Liberation Through the Body's Destruction: A Deleuzian Analysis of the Body in the Late-Capitalist Landscape of Kurosawa Kiyoshi's *Cure* (1997) and *Pulse* (2001)

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Abstract:

Japan in the late 1990s to early 2000s was in the midst of a seismic economic crisis that shaped a society that was overworked and desensitised. This malaise is reflected within the horror films of this period, colloquially known as J-horror. This paper argues that these films can be better understood through the application of Deleuzian affect theory. Contextualising the national situation allows for the use of a national understanding that brings Deleuze's focus on sensation to horror films reflective of a Japanese society in search of sensation. Furthermore, the horror genre's abundant on-screen representations of sensation provide a fertile ground for Deleuzian affect theory. Focusing on two films by Kurosawa Kiyoshi: Cure (1997) and Pulse (2001), this paper examines the transformation of both the individual and the societal body when faced with a massive upheaval. Cure's transformation is one that unearths the evils lying under the surface of humanity. Bodies desperately starved for the sensation they once found in a period of economic prosperity begin to turn on one another and cannibalise themselves until all that is left is spite and the remnants of desire. Pulse, on the other hand, examines the transformations of a society left isolated amidst the ruins set aside by technological ghosts where bodies become transformed into perfect examples of the body without organs. Characterised not by a synthesis of desires but by an extreme repression that has hollowed out the body due to the overwhelming demands of a late-capitalist society, these ghosts are just one transformative outcome of the rigours of late-capitalism. This paper analyses the ways in which the physical and liminal transformations of the body in Cure and Pulse are symptomatic of a society in desperate search for self in a shifting economic paradigm.

Keywords: Bodies, sensation, transformation, late capitalism, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Cure, Pulse, and Kurosawa Kiyoshi.

Introduction

Japan entered a period of economic prosperity between the years of 1986-1992 that is colloquially known as the country's bubble period. But as is the case with any bubble, it must burst and in 1992 the country found itself in a period of economic instability and uncertainty. Due to the increasing financial deregulations within the country, the banking system's short-term plans to increase profitability led to an unstable economy that collapsed in on itself and left the country in a state of transition.[1] Gone were the materialist pleasures that satiated the sensate bodies of the Japanese people (high-end cars, fashion, overseas travel and boutique home appliances to name a few) instead all that remained was a late-capitalist landscape that rendered the nation overworked and desensitised. The country's adoption of a capitalist system in the late 1800s was one that rendered the workers — in this case, farmers — and their interests obsolete in the pursuit of capitalism.[2] This continued throughout the years until the farmers became office workers, and other members of the working class, whose desires could only be answered through the consumerism of late capitalism. The cycle of consumerism that builds national identity through its purchases, services and the affectations that follow could readily be applied to the Japanese cultural body.[3] However, with the bubble bursting, opportunities to indulge in these desires became fewer.

This period of Japanese history can be defined by a search for stability whilst the country is in a state of socio-economic turmoil. Zahlten describes this period in Japanese history thusly:

> "The 1990s are often —though somewhat simplistically— described as a time of increasing conservatism during which economic trou-bles provoked a reassertion of national identity, traditional values, and often reactionary politics."[4]

The national body can be described as desperately attempting to re-evaluate its sense of self — on both a collective and an individual level. Society's break from the pleasures afforded by the relative economic freedom of the bubble period now gives way to a societal malaise; an

[1] Monzur Hossain and Farhana Rafiq, "Asset Price Bubble and Banks: The Case of Japan," *The Bangladesh Development Studies* 34, no. 1 (2011): 23.
[2] Yasuzo Horie, "An Outline of the Rise of Modern Capitalism in Japan," *Kyoto University Economic Review* 11, no. 1 (1936): 114.
[3] Katarzyna J. Cwiertka and Ewa Machotka, *Consuming Life in Post-Bubble Japan: A Transdisciplinary Perspective* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 1.
[4] Alexander Zahlten, *The End of Japanese Cinema: Industrial Genres, National Times, and Media Ecologies* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017), 175.

emptiness and a desire for sensory experiences that can no longer be satiated by consumerist frivolities. Lacking a pronounced vision of self-identity that was not inextricably linked to the machinations of late capitalism, the national body found itself in a state of disarray; a malleable entity at a moment of cultural transition.

Horror directors of the time seized on this moment of cultural uncertainty and J-horror became popularised for its examinations of a transforming national body. *Ring* (1998, Nakata Hideo) — the most famous film to come from this emerging genre — focused on contemporary Japanese citizens being haunted and killed by a spirit of Japan's past in the form of Sadako. Identity and a re-examination of national identity was at the heart of many films of this genre. Conceptions of masculinity changed with the failing economy as the capitalist ethos of financial success correlating to masculine pride meant that more men were uncertain of their identity. As horror often does, it took the anxieties of the cultural subconscious and projected them onto the filmic body. These films focused on the various transformations the body undergoes — both in death and in life — as a response to a national body longing to be known by itself. Often these metamorphoses would be facilitated by indulging in a desire long since repressed in the wake of economic instability. Pushed to the extremes, Japanese horror cinema was indicative of a nation in search of sensation amidst the collapsing boundaries of the body itself. None more so incorporated its national context and this bodily uncertainty than *Cure* (1997, Kurosawa Kiyoshi) and *Pulse* (2001, Kurosawa Kiyoshi).

Kurosawa's films positioned the body in various stages of metamorphosis both literally and figuratively as they became emblematic of the national body. Sensate bodies that searched for extreme forms of stimulation and become transformed by their experiences. Deleuzuian ideas on becoming and the body's sensory experiences become an apt tool in analysing the way that Kurosawa's cinematic bodies become altered by their desires. Using Deleuzian theories as a framework, I analyse *Cure* and its representation of people — starved of a sensation they once relied upon — cannibalising both the self and others in search of a sensory experience that will satisfy them. In mutilating the bodies of others and themselves, Kurosawa's film focuses on the repressed national body pushing itself to experience something new even if that experience is pain and suffering. Furthermore, with Deleuze's theories on becoming and the body without organs, I analyse *Pulse*. The film's inclusion of spectral figures existing in a state of liminality is emblematic of the body inhabiting a sensory experience as its final form. Deleuze and Guattari's theory on the 'becoming' as a liberating force is intensely linked to the shift to liminality evidenced by the film's ghosts. It is in this shift that the figures are

highlighting another of Deleuze and Guattari's theories in the 'body-without-organs' or the disorganised body. A necessary 'becoming' if one is to attempt to live in a late-capitalist society, however, these characters soon become despondent within this disorganisation. In the act of committing suicide, the sensation of the act has transformed these bodies into crystalised sensations; an indefinite corporeality of experience that ignites sensations in others. In using Deleuzian theories, Kurosawa's films present an idea of bodily transformation at a time when the socio-economic situation is just as malleable and shifting as one's corporeality.

Corporeal Liberation Through Mutilation: *Cure*

Takabe (Yakushi Koji) sits at a cafe table, tense and preoccupied with the events of his life. The detective is investigating a series of killings by different murderers who apparently have no connection at all. No real motive exists for any of the killings and the only line connecting them all is an X mark carved into the bodies of their victims. Alongside his professional worries, the detective also has a sick wife whose memory issues leave their relationship strained and Takabe needing to undertake most of the domestic tasks in the home. Into this pit of despair arrives Mamiya (Hagiwara Masato), an amnesiac hypnotist who meets each of the murderers before the time of their killings. His liberated attitude and silver tongue insert themselves into the lives of the soon-to-be murderers and the detective investigating them. Ordinary citizens become reflective of their innermost desires and act out violence that existed only in a darkened corner of their minds. Seemingly unfathomable acts of murder and mutilation begin to be carried out by the irreproachable masses. As a psychologist states: 'The devil made them do it is all I can guess'.

Each murder exists in isolation within the lives of the killers. Ordinary citizens who in a moment of disassociation find themselves giving in to a longstanding hate or desire to destroy one's body. In the moment of the killing, the citizen is transformed into a murderer; a moment of extreme violence to fill the emptiness brought forth by existing in late capitalism. Perhaps only in the sensation of indulgence can the overworked citizen find contentment in late capitalism's 'endless everyday'.[5] A monotonous existence where one becomes lost and is unable to imagine oneself present within one's own culture. Thus, the killers' actions represent a desire to find themselves in a culture they cannot identify with and only through a

[5] See Shinji Miyadai, Living an endless everyday! A manual on how to defeat Aum (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1995).

transformation of the body — here it is the literal body of the victim and the figurative bodies of the murderers — can their body, their life be within their control. If late capitalism has repressed the desires of the Japanese cultural body, then the destroyed bodies act as the violent culmination of the anxieties and desires of a nation that finds itself lost amidst a changing economic paradigm. Kurosawa's use of the body becomes akin to Deleuze's affirmation that:

> "It is through the body (and no longer through the intermediary of the body) that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought."[6]

Only through cinematic depictions of the sensory experiences of the body can one understand the thoughts of a nation. In its sensory experiences there exists the truth of a national body whose desires exist underneath the skin just waiting to be found; the X carved into the skins of their victims acting as treasure maps, pointing towards the desire hidden deep inside the body's pressed shell.

This desire hidden within the body of the repressed individuals is indicative of Japanese art's deployment of the body as subject. McRoy states:

> "Japanese artists and intellectuals often employ the image of the body, and the integrity of its 'boundaries', within a larger allegorical framework; as such, it frequently provides a vital component for imagining modern and contemporary notions of 'Japanese-ness'." [7]

Thus, the body in Japanese art becomes a medium for understanding the underlying anxieties and desires of the Japanese cultural body. By mutilating these on-screen bodies and pushing them to their corporeal limits, Kurosawa is attempting to liberate the repressed body; peeling back the skin and exposing it to the sensations of the flesh (Figure one). Only in the destruction of one's corporeal form can the repressed body be freed. As Midori states: '(a)ccording to each historical application, the return of the repressed Japanese "body" can be made either regressive or liberating'.[8] Thus, the murder and mutilations by citizens can be seen as an attempt to free not only themselves but the larger Japanese national identity from the shackles of repression in post-bubble Japan. In destroying these repressed bodies, one liberates instead of regressing into

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[6] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: The Athlone Press, 1985), 189.

[7] Jay McRoy, *Nightmare Japan: Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema* (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 2008), 19.

[8] Matsui Midori, "The Place of Marginal Positionality: Legacies of Japanese Anti-Modernity," in *Consuming Bodies: Sex and Contemporary Japanese Art*, ed. F. Lloyd (London: Reakiton Books, 2002), 144.

the overwork expected of a late capitalist society. The body as fixed subject of their desire follows Deleuze's theory that no subject can exist without repression:

> "Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack the object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression."[9]

If one's desire was regularly fulfilled then there would be no fixed subject but within the laborious demands of late capitalism, there exists no regular outlet for their desires. The film positions murderers as ordinary citizens (a cop, a teacher, a doctor, an office worker etc.), these figures are representative of a repressed proletariat body that cannot process desire in a landscape that owns them corporeally as another facet of capital. The body as a medium for desire thus begins to focus on itself, cannibalising other bodies in an attempt to liberate its own bodily desires.

Figure one: The mutilation of the Japanese body, pushing the limits of sensation and liberation.

One who wishes to 'save' these bodies from the depths of their repressed state can view oneself as a missionary figure. Mamiya is described as a missionary by a psychologist in the latter stages of the film who — upon seeing his secrets — refers to him as a 'missionary' preaching a salvation whose roots lie within the ruins of the body. The character's amnesia places them outside of the control of late capitalism. In being unable to remember their commitments to labour his body is ruled solely by desire and not informed by a socioeconomic hierarchy of capital. His mesmerism takes the forms of these desires. In hypnotising an individual, Mamiya simply smokes or gets a glass of water — base elements that are

[9] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane (New York: Penguin Classics, 1977), 26.

representative of a bodily desire for stimulation — to lure the citizens inside of themselves and liberate the repressed body by giving them freedom to act on their desires. Conflict is the only way for the liberation of the body from late capitalism. Bingham states that, in the films of Kurosawa, this conflict — as is the case in *Cure* — is one of mundanity: 'the continuation of everyday life, of the minutiae that comprises day-to-day existence, remains the most potent struggle'.[10] The mundanities of late capitalist Japan drive the individuals to their base instincts and to understand the world through the sensations of the body. Mamiya is simply the catalyst for this change, a tool that breaks through the numbness of post-bubble Japanese society. As such, this liberation of the repressed body — literalised through the murders themselves — is one that uses the genre's penchant for body horror to provide a visual allegory for the liberation of the worker. Azalbert describes the impact of late capitalism's effect on the body accordingly:

> "[…] the abstract stage of a bio-power that does not aim to punish the bodies, but to turn them into docile entities through processes of subjection (social, sexual or aesthetic) that individuals integrate unwillingly."[11]

This sentiment is one that can be found in post-bubble Japan where the individual's body has been tamed so that it can fit the work environment. In reintroducing one's base desires — the doctor's fascination with the body, the salaryman's lust and Takabe's anger at his wife's illness — Mamiya is simply allowing one to follow their bodily desires and not be tethered to the conventions of post-bubble Japan. As stated by Mes on *Cure*'s characters:

> "Destruction is only a means to an end. The point of stripping away values is to arrive at the point of tabula rasa, the blank state. It is a necessary step in the process of rebirth. It is only with everything stripped away that we can begin again to redefine ourselves."[12]

The individual is not ruled by the role given to them by society but by the sensations of the corporeal body. Redefined in the image of one's base desires and thrust forward on instinct alone, the body comes to the fore; a liberated being.

The implication that the body can only be liberated through the sensory experiences of bodily destruction renders those that exist whole as repressed bodies. Takabe and many other masculine bodies find their repression personified as the anxieties surrounding their masculine

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[10] Andrew Bingham, *Contemporary Japanese Cinema Since Hana-Bi* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 113.

[11] The idea of 'bio-power' and biopolitics is a Foucauldian idea that governmental power is exhibited in the control of the nation's bodies and lifestyles (including sexuality and personal expression amongst others). See Nicolas Azalbert, "Le Corps défendant – Dans ma peau de Marina de Van," *Cahiers du cinéma* 574 (2002): 82.

[12] Tom Mes, "Embracing Chaos in Kurosawa Kiyoshi's Cure," in *Cure Booklet*, eds. J. Milligan & S. Southin (London: Eureka Entertainment, 2017), 12.

identity. Undone by the financial collapse, the stereotypical masculine role of breadwinner has become null. Working the same hours but for nowhere near the same pay, the family dynamics become untenable and — in the case of the detective — he has become both breadwinner and domestic worker. The engrained toxic masculinity of these dynamics becomes evident in a tense confrontation between Mamiya and Takabe. Upon probing from Mamiya in relation to his thoughts to his wife's condition and their new familial roles, Takabe states:

> "I'm a detective. I've been taught never to show any emotion, even with my family. And this is the result! I don't understand her. She doesn't understand what I go through."

Takabe's engrained misogynistic expectations of one's domestic life infects his view of the world. His innate masculinity has pigeonholed him into a role that no longer exists in post-bubble Japan; husband and wife may now need to work in a shifting economic landscape. Only through the destruction of the conflicts in his life — the killing of his wife to free himself from the role as caretaker and the killing of Mamiya to take control of his life as a detective — can Takabe become liberated in the expectations of his pre-bubble-burst mindset. White states on Takabe's rebirth:

> "It is his strict adherence to social roles and expectations that has damaged Takabe's psyche. Only by dealing with his problems in a socially unacceptable way – shooting Mamiya, murdering his wife – can he be whole again."[13]

In going against the conventions of post-bubble Japan — a focus on work and family — Takabe can transform into the liberated version of Midori's repressed Japanese body by destroying that which he viewed as repressive.[14] At the climax of the film, Takabe has become ruled entirely by their base desires. He is once again sitting in the café where — earlier in the film — the detective sat agitated, unable to eat or relax (Figure two). Now the detective leisurely relaxes, eating the entirety of his meal and refusing to rush off to respond to a police call as he would have once done (Figure three). Takabe has become unbound by the conventions of post-bubble Japan; transformed into the liberated Japanese national body.

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[13] Jerry White, *The Films of Kiyoshi Kurosawa: Master of Fear* (California: Stone Bridge Press, 2007), 129.
[14] Midori, "The Place of Marginal Positionality," 144.

Figure two: The agitated Takabe sits on edge not indulging in bodily desires.

Figure three: A relaxed Takabe is now indulging in his bodily desires after killing Mamiya and liberating himself.

Transforming Beyond One's Corporeal Limits: *Pulse*

The corporeal limitation imposed upon the body by a post-bubble Japanese society was cut open — its boundaries exposed — liberating sensation from flesh in *Cure*, however, in *Pulse* the liminality of the body is instead transcended. Kurosawa's film transforms Japan into a desolate landscape. Disaffected youths — dulled by life in a late capitalist society — answer online messages of 'Would you like to see a ghost?' and subsequently release spectral figures that transform the living into similar formless figures. Spirits, or ghosts, have a longstanding

history within Japanese culture and are often used to symbolise a loss of identity through the lens of generational trauma.[15] However, Kurosawa's ghosts can be seen as ones of literalised sensations, indicative of Bataille's *formless*.[16] This idea was a rejection of contextual form and a celebration of the base elements of art and humanity. In this context, the ghosts become formless by rejecting their late-capitalist context and embracing their sensate experience. Foster describes Bataille's concept as such: 'a condition where significant form dissolves because the fundamental distinction between figure and ground, self and other, is lost'.[17] The corporeal body has extended beyond its own limits, becoming the embodiment of sensations and thus the antithesis of the repressed Japanese cultural body (Figure four). An encounter with a ghost is often followed by an on-screen sensation (diegetic silence, visceral sights, a cold chill, wind blowing, etc.). It is no coincidence that prior to their eventual demise, the affected Tokyo youths display similar behaviour to that of the hikikomori. Vogel describes hikikomoris as such:

> "Japan has also encountered a growing phenomenon of social dropouts, first as children who refuse to go to school...and then later as adults who stay sheltered at home for most of the day (*hikikomori*) [...] to avoid facing failure, rejection or social disapproval."[18]

Vogel combines this statement with two graphs showing a general increase in these behaviours following the 1990s.[19] Therefore, this coincides with the bubble-burst of the Japanese economy in the early 1990s. As such, these behaviours typify that of one ruled over by society with the stage of hikikomori being a rejection of societal pressures due to the stress induced by such. The disaffected youth of *Pulse* then — after taking on the form of the hikikomori — became emblematic of the repression of bodily desire and sensation found within the fallout of post-bubble Japan. Pleasure is mitigated and only the necessities of survival are adhered to, the body is listened to but not indulged in, thus the numbness of sensation. The ghosts, however, have escaped from their corporeal shells and in the process become *formless* with no physical limitations. This metamorphosis allows for one to become the literalisation of bodily desire and sensations; escaping the limits placed upon them by post-bubble Japanese society and returning to the base of humanity, unbound by the regulations of society. Kurosawa hints at

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[15] For more information on the Japanese ghost phenomena, see Michiko Iwasaka and Barre Toelken, *Ghosts and The Japanese: Cultural Experience in Japanese Death Legends* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1994).
[16] Georges Bataille, "Formless," in *Visions of Excess Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. A. Stoekl (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 31.
[17] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 149.
[18] Suzanne H. Vogel, "Japanese Society under Stress," *Asian Survey* 52, no. 4 (2012): 691.
[19] Vogel, "Japanese Society under Stress," 691-692.

this metaphor with the suicides by gunshot being strangely devoid of blood, as if the inside (base human desire and sensation) has simply escaped through a broken shell and not a human body.

Figure four: Bataille's *l'informe*; the repressed Japanese body that has broken its corporeal limits and become a literalised sensation.

Transcending one's human corporeality into something more liminal, a spatial sensory experience places the body in a state of flux. It has shed the limitations of its bodily form — the societal obligations and pressures of labour expected in a late capitalist society — whilst maintaining the core affectations of the bodily experience. To look at this transformation we must turn to Deleuze and Guattari and their ideas on 'becoming'.[20] The pair suggest that:

> "A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both."[21]

It is in between corporeality and not that exists liminality, the spatial dimension in which these ghosts exist. These figures exist simultaneously as physical beings and *formless*; anchored solely by the sensory experiences they both exist as and affect. The ghosts are a result of the suicides that spawned them and — much like in *Cure* — it is only through the destruction of the corporeal shell that the liberated body can exist, and freedom is offered in a violent sensory upheaval. Deleuze and Guattari even adjudge that becoming is a form of liberation in their

[20] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 232-309.
[21] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 293.

assertion of the wasp and the orchid 'becoming'.[22] Thus, this sensory experience becomes trapped in a body which is *formless*. A crystallised sensation that lures others into its liberated liminality with the promise of escaping the pressures of late capitalism. In describing their concept of 'becoming', the philosophers interchange the word with 'memories' and describe the two concepts' similarities as states of being.[23] The ghosts exist as 'memories' of sensation, that which has become unobtainable under the anxieties of late capitalist experience. In preaching to the disaffected youths whose late capitalist anxieties have repressed their desires, these 'becoming' sensations or sensory 'memories' exist as a reminder of what one can experience outside of late capitalist society. Liberation comes in the form of 'becoming' liminal.

Pulse's spectral visages appear illusive in nature and temporal positioning with the beings moving at will, yet always perceptible to the human eye. Kurosawa's framing of the spectral invaders can be what Beugnet describes as décadrage or the pulling of the audience's eyes to the edge of the frame 'where chaos might lie'.[24] These shadows that linger at the edge of the frame are the manifestations of sensations lost to the post-bubble era of Japanese late capitalism. The idea of the spectres being a form that should not be perceptible to regular human senses, but the numbness enforced by late capitalism's gruelling demands allows the formless to be sensed. Beugnet's description of the formless' connection with sensation is heightened by cultural specificity:

> "As if 'probing a wound', the cinema of sensation tends to move us closer, dig deeper into our perception of things, show that which normally escapes the naked eye and ear and, ultimately, immerse us in the pleasure and terror of the 'formless'."[25]

Thus, in *Pulse*, the formless ghosts are ones of possibilities lost; sites of unique sensorial displacement. Unfulfilled desires and omitted pleasures rendered physical in the formless ghosts of late capitalism. Kawashima's (Katô Haruhiko) final experience with a ghost is one

[22] This idea revolves around the deterritorialisation of both the wasp and the orchid. Both exist independently and 'in-between' one another. Deleuze and Guattari mention that the orchid becomes liberated from its own reproductive properties through the facilitation of the wasp. Thus, both are in a state of 'becoming'; an experience that is liberating through its sensory properties and removal of responsibility. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 293-294.

[23] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 294.

[24] Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 44.

[25] Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 16.

based upon touch and the idea that reality is only confirmed through a sensory experience (Figure five). If the ghost can touch and be touched, it is a sensory body or sensation.

Figure five: Kawashima experiences the physical sensation of touching a ghost and feeling its presence.

The characters are inescapably drawn to these ghosts due to their position as extreme sensations unobtainable through other means to the characters themselves. Only by becoming a ghost themselves can the extremes of sensation become literalised as the boundaries of late capitalism do not allow such pleasures of the flesh. Beugnet describes this allure in spite of the consequences accordingly:

> "The figure that is beckoned by surroundings appears alternatively incorporated into a field of sensual inclusiveness or drawn into a formlessness that annihilates it."[26]

This annihilation is one of sensory freedom for the people of *Pulse's* Tokyo, it is an untethering to the regulations enforced by post-bubble Japan. Deleuze and Guattari's 'body-without-organs' is an apt description of these characters whose sensory organs have slowly been numbed by the demands of late-capitalism. As Deleuze and Guattari state:

> "What we need to consider is not fundamentally organs without bodies, or the fragmented body, it is the 'body-without-organs', animated by various intensive elements."[27]

Formless ghosts become the revolutionary 'intensive elements' that animate and reignite the sensory organs of the characters. The obvious fear upon seeing their looming mass or the cold

[26] Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 111.
[27] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 171.

chills that follow every encounter; sensations are elicited where they once felt none. These formless ghosts are sensory organs-without-bodies whilst the characters are bodies without the sensory organs that were deemed unnecessary in post-bubble Japan. If combined one might form a body with the entirety of human experience.

Human experience and one's perception of the world around us is omnipresent in the film. The director outlines the film's message in its two central allegories: Yoshizaki's (Takeda Shinji) computer programme and the flowers in the greenhouse where Michi (Aso Kumiko) works. The former of the two allegories is the more pronounced where the characters comment on the programme and its likeness to the society around them (Figure six):

> "If two dots get too close, they die, but if they get too far apart, they're drawn closer [...] A miniature model of our world."

Symptomatic of post-bubble Japan, the programme details the inability to connect with others in a world built by late capitalism, but the inherent human desire for connection keeps pushing people together. White remarks on the centrality of this concept: 'More than anything, *Pulse* is about isolation, specifically the very human need to connect with another person'.[28] The inability to connect with others in a society that inhibits sensation and limits free time to the most basic needs does not allow for human connection to occur. This is further emphasised in the latter metaphor where the flowers represent the people of Japan whilst the greenhouse they inhabit is the post-bubble Japan created by late-capitalism (Figure seven). An artificial living environment that is akin to the slight illusions of freedom afforded by late capitalism. However, in the greenhouse, the flowers are unable to root — thus not able to connect with the other flowers — and are simply stationed there to serve a purpose just as individuals in late capitalism are simply conduits through which the economy aims to prosper. Human connection and sensation are severed. The style of which lends itself to Ihde's existential phenomenology, which is as follows:

> "A philosophical style that emphasizes a certain interpretation of human experience and that [...] concerns perception and bodily activity."[29]

When bodily activity becomes stationary, inert and numb then one must question the root cause of such inactivity, thus the film leads the spectator to look at post-bubble Japan's involvement in this period of dissatisfaction and disassociation within the Japanese people. Kurosawa

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[28] White, *The Films of Kiyoshi Kurosawa*, 163.

[29] Vivian Sobchak, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (California: University of California Press, 2004), 2.

further alludes to the culprit being the fallout of the economic bubble burst with the flashback sequence to the origin of the ghosts trespassing. An employee (Aikawa Shô) appears to discover the ghosts and attempt to seal them away (with red tape) in a building site only for the half-finished construction to be seemingly abandoned and destroyed. One such effect of the bubble period was an increase in land prices leading to an increase in construction.[30] However, the film's portrayal of the site's destruction implies that the film's setting is at the time of the bubble burst where the economy could not afford such constructions. Thus, the need for the Japanese body to become liberated — via the ghosts — only occurred due to the economic bubble bursting.

Figure six: The computer programme that serves as an allegorical comparison to the inability of post-bubble Japanese youth to communicate.

[30] For more information on the effects of the economic bubble, see Yukio Noguchi, "The 'Bubble' and Economic Policies in the 1980s," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994): 291-329.

Figure seven: The artificial living environment of the flowers in the greenhouse mirrors the artificiality of life under late capitalism.

Conclusion

In an era of repressed desires, liberation comes as a transformation of the body. Within *Cure* and *Pulse* by Kurosawa Kiyoshi, we can see the horror genre become appropriated to investigate the repression of the Japanese cultural body and transform it through violence. The murder and mutilation of the body in *Cure* is an attempt to open up the flesh to the sensations of the body that have become unobtainable by the labour expected under late capitalism. This focus on the opening of the body up to the possibilities of desire is indicative of the repressed body expressed by Deleuze. These are people in search of escape from the anxieties thrust upon them following the economic bubble burst and they try to find it within the body's destruction. Similarly, *Pulse* seeks to transform the body to escape repression but instead of through physical mutilation it is through Deleuzian 'becoming'. The body undergoes a metamorphosis into a state of formlessness that straddles the boundaries between corporeality and not; a perfect synthesis of sensory experiences in a form that likens to another Deleuzian idea of a 'body-without-organs'. The target of both films is those of the proletariat, overworked workers or disaffected youths who have become disillusioned by living in a late capitalist landscape. However, this system demands ownership of not only one's labour but, subsequently, also one's body. As such the only way to escape is through the destruction and transformation of the Japanese national body and Kurosawa's films do just that.

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