

## MASTER'S THESIS

### Toward an aesthetics of sensation: a study of backlighting in Shunji Iwai's films

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## Abstract

Shunji Iwai is a significant director of the Japanese New Independent cinema, who is best known for the fascinating visual style he adopted from the 1990s onwards. Rejecting the obsession with Japaneseness in Japanese cinema, Iwai developed a unique style of aestheticism through the use of backlighting, a technique he refined in partnership with cinematographer Noboru Shinoda. In existing academic studies on backlighting, cinematic lighting has generally been understood as a representational element that works to fulfill the needs of narration. Examples of such studies include Sharon A. Russell's (1981) semiotic study on the lighting style of French cinema, Patrick Keating's (2010) discussion of lighting convention in classical Hollywood cinema, and Lara Thompson's (2015) analysis on the use of light as a narrative tool in narrative cinema. By contrast, lighting in Shunji Iwai's films works in a different way. This difference prompts me to review the general conceptualization of cinematic lighting and turn to a materialist perspective, a non-representational attempt to study the sensation of lighting in cinema.

By adopting Deleuze's concepts of cinema and sensation, this project provides an analytical trajectory for studying lighting in cinema. I argue that lighting as an aesthetic materiality renders a new understanding of the film world of Shunji Iwai as something derived from the Deleuzian poetics of sensation. This argument can be a starting point for critically rethinking lighting as a means for producing a circulation of cinematic affects.

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