

Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Cloud*: "Profiteering and revenge overlap and amplify..."

David Walsh
27 July 2025

Kiyoshi Kurosawa (unrelated to Akira Kurosawa) is a veteran Japanese filmmaker, known for his work in the horror genre, psychological and otherwise. One of his best known films is *Cure* (1997), which concerns a detective investigating a particularly grisly series of murders.

One commentator notes that his films are generally

Tales of dread and uncertainty, [with] tensions lurking beneath placid surfaces, the world of the dead and of the supernatural blurring into reality, haunting sounds, memories, and appearances, Kurosawa's films are calculated devices that leave you needing to turn and check behind twice, just to make sure there's no dark force trying to catch up to you, too.

Another points out that

The definitive image in Kurosawa's cinema may well be the spectacle, in *Pulse* (2001), of his characters watching in helpless terror as their friends or loved ones, or strangers to whom they've formed desperate attachments, literally disintegrate before their eyes into dust-like particles.

Certain critics and filmgoers consider Kiyoshi Kurosawa a remarkable writer-director. Another possibility is that his bleak, misanthropic, often bloody films epitomize the overall decline in Japanese filmmaking, once a crowning jewel of international cinema (Akira Kurosawa, Mizoguchi, Ozu and others), over the past 40 to 50 years.

Cloud, Ryo?suke Yoshii (Masaki Suda) is a factory worker whose real obsession is online reselling. He specializes in obtaining (by fraud, coercion and other means) items for cheap and selling them dear. He has such success in his operations that he gives up his factory position, much to the chagrin of his superior. ("I want to try my hand at something different." ... "That makes no damn sense.")

Yoshii ambitiously and perhaps impulsively moves into a large house in the country with his girlfriend Akiko (Kotone Furukawa). He also hires a highly efficient assistant, Sano (Daiken Okudaira).

In a pivotal scene, Yoshii encounters a shady former schoolmate, who points out that they had always "wanted to make easy money." "Is life easy now? No." Not at all easy, "barely making any money." But "we can't quit." "How did we end up like this?" "I couldn't say." This is as close to self-examination and self-knowledge as Yoshii or his associates come.

He gets his hands on a large number of allegedly fashionable women's bags. Sano asks him, are they "real or false"? "I'll sell them before I find out," is Yoshii's response. However, the police begin to investigate the "fake designer jobs."

An object is thrown through his window. A mysterious car stops near his house, then pulls away. His enemies and rivals assemble online. "Let's get revenge." Eventually, they capture him and plan to burn him alive while streaming it. The punishment doesn't seem to fit the crime. When Yoshii is told, "This is payback for all your sins to date," his reply seems reasonable, "Am I ... so bad?"

In any case, a gory bloodbath ensues, in which Sano plays a central, lethal role. He seems to have underworld connections and experience. In the final scene, a now deeply shaken and unnerved Yoshii exclaims, "I'm doomed" and "So this is how you get to hell."

Everyone in *Cloud* is either a fraudster, a opportunist or a psychopath. Not a single one of them deserves much of the viewer's concern or attention. How accurate is that as a view of life in Japan, or anywhere else? Of course, works with nothing but detestable characters have been artistically successful, but in such cases the author or narrator provides or represents an alternative, ironically or by some other means. Kurosawa treats his material with stoical seriousness, without a hint of disapproval or outrage. In its way, *Cloud* may accurately reflect the stagnant and pessimistic state of bourgeois Japanese life and the mentality of its upper echelons. But the artist has the responsibility of doing more than merely identifying, much less wallowing in, such moods.

One commentator on social media, using the term "Marxist" in regard to the film, suggests *Cloud* is "one of the most sinister and moralistic narratives in Kurosawa's career so far." He argues that the film

depicts the demonic underworld of Japanese resellers and the faces of each actor embody a fiendish, mask-like quality, as if the viewer never really gets to peel the flesh back and see what these abhorrent characters are really thinking.

This is a serious misunderstanding, including of what "Marxism" is. These are relatively smalltime criminals and others caught up in something that goes implausibly out of control.

In a director's statement, Kurosawa argues that in the

obscure corners of modern-day Japan, violent incidents sometimes occur for seemingly no reason whatsoever. When the causes are investigated, it becomes apparent that a system of sorts exists through which petty grudges and frustrations are accumulated and blown out of proportion by the Internet.

The director goes on to assert that the "deadly battle" in *Cloud*

unexpectedly began to take on aspects of war.

cynic, ~~Profiteering~~ and revenge overlap and amplify, eventually setting violent acts into motion, and before you know it, there's no turning back. In a sense, this might also be how modern-day wars come into being.

There is no doubt an element of accident in the immediate *launching* of "modern-day wars," but they take place because of profound social and historical causes and driving forces, as do major "battles" within a society, to which contemporary artists are largely oblivious. Kurosawa puts forward a shallow, impressionistic view, and the film suffers from his general approach, although he has obvious skills and directs the goings-on effectively.

The biggest difficulty is the general political and cultural stagnation in which Kurosawa developed. In the end, despite their sometimes gruesome "sound and fury," his films, like many by his global contemporaries, are essentially passive, non-committal. The more genuinely radical impulses, which are still detectable here and there, have been largely neutralized or paralyzed. Kurosawa identifies, recognizes certain retrograde conditions and states of mind, but doesn't know what to make of them. He presents them, builds them up into something explosive, then that dies down. He recognizes another situation, pumps that up, it fades away. It's an abstract, circular, depressing movement. The concrete "here and now," the particular stage through which society is passing is missed, but *its* contradictions offer the way out of this "hell."

The artists have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point, however...



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact