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Abstract

Thomas Boyer breaks down the concept of the time-image and uses it to explore the films of Yasujiro Ozu, specifically focusing on *Early Summer* (1948). Boyer argues against what he sees as a misrepresentation of Ozu's style as Zen, insisting on the importance of not only Ozu's "still life" images, but also his thematic concerns, the ambiguity of his central character Noriko, and the use of dolly shots to create flowing sequences. Boyer explains that these elements add to the complexity of Ozu's representation of time, providing compelling, specific evidence from the film to support a nuanced analysis of Ozu's style.

Keywords

Ozu, Deleuze, Time Image, Early Summer, Late Spring, Bergson

Deleuze and the Time-Image in *Early Summer*

By Thomas Boyer

In *Cinema 2*, in reference to Yasujiro Ozu's *Late Spring* (1949), Deleuze states that "in Ozu, everything is ordinary or banal, even death and the dead who are the object of a natural forgetting. The famous scenes of sudden tears ... do not mark out a strong period which might be contrasted with the weak periods in the flow of life..." (14) These two sentences appear influenced by the emotional effect of Ozu's style. Calmly observational, with a heavy use of narrative ellipsis, Ozu's films appear to many viewers as espousing a simple pleasure in everyday life, the films are often (mis)interpreted as representing Zen. (Nygren 148) Deleuze may not simply pigeonhole Ozu as Zen, but the first sentence of this quote is a partly flawed assumption. While emotion is expressed calmly in Ozu, the heavy or traumatic events of the past have a strongly marked presence within the duration of *Late Spring*, just as the scenes of "sudden tears" do not mark a heightened presence when they occur. This point, however, can still be contextualized using Deleuze's conception of the time-image. The way in which the present contains more temporal information than simply 'the present' can be expressed in the time-image in a way that Deleuze does not mention in his analysis of *Late Spring*. By looking at Ozu's *Early Summer* (1951), the complex relationship of the time-image with the past and present can be examined through the character of Noriko, the themes of war and loss, and the visual construction of the movie.

Simply put, the time-image is the filmic, audiovisual representation of time. While this description is useful to communicate the function of the time-image, it betrays the complexity and the subtlety of both the specificities of the time-image and Deleuze's conception of time in general. In respect to the latter point, Ronald Bogue brings up an important fact, one that greatly helps to contextualize the time-image: "Deleuze's approach to cinema is predominantly Bergsonian in inspiration... [Bergsonian theory states that] the things we commonly call space and time are merely extremes of the contraction and dilation of a single *durée*, or duration." (3) Deleuze follows Henri Bergson's statement that time and space are inextricably linked; the concepts of time and space are both used in similar ways to describe happenings within a duration. (In Bergsonian theory, *durée* implies not only temporality, but spatiality as well; duration refers to the way an event is bounded within time as well as space.) If time and space are descriptive qualities of an event, then, what separates them is the level of discreteness, with space acting as a discrete quality and time as an indiscrete quality. (Bogue 3) When space and time interact, they form a whole that has discrete and indiscrete elements.

To illustrate, compare a photograph of a landscape to a minute-long film of the same landscape. Since the photograph precludes a temporal dimension, space-time is purely discrete: the photograph portrays a determinate space that does not change. A photograph taken a minute later at a different angle does not show us the 'flow' between itself and the previous photograph, making it similarly discrete; it possesses completely different spatial qualities than the original photograph. The flow of time, however, is represented in the film; if the film starts from the

original angle and ends on the second angle, the spatial qualities of each angle are suddenly not so discrete. Over the dimension of time, the boundaries of space are blurred. It follows that, in its pure form, time is completely indiscrete; it is *everything*, since every space and object is affected by the same, unchanging flow of time. But, since the film is a representation of spaces, it gives time a boundary; instead of displaying all of time, it displays only the flow of time over a set of spaces. Thus, to Bergson and Deleuze, space *discrete-izes* time, and time *indiscrete-izes* space, such that space-time is neither/both discrete nor/and indiscrete.

With this in mind, it is much easier to correctly conceptualize Deleuze's time-image. Earlier, I defined the time-image in terse, slightly inaccurate terms as the filmic, audiovisual representation of time. With Bergsonian space-time as a starting point, a better definition arises: the time-image is the filmic, audiovisual representation of the indiscrete side of space-time. Conversely, the movement-image is the filmic, audiovisual representation of the discrete side of space-time.

Since the above definition of the time-image is still highly conceptual, it can be useful to define it against the movement-image - to define the time-image by what it is *not*. Helpfully, Deleuze separates the movement-image into three relatively tangible and simple categories: the *perception-image*, the *action-image*, and the *affection-image*. First, the *perception-image* uses framing, lighting, and focus to make one area or element of the diegetic space more important than the space around it (Bogue 35). The perception-image *discrete-izes* space-time by separating one or more element of the diegetic space from the space of the diegesis, working to represent vaguely the cognitive act of perception. For example, *Early Summer* plays with the perception-image in the scene where Noriko meets Kenkichi at Kitakamakura Station. The camera is framed such that Kenkichi is placed at the edge of the frame, with a nameless woman in the foreground; Noriko appears to walk toward this woman and say hello to her, but the woman responds by walking away from centre as Kenkichi replies to Noriko, catching the viewer off-guard. Regardless of Ozu's reasoning for this specific framing, it is important to note that he tends to avoid perception-images in comparison to other directors. In *Early Summer*, the most diegetically important elements of a scene are not spatially emphasized over other elements of the scene; conversations are shot in deep focus, characters are often placed mid-ground behind prosceniums (door frames, walls, etc.), and lighting tends to be diegetically motivated. In this way, the form resembles modernist filmmaking, even if Ozu is not necessarily attempting to react to classical Hollywood codes; his shots do not work to create the most coherent or easily perceivable whole. However, his shots are also not quite so indiscrete as to easily embody time-images.

One exception to this statement, what Deleuze calls still-lives and Noël Burch calls pillow shots (such as the vase in *Late Spring*), functions as a subversion of perception-images; they separate an area of space from the space around it, but without a clear diegetic or symbolic motivation for doing so. Here, Deleuze creates a binary between still-lives and empty spaces (character- and movement-free spaces, such as establishing shots). "An empty space owes its importance above all to the absence of a possible content, whilst the still life is defined by the

presence and composition of objects which are wrapped up in themselves or become their own container." (16) If empty spaces represent semantic emptiness, still-lives represent semantic fullness; the object of the still-life, like the vase in *Late Spring*, is a whole that exists within a nothing, having been divorced from the film's diegesis. It follows that "the still life is time, for everything that changes is in time, but time does not itself change, it could itself change only in another time, indefinitely." (17) Placed as a shot within a film, the vase is given a temporal dimension, and it lasts on the screen for several seconds. But the shot is still, and it does not change; the only change is the passage of time. The still-life is space-time at its most indiscrete: it represents *everything*, bounded only by the determinate constancy of time. It is the time-image at its purest.

Deleuze limits his study of time-images in Ozu to these still-lives. However, there is still room for other types of time-images to exist within Ozu's style. While they may not represent pure time in the way the still-lives do, they still display space-time as relatively indiscrete, such that the presence of time within the scene is foregrounded to some extent. To illustrate, the concept of the second type of movement-image, the action-image, is useful to display as another point of contrast. (The third type of movement-image, the affection-image, while an interesting possibility to explore, remains outside the scope of this essay.) The action-image, like the perception-image, works to *discrete-ize* space-time. However, instead of dividing space into separate parts, the action-image divides *time* into separate parts. It is the temporal interval between which an 'ingoing' event affects an 'outgoing' event - the moment between 'cause' and 'effect'. (Bogue 36) As such, filmic moments of decisive and sudden change in plot - the inciting action, the climax, and such - can be considered action-images; they create a strong sense of 'before' and 'after', with little similarity between the two.

Ozu tends to avoid action-images, a fact that can be seen in two aspects of his style. The more concrete aspect is his proclivity for narrative ellipsis, a technique where important events in the diegesis are kept offscreen: there is a 'before' and an 'after', but no dividing point of change. The most obvious example in *Early Summer* is the omission of Noriko's wedding: Noriko is seen crying, suddenly aware of the fissive effect her impending marriage will have on her family; at which point, Ozu cuts to her parents, some months later, discussing the split of their family. In this sequence, the theoretical action-image would be Noriko's wedding ceremony, or maybe her final goodbye to her family; by omitting these action-images, Ozu focuses less on the decisive moment, the moment of 'action', instead choosing to portray the non-active events of the everyday. The other aspect of his style, less concrete, is precisely this notion of the everyday. Deleuze acknowledges this in the quote that opened this essay: "In Ozu, everything is ordinary or banal, even death and the dead who are the object of a natural forgetting..." (14) In the crying scene of *Early Summer*, this banality could perhaps be the result of the lack of a music cue, the absence of a reaction from another person, or the way the framing of the scene does not vary from Ozu's usual framing style. The importance of the everyday-ness of this and most other scenes in Ozu to Deleuze, though, is in how the narrative evokes a *flow* of time, rather than a series of temporal durations. The action-image is an event whose causal structure is readily

perceivable and detected by the viewer; conversely, Ozu's everyday narratives use a causal structure that, while certainly present, is not perceived by the viewer as a chain of cause/effect.

While the absence of an action-image in Ozu's films is certainly interesting, the more important question to ask is whether or not this stylistic trait can represent any sort of coherent meaning. One way to do so, drawing a final time from Deleuze, is with the distinction between history and becoming - roughly and respectively, the difference between the recognized conditions of a past event and the "shadowy and secret part [of an event] that is continually subtracted from or added to its actualization." (Patton 33) There is a clear parallel here with the action-image: like history, the action-image is visible, identifiable, concrete *change*. Conversely, invisible causal links within film correspond to the state of becoming. Using this parallel, the action-image, and its lack thereof in Ozu, can be historicized and compared to a film's historical material. Nygren posits an example of this in his analysis of Ozu's hybridized humanism: "Japanese tradition associates personal loss with the passing of seasons through the trope of poignancy, and Ozu in *Tokyo Story* ... locates the death of the mother in this nexus. As in nearly every Ozu film, nature in *Tokyo Story* is woven together with images of modernization ... The seasons, through parallelism, can be extended to the continuing transformation of the modern world and the inevitable loss of one's own childhood world of libidinal transparency." (152-153) Here, Ozu utilizes a traditional association - death and the passing of the seasons - and links it with the continuing change of modernization. However, while the passing of seasons - divorced from social causality - is an ahistorical expression of time, the transformation of the modern world is commonly historicized, shown as an effect of social and technological change. With this association, Ozu dehistoricizes modernity, positing it as part of the continuing evolution of the world over time; his modernity is not displayed with the hard change of the action-image, but rather as a subtle, invisible change.

Without an action-image (such as, for instance, trees being cut down to make way for a house, or teenage delinquents loitering in front of a Buddhist shrine), Ozu opts against *discretizing* tradition and modernity, choosing to blend them into a continual evolution; as such, *Tokyo Story's* aforementioned establishing shots constitute in themselves a time-image, in that the lack of an action-image in representing the past and the present works to *indiscrete-ize* history. In this way, the present becomes more than just the present; the present, rather than defined against the past, appropriates and is mediated by the past. Through Ozu's use of time-images, the past, in a mediated way, co-exists with the present. This idea manifests itself in *Early Summer* in three different ways: firstly, in the movie's use of dolly shots; secondly, in its references to the war and Noriko's dead brother; and thirdly, in the character of Noriko herself.

Since Ozu is known for almost always using static shots in his films, it is worth paying attention to the sequences in which the camera moves. In *Early Summer*, there are three cuts which transition between two different dolly shots. The first occurs after Noriko's boss suggests a marriage prospect to her; Ozu cuts from a dolly shot in the empty hallway outside his room to a dolly shot inside an empty Noh theatre. The second happens soon after Minoru and Isamu run away; the camera cuts from a dolly of the two pieces of bread on the ground to a dolly of the two

children walking along the beach. The third appears when Noriko and Aya are about to sneak a look at Mr. Manabe, Noriko's original prospect; Ozu cuts from a dolly of them sneaking through a hallway to the hallway of Noriko's house, where her family is lamenting her sudden decision to marry. In all three of these sequences, Ozu establishes a flow that is not present in his cuts between static shots. By allowing the shots an actively noticeable similarity in movement (as opposed to the similarity between static shots, a homogeneity that is so common throughout the movie as to be invisible), he sutures each set of shots together in a way that his usual piecemeal-style editing does not allow. In relation to the rest of the film, traces of each first shot remain in their corresponding second shot; each shot subsumes its correlating shot. What makes these sequences time-images, then, is the historical signifiers each of them contain. In the first, the traditional space of the Noh theatre subsumes the space of the [then-]present era; the past is given a presence in the present era. In the second, the bread displays an awareness of the importance of food to Kōichi's generation, having recently lived through the war and the food shortages that succeeded it. Its comparison with the shot of Isamu and Minoru could have a multiplicity of meanings; one of the more interesting, perhaps, is how the trauma of the war lingers in the two boys' anger at their father. In the third sequence, the youthfulness of Noriko and Aya - signified by the way they playfully tiptoe - is subsumed by the judgemental disappointment displayed by Noriko's family; her youthfulness is placed within the context of a society that is largely traditional. Here, the second shot has a greater effect on the first than vice versa; it allows a presence of tradition within the otherwise nondescript hallway of the first shot. Nevertheless, this sequence, along with the other two, is ultimately a time-image; it *indiscretizes* space-time by emphasizing the flow between a past and a present.

The time-image is also present in the film's direct references to the war. Noriko's deceased brother, Shoji - who died in the war - is referenced in a conversation between Noriko and Kenkichi, who was Shoji's best friend. Kenkichi tells Noriko that, during the war, he received a wheat stalk from Shoji in the mail. The significance of wheat as a symbol for the dead Shoji - or perhaps of the continuing presence of the dead in the present - is made clear in the film's closing shot of a wheat field blowing in the wind; Ozu creates a consciousness about remembrance of the dead, contrasted against the previous image of a bridal procession through the wheat. Perhaps one way of seeing this consciousness is as an expression of *samsāra*, the transmigration of souls in Buddhist thought, referred to in Japan as *rinne*. (Keown) In this way, the soul of Shoji inhabits a presence within the marriage of Noriko and Kenkichi, his sister and his best friend; rather than existing in the present as just a memory, he exists as something more, thereby blurring the line *moreso* between the before-death and the after-death of his existence.

Finally, the most complex form of time-image in *Early Summer* is Noriko herself, defined by cultural signifiers in such a way that she comes to represent a complex, indeterminate synthesis of past and present. On one hand, she comes to signify modernity; as a young woman during the occupation, she is among the first women with complete emancipation from "the paternal controls of the Meiji Constitution." (Perez 141) On the other hand, this difference is not expressed in a wholly determinate way. In occupation-era Japan, the symbol of modernized

femininity was the *panpan*, the ostensibly Americanized prostitute that serviced American GIs - sometimes out of poverty and desperation, but sometimes simply out of curiosity or boredom. (Dower 132) If the *panpan* is the action-image of feminine modernity - a determinate, distinct break from the past - then Noriko, a relatively traditional figure, is certainly not as representative of modernity as the *panpan*. The best example of this mediation is displayed about a third into the film. Ozu contrasts two scenes of Noriko talking about a friend's wedding: the first, with her friends at a restaurant; and the second, with Fumiko at their house. Ozu sets up two binaries of modernity and tradition. Firstly, the spaces of each scene provide a stark contrast; the somewhat Americanized restaurant, with its Western-style chairs and tables, brick walls, and large Modernist painting of a nude woman, contrasts with the traditional Japanese house and its paper walls, sliding doors, and pillows as seats. Secondly, Noriko talks about the wedding in contrasting terms between each scene; her flippancy towards the ceremony, and marriage in general, gives way to her appraisal of the bride when she arrives home. There is no reason to believe that one side of her attitude towards marriage predominates her personality - no signification is made to display her as a liar in either scene. There is simply an embodiment of two different attitudes, a blurring of the line between modern and traditional personalities. Noriko is, plainly put, a time-image of Japanese culture; she represents tradition and modernity as indiscrete, indeterminate values.

Deleuze was correct to assume that Ozu represented time in a complex, indiscrete way in his films. However, by limiting his analysis of Ozu to his still-lives, Deleuze failed to recognize other forms of Bergsonian time in these films. In *Early Summer*, the indeterminacy of the Noriko character, the themes of death, and the use of dollies are just a few forms of the time-image Ozu presents.

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