

1

Depiction of Violence in the Early Films of Sogo Ishii

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1. Introduction

In this paper I will be discussing Sogo Ishii's [also known by his real name Toshihiro Ishii and recent name change Gakuryu Ishii] depiction of violence in his early films, especially the early feature lengths: *Panic High School* (1978), *Crazy Thunder Road* (1980), and *Burst City* (1982). I will be arguing toward the necessity of the style of violence that Ishii visualizes. The first thing that I need to do is to clarify the type of violence I want to talk about that the films depict, grounded in the very *problem of depiction* in philosophy of art and film studies. Then, I will give a brief analysis of the stylistic structure of the films and exemplify *how* and *why* Ishii's style is appropriate for what the films seemingly aim for.

1.1. Background of Post-War Japan and the Punk Movement

Sogo Ishii or Gakuryu Ishii was part of the punk movement in Japan during the 70s and 80s (Mes & Sharp, 2005, p. 67) Ishii and his friends were inspired by the American punk

movement because of the American naval bases around the city they grew up in ("Midnight Eye Interview: Sogo Ishii," 2005). The landscape in Japan's post-war period film saw the emergence of filmmakers who challenged conventional filmmaking. They tried to explore new ways to push the boundaries of narrative and visual style in filmmaking. Ishii's unique input was that he was one of the pioneers of the punk film movement, later became the *Japanese cyberpunk* movement. His films were extremely influential especially in the films that were made in the sci-fi genre. His style could be described as energetic, full of angst and rage, *anti-everything traditional*, though ironically this turn in stylistic understanding became a tradition itself.

The punk movement in Japan began around the same time as the rest of the world, especially in New York and London (Dazed, 2016). Ishii was born into the "punk rock revolution" and where he grew up was one of the centers of the movement (Mes & Sharp, 2005, p. 67). Ishii too joined and formed bands, but he felt that making films was what he really liked to do. He brought the punk mindset and attitude to making films. This could be seen especially in the fact that his first feature length film was financed by Nikkatsu, a soft porn production company, and was made while he was still a sophomore at Nihon University in Tokyo.

Ishii's early films are part of the punk culture as much as the bands and the lifestyle of the movement. Even though he sought financing now and again he was mostly an independent DIY filmmaker who refused to go the traditional route of becoming an assistant at a film studio (2005). Ishii's beginnings were around the same time when the studio system in Japan was failing. His early films and music videos for famous hardcore bands set the precedent of the Japanese punk and cyberpunk movement. These same bands also joined Ishii's films as actors. *Burst City* (1982) is the very film that defined and

expressed both Ishii's style and the lifestyle of Japanese youth of the time.

Ishii's style of filmmaking was rebellious, fast paced, emotive and full of rage that was projected through violence. The violence he employed was a tool to get the emotions and thoughts out. This is the reason why violence in Ishii's films acts as a double-edged sword; condemning the way the system is built but encouraging its disruption. The only way out of the system is realizing its only vulnerability as collective violent uprising stemming in outcast individuals who want to be heard.

2. *Violence*

It is important to determine a working definition of what I understand from violence in order to be able to identify it in the films of Ishii. The question here, then, is quite simple: what is violence and when is it *acceptable* in art? The first part of the question seeks to philosophically define the *essence* or *commonality* of acts that may be considered as violent. An attempt for a complete analysis of violence would be quite unsatisfactory for a book chapter, hence I will be referencing philosophers like Weil and Žižek in order to paint a clearer picture, because I think their conception of violence is in line with Ishii's depiction. In simple terms, I will be talking about the ordinary understanding of interpersonal violence, that comes to mean any infliction of physical or psychological pain on to another by *violating* their borders of individuality. This type of violence may or may not be a result of societal oppression. Violence can arise as a result of psychological torture or desperation as an individual within a society. Here, the society may not *actively* be seeking to inflict violence on certain individuals that are outliers of the system but only as a result of the political, cultural and economic status of the dynamics of interpersonal relations within a community.

Though the effects of such systems may not be deliberate, they are nonetheless ignored in place of the economy—which is something that can be seen all throughout history.

The second question, then, asks whether violence is ever acceptable. Philosophers like Machiavelli in *The Prince* (2014), Hobbes in *Leviathan* (2017), de Beauvoir in *Pyrrhus and Cinéas* (1944), and Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (2021) argued for the acceptability of violence in certain circumstances. Georges Bataille went even further and claimed that violence is a fundamental part of human beings as well as Nature (Bataille, 1986, pp. 16, 39). Simone Weil, on the other hand, conceived violence as being a destructive force for both the wielder as well as the victim. We cannot deny that through such an act both agents are lost. Physical pain and injury is certainly more urgent than the psychological but in the aftermath, there are no winners. There are no winners especially if violence leads to death. What Weil is trying to uncover with this conception is that even though we tend to think that violence is a one-way action that affects only the victim, but, in fact, it destroys the person who inflicts the violence as well. Not only does violence or *force* transforms the body into an object as a corpse but also turns the living inflictor into an object as well: "Force is as pitiless to the man who possesses it, or thinks he does, as it is to its victims; the second it crushes, the first it intoxicates. The truth is, nobody really possesses it" (Weil, 1945, p. 324).

As we have established, there is at least one kind of understanding of violence that is interpersonal, which means that for there to be violence there needs to be at least an instigator and a victim. In this regard Simone Weil has a unique understanding toward violence which I believe is extremely important here: "violence turns anybody subjected to it into a thing" (Weil, 1945). In other words, through violence and force, a human being loses their humanness and becomes no different than an object being driven by something other than

themselves. Weil describes violence as a kind of *force*. The worst kind of force is the one that kills. I will be focusing on this specific kind of force or violence that is depicted. I argue that both the paradox of being a rebel and the corrosiveness of violence is what the films of Ishii show us, whether this was his intention, or a natural outcome is arguable of course. However, this does not matter either way to us as spectators.

Žižek, on the other hand, distinguishes between *subjective* and *objective* violence. Not only is there an interpersonal, subjective, violence where there is an identifiable agent performing the violence, there is also objective or systemic violence where the performer is not apparent to the victim or victims stemming from the economic and political systems (Žižek, 2008, p. 1-2). He further claims that systemic violence must be considered in order to understand why some unexplainable bursts of subjective violence occur. This does not mean that the perpetrator of the violence is completely innocent of the violent act. However, there is also an undeniable correlation between the stress that the system causes on the individual and the irresistible actions based on primal urges that individuals hold within. The existence of systemic violence opens up possibilities to interpersonal subjective acts of violence. Thus, individuals are responsible for their actions, but it is the whole system that allows for such actions to be able to or even thought of being carried out.

Nonetheless, violence is something that may be seen as open concept that we know it when we see it. However, kinds of violence are important to distinguish in order to discuss, understand the reasons behind them and their short-term and long-term effects. The kind of violence that we see in Ishii's films is nothing to do with a personality disorder or domestic altercations. Nor do they have anything to do with all-out war between nations, or violence within sports. Hence, our outlook on the film's depiction of violence changes with the kind of

violence that we identify on the screen. A war film does not have the same emotiveness as a boxing film, even if they are stylistically comparable somehow. We are always aware of the emotional and perceptual differences. Ishii's films show violent acts and behavior related to rebellion, uprising, social injustice, alienation, authority and oppression.

3. *Depiction of Violence*

In our case, the question, rather, is if the *depiction* of violence is ever acceptable in the arts. While some philosophers like Plato felt that depiction of violence would negatively impact society, especially the youth (Plato, 1968), philosophers like Aristotle in the *Poetics* (2013), Nietzsche in *the Birth of Tragedy* (2008), and Martha Nussbaum in the *Perceptive Equilibrium* (2010) argued for the depiction of violence to be acceptable in some cases.

Noël Carroll, for example, argued for a moderate stance in terms of evaluating an artwork morally and aesthetically (Carroll, 1996). He defends the point that the defect or virtue of an artwork's moral depiction is dependent on the circumstances that should be considered aesthetically as well. In other words, especially in narrative works morality is part of the work and not something separate entirely, hence moral virtuousness or shortcomings have everything to do with the aesthetic virtue of certain artworks. So, the point Carroll is trying to make is that depiction of certain moral actions should be considered based on an evaluation of each work and not universally posed, Violence, then should be considered in relation to the work itself.

Depiction of violence, whether acceptable or not depends, firstly on the *kind* of depiction as well as the *kind* of violence on screen. There may be two ways to consider this

then: the first would be the conventional Hollywood depiction of aestheticized violence, the second is the depiction of violence that stands opposite the established values, system, and ideology. The second kind of depiction and violence is what we certainly see in Ishii's films. Stephen Prince also puts the duality in this way: "Violence on the screen has two components, the depicted behavior and the stylistic means through which it is presented" (Prince, 2009, p. 282). He also points out that according to psychological research, it is not the graphic but the sanitized non-graphic violence that causes the most harm.

Considering this, then, it is the overly graphic violent films that usually have an effect of being anti-violence rather than those films that have a softer understanding. The desensitization of violent behavior is much worse than to show the act as it is. This is also the reason why Hollywood is criticized for their soft depiction of non-graphic violence which tends to convey a meaning of violence being necessary and not all that bad (Potter & Smith, 2000, p. 319 as cited in Prince, 2009, p. 280).

Ishii's depiction of violence is quite graphic for its time and quite unlike the Hollywood style of the era as well. Even compared to the violence that is depicted in Hollywood films, it is quite clear that Ishii's style is raw, brutal and distinct. In line with all that is said regarding violence and depiction of violence, Ishii's style seems to come out as a way to criticize violence and its role in society as much as it shows violent acts in all its bareness.

As we have established before, Ishii's depiction of violence is shown as a natural outcome of the systemic oppression against the people in a community. The community as individuals or groups have nothing else but to resort to violence or be destroyed in the face of violence. Violence is an *actor* just as much as the characters themselves, it is the double-sided blind force between entities, destroying whatever it

touches. Even if the individual or groups come out as winners, they lose a part of themselves that was essential to their past-being. However, this sacrifice opens up new possibilities for the future, especially for those who were born into but not yet affected by the oppression as much as their older counterparts. Despite the possibility of the acts being egotistically driven, the ends are benefited by more than the individual that was a victim.

4. *Sogo Ishii's Depiction of Violence*

In the early films of Sogo Ishii, depictions of violence can be seen clearer in the light of all the philosophical input on the matter. Ishii's style of depiction of violence serves as a reflection of the violence that is forced by the system to come out from the *delinquent* individual. Violence in Ishii's films *teach* us something about the position of the unfortunate situation of the reluctant punk rebel.

This notion should not be taken as overly didactic in that there is a message that needs to be extracted from these; there is no clear and direct message. If there was, it would be against everything the punk movement is *for*. However, there is also a part of these works that goes in line with Žižek's answer to what to do "when we find ourselves bombarded with mediatic images of violence," which is to firstly find out and "learn" the causes of violence (Žižek, p. 8, 2008). Not only is there no clear message that the "punk" films of Ishii are trying to convey, but there is also no direct and clear reason as to why the individuals in the films are doing what they are doing in the context of the film's narrative. This is because the narratives along with the violence are "decontextualized" as Žižek puts it.

The individuals are not *directly* reacting to anything in the extra-diegetic world. This fact makes the depiction both stronger and *acceptable* in that there is no call to violent action

but call to inner reflection of the reasons of the thought and practice of such violent acts that the characters share with Ishii's contemporary youth movement. The shared indirect portrayal of violent individuals practicing violent acts is a way for Ishii and his friends in the subculture they belong to.

Of course, it should be said that there is no possible way to *truly* understand exactly *what* Ishii and his friends experienced in their worlds that they are expressing without having a very firm grasp on the socio-political situation of Japan in those times. This is, again, quite difficult as a foreigner, however what we can take out of this is not the specifics of Ishii's Japan, but investigate the *how*. In doing this, it is possible to get closer to the subjective experience as much as one can, even if it is only conceptual in nature without also forgetting the systemic causes of acts of violence as well as the depiction of such acts of violence such as those we find in Ishii's films.

4.1. *Panic in High School* (1978),

Let us now look at the three early feature-length films of Ishii. Instead of heavily delving into the formal structure of each film, I will try to talk about the common stylistic choices that shape the overall depiction of violence that we have established so far. As mentioned before, Ishii's early films share a common individualistic depiction of *subjective* violence that undoubtably arises from a systemic *objective* violence. In *Panic in High School* (1978), we see a rebellious student rising against an education system that caused the death of one of their friends. The provocative stance of the school executives as well as the math teacher, in a way, dehumanize the students and give the student-shooter a position to react in which he finds himself pushed toward more violence—the only way out is through.

The plot is simple. In the aftermath of a student, Tanaka Shoji, committing suicide because of the pressure by the Japanese educational system, the administration is negligent and cagey about the whole situation. The students are naturally appalled by this and one specific student Jono Yasuhiro, cannot contain his anger and attacks the carefree math teacher being dismissive about reasons behind Tanaka's act and continues teaching as if nothing happened. The acting out escalates even further when he decides to steal a shotgun from a store. However, Jono does not immediately submit to violent behavior, he waits until the last moment. He accuses the teacher of being responsible for Tanaka's death after the teacher refuses to talk about the real reasons behind Tanaka's suicide. The reasons which are clearly the pressure from the extreme academic expectations that are projected on to students by the administration, the teachers, and the governmental system. Jono tries to fight the math teacher but somewhat fails which is when he runs out and steals a shotgun on his way through a market alleyway. He returns to the school and shoots a student by mistake when meaning to shoot the teacher. He succeeds in shooting the teacher right after.

The reaction of Jono is portrayed as being built up from the very beginning of the day. Jono is not just another psychopath that finds a gun to kill authority figures. On the contrary, Jono seems like a quiet, ordinary student who cannot contain his emotions that are constantly being pushed to their limits. We see that he is in extreme despair and has no choice but to let go of his impulses. The consequences however are just as cruel, affecting everyone involved in the worst possible way. Along with the suicide of Tanaka, the incident of Jono's rampage destroys the whole community. In this sense the depiction of violence may be seen as a warning. This should not be taken as a threat but a plea for finding the middle ground perhaps, because Jono is not on a revenge crusade but

rather feels pain with every moment that passes during his outburst. He does not wish to cause harm but feels trapped in a corner. The film shows us how all of this could have been avoided but as the system is in its current form these types of incidents are inevitable and can escalate to the very extremes without even meaning to in the beginning.

There are five specific scenes that show important plot points within the narrative that depict violence. These scenes in, order, are: 1- Jono shoots at the teacher, misses him and kills a nearby student. Shoots again, killing the teacher this time. 2- Jono is trapped but the only way out is through. 3- Jono's actions result in the loss of an innocent life again. 4- Jono and his hostage Mihoko are trapped in a room, the police strike and Mihoko gets killed. This shows just another bystander being killed because of Jono's actions. 5- Jono is captured violently and is not injured or killed unlike his friends.

These scenes all have a few similarities, or a sort of running theme among them. The obvious one is that young innocent lives are lost because of Jono's violent actions. However, there is always the looming specter of the system that serves as the commencement of the whole thing. There would not have been such an incident if Tanaka had not committed suicide and Tanaka would not have committed suicide if the system was built as being more lenient on the students. When viewed as such, the whole thing seems like dominoes, a quite cliché comparison but causality of choices, acts and structural components that lead to violence are quite similar in all of human life.

4.2 *Crazy Thunder Road* (1980)

Crazy Thunder Road (1980), presents us a subculture of violent motorcycle gangs as an identity of youth. The characters in the film all try to find a place for themselves

within or outside the system but fail in different ways. They struggle against societal norms and find themselves in the world of violence again and again even when they try to lead peaceful lives. The way the characters are set up and interact with each other gives a sense of impossibility of escape from the systemic fate that get written as soon as they are born.

In an imaginary near-future city called Thunder Road biker gangs and a right-wing extremist paramilitary organization get into a three-way battle for the control of the city. The leader of the most feared biker gang Maboroshi, Ken, decides to leave the biker life and live with his girlfriend Noriko and wants to make peace with all the other gangs after new police laws regarding traffic limits their authority. The leader of the kamikaze section of the gang Jin is against this decision and attacks Ken's truce meeting. Jin and others challenge every other biker gang which are now united under the name Elbow Union in an all-in fight at an abandoned industrial plant. Elbow Union overpowers them, but they are saved by the far-right National Defense Corps who are led by the original Maboroshi leader Go. Go forces Jin and his group of kamikazes join him but Jin struggles with the paramilitary lifestyle. His membership comes to an end after he starts a brawl in the street after Elbow Union members mock him because of the way they bowed to the fascists and are now nothing but soldiers under orders. After Jin quits the National Defense Corps to take revenge from everyone including the Elbow Union his enemies form an alliance to destroy Jin. They capture Jin and mutilate him, cutting off his arm and leg with a chainsaw as a warning. This puts Jin into a depressive spell, he gets addicted to drugs and loses all of his will to live. Jin finds his strength and quits the junky lifestyle to once again take revenge of those who wronged him. Jin and his newly formed kamikaze group attack the Elbow Union and the National Defense Corps. In order to do this, Jin, transforms himself into a sort of proto-cyborg in

black leather with armor and weapons attached to his body. Jin and his friends wreak absolute havoc in the middle of a street killing virtually anyone associated with Elbow Union. The film ends with Jin being stuck to his motorcycle without a functioning brake, so he rides on.

In this film, again, we see youth crushed under a post-apocalyptic dystopian system trying to find a way to live their lives and regain their individuality. However, as counterintuitive as it looks, they try to find themselves within anti-establishment societies and organizations and realize that the system they are against soon gets built within their own system. This realization after being beaten and mutilated by the Elbow Union and NDC is perhaps what both puts Jin in depression and gets him on his feet to fight back. In the end, we see Jin getting help from friends to win his war but leaves the scene on his own with his bike being forced to ride away with no braking system and being stuck to the bike. His actions cause many lives to be lost and he does suffer from these losses even in the end but also finds himself free of both the system and the anti-system.

4.3 *Burst City* (1982)

In *Burst City* (1982), violence is shown as part of a resistance and rebellion against the dystopic authoritarian control. Violence is a way for individuals to cling to the, perhaps, last remaining part of their individuality among a society where everything is monetized. Only through the acts of violence can they feel like they have control over their lives. They are trying to find a way to keep their individuality within a system that does not accept them as they are.

The film is set in a place called "Bay Area Special Designated District 304" surrounded by factories and elevated,

intricate highways. A section of this area is occupied by the lower class, forming slums and entertainment districts. In a venue called the "20,000V" every Saturday night, popular rock bands "Battle Rockers" and their rivals "Mad Stalin" perform prohibited rebellious, anti-establishment punk rock music. These performances lead to intense conflicts and violent acts between their fans and the armed police "Battle police."

Amidst the chaos one night, a thug named Kurokuma introduces a local politician to his mistress, a young girl named Blue, under the orders of Kirishima, a yakuza leader aiming to profit from a nuclear power plant construction project in the district 304. The yakuza group takes on the construction work, deciding to employ the slum residents as laborers. One day, a pair of bikers, a young and short mute and a tall animalistic protector, arrive in the district 304, astonishing the youth with their racing skills (Mes & Sharp, 2005). The duo, upon seeing Kirishima, become agitated, revealing that Kirishima was involved in the massacre of the younger man's parents, and so the reason why they have arrived in town is because they are seeking revenge. As the police crackdown of crime intensifies, the venue 20,000V is forced to shut down. The bands take their performances to the streets, leading to confrontations with the police. Meanwhile, the slum residents are imprisoned, and their homes are destroyed to make way for the construction. The elder brother breaks out, leading to a massive fight involving the punk rock fans, the police, the slum residents, and the Yakuza. During the fight brothers confront and defeat Kirishima. The film concludes with the youth triumphing over the police, and the front man of the Battle Rockers defiantly raises his fist.

Throughout the film the depths of the characters desperation are revealed, which works as a way of the reasoning behind their resort to violence as a final solution against the systemic dehumanization and alienation by the government and

other powerful organizations such as the Yakuza. Ishii brutally shows graphic violence in all its ugliness. In a way the situation of the common individual is brought into serious consideration. The violence and the punk subculture are not portrayed as mere aestheticization of marginal groups but as an outburst toward the loss of individual freedom in an anarcho-capitalist dystopian cyberpunk police state run by money and antagonistic technology. Ishii shows a way to recognize violence as a language of oppression in and through both sides of the conflict. The portrayals of dystopic realities become something of a shock factor through *ad absurdum* conceptualization of what the late-capitalist society might look like which does not seem much of a fantasy. This is because as with the other films, *Burst City* does not focus on the objects of violence, technology, or authority but the individual strife within the system. The instigators of violent acts from all backgrounds suffer from the very systemic violence that they helped create; in other words, everyone is a victim. Violence is both seen as the only way out of and the only way to get into the structure of society that they find themselves in. The collective struggle ends in solidarity and collaboration of the counterculture youth as opposed to the symbolic *old* authorities like the police and the Yakuza. The whole film can be seen as a way of moving forward.

The youth in *Burst City* are portrayed as a countercultural force. They embody the punk understanding of non-conformity, resistance, and rebellion. Their rebellion is shown through their music and fashion which represent their whole outlook on life. The authority figures like the police, the Yakuza, and the corporations are the controlling agents looking to exploit the people for profit. We see the struggle between the youth against these figures of authority. This way, the violence that is depicted is justified as the only way to take back their basic and authentic selves. There is an ideological clash.

Individualistic violence also serves as a critique of the societal structures that provoke the person for them to turn their selfness to the system. It emphasized the idea that violence is not inherent to the individual, but it is often a reaction to external circumstances that deny basic human needs and rights. By focusing on the individual experience of violence. This also works to empathize with the characters and become aware of the changes needed in order to prevent such acts from occurring. However, most of all, Ishii made films that showed the Japanese youth in their natural habitat within themselves.

5. Conclusion

The early film works of Sogo Ishii, *Panic in High School*, *Crazy Thunder Road*, and *Burst City*, we see the depiction of violence used as a major and vital feature that spreads throughout the narratives. Ishii uses violence as a reflection not only for the conflict of countercultures but also as the psychological state of the main characters. These characters represent Ishii's own youth and emotions. When we define and identify the specific scenes and stylistic choices, Ishii, knowingly or unknowingly, gives out a plea, a warning rather than a threat to the established traditions that are at the root of the oppression caused by systemic violence. In other words, we see a clash of subjective and objective types of violence as Žižek puts it.

Beginning with *Panic in High School*, violence is caused by the strict educational system followed to the letter by teachers that puts immense pressure on the students. Jono, the main character, searches for ways to push back but finds himself resorting to extreme violence. Even though it is only one individual student that carries the violent acts, it is presented in a way that any one of the students could have been in the same situation. On the other hand, no matter which student reacts to

the system, innocent students as bystanders are the ones who lose their lives. The instigator of the violence comes out unscathed but scarred for life, perhaps, as Simone Weil puts it, losing his life in life, a negative soul-death that leaves the person completely empty and without further motivation. However, the only agent that is to blame is the system itself and its guardians-gatekeepers.

In *Crazy Thunder Road*, we see bike gangs clinging to violence to create order and hold on to communities of their own as opposed to conforming to societal norms. However, this way of life is constantly criticized as being only another version of the conformity and fascism they so despise. This is shown especially through the similarities in structure between the fascist NDC, the police and the bikers. They are completely against each other but structurally very similar. Hence, it is no surprise that the Elbow Union and NDC form an alliance to take down Jin. In the end, Ishii presents an individual fighting against structure, destroying the established norms of cliques, gangs, organizations, and society in general, in order to build from ground up. Though victorious, Jin gets stuck on his own motorcycle which is again quite symbolic of how violence causes both sides to lose themselves. On the other hand, Ishii's characters have no other choice, in fact all of this begins because the leader of Maboroshi, Ken, wants to leave the gang life behind to live a calm life with his girlfriend. The system is so rigid that even when a delinquent decides to become something other than his assigned status in society, he is rejected.

Finally, in *Burst City*, Ishii portrays punk rock fans and marginalized groups rising against authorities, corporations, and the Yakuza. Compared to the previous two films, we see more of a collective mood in this film, but violence destroying all sides in different forms is still a running theme. The decline of societal wellbeing is kept in line by the gangs, governmental

organizations and corporations and resisted against by the people outside these groups. The ones who instigate and lead the fight against oppression are punk rockers this time, but they are not any different than Jono or Jin. The duo looking for the man who killed one of their brothers finds out in the end that it is the same man that causes the oppression on the community in the first place. This realization combines the punk rockers, the community and the two vengeance-seeking bikers.

In all three films, then, we see a systemically oppressed youth. They rise against oppression either as individuals, a small group with a leader or as a community with individual parts. In the end, all sides of the violence are either completely destroyed, injured or spiritually lost. When looked in this way, it is possible to infer that Ishii's style of depiction of violence is a way to both critique the contemporary problems he sees in his community as well as things that are sure to come if the system is held up the way it is. The problem is not the system itself but the guardians of the system. It is always the ones who try to uphold the system that they benefit from that cause the most damage as well. This poses a philosophical problem regarding authenticity of the individual as well as the ethical implications of a system that gets created amidst self-interest. Hence, the depiction of violence in Ishii's early works shows a way for the necessity of graphic violence on screen akin to Nietzsche's philosophy with a hammer (Nietzsche, 2003).

In an age where even DIY is exploited by neoliberal capitalist system, Sogo Ishii's early films shed light to the individual with a voice within a community. Neither the community nor the individual is left on its own. He shows that when systemic violence takes over, we lead ourselves into a dystopian wasteland. The only way out of the wasteland might be extreme violence but it should not have to be so. We do not have to follow the comfortable path to the wasteland.

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