

Charlotte-Susabi

A review by Kazuhiko Namekawa

It's been a while since I experienced a new movie that numbs my whole body.

Masaki Iwana was born in Tokyo in February 1945. Since 1988 he has lived in France. He started making films at the age of 60. Iwana continues to be an active Butoh artist. *Charlotte-Susabi* is his fourth feature film to date. The thought arises that perhaps this film is inspired by his previous wife's soul. Whatever the case, *Charlotte-Susabi* is a profound masterpiece, approaching a scale far beyond mere "my novel" movie.

I will cease to tell the story in detail, as the film has the expression of a strangeness exceeding the space-time that can only be shown within a movie. Also because it has a flow of a story, that is difficult to put into orderly writing. The realism and romance that only movies can possess, quietly breathes within this film.

To attempt to explain the narrative is like creating a puzzle within a chaotic story. However, because the story advances around the main protagonist Kamimura's love affair with a married woman Asako, we never get lost as to the story line. To that effect, the illusion of Kamimura's deceased wife Suiko, overlaps the story line and thus the story expands.

The drama is progressed by Charlotte, an enigmatic 'freak' who lives at the edge of the mercy of life, and also by a suspicious master and a 'granddaughter' who together run a broken down Yorozya (ancient mini market) living there as outcasts, whilst being deserted from both the country and by the villagers of F. Prefecture, a 'No Mans Land' since the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

From there on the film swiftly accelerates in action and situation to the final stage, as the characters live out their lives to the theme of "farther, faster, run away!"

With that kind of set up, the story commences in France. Meanwhile, the story enters the whirlpool that Japan encountered between the days of the Showa era 20's (1952) until 2011, then some time after.

I am reminded of the ATG (Art Theater Guild) works of the 60's and the Japanese movies of Nouvelle Vague in the 1970's that Iwano was closely watching.

The smell of the underground Japanese movies of that era such as Wakamatsu Koji's initial work, comes out in this film.

At the same time, *Charlotte-Susabi* shares ideas of erotic sensation and some humour, with an imprint of casual politics, as seen in a series of movies directed by Jesus Scolymovski of Poland (though the sex scenes are less severe in Iwano's work). Especially I am reminded of the anarchistic panel, layout and rhythm that recalls Scolymovski's 60's movies.

Of course, I draw a line with nostalgic works. I wake up to a slightly different sense from a director who has been living in Japan. There is minimal dialogue, in the traditional dramatic mood of Japanese movies (and the more recent sub culture). Principally the film is black and white, deeply carving sharp images that spring slowly whilst tripping with a starkness that cuts.

The film is 175 minutes. However, there is no wasted moment in this film. As in all of the great movies, every scene is vital. Basically it has a quiet appearance, something like a silent movie, that possesses symbolic images which reinforce the story. The soundscape is of a contemporary music style, songs and sounds too, such as various squeaks. The insertion of something like that is also stoic and tight. In any case, a commitment is given to detail. We do not need to carefully reflect upon each item.

Following a sex scene, there is a shattering of glass and a fall. It is directly from the pure Platonic mood. It is real. Films that take time in sex scenes are decided entirely by their freshness, both in Japan and abroad. This interweaves primitive exquisite techniques without blurred sexual exposure, it is a breathtaking exclamation to the undeniable direct depiction that is worthy of being described as sexual passion rather than common copulation. Moreover, the intense sexual intercourse, that happens within the abandoned, desolate room, we witness over and over again, intensifying each time. Sex is performed upon an elevated sheet of glass, balanced upon wine glasses, performed so, because of the hero's 'life trauma'. Everything is full of life and vitality, and somehow a living testimony to the storyline, including even the suspicious old man peeping and masturbating at our lovers through a hole in the door.

Beyond the sexual scenes involving humans, it is noteworthy to mention the breath of animals such as cattle, insects and fish.

For some time after the movie started, the character of Charlotte seems to be purely a supporting role, however as the name is used in the title of the movie, as we progress towards the end, you can see that she is the symbolic key person of this work. The enigmatic light emitted by her flesh is a melody of arousal. This is exactly at the core of *Charlotte-Susabi*.

Like all of the great arts, not just limited to movies, this is a work which does not state "This is how it is!" You are left to your own conclusions. I only saw *Charlotte-Susabi* once at the preview screening, yet since then every time I see it, a deeper, richer expression, suggestion and inspiration becomes visible.

I do not draw any conclusions. After all, at the end of the day, the ultimate importance is that one's consciousness is inspired.

Kazuhiko Namekawa
Writer

Translation: Solitary Body
Rewrite: Miriam King

—

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://www.iwanabutoh.com/su.php>