

## The Buffalo Film Seminars



**Directed by** Masaki Kobayashi  
**Screenplay by** Shinobu Hashimoto  
**Story by** Yasuhiko Takiguchi  
**Produced by** Tatsuo Hosoya  
**Original Music by** Tôru Takemitsu  
**Cinematography by** Yoshio Miyajima

Tatsuya Nakadai...Hanshiro Tsugumo  
Rentaro Mikuni...Kageyu Saito  
Shima Iwashita...Miho Tsugumo  
Akira Ishihama...Motome Chijiwa

**Masaki Kobayashi** (14 February 1916, Hokkaido, Japan—4 October 1996, Tokyo, cardiac arrest) directed 22 films: *Shokutaku no nai ie/Family Without a Dinner Table* (1985), *Tokyo saiban/Tokyo Trial* (1983), *Moeru aki/Glowing Autumn* (1979), *Kaseki/The Fossil* (1975), *Inochi bô ni furô/At the Risk of My Life* (1971), *Nihon no seishun/Hymn to a Tired Man* (1968), *Kaidan/Ghost Stories* (1964), *Seppuku/Harakiri* (1962), *Ningen no joken III/The Human Condition III* (1961), *Ningen no joken II/The Human Condition II* (1959), *Ningen no joken I/The Human Condition I* (1959), *Kuroi kawa/Black River* (1957), *Anata kaimasu/I'll Buy You* (1956), *Izumi/The Spring* (1956), *Uruwashiki saigetsu/Beautiful Days* (1955), *Kono hiroi sora no dokoka ni/Somewhere Under the Broad Sky* (1954), *Mittsu no ai/Three Loves* (1954), *Magokoro/Sincerity* (1953), *Kabe atsuki heya, The Thick-Walled Room* (1953), and *Musuko no seishun/My Sons' Youth* (1952).

**Shinobu Hashimoto** (18 April 1918) has written 55 scripts, the most recent a remake of *The Seven Samurai*, which is now in production. Some of his earlier films are *Zero no shoten/Zero Focus* (1961), *Shichinin no samurai/The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *Kumonosu jô/Throne of Blood* (1957) *Shichinin no samurai/Seven Samurai* (1954) *Ikiru/To Live* (1952) and *Rashômon* (1950).

**Tatsuya Nakadai** (13 December 1932 or 1930, Tokyo) has acted in 128 films and TV series, the most recent of which was *Inugamike no ichizoku* (2006) and the earliest of which was *Kabe atsuki heya/The Thick-Walled Room* (1953). Some of the others were *Shokutaku no nai ie/Family Without a Dinner Table* (1985), *Ran* (1985), *Kagemusha* (1980), *Kaidan/Ghost Stories* (1964), *Tsubaki Sanjûrô/Sanjuro* (1962), *Yojimbo* (1961), *Ningen no joken I/The Human Condition* (1959), and *Shichinin no samurai/Seven Samurai* (1954).

February 26, 2008 (XVI:7)  
Masaki Kobayashi *HARA KIRI* (1962, 135min.)



**KOBAYASHI, MASAKI**  
from *World Film Directors, V. II*. Ed. John Wakeman. The  
H.W. Wilson Company, NY, 1988.

The Japanese director and scenarist was born in the small port of Otaru on Hokkaido, the northernmost of the Japanese islands, and went to school there. In 1933 he entered Waseda University in Tokyo, studying philosophy and Oriental art, especially Buddhist sculpture. He did not graduate until 1941 and would have pursued his studies further. However, the Pacific War had begun, and Kobayashi says that “In art history I knew that it would require many more years of painstaking research for me to make a contribution, and the war made the future too uncertain. But with film, I thought there might be a chance of leaving something behind.”

In 1941, accordingly, Kobayashi joined the Shochiku company at its Ofuna studios. After only eight months there, in January 1942, he was drafted into the army, serving in Manchuria and later participating in the defense of the Ryukyu Islands. He hated the cruelties and indignities of life in the Imperial Army and protested the only way he could, by refusing any promotion. Taken prisoner at the end of the war, he was held for a year in a detention camp on Okinawa.

Kobayashi rejoined the Shochiku company in November 1946 and, in accordance with the conventions of that intensely paternalistic organization, proceeded to serve a six-year apprenticeship as assistant director. His master and mentor was

Keisuke Kinoshita, a versatile, accomplished, but sometimes sentimental mainstay of the Shochiku dream factory. Kobayashi assisted Kinoshita on fifteen movies—melodramas, social protest films, love stories, ghost stories, and satires (including *Broken Drum*, which Kobayashi coscripted in 1949).

In November 1952, eleven years after he first joined the Shochiku company, Kobayashi completed his debut film, *Musoko no seishun* (*My Son's Youth*). It was made very much under the supervision and influence of Kinoshita—an amiable, episodic *shomin-geki* (film of lower-middle-class life) about a father and his two teen-aged sons and the latter's rivalries and first dates. The movie's mood was set by the sentimental score supplied by Chuji Kinoshita, the brother of Kobayashi's mentor. In spite of the interminable apprenticeship that had preceded it, it was praised for freshness and lyricism. And Kinoshita's part in Kobayashi's second film was even more direct—by way of celebrating his assistant's promotion, he wrote its script. This was



*Magokoro* (*Sincere Heart*, 1953), a highly characteristic Kinoshita story about a student's pure and hopeless love for a beautiful young invalid whom he can see only through her window.

Kobayashi made his first break for freedom with his next film, *Kabe atsuki heya* (*Room With Thick Walls*, 1953). He formed his own production company, Shinei Productions, persuaded the Shochiku company to handle distribution, and invited novelist Kobo Abe to write the script. At that time Abe had no experience of the medium Kobayashi says "he wrote something novelistic, and I went over it and made it into a real scenario." Kobayashi has followed this procedure ever since, however experienced his scenarist: he is a perfectionist who likes as much control over the filmmaking process as he can possibly secure.

*Room With Thick Walls* is based on the diaries of low-ranking Japanese war criminals. It shows through flashbacks that many of those who received long sentences committed atrocities on the orders of superior officers who escaped unscathed, an explosive revelation at that time. Moreover, though the film deals much more harshly with the Japanese military than with the Americans, there is some criticism of the latter, especially in the story of a girl corrupted into prostitution by contact with the occupation forces. It is said to have been for fear of offending Americans that Shochiku's chief Shiro Kido shelved the film for nearly four years. Finally released in 1956, it won the Peace

Culture Prize, though later critics have found it overly concerned with social criticism, too little with characterization.

Returning to the Shochiku fold, Kobayashi then made four films that gradually reinstated him in Shiro Kido's favor. After *Mitsu no ai* (*Three Loves*, 1954), scripted by the director and telling three separate love stories in the Kinoshita vein of sentimental humanism, came *Kono hiroi sora no dokoka ni* (*Somewhere Beneath the Wide Sky*, 1954). A slice of lower-middle-class life in the industrial city of Kawasaki, it was written by Kinoshita's sister, Yoshiko Kusada, with a score by Chuji Kinoshita. Two more lyrical *shomin-geki* dramas of *petit bourgeois* life and pure love followed in *Uruwashiki saigetsu* (*Beautiful Days*, 1955) and *Izumi* (*The Fountainhead*, 1956). Both were scripted by Zenzo Matduyama, who wrote or co-authored Kobayashi's next five films as well.

According to Audie Bock, Kobayashi's instinct for self-preservation within the Shochiku system was correct. In Kinoshita he had an excellent teacher and powerful patron. While none of the early films he made under direct Kinoshita tutelage are bad films, they are more his mentor's late style than his own, and very different from what Kobayashi already knew he wanted to do as a director."

By 1956, he was well enough established at Shochiku to win approval for a more personal and controversial movie, *Anata kaimasu* (*I'll Buy You*), an exposé of the corruption in professional baseball. Zenzo Matsuyama's script centers on a ruthless talent scout and his efforts to recruit for his team a brilliant high-school star. In the course of his successful campaign, he uses bribery, wrecks the boy's relationship with his girl-friend, and interferes in his family life. It is a totally pessimistic account of a system in which only the heartless opportunist can hope to survive.

Another exposé followed in *Kuroi Kawa* (*Black River*, 1957) investigating the prostitution, gambling, and gangsterism that had grown up around American bases in Japan. It attacks not the Americans but the Japanese social system, "which permitted lawlessness to go unpunished and even officially unnoticed." The film was in general very well received and launched the movie career of Tatsuya Nakadai, a young actor trained in the modern (as distinct from classical) Japanese theatre. Now a major star, Nakadai has played lead roles in many of Kobayashi's films, becoming his "personal representative on the other side of the camera."

Donald Ritchie has praised in particular the last reel of *Black River*: "It is a rainy night and the jerry-built bars and pinball parlors, cheap restaurants and souvenir shops which have grown up around the camp entrance look like a deserted amusement park. The young gangster, played by Tatsuya Nakadai, now dead drunk, is being taken home by the girl, Ineko Arima, whom he has seduced and who is now his mistress. There is an argument and he races off down the long, rain-slicked highway. Along the road comes a convoy of American trucks. He slips in front of one of these and is killed. The girl drops her open umbrella and rushes toward him; the final shot shows the umbrella on the highway while she, crying, runs toward the now stationary trucks. The entire sequence is made up of short shots, gathering momentum to stop abruptly on the long-held final image."

Kobayashi's next project, one of the most controversial ever made in Japan, occupied him for four years. This was *Ningen no joken* (*The Human Condition*), a massive chronicle of world War II based on Jumpei Gomikawa's best-selling six-volume novel. Kobayashi read the book and bought the rights before it became a bestseller, but had to threaten to quit before Shochiku

agreed to finance the picture. Adapted by Zenzo Matsuyama and the director, the story was filmed in three parts, each more than three hours long; the complete movie entered the *Guinness Book of Records* as one of the longest films ever shown. Photographed in black and white and ‘scope by Yoshio Miyajima, it has a score by Chuji Kinoshita. The hero, Kaji, is played by Tatsuya Nakadai.

The trilogy begins with *No Greater Love* (1959), set in 1943. Kaji, a sensitive and humane young man, by inclination a pacifist, escapes military service by taking a civilian administrative post in a Japanese-controlled iron mine in Manchuria. He finds that the kidnapped coolie workers and especially the Chinese prisoners of war used as slave labor are treated with a sickening barbarism against which he frequently protests. But at times even Kaji is drawn into the general brutality, however reluctantly, as when he whips starving prisoners away from cartloads of raw lentils that they are in no condition to eat. Seven prisoners who try to escape are condemned to death and three have died in a horrific public beheading before Kaji intervenes, halting the execution. As a result, he is himself arrested by the military authorities, interrogated, tortured, and finally released, only to receive his army draft papers.

A hotly debated success in Japan, *No Greater Love* won the San Giorgio Prize at Venice. It seemed to Derek Hill “a masterpiece, one of the cinema’s handful of truly great productions.... The hero ... seems the embodiment of the world’s conscience. His weaknesses are as honestly set forward as his strength; and a nagging conclusion reminds us—and him—that he will never forget letting three men die before he mustered his courage.” This is one of the trilogy’s principal themes—Kaji is both oppressor and oppressed, and Kobayashi believes that “this tragic dual nature is something which all Japanese experienced, some more than others, during the war.” Elsewhere he has said: “I am Kaji.”

*Road to Eternity* (1959) opens with Kaji in training at a desolate army camp, where the recruits are mistreated and brutalized almost as shamefully as the prisoners had been in the earlier film. Promoted to instructor, Kaji tries to ameliorate the harshness of the regime, earning the hostility of his fellow officers and a reputation as a “red.” When at last they go into action, Kaji’s unit is wiped out by Soviet forces, primarily because the young soldiers have not been trained to think from themselves, only to follow orders. In the end, Kaji is one of three survivors.

The trilogy concludes with *A Soldier’s Prayer* (1961). After the Japanese surrender, Kaji and other refugees are captured by the Russians. He has been an idealistic socialist, looking to Russia as “the land of freedom,” but he finds himself and the other prisoners used as slave labor and treated as barbarically as the prisoners in the Manchurian mines. Kaji is once more in conflict with authority, and in the end, desperate to return to his wife, he escapes into the snowy wilderness. Making a superhuman effort, he treks across Siberia but dies before he can reach the border, betrayed equally by Japan and by Stalinism. “To me his death was actually a resurrection,” Kobayashi has explained. “He had to die there. With his death he lives in the minds of people for a long time as a symbol of the hope that we can eradicate the human tragedy of war.” Like the rest of the trilogy, *A Soldier’s Prayer* was based on fact: of the half-million Japanese soldiers captured by the Russians in 1945, fewer than 30,000 returned home; the rest perished in Soviet labor camps.

As Audie Bock says, Kobayashi in *The Human Condition* attacks above all “the loss of emotion. It is this emotional rigidity, the negation of common feeling with one’s fellow man, that

threatens life itself.” It is a theme that recurs in his work, and another such, the sanctity of the family, emerges in the way Kaji is sustained through his ordeals by thoughts of his wife. Critics in the West were astonished by the trilogy’s “terrible frankness”—the uncompromising nature of its national self-criticism—but it seemed to Donald Ritchie that in general the work “is more interested in society than it is in people,” sacrificing “character to action.”

For many, however, as for David Shipman, *The Human Condition* is “one of the least seen and known cinema masterpieces.” Shipman says that “Kobayashi fully intended an epic. Steeped as much in Homeric and Biblical myths as those of Japan, he set out to create a man on the scale of Ulysses or Moses.... At the beginning... [Kaji] is little more than an expression of guilt, but... he emerges hugely, a man that Michelangelo might have carved: not man himself, but man the doer of good.... Kobayashi can be accused of over-simplification in making his points, but he has created a teeming world which lives on in the consciousness.”

*Karamiai* (*The Entanglement/ The Inheritance*, 1962) is, like *I’ll Buy You*, a film of anti-materialist social comment, about what happens when a dying patriarch decides to leave his fortune to his illegitimate children. In the search for these heirs, blackmail, imposture, and even murder come into play. Apart from one of the old man’s sons—a violent but not unattractive innocent—none of the characters in this bleak parade of heartlessness and avarice shows any sign of human feeling or any capacity for enlightenment, and critics found it hard to sympathize with such unrelenting pessimism.

Kobayashi tried his hand at a quite different genre in *Seppuku* (*Harakiri*, 1962). This is a *jidai-geki*, a period film in which the past is explored for what it can teach the present. Brilliantly adapted by Shinobu Hashimoto from a novel by Yasuhiko Takiguchi, this film is set in 1630 when, at the end of an era of civil strife, many samurai found themselves to be *ronin*—masterless warriors. They were still, however, bound by the samurai code, which forbade them all other employment. Since few of the victorious lords had any immediate need for more warriors, many *ronin* were faced with the grim choice of dishonor, starvation, or ritual suicide—*seppuku*. On rare occasions, a *ronin* would approach some noble household and ask to perform *seppuku* there, in the hope and expectation that he would instead be offered suitable employment.

At the beginning of *Seppuku*, a *ronin* named Tsugumo (Tatsuya Nakadai) presents himself at the degenerate House of Ii. He is informed that he will be taken at his word in his expressed desire to commit suicide, and in flashback we are told the story of a younger samurai who had been forced by the House of Ii to follow the appalling ritual to the bitter end, though he had pawned his sword—the samurai’s “soul”—and had only a bamboo blade with which to perform the required disembowelment.

Tsugumo then reveals that he is the father-in-law of this tormented young martyr to the code of Bushido. He has come to see that his son-in-law was right to pawn his sword for the sake of his family—that our honor merely adorns the surface.” And he has followed the young man to the House of Ii to wreak vengeance. In a climactic and brilliantly choreographed battle, Tsugumo wipes out the cream of the Ii swordsmen. Finally, dishonorably wounded by the new flintlock muskets, he commits *seppuku*, in the process tearing down the ancient suit of armor that symbolizes the honor of the House of Ii. A hypocritical entry in the Ii record book passes blandly over these disgraceful events.

*Seppuku* is as pessimistic as the film that preceded it, and in fact Kobayashi regards the inhumanity of the feudal era as identical with that of the Imperial Army in World War II. He says that he approaches period films just as he does contemporary ones—that he understand “the past as the present.” In an interview with Joan Mellen, Kobayashi states, “Since I am inclined to believe that wars will continue, you might say that I do not see much prospect for a changed society. However, we must live on, and to do this, we must have hope.... Both *Seppuku* and *The Human Condition* end as tragedy. But my underlying theme transcends that. I try to express the possibility that human beings can overcome the tragic events of the world.”

*Seppuku* was generally recognized as an important advance for Kobayashi, beginning “a new exploration of formal beauty.” Photographed by Yoshio Miyajima, it is, as Joan Mellen says, “characterized by sharp contrasts in black and white with stark and ascetic geometrical shot compositions, at once formalistic and cold,” to emphasize the rigidity of the clan system and its lack of softening humanity. The film received the Special Jury Prize at Cannes and caused a sensation in Japan, where Kobayashi at once joined the ranks of the masters of the samurai film. Donald Ritchie considers *Seppuku* his “single finest film,” and many agree.



This success brought Kobayashi what was then the biggest budget ever granted in Japan, for his next film *Kaidan* (*Kwaidan*, 1964), which he had been preparing for years. It is made up of four tales drawn from Lafcadio Hearn’s versions of traditional Japanese ghost stories: “Black Hair,” “The Snow Princess,” “Earless Hoichi,” and “In a Cup of Tea.” Again photographed by Yoshio Miyajima, this was Kobayashi’s first color film and continued his “exploration of formal beauty.” He says that his “main intention in the film was to explore the juxtaposition between man’s material nature and his spiritual nature, the realm of dream and aspiration.... I also enjoyed conveying the sheer beauty of traditional Japan.

By this time Kobayashi “felt that I had come to the end of pursuing realism in film,” and in *Kwaidan* he “intended to

express...the ultimate in stylized film method.” Seeking absolute formal control, he took over an unused airplane hangar, built all his sets inside it, and painted them himself. Filming proceeded at his own pace—never more than three final takes a day, often only one. Toru Takemitsu, the avant-garde composer who had provided the interesting electronic score of *Seppuku*, and who was thereafter Kobayashi’s regular composer, excelled himself with *Kwaidan*, fitting to each story musical background dominated by electronic variations on some appropriate sound—of an ancient musical instrument, of wood being split, or of stones being struck.

Lacking the social concerns of Kobayashi’s other work, *Kwaidan* is a gorgeous multicolored scroll...based on the lines and tones of an India-ink brush painting,” and is considered by some one of the most elegant films ever made. Critics seemed particularly taken by the story of “Earless Hoichi,” about a blind young monk forced by the spirits of ancient warriors to tell the story of their great battle over and over in the abandoned cemetery where they meet by night. To break the spell, Hoichi’s abbot has every inch of the boy’s body covered by sacred writing, but forgets his ears. Hoichi is released from his terrible bondage but his ears are claimed in revenge. It seemed to Pierre Billard that what Kobayashi had done in *Kwaidan* was “to invite the hereafter to cooperate with the visible and concrete world, to defend, exalt, and sing all the ways of humanity, and to affirm that man in his wounds and dreams remains that infinitely small residue that gives the world its true meaning.” The most successful commercially of all Kobayashi’s films, it again brought him the Special Jury Prize at Cannes.

In *Joiuchi (Rebellion/ Samurai Rebellion*, 1967) matched Tatsuya Nakadai against Kurosawa’s *jidai-geki* star Toshiro Mifune in another indictment of the feudal code and its disregard for the individual. Mifune plays a samurai whose son is ordered to marry the lord’s discarded concubine. They have been very happily married for two years when the lord demands the woman’s return, her son having become his heir. The samurai family rebels, and the film ends in a bloodbath culminating in a fight between Mifune and Nakadai that, for Richard N. Tucker, had “all the classic grace and control of high art.” ...

Returning to a contemporary theme, Kobayashi once more attacked the inhumanity of war in *Nippon no seishun (The Youth of Japan / Hymn to a Tired Man*, 1968), a “rather strident” film adapted from a novel by Shusaku Endo....

By this time, the once vast and booming Japanese film industry was in decline, with little inclination to attempt anything but exploitation movies. At the beginning of the 1970s Kobayashi developed one project after another but, he says, “all of them were rejected and all of them were social criticism films.” Seeking some way to continue serious filmmaking, Kobayashi joined forces with Kurosawa, Kinoshita, and Ichikawa in a group called *Yonki no Kai* (“The Club of the Four Knights”). At first they wasted much time and money attempting a collaborative script and then, finding they were all too individualistic to agree, turned reluctantly to television, each director to make a separate film.

The subject Kobayashi suggested for himself was Yasushi Inoue’s novel, *Kaseki*. Inoue’s books had always resisted adaptation, and the story was one that would require expensive location shooting in Spain and France, but to Kobayashi’s surprise, his colleagues in *Yonki no Kai* approved. Adapted by Shun Inagaki as a serial of eight one-hour parts, *Kaseki* was filmed in three months, including sixty days on location in Europe. It was, as Kobayashi says, “a hard schedule, exceeding the limit of human endurance”—shooting in Paris in bitter cold,

he worked even on New Year's day, abandoned by all but his intensely loyal Japanese crew. Kobayashi has no use for television and reportedly didn't watch the serial when, in 1972, it was shown with great success on Fuji-TV. He had privately intended from the beginning to edit the work down for feature release, and the film finally appeared in 1975, cut from eight hours to 213 minutes....

Kobayashi used a voice-over commentary in *Kaseki* mostly in an attempt to preserve the feel of Inoue's novel, but the technique, "materially altering the way images are perceived," seemed to one critic a fascinating "exploration of the territory between film and literature," while Inoue himself said that "the camera has caught what I could not express with my pen." There was a chorus of praise for the truth and depth of Shin Saburi's performance in the lead, and another for Kozo Okazaki's color photography, which captures "each aspect of the French, Spanish, and Japanese locales in breathtaking fashion as if we, too, are seeing through the heightened perspective of Itsuki." Penelope Gilliatt called the film "a marvellous piece of work, which comes to terms with bedrock subjects usually out of film's depth."

According to Audie Bock, Kobayashi denies that *Kaseki* constitutes a change of direction, but as she points out, humanism in it emerges "in an entirely new light for Kobayashi," with the implication that man's proper study is not society but self. This is arguably the theme of his next feature, *Moeru aki (Glowing Autumn)*, made five years later and filmed partly on location in Iran (where Kobayashi hoped eventually to make a film version of Inoue's *Tun-huang*)....

*Tokyo Saiban (The Tokyo Trials, 1983)*...is an extraordinary historical document, making exemplary use of archival and newsreel footage. It is an exhaustive account of the court proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East between May 1946 and November 1948. During these proceedings, intended by the Allies as the Pacific counterpart of the first Nuremberg trial, twenty-eight important Japanese generals, admirals, and politicians were tried for involvement in war crimes. There were twelve Allied judges, and at the conclusion of the proceedings, all the defendants were found guilty in some degree. Seven, including former Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, were hanged.

Kobayashi viewed 30,000 reels of Pentagon footage to make *The Tokyo Trials*. To put the period in perspective, he begins his film with background material, referring to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 and the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in the 1930s, among other things. However, the main body of the film concerns the immediate postwar reckoning. Intended primarily for a domestic audience, *The Tokyo Trials* gives little sustained attention to the atrocity charges, although Kobayashi, the pacifist and former POW, does attempt to place these crimes in a context of war and militarism. But it is the courtroom drama—the spectacle of the victors condemning the vanquished across a gulf of mutual incomprehension, in proceedings of dubious legality—that becomes the focus of interest. David Stratton writes that "Kobayashi is extremely selective in his use of material, but he makes a compulsive drama out of it....It's often the small details that impress: a Japanese official doffs his hat and a piece of paper falls out of it onto the floor; the judges are caught napping or looking desperately bored; an MP removes prisoner's headphone before he's finished listening to a translation, and he angrily snatches it back." Originally four and a half hours long, but edited down slightly for international release, *The Tokyo Trials* was made in conjunction with Kodansha, one of Japan's leading publishers, as a project to

commemorate the firm's seventieth anniversary. The topic was selected because of recent interest on the part of the Japanese public.

*Shokutaku no Nai Ie (The Empty Table, 1985)*...is set in the early 1970s. It is a fictional work but uses as its basis a real confrontation between Japanese terrorists and police at the radicals' mountain hideout.... Derek Malcolm found "the stately progress of Kobayashi's beautifully shot and constructed film" more reminiscent of *Kaseki* than of *The Human Condition*, "but its cumulative effect is as considerable, and underlined by some magnificent ensemble playing. Kobayashi is actually attacking the conservatism of Japanese life, even when the film appears to be very much part of it in mode. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the performance of the actress who plays the engineer's wife, driven towards mental breakdown by the shame of her situation. *The Empty Table* is a formal, often reticent film, but the scene when she smashes the fish tank and tries to swallow the live fish comes like an emotional thunderclap.... What strikes one most about the film is that its classical restraint seems merely a mask through which we gradually see the terrible turmoil of...people driven by circumstances to abandon centuries of tradition in order to make their way out of the morass. Kobayashi's calm, measured filmmaking makes his final position clearer than any amount of more emotional work might have done."

Audie Bock describes Kobayashi as "a tall soft-spoken man who always wears a hat" and still maintains his interest in ancient art. A cousin of the great actress Kinuyo Tanaka, he is a meticulous perfectionist who has made relatively few films by Japanese standards.

Speaking of the main body of his work, Richard N. Tucker writes that Kobayashi's heroes "all face a system of rigid values, a system in which they have given place and a code of behaviour they are expected to follow. The act of becoming an individual and discovering one's own way is the *raison d'être* of Kobayashi's central characters—he has "maintained a consistent rebellion against the central traditions of the Japanese way of life" in films that "rise clear of simple social criticism into the realm of major art."

**Harakiri: Kobayashi and History. Joan Mellen. Criterion Collection 2005**

Japanese director Masaki Kobayashi came of age in the postwar moment, a time when filmmakers were at the vanguard of dissident expression in that country. Drawing upon a rich history of protest in Japanese cinema, which had fallen dormant during the war and occupation years, filmmakers seized the opportunity to challenge those institutions that remain wedded to the nation's feudal past. Of this generation of directors, none was as passionate as Kobayashi. Every one of his films, from *The Thick-Walled Room* (1953) to the feature documentary *Tokyo Trial* (1983) to *The Empty Table* (1985), is marked by a defiance of tradition and authority, whether feudal or contemporary. Kobayashi found the present to be no more immune to the violation of personal freedoms than the pre-Meiji past, under official feudalism. "In any era, I am critical of authoritarian power," Kobayashi told me when I interviewed him in Tokyo, during the summer of 1972. "In *The Human Condition* [1958-61] it took the form of militaristic power; in *Harakiri* it was feudalism. They pose the same moral conflict in terms of the struggle of the individual against society."

Like other directors of this period—notably Akira Kurosawa—Kobayashi often expressed his political dissidence via the *jidai-geki*, or period film, in which the historical past becomes a surrogate for modern Japan. In Kobayashi's hands, the *jidai-geki* exposed the historical roots on contemporary injustice. ...*Harakiri*, made in 1962, was, in Kobayashi's career, the apex of this practice. In the film's condemnation of the Iyi clan, Kobayashi rejects the notion of individual submission to the group. He condemns, simultaneously, the hierarchical structures that pervaded Japanese political and social life in the 1950s and 1960s, especially the *zaibatsu*, the giant corporations that recapitulated Japanese feudalism.

Born in Hokkaido, on February 14, 1916, and educated at the prestigious Waseda University, in Tokyo, Kobayashi joined the Shochiku Ofuna studio in 1941, as an assistant director. Eight months later, he was drafted into the Japanese Imperial Army. There, he resolutely rejected the opportunity to become an officer, insisting upon remaining at the rank of private. To suffer the misfortunes of the ordinary recruit at the hands of the military clique, to place himself in harm's way without the prerogatives of the officer class—the class that had led Japan into the Pacific War—was Kobayashi's means of protesting against the war itself. The Pacific War, Kobayashi has said simply, was “the culmination of human evil.”



After the war, Kobayashi returned to Shochiku Ofuna, where he assisted the great director Keisuke Kinoshita, before graduating to directing in the early 1950s. His antiauthoritarian tendencies were immediately apparent in his work, inevitably provoking studio censorship. His first major film, *The Thick-Walled Room*, was shelved by Shochiku Ofuna for four years, as a result of its controversial suggestion that those responsible for Japanese wartime atrocities were not the minor, or “B” and “C”, war criminals but those at the top. Kobayashi had been indignant that, at the end of the war, many soldiers and low-ranking officers were punished cruelly, while many of those directly responsible for the crimes escaped censure.

It is surprising that a director like Kobayashi would ultimately flourish at Shochiku Ofuna, which was then specializing in sentimental domestic dramas of everyday life. Even the great directors working at the studio, Yasujiro Ozu and Kinoshita, fit the studio model. Ozu's films may dramatize social change—nowhere more so than in his masterpiece *Tokyo Story*—but his characters ultimately accept that they are powerless to alter their circumstances. In contrast, Kobayashi's characters risk their very existence by coming into conflict with the forces of injustice. Indeed, the individual in his films best expresses himself when he risks everything, taking a stand against corruption, hypocrisy, and evil.

*Harakiri* opens in 1630, only three decades into the more than 250-year reign of the Tokugawa shogunate. The Tokugawa consolidation of power, following its victory in a civil war, resulted in the destruction of many clans, depriving feudal daimyo of their fiefdoms and converting their samurai into *ronin*, condemned to wander the countryside masterless, in search of means of survival. Still armed with two swords—representing their soul, according to the code of Bushido—the former samurai are feared and mistrusted.

Safely under the protection of their Tokugawa ally, the Iyi clan are contemptuous of the suffering *ronin* who come to their door requesting that they be permitted to perform hara-kiri (ritual suicide), in the hope that they might instead be hired on. When Motome Chijiiwa (Akira Ishihama) presents himself before the Iyi clan for this purpose, they choose to preside over his death rather than offer assistance. It is his father-in-law, Hanshiro Tsugumo (Tatsuya Nakadai), who, in shaming the Iyi clan before their retainers and avenging Chijiiwa's death, expresses Kobayashi's view that there are ideas worth dying for. Tsugumo's bold defiance of feudal authority has a precedent in the code of Bushido itself: the samurai who sacrifices his conscience to “the capricious will...or fancy of a sovereign,” Inazo Nitobe writes in *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*, is to be chastised, even if the only recourse against injustice open to the samurai in *Harakiri*, after failing to appeal to the conscience of the Iyi clan elder, is to shed his own blood.

Kobayashi discovers irony in the finiteness of the Tokugawa period. The feudal daimyo behave as if their power will last forever, but audiences are able to penetrate their hubris through their awareness that the Tokugawas will be defeated and that official feudalism will fall with the restoration of the Emperor Meiji, in 1868. This irony is reinforced when Tsugumo tears apart the armored figure, with its white wig, that stands for the clan's heritage. When it is later resurrected and reseated in its

place of honor, Kobayashi exposes the fragility and transience of all authoritarian power.

This perspective fits Kobayashi's subtle critique of contemporary society as well. Kobayashi suggests that, just as the Tokugawas, in their arrogance, were shortly to be defeated by upstart, dissident clans loyal to the emperor—and as militarists during World War II had been defeated—those wielding feudal power in the present might well find their authority coming to an end.

Kobayashi's rebellious sensibility found its parallel in the actor he discovered, Nakadai, star of *Harakiri* and Kobayashi's other masterpiece, *The Human Condition* (and later of Kurosawa's *High and Low* and *Ran*). An actor of the modern Shingeki, or New Theater, Nakadai embodied postwar individualism and youth culture—in his clear enunciation and strong, deep speaking voice and in his expressive body movements, facial mobility, and willingness to convey deeply felt emotions, rather than repressing them on behalf of an outworn notion of samurai dignity.

Nakadai portrays the distinguished samurai Tsuguno as, in part, an ordinary man: a grieving widower, kind father, and doting grandfather. Kobayashi contrasts these images of the family man with the fierce, upstanding traits Tsuguno possesses as a samurai. Yet it is as a loving father that Nakadai is particularly moving. He refuses to allow his daughter to be adopted by a clan where she might become a concubine he will not sacrifice her to serve his own fortune, even as their economic situation is dire. This fierce individualism serves Kobayashi's dissidence. In the scene in which Nakadai examines the bamboo sword that his son-in-law was forced to use to end his life, he weeps, "The stupid thing was too dear to me...and I clung to it!" revealing a range worthy of Marlon Brando.

Like many Japanese novelists and filmmakers, Kobayashi depicts social themes through allegory; he is an expressionist rather than a realist. In *Harakiri*, the stark contrasts of black and white—for example, Tsuguno's black kimono against the white-sheeted platform on which he tells his story—reflect the intransigence of the Iyi clan, upon whose mercy Chijiiwa throws himself unsuccessfully. Kobayashi's extensive use of the wide screen signifies the seeming endlessness, the horizontality, of feudal power.

The setting may be the feudal past, but Kobayashi undermines its authority by juxtaposing rigid, hidebound politics with a panoply of modern film techniques, from zooms to fast pans to canted frames to rapid elliptical cutting to gruesome realism. With these modern techniques, which so obviously defy the stolid rituals of the past, Kobayashi expresses his belief that society need not be destructive of the needs of individuals and that authoritarian power, however cruel and seemingly permanent, may in fact be vulnerable to change.

*Harakiri* won the Special Jury Prize at Cannes, in 1963. Kobayashi's mentor, Kinoshita, pronounced the film a masterpiece, among the five greatest Japanese films of all time. Kobayashi would continue working for another two decades, ultimately breaking out of the studio system, in the late 1960s, and forming the independent Yonki-no-Kai, or the Club of the Four Knights, with Kinoshita, Kurosawa, and Kon Ichikawa. *Harakiri*, though, would remain the most vibrant expression of his belief

that life is not worth living unless injustice is confronted with unrelenting force and single-minded purpose.

Interview conducted by Joan Mellen with Masaki Kobayashi, summer 1972. The conversation originally appeared in *Voices from the Japanese Cinema* [Liveright, 1975]

JM: ..how do you explore the relationship between the individual and society in your work?

MK: Naturally, I was very interested in the social aspects of the human drama from the beginning of my career. This was the very basis of my film art.

I should add that I was in the army for six years. This experience heightened my social consciousness. During those six years, I never became an officer. I withheld myself from becoming an officer. I was really a rank-and-file soldier. I had a strong conviction that I must resist authoritarian pressure. I was wholly against the power that bore down on us and I was against the war itself. I still think I was able to make *The Human Condition* because I had voluntarily refused to become an officer. I was the protagonist and I felt this identification very strongly. The life the hero leads was much the same life I lived as a soldier.

JM: Are social issues and their impact on individuals the main theme in your films? Your people take on moral significance—indeed, self-awareness—to the extent that they confront the important social conflicts of their time.

MK: Yes. And I should add one more thing here. I am primarily concerned with history. I seek to discover the individual man in the historical setting surrounding him. In *Harakiri* this social background was feudalism, and in *The Human Condition* it was the last war. These backgrounds provide individuals with true-to-life conditions. If my films have any meaning, I feel it lies in my depiction of human problems created by the powerful historical framework. Historical interpretation always plays a very fundamental, important part in my films. The relationship of an individual's consciousness to his setting is my main theme.

Many times I have discovered that my interest is not aroused unless I start locating a particular drama in its historical context. It is really essential to my filmmaking.

JM: Is there any special reason why you have used Tatsuya Nakadai, Japan's most glamorous male actor, in your films?

MK: He possesses a quality shared by both the pre- and the postwar generations. In *The Human Condition* I needed an actor capable of expressing the ideas and thoughts of both generations.

JM: Because of his age?

MK: Not so much because of his age. He had a quality, an ability to characterize the sensibilities of two strikingly different generations. When I made *The Human Condition*, most actors at that time were either of prewar or midwar generations. I was looking for a person who could convey the feeling of the new generation. Nakadai was able to convey this new, strong, energetic side of postwar youth.

JM: His personality?

MK: This included his personality. But I must point out Nakadai's background as an actor. As you may know, he was educated with the Shingeki group for a long time before coming to film. Shingeki's traditional training and atmosphere were unique among young film actresses and actors at that time. Nakadai had a solid theatrical background, although he was very young. I still feel he was one of a small group of actors who combined the traditional Shingeki background with the fresh innocence and energy of our

postwar generation. He could thus effectively represent both pre- and postwar people.

JM: Have you ever experienced censorship by the big companies in Japan?

MK: Yes, I have. Some sequences had to be cut from *The Human Condition*. This was ordered by Eirin [Eiga Rinri linkai, the Movie Morality Committee], Eirin was headed by Mr. Seiichiro Takahashi and it was a quasi-governmental committee to oversee so-called morality in films for public showings. We still have this committee today, and I believe it is still run by the government.

JM: This is extremely interesting. Who makes up the body of this committee? Did this occur around 1959 and 1960? To whom is such a committee responsible?

MK: I have never really inquired into the details of this committee but I am sure that the committee belongs to the Ministry of Education.

JM: Oh, to the government then, What is the basis of its censorship? What was it concerned to prevent?

MK: It was about twelve or thirteen years ago. The nude scene was ordered cut in *The Human Condition*. The scene was the one in which the soldier-husband, knowing he would not be able to return to see his wife again, asked her to let him see her nude at the barracks, where she was visiting him. It was an integral part of the drama, and I felt strongly that this sequence was necessary. But it was not accepted. As I remember, this was the only time one of my films was censored. Let me see...Oh, I had one more experience with them. This was over *The Thick-Walled Room*. I never found out, though, that this film was ordered to be shelved or that the company was ordered to withhold the film “voluntarily” to avoid stirring up trouble with the United States occupation army. Anyway, I was ordered by executives of Shockiku Films to cut and alter the film completely. I preferred to shelve it, as long as there was some hope it might eventually be shown. The film was released four years later.

JM: Was it censored for political reasons?

MK: Yes, I believe so. Around that time, just after the war, the film industry was extremely sensitive about bringing out anything that might result in criticism from the occupation army. After *The Thick-Walled Room*, I made sweet domestic dramas, and the company liked those all right!

JM: During which period in your career was this?

MK: From *The Thick-Walled Room* to *The Human Condition*.

JM: How would you sum up the ideological basis for these political criticisms?

MK: The film dealt with B and C, or second- and third-rank, war criminals. You should understand that during the end of the war, with such great confusion and all, there were many soldiers and low-ranking officers punished cruelly, although they were not directly responsible for particular crimes. I heard that many war crimes trials were hastily arranged, with only one or two native witnesses willing to point out a given Japanese soldier. The trials brought down severe verdicts on any Japanese who happened to be in the vicinity. Certainly, I am not speaking of A-rank war criminals, such as those who were tried in the Tokyo trials. I am talking about small people, mostly conscripts—rank-and-file soldiers and low-ranking officers who were designated B and C war criminals.

These war criminals were actually victims of the system itself. First, because they had to obey the orders of their superiors while the war was going on, and second, because they were punished after war for performing their “duty.” I must acknowledge, therefore, that on the surface you might perceive in

my film certain criticisms against the American army, which was directly responsible for many of the war trials. But what I intended to portray in the film was a much deeper and universal theme, namely the human dilemma, the human condition created by the particular setting of the last war. I couldn’t persuade the company. They were afraid of such an explosive subject.

JM: What exactly is the definition of B- and C-rank war criminals?

MK: All war criminals were classified into A, B, and C rankings. A criminals were those tried in the Tokyo trials, and B and C were primarily ordinary soldiers and noncommissioned officers.

JM: Do you agree that *The Human Condition* is a war resistance film?

MK: Yes, it is. But the film’s main theme simultaneously treats the fundamental evil nature in human beings. The war as the culmination of human evil. I wanted to explore this dark side of human nature.

JM: What precisely do you mean by “evil nature”? Do you mean something inherent, beyond redemption, like sin?

MK: Perhaps it is our “original sin.” This has a relationship to the A-bomb also. I can understand all the circumstances that caused America to drop the bomb and finish the war, but to me it was an expression of human evil, or original sin, no matter who did it.

JM: In a Freudian sense? Do you refer to instinctive aggression?

MK: No, rather in a Christian sense. I expressed this sense of human evil throughout *The Human Condition*, and also indicated the possibility of overcoming this evil at the end of the movie, when Kaji, the protagonist, dies. I wanted to negate the presence of evil.

JM: Is this conception of evil the inability of the human being to transcend a narrow self-interest and live for others, or at least sacrifice for them?

MK: In Kaji’s death there was hope that human beings could overcome this inherent evil. You can say that this is at once my desire and my personal tribute to Kaji.

JM: Is Kaji’s view, then, the view of the director?

MK: Yes, I am Kaji in the film. Although Kaji dies, denying us the hope of overcoming evil, I fear the whole situation is not that simple. Probably many more wars will be waged in this world. But at the same time I don’t believe that wishing, desiring, or hoping are totally useless.

I spent four years making *The Human Condition*. While making it, I received many letters from people requesting me not to let Kaji die in the end. I had considered that possibility, but to me, his death was actually a resurrection. He had to die there. With his death, he lives in the minds of people for a long time, as a symbol of the hope that we can eradicate the human tragedy of war.

JM: Does Kaji’s death imply any hope for the social condition?

MK: Since I am inclined to believe that wars will continue, you may say that I do not see much prospect for a changed society. However, we must live on, and to do this, we must have hope. I wanted to express this in the death of Kaji. Personally, I am not pessimistic, although it is very easy to become so after examining the history of humanity. You have to try hard to be optimistic.

In *Harakiri* the theme is similar. It ends as a tragedy. But my underlying theme transcends that. I try to express the possibility that human beings can overcome the tragic events of the world. I intend to be humanistic. In *Harakiri* the tragedy is triggered by authoritarian pressure, which smothers individuals. In this film, human evil takes the form of an oppressive feudal power structure. I was fascinated by the tenacious human



resilience that continued to defy this extreme pressure.

JM: Does your sense of inherent hostility and your feeling that change is possible reveal an influence of Freud and Marx?

MK: Oh, you are trying to start a large discussion [*jokingly*]. I never consciously try to describe in my films what these two great men said. I am not aware of them at all when I am working. I am primarily interested in history, and within a vision of man's past, I treat social consciousness, social conflict, and class struggle. In the end, you may say that these problems are also concerns of Marx, and he did influence my work. However, I never consciously thought of being directly influenced by his ideas. When I was a student, I studied Asian art, particularly Buddhist sculpture. I spent many hours looking at numerous statues and images in our ancient cities. While I was making *Harakiri*, I was very much aware of traditional Japanese aesthetics. *Harakiri* was my first costume film, or *jidai-geki*. While making it, I was keenly aware of, and attracted to, the stylized beauty of our traditional forms. Around that time, I felt that I had come to the end of pursuing realism in film. This new approach delighted me. I had been searching for a meaningful mode of expression for some time, and this stylized form of filmmaking provided me with the answer. I took *Harakiri* to the Cannes Film Festival and was granted the Special Jury Prize. At that time, someone said the film reminded him of a Greek drama. The stylized beauty of the film was understood. I was very encouraged, rewarded, and flattered by this. I was already planning the second film in this style, *Kwaidan* [1964]. I intended to express in *Kwaidan* the ultimate in stylized film method. The main theme of the four fairy tales in the film was the right material for this attempt. I wanted to capture the spiritual importance of human life. *Kwaidan* was also my first color film. After *Harakiri* and *Kwaidan*, the direction of my filmmaking has changed....

JM: One more question, relating both to *The Human Condition* and *Harakiri*. Both of these films take place in the past, the former around the time of the Second world War, the latter pre-Meiji.

Were you criticizing the social condition and state of mind in present-day Japan while you were speaking about the past?

MK: In any era, I am critical of authoritarian power. In *The Human Condition* it took the form of militaristic power; in *Harakiri* it was feudalism. They pose the same moral conflict in terms of the struggle of the individual against society. These struggles are the main drama of all my films.

JM: What is your view of Akira Kurosawa's place in Japanese film?

MK: Kurosawa-san's works have had a tremendous impact on Japanese filmmaking. We cannot think or talk of Japanese film without him. I don't agree with those who say that his films have no direct connection with present-day Japan. They certainly have. I should say this, however. The present Japanese film industry placed him in a position where he could not create effectively. They ostracized him. I hold the opinion that Kurosawa-san is still capable of producing major films—now and in the future. He is indeed a great artist. Oshima has been mentioned by many as a new filmmaker who has a finger on the pulse of modern Japan. I myself consider him a political figure rather than an artist, a filmmaker. I think Oshima will have many future problems in his filmmaking....

JM: Going back to the interesting point you were making about Kurosawa, why is the Japanese filmmaking world preventing him from working?

MK: Kurosawa-san, Kinoshita-san, Ichikawa-san and I formed a group called Yonki-no-Kai [the Club of the Four Knights]. Our

main purpose was to produce quality films. We were very much discouraged by the recent decline and degeneration of Japanese film as a whole.

Eventually, we wanted to invite new directors into our club. At first, we planned that each of the four members would make one ambitious, serious film, in the hopes of rejuvenating the industry. Kurosawa-san was the first of the four to undertake this plan. He made *Dodes'ka-den*. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a box-office disappointment and it held up our future plans. Then came the tragic incident of Kurosawa's attempted suicide. All of us were terribly shocked. At present, we are biding our time. In answer to your specific question, I should add that the movies that Kurosawa-san is interested in are so expensive to produce that none of the five major companies is, at present, willing to undertake the production. You cannot forget that the movie industry as a whole is fighting hard to survive. So today, more than ever, the companies are thinking in terms of how quickly they can earn back their investment. This sort of pressure makes filmmaking downright difficult, not only for Kurosawa-san but for me as well. It is a very difficult situation [*laughter*]....

JM: Have there been many Western directors whom you admire or who have influenced you?

MK: So many of them. Too many. But I can say that while I was a university student, I saw many films of Renoir, Duvivier, René Clair, and the Americans Frank Capra and Wyler. This must have been around Showa 15 or 16 [1940 or 1941 on our calendar]. So I can say that I must have been influenced by them. I still think of their work with a bit of nostalgia. But in the end, an artist must rely on himself; you cannot depend on anybody. It is a very lonely, solitary existence. Last year I went to the Cannes Film Festival and met Charles Chaplin. They showed some of his works. I was deeply impressed by his greatness. His films, his methods and content, are modern and so contemporary. He is a great genius.

JM: Which of the Chaplin films is your favorite?

MK: I forget the title. It was the story of a poor blind flower-vending girl [*City Lights*].

JM: To express the nature of your visual style, could it be said that you consciously create and unfold geometric patterns within your shots, and that you very often contrast very static scenes with scenes involving many traveling shots?

MK: Probably this notion refers to the formal beauty I pursued in *Kwaidan*. In that film, I modeled my shots on the stylized beauty of traditional Japan. I am very aware of the contrast between the static and the dynamic in my films. But I never plan on these shots beforehand. They are brought out by the particular demand of a shot, which I execute in order to express a specific emotion or a particular scene of the drama. It is all an integral part of the filmmaking.

JM: Does the contrast between the static scenes and those with traveling shots arise for you as a result of the emotional changes in the characters?

MK: You could say so, but these things never come out of intellectual analysis. Usually during the shooting, I do not have more than one alternative. I *had* to do it this way. It is all a very emotional procedure. As the drama develops, I get a hunch that I should stop the camera or that I should move the camera rapidly.

Do you remember, in *Harakiri*, the sequence of the young man committing hara-kiri? He was using the cut bamboo sword to stab himself. I still remember how I came to shoot these sequences. I was really struggling with the scene, because I had

tried several approaches and none was convincing. I drank sake and was thinking about it all night. At dawn it came to me suddenly that it was impossible for him to stab himself with the bamboo sword. There was only one way for him to kill himself—namely if the sword were stuck into the tatami mat, and the man threw himself over it. After this everything was easy. We finished shooting in a very short time. I was very satisfied with the result of this particular hara-kiri scene and with its effect on the surrounding sequences.

This, as one example, explains how the artist's mind works. It is challenging to create something new, but it is a simple operation if it comes to the mind of the creator. If one flash of an idea shines, the whole is revealed as an epiphany. But, of course, this sort of revelation happens only after many days of struggling, checking every angle and all possibilities.

The major points of making the film, such as the theme or the social aspect of the theme, must be worked out long before you start shooting. Once the camera starts rolling, I have to forget nearly everything. From then on, in my own case, I let my mind dictate what to do next to create each scene. My sensibility is then the sole guide to follow throughout the work. To the artist, this kind of dependence on his own sense—rather difficult to put into words—is, I feel, very important.

For instance, while the cameras were rolling, someone asked me how I had decided on the position of the camera. I didn't know. While working on the continuity of the film, I just knew that the camera should be at a certain height to shoot those scenes. If you are clouding your mind by thinking of the film's theme or its message, the film would be awfully dull. The audience would see nothing but the director's intention, not his execution of the theme. The artistic execution gives the film its flesh and blood. With this aesthetic effort of the director, the film becomes art. I myself become physically hot when I encounter this challenge. I get excited and emotionally involved [laughs].

JM: I have heard that you're a Method director in relation to your actors. Would you agree?

MK: Perhaps. Naturally I discuss the scenes thoroughly with the actors, and perhaps this includes asking them to locate in their own lives feelings similar to what they are portraying in the film. Filmmaking is an art that integrated many different media. I talk fully, when it is necessary, to anybody—with the scenario writers, assistant directors, art directors, musicians, cameramen, and so on. I have to organize many people's endeavors into one. I get very demanding sometimes. I become very greedy [laughs].

JM: One last point. Do you write your scenarios yourself?

MK: I always bring in one professional scenario writer. I usually let him work first. After he has said he has put in everything he thinks appropriate, then I start to write the scenario myself.

**THIS FRIDAY AT THE ALBRIGHT-KNOX GUSTO AT THE GALLERY, FEB. 29, 7:30 P.M. (FREE) WITH BRUCE JACKSON AND PHILIP CARLI**

“We know what Picasso, Braque, and their cubist colleagues in Montmartre were seeing inside their heads in the decade leading up to World War I because they painted those visions for us. When they weren't painting, talking, drinking, and otherwise socializing, they were watching movies, the amazing new art form that was also then in the process of finding and defining itself. Movies captured time, slowed time, and sped it up. Movies broke time into pieces and freed motion from the ordinary demands of gravity and space. Movies were just what those Parisian cubists needed when they weren't doing exactly the same thing in another way in their studios. Join Bruce Jackson and the internationally celebrated silent film pianist Philip Carli for a screening and discussion about the literal and fantastical films Picasso and Braque could very well have seen in their regular visits to those darkened rooms.”



General Akashi Gidayu preparing to commit Seppuku after losing a battle for his master in 1582. He had just written his death poem, which is visible in the upper right corner. Artist: Yoshitoshi Tsukioka, created about 1890.

**COMING UP IN THE SPRING 2008 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS:**

- Mar 4 Robert Altman MCCABE & MRS. MILLER (1971)\*
- Mar 18 Hal Ashby BEING THERE (1982)\*
- Mar 25 Sydney Pollack TOOTSIE (1982)
- Apr 1 Krzysztof Kieslowski THE DOUBLE LIFE OF VERONIQUE (1991)
- Apr 8 Jane Campion THE PIANO (1993)
- Apr 15 Clint Eastwood UNFORGIVEN (1992)
- Apr 22 Ingmar Bergman THE SEVENTH SEAL (1957)

**CONTACTS:** ...email Diane Christian: [engdc@buffalo.edu](mailto:engdc@buffalo.edu)...email Bruce Jackson [bjackson@buffalo.edu](mailto:bjackson@buffalo.edu)...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>...to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to [mailto :addto list@buffalofilmseminars.com](mailto:addto_list@buffalofilmseminars.com)....for cast and crew info on any film: <http://imdb.com/>

The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the Market Arcade Film & Arts Center  
and State University of New York at Buffalo  
with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation