

Eros Plus Massacre

(Erosu + Gyakusatsu)

Staff

Production	Gendai Eigasha
Producer	Soshizaki Shinji, Yoshida Kijû (Yoshishige)
Director	Yoshida Kijû (Yoshishige)
Screenplay	Yamada Masahiro, Yoshida Kijû (Yoshishige)
Photography	Hasegawa Genkichi
Editing	Yasuoka Hiroyuki
Sound	Kubota Yukio
Lighting	Unno Yoshio
Music	Ichiyanagi Toshi
Art director	Ishii Tsuyoshi

Cast

Okada Mariko, Hosokawa Toshiyuki, Kusunoki Yûko, Takahashi Etsushi, Inano Kazuko, Yagi Masako, Shinbashi Taeko, Matsueda Kinji, Takagi Takehiko, Ii Toshiko, Harada Daijirô, Kawabe Kyûzô, Sakaguchi Yoshisada, Tamai Midori, Kanauchi Kikuo

Release date: March 14, 1970

165 min. (orig. 202 min.); B&W; 1:2.35; 35mm

Eros+Massacre is Yoshida Kijû's 13th film in a nine years cinematographic career, but the first one he has been able to achieve in complete independence. For instance, the Arriflex camera he managed to buy at the time allowed him to work aside from any external support for the first time since he had left Shôchiku studios in 1964 – be it Nikkatsu studios and the daily *Chûnichi Shinbun* for *Mizu de kakareta monogatari* (A Story Written with Water, 1965), or Japan Airlines for *Saraba, natsu no hikari* (Farewell to the Summer Light, 1968). Considering its length (at first, it claimed a total duration of 3h45), the film cost much more than the “10 millions yens” that made the reputation of ATG. Nonetheless Yoshida was granted the opportunity to use its distribution network, without any risk of seeing ATG committee interfere in the making of the film.

Such conditions may explain the formal and narrative audacity *Eros+Massacre* is still credited with today. One shall not forget the importance of Hasegawa Genkichi, former set photographer, then promoted to cameraman, whose lack of experience was to Yoshida the promise of greater flexibility. *Eros+Massacre* actually gathers the crew the filmmaker needed to reach the goals he had set from the end of the 1950s. Beside actress Okada Mariko, Ichiyanagi Toshi (soundtrack), Kubota Yukio (sound recording), Unno Yoshio (light), Yamada Masahiro (scenario) and Hasegawa thus offered the author the opportunity to achieve his aesthetic aims, raising to higher powers what his past films had attained.

From *Mizu de kakareta monogatari* (1965) to *Juhyô no yoromeki* (1968), the topic of filiation seemed to have become of prime significance in Yoshida's filmography, through female characters facing the contradictions between maternity and sexual fulfillment, as well as their husband/lover's incapacities – make it indifference, impotence or sterility. But, beyond a description of morals, these films raised the question of determinism, such as: how far do (Japanese) social structures govern the individual? What about atavism? How free can get anyone willing to cast off those yokes? Up to then, those topics were developed among the family environment or, in previous films

made for Shôchiku, through the illusive fictions enacted by characters obsessed by their own social ascent. But *Eros+Massacre* upgrade them by shifting their scope of relevance toward modern history.

Let us consider the question of free love, which is at the core of the film. The main character, anarchist Ôsugi Sakae, was its first theoretician at the beginning of the 20th century. In addition, he was his first protagonist: married to Yasuko, he was also Kamichika Ichiko's (whose name was changed to Masaoka Itsuko for privacy issues, what eventually led Yoshida to reduce the duration to 2h45) and Itô Noe's lover. Last, he was his first victim, injured by Kamichika/Masaoka in 1916, and then murdered, alongside Itô and his nephew, by the imperial police seven years later. Ôsugi's definition of free love actually breaks the concept of family structure, as well as the so-called obviousness of the concepts of paternity and lineage. It goes deep right to the core of society and, by induction, addresses the Emperor's status as the nation's patriarchal figure. The topic of filiation then maintains its ontological meaning, but opens up to the political.

Eros+Massacre is indeed far from a traditional biopic. It embodies a contemporary frame, based on the characters of Eiko, a young student, occasionally a prostitute, and Wada, a nihilist obsessed with fire but too pusillanimous to become a real arsonist. As their researches advance, Ôsugi, Itô and Masaoka's portrayals incarnate in their discourses, adopt their hesitations, in a discontinuous and achronological structure. For instance, we shall see three successive versions of Ôsugi's first stabbing attempt. This outlook motivates the setting of diverse temporalities and discourses, theories, fears, memories or genuine fantasies. Up to the viewer to unravel its intricacies, just as Eiko and Wada appropriating Ôsugi's figure.

Eros+Massacre replaces the tedious causes-and-consequences logic of history by the much uneven ground of historiography, conceived not as a "discourse on history" but as the prime principle of its process. As if Yoshida aimed at sounding the depths of history, testing its links with memory, putting under question the logical authority of the past over the present. Then, does the past exist beyond the words that state and organize it? Is what we call "world" anything but a tracery of "world views"? Then, how unlikely would it be for Itô Noe and Eiko to meet in a contemporary setting? In a probably conscious way, Yoshida grasps the same questions as contemporary structuralist thinkers do, mostly their obsession of the "text", with *logos* as the leading organization principle.

Hence one shall not be surprised to hear lots of plays on words and language, stammering and shouts, as signs of a then-occurring discourse. But one shall also appreciate the dialogues' accurate irony, the metaphorical shifts and digressions of a film sustained by a true "textual" jubilation. Nonetheless, *Eros+Massacre* is far from being theatrical (even if it sometimes achieves a kind of theatricality), nor is a film which only advances on a dialogue basis. Yoshida rather integrates the fundamental mechanisms of language and, on the opposite, loosens from rational logic thanks to the freedom granted by the cinematographic medium – an endless combinational of editing, and the ability to evoke past and future in one shot.

What is at stake? The second half of the 60's saw a new rising tide of protests, whereas the Ôsaka 1970 world fair was approaching, bound to praise the excellence of the socioeconomic model of Japan. In that context, what may be Yoshida's point of view over political action, considering he saw the failure of 1960 riots? He probably does not believe in direct confrontation anymore – if he ever believed in. The emergency would rather be to step into the field of representation, the one of History for instance, to place it under control and then to find out how to act in a way severed from any sociocultural determinism. Such as Eiko and Wada who finally made love, after dismissing all their neuroses and other tropes of alienation. Such as *Eros+Massacre* which invents for itself something like its own idiom.

Mathieu Capel