

GUPT

A FILM BY AMIR NADERI





SYNOPSIS

Struggling young filmmaker Shuji is dedicated to changing the state of cinema. Shouting passionately in the street for radical change in public taste, he longs to bring back the artistic quality of the cinema classics. Frustrated, he finds solace in visiting the graves of his cherished directors: Kurosawa, Ozu, Mizoguchi.

One evening during one of his rooftop cinephile screenings, two thugs come and take Shuji away to an old boxing gym turned yakuza office/bar. Boss man Masaki informs Shuji that his brother Shingo borrowed lots of money to finance Shuji's filmmaking. His brother has been beaten to death for failure to pay back the loans. The responsibility now falls on Shuji.

Shuji decides that the only way to pay off the debt is to become a human punching bag in the gym's toilets where his brother was killed. For a price per punch, gang members can hit Shuji's six-pack until he can't take anymore. This quickly becomes a sick game for the violent yakuza to shoot off steam. Shuji withstands the beatings by thinking lovingly of his favorite films or angrily at "shit films."

Pretty bartender Yoko manages the punching sessions and collects Shuji's earnings. She supports him compassionately, but watching the pain Shuji endures becomes too much. She is replaced by veteran yakuza Hiroshi, who recruits even more paying punchers and integrates a betting system.

As the payback deadline approaches, the yakuza boss implements questionable additional payments to make things more difficult for Shuji. His energy and mental condition are weakening, but Shuji's toughest battle is still to come.





COMMENTS FROM AMIR NADERI

THE CHALLENGE AND THE EXPERIENCE I have a long interest in and feel a deep relation with Japanese cinema. For me, Japanese cinema, especially from their Golden Age, has always been one of the most important. What I have seen in Japanese cinema has been “secret” and “pure cinema.” I have the same feeling for old American cinema, but not in a nostalgic way. And that’s why I was able to tap into the spirit of filmmaking in America. In fact, I must admit that without having made five films in America, I would not have been ready to take on the challenge of making a film in Japan. And now after 20 years making films in a country different from my homeland, Iran, I felt that I was ready to go and make this film in Japan. I knew that it would not be easy to fully interpret the Japanese culture as a foreigner, but I loved the challenge and experience, just like when I made my films in America.



JAPAN IS A MODERN POEM When I decided to actually go forward and make CUT, I had to remind myself that I was going to make a “Japanese” film. I travelled there a few times. I knew that the process of making a film in Japan wasn’t going to happen all of a sudden, despite my existing knowledge and research on Japanese cinema. At the same time, I felt Japan was closer culturally to my native Iran than the multi-cultural America. Each state of America can be like a different country. Making a film in New York is quite different from making a film in Las Vegas. Japan, however, has one strong root in its history, art, cinema, literature. And the untouchable mystery of Japan makes this country a unique one. Japan is like a modern poem for me.



NO INTENTION OF CRITIQUING JAPANESE CINEMA Before making CUT, I had been to Japan quite a few times. I've been following Japanese cinema for many years. And I have had the chance to watch the classic masterpieces of Japanese cinema at the Museum of Modern Art in New York or the Cinematheque in Paris. I carefully viewed all these works and researched them. Whenever I give a workshop at university, I talk about Japanese cinema to my students and explain the important status of this cinema. I respect Japanese cinema, which include even today some of the greatest filmmakers in the world.



JAPANESE INFLUENCE Japanese cinema has significantly affected my own work. For example, in my film THE RUNNER, all the action, editing, sound work, and the last scene of the film (which lasts 12 minutes and has no dialogue, where the children go for the ice and hold it and run until it melts in front of the fire) have been influenced by SEVEN SAMURAI's last scene. The idea of my film WATER, WIND, DUST was born from Kaneto Shindo's NAKED ISLAND. My film THE WAITING came from Masaki Kobayashi's KWAIDAN and Kon Ichikawa's BURMESE HARP. The complicated camera movements and long takes which I have always had in my films are inspired by Kenji Mizoguchi. Working with children in the city and the color of the city come from Nagisa Oshima. Hiroshi Shimizu is the godfather to us all for working with kids. And I have a special respect for the character and style of Ozu, especially for the way he used silence.

SHUJI AND HIDETOSHI NISHIJIMA The story of CUT and the character of Shuji were born from my own experience as a filmmaker and my meeting the Japanese actor Hidetoshi Nishijima at the Tokyo Filmex festival. Nishijima had seen some of my films and liked them. I told him that I had been thinking for a long time about making a film in Japan. We met several times after that and we always talked about my idea and our shared interests in cinema. I wrote the role of Shuji based on my firsthand knowledge of Nishijima's own personality. He was amazingly cooperative in finding the best dialogues for the character of Shuji. He is a very talented actor and also a very nice guy. He puts all his soul into the work, even in the most difficult situations as in this film.

CINEMA'S LAST SAMURAI Throughout history, society everywhere has always clashed with art. Today, financial power is stronger than ever and it has a dirty hold on art, especially on cinema. In CUT, Shuji's anger is a reaction from this situation. He fights for what he believes in and his religion is cinema in its purest form. Shuji accepts to be a human punching bag not only to pay back his brother's debt, but also as part of his reaction to the poor way society treats cinema today. Each punch that Shuji receives is from the people who brought cinema to this low level for the sake of entertainment and profit only. Young audiences are being brainwashed to appreciate the same types of films over and over. Their taste is being dictated by business. Today's cinema needs a change. Shuji's actions and this film are a small movement toward that change. Somebody must stand up and shout, and Shuji does this in CUT. For me, Shuji is the last samurai in cinema. A samurai who sacrifices himself for what he believes in most: pure cinema.

CUT THE BULLSHIT The great filmmakers of the past put their souls into heightening cinema as an art form. Their efforts remain for us to appreciate today, but their heritage is being blown away quickly with the wind. Everybody knows that today's cinema has been poisoned. Independent films are piling up on dusty shelves. By some stroke of luck, they might get one screening somewhere, and for free. There is no obvious profit anymore for these type of films. The lucky ones might sell a few DVDs online. Sadly, there is no place left for these films to be screened. Most arthouse theaters have closed down and the remaining ones are struggling. If you're wondering about why I chose CUT as the title for this film, it's also to say "Cut the bullshit in today's cinema!" As Shuji shouts in CUT: "Cinema is not a whore. Cinema is art and we should respect it." It's way past time for us to take action. Soon we will be left with only the ashes of true cinema. The next generation might not have any recent reference as to what true cinema is. We must do something before it's too late.



THE SCRIPT I originally wrote the story and dialogues of CUT in English with my dear friend Abu Farman, an Iranian poet and video artist who grew up in Montreal. I eventually realized that the feeling and nuance of Persian is much closer to Japanese than English. So I rewrote the whole script in Persian and then that script was translated into Japanese. Film historian and Tokyo Filmex programmer Shozo Ichiyama introduced me to Japanese filmmaker Shinji Aoyama. I had seen his remarkable film EUREKA. He worked on the dialogues and helped me to rewrite some sequences. Getting to know him during our collaboration has been a great pleasure.



LANGUAGE DOESN'T REALLY MATTER I don't speak Japanese at all, but I didn't see that as a major obstacle. The language of the dialogues doesn't really matter to me. As much as I admire the effective dialogues in other filmmakers' works, I myself am not a man of dialogues. For me, dialogue is simply another means to carry the story forward. In general I'm much more inspired by shooting scenes without dialogue. Sequences without dialogue are especially my own world. Silence is also very much part of my world. My passion for filmmaking is connected to working with images, movements, sound, editing and silence. I think in CUT these elements are also among the main characters.

COMMON GROUND With the help of interpreters on the set, I was able to communicate with the actors and crew. Most everyone could understand my English, but they were hesitant to speak in English because of their Japanese shyness. When working with actors and crew, my very first condition is that they see my previous films. They need to take a step into my world of filmmaking. I put myself and my thoughts into them. I believe that the focus must be on the mood and atmosphere that is to be created on the set. Everything starts from mutual trust that doesn't come through words and promises, but only occurs after shooting two or three scenes. It happens after they experience what I want to say and how I say it. Nobody, not even myself, knows when this magic happens. There is always a moment on a shoot when everybody reaches common ground and from then on, all the doors open. Especially on CUT, this happened. After that we didn't need to use many words because the feeling between us spoke for itself. With one look or one gesture or even with silence, we were able to communicate.



NO ROOM FOR IMPROVISATION At times, I felt that making a film in Japan was like committing hara-kiri! Japan is a very systematic country with focus on punctuality and details. When you come to the set in the morning, everything from A to Z is scheduled and must be cleared meticulously for everyone on the set. Working in Japan means working in a strictly disciplined system. This was difficult for me to digest in the beginning as I like the freedom of looking for those magic unscheduled moments that define the mood of each image. In general, Japanese language and culture don't leave much opportunity to create improvisation. The severity sometimes broke my back, but I loved working in Japan. Despite the difficulties, I think that I have done my job well and the result is satisfactory. The language of cinema is a global language which enabled me to adjust myself to a new culture which I don't belong to.

DISCOVERY AND RISK Despite the barriers I experienced as a foreigner making a film in Japan, I remained free and open. I insist on making sure that my films have exactly the same smell and feeling of the culture of the story's location. I don't want to make films through the eyes of a tourist. From the start, I insist on not showing the stereotype images of the place where I am shooting. I allow myself to be free to discover. Even if my discovery might be naïve, it is still personal and instinctive. Discovery and risk are very important elements in filmmaking. I don't complain if I lose something along the way. The experience of a loss forces me to find another way. This process eventually leads me to the right solution. Like Shuji in CUT, I stand firm and fight until I get what I want. That's my job as a director. Challenges make me stronger. And I love impossible challenges. I know ultimately I'm the one who must knock down the obstacles. This has been the path of my life, especially my career. And the stories of my films have all come from this idea.

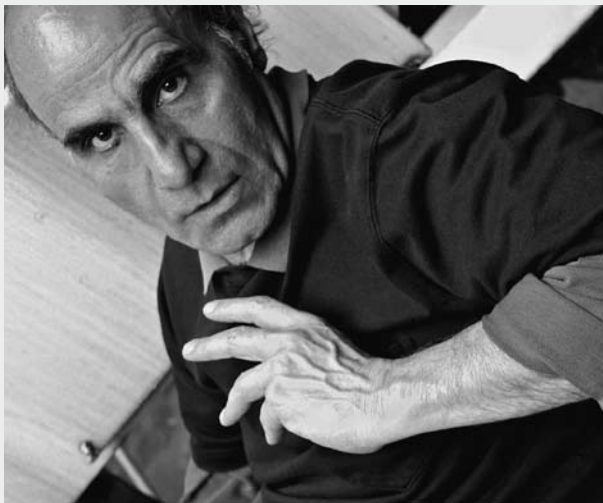


PRECIOUS PAST Working in Japan on CUT was a revelation for me and I somehow discovered a lot of things about myself. I can honestly say that CUT definitely has my own signature. CUT is a pure Amir Naderi film. From A to Z, without a doubt! It took me 20 years of making films in America to catch the soul and the feeling of that country that I call my second home. This only really happened in my last film VEGAS: BASED ON A TRUE STORY. Maybe this is the result of the strange life that I've led, full of risks and fun. I'm not very nostalgic, but my past has always served me, like a precious treasure. I always look ahead, but always with an appreciation of my roots and values, especially in regards to cinema. Because I know well that the good films that we have now are all born from that precious past of true cinema. This is one of the messages of CUT.

CHALLENGING FUTURE I would like to eventually go back to Japan and make another film with Hidetoshi Nishijima. I am also considering making a film in Korea. But my next film will probably be shot in America. In the deserts of New Mexico and Nevada. I have missed the sound of the desert winds. I have been thinking about this project called THE MOON. It's a whole other universe, a place with its own culture. The challenge of making that film will be yet another story for me. What I can say is that whatever I end up making, it will retain its own originality. Just wait and see.







AMIR NADERI

Since the 1970s, Amir Naderi has been among the most influential figures of New Iranian Cinema, developing his knowledge of film at the theater where he worked as a boy. He entered the international spotlight with cinema classics such as **THE RUNNER (1985)** and **WATER, WIND, DUST (1986)**, which both won the Golden Montgolfiere at Nantes. The first prominent Iranian director to expatriate in the late '80s, Naderi's American films have uniquely captured the vanishing texture of New York, premiering in *New Directors/ New Films*, Venice, Cannes, Tribeca, and Sundance. **SOUND BARRIER (2005)** won the Roberto Rossellini Critics Prize at the Rome Film Festival. His last work, **VEGAS: BASED ON A TRUE STORY**, premiered in competition at Venice in 2008. Naderi's work has been the subject of retrospectives at museums and film festivals around the world including Lincoln Center, Pusan, and Torino.



FILMOGRAPHY

2008 Vegas: Based on a True Story **2005** Sound Barrier **2002** Marathon **1997** A, B, C... Manhattan **1993** Manhattan By Numbers **1989** Ab, Bad, Khak (Water, Wind, Dust) **1985** Davandeh (The Runner) **1981** Josteju Doe (Search Two) **1980** Josteju Yek (Search One) **1979** Barandeh (The Winner) **1975** Marsiyeh (Requiem) **1974** Entezar (Waiting) **1973** Saz Dahani (Harmonica) **1973** Tangsir **1971** Tangna (Impasse) **1970** Khoda Hafez Rafiq (Goodbye Friend)



HIDETOSHI NISHIJIMA AS SHUJI Born in 1971, Nishijima has been acting in feature films and TV series since 1992. In 1997, his performance in Nobuhiro Suwa's debut film, *2/Duo*, was highly acclaimed by critics. In 2002, he acted the main role of Takeshi Kitano's *Dolls*, which was selected for Competition in the Venice Film Festival. His recent feature film credits include *Zero no shoten/Zero Focus*, *Kanikosen*, and *Sayonara itsuka/Saying good-bye, one day*. He won the Best Supporting Actor Award at the Yokohama Film Festival 2008 for his roles in *Kyuka/Vacation*, *Oka wo koete*, and *Tounan kadobeya nikai no onna/Tokyo Rendezvous*, and the Best Actor Award at the Japanese Professional Movie Awards in 2000 for his performance in Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Ningen gokaku/License to Live*.



TAKAKO TOKIWA AS YOKO Born in 1972, Tokiwa debuted in 1991. Her film debut came in 1999 with *Moonlight Express* opposite Leslie Cheung. Tokiwa has become one of the most recognizable and popular Japanese actresses among both audience and critics, and in 2004 she won the 28th Japanese Academy Award for Best Actress in *Akai Tsuki/Red Moon* (2004). Her latest film work, *Dirty Hearts*, a Brazilian film was shown in the World Competition (a collection of favorites) of the 35th Montreal World Film Festival in August 2011. Her other major films include *Hikidashi no naka no Love Letter/Listen to My Heart* (2009), the 20th Century Boys trilogy (2008–2009), *After School* (2008), *Fudeko sono ai/Fudeko & Angel's Piano* (2007), and *A Fighter's Blues* (2000). Her primary TV drama series credits include *The Wife of GOD* (The story of Konosuke Matsushita) (Autum/2011), *The Tower of TARO* (The story of Taro Okamoto) (2011), the NHK period drama *Tenchijin* (2009), *Kabachitare* (2011), *Beautiful Life* (2000) and *Aishiteiru to itte kure/Say you love me* (1995).



TAKASHI SASANO AS HIROSHI Born in 1948, Sasano received recognition in the play *Shanghai Basking*. In 1985, he appeared in the Yoji Yamada film *Otoko wa Tsurai yo - Shibamata yori Ai wo Komete* (It's tough being a man - from Shibamata with Love) and has since been a regular in Yamada's films. He won the Japanese Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his work in *Bushi no Ichibun/Love and Honor* directed by Yamada in 2006. He has appeared in many films, dramas and plays. His representative works include the Yojiro Takita's Best Foreign Language Film Academy Award winning *Okuribito/Departures* (2008), the movie series *Tsuribaka Nisshi/Fishing Fool's Diary*, Miwa Nishikawa's *Dear Doctor* (2009), Yoji Yamada's *Ototo/Her Younger Brother*(2010). In 2011, Yoshinari Nishikori's *Wasao*, Hiroshi Shinagawa's *Manzai Gang*, Masayuki Suzuki's *Princess Toyotomi*, and Tetsuo Shinohara's *Ogawa no Hotori* were released. He recently appeared in Takashi Miike's *Ichimei/Harakiri: Death of a Samurai* and Yoshimitsu Morita's *Bokutachi Tokyu-A Resha de Iko*, which are yet to be released.

CAST

Hidetoshi Nishijima Shuji Takako Tokiwa Yoko Takashi Sasano Hiroshi Shun Sugata Masaki Denden Takagaki

CREW

Written and directed by: Amir Naderi Original Screenplay by: Amir Naderi, Abou Farman Co-writers: Shinji Aoyama, Yuichi Tazawa Produced by: Eric Nyari, Engin Yenidunya, Regis Arnaud Producers: Yuji Sadai, Shohreh Golparian Co-Producers: Vincent Larnicol, Ji-Seok Kim, David Cotterchio Director of Photography: Keiji Hashimoto Production Designer: Toshihiro Isomi Special Makeup: Soichi Umezawa Sound: Takeshi Ogawa Lighting: Kenji Ishida Film Editor: Amir Naderi Sound Editor: Shogo Yokoyama Costume Designer: Kyoko Baba Casting: Hiroyuki Negishi Associate Producers: Jozef Amado, Murat Eken A production of: Tokyo Story In association with: Bitters End Supported by: Busan International Film Festival – Asian Cinema Fund



B I T T E R S E N D



TECHNICAL DETAILS

Production Year: 2011 Production country: Japan Length: 132 Min. Format: DCP, 1:1.85, Dolby Digital Original Language: Japanese Original Title: Cut

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CUT

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