

***Nora Inu* “Stray Dog” (1949) directed by Akira Kurosawa
Film Workshop by Caryn Cline**

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Detective Murakami (Toshiro Mifune)
Chief Detective Sato (Takashi Shimura)
Shinjo Yusa, the thief (Ko Kimura)
Harumi Nikimi, Yusa’s girlfriend (Keiko Awaji)
Hondo, the suspect (Reisaburo Yamamoto)

The opening credit sequence shows us a close-up of a dog, panting. Weather is an important element in the film (as it is for Spike Lee in *Do the Right Thing*). How does the heat add to the tension in the film? How does the rainstorm much later in the film function?

The theme of the “stray dog” or the “mad dog” is developed, and enriched, during the film. Chief Detective Sato says, at one point, in reference to the thief, that “a stray dog becomes a mad dog, right?” How is Murakami also a “mad dog”? At one point, Yusa, the thief, refers to himself as a “cat.”

Kurosawa establishes the connection between the detective and the thief in several scenes. How are the similarities and differences between Murakami and Yusa developed during the film?

The second long sequence involves Murakami tailing the woman pickpocket. What is the **tone** of this sequence? What **editing** devices are used to show the passage of time in this sequence?

In the third sequence, the detective has been instructed by the woman pickpocket that in order to find out about the black market in guns, he needs to hang around and “act down and out.” Murakami dresses like a soldier in order to accomplish that. Look carefully at the **mise-en-scene** in this sequence. What do we learn about conditions in post-war Tokyo? What **editing devices** are used to indicate the passage of time indicated in this sequence? What sort of music do we hear during this sequence?

The gun Murakami has stolen from him is a Colt. (Guns, we learn, are in short supply after the war.) Hondo, the suspect, is apprehended at a baseball game. Yusa’s friend, the hotel clerk, sports a pompadour haircut (Yusa’s sister calls it a “disgusting haircut.”) We hear snatches of

Western music--classical, jazz, blues, etc. throughout. What are we to make of these elements of **mise-en-scene** and **montage**?

We learn something about Yusa as Sato and Murakami examine his room. We have seen him only briefly, in the initial chase scene, but he has been an off-screen character, and presence, from the very beginning. As we learn more about him, how are we to feel? Do we sympathize with him? How does Sato feel? Murakami?

How would you describe the relationship between Sato and Murakami? How are they alike? different? Notice the different approaches they have to questioning the female suspect. At Sato's house, they begin to discuss their generational differences. What are the issues raised in this discussion?

At Yusa's girlfriend's (Harumi's) place, the dress Yusa stole for her serves as a kind of catalyst in the scene. Notice how it is used in the **mise-en-scene**: at one point, it is spread out in the middle of the room as Murakami, Harumi and her mother occupy positions around it on the floor. Harumi says, in defense of Yusa, that [his criminal behavior] is "because his knapsack was stolen." How does Murakami respond? What happens to the dress?

Kurosawa uses **parallel editing** to cut back and forth between Harumi's place and the hotel where Sato has tracked Yusa. He builds tension in a number of ways in this scene, particularly with the phone call Sato places to Murakami. Discuss how that tension is built.

The final confrontation between Murakami and Yusa is played out in a setting that differs from most of those we've seen previously in the film. How is it different? Given the way that their struggle, and Yusa's capture, is staged and shot, how might we interpret this scene? What do you make of the woman playing Mozart in the house?

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