

# The Postmodernity in Sion Sono's Violent Aesthetic Films

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**Abstract:** Director Sion Sono became a pioneer of Japanese postmodernist cinema due to his works' distinctive personality and tension stemming from absurdity. This paper explores the postmodernity in Sion Sono's violent aesthetic films through the deconstruction of meta-narrative, the employment of fragmented collage narrative, the shaping of audio-visual elements from the perspective of violence aesthetics, and the decomposition and reconstruction of the meaning of violence through absurdity and black humor.

**Keywords:** Violent Aesthetics; Postmodernity; Deconstruction

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## 1. Collage fragmented narrative mode after the deconstruction of meta-narrative

Sion Sono's film narration disregards conventions, fully expressing individual will and freedom, deconstructing meta-narratives, and opposing grand narratives. The fragmentation of the story allows the audience to discover clues from the fragmented images, guiding them to explore their desires. Meanwhile, the technique of "resemblance" is employed to subvert traditional film element symbols and dissolve history from a postmodern perspective. According to Lyotard, postmodernism questions the representation of all narratives, emphasizing uncertainty and discontinuity, and pointing out the crisis of language representation. Therefore, it possesses a strong subversive nature, disrupting not only the narrative of traditional texts but also the order formed by discourse.

Meta-narrative, as a traditional narrative approach, no longer adheres to conventional principles in the context of postmodernism. Sion Sono showcases the unique aesthetic value of deconstructing meta-narrative by subverting traditional aesthetic norms and rejecting didacticism. He focuses on individual experiences and self-understanding, often replacing heroic characters with ordinary individuals. Postmodernism challenges the fundamental aspects of meta-narrative, and Sion Sono emphasizes the substitution of grand narratives with minor narratives. The violence depicted in his narratives exhibits traits of dispersion, mimicry, discontinuity, openness, randomness, irony, self-reflection, heterogeneity, and textual schizophrenia.

The film "Kazoku no Shokutaku" (English title: "The Family Dining Table") takes the ordinary lives of the Islandara family, living in the countryside of Izu, as its main focus. Using individual actors within the ensemble as entry points, director Sion Sono advocates for countering grand narratives within fragmented spaces. This is achieved through dismantling the narrative process, overthrowing grand themes, and reconstructing narrative structures. He presents a postmodern consciousness in his narratives, formed through interpretations of change, modification, and constraints. He pursues breakthroughs and ruptures, seeking events rather than a new world. He seeks an immediate and ever-changing momentary reality and explores the changes that occur in the representation of things and the ways in which they change. Sion Sono is engaged in a narrative revolution centered around "perception". With a unique perspective, he focuses the lens on ordinary people and daily life, constructing scenes full of tension through character relationships, thereby arousing the audience's deep visual enjoyment.

Postmodernism implies the transformation of reality into images and the fragmentation of time into a series of eternal present moments. Sion Sono is also accustomed to breaking the original logic of time and space, transitioning between extensive memories and reality, intertwining narratives. In Sion Sono's films, the aesthetic of violence exhibits qualities of diversity and heterogeneity. The excessive use of fiction and simulation blurs the boundaries of reality and replaces authentic expressions. It embodies both a tendency towards "anti-realism" and the spirit of "realism." Due to a lack of ability to connect symbols and images into coherent narratives, continuous time is segmented into a series of eternal present moments, which leads to a fragmented and schizophrenic experience of violence representation.

## **2. The Shaping of Audio-Visual Elements from the Perspective of Violence Aesthetics**

"The most typical aesthetic manifestation of postmodernism is not parody but pastiche, an empty and neutral practice of imitation that lacks any ironic or alternative meaning, and does not possess the creative mystery of surpassing the satirical arrangement of rigid styles. Sion Sono's films seem to deconstruct the development of a complete event into various fragments, removing subjectivity and centrality. The overall structure and actual situation are similar but distinct, resembling how reality cannot identify something as an absolute subject. Unlike reality progressing at a certain pace, films do not need to follow a chronological order like real life. Linear time in films is disrupted, not allowing the audience to view them according to conventional logic. Sion Sono prefers to disrupt the coherence of shot sequencing and reduces the horror in the depiction of bloody scenes.

The representation of colors in films holds not only artistic significance and aesthetic appeal but also serves as another interpretation of the movies: colors are a language, they are rhythm, they are thoughts, they are emotions. Violence is inherently associated with the color red, while black suggests sinister violence, and colors like white and blue also reflect violent characteristics. In Sion Sono's films, the theme of violence is often expressed through colors, with emotional elements infused into these colors, making violence a symbol with strong allure. When colors merge with elements of violence, various psychological connections emerge. As a result, the changes in color in the film can evoke different sensations among the audience, aligning with the themes that the movie aims to convey. In Sion Sono's films, the juxtaposition of red and white and the mixing of multiple colors are common. The contrasting tones of black and white often bring strong visual impact and profound emotional resonance. The juxtaposition of red and white is frequently seen in gruesome or emotionally intense scenes, representing the essence of death. The mixing of multiple colors is often present in violent scenes, showcasing a respect and celebration of life.

Sound, particularly music, plays a crucial role in violence aesthetic films by enhancing emotional expression and engaging multiple senses. It stylizes violent elements, turning them into theatrical performances that satisfy viewers' need for auditory stimulation. The use of music in these films creates a unique charm and value. It sets the atmosphere, intensifies emotions, and strengthens the narrative effects of the storyline. In Sion Sono's film "Love Exposure," girls wearing white sailor uniforms recite biblical verses and commit suicide amid the joyful ice-skating waltz music. The juxtaposition of the relaxed atmosphere with intense violence creates a sense of redemption. The bloody visuals visually stimulate viewers, while the violent actions provide a sense of realism. The fluctuating background music adds an element of absurdity, creating a separation between sound and visuals.

## **3. The deconstruction and reconstruction of the meaning of violence through absurdity and black humor**

Unlike the Leotardian perceptual image, the absurd representation of violence and the display of black humor do not emphasize direct immersion and non-reflection in the primary process. Instead, they belong to the foundational discourse understanding of the secondary process, which is in opposition to the former. This allows for a concentrated focus on the artistic legitimation of the meaning of violence. Director Sion Sono, in his films, demonstrates a sarcastic postmodern style and utilizes absurdity, black humor, and other techniques to deconstruct and reconstruct the "meaning of violence," taking the concept of "violent aesthetics" to the extreme. His works often employ techniques such as exaggeration and irony, imbuing the films with a sense of absurdity. Although Sion Sono is fascinated by violent imagery, he does not advocate for violence. He excels at manipulating the audience's emotions, using a form of violent aesthetics to blur the boundaries between justice and injustice, while also providing a visual and auditory pleasure to the audience.

Violent imagery is not simply aimed at a specific object; it is a response to the real world within a particular social context, and its consequences are often regarded as acts of wrongdoing. Violent imagery does not simply illustrate an individual's behavior and physical state; to some extent, it conveys an emotional experience of "empathy for others." In film "Cold Fish," Murata serves as a symbol of absurd sadism, where his violent tendencies are deconstructed through various absurd actions that affect the victims. He constantly uses language to humiliate, criticize, and belittle his wife. He exhibits abuse towards his wife and punishment towards his children within the household. There exist dramatic emotional shifts, frequent dissatisfaction with marriage and family life, and a

constant self-centered suppression. Despite being capable of violent acts, deep down, people like Murata actually fear violence. "Father, it hurts so much, Mother, please stop him, Father, I beg you..." These are Murata's most elusive childhood memories revealed in his dying moments. He both loathes and respects his father, learning and replicating his father's actions while yearning to destroy him.

Superficially, Murata appears numb and powerless when faced with violence, but in reality, he instinctively detests it. This aversion stems from his own mentality. Murata seeks to save himself in the role of a "father" and hopes to change himself, reclaiming a new life and restoring his sense of self. His spirit of resistance is a rebellion against the patriarchal cultural tradition. However, in the process, he gradually loses himself, and this desire intertwined with despair forms the tragic psychology that reflects Murata's inner conflicts. It is the painful root of his unresolvable spiritual world. In the depths of his innermost lack of security, behind the absurd acts of dismembering bodies, is a fear of violence stemming from his primal family, where the meaning of violence is reconstructed.

## 4. Conclusion

Sion Sono's works, both in form and content, belong to the realm of violent aesthetics in cinema. They simultaneously criticize and reflect upon the repression and eruption of human nature, exposing various problems and realities present in today's society. Furthermore, the audience's understanding of the violent meaning within the text becomes decentralized due to multiple perspectives. The intervention of deconstructionism also affects the stability of the film language, yet it reconciles the absence of film within the discourse space of postmodern art.

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