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AI NO CORRIDA

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Written and Directed by

NAGISA OSHIMA

with

Eiko MATSUDA

and

Tatsuya FUJI

Decor and Costumes

Jusho TODA

Photography

Hideo ITO

Lighting

Kenichi OKAMOTO

Sound

Tetsuo YASUDA

Editing

Keiichi URAOKA

Original Music

Minoru MIKI

and

Traditional Songs of Japan

General Coordinator

SHIBATA ORGANISATION INC

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INTERVIEW WITH NAGISA OSHIMA

Question : You had thought of calling your film in Japan "Corrida of Love". It is, therefore, in your mind, a killing?

Answer : For a long time I had been thinking of a project based on the famous story of Sada. Anatole Dauman, the producer I admire the most in the world, one day suggested this title which determined the making of the film.

Q. : What relation do you establish between physical passion, enjoyment born of sexual pleasure and death?

A. : An indissoluble link. In the ecstasy of love, the cry is: "I'm dying".

Q. : Did you think of Georges Bataille, Antonin Artaud or of Sade, who inevitably come to mind because of Sada?

A. : I'm too lazy to have re-read them before writing my script.

Q. : The action of the film is presented like an act of uninterrupted love: only the places where it is carried out change in accordance with an itinerary which allows no halt for the two lovers. There are 20 different decors, 20 rooms of love, cloistered places like an arena and consecrated to a deadly rite. Are you, like we are, convinced of the unicity of your action.

A. : As you state so pertinently, I wanted gestures and words emanating from one language: the sexual language. Had it been different, I would consider my film a failure. The chosen space is certainly that of Love and Death, and to me it covers the whole of Japan.

Q. : You will not allow us to look at Sada as a murderer. The man, her victim, accepts and even provokes his own end. Going further than mere anecdote you seem to celebrate Mad Love as a religion of the Absolute.

A. : In connection with Sada, the word 'murderer' shocks me as it would any Japanese. If, in the beginning, Sada and Kichizo seem to be libertines, they move towards a form of sanctification, and I hope that everyone will understand it.

Q. : "The Young Boy" and "The Hanging" refer to very recent events: "L'Empire des Sens", is based on an event that took place 40 years ago. What is its relativity for you today?

.....

- A. : Facts lose nothing of their relativity as long as they awake in us some echo, even if they belong to another century.
- Q. : Some people will reproach you for having given up your social and political commitments.
- A. : Is it not extremely significant to show one's indifference to politics?
- Q. : What remains of the principal theme of your previous films? Childhood dreams - Japanese reality? Can it be found in the oedipal relationships which unite these near-orphans Sada and Kichizo, to sexual partners older than themselves?
- A. : I do not intend to deny this form of psychanalytical approach that you are free to use in relations to my film. It is your responsibility. I would, however, say: does one know what to do with one's life when young? Later, one ends up by perceiving something, and it is precisely the case of my characters who state their desires, in opposition to society.
- Q. : What, in your opinion, are the key scenes?
- A. : Let each spectator answer for me.
- Q. : To avoid any misunderstanding, could you define the meaning of the words 'geisha' and 'prostitute' in the Japan of 1936 and today?
- A. : The word 'geisha' implies very different professional categories. It means 'sell one's art' but at the bottom of the social scale it means 'sell one's body'. I should add: according to ideas specific to our country, the world of sensuality is far from compromising to human values. This notion of 'koshokou' which combines 'know how to appreciate' and 'know how to love' was never neglected. In the past, it was even a condition for being a gentleman. In the 10th century the 'novel of Ghenji' found the Japanese aristocratic society, and for the first time, because of it, a sexual culture claimed 'to know how to love'. Polygamy and polyandry were paramount in this aristocratic society. This refinement in erotic morals ended during the brutal era of the 'Samourais', but it was revived during the 'Edo era', that is between the 17th and 19th centuries. Of course, such a culture was the privilege of the ruling classes, who practised it in houses of pleasure. Houses which were not devoted to - absolutely not - Monogamy was imposed during the 'Meiji' period encouraging the economical modernisation of the country, based on an imported model. The beautiful tradition of 'know how to love' fades away and dies out just before the outbreak of the second world war. Sada and Kichizo

are the survivors of the sexual tradition which has lived on and which, to me, is admirably Japanese.

Q. : The end of the film recalls that 4 days after her crime Sada was found resplendent with happiness and holding in her hands her lover's sexual organs. Where did this information come from?

A. : All the police reports state this fact, and they inspired the last shot of my film without which it would be false from start to finish.

Q. : Your dialogue is short ... pointillistic. You force the spectator to see, to feel, to think. For each person the film becomes more personal, more intimate.

A. : I preferred to use short dialogues, and the French subtitles reflect very well the conciseness and after all the act of love does not need words.

Q. : Mad Love seems to find its accomplishment in the final castration and perhaps it would be appropriate to bring up the idea of sin in the Christian sense?

A. : Certainly. And I hope that Kichizo does not evoke for you the image of Crucified Man.

Q. : Who is part of your spiritual family?

A. : All those who wanted or want to change Society and those who wanted and want to change themselves. But, choosing between famous people and those who are not, I prefer the company of the latter.

Q. : 'Oshima' aesthetics naturally call on the use of decor, costumes, music and you are always helped by the same decorator.

A. : In the beginning I considered myself someone who wanted to destroy all aesthetics and yet, from film to film, I have discovered my own aesthetics, particularly since my meeting with the eminent decorator, Jusho Toda. If I have to explain myself, it would be a mixture between a form of asceticism and an ineffably epicurean feeling. If I resume myself in one shot it would be a flame on a black, or a very dark background. In this way 'L'Empire des Sens' deliberately shows the limits to which these aesthetics have brought me.

Q. : In fact, and it can only be deliberately, for the first time you have shut yourself up in a physical and even sexual action, being aware of all the misunderstandings that might arise.

- A. : It is true that I felt totally free to make this film as I wanted.
- Q. : In Japan, Sada is a popular figure. What does she represent today and why dedicate this film to her?
- A. : The name of Sada is so popular in Japan, that it is enough to say it, to raise the question of the most serious sexual taboos. It is quite natural that a Japanese artist would want to dedicate his work to this marvellous woman. Thanks to the magnificent collaboration of the actors and the means provided by the producers, I do not think I betrayed her image.
- Q. : Do you obey any axiom, any rule?
- A. : I have always dreamt of mixing dreams and reality.
- Q. : What is the subject of your next film?
- A. : Ask Mr Anatole Dauman.

AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDRE PIEYRE DE MANDIARGUES BY ORNELLA VOLTA
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L'EMPIRE DES SENS is the first film by Oshima that I have seen: it gives me a great desire to know this director's work better, since he seems to me to be the most fascinating director of the new Japanese cinema.

L'EMPIRE DES SENS is a totally erotic film. To say that is not to state an affirmation, because nowadays the adjective 'erotic' is employed frequently for any common sexual manifestation, for everything that the French with their beautiful language call 'smutty talk', all that well brought-up call 'cunt'.

Watching this film I thought, almost all the time, of Mishima and his great book 'L'Ordeal des Roses'. In L'EMPIRE DES SENS it is at an ordeal of sex that one assists. A man, in the same way as Saint Sebastiane is pinned to the tree, is rivetted by his sex to the woman who loves him and who will mortally strike him with her implacable love.

It is almost too obvious to quote, in relation to this film, Georges Bataille's famous definition of eroticism being the approbation of life until death. Certain scenes, and I am thinking particularly of the one in which the mistress forces her lover to make love to the old 'geisha' who reminds him of his mother's corpse, seem to me not only very akin to Bataille's thinking, but even directly inspired by his work. The significance of such a scene in fact goes far beyond the notion of communion with the forebears, which is part of the Japanese religious tradition. 'L'Histoire de l'Oeil' and 'Le Bleu du Ciel' can help us to understand this better.

The real relationship between Oshima and Bataille is such that the only question that should be asked, it seems to me, by the critics, the general public and the magistrature is the following: whether or not we consider Georges Bataille to be one of the greatest geniuses of this century, one of the greatest classical writers of French literature, one of the greatest philosophers of sexuality, and one of the major exponents of the burning question, what is eroticism? If, as it is to be hoped, the answer is yes, then one has to agree that L'EMPIRE DES SENS is the most noble illustration that can be given to Bataille's work.

Watching this pageant of images of an intensity and an incomparable force, I also thought of Balthus' painting, and not just because Balthus is married to a young Japanese who is one of the most beautiful and intelligent women I have met, but because in his work it would seem that Balthus has a lordly and feudal conception of love, somewhat like that of Tristan and Isolda, and which at the same time is specifically Japanese.

In passing it should be noted that the role of the lover's wife in the story is to personify the limit to be overcome, to signify the forbidding of violation so that love can flower in death. The wife plays the same role here as Canon Fulbert plays with Abelard and Heloise. She personifies the condemnation without which there would be no tragic awakening.

When the young woman, Sada, feeds her lover with food that she has put in her womb, one thinks of Pierre Jean Jouve and of the important chapter of his book 'Dans les années profondes', in which the two future lovers, exchange flowers which they have bathed with their sexual liquids. However, Oshima goes even further. For him it is a matter of the nutritive sex and its consumption, as the end of the film proves.

Lacan, I am told, claims that the film is one of the most chaste he has ever seen. I agree with him. Eroticism enlightened by death such as Bataille conceives or preaches, is, in fact, absolutely chaste, desperately pure. I do not think that 'Madame Edwarda' excited even the most excitable of schoolboys. It appears that one of the most successful films of recent years 'Les Valseuses', which I have not seen and certainly will not, has sexually excited at least half of the French population, women included. It will certainly not be the case of L'EMPIRE DES SENS which could, on the contrary, be recommended by the regional bishoprics as a wholly salutary instrument of terror. The glacial nature of eroticism, such as it appears in this film, comes from the nobility, the pureness, the extreme simplicity with which the question of love is considered, the absence of any frills, which places it, I've already said, on the level of Tristan and Isolde.

Throughout the film, the young woman plays with a knife. The man meets her for the first time, when she is brandishing a knife at his wife. Later, when they live together, every day as she shaves him she shows him the blade that will serve in the last rite. The surprise, if surprise there be in the film, is that the ritual killing of the lover is not with a knife, which is used for the ablation of the sex. I insist on the word ablation here, rather than castration, because it is not a question of deprivation, of a diminution, on the contrary. When the woman holds up the man's sex like a torch - the sex she has just cut off - one feels that she has achieved the ultimate objective of love. The woman's soul seems to be wholly concentrated in the man's sex.

What seems very Japanese to me, and which is very beautiful, is the representation of the sexual pleasure of the woman, that the Japanese knew and know how to show with astonishing intensity. The famous amatory engravers, Utamaro and Hokusai, have thousands and thousands of times drawn the face of a woman embellished by sexual ecstasy, transfigured

by the wave of pleasure, exalted by the orgasm. It is quite surprising that until now the influence of Utamaro and Hokusai has not been felt on the Japanese cinema - to my knowledge, I am not an expert. It could be said that Oshima consciously used these splendid watercolours and wood-engravings for the numerous close-ups of faces, which never cease to recall the beauty of Japanese 18th century engravings.

It is admirable that it should be a man, the director Oshima, who shows such veneration for feminine eroticism. In *L'EMPIRE DES SENS*, the virile character, sexually abnormal because he is in a state of almost perpetual erection, is little by little reduced to the role of object. Towards the end of the film, he is ready to die, he only asks to be finished off. The desire to possess fully the object of her love, the fear of killing her male, seems to me a normal female fantasy, and I might add that nothing can flatter a man as much as such desire, which unfortunately is shown much less often than one might wish ...

The connection between the sex and the knife inevitably refers to Sade. We are tempted to see a definite allusion in the first name of Sada, chosen by Oshima for his heroine. However, this is a fairly common name in Japan, and I consider that one should rather see in this coincidence a sign of natural sympathy or spontaneous agreement between Sade and the sensitivity of the Japanese people. Perhaps because of the aristocratic refinement of the Marquis' eroticism, when one thinks of Japan, the notion of aristocracy always arises. The Japanese masses with their canned foods, cluttered with camera and transistor radios seem to be as common and ill-mannered as are the American masses. However, there are in Japan a few artists, a few writers, a few poets whose position is comparably above the rest of the country. Oshima is one of these great lords.

It is particularly interesting that the story of Sada was not invented, but concerns an event which really took place in Japan in 1936. It is significant that this young woman, by her act, became a national heroine in Japan, a sort of Joan of Arc - and I must insist on the comparison. That it can be seen as a forewarning of the acts of the Kamikases, I would not deny. Another connection, if not relationship, between Joan of Arc, Mishima and very present-day Oshima.

André Pieyre de Mandiargues