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King Kong vs. Godzilla: how localisation produced "badness"

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ABSTRACT

There almost always seems to be a Godzilla film in badfilm lists. In Harry and Michael Medved's first book on bad movies, it was *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* (*Gojira tai Hedora*, AKA *Godzilla vs. The Smog Monster*, Banno Yoshimitsu, 1971); for Rob Hill in *The Bad Movie Bible*, it was *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* (*Gojira tai Mekagojira*, Fukuda Jun, 1974). Godzilla films undoubtedly sit within the canon of "bad cinema," even praised for their paracinematic quality. This article considers Tōhō Studio's 1962 film *King Kong vs. Godzilla*, perhaps the most transformed film in the Godzilla series, in both its Japanese and American versions. For its release in the US, the film underwent a significant transformation, with approximately 20 of its 97-minute running time removed, new scenes added, as well as changes to its soundtrack, with the vast majority of music replaced and a new dialogue dub. As the paper argues, the transformations to the film align with objective techniques of badfilm production, including the use of stock footage, library music, issues of logic, and failures of "good" filmmaking technique. The results help to demonstrate the ways in which we can understand how localised films then became canonised as badfilms. Badfilm scholarship has repeatedly problematised the place of non-American cinema within the canon of bad movies, since aesthetic failure is often defined in relation to Hollywood cinema. However, in order for films like *King Kong vs. Godzilla* to enter badfilm canons, localisation and the work of American distributors must first transform the work into an objectively "bad" work of art, erasing cultural specificity along the way. Nevertheless, such localisation challenges the failed intentions argument of much badfilm scholarship.

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There almost always seems to be a Godzilla film in badfilm lists. In Harry and Michael Medved's first book on bad movies, it was *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* (*Gojira tai Hedora*, AKA *Godzilla vs. The Smog Monster*, Banno 1971) (Medved and Medved 1979); for Rob Hill in *The Bad Movie Bible*, it was *Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla* (*Gojira tai Mekagojira*, Fukuda Jun, 1974) (Hill 2018). Godzilla films undoubtedly sit within the canon of "bad cinema," even praised for their paracinematic quality (Sconce 1995). The films canonised as "bad" were produced at a time of crisis for the Japanese film industry. Banno and Fukuda's films were produced through a period of declining budgets and resources that led to threadbare resources and visible degeneration in terms of special effects. *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* has nevertheless since become a canonised cult classic, an idiosyncratic mixture of psychedelia, animation, and environmental politics (Rhoads and McCorkle 2018) that has made it stand out from other Godzilla movies produced at the time. *Hedorah* seems to qualify as a badfilm for its bizarreness, something the text seems to define as entirely *intentional* in its address of specific themes. This article explores how badness can be inscribed into a film's text through acts of localisation. In trying to "cover up" the foreignness of a text, producers can inscribe the techniques associated with badfilms into the film. We can see how such acts work in palimpsestic ways, in which the original is "overwritten" in ways that are intended to mask its perceived foreign nature to create a work where foreignness can be substituted with "badness" and aesthetic failure. John Dyck and Matt Johnson have discussed how bizarreness is "an aesthetically positive effect" of creative failure (Dyck and Johnson 2017, 281). As they argue, works that fall into the bad art category are predicated upon a pleasurable effect that is the result of a work of interpretation that is at odds with the ways in which intentions are understood in the work. For such an effect to arise, the bad artwork

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conveys "the total bizarre mix of intended artistic effects and actual effects" (287). *Godzilla vs. Hedorah* displays a kind of bizarreness, but, aside from dubbing, it is as its creators intended. The main case study discussed in this article, *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (*King Kong tai Gojira*, Honda Ishirō, 1962), has largely circulated outside Japan in a significantly altered version that exhibits many of the conventions in failed works of art. "Intended artistic effects" and "actual effects" are not necessarily the work of the same team of creators, and we may come to understand that those intentions are at odds with one another, even where such an appropriation is permissive on the part of the studio that produced the film.

In *Badfilm: Incompetence, Intention and Failure*, Becky Bartlett discusses how badfilms are generally "understood to be striving to adhere to the conventions of narrative and continuity established in Hollywood" (Bartlett 2021, 6). Failure is generally conceived as an inability, for whatever reason, to meet the expectations established by Hollywood studio productions. The many independent and exploitation films that pepper the badfilm canon, such as *The Room* (Tommy Wiseau, 2003), *The Beast of Yucca Flats* (Coleman Francis, 1961), *Zontar, the Thing from Venus* (Larry Buchanan, 1967) and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (Edward D. Wood Jr., 1957), are viewed through the understanding that their makers have aimed for the heights of quality defined by Hollywood, and, for whatever reason, be it talent, budget or misadventure, failed miserably. Such *extreme* failures are all American. Even as Iain Robert Smith (2019) has discussed, where filmmakers outside the US are inducted into badfilm canons, their films are generally seen as an attempt to imitate American genres or standards. He discusses how accented English in films like *The Room* and *Birdemic: Shock and Terror* (James Nguyen, 2010) by international filmmakers leave traces of "foreignness" onscreen that are regularly discussed within badfilm discourses, but these can be largely removed in localisations like *King Kong vs. Godzilla*. Smith contends that badfilms are often marked by the "displacement" of their makers from their original cultures (706). In this case, as we'll see, attempts to overwrite "foreignness" can lead to the incorporation of techniques that are usually associated with seemingly objective badness. Rather than its principal creators here, it is the film itself that becomes displaced. But, reading strategies for badness do implicate "questions of cultural and ethnic power" (713). They are not without harm. Such questions of power here are built into the localised film itself, since the work is transformed and reworked into something that has taken on the aesthetics of the badfilm.

James MacDowell and James Zborowski have discussed how "what counts as demonstrably aesthetically *bad*" can fall "within certain delineated parameters" (MacDowell and Zborowski 2013, 3). They explore how *The Room's* assumed intentions to fit within the same conventions as the majority of Hollywood studio productions are undermined by how far the film seems to be from those standards: scenes are superfluous to the main story, dialogue seems to be illogically related to other lines, language is awkwardly used, and narrative time and space are incoherently maintained. Key to the adoption of the film in badfilm circles is not "a perverse version of the auteur theory" (23) but a set of aesthetic principles and a protocol through which it is read, and importantly, *enjoyed* for being a badfilm. The reading of a classic badfilm in this way only goes so far for this discussion, since, while there is an undoubtedly sense of enjoyment for many viewers in reading *King Kong vs. Godzilla's* "badness", the aesthetics of the badfilm on display aren't a consequence of either the original author's intentions or the exotic nature of the text. Here, the aesthetics of the badfilm are intended to *mask* the foreignness of the original. Like Smith and MacDowell and Zborowski, Bartlett identifies a series of objective techniques associated with failed intentions, limited resources and inept filmmaking that can help us to see how, in transferring films from East to West, many techniques became inwoven into films that made it into lists of badfilms—not just Godzilla films, but many Japanese genre films that were acquired by American distributors and then moulded to the assumed standards and tastes of American audiences.

Smith also notes how many bad American films are made by non-American filmmakers, including Wiseau, a phenomenon Smith refers to as "accented," following Hamid Naficy's work (Naficy, 2001). Smith identifies a cultural gap between the audience and filmmaker from "outside" that the work cannot bridge, leading to pejorative readings that treat the film as "so bad it's good". Adopting Naficy's diasporic terminology, Smith sees the gap between home and host cultures as too wide, and the Otherness of the film and its creator is always on display. Hence, questions of intention are implicated in the badfilm viewer's reading of the work, to identify how the "foreign" creator has attempted to imitate American culture in a way that makes it impossible to bridge the distance. This leads to the reading of failed intentions on the part of the film's original creator. However, in this case, an intermediary producer has intervened to bridge

that assumed gap *for* the audience. *King Kong vs. Godzilla* was a marquee release for its Japanese studio Tōhō, but the version seen globally for decades was a significantly reworked version produced by John Beck, an independent producer whose biggest hit was the adaptation of *Harvey* (Henry Koster, 1950), who had also supervised the creation of Universal-International, the studio wing whose hits included monster movies such as *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (Jack Arnold, 1954) and *The Deadly Mantis* (Nathan Juran, 1957). Beck acted as a conduit to deliver the rights for the giant ape to the Japanese studio. In so doing, he retained the rights to distribute the film internationally. However, he was reported to have found the film to be too alien for consumption by American audiences (Ragone 1995/96). His crew, led by director Thomas Montgomery and editor Peter Zinner, shot new framing scenes with a United Nations reporter on a space station, cut others, created a dialogue dub in English, and significantly altered the film's musical score. But, in so doing, and consequently attempting to mask the foreignness of the work (an impossible task, as many of Smith's examples are incapable of hiding their accents), the film is inscribed as "bad". Acts of localisation can therefore become a process of "making bad". As Andrea Esser has argued, localisation relies on "deeply engrained cultural essentialism, where space-based conceptualisations of place and the national imaginary reign." Yet, such processes also "evidence… the appeal of the foreign, the exotic" across "global popular culture's" novelty. Or, there is simply a preference for foreign material as "better quality" (Esser 2016, 20). Here, those two aspects are in tension, as the preference for the local overrides the foreign, but the assumptions of the team behind the localisation have understood the text as too exotic for local consumption. Esser charts how processes of localisation can help us understand how audiences are constructed by media localisers, and that localisation "strategies should be carefully mapped out on a case-by-case basis" (21), something this article will do, to chart the impact of this particular producer's strategy. As such, it understands localisation as a process that is not wholly itself an act of translation, but one that evidences translation in its final outcomes.

There's a sense of injustice, Bartlett notes of the Medveds, to bashing films produced outside a US context for their inability to conform to standards, especially of effects, determined by Hollywood productions of the time. There generally seems to be a pejorative at play in Othering the foreign text in comparison with Hollywood. But, when a text is localised to eradicate the very elements that make it Other (language, cultural specificity, its address to local audiences), it can be subsumed by the same discourses and techniques that mark American films with failed intentions. The framework that determines the standards of quality in the badfilm pantheon, as Bartlett notes (6–7), continues to be derived from a US-American and Anglophone context. Yet, the Godzilla films that fall into lists of the worst films of all time, the ones that transcend their lack of perceived quality to be enjoyable for cult audiences, are generally those that fall into established genres of American cinema, especially science fiction, including most of the examples mentioned earlier, but also Israeli sci-fi musical *The Apple* (Menahem Golan, 1980) and the Italian *Troll 2* (Fragasso 1990) (Smith 2019). For Jeffrey Sconce, "the golden age of badness addressed juvenile tastes focused on excess and the fantastic, constituting a corpus of failure that anticipated the emergence of the fantastic as New Hollywood's most lucrative product-line and most intense arena of fan investment" (Sconce 2019, 667). While this perhaps helps to explain how Godzilla films have remained a global staple for so long, the proximity of the *kaijū* films of the 1950s, 60s and 70s to American-produced creature features makes the films strong candidates to be subsumed into the badfilm canon for their excess and juvenile fans. Their relationship with those films, and with American cinema more broadly, was determined by films that were routinely co-produced with or distributed by US-based exploitation companies, making possible interpretations through criteria determined in relation to American cinema. There's no denying that these films share elements with American-made "objectively bad movies", as J. Hoberman described them. In comparison with Hollywood cinema, they were produced in relative conditions of "extreme austerity", and once they travelled across the Pacific were generally "targeted at the most exploitable or lumpen sections of the movie audience (ethnic minorities, teenagers [sic], sub-literates, 42nd Street derelicts)" (Hoberman 1980, 8). They certainly fit comfortably with the dominant genres of badfilms and were often promoted in similar ways.

King Kong vs. Godzilla was one of the nominees in the Medveds' *Son of Golden Turkey Awards* (Medved and Medved, 1986). It gets a nomination for one of the "most idiotic ad lines in Hollywood History" (6), but the monster itself is named in the rogues' gallery (a "Who's Who in the World of Bad Movies"), "Japan's biggest star" who has fought "alien cockroaches', and "an enormous man-eating cocker

spaniel" (206). Perhaps more unfair is the entry for Honda Ishirō, the Tōhō staff director whose work came largely to fall in the *kaijū eiga* and *tokusatsu* film, astride science fiction and the horror film. Honda became the de facto *auteur* of the *kaijū* genre, and the Medveds are almost reverential of "Toho Studios' most wildly inventive director" (although this overlooked those who worked with Honda, especially Tsuburaya Eiji, the films' special effects director throughout the 1960s), but the disparaging comments imply that it is the monsters in such movies that are the source of their "badness". Honda films, they point out, include such aberrations as "a huge killer moth", "a giant man-eating walrus", "a flying lion" and "an octopus from beyond the stars" (208). They are the type of creative leaps that saw the *kaijū* eiga become classically paracinematic (Sconce 1995). But, outside Japan, Honda, here named as Inoshiro, a common transliteration of his name, regularly had to share onscreen credit with the American exploitation filmmakers who re-worked his films. Honda is the *auteur* of the *kaijū* eiga; in the classical sense of auteurism, his work is undoubtedly *auteurist*, built on common themes and a global pacifist worldview, but his addition to the rogues' gallery of bad cinema is partly down to ways in which genre cinema, and predominantly independent and exploitation cinema, worked at a particular time. Honda became Tōhō's most lucrative director after the release of the first Godzilla film in 1954, alongside internationally celebrated *auteurs* like Kurosawa and Inagaki (Galbraith 2008, xii), but the way his films were often released in, or localised for, the American market led to his films becoming fodder for the badfilm movement, equally celebrated and maligned. As Godzilla and *kaijū* films have become re-appraised through academic cult film and fandom approaches, this is a good time to explore how the standards imposed on Godzilla films turn popular cinema in Japan into badfilm in America.

Localisation challenges the failed intentions argument of much badfilm scholarship. Exploring the "so bad it's good" field of film reception means regularly reflecting upon how intention is understood in the text and why a film can be read as "aesthetically positive" in cases where *extreme* failed intentions are visible and audible. There are multiple reasons why such failures may be tangible, impoverished conditions of production, lack of skill, incompetence, and cultural differences. For Bartlett, studying badfilm is to study failure. Badness is a visible outcome in the text's "haphazard, ramshackle and incompetent ways" (4). Intention is generally something read from the text—failure is a visible feature of these films. So, as Bartlett attests, *The Room* will always be read as bad, no matter how often Wiseau claims his intentions were to make a comedy. Where films deviate from the aesthetic conventions of the time in which they were made, they are generally seen as accidental, "as the consequence of ineptitude and incompetence" (26). Any film could fail in its perceived or even stated intentions, but only a small number of films become badfilms. The "failed intentions claim" discussed by Dyck and Jonson leads to *bizarreness*, the perceivable deviation discussed by Bartlett, something that "commands our attention as viewers" (283). This is perhaps why only a small number of works seem to transcend seeming mediocrity into badness. We can be sure that David Lynch's films, Dyck and Johnson discuss, are intentionally bizarre and not good-bad. Intention is a textual determination, where scenes or representations fail as "clearly not intended", like the sex scenes in *The Room*. For MacDowell and Zborowski, "badness (in the sense relevant here: incompetence) presupposes unachieved aesthetic aims, and aims presuppose intentions" (7). The determination of intention and its resultant failure, especially where the intent of the author is unavailable, is an issue of categorical classification, a "failure to successfully inhabit the categories they intend to" (9). As Bartlett puts it, "badfilms challenge our ability to read the film in the way in which it was originally intended: horror becomes comedy; science fiction becomes fantasy; tragedy becomes farce" (Bartlett 2021, 30). *Godzilla vs. King Kong* offers a conundrum in this regard, since in its American version, the film also plays largely as its American producer intended, but this overwrites many of the original intentions of the Japanese version, diminishing the core theme, further emphasising the spectacle of the monster fights and introducing elements of incongruity into the visual and aural performance of the film. In the vast majority of films discussed in badfilm contexts, the films are as the original creators produced them, either because it was what they intended, or the closest they could get to those intentions. Localised films provide a case study for ways in which producers can inadvertently inscribe "objective" badness through cross-cultural adaptation. This is palpably different from the cases discussed by Smith, where such efforts of cross-cultural translation in transnational productions are often met with cult reception. The presence of two versions offers palpable evidence of intentions to de-foreignise the work (not the foreignisation of American genres, as discussed in many scholarly works on cult film). Therefore, localisation produces a

tension between the intentions of the original and the effects of the "bad" object of the localised work. It is not a case of what is unachieved, but what has been achieved in the localisation of the work that allows us to read the aesthetics of the badfilm as present in the version of the film that circulates in the West. In the context of de-Westernising the canon in film studies, some works may first need to be de-Westernised themselves before we fully understand the impact of cultural assumptions of difference attached to works deemed "too foreign" to speak to Western audiences, or that fail, in extreme ways, to meet their expectations of technical and aesthetic standards.

From the 1960s onwards, the Godzilla films produced in Japan were targeted almost exclusively at children, mostly male children. Repackaged for American audiences, they often played in drive-ins, but, more generally, on television. Even if they weren't re-edited, they were always transformed for exhibition, always dubbed, panned-and-scanned, and re-formatted for television. They often existed in materially different forms than they were exhibited in Japanese cinemas. Therefore, in this article, I will explore how the material changes made to Godzilla films aligned them with the standards of "objectively bad" filmmaking. While there are certainly overlaps in the generic identity of the films canonised as badfilms; the *kaijū egia* is a specifically Japanese form of creature feature appropriated from American cinema (Rawle 2022), and the films shared anti-nuclear themes with other science fiction films of the 1950s. Transcultural adaptation can therefore align foreign-made films with the standards of the American badfilm. As I'll argue throughout this article, this could have an impact on aspects of ethnicity, and function as an erasure or palimpsestic over-writing of aspects of national specificity, but this can also operate on a formal level that integrates objective elements associated with the badfilm into Japanese-produced cinema. Bartlett discusses how the "text's intentions" are generally "accidental" (28), but what about when the intentions written into the text don't belong to the original filmmakers themselves? Such inscriptions cannot be considered as accidental when their aim is read as an act of translation. To this end, I'll analyse *King Kong vs. Godzilla*'s original Japanese and localised American versions. With the exception of the American release of the first Godzilla film, it is perhaps the most transformed film of the series. For its release in the US, the film underwent a significant transformation, with approximately 20 of its 97-minute running time removed, new scenes added, as well as changes to its soundtrack, the vast majority of music replaced and a new dialogue dub. As I'll argue, the transformations to the film align with visible techniques of bad filmmaking, with use of stock footage, library music, issues of logic and failures of "good" filmmaking technique. The results help to demonstrate the ways in which we can understand how later Godzilla films became canonised as badfilms. Such an argument, therefore, expands discourses around bad and cult film that predominantly focus on American cinema or transnational imitations of American films deemed to fail to meet the standards set by Hollywood cinema. It's common for translated works to be seen as defective in some way, as I'll show here, but such defects also bring them within the scope of the study of film spectatorship, principally the study of badfilms and good-bad art.

King Kong's journey to the east

King Kong vs. Godzilla is one of several films that effectively evidence the transnational origins of the *kaijū* film. The original *King Kong* (Wallace and Cooper 1933) played a significant role in inspiring the genesis of Honda's original *Gojira* (1954). A twentieth anniversary re-release of *King Kong*, alongside the release of *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (Lourié 1953), helped to create the bones of the *kaijū* film, in which giant beasts are transported, generally through human hubris or nuclear experimentation, to New York where they wreak havoc. But *Gojira* became a major re-interpretation of its forebears when filtered through the imaginary of the post-nuclear nightmares of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Made just 9 years following the end of the Second World War and 2 years after the end of Allied occupation in Japan, *Gojira* develops the template developed by Wallace and Cooper to fit the Japanese context. Willis O'Brien, the special effects luminary behind *King Kong*, was a strong influence on Tsuburaya Eiji, the visual effects director of *Gojira* and many subsequent Tōhō *kaijū* films, and it was only the limitations of budget and resource—the relative austerity of Japanese cinema in the 1950s—that meant suitmation (the conventional term used for the "performer-in-the-suit" effects) was used rather than stop motion. As William Tsutsui described it, *Gojira* was "more nuanced, the special effects so different, and the emotions stirred so much more" (Tsutsui 2004, 20) than in previous films. This began the localisation of the *kaijū* film into the

Japanese genre we know today. While we can see the *kaijū eiga* was derived from an American genre, as many badfilms take their cues, the localisation of the content is so definitive that *Gojira* has become a classic of national cinema, often seen through a lens of national specificity in relation to the historical circumstances of Japanese trauma and victimhood (see Anderson 2006; Brophy 2000; Gerow 2006; Kerner 2006; Low 1993; Napier 1993; Noriega 1987; Ryfle 2014; Yomota 2007).

Despite the recent growth of scholarship surrounding Godzilla and themes of environmentalism and nuclear catastrophe (Rawle 2024), *King Kong vs. Godzilla* remains little explored in scholarship regarding these films. This is perhaps down to its avoidance of nuclear themes and the distance that the series begins to gain from the original film and its figurative references to the Hiroshima and Nagasaki tragedies. In a detailed discussion of changes made to multiple Godzilla films, Jeeshan Gazi (2024) discusses *King Kong vs. Godzilla* only as a footnote, despite emphasising the substantial differences in the two versions. It was the first Godzilla film produced in seven years after the lukewarm reception of *Godzilla Raids Again* (*Gojira no Gyakushū*, *Godzilla's Counterattack*, Oda Motoyoshi, 1955). While Tōhō had left its marquee monster to slumber for more than half a decade, the studio had embarked on the production of several successful monster movies, both involving *kaijū* and smaller monsters, including *Half Human* (*Jūjin Yuki Otoko*, *Beastman Snowman*, Honda, 1955), *Rodan* (*Sora no Daikaijū Radon*, *Giant Monster of the Sky, Radon*, Honda, 1956), and *Varan the Unbelievable* (*Daikaijū Baran*, *Giant Monster Varan*, Honda, 1958). *Rodan* and *Half Human* were both successfully released in the US by Distributors Corporation of America (DCA). *Half Human*, a Japanese take on the abominable snowman craze of the time, was reworked by DCA into a new version featuring new scenes with John Carradine as "Dr John Rayburn, Anthropologist" narrating the original footage from the Japanese version. While the transformation of the film is in line with the ways in which *Gojira* was transformed into *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* (Honda, with new scenes directed by Terry O. Morse, 1956), the localisation of *Half Human* is more in keeping with techniques used in *King Kong vs. Godzilla*, with an absolute separation of the new scenes from the footage of the original film. Carradine merely comments on the original film, and even diegetic sounds are removed. The Americanised version of *Half Human* fits the template of the badfilm much more closely than the Godzilla films—it even shared a distributor with *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. These localisations helped keep Japanese monster films—and Japanese science fiction *tokusatsu* (the Japanese word for special filming) movies—within the general field of the badfilm in America, sharing editing techniques and distributors.

The growing popularity of *kaijū eiga* with American distributors began to stretch into co-production. *Varan the Unbelievable* was an early collaboration between Tōhō and the US company AB-PT. Although it eventually became a Tōhō feature, it had initially been intended to be a TV series (LeMay 2018). *King Kong vs. Godzilla* also begins, perhaps understandably given the giant ape's origins, as an American film. As Steve Ryfle has documented, the film began life as a treatment by Willis O'Brien. O'Brien was still working in Hollywood by the end of the 1950s and wrote a story outline entitled *King Kong vs. Frankenstein*. The story revisits some of the tropes from the original, but this time it would be a monster created by Frankenstein's descendants that was brought to the US. This new monster would be paraded next to King Kong, leading to an inevitable showdown between the two. O'Brien began to produce concept art for the film in an effort to encourage RKO, the original film's rights holder, to license its monster. In the process, O'Brien began to work with Beck, who supervised the development of O'Brien's treatment into a screenplay, entitled *King Kong vs. Prometheus*, taking a cue from the subtitle of Shelley's novel, *The Modern Prometheus*. Nevertheless, Beck struggled to sell the film to a US-based company. He eventually turned to Japan and to Tōhō, who were interested in acquiring the rights to King Kong, the world's most famous giant monster. Tōhō bought the screenplay but substituted the Frankenstein monster with Godzilla (Ryfle 1998, 80–81). The studio would eventually produce two films based on the Frankenstein monster concept, but not until later in the decade. Beck retained the rights to produce and distribute the American version of the Kong-Godzilla film though, to which we'll return later.

The concept passed to Honda and the team at Tōhō, undergoing a radical localisation of its own. 1962 was to be Tōhō's thirtieth anniversary, and the new Godzilla film was set to be one of five marquee releases by major directors, including Kurosawa Akira's *Sanjuro* (*Tsubaki Sanjūrō*), Inagaki Hiroshi's *47 Samurai* (*Chūshingura: Hana no Maki, Yuki no Maki, Story of Flower, Story of Snow*), Naruse Mikio's *Her Lonely Lane* (*Hōrōki*), and Chiba Yasuki's *Born in Sin* (*Kawa no hotori de*). In its journey to canonised

badness, *King Kong vs. Godzilla* actually begins life as prestige cinema. With its address to global trends, the *kaijū* and *tokusatsu* films were becoming key export genres (Anderson and Richie 1959; Tanikawa 2020), so the Godzilla film would take a different pathway to world markets. Yet, the genesis of the film, when explained without the monsters, seems likewise fitting with conceptions of nationally specific cinema rather than transnational exploitation. Honda biographers Ryfle and Ed Godziszewski (2017) highlight how *King Kong vs. Godzilla* began life as an observation aboutthe growing commercialism of Japanese life. They recount a story that seemingly influenced the film's core theme, that a shocking pro-wrestling match featuring the legendary Rikidôzan led to the deaths of two elderly viewers, who were so shocked by what they watched onscreen that they immediately passed out and died (Ryfle and Godziszewski, 2017, 185). This inspired the film's focus on the race to create wilder and wilder spectacles to grab viewers and, therefore, generate ad revenue. This determines the film's satirical intentions, and leads to its similarities with salaryman comedies. The salaryman comedy, a reflection of Japan's unprecedented mid-century growth, was a staple of Tōhō's output (Airriess 2023). Like *Gojira* before it, *King Kong vs. Godzilla* is a statement film, and, in its original version, plays like a more conventional comedy than the "*vs.*" monster battles that would follow in the 1960s when Godzilla became the protector of Japan. It is, in many regards, a high-quality film, united by a consistent and core theme, edited by Kaneko Reiko, who was an assistant editor on five features with Kurosawa. Nevertheless, its suitmation effects sequences eventually take precedence over plot, and are really its primary pleasure. The American version subsequently minimises the coherence of the core theme and emphasises the film's spectacle. This is the version that has circulated continuously since its release in 1963, while the Japanese version of the film fell out of circulation, in general due to damage to the film's negative following its re-editing for a Champions Festival screening, when the film's runtime was reduced to 74 minutes for the 1970 festival (Ragone 1995/96, 75). The film was only restored in the 2010s and released globally in an official version in 2019. The "bad object" overseen by Beck was, for a long time, the only way most viewers could access the film, even though for decades it had remained the most successful Godzilla film at the Japanese box office in terms of admissions (Ryfle and Godziszewski 2025).

Honda's version

Given the film's genesis, we can read the film as we presume the producers intended. Viewers can read the text as "intended"—this can be especially important where the "original" has been unavailable for long time, the localised text the "original" for so long, before being "untranslated". If bad art, as Dyck and Johnson contend, is determined by a reading strategy of failed intentions, we have to read Honda's attempt as a success in more traditional auteurist terms. If the text of the original is bizarre, strange, or weird, it is due to its special effects, since they fail to conform with the standards of American cinema. This would return us to Bartlett's argument, that to judge the film as bad would be fundamentally unfair, since it would be to judge the film through American standards. For the film to fit into those objective badfilm criteria, it must be transformed. The subsequent gap between the two texts can therefore be subject to readings through a "techno-occidentalism", that Matt Hills has described, a strategy of "reading-for-cultural-difference… outside "the mainstream"… based on [an] identification with, and of, Japanese cultural identities and aesthetics' (Hills 2005, 171). Oppositional readings become possible in this matrix, especially with Honda's version being invisible in the West for so long. The criterion for such a reading becomes intention, that such intentions are not overwritten, and a conventional *auteurist* reading is more fitting with the standards of art cinema reception.

The following outline of the film is intended to highlight the film's narrative construction and references both to other films in the monsters' series but also to Japanese film genres beyond the *kaijū eiga*. In some senses, this is to align the film with popular film trends and qualities more associated with quality filmmaking, including thematic cross-cutting of narrative, and editing techniques such as match cutting and creative uses of sound. But, ultimately, it demonstrates the intentions of Honda's team in crafting the narrative. The text carries those intentions, and it's impossible to see them as *failed*. Such creative techniques can be understood as successful, and thus uncomfortable with conceptions of bad art. There is also no gap between the cultural identity of the film and its inspirations—taking its cues from a key Japanese entertainment genre, not from a Hollywood one.

Honda's version begins with Ifukube Akira's pulsating adventure soundtrack with brass and tribal chanting. Cut from the credits to a rotating globe. A voiceover gives us some dry facts about the planet's rotation and asks if we can survive if the Earth's rotation suddenly halts. Having tantalised the audience with a potential science-fiction motif, the film segues into a television show, as the show's presenter addresses the camera directly. A title caption flashes up "Wonderful World Series" and cuts to the show onscreen as the presenter talks about amino acids and the creation of life on Earth. Watching the show is Mr. Tako (Arishima Ichirō, a comedy actor known for his roles in the *Wakadaishō* [*Young Guy*] series of movies[1]), head of advertising for the show's sponsor, Pacific Pharmaceuticals. The show is boring, Tako decries, and its ratings share is only 5%. After some comic business with the telephone, Tako is berated by the company's boss after being asked to apologise, failing to recognise his senior. We cut back to the TV screen and a piece about the Seahawk, a nuclear submarine currently investigating unusual activity in the Northern seas around Japan. There are a series of TV and video screens that frame action throughout the film, and the next sequence, inside the submarine, cuts back and forth between screens onboard. The Seahawk sequences are all in English, a reflection of the Japanese film's address to international markets.

As the submarine sails to investigate an iceberg, preserving the narrative mystery, a low, ominous musical cue crash cuts with the sound of a cymbal to a close-up of one being hit by a drummer. We discover the film has cut into the diegesis of a commercial for a stamina supplement produced by Pacific, cutting back to the film's diegetic space: Furue (Fujiki Yū, a Tōhō studio player) is searching for Sakurai (Takashima Tadao, who often starred in combination with Fujiki). Sakurai and Furue both work for Tako, and Sakurai is helping out by playing the drums (Takashima was a talented jazz musician). Furue explains that Tako has big plans to build the ratings for the science show we saw at the beginning. A scientist has discovered an island in the seas to the south of Japan, but Tako is most interested in the myth of a giant monster living there, a potential ratings winner for Pacific.

The opening of the Japanese version is snappy comedy. It introduces the Abbott and Costello-style duo at the core of the film (there are also multiple baseball references throughout the film), and Honda cuts back and forth between cinematic and TV framing, including frames within frames, to establish the main core of the narrative's drive. Sakurai and Furue will travel to Faro Island (standing in for Skull Island, the traditional home of King Kong) to discover the monster for Pacific's TV show and cause a sensation. Of course, this maps onto the "Eighth Wonder of the World' plot from the original *King Kong*, where Carl Denham is the exploitative filmmaker who travels to the primitive island for his latest project. As Cynthia Erb has explored, the text of *King Kong* models colonialist ethnographic filmmaking rather than the horror film with which it has become more conventionally associated since its original release. Sakurai and Furue travel to Faro Island, where they discover a primitive tribe, continuing the nature/civilisation binaries of *King Kong* (including the use of Japanese actors in blackface makeup to play Pacific Islanders), something that continues what Erb describes "a story of 'male trouble'" (Erb 2009, 207) that is often common throughout appropriations of *King Kong*.

The introductory sequences in *King Kong vs. Godzilla* emphasise its light comedy alongside the emerging monster storyline. Honda cross cuts between scenes that move toward the expedition to Faro Island and the Seahawk's investigations. The film cross cuts between a goodbye for Sakurai and Furue, "the departure of the overseas coverage team" for the "Wonderful World Series" show, a banner states. As Tako berates his staff again, we cut back to the Seahwk's investigation of an iceberg that begins to crumble. The submarine is caught in the explosion and we hear the familiar roar of Godzilla. One of the scientists points to the fire and simply exclaims, "Gojira!" (a break from the use of English in these scenes). A lengthy sequence follows in which Sakurai and Furue first reach the island with their guide and translator Konno (Omura Senkichi). The sequence introduces the island tribe's worship of the monster on the island, where its roar is mistaken for lightning. Honda cuts away from this scene to another reference to television, merging the sound of Kong's roar with that of a lion on Sakurai's sister Fumiko's (Hama Mie) TV, another creative touch in the cross-cutting of the narrative.

As the film progresses, the monster narrative begins to take over. On Faro, Kong fights a giant octopus (a pun on Tako's name, since *tako* is the Japanese word for octopus). The film begins to turn more toward the looming outcome, the anticipated wrestling match between Kong and Godzilla at the end of the film (one Pacific employee references wrestling early on). The main characters start to become witnesses to the action rather than participants as the military takes more of a role in attempting to stop the two monsters.

There are also references to earlier films, as Godzilla and Kong both attack trains (which both did in their debuts) and the military tries to stop the creatures with electrified wires and pylons (something that also failed in *Gojira*). Godzilla is repulsed by the electricity, while Kong is super-charged by it. Kong carries Fumiko through Tokyo and stands atop the Diet Building (echoing Fay Wray and the Empire State Building). Sakurai and Furue help to send the monster to sleep using the berries from Faro, and the tribe's drums. Fujita's ultra-strong wire is then used to transport Kong to Godzilla for the final showdown. They fight, making their way to Atami in Shizuoka, where both monsters fall into Sagami Bay. King Kong swims away, heading for Faro Island, while Godzilla isn't seen again, but we do hear the monster's distinctive roar, readying us for when the creature will emerge again. As we turn to look at the more familiar American version, such intentions become lost, the salaryman thread is buried, and filmmaking style is replaced with what we might describe as a more naïve technique. As the narrative is transformed, it becomes more aligned with the techniques of the American badfilm, the "foreignness" of the film is subject to localisation and therefore fails to meet established expectations of Hollywood cinema.

The bad object in translation

MacDowell and Zborowski argue that badfilms are those that seem "faulty" in some regard (MacDowell and Zborowski 2013, 19). Putting aside the film's special effects, which are problematic to judge through reference to standards of Hollywood films, the "faultiness" of the localised text comes from the recognition of the gap between what was intended (perhaps what is *achieved* in the original version) and the outcomes, which here was can see as entirely intended, albeit often projected back onto the original Japanese makers in badfilm discourse. As Smith notes however, "the appeal of 'so bad it's good' cinema rests on the aesthetic distance between what the director intended to produce and what they have actually produced" (Smith 2019, 707). This includes temporal distance, plus aesthetic distance. Here, though, we might also include the distance between original and localised versions, where changes to the text might be seen as commentary on the original work, perceived flaws in its production or construction. It also includes the distance between the foreign and the familiar, where choices have been made to avoid the locally specific and the globally appealing, where transformation leads to the minimisation of themes and social criticism. These are "problems" with the bad work of art that are not always addressed in badfilm scholarship, where failure takes precedence. Here, the bad work is produced through the successful application of localising techniques.

Language and dubbing are the most superficial levels in which the film is transformed and localised. As so often happened with *kaijū* films, the Japanese dialogue has been entirely removed and overwritten by Anglophone dialogue. Localisation in anime and video game studies has long highlighted the problematic decisions made by producers (Carlson and Corliss 2011; Denison 2015; Roedder 2014; Ruh 2010), and the assumption is generally that the text has been localised to minimise its foreignness. As Abé Mark Nornes has argued, dubbing is generally considered the lowest form of translation, extracting the original text, its difference, and replacing it "with sameness" (Nornes 2007, 219), "a system that networks, rationalises, and homogenises" (233). Nornes argues that it is a system accelerated by globalisation, while Tessa Dwyer connects that system with the mechanics that produce the badfilm: "translation constitutes a 'bad' object for film culture *in general*, virtually elided from its composite strains of history, theory, and criticism" (Dwyer 2014, 53). Translation, especially dubbing, "is implicated within badfilm discourse" (46), even if it does provide "access to films, genres and directors from non-English-speaking contexts [, this] tends to depend upon the logistics of film translation, predominantly subtitling and dubbing" (46). The assumptions of film producers and translators contribute to the bad text of the film, as their actions remove culturally specific elements they assume won't play well with their target audiences. Elements of comedy are notoriously difficult to translate, such as afight with anoctopus (*tako* in Japanese) that mocks the boss's name. But Ryfle quotes a Warner's executive who emphasised how the Japanese language was initially a major blockage for Beck: "Johnny Beck was not quite enthusiastic from the first screening, probably because he did not understand the Japanese language" (Ryfle, 1998, 87). Only after seeing the film with translated dialogue did Beck reportedly begin to warm to it. Yet, Beck is still reported to have thought the film was "too foreign" (Ragone 1995/96, 70). Similarly, Peter Zinner, who supervised the audio for the translated version said that Beck disliked Ifukube's score and wanted something more "Westernized"

(Ryfle 1998, 89). The original score was then removed almost entirely and replaced with library cues from the Universal-International library and public domain sources.

The musical treatment of Godzilla films has been a recurring focus for localisation, producing a distance between the celebrated original and bad translation. In "Funny Accents: The Sound of Racism" (Brophy 2001), Philip Brophy discusses the translation of *Gojira* into *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* and highlights the thematic gap created between the two versions. Yet, writing before the widespread release of Honda's original version in 2004, Brophy notes the reworked usage of Ifukube's score to foreground the ominous elements of the score over the elegiac moments of reflection in the score. The divergent soundtracks exhibit "relational fractions" as well as "intertextuality and transcultural fissures" that account for differing ways in which the monster is understood. Brophy's account is perhaps limited in its reference to the changing dimensions of the monster's different representations after its first appearance, but his emphasis on the "work" undertaken to transform the soundtrack of the original film is highly pertinent:

> In the muting of voices, I maintain that a form of racial removal and ethnic erasure is, if not enacted, at least alluded to through a lack of consideration of the status of the original non-western textual object. Furthermore, the act of translation is not an operation of folkloric tradition, wherein mistranslation, improvized rewriting, and even racial divisioning organically contributes to generic multiplicity, polyglottic texts, and multi-lingual narrative forms.

The "lack of consideration" accorded to the original text extends to the canonisation of *kaijū* movies as badfilms. The Medveds refer multiple times to the English language tracks of translated Japanese movies. Gamera, one of the "Most Ridiculous Monster[s] in Screen History" is referenced through the English language dialogue of *Gammera, The Invincible*, US distributor Harris Associates' 1966 reworking of *Daikaijū Gamera* (*Giant Monster Gamera*, Noriaki 1965). The English dialogue is ridiculed by the Medveds, but the film remains a "Japanese saga" (Medved and Medved 1980, 19). It is a "non-western" object, problematically positioned in relation to badfilm discourse. The erasure of foreignness, of difference, by the dubbed track enables the films to be subsumed by badfilm discourse. *King Kong vs. Godzilla* relies on similar tactics of translation that position it more closely with the B-Grade cinema Brophy discusses. Translation in this case is a process that continues to align international cinema with techniques that transform along the lines of the badfilm identified initially by McDowell and Zborowski, but more so as a visible set of criteria discussed by Bartlett. This means that not only is translation implicated as an erasure of difference, as dubbing tends to do, but also that this continues to interpolate Japanese cinema into the standards of American badfilm.

The significant transformation of the structure of the narrative comes to incorporate a number of elements of the markers of failed intentions that Bartlett highlights. Firstly, voiceover narration and poorly synchronised dialogue undermine the illusion of the diegesis, either highlighting its lack of coherence in the case of poor synchronisation or through recourse to voiceover to paper over the cracks of narrative incoherence. The narrative framing of the American version of *Godzilla vs. King Kong* takes a partial cue from the satire around television in the original version. The film opens with different credits, but still cuts to the same shot of the spinning globe. But, instead of cutting into the diegesis of a television programme, the shot is inter-diegetic, and a disembodied voice quotes Shakespeare: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy", a nod to the fantastical events we're about to witness. The quote also adds a patina of seriousness and respectability, with a high cultural reference. Ultimately, the shot offers spectacle, but now little narrative development. Whereas Honda's version deliberately undermines the potential spectacle and misdirects toward the science fiction film, there is no such commentary here. Instead, we cut to a news broadcast, from the UN's international communications satellite (ICS), and Eric Carter, a news anchor played by Michael Keith, an actor whose only other feature credits were *The Worm Eaters* (Robins 1977) and *Bikini Bistro* (Sauer 1995).[2] The ICS is a spartan set, with a UN flag pinned to the wall. We're initially introduced to a story about an earthquake in Chile, and cut to a correspondent in Chile (played by an uncredited actor). These scenes function in a similar way to the introductory explanatory scenes in *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, except these scenes are spread out across the whole film. They provide a parallel commentary on the film, rather than communicating with or connecting with that narrative. They cause a number of issues in terms of narrative coherence, as well as having an impact on Honda's "show, don't tell" direction of the main film, something Bartlett references as a "guiding principle" of film direction (Bartlett 2021, 45).

Yet, while techniques such as voice-over narration speak to aspects of "control and authority" for Bartlett (43), it is generally a lack of control in the text that is signified by the all too visible technique. In this case, it is the intervention of Beck's authority that becomes written over the text. One of the issues of dialogue translation that is most regularly mentioned is the changing character names throughout the film. Fumiko is called "Tamiko" more than once, while General Shinzo is called Kenzo at times. Dr. Shigezawa has different occupations in the film as well, first Minister of Defence, then a promotion to Premiere. Konno, the Faro guide, also seems to speak with two voices: the original actor's voice that addresses the island natives in their language and the dubbed voice, which is interchangeably used. This suggests the conditions under which the film was produced, working with limited time and the assumption of a lazy attitude toward translation. It undermines the credibility of the diegesis at several points, but it is generally the newly filmed UN sequences that produce badfilm effects. While the UN scenes are generally static and dour in tone, they often undermine narrative coherence. For instance, roughly a quarter into the film, we're introduced to Dr. Arnold Johnson, "curator of the New York Museum for Natural History and an esteemed authority on prehistoric animals." Johnson has a dinosaur book with a Tyrannosaurus Rex on the cover. He explains that Godzilla is "a prehistoric species of dinosaur", a cross between different types of dinosaurs. As evidence of the monster's ability to remain frozen in the iceberg, Johnson mentions a Mexican frog that lay dormant for 2 million years and 3000-year-old lotus seeds that blossomed in Japan. Both of these examples are used in the original dialogue by Shigezawa to explore how Godzilla could hibernate in the iceberg. These sequences with Johnson act to introduce the monster to the audience. What is incoherent is that Johnson is talking about a creature that has already been referenced by name and seems to be something of a celebrity. The explanation also elides the burgeoning continuity of Tōhō's monster films, which would grow further throughout the 1960s. This is because it disavows the existence of previous Godzilla movies, a consequence of the fragmented distribution of the Godzilla series up to this point. The Embassy had released *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!,* and *Godzilla Raids Again* was turned into *Gigantis, the Fire Monster* (Hugo Grimaldi, 1959) by Warner Bros. Even Godzilla's distinctive roar is minimised in the sound mix so that the monster can be introduced anew and highlight its novelty. Yet, characters in the film seem excited to see Godzilla, especially children, despite this previously unseen new monster. And, of course, what's perhaps most noticeable in this repositioning of the monster is the absence of nuclear metaphors. This monster isn't born of radiation, as one character says in the Japanese text, but a frozen dinosaur. Erasing this memory of the atom bomb means characters can repeatedly suggest the bomb as a way of defeating the monsters.

The most incoherent pieces of the dub relate to Fujita's suspected demise in the film. A scene in which we see Fujita travelling at sea, dreaming of girlfriend Fumiko back home, is missing altogether. In the Japanese version, viewers can surmise that Fujita's ship has been attacked and sunk by Godzilla. However, in the American version, Fumiko is informed that Fujita's plane has crashed in Hokkaido, killing 118 passengers. Firstly, in narrative terms, this is redundant, with no spectacle or enigma around the monster's involvement. The scene in which we first meet Fujita is still in the film, but shorter, and we're told then that Fujita is going to Hokkaido to test his strong wire filament. Secondly, the visual and aural portions of the film don't match. Fumiko is shown a newspaper report about the plane crash, but it has a picture of a ship on it (which matches the establishing shot in the original version), and the Japanese text is the same (it assumes none of the audience can read Japanese). The film then clumsily links back to the UN sequences. Fumiko's friend encourages her to go to Hokkaido. "Why don't you go to Hokkaido?" Smash cut back to the UN broadcast: "Do not go to Hokkaido!" Japanese anchor Omura (played by Asian American bit part player James Yagi) tells us the Japanese government has issued an alert that Godzilla will attack Hokkaido, before we cut back to Carter and Johnson in New York. As Bartlett argues, bad "dialogue provides evidence of badfilms' incompetence and weirdness" (Bartlett 2021, 47). The "intrinsic" aspect of the text here is more visible than the examples Bartlett discusses. Whereas Bartlett discusses how viewers can make judgements about the failure of the text by comparing one film with another, this example, as is different from many badfilms, has an "original" with which it can be compared as well as other badfilms. Here, the gap between the original and localised versions is even more accentuated through changes that don't relate to the visual text. While the casting still nods toward ethnic difference—the casting of Yagi and Asian accented dialogue for many, but not all, character dubs—the revised dialogue highlights how the techniques associated with the American badfilm have been introduced into the Japanese text.

Weird translation, rewriting of the text, and the inclusion of multiple scenes of exposition map the film closely onto Bartlett's criterion-based evaluation of the badfilm. "The redundant tendency to foretell events marks the narrator[s] as largely irrelevant", Bartlett explains (Bartlett 2021, 51), a tendency seen throughout *King Kong vs. Godzilla*, such as when Johnson explains, seemingly with no evidence, that Godzilla, as a reptile, will be repelled by electricity. Johnson does try to say that Godzilla was repelled by the wires when it attacked the train in Hokkaido, but this doesn't seem to fit the visual evidence when we see the monster happily stepping on electrical cables. Kong, meanwhile, we're told, grows stronger from electricity. Again, we're offered no visual evidence of this, it is redundant information. The scene where the military erects pylons to block the monsters' paths demonstrates this adequately. Godzilla is repelled by the electricity, and Kong is super-charged by it. This helps explain the ending of the film when Kong is struck by lightning and becomes able to fight back against Godzilla's attacks. As presented in the original version, it's an experimental tactic by the military (even though it didn't work when Godzilla attacked Tokyo in *Gojira*), and the film conveys its information visually. It is an example of "show, don't tell" filmmaking, where the intentions implied by the text appear to coalesce with narrative. The clunky onscreen narration of the American version tends to undermine the effectiveness of the spectacle. While it partly "de-foreignises" the text by providing some Western focalisers for the audience, it introduces discrepancies between the aural and visual elements of the film that emphasise the "badness" of the technique on show. By this, I mean the techniques associated with the badfilm by Bartlett, not necessarily the gap between intention and achievement, since the techniques used seem exactly as intended, produced in a situation with limited resources analogous to those of many notoriously bad filmmakers. It is a faulty rather than failed intention. The visible marks of localisation produce a noticeable intention to deflect from the film's inherent foreignness (itself a "bad" intention), something which cannot be fully hidden. That the localisation is aesthetically in accordance with the techniques of the badfilm illuminates how localising strategies contribute to "bad" objects.

Editing and recycled footage

Alongside bad voices and acting, Bartlett explores how the aesthetic principles associated with the badfilm extended to aspects of editing and the recycling of stock footage. Bad editing is generally associated with visibility: "the unintended visibility of editing can draw attention to the film's construction and style in disorienting, unexpected ways" (140). Honda's technique in the original version is visible through cross-cutting and audio bridges, but these are motivated by the narration and its themes. Editing can fail to follow conventions of continuity, providing visibly incoherent and fragmented spaces, unmatching eye-lines, and often surreal effects where shots don't match. While *King Kong vs. Godzilla* provides a host of different editing effects, mostly truncation or removal of scenes, and some narrative re-ordering, it is the removal of editing in other ways that is visible. The UN sequences are often shot in long, wide takes, with some functional shot-reverse-shot cutting. In many respects, this plays unintentionally into the film's discourses around television. The film does retain some of the original themes of chasing ratings through sensationalisation, but a lot of this plot is removed (especially at the beginning of the film), replaced by the more functional address and cutting reminiscent of live television broadcasting. Visually, it is more boring than incompetent or incoherent, a lack of competence in staging and executing cinematic language, something Bartlett doesn't address as an example of bad technique. This lack extends to the removal of some of the more artistic editing effects in the original version, such as the audio match cuts, the cymbals, and the lion's roar that cut across different spaces in the narrative. The American version cuts back and forth between diegetic spaces through close-ups of televisions, sometimes with but usually without actors, reframing the widescreen images (this was the first Godzilla film produced in colour and Tohoscope), and pre-empting how many of these Japanese films would play reformatted from their original versions on American TV for decades. When Tako bemoans the publicity that Godzilla is getting over his own company's monster, he's no longer talking about a plethora of newspapers and magazines, he's watching television, something emphasised through a Kuleshov effect, where the shot-reverse-shot construction creates a relationship between the two shots. The effect is limited, though, since Tako's eyeline doesn't match the straight-on angle of the TV set, which plays a lengthy part of Godzilla's attack on the military base. The background colours also don't match, emphasising a lack of coherent continuity

Perhaps the main way in which editing differs between the two versions, aside from the addition of the UN scenes, is the reconstruction of the scenes involving the Seahawk. Honda's version cuts back and forth between Pacific's preparations to exploit Kong, while Beck's version cuts all of the Seahawk scenes into a single unbroken sequence. It becomes a scene of continuous spectacle, which the revised version foregrounds as it primary appeal. We go straight from the first UN report talking about the Faro berries to Tako, Sakurai, and Furue meeting with the professor, before a shortened version of the scene introducing Fumiko and Fujita. The three scenes on the Seahawk, plus the helicopter discovering Godzilla, then become a single sequence. Godzilla's first appearance in the Japanese version is around the 25-minute mark, but the creature emerges from its frozen tomb just 12 minutes into the American version. The pacing of the narrative at this point is much quicker, albeit slowed down by the static direct address of the UN sequences. Again, it's difficult to see this as incompetent, even if it does provide an experience that minimises the specificity of the film's original themes. It works as expected, to emphasise and speed up what the film communicates as the primary pleasure of the text, its special effects action. Nevertheless, at this stage in the film, it also minimises the "foreignness" of the text, removing screen time for the Japanese cast and reducing the role of key scenes to only their narrative function. The scene between Sakurai, Fumiko, and Fujita is less about their relationships than it is about its introduction of the thin, strong steel wire that will play a key narrative role later on.

Editing thus tends to function like the film's dubbing, to minimise visible ethnicity. But, one aspect stands above others in terms of how the application of techniques associated with American badfilms is visible in the film: the insertion of stock footage and "borrowed spectacle." Bartlett simply notes that "recycled footage was regularly used as a cheap source of spectacle" (91). Such a judgement is too straightforward to account for how *King Kong vs. Godzilla* as a film with plenty of of its own intrinsic spectacle. Spectacle is one of the film's main appeals and, as a marquee Tōhō release, was a relatively high-budget film for Japanese cinema. Therefore, there is no initial need for "cheap" spectacle. As we've already seen, the re-editing of the narrative concentrated scenes of spectacle to place it in a hierarchy above narrative. But "given their low-budget and largely independent contexts, recycling practices are commonplace in badfilms made on the fringes of Hollywood during the 1950s and 1960s. It is quicker, cheaper, and easier to simply repackage an old film than to create a new one" (73). The localisation of *King Kong vs. Godzilla* re-positioned it on the "fringes" of the American film industry, at the behest of an independent producer making assumptions around the audience's expectations. The borrowed spectacle certainly makes logical sense from a financial standpoint, but it is far from having the same kind of avant-garde or disorienting impact that Bartlett mentions. Turning to existing footage, especially where the source may not be well known to audiences, may not actually produce a "bad" effect. They can fill gaps and bridge narrative scenes, even while their use exhibits practices with borrowed footage that testify to the relative paucity of the conditions of the localised version's production.

There are several ways in which Beck's crew incorporated recycled footage in their version. Some increase the amount of spectacle in the film, such as adding spectacle of an earthquake at the end of the film, while others simply provide establishing shots, such as that of the UN building in New York or a shot of Tokyo that is used three times when the film cuts back to scenes in Japan. Much of the recycled footage in the film comes from a single source, Honda's earlier film, *The Mysterians* (*Chikyū Bōeigun*, literally, *Earth Defense Force*, 1957). Beck licensed the film from the American rights holders, RKO (Ragone 1995/96). Multiple shots are inserted at various points in *King Kong vs. Godzilla*. The UN's communications satellite is the Mysterian space station—small ships can even be seen leaving and arriving at the station.[3] A wide shot of flags at the start of the American version of *King Kong vs. Godzilla* has also been repurposed from *The Mysterians*, as have shots of a series of international delegates arriving at an unidentified location. That scene recycles a number of establishing shots of arrival at the Defence Force of the Earth in *The Mysterians*. These provide stock footage-style shots of key buildings and military build-up without recourse to filming new sequences. During the arrivals at the Defence Force building, we can see the Japanese Diet Building in the background, a visual conflict with the UN-set scenes.

Several scenes strongly emphasise the "borrowed" nature of the spectacle in *King Kong vs. Godzilla's* American version. While much of the film's emphasis is on its spectacular special effects, several reused scenes from *The Mysterians* bulk out both the film's running time and provide further spectacle for already spectacular scenes. As Kong approaches Tokyo and attacks, we see scenes of organised mass

evacuations (even though Shinzo is surprised by Kong's appearance there), scenes lifted untransformed from *The Mysterians*. They come right before the scenes of evacuations that are included in the original version of the film and supplement their spectacle (they have more urgency, more visible military presence than the scenes in the original), and another mass evacuation shot is added into the sequence later on, with people rushing up steps. But the bulk of the borrowed spectacle is inserted into the film's climax. When Godzilla and Kong fall into the bay, there is an earthquake in both versions. The original limits that to shots in the location with our main characters, but the American version cuts to a wide shot of a wave coming over a ridge into a valley (the direction of the wave suggests it's coming from inland, not from the coast). A huge fissure opens up in the ground, and a village is consumed, before we cut back to shots of rocks rolling down that quarry that match what is seen in the original sequence. This combines two sequences from *The Mysterians*, the earthquake from the film's first act that reveals the appearance of a giant robot, while the wave is taken from a scene later in the film where the Mysterians create a tidal wave to attack the Earth Defense Forces. The borrowed spectacle mismatches slightly in terms of quality and colour timing as well, but ultimately bulks out the spectacle. As Bartlett discusses, the impact of this relies on the audience's inability to recognise the recycled footage, since it is de-contextualised from *The Mysterians*, even though it seems slightly out of place. Fans of the films are fully aware of the source, and the transformations of the film are routinely discussed with complete awareness of their source, unlike a great deal of the music in the film. They constitute a slight failure to cohere, mostly due to the slight mismatch between the original and revised versions, but the borrowed spectacle testifies to its redundancy, with spectacle supplementing spectacle without building further narrative cohesion for those shots, only making sequences longer. More likely to emphasise failure and the limited resources for the revisions are the establishing shots of Tokyo, of the Ginza district. One shot is repeated three times whenever the film returns to scenes set in Tokyo, regardless of the time of day of other scenes. The repetition is poorly disguised, however, through various stages of a tilt down, cutting into different parts of the shot. This further emphasises how Honda's film is marked by extrinsic badfilm markers ("actual effects" in Dyck and Johnson's terms), where "production contexts often hindered the creation of original spectacle, or necessitated films to be churned out quickly, cheaply and with minimal resources or effort" (Bartlett 2021, 100). Repetition from other sources, as well as repetition within the film, repeatedly highlight these sparse resources, as well as once more evidencing the ways in which films made outside the US can be transformed via techniques associated with the American badfilm and therefore subsumed into the badness usually positioned in relation to standards of Hollywood productions, something that also implicates perceived failures by Japanese filmmakers to meet the standards of Hollywood filmmaking. There is no gap here between the intentions of the adaptors of the text and the effects onscreen—they are intended, the recycled footage an indication of the "minimal resources" attributed to the translation rather than actual production. Localisation is once more a process of "making bad", so that even where it might be unfair to see films produced outside US contexts in this way, such processes mark localised films in ways that can comfortably incorporate them into badfilm discourses. Ultimately, it is in relation to the film's score that Beck's assumption that the film was "too foreign" for American audiences is made more clear in the comparison between the two versions.

From Ifukube to library music

Perhaps the area most discussed by fans of *kaijū* cinema in relation to the changes made to *King Kong vs. Godzilla* relate to its original score. In almost every way, Ifukube's score has been removed and replaced with a collection of library music from Universal's vaults. To date, fans have been unable to track down a complete track listing and soundtrack for the American version, although a number of tracks have been identified and pulled together as a partial soundtrack (SpacehunterM, 2018). With the exception of the scenes on Faro Island, all of Ifukube's music has been removed, including the iconic Godzilla theme, "The Terror of Godzilla". This works to diminish the continuity of the series for American viewers at the time, since *Godzilla, King of the Monsters!* and *Gigantis, The Fire Monster* had also been reworked, making American International Pictures' release of *Godzilla vs. The Thing* (originally *Mothra vs. Godzilla*, *Mosura tai Gojira*) in 1964 the first time that American audiences could hear Godzilla's theme. Sound cues do the same, including the removal of Godzilla's roar right at the end of the film. In the Japanese

version, we can hear an offscreen roar as King Kong swims off the horizon, signalling Godzilla's impending return. This has been removed in the American version, something that has perhaps helped sustain the long-held rumour that Godzilla was the victor in the Japanese version and Kong the winner of the American showdown. In both versions, they tumble into the sea together, and only Kong is seen swimming away, but the absent roar can perhaps be read as signalling Godzilla's demise, even though it looks ahead to the monster's return in Tōhō's growing series of *kaijū* movies.

Nevertheless, the changes made to the film's musical score introduce a tension in the text between Beck's intention to downplay foreignness and a contradictory Orientalism of the replacement cues. Ifukube's opening title, a highly percussive beat under brass with choral voices, which echoes the Faro Island sequences later in the film (which, it should be noted, remains in the film, largely because of its diegetic synchronisation) is replaced by Hans Salter's opening title theme from *The Golden Horde* (Sherman 1951), a Universal-International genre film. While the opening fits in terms of the generic intentions of the film, it isn't integrated thematically, and no longer foreshadows the score in later sections of the film. And, for a film already deemed "too foreign", the opening score comes from a film with deeply Orientalist overtones. *The Golden Horde* is a low-budget historical epic set in Samarkand in Uzbekistan. Sir Guy of Devon (David Farrar) and his band of crusaders have to resist the forces of Genghis Khan, played by Marvin Millar, a white Missouri-born character actor best known for his narration and animation voice work. As some fans have noted, the choice of *The Golden Horde* to replace Ifukube's opening title is a much more Orientalist choice, and hence potentially more "foreign" in tone than Ifukube's island rhythm-inspired opening title.

In total, the nearly 40 cues in Ifukube's score have been replaced by just over 30 alternate cues. Most come from Universal-International releases, although others are programmed from other distributors. The replacement score helps position *King Kong vs. Godzilla* in close proximity with films produced in the US exploitation and B-picture sectors, as well as some transnational releases. For instance, the opening title from *The Golden Horde* segues into a cue from *First Spaceship on Venus* (Kurt Maetzig, 1960) that underscores the quote from Hamlet with a space-age theremin-style cosmic sound. However, the cue comes not from the film's original score, composed by Andrzej Markowski, but from the music compiled for the film's American release by Gordon Zahler, edited by Joseph von Stroheim and Walter Greene. An East German and Polish co-production, with an international cast and based on Stanislaw Lem's novel *The Astronauts*, *First Spaceship on Venus* (originally *The Silent Star*), typifies how many international films were treated by exploitation distributors, in this case Crown International (who released the film in a successful double bill with *Varan the Unbelievable*), with significant amounts of localisation. However, not all such films were recognised through the lens of badfilm discourse. The trends for Japanese creature features tend to stand out from other films that received similar kinds of localisation and were singled out for specific treatment.

Such a scenario demonstrates the difficulty of researching the original sources for music in these films, where library cues were used to replace the films' original scores, and can only sometimes be traced to second-hand sources, or where they were recycled in other films. Other identifiable cues were taken from a range of American science fiction and genre films, produced by several companies, including Heinz Roemheld's score for *The Monster that Changed the World* (Laven, 1957), Paul Swatell and Bert Shefter's work on *The Deerslayer* (Kurt Neumann, 1957), and the soundtrack of film noir *While the City Sleeps* (Lang 1956) by Herschel Burke Gilbert. But many cues in the localised version come from Universal productions with scores by Hans Salter: including, westerns *Battle at Apache Pass* (Sherman 1952) and *Wichita Town* (TV series, 1959-60), Errol Flynn swashbuckler *Against All Flags* (Sherman and Sirk 1952), *Man-Made Monster* (Waggner 1941), and most notably at multiple points in the film, *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. The replaced score creates, as Brophy noted in other localised texts, a series of fissures and unintended intertextual connections that situate *King Kong vs. Godzilla* in close proximity with certain kinds of American filmmaking, even though Ifukube's score for the original is generally highly westernised in its orchestration—it is conventional film music, despite Beck's dismissal of it as "too foreign" and therefore muted throughout most of the film. The palimpsest that remains in place of the original score has become a puzzle for many *kaijū* fans to track down the sources of the cues and engineer a soundtrack. Nevertheless, the recourse to recycling and the erasure of the film's original score with generic cues continue to evidence how American producers' work on localised versions crafted their productions in ways that have ensured localised texts sit comfortably with American traditions in badfilm discourse.

Conclusion

The bizarreness of bad art is generally a process where intentions are understood as unmet, failed, or impossible in some cases, especially where Hollywood genres are appropriated by filmmakers in other countries. Yet some international films are more likely to be considered bad than others, and, as we've seen, this is generally not understood as the work of cross-cultural localisation undermining the intentions of the original creators. Such labour can make the text appropriate as a "bad" object in other contexts beyond the cultural gap that may make their strangeness more pleasurable. And de-Westernising texts in the badfilm canon can help us understand some of the processes through which they were translated to end up there in the first place. That badness might not be the result of failed intentions, as is usually the case in discussions of badfilms, but the result of visibly realised intentions to localise and de-Other a "foreign" text like *King Kong vs. Godzilla*. Beck presumably set out to improve the film by minimising its difference, something the US version of the film partly achieves, but its failure to fully meet that intention has resulted in some of the aesthetic failures discussed throughout this article, resulting in the localisation's haphazardness, its faultiness on display. Those aspects can't be traced back to the film's original creators, even if the text names them as responsible in the credits.

The case study here has shown how practices like the muting of voices and music help to mark transnational localisations with visible techniques associated with the American badfilm. Despite Bartlett's initial positioning of those international films outside discussions of failed intentions, even where there might be aims to imitate American cinema's generic and technical standards, techniques associated with localisation, diminish the text's potential Otherness, and overwrite their cultural difference. As I've mentioned, other films, like *Gammera, the Invincible,* and *Half Human*, were subject to similar transformations, and either could be subject to analysis to show how their assumed foreignness was overwritten with corresponding techniques. Such foreignness is substituted with focalising sameness using aesthetic standards similar to those seen in many badfilms, from a lack of synchronised voices to banal narrators, alongside recycled and borrowed spectacle. The erasure of work by Ifukube, whose music is revered by *kaijū* film fans, has encouraged what Jason Mittell describes as "forensic fandom" (Mittell 2009), turning the film into a drillable text that enables fans to investigate and attempt to follow the intertextual threads woven into the film by its American producer.

It is undoubtedly possible to see many of these aspects becoming more visible in Japanese filmmaking toward the end of the 1960s and into the 70 s as studios in Japan suffered austere conditions akin to those of the most celebrated of bad filmmakers, where the films became more reliant on recycled footage, and effects became more noticeably threadbare. Yet, prior to this, many techniques of the badfilm were introduced into Japanese films by American producers. Cult appreciation of the films has celebrated their bizarreness, especially those first inducted into the badfilm pantheon, but it is often because of the work of American producers and their assumed standards for audiences that "foreign" films could be seen as badfilms in the first place—for a long time, this was the only way they were visible to audiences. It is only in the last two decades that these films have become more widely available. Yet, in the case of *King Kong vs. Godzilla*, the Criterion Collection's release of the film includes the original version as an extra, with the American version as the main feature. This is partly down to the condition of the film materials, as the original remains poorly preserved, but this does promote the localised version as the "original". So, while Bartlett does problematise the inclusion of non-American film within the badfilm canon, it's undeniable that certain types of international filmmaking have a core role in the constitution of badfilm appreciation. There is almost always a Godzilla film or Japanese *tokusatsu* film, or filmmaker (normally Honda), on such lists, and this is often down to the localisation of such films that enabled them to become both "less foreign" but also fused with the technical and aesthetic standards of the American badfilm.

Endnotes

1. Ryfle and Godziszewski note that his nickname was "the Japanese Chaplin".
2. Neither film rates higher than 3.2/10 on IMDb.
3. The same shot was reused in Tōhō's film *Atragon* (*Kaitei Gunkan*, The Undersea Warship, Honda), released the year after *King Kong vs. Godzilla*.

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