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Ichiban utsukushiku (The most beautiful), Kurosawa, Akira, 1944  
Shichinin no samurai (Seven samurai), Kurosawa, Akira, 1954  
Rashomon, Kurosawa, Akira, 1950  
Tsubaki Sanjuro (Sanjuro), Kurosawa, Akira, 1962  
Hakuchi (The idiot), Kurosawa, Akira, 1951  
Ikiru (To live), Kurosawa, Akira, 1952  
Donzoko (The lower depths), Kurosawa, Akira, 1957  
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Ikimono no koroku (I live in fear), Kurosawa, Akira, 1956  
Sugata Sanshiro (Sanshiro Sugata), Kurosawa, Akira, 1943  
Yoidore tenshi (Drunken angel), Kurosawa, Akira, 1948  
Kakushi toride no san-akunin (The hidden fortress), Kurosawa,  
Akira, 1958  
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1960

SIGHT / SOUND

# KURROSAWVA



# ON



*gathered, edited & annotated by* **DONALD RICHIE**

# KURROSAWVA

**K**UROSAWA DOES NOT LIKE to talk about his films, nor is he fond of discussing film theory. Once, when I asked him about the meaning of one of his pictures, he said: "If I could have said it in words, I would have--then I wouldn't have needed to make the picture."

Recently, however, Kurosawa expressed an interest in looking back over the body of his work, and these are the results. I have deleted nothing and have only added to the material when it seemed relevant.

## SUGATA SANSHIRO

(*Sanshiro Sugata/Judo Saga/La Légende de judo*), 1943, Toho

I REMEMBER THE FIRST time I said *cut*—it was as though it was not my own voice at all. From the second time on it was me all right. When I think of this first picture I remember most that I had a good time making it. And at this period it was hard to have a good time making films because it was wartime and you weren't allowed to say anything worth saying. Back then everyone thought that the real Japanese-style film should be as simple as possible. I disagreed and got away with disagreeing—that much I could say. Still, I was anything but sure of myself. I remember doing a scene with the heroine, Yukiko Todoriki, and we decided together how it should be done. I remember when I saw an advertisement for the novel this film was based on, I intuitively thought it would be right for me. When it came out I went to the producer's house and asked him to buy the rights. He did so and two days later every major studio was wanting it. It was ideal for an entertainment film and that was about all we were allowed to make back in 1943.

I remember the first day I met Shimura [Takashi Shimura was later the woodcutter in *Rashomon*, the hero of *Ikiru*, and early became a member of the Kurosawa "group"]—he was standing on the lawn of the studio and I didn't recognise him. He was wearing a very old and very shabby hat and I remember thinking that the hat suited him extraordinarily well. At the same time I met Fujita [Susumu Fujita was the hero of this film, and later appeared in *The Hidden Fortress* and other Kurosawa films] and Ryunosuke Tsunagata who was playing the villain. I remember that the critics said he overacted and stole the show. That is not true. He did not overact. He certainly stole the show, however. I told him to. I was much more interested in his character than in the hero.

## ICHIBAN UTSUKUSHIKU

(*Most Beautifully/Le Plus Doux*), 1943, Toho

THIS IS ONE OF Kinoshita's favourite films. [Keisuke Kinoshita is known abroad mainly for *The Legend of Narayama*.] He has always liked it best and I still like it myself. It was my own story and in it I wanted to portray women in a group—a kind of everyday documentary of their lives. All the actresses were told not to use their personal idiosyncrasies and I told them to play it like amateurs. I made all the girls live together in a dormitory during the filming, and I made them run a lot to get them tired—to show themselves on the screen. It is interesting that, after the film, one after the other got married and all became exemplary wives. It was rumoured that I was in love with my star but that was not true. I too got married after it was over, however. I married Yoko Yaguchi.

## SUGATA SANSHIRO ZOKU

(*Sanshiro Sugata—Part Two*), 1944, Toho

THIS FILM DID NOT interest me in the slightest. I had already done it once before. All I remember is that I took Masayuki

Mori off the stage for it. [Mori was the husband in *Rashomon*, and also appeared in *The Idiot* and *The Bad Sleep Well*; he still maintains a career in the theatre.] Again what interested me was not the hero but his opponent. It was an odd film.

## TORA NO O O FUMU OTOKOTACHI

(*The Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail/Walkers on Tigers' Tails/Sur la Piste du Tigre/Die Tigerfährte*), 1944, Toho, released 1953

I HAD ORIGINALLY WANTED to make a costume picture to be called *Doko Kono Yari* [the film—title untranslatable—was never made] and the script was ready but we couldn't make it. No horses. So we made *Kanjincho* instead. [*Tora no O* is based on the Kabuki play *Kanjincho*]. I wrote the script in one night. There was only one stage-set. All the rest was location. This was an order. But, even so, it was much easier to shoot this way. Enoken was very easy to work with [Enoken played the stupid porter who almost gives the plot away; this character is not in the original play; Kurosawa used him to give the reactions of the contemporary Japanese and it was he who contributed all of the comedy in this short film] and this was because he had, after all, had a long career on the stage, and had been trained by Kajiro Yamamoto. [Yamamoto also trained Kurosawa, who was his assistant for the 1941 *Uma* (Horses); together they made the 1946 *Those Who Make Tomorrow*.] It was later shown to, among others, Michael Powell, who expressed himself as pleased. I wanted to remake this film with more sets, lots more technique. Hayasaka and I talked about this project, but never did anything about it. Then he died. His death ruined that as well.

[One of Kurosawa's closest friends was Fumio Hayasaka, the composer who contributed all of the film scores up to and including *Seven Samurai*. Kurosawa has said that the reason for the "failure" of *Ikimono no Kiroku* was because he was deprived of Hayasaka's help, which was much more than that which a composer usually gives a director. They used to think up story ideas together and Hayasaka often helped with the script as well. It is unfortunate that the West is mostly familiar with his music for *Rashomon*, which is quite untypical. He had prepared a Japanese score for the picture and it was Kurosawa who insisted that he wanted something else, something more like the *Boléro*—which is just what he received.]

I knew Hayasaka very well during this early Occupation period, though I did not know Kurosawa at that time. He was an extremely gentle, extremely intelligent man with thick glasses and wild hair. He used to come to listen to new records I would get from America and I remember his excitement when he first heard the Berg Violin Concerto. His own music was highly adventurous and I remember the première of his Piano Concerto which stunned the 1946 audience. Later, he took me to Toho one afternoon and we watched them make a film and I talked with the young director. The film was *Drunken Angel* and the director was Kurosawa.]

## ASU O TSUKURU HITOBITO

(*Those Who Make Tomorrow/Ceux qui font les Lendemains*) Co-directed with Kajiro Yamamoto and Hideo Sekigawa, 1946, Toho

THIS FILM IS NOT REALLY MINE. Not the other directors' either. It was really made by the labour union and is an excellent example of why a committee-made film is no good. I did my part in a week. Even today when I hear the band music on May Day I feel very, very sleepy. Still, it wasn't too bad for just a week's work.

## WAGA SEISHUN NI KOINASHI

(No Regrets for my Youth/  
Je ne regrette pas ma Jeunesse), 1946, Toho

THE ORIGINAL SCRIPT WAS a lot better than the one we had to use. Eijiro Saita wrote it and told what really happened to Hidemi Ozaki, how he was suspected of spying, how he died in prison. The trouble was that there was another script which Kiyoshi Kusuda wanted to use and there was a certain amount of resemblance. The scenario committee told me that I was "standing in the way of a young director." This I didn't want to be doing, but I told them that simply because two directors were involved the films would be different. That is the way movies are, the difference comes from the director, not the story. In fact, I said, I wanted to make a better film than he would. This they did not like and so I had to change the whole second half of my script. Saita refused, I begged, and somehow we started shooting.

The critics were ferocious about the character of the woman in this picture [the heroine, Setsuko Hara, goes to work on a farm, to forget what has happened, turning her back upon social "responsibilities"] but it was only here and in *Rashomon* that I ever fully and fairly portrayed a woman. Of course, all my women are rather strange, I agree. But this woman I wanted to show as the new Japan. I was right, I still think, to show a woman who lived by her own feelings. The critics hated her as though she were a man. But she wasn't—that was the point.

At any rate, it wasn't much of a production—the labour union got in the way. Still, it was the first film in which I had something to say and in which my feelings were used. Everyone disagreed. They said I should go back to the style of *Sugata*. Look, I said, if I could have made anything better than *Sugata* at the time I would have done it—what do I have to go back to? Then they said it was technically more proficient. It wasn't. Besides, techniques are there only to support a director's intentions. If he relies on techniques his original thought cannot help but be cramped. Techniques do not enlarge a director, they limit him and they tend to undermine the basic idea which should prevail.

## SUBARSHIKI NICHiyOBI

(Wonderful Sunday/  
Un splendide Dimanche), 1946, Toho

I GOT THE IDEA FOR THIS FILM from an old Griffith picture about a couple after the first war who plant potatoes. Someone steals the crop but they don't give up; they try again. [Naturally, the "idea" was not literal. Kurosawa, always interested in people trying again and again, made it into the story of a young couple who, despite everything, manage to enjoy themselves on Sunday—their one day off.] Though this film won me the prize for the best director of the year, I think I did not make it nearly freely enough. It is certainly by no means my favourite picture. I had a lot of things to say and I got them all mixed up. I remembered this in *Drunken Angel* and kept my eyes open.

## YOIDORE TENSHI

(Drunken Angel/L'Ange ivre/  
Der trunkene Engel), 1948, Toho

IN THIS PICTURE I FINALLY discovered myself. It was my picture: I was doing it and no one else. Part of this was thanks to Mifune. [Though Toshiro Mifune had been in several films this was his first starring role and it resulted in almost instant fame.] Shimura played the doctor beautifully but I found that I could not control Mifune. When I saw



TOSHIRO MIFUNE IN "DRUNKEN ANGEL".

this, I let him do as he wanted, let him play the part freely. At the same time I was worried because, if I did not control him, the picture would be quite different from what I had wanted. It was a real dilemma. Still, I did not want to smother that vitality. In the end, although the title refers to the doctor, it is Mifune that everyone remembers.

I had seen him in Taniguchi's *To the End of the Silver Mountains* but had no idea that he would be like this. His reactions are extraordinarily swift. If I say one thing, he understands ten. He reacts very quickly to the director's intentions. Most Japanese actors are the opposite of this and so I wanted Mifune to cultivate this gift.

It was from here on that the critics started calling me a "journalistic" director, meaning that I interested myself in "topical themes." Actually, I have always thought of films as a kind of journalism, if journalism means a series of happenings, usually contemporary, which can be shaped into a film. At the same time I know that a timely subject does not make an interesting film, if that is all the film has. One ought to make a film in such a way that the original idea, no matter where it comes from, remains the most important thing; and the feeling that one had at that moment of having the idea is important. Timely then, in my sense, is the opposite of sensational.

One of the reasons for the extreme popularity of this film at the time was that there was no competition—no other films showed an equal interest in people. We had difficulty with one of the characters: that of the doctor himself. Jin Uekusa and I rewrote his part over and over again. Still, he wasn't interesting. We had almost given up when it occurred to me that he was just too good to be true, he needed a defect, a vice. This is why we made him an alcoholic. At that time most film characters were shining white or blackest black. We made the doctor grey.

For this film I had originally wanted to use the *Drei-graschenoper* music but we could not get the rights, so we used cheap guitar music as a substitute. This was the first picture on which Hayasaka worked with me; and from the first we agreed on everything. Like using that vapid *Cuckoo Waltz* for the saddest part of the film. We thought of it separately but together, and after inspiration had struck us both, I remember, we shook hands. It was until that time music and pictures. We wanted both to contribute to each other. It is easy to talk about this but extremely difficult to do.

## SHIZUKA NARU KETTO

(The Silent Duel/Le duel silencieux), 1949, Toho

ORIGINALLY, I SAW THE stage play, done by Chiaki Minoaru, and I thought it would be good for Mifune. He had been a gangster, now *he* could be the doctor. This was also the first production of an independent unit I had formed, and it was the kind of film that a young production company could more easily do. Still, the people who work in movie studios are pretty much the same, and I have certainly never had any lack of confidence.

Yet, when I remember it, it seems to me that only the early scenes in the field hospital have any validity. This is because I didn't *describe* things too well in this picture. When the locale moved back to Japan somehow the drama left the film.

I am the kind of person who works violently, throwing myself into it. I also like hot summers, cold winters, heavy rains and snows, and I think my pictures show this. I like extremes because I find them most alive. I have always found that men who think like men, who act like men, who most *are* themselves, are always better . . . certainly they work better.

The synopsis of the film was sent to CIE [this was during the American Occupation and all film scripts were supervised by the Civil Information and Education Section, lest "feudal content" be included] and was then sent to the Medical Section, where the doctor in charge informed me that I would absolutely terrify the people of syphilis and they would not come for aid. [In the film the doctor accidentally contracts syphilis while operating. In the original version of the film the tertiary stages of the disease were to be shown.] In addition a number of Japanese doctors agreed that it was "un-medical." If you show a man going insane from syphilis, they said, it would not be true. Anyway, the script was approved up to that point and so it could not be helped—Mifune did not go insane in the end. Because of this, however, there were many script problems. I decided to make it a tragic love story and that, tellingly, was the most difficult part of the picture to film.

## NORA INU

(Stray Dog/Chien enragé), 1949, Shintoho.

I AM VERY FOND OF Georges Simenon and I wanted to do a film in his manner. I wanted to, but I failed. Everyone liked the picture, but I do not. It is too *technical*—all that technique and I had not one real thought in it. Shimura is quite good in it but I had not seen very deeply into his character; nor anyone else's for that matter. If I saw into anyone at all it was the murderer. This part was played by Ko Kimura and it was his first part in a film. [Kurosawa used him later in both *Seven Samurai*—the love-struck warrior—and *High and Low*.]

I remember the difficulties we had with the music. Hayasaka and I went from one used record store to the next trying to find just the right music for the scene with the showgirl where the radio is playing. The record had to be old and scratched and the music had to be right. I remember we were so happy when we finally found that ancient rendering of *La Paloma*. During the scene the dubbing was so difficult that I remember my sound man actually cried with rage and frustration.

Other troubles were in shooting. There is the scene where the detective is wandering around looking for his pistol (this story is true, by the way, the original idea for the film came when I heard about a real detective who was so unfortunate during those days of shortages as to lose his pistol), and originally he was to wander through four sections of the city: Shinjuku, Asakusa, Shibuya, and Ueno. It was to be shot in sections on consecutive days. At this point a typhoon descended upon us, the producers asked us to hurry, we did,

and all of this interesting material never got filmed.

I made this film in an unusual way. After hearing the original anecdote I wrote a novel (unpublished) about it. From this I had thought it would be easy to make the script. Not at all. Writing the script took just as much time as it usually does. Time was a problem in another way. Movies have their own internal time—motion-time. In writing a scenario one is always surprised at how much longer it takes than the actual filming does, but this is the way it is. You write a scenario with a different part of your mind, as it were. And you have to remember the context of each shot and make use of it. I remember that the first scene in the film was to have been the opening scene in the police station. We saw the rushes and it was just no good for the opening. I re-read my novel and finally understood why. In the novel it explained itself; in the film there was no context for it to exist in. The novel had begun with a number of details—for example, that it was the hottest day of the year. I filmed these hot-day details, then put in the station scene and the talk about the gun which follows; and it all worked.

## SHUBUN

(Scandal), 1950, Shochiku

THIS IS A PROTEST FILM. It is directly connected with the rise of the press in Japan and their habitual confusion of freedom with licence. Personal privacy is never respected and the scandal sheets are the worst offenders. I felt outrage that this should be so. [Though Kurosawa's protest had no personal involvement. He has for so long remained cool to the press that even simple details about his home life are not published. He has never appeared on TV, from which no Japanese celebrity is ever entirely immune; and he dislikes reading even favourable criticism of his work.] Still, the script wouldn't work right, and no matter how hard we worked it did not satisfy us. Then I thought of the character that became the lawyer in the film and this solved the problem. It is interesting how I thought of it. About ten years earlier I had been drinking in a bar in Shibuya and got talking to the man next to me. He was an older man and he was taking some food to his daughter in the hospital and had stopped off for a drink on the way. We talked about her. He adored her, said there was no one in the world like her. For some reason or other this apparently impressed me. In making this picture I thought, all of a sudden, of the character needed for the lawyer, and went on and made the film. When I looked at it, I found what I had done. The lawyer was the very image of this old man: he talked like him, acted like him.

The part was played by Shimura and was a much more interesting character than that he had played in *Drunken Angel*. I think this was because the doctor was someone I had thought up; but the lawyer had been living in the back of my head, waiting to come out.

In the film we have the daughter die. At that point Hayasaka insisted we use the trumpet. The trumpet? I wondered. And until I saw it I did not know how right he was. I still remember that scene—music and image were one. It taught me an enormous amount.

## RASHOMON

1950, Daiei

I WAS SUPPOSED to make a film for Daiei. At that time Shinobu Hashimono [with whom Kurosawa later worked on *Ikiru* and many other films] had a number of available scenarios. One of them appealed to me but it was too short and had only three episodes in it. All my friends liked it very much, but Daiei did not understand it. They asked: What is it about? I made it longer, put on a beginning and ending—and eventually they agreed to make it. Thus Daiei joined



"RASHOMON": BANDIT AND NOBLEMAN.

those—Shochiku for *The Idiot*, Toho for *I Live in Fear*—who were brave enough to try something different. [This is charitable of Kurosawa. Actually Daiei was fairly adamant in its reluctance to understand. The head of the studio walked out on the first screening and, until the picture began winning prizes abroad, was fond of telling the press how little he understood; Shochiku, of course, butchered *The Idiot*.]

I think Machiko Kyo was marvellous in the film . . . so forceful. And it took about a month of work to get that. After we had finished I wanted to work with her again but never had the opportunity. [Until recently Miss Kyo was exclusively contracted by Daiei, and Daiei never invited Kurosawa to make another film.] We were staying in Kyoto, waiting for the set to be finished. While there we ran off some 16 mm. prints to amuse ourselves. One of them was a Martin Johnson jungle film in which there was a shot of a lion roaming around. I noticed the shot and told Mifune that that was just what I wanted him to be. At the same time Mori had seen downtown a jungle picture in which a black leopard was shown. We all went to see it. When the leopard came on Machiko was so upset that she hid her face. I saw and recognised the gesture—it was just what I wanted for the young wife.

Another thing about this film. I like silent pictures and always have. They are often so much more beautiful than sound pictures are. Perhaps they have to be. At any rate, I wanted to restore some of this beauty. I thought of it, I remember, this way: one of the techniques of modern painting is simplification, I must therefore simplify this film.

We had our share of troubles in making the picture. After one reel was edited there was a studio fire, and another one during dubbing. I'm not happy when I think back to those times. Also, I did not know that the film was being sent to Venice. And it certainly would not have been sent if Giuliana Stramigioli (then head of Unitalia Film) had not seen and liked it.

The Japanese are always terribly critical of Japanese films, so it is not too surprising that a foreigner should be responsible for this film having been sent. It was the same way with Japanese woodcuts; foreigners first appreciated them. We always think too little of our own things. Actually, *Rashomon* wasn't all that good. When I say this then people say to me: You Japanese always think too little of your own

things. Why don't you stand up for your film? What are you so afraid of?

The thing that most surprised me about the film was the camerawork. Kazuo Miyagawa [photographer of *Ugetsu*, *Kagi*, and, later, *Yojimbo*] was worrying about whether it was good enough. Shimura had known him from way back and told me about his fears. I saw the first day's rushes and I knew. He was absolutely perfect.

## HAKUCHI

(The Idiot), 1951, Shochiku

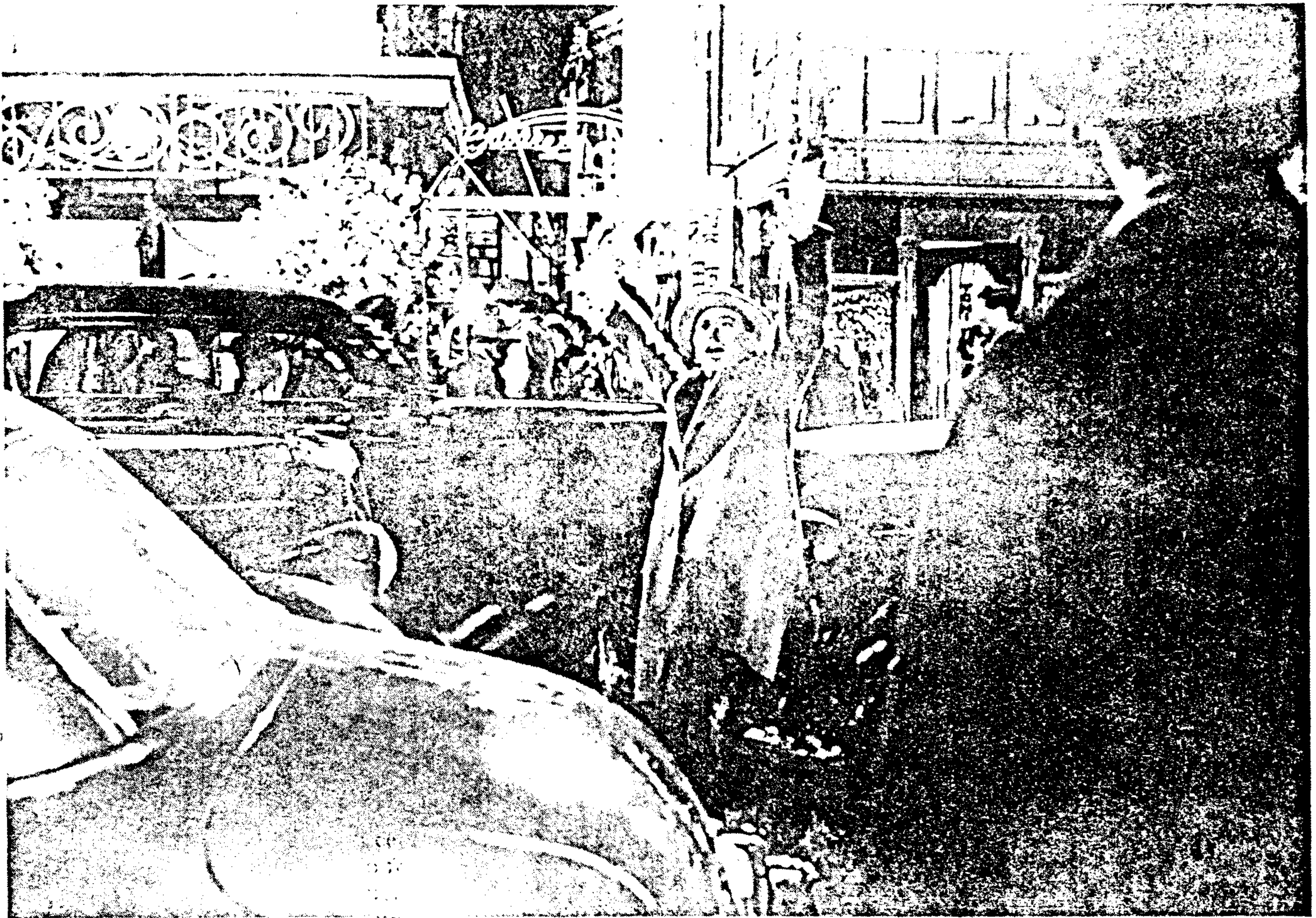
I HAD WANTED TO MAKE this film since before *Rashomon*. Since I was little I'd read Dostoevsky and had thought this book would make a wonderful film. Naturally you cannot compare me to him, but he is still my favourite author, he is the one who writes most honestly about human existence. And I think that when I made this picture I really understood him. He seems terribly subjective, but then you come to the resolution and there is no more objective author writing.

I tried something like this in one of the scenes, when the Prince (in the original) tells Anastasia how good she is. She laughed. I had Setsuko Hara do it just as Dostoevsky had written it. Mori was watching and he was surprised. He liked it but it surprised him. This was just what I wanted.

Making the film was very hard work—it was difficult to make. At times I felt as though I wanted to die. Dostoevsky is heavy enough, and now I was under him—I knew just how those enormous *sumi* wrestlers feel. All the same it was marvellous experience for me.

"THE IDIOT".





A SCENE FROM "IKIRU".

People have said the film is a failure. I don't think so. At least, as entertainment, I don't think it is a failure. Of all my films, people wrote me most about this one. If it had been as bad as all that, they wouldn't have written. I trust my audience. They understood what I was saying. It was a new kind of melodrama [in Japan the word *melodrama* has no nuance of the derogatory; we should perhaps use the term psychological-drama, with the understanding that psychology is shown by action] and this the audience understood. That is why I wanted to make it at Shochiku. [That is, Shochiku had a reputation for making action-films of the *melodrama* variety. Even so, perhaps this company was not the best choice. Kurosawa neglects to note that the company asked him to cut the film by half and he made his famous reply: If you want to cut it, you had better cut it lengthwise.] If a director does not make a habit of lying to his audience, he can trust them.

The reviews were terrible [and those from America when it was shown, more or less uncut, in 1963 were equally bad] and if I had not made this film perhaps critics would not have had it so in for me. But, on thinking it over, I suppose that any director ought at least once to have been roundly attacked and embarrassed. One should be brave enough to risk this kind of "mistake". Nowadays no one does. Directors are too smart. They avoid this kind of failure. Yet, to make a failure surely is no disgrace. Still, I would have been happy if at least one critic had admired something about it. Certainly Mifune and Yoshiko Kuga were fine enough.

## IKIRU

(Living/To Live/Doomed/Vivre/Vivre enfin un seul jour/Leben!), 1952, Toho

WHAT I REMEMBER BEST here is the long wake sequence that ends the film, where—from time to time—we see scenes in the hero's later life. Originally I wanted music all under this long section. I talked it over with Hayasaka and we decided on it and he wrote the score. Yet when it came time to dub, no matter how we did it, the scenes and music simply did not fit. So I thought about it for a long time and then took all the music out. I remember how disappointed Hayasaka was. He just sat there, not saying anything, and the rest of the day he tried to be cheerful. I was sorry I had to do it, yet I had to. There is no way now of telling him how I felt—he is gone.

He was a fine man. It was as though he (with his glasses) were blind and I was deaf. We worked so well together because one's weakness was the other's strength. We had been together ten years and then he died. It was not only my own loss—it was music's loss as well. You don't meet a person like that twice in your life.

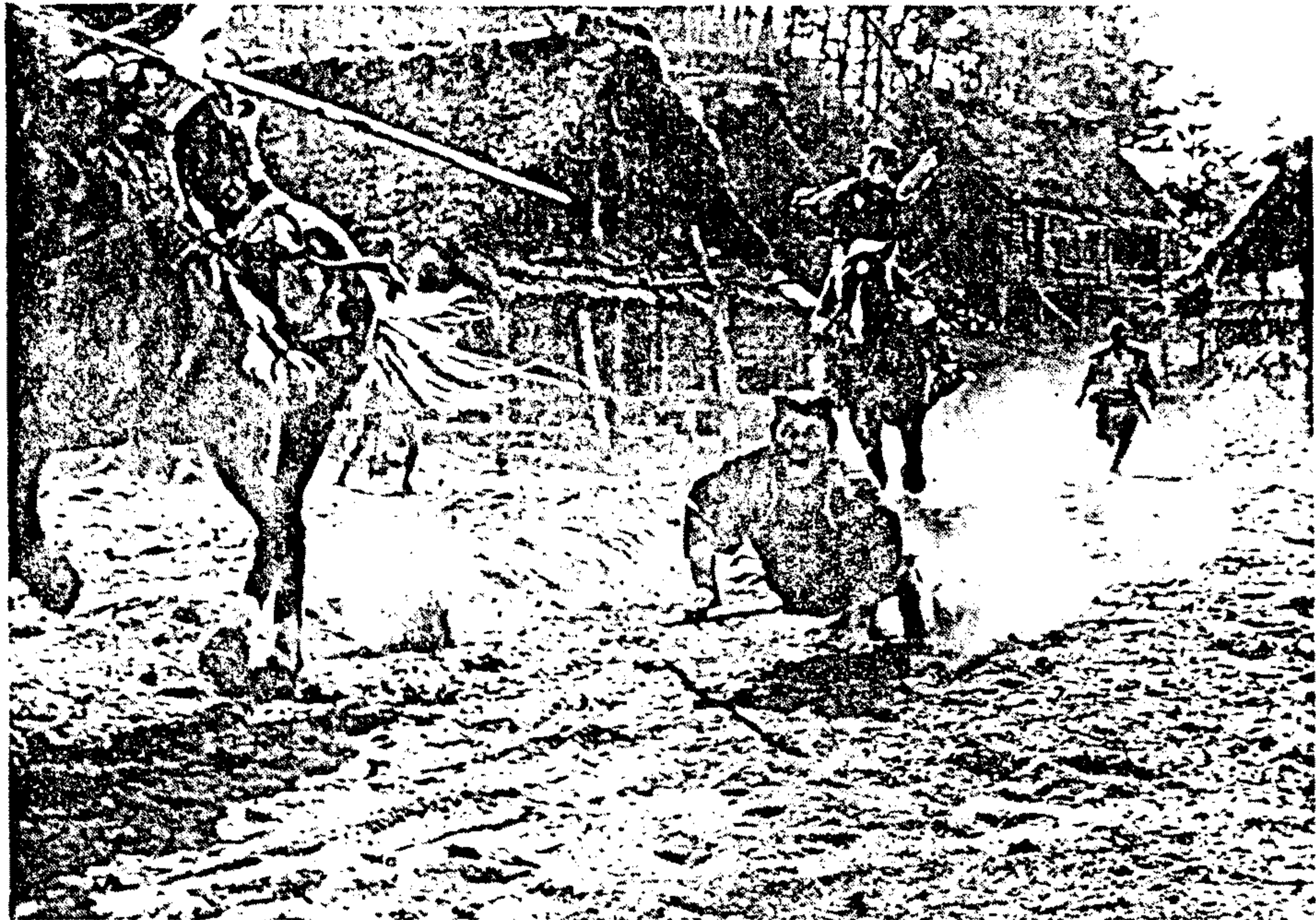
[Kurosawa has mentioned elsewhere the genesis of the idea that resulted in *Ikiru*: Occasionally I think of my death... then I think, how could I ever bear to take a final breath, while living a life like this, how could I leave it? There is, I feel, so much more for me to do—I keep feeling I have lived so little yet. Then I become thoughtful, but not sad. It was from such a feeling that *Ikiru* arose.]

PART TWO OF "KUROSAWA ON KUROSAWA" WILL APPEAR IN THE OCTOBER SIGHT AND SOUND.



# KUROSAWA

ON



# KUROSAWA

*PART TWO / gathered, edited & annotated by DONALD RICHIE*

THE FIRST PART OF this article, in which Akira Kurosawa looks back on his own films, was published in the Summer **SIGHT AND SOUND**. Donald Richie writes: "I have deleted nothing, and have only added to the material when it seemed relevant." His comments appear in the text in square brackets.

## **SHICHININ NO SAMURAI**

**(Seven Samurai/The Magnificent Seven/  
Die sieben Samurai/Les Sept samourais), 1954, Toho**

JAPANESE FILMS ALL TEND to be *assari shite iru* [light, plain, simple but wholesome] just like *ochazuke* [green tea over rice, a dish whose *assari* connotations are so celebrated that Ozu once used it in a film title], but I think we ought to have richer foods, richer films. And so I thought I would make this kind of film, entertaining enough to eat, as it were. Of course, I've felt that way from the beginning—still, the labour of doing just that in Japan! Something always comes up. We didn't have enough horses; it rained all the time. It was just the kind of picture that is impossible to make in this country.

And then when it was finished it was too long, but they released it uncut in Japan anyway. [The original was over three hours long and was shown only in 1954 and then only in key cities. A shortened version played second and third runs. A second shortened version was made for export and this is the version most people have seen. A third was made for the Venice Festival—upon which Kurosawa remarks below. There are no prints of the original in Japan, and even negatives of the cut-outs seem to have disappeared.] But we had to shorten it for Venice. Naturally none of the critics

understood it. They all complained about the first half being confused. It certainly was—that was the half that was so cut. I know what a good film it was. The second half, which went to Venice without major cuts, they understood and liked; as a matter of fact minor cuts helped it.

It was difficult making that film. [Kurosawa does not mention that part of the difficulty was occasioned by the producers who, understandably disturbed that an expensive production should be over a year in production and that half of that time should be spent at a distant location site, sent a number of telegrams telling the director to come back at once. These the director answered with other telegrams saying that they had the alternative of allowing him to continue or firing him.] But it was wonderful work too. My own staff, those people who always work with me . . . well, there are no better people in the world to work with. And I don't mean only those who worked on the script or the design or the production—I mean the carpenters, the electricians, the grips. Even if I didn't tell them how to do a single thing, they would know just what I wanted. It is due to people like this that I have been able to make films such as this one.

## **IKIMONO NO KIROKU**

**(Record of a Living Being/I Live in Fear/What the Bird Knew/Si les Oiseaux savaient/Vivre dans le Peur/  
Bilanz eines Lebens/Ein Leben in Angst), 1955, Toho**

WHILE I WAS MAKING *Seven Samurai* I went to see Hayasaka, who was sick, and we were talking and he said that if a person was in danger of dying he couldn't work very well. He was

quite ill at the time, very weak, and we did not know when he might die. And he knew this too. Just before this we had had word of the Bikini experiments. When he had said a person dying could not work I thought he meant himself—but he didn't, it turned out. He meant everyone: all of us. Next time I met him I suggested we do a film on just that subject. He was pleased. The film was begun. Together and through asking other people we decided that a satire would be best. This followed my idea: I wanted to do a satire, but I didn't know how to make a satire on something like the H-bomb. And this was the problem I kept running up against while trying to write the script. It was difficult to keep it satirical.

As we [Shinobu Hashimoto, Hideo Oguni, and Kurosawa himself] worked on the script we more and more felt that we were really making the kind of picture with which, after it was all over and the last judgment was upon us, we could stand up and account for our past lives by saying proudly: We made *Ikimono no Kiroku*. And that is the kind of film it turned into.

Perhaps that is the reason it might be thought incoherent or even chaotic [i.e. turning a satire into a tragedy]. Still, it was good we made it. Anyhow, the way we felt, how could we have made a satire? This time the entire staff knew how we felt, sensed our confusion. No one said very much, everyone worked very hard. And it was very hard work indeed. After it was all over we had a party to celebrate and Noriko Sengoku [who had a part in the film] said to me: "Well, we worked hard, didn't we? But from now on our parts will be all the more difficult." I agreed with her, and would still agree. Still, after I had made the film, I felt as though I had put down a heavy load, I felt as though I had got rid of lots of things.

It was during the filming of the scenes after the fire in the factory, it was just then that Hayasaka died. This was a great shock. I didn't even have the strength to work, to work well at any rate, and that is why these scenes are so weak. And the ending too [where the hero, gone mad, looks at the sun and says: The earth—at last it is on fire, it is burning up], that is weak. After *Seven Samurai* was over we were all tired out but happy; after *Ikimono* we were exhausted.

The turn-out for this film was very bad, few people came, and it was my biggest box-office failure. After having put so much of myself into this film, after having seriously treated a serious theme, this lack of interest disappointed me. When I think of it, however, I see now that we made the film too soon. At that time no one was thinking seriously of atomic extinction. It was only later that people got frightened, and that a number of films on the subject appeared, among them *On the Beach*.

## KUMONOSUJO

**(The Castle of the Spider's Web/The Throne of Blood/Kumonosu-Djo/Macbeth/Das Schloss im Spinnennetz/Château d'Araignée/Le Trône de Sang), 1957, Toho**

WITH THIS FILM, *The Lower Depths*, and *The Hidden Fortress*, I seem to have made a *jidai-geki* trilogy. [Almost all Japanese, and Kurosawa is no exception, think of films as being divided into period-pictures (*jidai-geki*) and modern-story pictures (*gendai-mono*) as though these were the only two alternatives. The West has something like this in its attitudes toward Westerns (i.e. the "adult Western" etc.) and the crime film.] I have long thought that the Japanese *jidai* picture is very often historically uninformed, and, beyond this, has never really availed itself of modern film-making techniques. In *Seven Samurai* we tried to do something about that, and *Kumonosujo* had the same general feeling behind it.

Originally I had wanted to produce this film and let a younger director direct it. But when the script was finished and Toho saw how expensive it would be, they asked me to direct it. So I did—my contract expired after these three films.

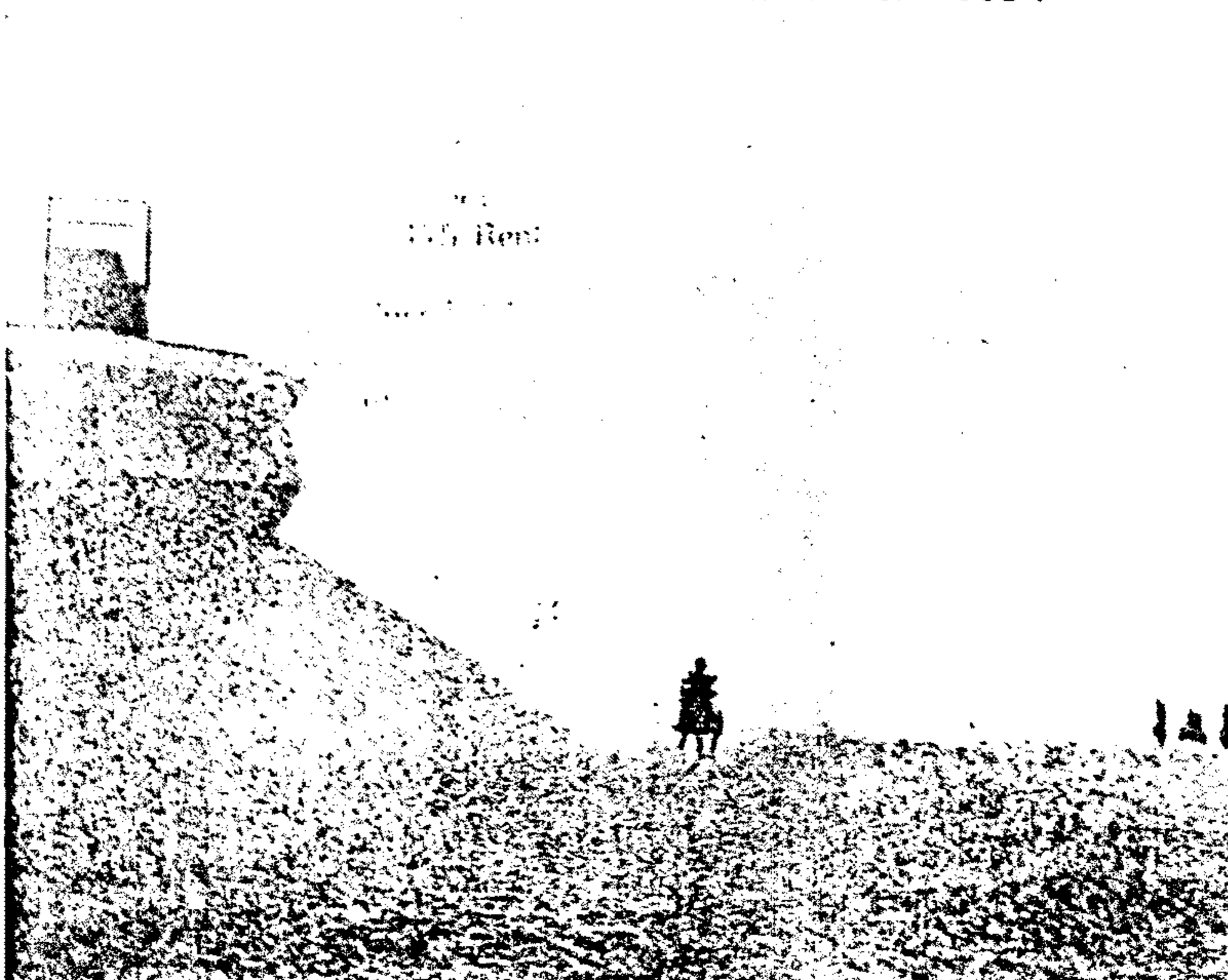


"I LIVE IN FEAR".

I also had another idea about the film, and that was simply that I wanted to make *Macbeth*. [Kurosawa had seen none of the other film versions, though much later he saw Orson Welles' on television.] The problem was: how to adapt the story to Japanese thinking. The story is understandable enough but the Japanese tend to think differently about such things as witches and ghosts. [Though ghosts tend to be vengeful, as in the innumerable *kaidan* films, the idea of a gratuitously malevolent trio of witches is far from the Japanese imagination.] I decided upon the techniques of the Noh, because in Noh style and story are one. I wanted to use the way Noh actors have of moving their bodies, the way they have of walking, and the general composition which the Noh stage provides. [In the film the most successful examples of this are usually associated with 'Macbeth's' wife, who uses slightly accelerated Noh movements, and the scene where she tries to wash her hands clean is pure Noh; also the asymmetrical composition of Noh is much seen, particularly in the long conversation scenes between 'Macbeth' and his wife before the initial murder. The appearance of Banquo's ghost, on the other hand, uses very little Noh technique.]

This is one of the reasons why there are so very few close-ups in the picture. I tried to show everything using the full-shot. Japanese almost never make films in this way and I remember I confused my staff thoroughly with my instructions. They were so used to moving up for moments of emotion, and I

"THRONE OF BLOOD".



told them to move further back. In this way I suppose you could call the film experimental.

It was a very hard film to make. We decided that the main castle set had to be built on the slope of Mount Fuji, not because I wanted to show this mountain but because it has precisely the stunted landscape that I wanted. And it is usually foggy. I had decided I wanted lots of fog for this film. [Kurosawa has said elsewhere that since he was very young the idea of samurai galloping out of the fog much appealed to him. At the beginning of the original version of this film, Mifune and Minoru gallop in and out of the fog eight times.] Also I wanted a low, squat castle. Kohei Ezaki, who was the art director, wanted a towering castle, but I had my way. Making the set was very difficult because we didn't have enough people and the location was so far from Tokyo. Fortunately, there was a US Marine Corps base nearby and they helped a great deal; also a whole MP battalion helped us out. We all worked very hard indeed, clearing the ground, building the set. Our labour on this steep fog-bound slope, I remember, absolutely exhausted us—we almost got sick.



"THE LOWER DEPTHS".

## DONZOKO

(*The Lower Depths/Les Bas-fonds/Nachtasy!*), 1957, Toho

GORKY'S SETTING WAS Imperial Russia but I changed it to Japan, the Edo period. [Kurosawa's choice of period was intended ironically. Most Japanese look back romantically to the Edo period—age of the great courtesans, great Kabuki, great woodcut artists, great literature—with extreme nostalgia. Kurosawa thinks of life at that time as comparable to the miseries in 19th-century Russia.] Also I used *bakabayashi*. [This is the kind of music—flute, drums, clappers—traditionally associated with travelling entertainments, with shrine fairs, with the annual *matsuri*.] We always think of this music as being joyous and festive. I used it for precisely the opposite reason. I wanted to suggest something tragic and dark. [In the choice of "La Paloma" in *Stray Dog*, the "Cuckoo Waltz" in *Drunken Angel*, and in his deep appreciation for the music of Kurt Weill, Kurosawa has often demonstrated that the use of innocent, unsophisticated music, or at least unsophisticated-sounding music, heightens the tragic suggestion.]

In Edo during this period the Shogunate was falling to pieces and thousands were living almost unendurable lives. Their resentment we can still feel in *senryu* and *rakushu* [satirical poems and entertainments] of the period. I wanted to show this atmosphere, to reveal it, though whether I really did or not, I don't yet know.

This film was easy to make. We worked steadily and well, and shooting did not take long. We had only one closed set, and one open set. We also had many rehearsals, and worked out all the choreography, movements, camera, etc. well in advance. Once, to get everyone in the proper mood, I invited on to the set one of the few remaining practitioners of the old Edo *rakugo* [humorous but highly satiric stories]—and we never had more fun than on that day. Also I wanted Mifune to play his part (the gambler) in the style of Nezumi-Kozo. [A fictitious and romantic robber who saves maidens and only steals from the rich, the hero of a hundred films. Naturally, he is a figure much looked down on by the intelligentsia and only children, farmers, and labourers crowd into his frequent film appearances. A bit like Robin Hood, he is too near in time to have acquired any antique patina, and Kurosawa's idea was personal, highly interesting, and almost dogmatically unfashionable.] That did not work though. Mifune is simply too well-built, he has too much presence, he cannot help but bring his own identity to his roles.

## KAKUSHI TORIDE NO SAN-AKUNIN

(*Three Bad Men in a Hidden Fortress/The Hidden Fortress/Die verborgene Festung/La Forteresse Cachée*), 1958, Toho

THE FIRST HALF of this film was made in Arima in Hyogo [not far from Kobe] and the second half was done around Gotemba at the base of Fuji. I remember there was good weather at Arima and we worked fast, but Fuji!—the weather changes so rapidly that it is cloudy one minute and bright sun the next. Making it there was difficult enough, but just then a big typhoon came and tore up all our scenery. I remember, at one point, we waited over one hundred days for good weather, and so our film was considerably over its three-month production schedule.

And there was always a strong wind, blowing all the time. Come to think of it, there has always been a gale whenever I wanted to make a picture. There was even one during the location scenes for *Sugata*. People have occasionally called me *kaze-otoko* [lit. wind-man] as a joke. On the *Kakushi* set everyone called me that. [Other nicknames for Kurosawa have included *Kurosawa-tenno* or "the Emperor Kurosawa" because of his presumed directorial ways. It is telling, however, that only the newspapers use it, never his own staff.]

Anyway, no matter how hard it was to make this film, it was an enormous hit [and remained Kurosawa's biggest financial success until *Yojimbo*] and the company was delighted. It was very expensive but the books balanced out most comfortably in the black.

## WARUI YATSU HODO YOKU NEMURU

(*The Bad Sleep Well/The Worse You Are the Better You Sleep/The Rose in the Mud*), 1960, Kurosawa Productions (Independent), Toho (Distribution)

THIS WAS THE FIRST film of Kurosawa Productions, my own unit which I run and finance myself. From this film on, everything was my own responsibility. Consequently I wondered about what kind of film to make. Making a film just to make money did not appeal to me—one should not take advantage of an audience. Instead, I wanted to make a film of some social significance. At last I decided to do something about corruption, because it has always seemed to me that graft, bribery, etc., on a public level is the worst crime that there is. These people hide behind the façade of some great organisation like a company or a corporation—and consequently no one ever really knows how dreadful they are, what awful things they do. Exposing them I thought of as a socially significant act—and so I started the film.

But even while we were making it, I knew that it wasn't

working out as I had planned, and this was because I was simply not telling and showing enough. Like the final scene with Mori on the telephone. That suggests, but it is not explicit enough. An even worse man is at the other end of that telephone line, but in Japan you cannot go further than that. [Kurosawa's comment means the above but is almost untranslatable. In Japanese it reads: *Sodo made tsukondeiku to hobo ni sashisawari ga dete kuru* or "if you go (too) far you (might) make trouble come to someone (else?)"—but the inference here, as in the final telephone scene where the villainous Mori calls someone and tells them that the matter (Mifune's murder) is taken care of, is that the greatest corruption of all in Japan is governmental. Kurosawa had suggested this in *Ikiru*, but there he was only dealing with a single ward office in the city government. In *Warui Yatsu* he was, ostensibly, incriminating big business, but if he had tried to show a corrupt government, trouble would indeed have come to someone. The revelations of the film, even so, were considered quite sensational in Japan, though in Europe and America they seemed tame indeed.] At any rate it was too bad I didn't



"SANJURO".

go further. Maybe I could have in say, America, a big country. Japan, however, cannot be this free and this makes me sad.

## YOJIMBO

**(The Bodyguard/Die Leibwache/Le Garde du Corps), 1961, Kurosawa Productions, Toho (Distribution)**

FOR A LONG TIME I had wanted to make a really interesting film—and it finally turned into this picture. The story is so ideally interesting that it's surprising no one else ever thought of it. The idea is about rivalry on both sides, and both sides are equally bad. We all know what this is like. Here we are, weakly caught in the middle, and it is impossible to choose between the evils. [I doubt that Kurosawa intended any political implication. He is not interested in politics. The moral aspects of the problem—of any problem—appeal to him most.] Myself, I've always wanted somehow or other to stop such senseless battles of bad against bad, but we are all more or less weak: I've never been able to. And that is why the hero of this film is different from us. He is capable of standing squarely in the middle and stopping the fight. At any rate, this was the beginning of the film in my mind.

It was truly an enormous popular hit. Everyone at the company said it was because of the sword-fighting. But that is not so, the reason was the character of the hero and what he does. He is a real hero, he has a real reason for fighting. He doesn't just stand by and wave his sword around.

## TSUBAKI SANJURO

**(Sanjuro Tsubaki/Sanjuro), 1962, Kurosawa Productions, Toho (Distribution)**

ORIGINALLY THIS WAS A story by Shugoro Yamamoto [who also wrote the novel upon which Kurosawa's latest, *Aka-Hige (Red Beard)*, is based]. I'd changed it around and finished the script before doing *Yojimbo*. In the original version the hero is not very good with the sword but he is smart and he fights with his head. After *Yojimbo* was such a success, however, our company decided to make something like it and so this not-so-strong samurai became the hero, Sanjuro. [Though Kurosawa takes full responsibility for all of his films, the new company naturally has a board, numerous advisers, holds committee meetings, etc.—naturally, since it is a Japanese company—and Kurosawa usually listens to the wishes of these people.] I rewrote the script and was going to give it to Horimichi Horikawa to direct, but again the company decided that I would have to. So, I wrote the script over again and Sanjuro became more athletic, better with the sword.



"HEAVEN AND HELL".

Eventually we only used a third of the original script but we included lots of action not in the original.

From this original we only kept two characters, that played by Kobayashi Keiju [the comic spy who is treated so well by his captors] and by Takako Irie [the winning and funny lady who insists upon observing "proprieties" in the midst of emergencies], and among the things sacrificed was my original idea of using colour just for the section where the white and red camellias are floated down the stream.

Personally, I think it very different from *Yojimbo*—in Japan the audiences do too. The youngsters loved *Yojimbo*, but it was the adults who liked *Sanjuro*. I think they liked it because it was the funnier and really the more attractive of the two films.

\* \* \*

KUROSAWA DID NOT want to talk about his two latest films. Of the 1963 *Tengoku to Jigoku (Heaven and Hell/High and Low/The Ransom)* he only wanted to say that he liked it better than *Stray Dog*—thus stressing a connection which has been noticed by reviewers in countries where the film has played. About *Red Beard* (to be released in October, 1964, about a late Tokugawa Period doctor—Mifune—and a younger medical student; a story perhaps aligned to that of *Drunken Angel*) Kurosawa did not want to say anything. "After all, I don't know—it isn't finished yet. It has been difficult enough talking about all my past films without trying to decide what I think of this new one."