and infinite phenomenon, the mathematical underpinnings of perspective took our understanding of space into the realm of Euclidean geometry. Once the world could be conceived and represented as a vast interconnected geometrical web expandable in all directions, our very understanding of space and our position in it was changed; Panofsky would call it a transformation of space from something "psychological" to something "mathematical". (Panofsky, 1991) Space was now something measurable, explainable and controllable. It had been mastered by "man" through the application of his mental reason and would go on to dominate Western art and architecture until the early twentieth century.

In the realm of art, the first major challenge to this dominance came in the Twentieth Century in the form of Cubism. In architecture, the spatial art par excellence, it was Siegfried Gideon's Space, Time and Architecture that would document this challenge and attempt to transpose the spatial characteristics of Cubism to architecture. (Giedion, (1954) Repeated in the works of other architectural theorists, notably Bruno Zevi, the Twentieth Century notion of architectural space was conceived in four dimensions. (Zevi, 1957) No longer a purely optical phenomenon which could be captured through the mathematically based, and seemingly optical true techniques of perspective; space became an active, temporal and experiential phenomenon. For both Zevi and Gideon, architectural space, indeed the notion of space in general, was no longer a homogenous, unified phenomenon in which a single point of view has to be privileged in artistic representation. On the contrary, it became something less codifiable and representable in standard media; a phenomenon that was in constant flux and always intangible. Through the introduction of time into the spatial equation, the architects of the Modern Movement reconfigured the standard understanding of space that had come to dominate their field since Brunelleschi's first important church designs.

This reconfiguration of the traditional Western view of architectural space occurred at the very moment in which the influence of Japanese architecture, and its own specific conceptions of space, was beginning to be felt in Western architecture. The mid nineteenth century saw the reopening of Japan to the West after two centuries of isolation during the Edo Period. In its attempts to maintain control of the nation in the face of the aggressive and expansive trade and influence from Western Europeans, the Tokugawa shogunate had shut its borders with The Closed Country Edict of 1635. (Tempel, 1969) During this period the nation's capital was moved to Edo (later Tokyo) and the stylistic characteristics of civil architecture were imposed across all manifestations of architecture. Consequently, the restrained style of Edo period civic architecture became clearly reflected in the domestic arena and we see the establishment of the sukiya style of residential design.

This was particularly relevant given that the move to Edo meant a significant increase in the construction of domestic architecture on restricted plots of land. (Okawa, 1975) In turn, this led to the establishment of an urban domestic architecture that would characterise late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japanese housing and which, for the purposes of this essay, we will define as the "traditional Japanese style". Given that Japanese architecture is incredibly multifarious, due to centuries of influence from China and the multiple philosophical and religious influences of Shinto and various strands of Buddhism, the use of such a defining term is inherently problematic. Nevertheless, it serves as a necessary framework through which to define a number of important architectural and spatial principles that we dwell on with respect to the work of Yasujiro Ozu; a director whose films tend to revolve around the humble domestic architecture of the Japan's early and mid-twentieth century urban centres.

This "traditional" architecture is dominated by a series of features; a roof structure with the large overhanging eaves that creates the characteristically dim interior demarcated by a luminous perimeter wall of sliding panels or shoji; a fragmentary and flexible spatial plan organised around a principal undefined space known as the moya; internal fusuma or sliding doors; a predominant use of timber in an unfinished state and the dominance of a whole series of aesthetic principles revolving around the notion of wabi-sabi.

The use of these features and characteristics are underpinned by the spatial notion of ma; an understanding of space that conceives it as inseparable from the notion of time, and thus something that cannot be captured visually in all its nuances. A concept that is indescribable with a single Western term, ma combines an understanding of spaces, pauses and gaps; an intuitive grasp of events, emotions and phenomena that have been and are yet to come. It becomes intrinsically linked with the void, with absence and with the multiple intangible phenomena that exist in an indefinable space "between" architectural elements rather than in a limited, measurable space enclosed by them.

The conceptual notion of space that one finds in traditional Japanese architecture then, is completely different to what one encounters in the "traditional" perspective based concepts that dominated the West until the early 20th century. Space, in the Japanese tradition, is not something codifiable or understandable through the application of a rational set of representational rules. On the contrary, it is something only graspable in an intuitive way; something that almost requires a sensibility for the ephemeral; one may even say for the "spiritual". It is the exact counterpoint to the rational, mathematical space that perspective drawing represents.

3. The Western Tradition of Realism and Spatial Unity: Le Grande Illusion. Jean Renoir

Set during the First World War, Le Grande Illusion is ostensibly a war film. However, it is far more concerned with issues of class divisions and social privileges at the beginning of the 20th century than with the horrors of one of history's most bloody and futile conflicts. In this regard at least, it shares some of the understated narrative and thematic characteristics that we will see subsequently in the approach of Yasuijro Ozu. Set in a German prisoner of war camp, Le Grande Illusion is an astute, funny, and at times emotive portrait of class, nationality and religion set against "a vague ambiance of the conflict". (Sesonske, 1980) Played out by a cast including Jean Gabin, Dito Parlo and Erich von Stroheim, it is a key film in understanding the political leanings, artistic tendencies and approach to the construction of what we may call "cinematographic space" of Jean Renoir.

The story revolves around the relationships between three French compatriots, Lieutenant Maréchal, a Jewish private, Rosenthal, and the aristocratic Captain De Boeldieu whose friendship with his German counterpart, Capitain von Rauffenstein, forms another of the film's principal themes. Through these figures Renoir investigates the social and political questions of the time; a historical moment in which the previous certainties of class, nation and politics with which Renoir was closely associated, were all coming under sustained and critical scrutiny across Europe. (Bertin, 1991) It also makes reference to a series of other historically relevant questions such as anti-Semitism, battles between artistic styles and, in certain moments, changing attitudes towards feminism. Mostly dealt with "side on", Renoir operates through delicate subtexts, a subtle selection of props and, most interesting in this context, a sophisticated approach to spatial composition.

The combination of these factors is evident in the film's first notable scene in which three of the main protagonists meet each other for the first time. Having just shot down a French reconnaissance plane in which De Boeldieu and the Lieutenant Maréchal were flying, Captain von Rauffenstein enters the dining room of German Officers and heads straight for the bar. Quaffing a brandy presented to him by an elegant waiter, who subsequently relieves him of his jacket, he orders an inferior to check whether the French prisoners are of the "officer class". If so, they are to be invited to dine with their German counterparts.

The scene is as funny as it is absurd with the officers being served by waiters as if they were in a gentleman's club in high society Berlin. Throughout the scene the atmosphere is of upper class decorum and respect; in stark contrast to the horrors and madness of World War I captured in the poetry of Wilfred Owen and Siegfreid Sassoon for example. Over dinner De Boeldieu and Von Rauffenstein, who completely ignores the Lieutenant Maréchal, talk about the illustrious histories of their respective families. They reminisce about shared events and memories, and swap stories of horse races and aristocratic parties. At the same time, Maréchal strikes up a conversation with a

German of his own rank and their conversation revolves around the factories they worked in before the war. The divisions and contradictions that the film will develop later are introduced and laid bare from the very start. Figure 1

Figure 1 *Le Grande Illusion*. Director: Jean Renoir

However, in addition to introducing the principal narrative themes of the film, this scene also introduces the type of filming and spatial treatment that will characterise all that follows. Using a series of long takes, the camera documents the room and the actions within it. The protagonists of the scene number around eight and each introduces himself and prepares to sit down for dinner. They change positions in and around the room by following a strict choreography of movements. This tightly controlled, but apparently natural movement, enables them to enter and leave the shot without disrupting our view of the principal characters and, more importantly, without the director having to resort to a cut at any time.

By the end of these introductory movements, the actors have taken up their final positions at the table around which the conversations mentioned earlier take place. At this point all the actors remain static and the camera begins its principal long take. Moving slowly in a circular motion around the table, it passes from one conversation to another in such a way that each set of protagonists is given enough time to deliver their lines. Thus, the scene can pass from one set of actions, to another completely unrelated set of actions, without the need to rupture the spatial and temporal unity of the shot through cutting.

This avoidance of unnecessary cutting became a central preoccupation for Renoir on the basis of his view of the medium. Seen as a tool for achieving greater "realism", the camera was seen to offer an opportunity to capture the nature of external world with greater fidelity than any other form of visual representation then available; it would enable the breaking down of differences between "screen perception" and "actual perception". (Dudley, 1976) For Renoir, this translated into an attempt to reproduce "optical reality" on screen and thus became a reflection of what Bazin would call the "art of the real". (Dudley, 1976) On this basis, the analogy between the camera and the eye became central and the need to maintain spatial and temporal unity became key. It was precisely this unity that the most important proponent of "cinematic realism" would praise some years later. (Bazin, 2004).

Although André Bazin does not highlight Le Grande Illusion as one of Renoir´s greatest films, he did identify that it contains all the major aesthetic tenants that make his work "realist"; something seen in the acting, wardrobe, narrative theme and dialogue but also, and more importantly in this context, in this continuous "optically realistic" filming. (Bazin, 1973). One of the most important consequences of continuous filming is the approach to composition and movement it necessitates.

In order to follow and show multiple actions and narratives, as in the scene just mentioned, both the movements of the camera and those of the actors must be intricately controlled, if not choreographed. What this ensures is an on screen composition in which the multiple actions dealt with do not distract attention from the main protagonists. In scenes in which the camera and the protagonists remain more static, the consequences of this type of filming become more exclusively compositional and refer us directly back to the Western realist technique par excellence; perspective painting.

A typical example is seen in another dining room scene; this time a dining room assigned to the French prisoners of war in their internment camp. Beginning with a typical sequence of camera movements that reveal the space, and all the characters in it, the camera stops in a frontal position in relation to the protagonists (who in this case are preparing costumes for a theatrical show they will later stage). Figure 2 In order to present three sets of actions or dialogues simultaneously, and without rupturing the "realistic" space-time unity of the shot, Renoir sets up a clear one point perspective image. The camera position sets up a strong centrally balanced composition in which the space extends backwards. Renoir then positions secondary characters in the foreground, thus leaving the principal actor of the scene, Rosenthal, centrally positioned in the middle ground. Rosenthal occupies the focal point of the shot and is, in addition, framed by a window behind. Through this window we hear and see the secondary backgrounded and architecturally framed actions of other prisoners and German soldiers in the prison yard. In short, he creates a three plane perspective image that takes its compositional pointers from Renaissance perspective painting.

Figure 2 *Le Grande Illusion*. Director: Jean Renoir

The results of this are not just compositional however. In such scenes unified space and continuous filming become entwined with multiple narratives in sometimes complex ways. Whilst Rosenthal speaks there is a deliberate lack of conversation around the table and relatively little movement in the background. Consequently, the viewer's attention is focused on the framed protagonist. However, when one of the actors in the foreground speaks, or we see a background action through the window, the attention of the viewer changes to fore or background respectively. As a result, we not only see a strict control of spatial organisation, but a strict control of dialogue and movement as well.

Although not particularly common in film, the relationship between unified space and multiple narratives is one with a long and well documented history in perspective painting. It is discussed by Michael Kubovy, amongst many others, who has identified that the spatial unity of Renaissance perspective painting was used narratively in very similar ways; each depth plane being used to

portray a different action and protagonist. (Kubovy, 1986) In some instances the events were intended to be read as temporally simultaneous but spatially separated, whilst in others, they were to be read as sequential; initial and final actions occupying the background and the foreground respectively.

Similarities between the compositional and narrative techniques of Renaissance paintings and the cinematic work of Renoir may be emphasised in images such as Pietro della Francesca The Flagellation of Christ, circa 1455. Fig. 3 In this painting we are presented with the principal action of the scene in the background; the flagellation of Christ, whilst in the foreground three as yet undefined figures are positioned to the right. Thus what we have are two distinct actions placed in two distinct depth planes; a device that allows the eye of the viewer to pass between the two. Being positioned out-of-line with each other, this movement is unhindered and further facilitated by the compositional treatment of the architectural setting; the beam and column structure and the quadrangular floor patterning operating as spatial devices demarcating different spaces and directing the movement of the eye.

In Renoir's cinematic spatial construction, architectural elements are repeatedly used to demarcate depth planes in this way. He also locates characters in specific positions so that the viewer's sight line is unhindered, thus facilitating the transference of attention without spatial interruption. The main difference is that Renoir operates with the additional temporal dimension permitted by his medium. As a result, he can control not only how, but when, our attention jumps between the different actions and depth planes of his images.

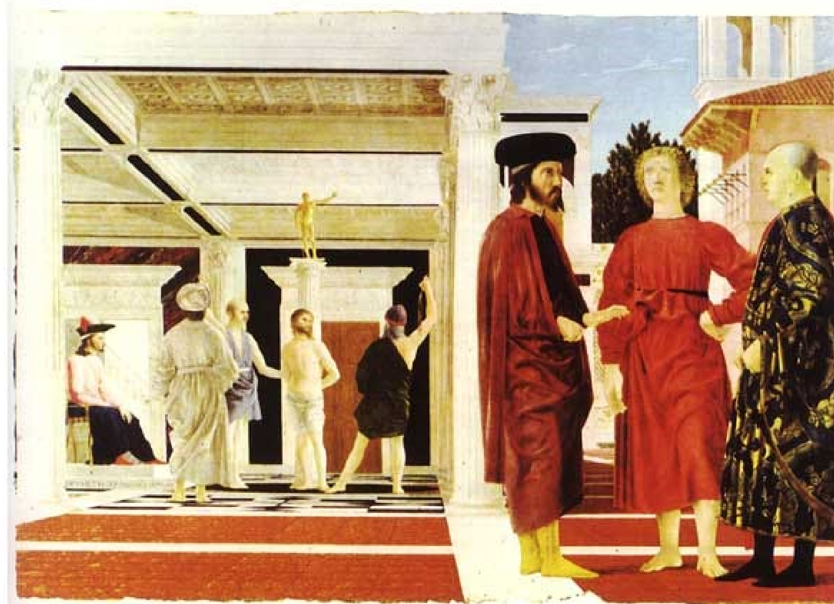


Figure 3 *The Flagellation of Christ*, c. 1455. Pietro della Francesca

Although the major similarities between Renaissance painting and Renoir's approach to filming are most obviously compositional, there are scenes in Le Grande Illusion that suggest multi-layered symbolic references as well. For example, Renoir offers us a scene in which we get an image of Rosenthal, a working class Jewish prisoner, reading a text of the classical Greek poet Pindar. Figure 4 He sits under an arch, the only important architectural element of the scene, whilst secondary actions are played out in the background. Here the references to Renaissance compositional and narrative tendencies appear self evident. Indeed, it is even possible to discern similarities with specific images; Antonello da Messina's 1479 portrait of Saint Jerome in his study coming to mind. Saint Jerome, translator of Greek and Hebrew, is positioned under an arch whilst the extended space in front and behind is filled with secondary symbolic elements and features. Figure 5

Given a lack of explicit comment from Renoir himself, whether such specific intertextual references are intentional is open to debate. However, they would certainly fall into a general

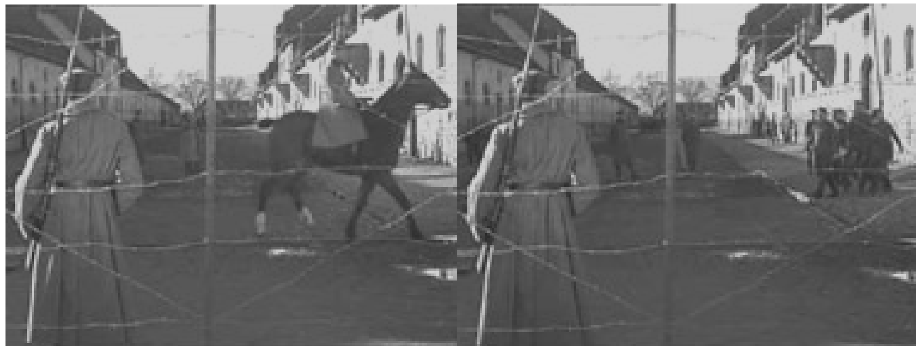
model of cross referencing that Renoir deliberately plays with throughout Le Grande Illusion. The most obvious example in this scene is found in the attitude of von Rauffestein towards Rosenthal. Upon seeing Rosenthal with a collection of Pindar poems, Von Rauffestein is apparently intrigued. He looks Rosenthal up and down before eventually lamenting "poor Pindar". Finding it difficult to understand how high classical culture has arrived in the hands of a working class Jew, he shows a disdain that, given the horrific characteristics of the World War II (on the point of breaking out at the time Le Grande Illusion was released) turns this apparently insignificant scene into a reference that is both prophetic and disturbing.

Figures 4–5 *Le Grande Illusion*. Director: Jean Renoir; *St. Jerome in His Study*, c.1475 - Antonello da Messin

The same complexity in the filming, spatial control, composition and use of secondary textual references is repeated multiple times. The basic dynamic involves the introduction of the scene through a long take, the subsequent creation of a deep space composition, the presentation of multiple actions in that space, and the incorporation of various subtextual references. Perhaps the quintessential sequence of the film in this sense is a comic scene in which the prisoners are disposing of soil collected from an escape tunnel they are digging. It begins with actions and conversations that are apparently simple and insignificant. Using a tracking shot the camera follows three French soldiers whilst they talk and stroll. When they eventually stop, they are positioned in the foreground of the shot. They are joined by two more soldiers who approach from the background, and once these two move to the foreground they exit screen left. Again without any disruption to the continual filming, they are followed by the camera which now takes up another tracking sequence, only this time following the new protagonists. Figure 6

This tracking shot continues until the two new French prisoners pass behind a German guard positioned on the other side of a barbed wire fence. When they stop to joke with him the camera pauses too. Figure 7. Again, we see a deep space composition with direct Renaissance overtones in its perspective, disposition of architectural elements and narrative actions as more choreographed movements are presented to the viewer in different depths of field. It is a visual sequence that reveals Renoir's skill at choreographing actions and movements, and his understanding of the spatial and narrative possibilities of the deep space perspective image. Figures 8-9

Figure 6-7 *Le Grande Illusion*. Director: Jean Renoir



Figures 7-8 *Le Grande Illusion*. Director: Jean Renoir

Something similar is evidenced in the scene that immediately follows which begins with the two French soldiers that exited the previous shot now seen digging an allotment in the camp. Behind them we see a bored German guard who strolls distractedly around in the background. Figure 10 On the right hand side of the image is a long wall that runs from the foreground to the background, perpendicular to the camera's point of view. Operating as a compositional device that, instead of demarking distinct planes of action, unifies them in one long lineal perspective, this wall is a visual device that eventually emphasises the distance between the guard and the prisoners. It is around this distance, and hence the compositional device of deep space construction, that the humour of the scene revolves.

Initially, the prisoners seem to be simply raking their plot of land. However, when two other prisoners enter the shot and place themselves in front of the original two protagonists, the true nature of the scene reveals itself. Surreptitiously, the prisoners have spent weeks digging an escape tunnel. Cultivating the allotment thus becomes a cover for disposing of the excavated ground they have to get rid of. On the pretence of simply chatting with friends, the newcomers to the scene comically begin to shake out gravel carried in bags concealed in their trouser legs.

Once made, the joke is repeated by two other prisoners who again place themselves in the front of an already congested foreground. Figures 11–12 On the one hand, the humour of the scene is based on the simple comic actions in the foreground. However, it also depends on the viewer continually being aware of the presence of the guard who remains visible in the background throughout. It is thus another scene based on Renoir's control of actions, composition, movement and their combination in a deep perspective space.

Figures 10-12 *Le Grande Illusion*. Director: Jean Renoir

In addition to being a clear example of the compositional influence of the Renaissance perspective tradition on Renoir's cinematic spatial construction, this scene again involves the interweaving of social and political references that adds an extra dimension to the action and our understanding of Renoir himself. Whilst the soldiers joke amongst themselves about the roles they will play in their Music Hall Christmas Show, Captain De Boeldieu argues that he will not partake because he has somewhat particular tastes when it comes to theatre.... "I am a realist", he sardonically comments.

On the face of it this comment could be read as simply a personal opinion regarding De Boeldieu's acting ability and tastes, albeit, one he shares with the director. (Renoir, 1974) However, it also works in other registers outside the confines of the cinematic text. It functions as a subtle reference to class differences by distinguishing the more "refined" artistic tastes of the officer class from those of the privates who prefer the accessibility and frivolity of vaudeville. The constant references to class distinctions that appear throughout Le Grande Illusion are drawn from Renoir's direct experience; he had fought in the First World War and later, not entirely ironically, described it as "a war of respectable people; of well-bred people…. a war of gentlemen". (Sesonske, 1980)

However, in the context of this essay, De Boeldieu's preference for "realism" takes us into the realm of Renoir's own artistic tendencies and preferences. It refers us to the perennial debate about artistic movements; something of particular relevance in the 1930s as the Western traditions of the art world were being fundamentally challenged by modernism on all fronts; in sculpture, theatre, literature and, most significantly in this context, in painting and architecture. In painting and architecture the challenge to perspective was not only based on the ideas of space and time most obviously inherent in Cubism however. This challenge was also animated by a fascination with film as a fragmentary spatio-temporal medium that could reconfigure spatial representation; Soviet montage being the main reference point in this regard.

Renoir's allegiance to the realist tradition was not challenged by this rupturing of space nor by concomitant developments in architectural theory. Nor was it challenged by the new representational and temporally fragmentary possibilities of film itself. On the contrary, Renoir, as we have mentioned, saw film as a way of advancing that tradition through a direct analogy between the eye and the camera and, in particular, the long take and the nature of human sight. Pushing him, in directorial terms, to resort to a very specific set of spatial compositional devices, this approach not only stemmed from the director's affiliation and sympathy with the Western pictorial tradition of perspective, it allowed him to rework that tradition in the context of the new medium.

Hence, what we see in a Renoir film is not just a subtle approach to narrative, a clever and skilled control of movement and composition, but a modern reworking of unified space centred around a privileged point of view. Only for Renoir, that privileged point of view was not that of the painter or viewer, but that of the camera. We see the unity, objectivity and clarity of perspective space manifest in the control, order and clarity of Renoir's cinematic space; a cinematic space whose raison d'être is an interpretation of film in the realist and humanist tradition.

4. The Eastern Tradition and Ephemeral Space: Tokyo Story. Yasujiro Ozu

In a similar way to Jean Renoir in the context of France, Yasujiro Ozu was one of Japan's most prestigious, celebrated and prolific directors. His catalogue includes fifty four films produced over a career that spanned four decades. Umarete wa Mita Karedo, (I was born, but...) 1932, is generally recognised as his first feature film whilst Samma no Aji, (An Autum Evening) 1962, was his last. Tokyo Story was made in 1954, almost a decade after the devastating end of the Second World War, and is representative of what could be called his "mature style". It was also one of his most successful and put him in the international limelight. (McDonald, 2006).

As with many of his other films from the same period Tokyo Story represents an investigation into the social and family structures found in a Japanese society passing through a period of historical change. The so called "Americanization" of Japan, a phenomenon well known world wide during that period, is the implicit background to the film. Dealing with the everyday and centring on the question of family, its treatment of social and political questions is indirect and the subtlety of its narrative echoes that of Renoir in Le Grande Illusion.

Typical of the shomingeki genre, the script of Tokyo Story, written by Kogo Noda, deals with the Hirayama family and revolves around a visit to Tokyo by provincial grandparents. (Anderson & Riche, 1982) By centring on urbanite children and provincial grandparents, Ozu draws attention to the gradual, silent and painful disintegration of the contemporary family. The lives of the protagonists occupy the foreground of the film through a dialogue whose style is deliberate, slow and sombre. Full of metaphors and contemplative phrases laced with melancholy, it gives his typical "compendium of everyday images" a strong melodramatic tone through which the everyday becomes poetic and seemingly important. (Phillips, 2007) In the terms of Gilles Deleuze, it is a film about the banality of the everyday. (Deleuze, 1989)

Despite the dialogue playing a central role in the presentation of the film's argument however, Ozu was principally a director of images, and this film is no exception. It unites his most renowned visual and filming characteristics; the tendency to film empty spaces, the use of a low level static camera and the employment of architectural elements such as walls, door frames and windows to act as sub frames demarcating the action. In terms of his "editing style" it is also typical of his work; stitching sequences of static images together in a syncopated and deliberate series of shots which seem to move at 90-degree angles with every cut.

It is relatively easy to see that there is a direct relationship between these visual and editing tropes and the nature of the spaces he tends to film; the traditional Japanese town house or machiya, with its roots in the Edo period. Revolving around the central moya space, the plan layout of these houses is asymmetrical and modular in nature. The grid upon which it is based is directly related to the layout of the ken, the modular system used to construct the Japanese house, and consequently, the plan becomes a sequence of interconnected spaces put together like a series of dominos. Related to each other in 90-degree templates for camera movements in practically every Ozu film. (Yoshida, 1955)

Given that the spaces (or rooms) within this modular arrangement are not allocated specific functions, and the furniture used is portable, any space can be used a bedroom or, alternatively, as a dining room or study. Not only are these spaces alterable in terms of function however, but they are also alterable in terms of size. The fusuma (the sliding walls dividing one room from another) are normally constructed from timber frames with pap uner (washi) screens and are easily moved leading to an interchangeable arrangement of spaces that, whatever their disposition, are connected in modular relationship with the others around them. It is an architecture that, as we shall see, offers a range of spatial characteristics that the direct manipulates and skilfully exploits in various ways. Figure 13

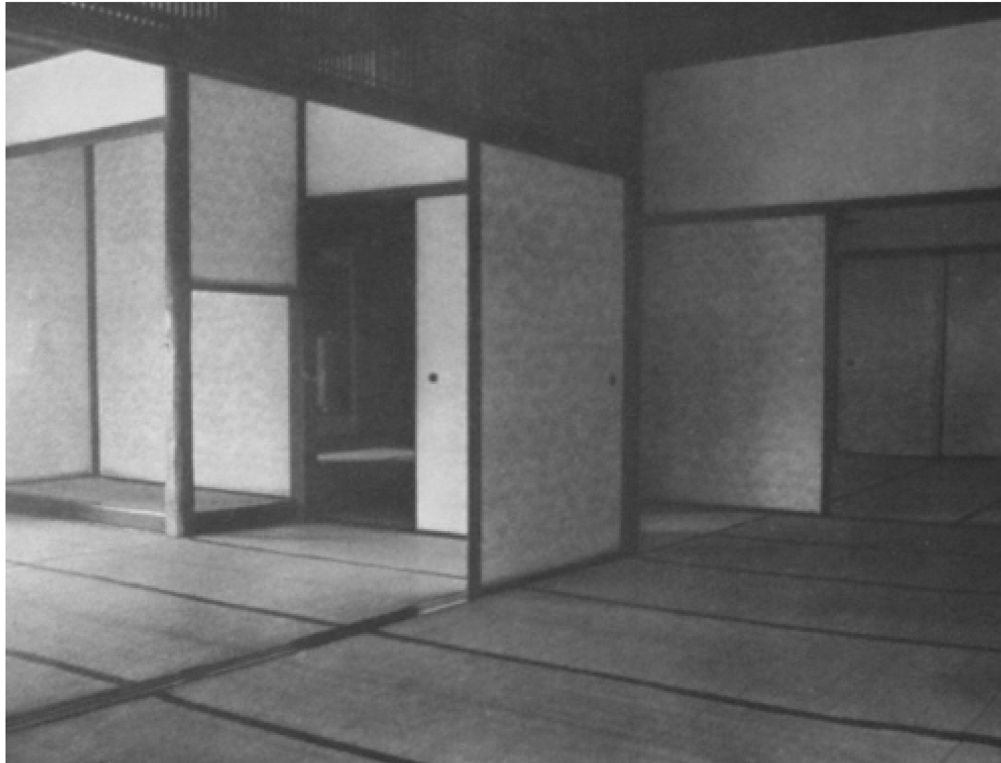


Figure 13 House Interior. *The Japanese House and Garden,* 1955. Tetsuro Yoshida

These sliding screens add to the potential complexity of the spatial arrangement and spatial template that Ozu follows in his filming. However, they are also what he uses to frame the actions he films. These sliding screens fit within the modular plan and are thus themselves modular in size; reflecting the strict spatial relationships that revolve around the ken. Based on the distance between two columns, the ken (the construction standard of these houses) controls and indeed creates, the modular aesthetic that characterises the architecture in plan, interior appearance and exterior fenestration.

Thus, when Ozu frames his action using architectural elements and moves his camera through a series of 90 degree twists, he is presenting us with a syncopated perception of the space that is fundamentally informed, if not controlled, by the architectural characteristics of that space. When one adds to this, the fact that his low level camera is generally considered to reflect the view of a person sat on the floor, it is a style of filming and editing that presents us with a view of the house interior in full accordance with the nature of the traditional domestic architectural space and its use. In short, he creates a culturally specific cinematic on-screen space fully imbued with the formal qualities of traditional Japanese architecture. However, this architectural-filming relationship does not tell the entire story in regard to the principles underlying Ozu's "filming style".

The film historian and critic Donald Richie has underlined the roots this style has in the deep and complex cultural traditions of Japanese art and culture. Richie emphasises that the pictorial qualities of Ozu are not only of the product of the architecture in which he sets his films but, in large part, result from the compositional sensibilities typical of his cultural background. (Richie, 1974) These sensibilities, he argues, are known in the West through Japanese woodblock prints which came to be a reflection of popular culture in the Edo period; the ukiyo-e. (Takahashi, 1972) In the ukiyo-e we find virtually all the compositional techniques used by the director and thus a clear indication of the variety of influences that thread themselves through his work. Figure 14 Common to this tradition for example, is a low level point of view, corresponding compositions weighted toward the lower part of the image, the demarcation of protagonists by architectural elements and the predominance of actions in the fore or middle ground seen front-on; all compositional characteristics typically repeated in the work of Ozu.

Figure 14 *Morning Snow at the Brothel House*, 1789. Torii Kiyonaga

This tendency to employ architectural elements to define actions, figures or views, both in the work of Ozu and in the pictorial tradition of the ukiyo-e, is also seen in one of the other most notable characteristics of traditional Japanese domestic architecture; its relationship with the garden. As with the architecture itself, the tradition of Japanese gardens is complex and multifarious and there are several types, each with individual characteristics. However, in general terms it is possible, for our purposes here, to highlight a number of shared features such as the presence of water, either real or symbolic; the use of enclosure devices such as hedges, fences and walls to control views; and the use of symbolic elements such as bridges, stones and lanterns.

Some gardens, such as the Karesansui, use raked gravel to symbolise water and rocks and moss to represent ponds, islands, rivers and mountains. The Tsukiyama gardens are known for copying famous landscapes and create very deliberate views from inside the house and garden to natural elements in the distance. Chaniwa gardens are designed for settings in which the tea ceremony is key and usually incorporate pathways that lead people along routes of “mental and physical cleansing” before they enter the tea ceremony hut. Domestic gardens may have all these elements but are distinguished from other types by the fact they are designed to be seen from inside the residence. Designed to be seen from inside the house, they are invariably seen by somebody sitting on the floor looking through an open screen. Consequently, the view is framed by the architectural elements we have been describing and are also characterised by compositions in which the weight of the composition falls in the lower part of the image. In his extensive descriptions of the Japanese house and the Japanese garden, the historian Heinrich Engel refers to this very deliberate and composed interior view as a “live picture wall”. (Engel, 1964). Figure 15

Figure 15 Live Picture Wall. *The Japanese House. A tradition for Contemporary Architecture, 1964. Heinrich Engel*

The importance of these compositional characteristics in the design of Japanese houses and gardens is seen in the interior decoration of the houses which often decorates the partition screens with replicas of this view or, alternatively, the view of a larger landscape. In the examples in which the garden view is replicated, we inevitably see a framed view of a simple garden whose compositional focus is in the lower portion of the image. When this image adorns the screen between house and garden the replica effect is even clearer. (Engel, 1964) In Tokyo Story, Ozu shows us all this in the most obvious way; through the creation of the self same effect on screen. The camera takes up the position of the viewer (sat on the floor) and frames the view of the garden from inside the house for the cinematic spectator; the on-screen effect becoming another replica of the real view and the interior decoration that often accompanies it. Figure 16

Figure 16 *Tokyo Story*. Director: Yasuhiro Ozu

It seems self evident from such shots that Ozu's positioning of the camera, his use of fixed filming and his long static takes, are intended to be read as direct replicas of the real perception of somebody using the house, and therefore sitting on the floor. However, as Donald Richie has pointed out, the cinematographer of Tokyo Story (Yushun Atsuta) emphasises something quite different when questioned on this. Eschewing the standard and long standing interpretation of Ozu's filming in these terms, Yushun Atsuta argues that there was another issue also being dealt with; an attempt by the director to avoid the visual sense of depth that results from a higher point of view. (Richie, 1974)

It is inevitable that a more elevated eye level augments the optical effect of perspective in any spatial context. However, in the traditional Japanese house there is another factor that reinforces this and thus forced Ozu to use a low level camera; the black lined borders of tatami mats. As a result of their colour contrast and their linearity, these borders tend to emphasise the effect of foreshortening when visible on screen. In order to avoid this, argues Atsuta, Ozu positioned his

camera near the floor, but also strategically distributed props so as to cover them up. What this indicates is that although the relationship between the architecture of the Japanese house and the filming of Ozu is easy to understand at first glance, it is in fact more subtle than it would initially seem.

Although the issues raised thus far are fairly simple to identify in even quite cursory examinations of Ozu's work, this last point of Atsuta's begins to indicate the subtlety of Ozu's spatial thinking; a thinking intrinsically linked to conceptual notions such as wabi, sabi and ma. In his treatise, The Japanese House, Heidrich Engel lays out the artistic concepts of wabi and sabi in the architectural context. In aesthetic terms he underlines that Sabi emphasises the importance of solitude and emptiness whilst wabi involves notions of simplicity, crudeness and the elimination of all superficial detail. (Engel, 1964) More importantly however, Engel identifies that these concepts come from the tradition of Zen Buddhism and thus begins to draw out a link with ideas concerning the representation of intangible spirits, ethereal forces and, by extension, the very notion of space itself.

Most clearly seen in the pictorial tradition of Japanese landscapes, these ideas revolve around the cultural reading of natural elements such as trees, rivers and mountains as physical manifestations of deeper spirits and natural-mystical forces. On the basis of such a reading, any landscape painting for example, is actually a painting of spiritual forces and not simply a representation of the natural environment. Consequently, an artist dealing with this subject matter is actually trying to represent or insinuate the "presence of intangible and ephemeral spirits" rather than realistically representing the physical entities of landscape. What this results in, is a deliberately ambiguous representation of physical features in which they are not shown in all their detail. Rather, they are insinuated in light brush strokes, referenced in generalised lines and presented in almost abstract terms.

This deliberate abstraction, or ambiguity, can thus be seen as an incomplete physical representation that viewers are invited to complete for themselves. However, the aim is not that the viewer completes the physical image in their mind, but rather, that they use the ambiguous physical representation as a vehicle through which to intuitively "feel" the intangible forces or spirits beyond. Engel describes this as a tradition of artistic representation that invites the spectator to engage in an "active process of interpretation". Understood in this way, the role of artists is to avoid showing subjects in all their detail; the representation of the intangible being seen to be of far greater value than a detailed optical representation of physical reality. (Engel, 1964) Consequently, what we have is an aesthetic tradition intrinsically linked to an aim that Engel defines as "leaving space for the intuition of the spectator"; a notion known as empathy.

Clearly, this goes against the grain of much of the Western representative tradition developed since the Renaissance, according to which, the artist attempts to reproduce the reality of the world as seen with the greatest fidelity possible. It certainly goes against the grain of continuity cinema which, in accordance with its Western bias, is focused on the presentation of events in a way that corresponds to our ideas of reality and truth, and which avoids any possible discrepancy in our reading of a film's basic narrative line. Indeed, the Western continuity tradition deliberately tries to avoid the need for interpretation (or intuition) on the part of the viewer and can thus be read as diametrically opposed to the notion of empathy.

Engel discusses empathy in comments centred on the traditional Japanese house and, although the houses used by Ozu are not necessarily of the same generation, they share virtually all the main characteristics identified. Aesthetically, this architecture tends to use materials that have a rustic quality and whose surface treatment tends to be simple and even rough. (Okawa, 1975) In spatial terms, it is an architecture whose modular organisation, combined with its use of moveable screens, allows each space to open out onto, and into, a contiguous one. Thus, it is an architecture that takes on a certain flexibility that is both complex and potentially in continual flux. Eschewing a single privileged point of view, around which the entire design revolves, it celebrates asymmetry and

fragmentary views. It is an architecture that creates a spatial experience that is unstable, partial and ambiguous.

Taking these inherent spatial characteristics of the architecture he employs, Ozu developed a type of cinematography that not only used its modular spatial organisation to direct the movements of the camera and frame his actions. He used it to introduce a certain ambiguity in his spatial representation on screen that would reflect the ideas of empathy and intuition. For example, it is quite common for Ozu not to begin a scene with a typical establishing shot. Consequently, certain visual clues that normally help orientate the spectator as the scene progresses are absent; the relative positions of protagonists is not always clear, the size of the room in which the scene develops in often unknown and many of its important furniture and decorative features are sometimes concealed until later in the sequence.

This deliberate ambiguity is magnified even further by the internal appearance of an architecture whose interiors tend to be aesthetically homogenous; a characteristic that makes the identification of the camera's position even more difficult to establish in its often complex spatial sequences. It is a spatial ambiguity further amplified through Ozu's technique of reorganising the disposition of the dividing screens between shots; the result being that two images filmed from exactly the same spot can appear to be images filmed in very different locations. When all of these factors coincide; the lack of an establishing shot, a restriction of visual information, the employment of spatial tricks and the inevitable aesthetic similarity of the architecture, we see a perfect example of a cinematographic representation of space that goes against some basic norms found in "traditional" Western art. They are however, completely in tune with the notion of wabi, sabi and ma; a reading of space as an intangible, temporal phenomena that can never be wholly captured.

Some examples of this are seen in the series of images reproduced here which, as is typical of Ozu, do not deal with any great narrative moment; the family is preparing to leave the house for a day visit to the city. Figures 17-21. The sequence begins with an image of the parents and the grandchildren getting dressed in the same room. It is an image that shows all the typical compositional features of Ozu; a low level fixed camera, a balanced composition weighted toward its lower section and the framing of the protagonists by architectural elements. The scene is filmed in a continuous take until the parents tell their eldest son to see if the grandparents are ready. At this point a cut is introduced and the camera repositions itself in an empty corridor. Subsequently, the child walks past the camera and, after another cut, the scene passes to the room in which we find the grandparents. The child again enters the scene and briefly exchanges a few words with his grandparents. Turning to leave the shot screen-right, the child exits and another cut is introduced. The following shot takes us back to the empty corridor through which we see the child walk again, before the final cut positions us once more in the original room.

Figures 17-21 *Tokyo Story*. Director: Yasuhiro Ozu

In the shot of the corridor we see the child enter the frame, turn 90 degrees and disappear behind a screen, later reappearing in what would seem to be an adjoining room in the following shot. However, the room in which the child reappears is, in reality, a room on the second floor;

something that the director disguises by eliminating a shot of the child going up the stairs. Although Ozu does not completely conceal this spatial information, he presents it in such a subtle way that it is almost imperceptible; as the child turns and disappears behind the screen an attentive audience can discern a movement of his foot that indicates he is beginning to walk up stairs. This movement is so discreet that it is very difficult to notice in a general viewing of the film. Entirely in line with concepts of ambiguity and subtlety in artistic representation then, it produces a "suggestive" rather than a "definitive" understanding of the space.

Another slightly clearer example of this type of spatial ambiguity is seen in the shot in which the child enters the parent's room for the second time. Although he actually enters the room seen at the beginning of the sequence, the father is now positioned to the left, the mother is not clearly visible and the child himself is seen from behind. The background to the shot also appears to have completely changed, suggesting that we may be in a different room. This spatial distribution is due to various factors; some of the protagonists appear to have left the shot, there is a temporal distance between the first and last images and, above all, there is a very clear transgression of some of the continuity system's basic rules.

According to the rules of continuity, in the scene in which the boy moves through the house and goes upstairs, Ozu should have shown a shot of the stairs, thus eliminating any possible misreading of the space and the actions presented. Similarly, in the latter scene, he should have shown a shot of any changes occurring in the room; such as the mother leaving the space or the father changing position. What Ozu does however, is very subtly break such continuity laws so as to introduce a certain level of ambiguity into shots that have been described as "eiga" or "descriptive pictures". Spatially, what he is doing is complex and echoes the notions of "ma" and "empathy". He creates a perception of space that links it with time and unseen actions, and which thus requires an intuitive effort on the part of the viewer to understand it. All is not revealed in the clearest way possible, thus allowing the viewer to "participate in the reading" of the space.

This space is presented in momentary, incomplete fragments as something intangible; as something only graspable through the mind of the viewer rather than the lens of the camera. These filming and editing characteristics combine with Ozu's static filming, preference for empty spaces and his approach to framing compositions. The result is a body of filmic work that is accessible to a Western eye, but which is clearly distinct from what is expected from Western continuity film. In addition, when one compares the Western narrative and goal focused tradition of Hollywood to the slow, apparently simple and open ended stories of Ozu, his films can feel narratively strange as well. Consequently, in Ozu we have a director whose films give us various insights into the sometimes detailed mutual relationship that can exist between space and filming. However, his films also give insights into the spatial and cultural traditions in which he operates. They present us with a cinematographic space imbued not only with the formal, but also the philosophical characteristics of the culture from which they emerged; a culture in sometimes stark contrast to the realistic concepts underlying "traditional" Western architecture and conventional film.

5. Conclusion

In Tokyo Story and Le Grande Illusion, we are presented with two apparently different narratives; in Ozu's case it is centred on the family life, whilst in Renoir's it revolves around one of the most traumatic political events of the twentieth century. In reality, however, both films use their respective contexts as little more than a backdrop for close, intimate studies of human relationships and cultural traditions. For Ozu, it is the relationships between generations in the culturally shifting environment of post War Japan, whilst for Renoir it is the subtle and similarly shifting relationships between social classes in pre World War II Europe presented through a filmic reworking of the Renaissance narrative painting tradition. Sharing the period around World War II then, these two directors offer contemporaneous examinations of the social tendencies and tensions in the East and the West respectively. In doing so, they may also give us an indication of

the relationship and tensions between the arts and architecture of the period and do so while reusing the artistic modes of seeing and representation their respective cultures offered.

Considering the issues of contemporary architectural relevance at the time of the films themselves, in the first half of the Twentieth Century many Japanese architects were sent to study in the United States and Western Europe whilst, simultaneously, significant Western architects were invited to design buildings in Japan; Le Corbusier, Bruno Taut, Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra, for example, all completing major Japanese projects in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. (Nute, 1993) Taut was a particularly significant figure as he brought the West's attention to the qualities of Japanese architecture and its sense of space in his exhibitions and essays on The Fundamentals of Japanese Architecture in the 1930s. Le Corbusier's contribution to this interchange of ideas was very different; he constructed the Tokyo Cultural Museum at the invitation of a number of young Japanese modernists in 1954 and thus cemented the influence of Western Modernism in Japan. Both events however underlined the potential relationship between the modernist fragmented space of the post cubist era and the asymmetry of the Japanese spatial tradition in formal terms. (Fawcett. 1980)

However, it is the work of the Americans Frank Lloyd Wright and Richard Neutra that perhaps showed the closest relationship between Western modernist and traditional Japanese arrangements of space; the work of both men taking on an ever more abstracted, fragmented spatial sense in the years subsequent to their experience in Japan. (Nute, 1993) The two films discussed here were both made during this historical period of architectural cross fertilization and thus could have become historical architectural reference points in the development of the contemporary architectural notion of space. Rather than show the similarities that would come to characterise avant-garde architecture in both the West and the East however, they underline the different cultural traditions from which the Japanese and European architects of the time were approaching one another.

In Renoir's case, despite his interest in the new possibilities offered by the visual language of cinema, the cultural traditions he reveals, celebrates, uses, and thus sustains, are to be found in the Renaissance. Steeped in the tradition of realism, with its origins in perspective, he saw film as a medium through which this tradition could, and indeed should, be advanced. In technical terms he reduced this conception to a direct analogy between the camera and the eye; the camera offering, for the first time in the history of art, the opportunity to reproduce the optical experience of a real subject for a viewer or spectator. Transposed to the direct analogy between optical vision and the long take, this underlying conceptual argument led him down a path which, in terms of spatial organisation and composition, had very specific formal consequences.

In order to facilitate the temporal nature of narrative film, he reutilised deep space compositions designed to present multiple actions to a static viewer, or in his case, to a static camera. Often obliged to either demarcate or unite those actions in receding depth planes through the strategic placement of architectural elements, he constructed compositions that directly borrowed from the iconic perspective images of the early Renaissance. Far from unaware or shy of these references, Renoir cultivated his filming and editing style to create what may be described as "perspective images on celluloid". In these celluloid perspectives, different spaces are presented with utmost clarity as visually linked homogenous realms in which actions take place in a simultaneous and unified way.

However, the cinematic perspective realism of Renoir is not simply operative on a formal level. For Panofsky, the narrative pictorial devices of the perspective tradition were to be considered as a symbolic reflection of the Renaissance psyche and its focus of reason, logic and the mathematical explanation of, amongst other things, space. Consequently, the clarity with which Renaissance perspective represents actions and allows an unhindered interpretation of the events and space is thus read as a reflection of the clarity of mathematical humanist thought. In returning to the spatial traits that underlie Western humanist art in his creation of a "realistic" cinema, Renoir not only

revealed a fascination for the technical possibilities of film and an interest in the history of Western art, he was also contributing to the continuance of those traditions and their fundamental values; values evident in the optical fidelity and clarity of his filming and the reasoned, logical and detailed control of his actions, spaces, narratives and dialogue.

By way of contrast, what we find in the work of Yasujiro Ozu is an approach to film in which optical reality, spatial clarity, mathematical logic and reason are of little or no importance to the director's oeuvre. As with the work of Renoir however, his approach to spatial representation can also be explained by reference to the aesthetic, formal and philosophical characteristics of the culture in which he operated and those he wished to maintain. On the aesthetic level, we see an interest in a simple cinematic style of cuts and fixed camera positions. Their simplicity repeats the basic aesthetic traits that characterise traditional Japanese art and architecture; characteristics that can be associated with the ideas of wabi.

In addition, we see an approach to composition that takes as its formal guidelines the modular nature of the architecture in which it is filmed and the compositional traits of Edo period woodblock prints. The asymmetrical and flexible nature of the architecture in question here however, carries with it a different and deeper set of connotations as well. It is representative of the notion of sabi and its celebration of the "incomplete" and the "ambiguous". Intrinsically linked to this, is the Japanese understanding of space-time, ma, and its interest in the intangible and the ephemeral. Thus, what we find in Ozu's work is an approach to film that reuses multiple aspects of Japanese artistic traditions, but which also resonates with its spiritual undercurrents.

Through his unpredictable use of establishing shots, his ruptures of spatial and temporal unity and in his wilful optical tricks that can momentarily disorientate the viewer, Ozu moves his cinema away from the Western model and into the realm of what we may call cinematic empathy. For Ozu, the presentation of space from a single privileged viewpoint, or the idea of "optical reality", is of little interest and of little cultural or artistic importance. Indeed, according to the Zen and Buddhist artistic traditions, such an approach would be of little worth. Rather than capture the superficial "physical reality" of the objects and spaces he films, Ozu deliberately attempts to veil and invite intuitive readings; he investigates "empathy" and, in doing so, underlines the difference between his work and the traditions it celebrates, to those traditions redeployed by Renoir and his concern with continuity and a renaissance inspired form of realistic artistic representation.

In a crucial moment for the globalised movement artefact par excellence, the "international style" of architecture and its approach to spatial organisation, these two directors redirected our view backwards to two conflicting artistic and spatial traditions in danger of being lost in the brave new world of modernist art and culture. They may both have had very different views of artistic representation, and thus used their medium in very different ways, but they also shared a number of traits: they used their medium in complex, controlled and deliberate ways; they revealed a subtle narrative sensibility and, in addition; they didn't see the medium of film as a threat to their traditions. On the contrary, they saw it as a tool for sustaining and developing those traditions. In the work of Ozu and Renoir then, film becomes a medium capable of preserving traditions in a time of change and a medium that reworks both conventional techniques of artistic and spatial representation and their underlying philosophical basis. Both the medium and its representation of space become phenomena that have to be understood historically as cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible.

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Resume

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