

REFIGURING ACTUALITY:
JAPAN'S FILM THEORY AND AVANT-GARDE DOCUMENTARY MOVEMENT,
1950s-1960s

BY

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INTRODUCTION

In the present day, the notion of the *avant-garde* seems to evoke a feeling of nostalgia rather than a sense of urgency. An air of obsolescence hangs around it. Likewise, *film*, the quintessentially modern medium, has gained a reputation as being the medium of twentieth century – and not the twenty-first. Its position as the principal object of study is being threatened, even from within the discipline of cinema studies. The elegiac voice that declares film's purported obsolescence is, moreover, often coupled with another voice that remarks on the waning currency of "film theory" (the heyday of which is said to be the 1970s). Summarizing this sentiment, D. N. Rodowick has recently written: "Not only do many feel that film theory is much less central to the identity of the field; within cinema studies itself the disappearance of 'film' as a clearly defined aesthetic object anchoring our young discipline is also the cause of some anxiety."¹ If Rodowick is correct in his assessment of the direction that the cinema studies is currently taking, a dissertation that examines the 1950s and 1960s avant-garde *and* film theory in Japan may strike some readers as anachronistic.

I would argue that it is not so. To understand why this return to both avant-garde art practice and film theory in Japan is an urgent and indeed "actual" task today, we might consider the recent upsurge of leftist discourse that has many younger generations of new media scholars and activists enthralled: the theory and the problem of "the common." The concept of the common and the question of commonness have recently gained theoretical currency through the works of Autonomist Marxists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, though there is also a parallel development of the concept of "the commons" by environmental and media activists. The innovativeness of Hardt and

¹ D.N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

Negri's theory of the common is, however, in their shift of focus away from older understandings of the common framed in terms of the legal right over shared resources, to an emergent form of "immaterial labor" that produces such commons under the changing conditions of present day capitalism.² Unlike traditional forms of labor that produce tangible material goods, the products of immaterial labor (e.g. information, knowledge, service, and emotional care) are, according to Hardt and Negri, "immediately social and common." "Producing communication, affective relationships, and knowledges, in contrast to cars and typewriters, can directly expand the realm of what we share in common."³ This mutual development of commonness unites otherwise disparate, singular social agents, who in turn constitute what they call "the multitude."

This notion of the multitude proposes to replace an older Marxist conception: that of the masses. The multitude is defined in relation to commonality or a commonness that lies at the basis of contemporary forms of communication, social production and human relations. Networking and sharing (including the sharing of information) become key to the construction of this commonness, of which the Internet provides an emblematic model. Thus aligned with the age of digital media and new media practice, the theoretical affirmation of commonness has become an integral platform of new social movements, including ones that are quickly spreading among youth and temporary workers in Japan.

² While the term *the commons* has recently become popular among activists, media scholars, and anthropologists, Hardt and Negri differentiate their use of the term *the common* from that of the former. For instance, in their explanation of the ontological uniqueness of the multitude they note: "Insofar as the multitude is neither an identity (like the people) nor uniform (like the masses), the internal differences of the multitude must discover *the common* that allows them to communicate and act together. The common we share, in fact, is not so much discovered as it is produced. (We are reluctant to call this *the commons* because the term refers to pre-capitalist-shared spaces that were destroyed by the advent of private property. Although more awkward, 'the common' highlights the philosophical content of the term and emphasizes that this is not a return to the past but a new development)" Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), xv.

³ Hardt and Negri also note, "The hegemony of immaterial labor creates common relationships and common social forms in a way more pronounced than ever before" (114).

No longer identifying themselves as the *proletariat* (a category that inevitably brings back the Marxist notion of the masses), these new generations of media savvy activists, who affirm the commonness that unites them, self-assuredly call themselves the *precariat*.⁴

Despite apparent dissimilarities, the current discourse on the common and the earlier discourse on the avant-garde have in fact fundamental points of intersection, namely the utopian, activist dream of transforming society. What connects these two discourses is their mutual valuation of the role of art and sense perception itself in the effectuation of the political transformations they seek. One of the key elements that differentiate these two types of discourses is, however, their divergent stances towards mass communication media. While the discourse of the common tends to affirm forms of media practice that have an “immediately social and common” appeal, the discourse of the avant-garde keeps a critical distance from the communicative immediacy and valorization of commonality found in the mass media. Indeed, avant-garde practice in general displays a deep-seated distrust towards modes of communication based on the presupposition of commonality, a distrust that manifests most keenly in its critical stance towards journalism.

⁴ The neologism *precariat* is formed from the amalgamation of the terms *precarious* and *proletariat*. The term was first used by Italian and French activists, but has recently been adopted by Japanese activists as well. I should note here that the rise of the common as an urgent problematic of the present is not limited to the aforementioned terrain of contemporary Marxism. The increasing interest in the aesthetic and political theory of Jacques Rancière attests to the appeal of a similar problematic of commonness. The common at stake in Rancière’s theory is not immediately given, as it is in the case of Hardt and Negri. The commonness at the basis of a community becomes a site of struggle and inquiry, since it directly links up with what he calls the order of the “distribution of the sensible,” that is, a set of conditions of possibilities that determine the horizon of what is visible, audible, and sayable in a given community. This horizon is, in turn, determined by what he calls *police order*, the order of the sensible given by and through the politically dominant group. Hence comes his definition of politics as an interruption of “the order that determines the partition of what is common” which includes even an act of disidentification. See, Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), and Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2000).

But what we must ask here is whether the contemporary turn to the common, and the parallel turn away from the traditional notion of the avant-garde have left something important behind? Is there not something amiss in the arguably unproblematic affirmation of the common by some of the theorists engaging with this notion today? Should we not go back to the avant-garde's problematization of the givenness of commonality, even if in order to develop the current theories of the common further? Indeed, I would argue that we can find a particularly instructive model of thinking the emergent form of the common in the avant-garde's *tension* with journalistic media. With this intention in mind, I propose to turn, in this dissertation, to a particularly vibrant moment in the history of intellectual thought and politico-artistic activism in Japan, a moment when the question of avant-garde's relationship to the commonness affirmed and produced by journalism and mass media practice came sharply into focus.

During the 1950s and the 1960s, not only did postwar Japanese avant-garde art practice gain intellectual momentum and expressive intensity, but it also gave rise to a politicized film theoretical discourse which took the problematic of "actuality" as its basis of inquiry. This problematic of actuality haunts the writings and filmic works of some of the key intellectuals and artists from this period. Sometimes the concept of actuality is articulated as the ontic dimension of the *real*, that is, as avant-garde art's relation to actually existent reality. Other times it is articulated as the problem of temporality: the avant-garde's *timely* relationship to the present. Other times yet, the question of actuality is posed as that of contemporary *relevance*: in short, the critical relevance of a given work to its contemporaneous social reality. All three senses of the term "actuality" (*akuchuaritii*) played important roles in the discourse of the avant-garde

and film theory in Japan at this time. Insofar as the problem of actuality may be restated as that of the tension between avant-garde art practice and journalistic media practice, focusing on this term will allow us to rethink limits of the discourse of the avant-garde, which affirms the dialectical interdependence between the masses and vanguard, in light of limits of the discourse of the common, which dispenses with the notion of vanguard altogether in its affirmation of the rhizomatic networking of the multitude.

Focusing on this problematic of actuality will thus allow us to rethink the relations between the avant-garde, politics, the media, and the masses. Importantly, Japanese film theory and avant-garde art practices, particularly the filmmaking practice of the 1950s and 1960s, shed light on the productive tension between the avant-garde's skepticism towards what goes by the name of commonality or commonness (from common sense to the common masses addressed by the media) and its desire to emulate journalism. This tension is most visible in the works of Japanese avant-garde critics and artists, who engaged with a genre of documentary art, particularly, with documentary film and reportage. The strategic appropriation of the documentary by self-proclaimed avant-garde critics and artists from a Marxist background in the late 1950s gave rise to what I call "the avant-garde documentary movement" (Chapters 1 and 2).⁵

The works of the avant-garde documentary movement, such as the writings of Hanada Kiyoteru and Abé Kôbô, and the films of Matsumoto Toshio and Teshigahara Hiroshi, also highlight a predicament of the avant-garde: its paradoxical desire to simultaneously emulate and yet differentiate itself from journalism. Divergent theorizations of the concept of actuality emerged in the process and different cinematic

⁵ The term "avant-garde documentary movement" is of my own coinage. Though these artists and critics never consciously presented themselves as members of a unified movement, their works address same issues and draw on same debates and materials, as I argue in this dissertation.

techniques became prevalent at this time. The central site of the struggle for these avant-garde documentary artists and critics was the habituated order of sense perception, including the perception of what *appears* as “actual,” that is, factual, real, and timely (Chapter 3). While generally not regarded as either avant-garde or Marxist, the experimental works of independent filmmakers, such as Oshima Nagisa, Wakamatsu Kôji, and Adachi Masao, evince the persistence of this same predicament. Unlike the preceding generation of avant-gardists, however, the works of these filmmakers attest to the difficulty of separating avant-garde practice from journalistic practice, and point to cinema’s complicity with journalism in its appropriation of what Jacques Derrida has called the “actuality-effect” (Chapters 4 and 5).

Investigating this group of artists and theorists, and the problematic of actuality, will also allow me to refute the widely held notion that film theory arose solely in the West, or, more specifically, that there was no body of writings or thought that deserve to be called “theory” in Japan. This misconception has been endemic to the study of film and avant-garde art of Japan. Noël Burch, in one of the pioneering studies of Japanese cinema, famously argued that “the very notion of theory is alien to Japan; it is considered a property of Europe and the West.”⁶ By drawing on original source materials (periodicals, memoirs, films, and interviews), my dissertation project contests this presumption, and in so doing provides an important corrective to previous studies of Japanese cinema.⁷ One of the aims of this dissertation is hence to bring to light

⁶ Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 13.

⁷ Exceptions are recent important works by Abé Mark Nornes’ *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era Through Hiroshima* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) and *Forest of Pressure: Ogawa Shinsuke Postwar Japanese Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007) – and Aaron Gerow’s “Writing A Pure Cinema: Articulations of Early Japanese Film” (PhD diss., Iowa University, 1996).

particularly innovative – and until very recently, thoroughly ignored – theoretical discussions and debates on the concepts of documentary, actuality, and the “mechanically produced image” (*eizô*). Moreover, this dissertation will bring to light important connections between theorists (such as Hanada Kiyoteru) and filmmakers (such as Oshima Nagisa) that have not previously been explored, and yet help us understand the intersections of avant-garde discourse and independent filmmaking. Indeed, once these connections are historicized, we will be in a better position to examine the works of both recognized (such as Oshima and Teshigahara) and relatively unknown filmmakers (such as Wakamatsu) side by side. This historical contextualization will in turn allow us to see postwar Japanese cinema in a novel configuration.

What makes Japanese avant-garde theorists and filmmakers considered in this dissertation important to us today is the way they make perceptible the productive tension between the politics of the common and the politics of the avant-garde. To schematize a perhaps more complicated history of this productive tension we might compare 1970s film theory, which laid its emphasis on the avant-gardist strategy of self-reflexivity and political critique, with contemporary media and activist theories of the common emerging today. On the one hand, within the Marxism-inspired sphere of '70s film theory the position of the avant-garde was affirmed in relation to the critique of the phenomenological impression of reality and the mass appeal of mainstream narrative cinema. On the other hand, within contemporary theories of the common, such as that of Hardt and Negri, the position of the avant-garde (and that of the vanguard) has been abandoned along with the Marxist category of the masses. There is hence a distinct sense,

as Rodowick suggests, that political film theory and the medium of film have past their prime.

However, if the group of Japanese artists and intellectuals I examine in this dissertation are so important to return to today, it is precisely because their works combine the problem of the common with the problem of the avant-garde. If the shortcomings of '70s film theory are that it could not extend its politics to the masses, the dangers of the theory of the multitude is that too quickly discards the avant-garde contestation of commonness (and in particular of common sense), and thereby falls into the trap of affirming a certain commonness as a given. The dangers of this trap are indeed illustrated by the recently emergent branch of cognitivist film theory, which bases itself on a kind of universal structure of sense perception. While the politics of the two are quite opposed, their affirmation of commonness risks plunging the theories of the multitude and the common into the apolitical stance towards sense perception that the cognitivist branch of film theory (or "post-theory") advocates.⁸ It is precisely the avant-garde's distrust of the habituated order of perception that raises the question of the "givenness" of common sense perception, and allows us to re-politicize the category of the common in direct relation to the media practices which continue to structure our sense perception. This dissertation thus not only offers a historical contextualization of the works of Japanese avant-garde theorists and filmmakers. It also attempts to rethink the relation between the avant-garde and the common by returning to an era when this relation was problematized by both filmmakers and theorists.

⁸ For an overview of "post-theory," see David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," in *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, eds. David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

Chapter One

Metamorphosis: The Elliptic-Dialectical Movement of the Avant-Garde and the Documentary

The principal characteristic of metamorphosis is that it takes time. Transformation is not instantaneous, and its condition requires plasticity, a capacity to change form. This much seems certain: metamorphosis is a concept that highlights this relation between temporality and plasticity. What remains uncertain is, however, the question of agent or medium. What kind of agent or medium can be responsible for this plastic movement of metamorphosis? For many left-leaning artists and thinkers the “avant-garde” has been the name of this medium that brings about metamorphosis, an all-encompassing transformation of society. But if the avant-garde is the medium, or the catalyst of this transformation, what would be the substance that makes up this form? According to Marxist avant-garde critic Hanada Kiyoteru (1909-1974), this substance with which the avant-garde needs to work in order to bring about social transformation is “the masses.”

In what would seem to be a counterintuitive position from the conventional understanding of the avant-garde, Hanada advocated for the synthesis of documentary journalism and avant-garde art in order to demonstrate the significant connection between avant-garde art and the culture of the masses. He envisioned the avant-garde and documentary approaches to reality as complementary praxes of addressing, reporting, and transforming present-day conditions. The aim of this chapter is to investigate Hanada’s theorization of the avant-garde, metamorphosis, and the masses in order to lay the basis for my argument in the next chapter, which will in turn analyze the impact of Hanada’s theory of the avant-garde documentary in relation to key events that took place in the

separate areas of literary criticism, film theory, and filmmaking in the 1950s and 1960s. As we will see more closely in the following chapters, postwar Japanese avant-garde filmmakers, writers, and critics constantly negotiated two seemingly irreconcilable approaches to reality: the avant-garde practice of defamiliarization and the documentary practice of factual recording. Unpacking Hanada's notoriously convoluted writings – the style of which gained him a reputation as a virtuoso rhetorician – will not only allow us to appreciate his work in its own right, but also help us understand why his work left such lasting impact on his contemporaries, including the writer Abé Kôbô, the filmmaker Matsumoto Toshio, and later generations of filmmakers such as Oshima Nagisa and Adachi Masao.

As writings by Oshima, Matsumoto and critics such as Takei Teruo, Haryû Ichirô, Sasaki Kiichi, Imamura Taihei, and Yoshimoto Takaaki suggest, Hanada consciously played the role of an agitprop organizer, often deliberately provoking debates and soliciting emotive reactions from his interlocutors (Figure 1).⁹ His allies and foes alike would readily admit Hanada's towering presence in Japan's postwar intellectual milieu. Nevertheless, his work has not been given proper consideration by scholars of Japanese avant-garde film, criticism, or theater (the three principal fields his work intervenes). His critical and fictional writings are still waiting to be translated into English, and only a

⁹ Oshima did not belong to Hanada's immediate circle of the avant-garde artists and filmmakers, but as he acknowledges in his autobiographical essays Oshima and his fellow filmmaker Yoshida Kijû frequented study groups and meetings held by film critics and artists, who are in close contact with Hanada. Oshima's relation to Hanada was, however, often tinted with an antagonistic tone, as indicated by his passionate denouncement of Hanada (because of his negative assessment of Oshima's own film *Night and Fog in Japan*) in the essay titled "Art Movement and Modernism" (*Geijutsu undô to modanizumu*). This essay was published in the March issue of *Kiroku eiga* in 1961. Others such as Abé, Matsumoto, and Takei also disagreed with Hanada time to time. But as Matsumoto and Oshima's famous rebuttal indicates, disagreement was also a productive aspect of the criticism of this period. Adachi Masao, on the other hand, noted the oblique but still important impact Hanada's writings left on his generation of independent filmmakers in a private conversation with the author.

handful of theoretical assessments of his work have appeared in Japanese.¹⁰ While this chapter will by no means offer a comprehensive account of Hanada's decades-long activism and oeuvre, it attempts to shed light on the theoretical implications of his thought on the avant-garde, which directly relates to the problematic of actuality that is at the heart of this dissertation project. In particular, I will focus on Hanada's Marxist interest in the role of the avant-garde, the dialectical movement of metamorphosis, and formal plasticity of Disney's animation. In order to situate Hanada's theory of the avant-garde, however, I would like to start by pointing to the close relation between the Marxist notion of the political vanguard and Hanada's understanding of avant-garde art.

The Genealogy of the Japanese Avant-garde

I want to begin by turning to his 1951 essay titled "Double Personality" (*Nijūjinkaku*) in which Hanada casually recalls how he learned the term *avant-garde* from Lenin's political treatise:

As you know, the term avant-garde [*avangyarudo*] means vanguard [*zen'eī*]. I learned this word from Lenin's text, *What Is to be Done?* What I call an avant-garde artist is hence someone who pays attention to thriving folk art, which lives on as tradition amongst the masses. This does not mean that I unconditionally affirm this folk art or praise it as the Japanese Romantics did during the Pacific War. Rather, what I have in mind is an artist who tries to completely re-create folk art with a clear

¹⁰ Two of Hanada's essays ("The Logic of Delirium" [*Sakuran no ronri*] and "A Chart of the Heavenly Bodies: On Copernicus" [*Tentaizu*]) have been translated J. Keith Vincent. However, they are only available on-line from the *tradukejo* website. Representative criticism and monographs on Hanada in Japanese language include: Okaniwa Noboru, *Hanada Kiyoteru to Abé Kôbô: Avangyarudo bungaku no saisei no tameni* (Tokyo: Daisanbunmeisha, 1980), Suga Hidemi, *Suna no perusona* (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1982), Sekine Hiroshi, *Hanada Kiyoteru: Nijusseiki no kodokusha* (Tokyo: Libroport, 1987), Ishii Nobuo, *Tenkeiki ni okeru chishikijin no tatakaikata* (Tokyo: Madosha, 1996), Doi Yoshihira, *Ozaki Midori to Hanada Kiyoteru: Yûmoa no seishin to parodi no ronri* (Tokyo: Hokuto shuppan, 2002). Kogawa Tetsuo's comment included in an anthology of Hanada's essays, *Hanada Kiyoteru hyôronshû* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1993) is informative. As an indication of a renewed interest in Hanada is attested by the recent publication of an anthology of his essays on film, *Mono mina eiga de owaru* (Tokyo: Seiryû shuppan, 2007).

sense of purpose, that is, to create revolutionary art by carrying out an artistic revolution.¹¹

In this passage Hanada makes a deliberate use of the term “avant-garde” (*avangyarudo*) to describe a Marxist-Leninist notion of political “vanguard” (*zen’ei*), which immediately estranges the loanword *avangyarudo* from its conventional art historical sense. While the gist of his argument – revolutionary art and artistic revolution are not only comparable but also complementary – is a banal one, the ways in which Hanada envisions this process warrant attention for they point to a unique historical conjuncture of artistic and political avant-gardism in postwar Japan, a conjuncture that becomes legible when we pay attention to two kinds of metamorphosis (one visual and the other social) that structure Hanada’s thought.

The question of the mediation between revolutionary art and artistic revolution also appears in his 1950 essay titled “A Thought on Apples” (*Ringo ni kansuru ichikôatsu*), which specifically addresses this question in terms of vision: “How do avant-garde artists attain the eyes of avant-garde politicians?” In answering this question Hanada argues:

Of course avant-garde artists can transfigure [*henbô*] themselves as avant-garde [*avangyarudo*] politicians – only if they retain the gaze that has been directed to the inner world, and invert it to the external world. If I say this, some of those self-claimed avant-garde politicians may sneer at me by saying: Don’t be ridiculous, we are not interested in geometric shapes or learning from children and primitives! But for me, such politicians are nothing but typical naturalists, and hence they don’t deserve to be called avant-garde.¹²

Hanada’s above statement about the transformability of artists into politicians incited heated discussions among his fellow avant-garde critics (of which the confrontation between Haryû Ichirô and Takei Teruo over the issues of artistic and political avant-

¹¹ Hanada Kiyoteru, “Nijûjinkaku” [Double Personality], *Hanada Kiyoteru Chosakushû* [Collected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol.3 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964), 133.

¹² Hanada Kiyoteru, “Ringo ni kansuru ichikôatsu” [A Thought on Apples], *Hanada Kiyoteru Chosakushû* [Selected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964), 114.

gardes in 1956 is the best known). While Hanada does not name socialist realism as such, his criticism of the “self-proclaimed avant-garde politicians” is clearly directed against Japanese Communist Party officials. He mocks their facile dismissals of modernist art by evoking hackneyed phrases such as “geometric shapes” and “children and primitives.” But what is more striking about this passage is Hanada’s privileging of vision as an instrument of transformation. Note the metonymic association of words: *eyes*, *gaze*, *transfigure*, *geometric shapes*. The very possibility of synthesizing art and politics is articulated in terms of form and sight. And it is the process of metamorphosis understood through the interlocking relation between the *materiality* of form and the *visual* perception of form that underpins his idea of the becoming political of the avant-garde artist.

Immediately following the above passage, we read: “Like naturalists, avant-garde politicians constantly pay attention to the external world, but it’s only because they want to deform it and not because they are interested in simply looking at it.”¹³ Hanada’s calculating use of the French word *déformer* (transcribed as *deforme*) underscores his point. Historically speaking, the term *déformation* belongs to the vocabulary of modern Japanese art discourse. It is a term that describes deliberate manipulations of pictorial forms like cubist paintings or cartoon drawings. But deformation in this context stands in for Marxist political activism. Here again Hanada mixes heterogeneous discourses of aesthetics and political philosophy to induce conceptual dehiscence. This move allows the question of the conditions of revolutionary social change to link up directly with the question of visibility, that is, the conditions of visual perception. Transformation then becomes conceivable as an event that occurs in the field of visual perception as well as in

¹³ Ibid., 115.

the production of form. It simultaneously cuts through the base and superstructure, aesthetic perception and material conditions of production. The form in this sense is no longer reducible to a facile opposition of form and content; it encompasses both substance and appearance.

Hanada's peculiar framing of political transformation through the pictorial concept of deformation can be better understood if we situate his writings in the larger historical context of discourses on the avant-garde. In conventional usage, the term *avant-garde* generally refers to European art movements of the 1910s and 1920s (i.e. Futurism, Constructivism, Dada, Surrealism). For art historians and theorists who follow the lead of Peter Bürger, the term can be used only provisionally to describe artworks produced after the "historical" avant-garde period of the 1920s.¹⁴ By contrast, the film historical sense of the term is more extensive, encompassing North American as well as postwar filmmaking.¹⁵ However, in spite of their usefulness, these established accounts of Euro-American avant-gardes are insufficient to analyze Japanese context. We may recall Edward Said's apposite remark that theoretical ideas and concepts, born out of specific historical situations, often travel to another place, another era, or another situation for reasons that are again historically specific. In the course of traveling ideas and concepts

¹⁴ The phrase "the historical avant-garde" is Bürger's. For his theorization of the historical avant-garde see Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

¹⁵ This view is represented by Peter Wollen's now classical essay on the two avant-gardes. Wollen contrast two distinct avant-garde tendencies. On the one hand, there is Co-op filmmakers' self-reflexive attentions to materiality of the medium, their propensity towards visual abstraction as well as their artisanal modes of production; on the one hand, there are politically active filmmakers, represented by Godard, who pay attention to the textual production of meaning and who inherit the insight of the Soviet avant-garde filmmaking, though sometimes they paradoxically come close to the commercial system of filmmaking. See Wollen, "The Two Avant-Gardes," *Readings and Writings* (London: Verso, 1982), 92-104. For an ambivalent position cinema occupies in Huyssen's schema of the great "divide" between modernism and mass culture, which the avant-garde mediates, see Anne Friedberg *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 165-166.

mutate in order to accommodate needs of critics in their given situations.¹⁶ The concept of the avant-garde met a similar fate in twentieth-century Japan. It traveled from Europe eastwards but on the way across the Eurasian continent it became intertwined with political vanguardism of a particular kind. In order to grasp Hanada's conception of the avant-garde, therefore, we need first to trace back the itinerary of the loanword *avangyarudo* ("avant-garde") in the twentieth century Japanese lexicon.

Today the loanword *avangyarudo* (or *abangarudo*) in Japanese language generally refers to artistic movements or styles. Yet the historical introduction of this word into modern Japanese lexicon is intimately tied to the use of another term, which belongs to a different discursive register. This second term is *zen'ei* (or "vanguard"). The use of the word *zen'ei* as a Japanese translation for the French word *avant-garde* and the Russian word *avangard* appears to antedate the use of the loanword *avangyarudo*. Importantly, when the word *zen'ei* had begun to be used to describe European art (in particular French surrealist films) around 1929-30, Japanese Marxist critics openly expressed their discontent.¹⁷ For the word *zen'ei* at the time was used almost exclusively by the Japanese Communist Party and its associated critics to designate the Marxist-Leninist conception of the proletarian vanguard.¹⁸ Subsequently, Marxist critics suggested either to describe surrealist films with the phrase "so-called vanguard" (*iwayuru zen'ei*) or put scare quotes around the word *zen'ei* in order to differentiate the Marxist-Leninist notion of the political vanguard from the aesthetic avant-garde.¹⁹ In the

¹⁶ Edward Said, "Traveling Theory," *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 236.

¹⁷ Namigata Tsuyoshi, *Ekkyô no abangyarudo* [Border-Crossing Avant-Garde] (Tokyo: NTT Shuppan, 2005), 33-37.

¹⁸ The Japanese Communist Party was established in 1922 as part of the Third International (Comintern), but was not legalized until 1945.

¹⁹ Namigata, 37.

course of this dispute, the loanword *avangyarudo* (or *abangarudo*) came to be used more widely as an alternative to describe artistic movements devoid of ideological associations with Marxism.

This brief overview of the Japanese historical context reveals an important difference between the European and Japanese situations. Precisely because the concept of the avant-garde was first widely disseminated through the Marxist-Leninist discourse, the Japanese genealogy of this concept does not align itself neatly with the established genealogy of European avant-gardes. Indeed it has become a commonplace for the theorists of European avant-gardes to trace a figurative use of the term *avant-garde* (with its militant connotation of politically radical artists) to the work of the nineteenth century French socialist Henri de Saint Simon.²⁰ With some degrees of difference, standard accounts of the modern European conception of the avant-garde suggest that it was largely shaped by the utopian socialism of the nineteenth century. In the words of Huyssen, “Through the mediation of the utopian socialist Charles Fourier, [the idea of the avant-garde] found its way to socialist anarchism and eventually into substantial segments of the bohemian subcultures of the turn of the century.”²¹

Huyssen’s narrative in particular traces continuity rather than discontinuity among utopian socialist, anarchist, and bohemian tendencies. In so doing he emphasizes the avant-garde artists and thinkers’ contestations against the “cultural conservatism” of

²⁰ Huyssen and Egbert uphold this lineage. Poggioli, on the other hand, refers to the writing of a Fourieriste Gabriel-Désiré Laverdant as a representative of the nineteenth century conception of avant-garde artists as political radicals, while Calinescu finds an even earlier usage of the term in the French historian Etienne Pasquier. See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Donald D. Egbert, “The Idea of avant-garde in Art and Politics,” *Leonardo*, 3.1. (January 1970), 75-86; Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (New York: Harper & Row Publisher 1968); Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University, 1987).

²¹ Huyssen, 5.

bourgeois society as well as the “technological determinism and scientism of Second International Marxism.”²² Bürger in contrast limits the referent of the term *avant-garde* to the early twentieth century phenomenon. He sees a radical rupture between the “historical” avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s and the preceding nineteenth century art movements. Despite these differences what ties Huyssen to Bürger is their implicit agreement that the avant-garde is fundamentally defined by its revolt against the cultural heritage of bourgeois society. Importantly however, they equally downplay the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of this concept.

Given their emphasis on the avant-garde’s revolt against bourgeois heritage, their disregard for the Marxist-Leninist interpretation seems puzzling. Huyssen in particular frames his genealogy of the European avant-garde in terms of the historical avant-garde’s direct opposition to the Second International Marxism (1889-1916). He relegates the Marxist-Leninist conception of the avant-garde to the margin, further arguing that “the vital dialectic between the political and cultural avant-garde” disappeared in the 1930s. His remark is supported by two epochal events of that decade: the official implementation of socialist realism by the Soviet Union and the rise of National Socialism in Nazi Germany. These events were pivotal, in his view, for destroying the “precarious balance of art and politics” that European avant-gardes had maintained since the time of Saint Simon.²³ In his critique of the instrumental subordination of art to political doctrines, Huyssen thus echoes Bürger who similarly keeps Lenin’s appropriation of the concept at bay.²⁴

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 22-23.

However, in the Japanese context it is crucial *not* to dismiss Lenin's appropriation of this concept, which is explicitly marked by his decisive use of the Russian word *avangard* in *What Is to Be Done?* (1902).²⁵ For, as I have argued earlier, the genealogy of this concept of the avant-garde in Japan is inextricable from the earlier currency of Marxist-Leninist discourse. Indeed, while neither Huyssen nor Bürger acknowledges it, Lenin was following earlier Marxists when he appropriated this concept for his own theoretical purpose. As Egbert writes, "By the 1880's, at least, Marxists were becoming accustomed to using *avant-garde* as a political term."²⁶ Lenin thus gave the term a new political connotation: that of the proletarian dictatorship. This new connotation clearly contradicts an older anarco-bohemian sense of anti-authoritarianism. Perhaps this explains, at least partially, why historians and theorists of the historical avant-garde tend to downplay the Marxist-Leninist connotation of this concept.²⁷ When situated in this larger historical context, Hanada's passing reference to Lenin in his discussion of the avant-garde attains new significance.

Hanada was a bona fide Marxist when he began writing on issues of avant-garde art. He converted to Marxism in the 1940s, joined the Japanese Communist Party, and even served as the chief editor of the Marxist literary journal *Shin nihon bungaku* (New Japanese Literature) in the 1950s. However, despite his commitment to Marxism Hanada remained skeptical of the Japanese Communist Party's dogmatic endorsement of socialist realism. Instead of upholding the "correct" view of proletarian vanguard art, he advocated

²⁵ Egbert points out that the Russian word used by Lenin in *What Is to Be Done?* is *avangard*. See Egbert, p.75.

²⁶ Ibid., 80.

²⁷ Lenin's strongly authoritarian understanding of the concept can be glimpsed in his essay "On Proletarian Culture" (1920). Here he argues that all educational work, including the avant-garde art, "should be imbued with the spirit of class struggle" aiming at "the overthrow of bourgeoisie, the abolition of classes, and the elimination of all forms of exploitation of man by man." V. I. Lenin, "On Proletarian Culture," *V. I. Lenin's Internet Archive*. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/oct/08.html>.

the creation of art that learns from, rather than rejects, the achievements of European avant-garde art movements of the 1920s. He believed that the fundamental achievement of the avant-garde of the 1920s, especially that of cinema, was its attempt to visualize the realm of the unconscious and abstract intellect:

Needless to say, the veritable novelty of the ‘avant-garde’ cinema lies in its bold attempt to visualize our inner world: the world of the unconscious and the world of abstract concepts. No doubt films like *Un Chien Andalou* and *Diagonal Symphony* were cutting edge in this sense, definitely deserving the title of the avant-garde film. These films attempted to realistically present the movement of the figurative-yet-irrational world of the unconscious on the one hand, and the movement of the rational-yet-non-figurative world of concepts. But, of course, both Dalí’s psychoanalytic method and Egging’s geometric method were still at their primitive stage.²⁸

Curiously, despite their achievements, Salvador Dalí is criticized for paying exclusive attention to images of the unconscious (and thus to the realm of “instinct”), and Viking Egging for focusing on the abstract movements of geometric shapes (and thus to the realm of “intellect”). This is due to Hanada’s adherence to the Marxist notion of dialectical materialism. The task of the postwar avant-garde is not only to learn from the techniques of the prewar avant-garde artists, but also to overcome their epistemic limitations. Dalí and Egging’s meticulous and daring visualizations of instinctual and intellectual activities of the mind are commendable, yet, in Hanada’s view, they were not dialectical enough. They do not re-direct the gaze that has been turned inward towards the outside.

Elsewhere he suggests: “Existence includes both external and internal existence. Of course the latter is determined by the former, but both contain not-yet-cognized realms of darkness, which await to be illuminated by our search.”²⁹ For the inner world of the

²⁸ Hanada Kiyoteru, “Nijûnendai no ‘avangyarudo’” [The “avant-garde” of the 1920s], *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushû* [Collected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964), 203.

²⁹ Hanada Kiyoteru, “Warai neko” [Cheshire Cat], *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushû* [Collected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964), 226.

unconscious corresponds to the pre-cognizant realm of the external world. Again Hanada is following the protocol of dialectical materialism here, though he crucially extends the concept of determination into the realm of the unconscious. He argues, “the external world too is full of concretely figurative-but-irrational-images similar to those Dalí has seen.”³⁰ Accordingly, the challenge for the postwar Japanese avant-garde becomes twofold: to “synthesize dialectically” artistic approaches to internal and external worlds, and to explore hitherto overlooked or pre-cognizant aspects of external social reality.³¹

Hanada’s reliance upon a series of binary oppositions notwithstanding, his dialectical conception of the avant-garde helps us see how political and aesthetic discourses of Marxism and avant-garde art dovetailed in the postwar Japanese intellectual milieu. While prewar Japanese Dada and Futurist artists such as Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901-1977) – one of the founders of the legendary dadaist group *Mavo*, the central organizer of the Proletarian theater movement and a member of Prokino (Japanese Proletarian Film League) – tried to bring together artistic experimentations and Marxist politics, arguably Hanada was the first Japanese critic to articulate the connection between the two in the most persuasive theoretical manner. Moreover, it was Hanada who first gave prominence to journalistic documentary practice and its relation to present-day actualities *within* the discursive framework of the avant-garde in Japan.

Consider, for example, his discussion of French surrealism. Disregarding the commonplace interpretation of Surrealism, he makes a rather bold claim that its principal technique is a variant of documentary “reportage.” When surrealists deployed this method of “automatic writing” they recorded traces of innermost psychic activities and

³⁰ Hanada Kiyoteru, “Kagami no kuni no fûkei” [Landscapes of the Land of Mirrors], *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushû* [Collected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964), 150.

³¹ Ibid.

produced their raw “documents.”³² He thus draws an analogy between surrealists and documentary journalists based on their mutual interests in the documentation of the real. They equally attempt to deliver first-hand reports on the real, though surrealists are far more interested in events taking place inside the individual psyche, whereas documentary journalists turn to events unfolding in the collective social milieu. Whether or not this schematic comparison between the surrealist method of automatic writing and the documentary method of reportage is historically accurate is beside the point. What is more important is the fact that Hanada’s idea of the dialectical synthesis of the avant-garde and the documentary, which influenced numbers of postwar Japanese filmmakers and artists, is already incipient in this analogy.

Hanada’s proposition to synthesize the avant-garde and documentary approaches to reality may appear idiosyncratic and even heretic, if we understand by the term *documentary* an established genre of photo-cinematic practice that foregrounds factual reporting of socio-historical events, and by the term *avant-garde* an artistic practice that foregrounds the formal effect of defamiliarization. However, if we take into consideration Hanada’s commitment to Marxism and his manifest sympathy towards the Soviet avant-garde, it may not appear so eccentric after all. As his frequent references to Mayakovsky and Soviet cinema indicate, Hanada held a strong interest in the works of the Russian and Soviet avant-gardes. While standard accounts of Japanese avant-garde art movements tend to privilege connections between Japan and Western Europe (as in the cases of Dada

³² We may recall here Breton’s definition of surrealism as psychic automatism, which dictates thought in the complete absence of intervention by the intellect. See André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), 36. For a deconstructive reading of surrealism’s affinity with photography see Rosalind Krauss “The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism” *October* 19 (Winter 1981), 3-34. For Krauss, the crux of Surrealist thinking is *not* in the documentary recording of the real but in the exposition of the paradox that the experience of the real is always already contaminated by representation. In focusing on surrealist photography, she points out the importance of doubling (or spacing) that heightens the viewer’s awareness of the photographic trace itself as a sign rather than an imprint of the real.

and Surrealism) or the United States (as in the case of Fluxus), a long history of vibrant interactions between Japan and Eastern Europe, especially the Soviet region, needs to be acknowledged.

During the 1920s numerous works of futurists and constructivists poured into Japan through the effort of Ukrainian and Russian artists. David Burliuk (1882-1967), a Ukrainian futurist and founding member of the futurist group *Hylaea* of which Vladimir Mayakovsky was another principal member, came to Japan in 1920. Victor Palmov (1888-1929), another Ukrainian futurist associated with the Moscow-based journal *Lef* (Left Front of the Arts), accompanied him. Burliuk's intention was to promote the work of Russian Futurism. He energetically lectured on the topic and helped organize art exhibitions during his stay in Japan.³³ Burliuk stayed in Japan for two years, and Palmov for one year. Burliuk and Palmov's visits left considerable impact upon interwar Japanese avant-garde artists, including the members of Japanese Dada and Futurist groups such as *Miraiha bijutsu kyôkai*, *Action*, and *Mavo*.³⁴ Meanwhile, the Russian painter Varvara D. Bubnova (1886-1983), who was a member of *INKhUK* (the art institute founded by constructivists), also went to Japan in 1921, and stayed for thirty-seven years. Upon her arrival in Japan, Bubnova published articles specifically on the topic of Russian Constructivism and introduced numbers of representative works of artists such as Rodchenko and Popova to Japanese artists.³⁵ There is little doubt that these historical interactions between the Soviet and Japanese artists of the interwar period helped

³³Ueno Rie, *Rossia abangyarudo kara mita nihon bijutsu* [Japanese Art Seen from the Russian Avant-garde] (Tokyo: Tôyôshoten, 2006), 8.

³⁴Ibid., 22.

³⁵ Ibid., 26.

familiarize Hanada's left-leaning avant-garde circle with the theoretical and formal achievements of the Soviet avant-garde.

One of the key factors that may have contributed to Hanada's reevaluation of documentary is, I believe, the high regard that the Soviet avant-garde artists held for the journalistic documentary forms of newsreel, photography, and literary reportage. As is well known, Dziga Vertov pursued rigorous formal experimentations within the journalistic genre of newsreel. He proposed to "substitute the document for 'direction' (*mise-en-scène*)," and triumphed *Kino-Eye* ("the cinema which is not played") over theatrical cinema.³⁶ But Vertov was not alone in his enthusiastic support of documentary journalism. Productivist appropriations of documentary journalism became integral to the visual and literary practices of the Soviet avant-garde during the late 1920s, as is suggested by the rise of *factography* among the Left Front artists associated with the journal *Novyi Lef*.³⁷ In his discussion of the factorgraphic works during this period, Devin Fore notes: "The plurality of names by which this practice was designated in the Soviet Union – factography, reportage, factism, documentarity – suggest that there was no single methodology or conceptual model that could encompass all of the manifestations of this tentative practice."³⁸ Indeed, diverse artistic experimentations with mass-oriented forms of documentary photography, newsreel, and reportage literature occupy a significant place within the Soviet avant-garde. This is to say that avant-gardist experimentations

³⁶ Dziga Vertov, "Dziga Vertov on Kino-Eye: Excerpts from a Lecture Given in Paris in 1929," *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, ed. Yuri Tsivian, trans. Julian Graffy (Gemonia, Udine: Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, 2004), 353-354.

³⁷ For a detailed discussion of factography's ambivalent relationship to language, see Devin Fore, "The Operative Word in Soviet Factography," *October* 118 (Fall 2006), 95-131.

³⁸ Devin Fore, "Introduction," *October* 118 (Fall 2006), 9.

with form and documentary-journalistic pursuit of factuality were not necessarily contradictory in the eyes of the Soviet artists.³⁹

The situation of the Japanese avant-garde of the 1950s invites a comparison with the situation of the Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s. There too, aesthetic and journalistic approaches converged, and the question of documentary *as* a legitimate avant-garde method rose to the fore. However, despite these similarities, it would be reductive to claim that the Japanese avant-garde simply followed the lead of the Soviet avant-garde. The historical and political conditions of 1950s Japan clearly differed from those of the 1920s Soviet Union, and the particularities of these conditions determined the ways in which methodological questions of the avant-garde and documentary were raised (see Chapter Three). It was not enough for Hanada, for instance, simply to *combine* the journalistic documentary method of reportage and the surrealist method of automatic writing. The postwar Japanese avant-garde needed to go one step further, which meant exploring and analyzing underlying conditions of documented events and phenomena.

Citing Marx's remark from the *Grundrisse* ("the concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations"), for instance, he cautions artists not to trust their immediate sensory perceptions.⁴⁰ Under the influence of habit and ideology, reality may appear concrete, obvious, even self-evident. However, it is such self-evidentiality of perception that needs to be questioned in the first place. When Hanada argues that the concrete yet irrational phenomena that Dalí observed in the unconscious region of the

³⁹ Nor is this to say that they agreed on executions of such artistic practice. For instance, Shklovsky openly criticized Vertov's disregard for plot construction. Shklovsky also notes that the boundary between fiction and fact are disappearing in contemporary art. See Viktor Shklovsky, "On the Fact That Plot Is a Constructive Principle, Not One from Daily Life," in *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, 266-269.

⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 101.

mind also exist in the collective social milieu, he is thinking of something like commodity fetishism. As Marx reminds us, the commodity's function appears obvious at first, but its structural relations to labor and value are by no means easily graspable. Commodities are concrete objects, yet behaviors of humans towards them are unreasoned, even irrational. Defamiliarizing what passes as concrete reality thus becomes an essential aspect of critical avant-garde activities, and the political desire to transform (or "deform") the material conditions of society becomes inextricable from this quintessentially avant-gardist device of defamiliarization.

Metamorphosis

While the idea of the politicization of the avant-garde art may not be necessarily original, the singularity of Hanada's thought lies in his dialectical, and strongly visual, interpretation of this process as a formal movement of metamorphosis (*henkei*). Hanada emphasizes that the form of reality and the corresponding perception of the form are historically conditioned, and equally malleable. The problem of malleability or plasticity of form recurs in many of his critical essays throughout the 1950s. From graphic deformations in Disney's animation to social theories of amorphous masses, and from the protean quality of *Ur*-sand (his equivalent to Goethe's *Ur*-plant) to shape-shifting aliens in science fiction, the problem of plasticity pervades his writings. Certainly, such fascination with the plastic dimension of form was not limited to Hanada alone. His fellow avant-garde writer Abé Kôbô also preoccupied himself with the theme of metamorphosis in his fiction and plays. But it was Hanada who articulated the theoretical

connection between dialectical movement conceived as metamorphosis and artistic experimentations with formal plasticity.⁴¹

The earliest instance of Hanada's writing on the topic of metamorphosis appears in the January 1946 issue of the literary journal *Kindai bungaku* (Modern Literature). The essay is aptly titled "Tales of Metamorphoses" (*Henkeitan*) which opens with a casual remark on the episode from the *Odyssey* in which Circe turns Odysseus' soldiers into pigs.⁴² He lists a few more classic examples that narrate various instances of humans transforming into non-humans. With regard to contemporary examples, he mentions only three works: Guillaume Apollinaire's *The Disappearance of Honoré Subrac* (1910), Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), and David Garnett's *Lady into Fox* (1922). Selective reference to these works is excused by the following remark: "As it is well known, among contemporary writers who live in this trans-formative age there are too many records of metamorphosis to enumerate."⁴³

At first sight the essay appears to be a brief historical overview of literary treatments of metamorphosis as trope. Yet, as the cumbersome phrase "trans-formative age" (*tenkeiki*) indicates, Hanada frames it within the Marxist view of history. The term *tenkei* is an unusual word often used as a Japanese translation for the word *Transformation* in Marx's writings on political economy. The phrase *tenkeiki* ("trans-formative age") also has a very specific connotation; it was previously used by Marxists, including the well-known proletarian writer Kobayashi Takiji (1903-1933) who was

⁴¹ It is worth noting that Hanada translated two of Kafka's short stories into Japanese in 1946. He later translated three more stories, and put five stories into a slim edition of collected short stories (*Kafka shôhinshû*) in 1950. Hanada was responsible for introducing Kafka's work to the postwar avant-garde writers, including Abé.

⁴² Hanada Kiyoteru, "Henkeitan" [Tales of Metamorphoses], *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushû* [Selected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964), 176.

⁴³ Ibid.

brutally tortured to death by the Japanese special police, to describe critical transitional moments in history.⁴⁴ Hanada's use of this phrase hence immediately activates inter-textual allusions to the discourse of Marxism, and forges a subtle relation between the literary trope of metamorphosis (*henkei*) and the material historical process of transformation (*tenkei*).⁴⁵ Just as the divergent concepts of vanguard and avant-garde, deformation and defamiliarization are juxtaposed and conjoined in the previous essays, the differing connotations of organic metamorphosis and political transformation are strategically brought together here.⁴⁶

Before I proceed with a close reading of this essay, I will briefly summarize the content of the three European texts Hanada mentions. Garnett's story narrates a sad fate of Mrs. Tebrick, who turns into a fox while accompanying her husband on a hunting excursion. Even after Mrs. Tebric becomes a fox Mr. Tebric cares for her as if she were still human. But she gradually loses her manners; she starts running wild, hunting ducks, and gnawing on bones at the dinner table. At the end dogs kill both Mr. and Mrs. Tebrick. Kafka's text in turn tells the tragic story of Gregor Samsa, who wakes up one morning and finds himself metamorphosed into a large insect. Samsa is no longer able to communicate with other humans. He dies from the infection of a wound inflicted by a rotten apple thrown by his father. Apollinaire's story too ends with the tragic death of Honoré Subrac, who accidentally gains a "mimetic power" to blend himself into walls in

⁴⁴ Since the Japanese word *tenkei* [転形] is also a neologism, I use a hyphen ("trans-formative") to indicate its status as a neologism in English. But it should be noted that a more colloquial Japanese equivalent for the English word *transformation* would be either *tenkan* [転換] or *henkei* [変形].

⁴⁵ For Hanada, the phrase connotes critical transitional moments in history. Kobayashi Takiji's unfinished novel, *Tenkeiki no hitobito* [People of the Trans-formative Age] was written in 1931-1932. See, for example, Hanada's discussion of Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance in "Kagami no naka no kotoba" [*Words inside Mirrors*], *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushū*, 15-29.

⁴⁶ In his deliberate juxtapositions of heterogeneous concepts we may detect a surrealist tendency, yet his emphasis is on logical compatibility between these concepts rather than purely aesthetic shock-effects.

the manner similar to natural mimicries of butterflies and chameleons. He uses this power to escape from numerous pursuits by jealous lovers of women whom he seduces. But one day he is shot to death by one of these lovers. The narrator, who presents himself as a friend of Subrac, tells the reader that he only saw a vague contour of a human face on the wall, into which Subrac has mysteriously disappeared.

All these literary examples of metamorphoses, however, are unsatisfactory in Hanada's view because they are hopelessly "unscientific":

My biggest complaint about these authors is that every one of them intentionally keeps silence over the methodology of metamorphosis, while they provide detailed report on the incidents of metamorphoses. How do humans change into non-human animals, plants, and minerals? And how do they get back to their original human form after having become animals, plants, and minerals?⁴⁷

By adopting his signature ironic tone, Hanada treats these fictional literary episodes *as if* they were factual reports on real incidents. For example he notes, "I guess Hauff offers some hints on this matter." He then relates how happy he was when he finally realized that the Latin word *Mutabor* means "I will be changed." This Latin word functions as a magic spell in the nineteenth century German writer Wilhelm Hauff's fairy tale, *The Tale of Caliph Stork*. Next he evokes the ancient Roman author Lucius Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* (also known as *Metamorphoses*) and argues that he too has tried making a donkey eat a rose as suggested by Apuleius. To his disappointment, the donkey fails to turn into a human. In another passage, he contends that Honoré Subrac's method of mimicry is too unreliable to imitate because Subrac's mimetic power becomes effective only at the moment of fatal crisis.

Hanada reluctantly praises Hauff and Apuleius for trying to provide feebly "practical" advice on the one hand, and criticizes Apollinaire, Kafka and Garnett for

⁴⁷ Hanada, "Henkeitan," 176.

completely ignoring this question of practicality on the other. Beneath the façade of such bizarre assessment is his pointed critique of modern literature. For the aforementioned three authors' indifference towards methodological practicality is symptomatic of the epistemological incapacity of modern literature to understand the concrete phenomenon of metamorphosis. "Now is the time," writes Hanada "that we discard every preconception in order to establish a new method of epistemological inquiry which will allow us to grasp the very fact of metamorphosis."⁴⁸ And this is where he introduces an unexpected alternative: Goethe's natural scientific writings on plant morphology.

Although his literary achievement and his theory of color are more known than his work on plant biology, Goethe left a considerable impact in this field as well. He coined the term *morphology*, and developed the theory of plant morphology in his book *The Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790).⁴⁹ As it turns out, Hanada's examination of literary works itself rhetorically performs a critique of literature that fosters certain preconceptions about the phenomenon of metamorphosis. What are these preconceptions, and why is Goethe's morphology more instructive in this regard? According to Hanada literary treatments of metamorphosis tend to be both anthropocentric and metaphoric. They relentlessly recount tragic episodes of humans transformed into non-humans. Metamorphosis is usually treated as a trope, and fantastic tales of metamorphosis as mere allegories or parables of human conditions.⁵⁰ By contrast, Goethe's morphology offers a

⁴⁸ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁹ Charles J. Engard, "Introduction," *Goethe's Botanical Writings* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, trans. Bertha Mueller (Woodbridge: Ox Bow Press, 1989), 3-7.

⁵⁰ Hanada would have agreed with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's claim that "metamorphosis is the contrary of metaphor." In re-reading Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari also put forward a nonfigurative understanding of metamorphosis in Kafka's oeuvre. For Deleuze and Guattari, metamorphosis is linked to "a vital escape" or "a line of flight" (35). That is, metamorphosis is a resistance per excellence to the conventions of exegetic – "literary" – interpretations of Kafka's texts. In their vitalist framework Deleuze and Guattari thus rejects metamorphosis as a metaphor. I bring up this example of Deleuze and Guattari's

theoretical understanding of metamorphosis as a non-anthropocentric phenomenon. It is concerned with the physical and material transformations of organisms. Hanada is particularly intrigued by Goethe's conception of metamorphosis as a dialectical movement generated by constant interactions between two opposing forces. The dynamic process is privileged over the static state, as is signaled by his model of formation (*Bildung*).⁵¹ For Hanada this dynamic conception of metamorphosis as a movement of *becoming* (rather than *being*) offers a much needed "scientific" understanding of this phenomenon.

A series of conceptual pairs are further introduced at this point. Formation and transformation are linked to contraction and expansion. Contraction and expansion are in turn joined by one more conceptual pair: Henri Bergson's evolutionary concept of "vital force" (*élan vital*), which he links to expansion, and Irving Babbitt's conservative concept of "vital control" (*frein vital*) which he links to contraction:

Astutely, Goethe does not only emphasize the process of transformation. Instead, he argues that the movement of transformation is nothing but a centrifugal force; its efficacy must be supplemented by the centripetal capacity of things to adhere to their realized states. In other words, we have to equally accept the romantic concept of *élan vital* proposed by Bergson as well as the classicist concept of *frein vital* proposed by Babbitt.⁵²

Thus conceived, the dynamic movement of metamorphosis unfolds in the rhythmic pattern of centrifugal and centripetal forces. What is crucial about Hanada's otherwise sweeping statement is his inventive appropriation of Goethe's morphology as a theoretical framework to explain his Marxist understanding of history. History is that

reading of Kafka only to underscore the conceptual path taken by Hanada, who similarly departs from the properly "literary" reading of authors such as Kafka, Garnett, Apollinaire, and Goethe. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁵¹ Hanada, "Henkeitan," 180. The German word *Bildung* is used by Hanada.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 180.

which dialectically moves through a series of constant interactions between two opposing forces of life.

This dialectical conception of the movement of life *as* history is, moreover, explained through a specific visual figuration: the ellipse. Unlike a circle, an ellipse contains two focal points. It hence embodies formal consistency that is predicated upon the difference between the two focal points.⁵³ No matter how minute this difference may be, as long as there is a degree of difference, the ellipse cannot be confused with the circle. The circle is a figure of perfection, but for that reason it lacks generative tension. Metamorphosis in contrast is an elliptic movement generated by the encounter between opposing forces of contraction and expansion, formation and transformation.

Literary preconceptions about metamorphosis are inadequate in this regard precisely because they do not provide this elliptic-dialectical understanding of metamorphosis as a constant movement:

Perhaps no other historical era has so ignored the question of dynamic equilibrium as the present one. Mrs. Tebric gradually returns to the wilderness. Samsa regards his beetle-like shell as an unbearable burden. And there is no doubt that Honoré Subrac would earnestly wish to escape from the stone wall. They are all believers of *élan vital*, and hence ignore *frein vital*. However, life can be life precisely because it is organized, bound, and stabilized. Even the smallest organisms consist of infinitely complex organizations that retain this dynamic equilibrium . . . and death is inevitable. No organization can avoid disintegration.⁵⁴

The point Hanada makes is that modern literature is too vitalist in the Bergsonian sense. Emphasis is laid unilaterally on the impetus to change, to escape, to break out of a given mold. This critique of one-sided celebrations of the transformative force is crucial to Hanada's dialectical conception of the avant-garde. While earlier avant-gardes, such as Dada and Surrealism, emphasized rebellion and destruction, Hanada remains wary of

⁵³ Hanada Kiyoteru, "Daen gensô" [Elliptic Fantasies], *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushû* [Selected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol.1 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1964), 173.

⁵⁴ Hanada, "Heikeitan," 182.

such Romantic conceptions of the avant-garde primarily through revolt.⁵⁵ Time and again he emphasizes the necessity of a dialectic of formative and transformative forces: *élan vital* and *frein vital*, impetus and restraint, dissolution and organization. Hence comes the importance of “dynamic equilibrium” embodied by the figure of the ellipse. While the phrase dynamic equilibrium may misleadingly suggest stasis, it is indeed instability that Hanada wants to emphasize here.

The centrality of this particular figure of the ellipse for Hanada is already evident from the title of his wartime essay, “Elliptic Fantasies” (*Daen gensô*), which was published clandestinely in 1943. He argues that the ellipse is a deformed version of the circle; it lacks proportional perfection, but for this reason it is truer to reality⁵⁶:

Needless to say, the shape of an ellipse can come closer to a circle or to a straight line depending on the placement of its two focal points. However, no matter how much its form changes, as long as an ellipse remains an ellipse, it means sleeping while being awake, being awake while being asleep, crying while laughing, laughing while crying, doubting while believing, and believing while doubting.⁵⁷

The ellipse embodies contradictions that abound in reality. In this sense it is far more “ordinary” than the perfect circle, which is after all an exception among myriad oval shapes. Perhaps we should keep in mind that when Hanada was writing this particular essay Japan was beginning to feel the repercussions of its colonial expansionism; the Allied Forces led by the United States were taking the upper hand in military offensives, and the material and psychological strain upon the Japanese populace was intensifying. It is also worth noting that Hanada led a dual life as a newly converted Marxist during the

⁵⁵ This is not to say that Hanada categorically rejects Romanticism. His frequent references to Goethe make it clear that he is indebted to certain aspects of the German Romantic ideology.

⁵⁶ For Hanada, the distance between two focal points must be kept rather than cancelled out. No matter how minute is the distance between two points, the distance is necessary for ellipse to be differentiated from circle. Hanada’s theory of an elliptic movement thus prioritizes the irreparable disparity between two forces, neither of which is deemed higher or superior.

⁵⁷ Hanada, “Heikeitan,” 172.

war. He worked as one of the editors for the right-wing journal *Higashi tairiku* (The Eastern Continent) during 1940-1941, but he also organized a clandestine resistance through the publication of a leftist review titled *Bunka soshiki* (Cultural Organizations) from 1940 to 1943.⁵⁸ The figure of the ellipse – a deformed circle – stayed with him for a long time even after the war was over. The ellipse not only expresses his understanding of life as a constant process of metamorphoses, but also emblemizes his self-critical view of his own political activism. I draw readers' attention to this particular figure because it also informs his idea of dialectically synthesizing avant-garde and documentary practices.

Plasticity of the Masses

As Hanada's appropriation of Goethe's morphology indicates, his understanding of metamorphosis is decidedly non-metaphoric. It is a concept that partakes in the epistemological inquiry of the world, and moreover, it is a concept that allows him to introduce an elliptic-dialectic understanding of history. Next I want to turn to his 1947 essay titled "On the Desert" (*Sabaku ni tsuite*), which similarly expresses his dialectical understanding of history. The concept of metamorphosis once again plays a pivotal role. The essay begins with a general observation about the destructive force of sand. From quicksand to the desertification of the earth, sand appears to pose danger and harm to living organisms. However, he quickly reverses his argument in order to question such generalized impressions:

Of course the sand crumbles easily, its form immediately changeable and ephemeral. Yet precisely because of these qualities, sand also follows any type of vessel just like water. If we were to take advantage of the fragility of sand, we could make a mold by

⁵⁸ Hanada Kiyoteru, *Hanada Kiyoteru zenshû: Bekkan II* [The Complete Works of Hanada Kiyoteru: Supplementary Volume II] (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1980), 146-150.

compressing it. And if we were to pour liquid iron into this mold, we could make rock-solid iron products in the exact shape of the original mold Sand thus holds an infinite power to destroy as well as an equally infinite power to create.⁵⁹

Now sand is regarded as the infinite source of creation as well as destruction. Its inherent plasticity is celebrated.

This example of the capability of molding provides a most appropriate characterization of the inherent plasticity of sand. As Catherine Malabou argues in her recent study of Hegel, plasticity by definition bespeaks of duality. It signifies the dual capacities of giving and receiving form. The formal versatility of sand – to constantly change its form and to be molded into a fixed form – is “plastic” in this sense defined by Malabou: “‘Plastic’, as an adjective, means two things: on the one hand, to be ‘susceptible to changes of form’ or malleable (clay is a ‘plastic’ material); and on the other hand, ‘having the power to bestow form,’ the power to mould’, as in the expressions, ‘plastic surgeon’ and ‘plastic arts.’”⁶⁰ In pointing to the logical connection between Hegel’s idea of the dialectical process (as the movement of self-determination) and the concept of plasticity, she notes:

The dialectical process is ‘plastic’ because, as it unfolds, it makes links between the opposing moments of total immobility (the ‘fixed’) and vacuity (‘dissolution’), and then links both in the vitality of the whole, a whole which, reconciling these two extremes, is itself the union of *resistance* (*Widerstand*) and fluidity (*Flüssigkeit*). The process of plasticity is dialectical because the operations which constitute it, the seizure of form and the annihilation of all form, emergence and explosion, are contradictory.⁶¹

Hanada’s plastic conception of sand similarly hinges upon its dialectical modalities. Its capacity to be molded into any shape is inseparable from its capacity to become a mold

⁵⁹ Hanada Kiyoteru, “Sabaku ni tsuite” [On Desert], *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushû* [Collected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1963), 247.

⁶⁰ Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth During (London: Routledge, 2005), 8. Malabou also notes that things that are plastic tend to preserve their shape, “*resisting* deformation.” Yet, as her discussion of Hegelian dialectics as an essentially plastic movement of preservation and dissolution indicates, plasticity and deformation are not mutually exclusive concepts.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

itself. Perhaps this is where he comes closest to Hegel, on this point about the dialectical understanding of plasticity.⁶² Yet the theorist he evokes in this essay is not Hegel; it is again Goethe.

With feigned astonishment, Hanada speaks of his imaginative ability to see instantaneous transformations of sand (from fragmented debris to a gushing mud, from a soft lump of clay to grains of sand) comparing its vivid imagery to the visual effects of time-lapse cinematography. This time-lapse imagery is further compared to Goethe's kaleidoscopic experience of seeing the primordial *Ur-plant* (*Urpflanze*): "I wonder if I am gifted with a unique talent much like that of Goethe – or more precisely, the talent that even Goethe did not have. If he were to have this talent, he would have named this sand that appears to his mind's eye – this sand which becomes the basis of every possible geological formation – the *Ur-sand*, following his coinage of the *Ur-plant*."⁶³ What this passage highlights is the generative potential of primal sand. As the primal form of plasticity the *Ur-sand* contains "every possible geological formation." The *Ur-sand* is a figure of pure plasticity.⁶⁴

Importantly, however, Goethe's morphology is not the end of his argument. "What is wrong with this idea of the *Ur-sand*?" asks Hanada. "It is wrong not because it emphasizes movement. No, it is wrong because the movement starts with a single grain of sand. Why not think of the movement of an infinite number of grains of sand – that is

⁶² It is arguable that Hanada does not mention Hegel because Hegel collapses the subject and the object of this plastic process into a single entity: the Absolute Spirit. The plastic process of giving and receiving form in Hegel might be called auto-poietic. The spirit affects itself and being affected by it in the constant process of self-differentiation and dissolution. Hanada's conception of the sand as the primal form of plasticity does not involve this closed circuit of auto-affection.

⁶³ Hanada, "Sabaku ni tsuite," 248.

⁶⁴ If Hanada was drawn to Goethe more than Hegel, one of reasons is Goethe's manifest interest in the plastic dimensions of form. Goethe believed that "[f]orm is something mobile, something becoming, something passing" (13). Quoted by Charles Engard in "Introduction" to *Goethe's Botanical Writings*.

to say, the movement of desert which consists of infinite waves of sand?”⁶⁵ Evoking Marx, Hanada contends that it is necessary to move from the concrete to the abstract and back again to the concrete. This reference to Marx marks a pivotal point in the essay, which similarly proceeds from the vague impression of sand to the abstract concept of the *Ur-sand* and back to the dynamic movement of innumerable grains of sand. In opposition to Hegel’s abstract thought process, Marx posits that the concrete is “a point of departure for observation.” However, thought needs to take this observation of the concrete to the level of abstract comprehension, and “from there the journey has to be retraced” back until thought itself arrives at the concrete.⁶⁶ Hanada follows Marx’s advice and begins with the commonsensical view of sand as dry, loose, inanimate matter. He then contemplates its paradoxically destructive and creative nature, which leads to the abstract concept of the *Ur-sand*. From there he returns to the dynamic movement of innumerable sands that incessantly generate the ripples and waves of a boundless desert.

This dynamic conception of sand as a privileged figure of plastic potentiality returns with a twist in his 1957 essay titled “Sand-like Masses” (*Suna no youna taishû*). Written ten years later, this essay begins with topical references to the concept of Art Informel (*l’art informel*) and the theory of mass society both of which were in vogue when the essay was published. The essay opens up with the following remark:

The reason why the word formless [*informe*] was suddenly recovered from the bottom of my memory is because so many theorists of mass society, such as Maruyama Masao, are describing the masses with the phrase ‘sand-like masses,’ and not because I was interested in the avant-garde art movement – so called Art Informel– promoted by Michel Tapié. To be honest, I have regarded Art Informel as a trivial phenomenon that appeared in the process of the disintegration of abstract art. But for some reason this word formless [*informe*] doesn’t leave my mind.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Hanada, “Sabaku ni tsuite,” 250.

⁶⁶ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 100.

⁶⁷ Hanada Kiyoteru, “Suna no youna taishû,” *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushû* [Collected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol.3, 140.

This opening passage ushers in the central theme of this essay: a sociological simile figuring the masses as formless or amorphous sand. Michel Tapié's Art Informel is used as a rhetorical lever to up-end the prevailing discourse on mass society. During the 1950s, theories of mass society and mass culture gained enormous popularity among Japanese intellectuals, including social theorists such as Maruyama Masao and political scientists such as Matsushita Keiichi.⁶⁸ But it was around 1956-1957 that the "mass society theory" (*taishû shakai ron*) gained its momentum.⁶⁹ It is also worth noting that 1956 was also the year that both the Japanese translation of Daniel Bell's "The Theory of Mass Society" appeared and Tapié visited Japan to curate an exhibit. A number of essays written by Japanese social theorists on the issues of Japanese mass society appeared thereafter. In this regard, Hanada's essay was perfectly timed. What is his view of the masses and how does it relate to his previous theorization of form?

Hanada starts by suggesting that the idea of the masses as something amorphous is nothing new. It is already present in Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930). According to Ortega y Gasset, the term "the masses" refers to an assemblage of "the average man." The masses consist of men who are "undifferentiated" from one another; they embody "a generic type."⁷⁰ Hanada takes issue with this definition of the masses as a generic type. He compares Ortega y Gasset's conception of the masses to a formless state of sand (the "raw material"), receptive to any form imposed from the

⁶⁸ I should point out the complexity surrounding relation between sociological theories of mass society and Marxism, which arose to the fore during this period. As Ryusaku Yamada argues, while "[m]any Western theories of mass society tended to describe mass society as an amorphous 'classless society,' Matsushita did not deny the capitalistic class relationship but rather built it into his mass society theory" (7). See Ryusaku Yamada, *Democracy and Mass Society: A Japanese Debate* (Tokyo: Gakujutsu Shuppankai, 2006).

⁶⁹ Imamura Hitoshi, *Gendai shisô o yomu jiten* [A Dictionary for Contemporary Theory] (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1988), 407.

⁷⁰ José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1932), 13-14.

outside. Such undifferentiated masses are *like* formless sand; they can be uniformly molded into a generic type. Given Hanada's commitment to Marxism, it is not surprising that he is resistant to Ortega y Gasset's view of the masses as a passive receptacle and the latter's rejection of class as a defining factor in the formation of the masses. For Hanada the concept of the masses is first and foremost political. It does not exist outside the form-imposing class structure. But this is not the sole reason why he is skeptical of Ortega y Gasset's view of the masses as an undifferentiated generic type. As we saw earlier, sand is a privileged figure of plasticity. It has the potential to give form as much as receive form. If the masses are to be compared to sand, this dual aspect of plasticity needs to be acknowledged: "I think that the masses already possess certain forms, whether they are self-generated or imposed by the others, and that class structure is what exerts the most influence upon the formation of their forms."⁷¹ In other words, the masses are endowed with a capacity for action; they are not an amorphous passive entity. They actively desire to shed their old forms, revert back to the state of formlessness, and willingly take up new forms. The masses exist or come into existence through this incessant, plastic movement of formation and deformation. Clearly, the "form" here signifies something more than sociological typology. It points to the generative desire of the collective, and this collective desire, in turn, is inseparable from the inherently plastic structure of class.

We can now see how Hanada's critique of the sociological simile of the "sand-like masses" is delivered with certain ambivalence. The simile is inadequate if we think of sand as an inert substance. Yet if we take sand to be the primal form of plastic potentiality, as Hanada does, then the simile is quite apt. Two observations can be made

⁷¹ Hanada, "Suna no youna taishû," 142.

here. First, Hanada's emphasis on the plasticity of the masses could be compared to the Hegelian conception of plasticity of substance. Hegel's dialectical movement of self-determination through which substance "affirms itself as at once *subject* and *predicate* of itself" presents a striking resemblance to the dialectical movement of the masses' self-formation.⁷² For both Hanada and Hegel plasticity is closely linked to the capacity "to receive form and give form."⁷³ However, this is not to say that Hanada's elliptic conception of metamorphosis is reducible to Hegel's circular conception of self-determination. Although both models are dialectical, each lays its emphasis differently; the former highlights elliptic tension and the latter absolute unity. Hanada begins with two focal points that never merge into one, while Hegel begins with the single spirit, which undergoes internal self-differentiation.

Second, Hanada's critique of Ortega y Gasset finds its precedence in the work of Marxist philosopher Tosaka Jun. While the connection between Hanada and Tosaka is rarely pointed out, there is clear evidence that Hanada was an avid reader of Tosaka's philosophical writings.⁷⁴ Tosaka's 1930 treatise *The Logic of Ideology* (*Ideorogii no ronrigaku*), for example, presents a similar critique of sociological theories of the masses from a Marxist standpoint. Distinguishing between the political concept of the "masses" and the sociological concepts of the "crowd" and the "public," Tosaka suggests that the masses need to be thought in relation to the political concepts of "multitude" and "people." Drawing on the numerical connotation of multitude (*tashû*) as majority, he points out its fundamentally democratic connotation. Meanwhile the concept of the

⁷² Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 11.

⁷³ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁴ After the war, a publishing house, Ito shoten, where Hanada's wife worked, compiled the first postwar collected works of Tosaka Jun (who died in prison in 1945). This project was made possible because Hanada owned the complete volumes of Tosaka's published works from the 1930s.

people conjures a structure of subjection and rule. The people designate a class of those who are ruled or governed. However, both concepts fail to account for a key trait of the masses: its self-organizational impetus. He writes, “The masses are not only a multitude who are already organized or being organized, but also that which organizes itself. . . the masses remain the masses only through this constant self-organization.”⁷⁵ Here Tosaka explicitly defines the masses as the organized multitude. Moreover, this organization of the multitude is understood to be processual: “An organization can remain as such only in the real process of organization. Otherwise it becomes a static system.”⁷⁶ The difference between the continuous process of organization and the completed system is crucial. This dynamic understanding of the masses finds a curious counterpart in the contemporary Autonomist Marxist theorization of the multitude. This concept of the multitude has a long history in the discourse of political philosophy that goes back to Machiavelli and Spinoza, but it has recently gained theoretical currency through the works of contemporary Marxist theorists such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, whose similarities and differences with Tosaka and Hanada make these two concepts worth comparing.

Unlike Tosaka who views the multitude as a pre-organized state of the masses, Hardt and Negri make an ontological distinction between the multitude and the masses:

The multitude is composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity – different cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations; different forms of labor; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences. The *masses* are also contrasted with the people because they too cannot be reduced to a unity or an identity. The masses certainly are composed of all types and sorts, but really one should not say that different social subjects make up the masses. The

⁷⁵ Tosaka Jun, “Ideorogii no ronrigaku” [The Logic of Ideology], *Tosaka Jun zenshū* [Complete Works of Tosaka Jun], Vol.2 (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1966), 85.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

essence of the masses is indifference: all differences are submerged and drowned in the masses.⁷⁷

I want to highlight the last sentence: all differences are submerged and drowned in the masses. Such definition of the masses through indifference is not too far from Ortega y Gasset's sociological view of the masses as a generic type. To quote Hardt and Negri again: "The components of the masses, the mob, and the crowd are not singularities – and this is obvious from the fact that their differences so easily collapse into the indifference of the whole."⁷⁸ The masses in their definition thus appear formless, amorphous, undifferentiated.

Hardt and Negri's affirmation of the multitude as an alternative political concept to the orthodox Marxist (and sociological) concept of the masses derives from their rejection of political vanguardism. Yet their critique of vanguardism associated with the Marxist-Leninist concept of the masses does not nullify Tosaka and Hanada's dynamic conception of the masses as an entity that seeks constant metamorphosis. The masses as they appear in the writings of Tosaka and Hanada are, indeed, opposed to the static sociological conception of the masses as homogeneous and undifferentiated.

The point I want to make here is that all four Marxist thinkers agree on the importance of the self-generative political organization of the masses or the multitude, and yet, they also part ways on one crucial point: the defining role of the vanguard (for Tosaka) or the avant-garde (for Hanada). For Tosaka the organization of the masses is made possible by the very existence of the vanguard: "The vanguard [*zen'ei*] does not exist outside the process of organizing the masses . . . thus the vanguard should not

⁷⁷ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, xiv.

⁷⁸ *Multitude*, 100.

differentiate itself from the masses, and they are conjoined in the name of the masses.”⁷⁹ Similarly, Hanada values the concept of the avant-garde precisely because of its structural correlation to the masses. As Ishii Nobuo puts it, the masses and the avant-garde constitute two focal points of Hanada’s elliptic thought.⁸⁰ By contrast Hardt and Negri dispense with the concepts of vanguard and avant-garde. There is no such thing as the vanguard of the multitude. Its topology lacks a definite frontline for it organizes itself through “collaborative social interactions” of singular subjects from multiple dimensions at once.⁸¹

While it is useful to keep this contemporary Marxist rejection of vanguardism in mind, I want to emphasize the two-tiered structure of avant-gardism in Hanada’s conception of the masses because it critically informs his idea of bridging art and politics. Arguably, this idea of bridging art and politics has become something of a cliché in the study of the avant-garde, be it film, literature or visual art. However, it is important to pay attention to historical and cultural specificities surrounding this idea. Without such specificities we are in danger of perpetuating a hegemonic view of the avant-garde that constantly downplays the Marxist conception of the dynamic masses, which figures instead only as the inert masses of consumer society. In order to avoid this, I am taking extra time to delineate specificities of Hanada’s thought, which resides in his Marxist

⁷⁹ Tosaka, “Ideorogii no ronrigaku,” 85-86.

⁸⁰ Ishii Nobuo, *Tenkeiki ni okeru chishikijin no tatakaikata* [An Intellectual’s Fighting Style in the Transformative Age] (Tokyo: Madosha, 1996), 18. It would be also helpful to quote Okamoto Tarô, an abstract painter and a close collaborator of Hanada. During the 1954 round-table discussion titled “Challenges for Actuality” (*Akuchuariti no tame no kadai*) Okamoto tells Hanada: “The avant-garde of the interwar period did not need to work as a team. The main body of its army was the bourgeoisie. Since the bourgeoisie still held power at that time, its destruction was the avant-garde’s task; that is, it had to spit on its own main army. This means you could become an avant-garde artist, even if you were a loner. The situation is different today . . . the present-day avant-garde is coexistent with its main army ” (24-25). See Okamoto Tarô, “Akuchuariti no tame no kadai,” *Bijutsu hihyô* 25 (January 1954): 15-31.

⁸¹ Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 222. Their rejection of vanguardism is strongly colored by the Communist idea of the Party leadership.

emphasis on the structural interdependence between the avant-garde and the masses. This is evinced by his idea of a political alliance between these two constituents that in turn led him to engage seriously with the mass-oriented forms of documentary journalism and popular culture.

This structural interdependence between the avant-garde and the masses also sheds light on Hanada's frequent references to contemporary popular culture and media. He believed that politically effective avant-garde activism (whether through artwork or a criticism) must retain this journalistic topical referentiality to mass culture, or better still, to the culture *of* the masses. Indeed, from television, cinema, and *manga* (cartoons/comics), to graffiti, detective fiction, and science fiction, Hanada and his cohorts showed voracious interests in the most *current* forms of the culture of the masses.⁸² This cultural sphere in the 1950s was already saturated with and structured by various forms of mass media (especially through the periodical circulation of films, magazines, and television programs), yet was not reducible to the monolithic idea of the mass consumer society. Hanada's essay "Sand-like Masses," which interweaves his critique of the sociological conception of the inert masses with topical references to popular culture, including American science fiction writer Robert Sheckley's short story (which is aptly titled "Shape" and was translated into Japanese in 1956) is exemplary in this respect.⁸³ That is, the publication of this essay attests to the fundamental disagreement between the Marxist conception of the masses as a self-generative collective agent affected by class structure, and the non-Marxist, sociological conception

⁸² For the sake of clarity, I am using the term "popular culture" interchangeably with "the culture of the masses."

⁸³ The essay goes on to offer a timely critique of Japanese cultural anthropologist Umesao Sadao, whose polemical book, *Bunmei seitaishikan (A View of Ecological History of Civilization)* also came out in 1957.

of the masses as amorphous consumers, which had begun to displace the former in the Japanese intellectual milieu of the 1950s.⁸⁴

Disney Animation and Marxism

I have lingered on the essay “Sand-like Masses” because of its exemplary quality. Whether explicitly or implicitly, Hanada’s critical writings consistently address elements of contemporary popular culture and topical events that had received media attention.⁸⁵ Another pertinent example of Hanada’s engagement with contemporary media culture is in his interest in the animated films of Walt Disney. This interest, moreover, leads back to one of the principal points explored in the previous section: plasticity.

In his 1954 essay titled “Cheshire Cat” (*Warai neko*) wherein Hanada proposes a new kind of synthesis between documentary filmmaking and avant-garde filmmaking, he finds an instructive, though failed, model in Disney’s animation. At first sight his argument strikes the reader as odd, since Disney’s animation is not something generally considered to be either documentary or avant-garde. Hanada begins his essay with the observation that contemporary Japanese horror and fantastic films fall short of reaching the level of criticality he expects from them; they lack an analytical side of the imagination that is necessary to think outside the conventional representational codes of the horrific and the fantastic. Hanada, believing that a new mode of criticality can be

⁸⁴ I should also note that 1956 was a particularly important year for the Japanese Marxist intellectuals because it was the year of Hungarian Revolution, that is to say, the year when serious critique of Stalinism began. While many disillusioned Japanese intellectuals turned their back on Marxism, Hanada remained supportive of the Soviet Union and China throughout the 1960s, even after his close friends including Abé Kôbô abandoned Marxism.

⁸⁵ Certainly, the journalistic topicality of his work derives, at least partially, from the fact that many of his essays were published in monthly periodicals. Yet the publication venue alone does not explain Hanada’s interest in journalism.

found in the dialectical synthesis of the documentary and the avant-garde, sees a glimmer of hope in Disney's animation.

Disney's animated films, in his view, are based upon a dialectical process of formation and deformation. The first stage of Disney's animating technique, he argues, is the observation of the dynamic movements of animals and humans. Actual filmic recordings often aid this observation. The second stage involves the imaginative deformation of these observed movements. Disney's animated films thus follow an analytical trajectory of documenting real movement, dissecting it into discrete frames, and reconstructing this movement with the important surplus of pictorial deformation and exaggeration.⁸⁶ In this particular reading Hanada borrows from an argument made by Imamura Taihei, a Marxist film theorist with whom Hanada worked on the film journal *Eiga Bunka* (Film Culture) in the early 1950s.

Imamura's 1941 book, *Manga eiga ron* (*A Theory of Animation Films*) argues: "The animating technique of Disney refers to the work of decomposing motions through photography, and then re-drawing these decomposed motions into pictures. The new imagination of animated films is thus founded upon photographs of the real; it does not come into being without the mediation of the camera."⁸⁷ While I should note that Disney did not use this technique in all his animated films (but limited it to particular segments or works), there is no doubt that Imamura's theorization of Disney's animating technique influenced Hanada's interpretation of Disney. According to Imamura, despite the fantastic appearances of animated images, Disney's films are based on the analytical observation of motion as mediated by the camera. Hence comes a paradox: "the fantastic

⁸⁶ Hanada Kiyoteru, "Warai neko" [Cheshire Cat] *Avangyarudo geijutsu* [Avant-garde Art], Tokyo: Kôdansha, [1954] 1994, 279.

⁸⁷ Imamura Taihei, *Manga eigaron* (Tokyo: Studio Ghibli, [1941] 2005), 31.

nature of animated films has as its basis photorealistic representation [*shajitsu*].”⁸⁸ This intervention by the camera, and the subsequent analytical decomposition of live movement is what Hanada stresses in his own reading of Disney, though he places equal emphasis on the process of recomposition as well. Indeed, for Hanada, Disney’s avant-garde potential lies in the crucial transition from photorealistic images to drawn images. In this transitional stage the analytical imagination (rather than the mechanical device of the camera) intervenes in order to adequately “deform” what has been mechanically documented. He writes: “If Disney were to make an animated film about folkloric monsters and supernatural figures, such as the Japanese cat monster (*bakeneko*), he would first shoot a documentary footage of a real cat. Disney would then scrutinize its movement frame-by-frame in order to grasp the objective law of its motion. From there, he would start afresh by embarking on a synthetic process in order to concretize this law of the motion by drawing cartoon pictures frame-by-frame.”⁸⁹

As noted earlier, the dialectical movement of metamorphosis for Hanada starts with the observation of the concrete phenomenon, reaches an abstract understanding, and then returns to the concrete phenomenon. His interpretation of Disney’s animation follows a similar trajectory; it starts with the mechanical recording of a concrete movement, analyzes this movement through still frames, and re-creates this movement by drawing each frame and projecting the animated film. However, the key to this dialectical synthesis in Disney’s animation lies in the graphic difference between the initial and the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 92. Disney himself corroborates Imamura and Hanada’s appraisal of such analytical aspect of Disney’s films. In discussing qualities of a good animator, he notes: “The list would start with the animator’s ability to draw; then, ability to visualize action – breaking it down into drawings and analyze the movement, the mechanics of the action” (43). See Leonard Maltin, *Of Mice and Magic: A History of American Animated Cartoons* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980).

⁸⁹ Hanada Kiyoteru, “Warai neko,” 224.

final sequence of motion. The initial recording of the motion and the final execution of the animated motion cannot be the same, and the difference between the two must be manifested visually. If Hanada lays such an emphasis on the process of pictorial deformation, it is because he appreciates Disney's ability to optimize this visual difference between documented and animated movement. Moreover, this difference is a material indicator of the conjunction of two distinctive techniques of filmmaking, and thus inspires a new kind of art that is documentarist and avant-gardist at once. It is for these reasons that Hanada find Disney's work particularly instructive.⁹⁰

Importantly, there was another Marxist theorist who was also interested in the same questions of metamorphosis, plasticity, and Disney's animation. This was the Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948). Though it is possible that Hanada knew about Eisenstein's enthusiasm for Disney (if not his writings on Disney), Hanada's assessment of Disney's work differs from Eisenstein's on several key points.⁹¹ One such difference is Hanada's insistence that Disney's films make use of the documentary technique of recording real motions. The other is Eisenstein's interest in animism and magico-religious roots of our attraction to metamorphosis, which Hanada does not share. Nevertheless, they do share keen interests in the visual phenomenon of metamorphosis conceived as a dynamic movement of formation and deformation. Moreover, for both thinkers this movement is exemplified by the protean quality of drawn images in Disney's animated films.

⁹⁰ Ultimately, for Hanada, however, Disney's animation fails to achieve this veritable dialectic of the documentary and the avant-garde because it engages with metamorphosis stylistically, not theoretically. Disney's animated films in this regard are said to be the "products of compromise" (227).

⁹¹ Some of Eisenstein's film theoretical writings on film were translated into Japanese and published before and in 1952, the year when Hanada published this particular essay, "Cheshire Cat." But the Japanese translation of Eisenstein's complete works was not published until the 1970s.

As is well known, Eisenstein was fascinated by the quality of what he called “plasmaticness” in Disney’s animation. Just as Hanada was drawn to the potential plasticity of the *Ur*-sand, Eisenstein was drawn to a protean form (such as fire) that “behaves like the primal protoplasm, not yet possessing a ‘stable’ form, but capable of assuming any form.”⁹² As we saw earlier, this plastic capacity to assume any form is what Hanada foregrounds in his theorization of the masses. Eisenstein’s enthusiasm towards visual practices that give concrete expression to the primordial desire of mankind to assume any form (“to become ‘whatever you wish’”) resonates well with Hanada’s analysis of the masses. And this resonance further points to the centrality of popular culture, of which Disney is representative, for these Marxist thinkers.

By linking the irresistible attraction of Disney’s animated films to the attractions of the German cartoonist Walter Trier’s illustration of a boy with elastic arms and to the attraction of the Japanese woodblock prints that depict folkloric figures of elastic monsters, Eisenstein argues that the attraction for such images is inseparable from the collective desire to escape from the rigid, stratified social order, be it twentieth century United States and Germany or eighteenth century Japan (Figure 2). Beneath the immediate attractiveness to the protean form is the deep-seated “rejection of once-and-forever allotted form.”⁹³ Similarly, what Hanada emphasizes is the masses’ desire to reject their allotted forms and adopt forms of their own choice. This point is raised sharply in his reference to Sheckley’s science fiction about shapeless aliens called the Glom. Because of their unique, “shapeless” bodily constitution, each Glom is given a

⁹² Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda, trans. Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1986), 21.

⁹³ Ibid.

prescribed shape at birth in accordance with the caste of their ancestors.⁹⁴ Not surprisingly, Hanada's reading of this short story highlights the Glom aliens' final rejection of their caste-bound shapes. Neither is it surprising to find Eisenstein and Hanada elaborating on the transformative potential of visual form. For them the visual dynamics of metamorphosis expressed in popular culture is inseparable from the Marxist question of social transformation. The rejection of the "once-and-forever" allotted form at the perceptual level of visibility is akin to, and inseparable from, the political rejection of the stratified social order.

In other words, for Eisenstein and Hanada the question of visual or aesthetic metamorphosis must be linked to the problem of social or revolutionary metamorphosis. The question of why this might be so is a fraught one, but one might point out the definite influence of Marxist revolutionary thought as well as the importance of dialectical thinking for Eisenstein and Hanada. As I pointed out earlier, Hegel's very concept of the dialectic can be read in terms of plasticity. If the idea of dialectic is predicated upon the connection between temporality and plasticity (that is to say, changes unfolding in time) then metamorphosis is a concept that bespeaks of both form and time. The question of time for these two Marxist thinkers on the other hand is ineluctably linked to the question of history. There is no such thing as abstract conceptual time cut off from the concrete temporality of history in the Marxist idea of time. Hence comes the insight of Eisenstein and Hanada to bring metamorphosis to bear upon the Marxist affirmation of the collective desire for change, the desire that fuels the locomotion of history.

But perhaps what we need to ask is not *why* but *how* they link these two poles of visual metamorphosis and collective transformation. And to what materials do they turn

⁹⁴ Robert Sheckley, *Untouched by Human Hands* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1954), 32.

to in order to create this link? As I have emphasized above, it is to popular forms of visual art and culture that these two writers turn in their search for the continuum between aesthetic and social transformation. Moreover, it is in these popular forms that these thinkers find the close relation between aesthetic and social metamorphosis already expressed. Eisenstein, to turn to his writings, finds that the protean quality of plasmaticness, “permeate[s] folktales, cartoons, the spineless circus performer and the seemingly groundless scattering of extremities in Disney’s drawings.”⁹⁵ Though different in medium, geographical locale or historical period, these popular cultural practices all give vibrant expression to the desire of the masses for possibilities of metamorphosis. Disney’s animated characters that effortlessly change their forms and constantly flaunt their elastic bodies give voice to the “protest against the metaphysical immobility of the once-and-forever given.”⁹⁶ Similarly, what Hanada stresses in his critique of the sociological conception of the masses is the desire of the masses to shed imposed forms and adopt forms of their own choice. It comes as no surprise that these two theorists turn their particular attention to folktales, cartoons, and the animated film, a vast field of popular culture filled with numerous images of metamorphosis.

In the aforementioned essay, “Cheshire Cat,” Hanada too discusses merits of Japanese folktales. Unlike Eisenstein’s positioning of Japanese folklores, however, his emphasis is on their potential to inspire future productions of the avant-garde documentary film. He writes, “Many of us immediately think of France when we hear the term avant-garde art, but there is no other country as blessed as Japan for its abundance in

⁹⁵ Eisenstein, 21.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 33.

abstract and surrealistic art forms.”⁹⁷ Referencing Eisenstein’s fascination with Japanese Kabuki theater, Hanada goes on to suggest that contemporary Japanese artists should make use of their native resources, especially folklores that parade “such fantastic figures as the sea bonze, the one-eyed monk, and the faceless monster” (Figure 3).⁹⁸ A particular kind of folklore on which Hanada places importance is, moreover, the old chronicles that interweave factual reports on historical events with fantastic accounts of ghosts, monsters, and supernatural phenomena. When appropriated by contemporary filmmakers, argues Hanada, these ostensibly anachronistic chronicles and folktales could offer a fertile ground for producing a new mode of cinematic experimentation. Hanada would later call this new mode of cinematic experimentation *sur-documentary*. It is fitting in this respect that Hanada describes this essay, which deals with Disney and Japanese folklore, as a discussion of “documentary art” (*kiroku geijutsu*). And it is this question of new documentary art, understood as the *elliptic-dialectical* synthesis of the documentary and avant-garde approaches, to which I will turn in the next chapter.

⁹⁷ Hanada, “Warai neko,” 222.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

The Rise of the Avant-Garde Documentary Movement and the Demise of Pure Literature

In 1963, experimental filmmaker Matsumoto Toshio (1932-) published a book titled *Eizô no hakken: Avangyarudo to dokyumentarii* (Discovery of the Mechanically-Produced-Image: Avant-garde and Documentary). The timely publication of the book is noteworthy because of the following two points. First, it deserves attention because Matsumoto included the term *eizô* (“mechanically-produced-image”) – a term that was quickly gaining a discursive currency among Japanese film theorists and critics at the time – in his main title. As Matsumoto often acknowledges in his interviews, he was the first filmmaker to use the appellation *eizô sakka* (a moving image auteur or a “mechanically-produced-image” auteur) to present himself. The appellation brings to the forefront the general, material foundation of visual media rather than the particularity of the cinema, and prefigures his later career as a pioneering experimental film and video artist in Japan.⁹⁹

More importantly, however, the book is noteworthy because of its supplementary subtitle, which reveals Matsumoto’s theoretical indebtedness to the work of Marxist avant-garde literary critic Hanada Kiyoteru. To place seemingly heterogeneous terms such as *avant-garde* and *documentary* side by side as Matsumoto did at the time was a provocative gesture. Yet the very idea of synthesizing the avant-garde and the documentary approaches was not entirely original to him. While many critics today regard Matsumoto’s theoretical vision of dialectically synthesizing avant-garde

⁹⁹ Author’s interview with Matsumoto conducted on February 16th, 2007 in Tokyo.

filmmaking and documentary filmmaking as uniquely his own, it is in fact a variation of an earlier theory proposed by Hanada.¹⁰⁰

A concept of the dialectic based on the figure of the “ellipse,” as we saw in the last chapter, constitutes the kernel of Hanada’s thought. The transformative process of an elliptic-dialectic movement forms the central logic of his argument. To discern this logic of the elliptic-dialectic in the vast corpus of his critical essays is like discerning a watermark wrought into the surface of a paper; we begin to see variants of the *ur*-pattern beneath the texture of individual essays. Idiosyncratic as it may seem, however, Hanada’s theory of the dialectic between the avant-garde and documentary art forms thoroughly influenced his contemporaries. The theoretical and practical implications of his logic thus go far beyond the content of his essays. As I hope to show in this chapter, Hanada’s conceptual model of the ellipse – and especially his understanding of the elliptic-dialectic relation between avant-garde and documentary – proves essential for the analysis of several key intellectual and artistic events of the late 1950s and early 1960s. While the avant-garde’s theorization of documentary art, filmmaking practice, and literary criticism would seem to have taken place separately, in fact they have a common determinant which comes to light if we take heed of Hanada’s dialectical theory of the avant-garde and the documentary. Once we put Hanada’s theory into play, connections among these different developments will be clear.

¹⁰⁰ For instance, in the foreword for the recent reprinted edition of Matsumoto’s *Eizô no hakken* (2005), contemporary film critic Chûjô Shôhei praises Matsumoto for ambitiously bringing together the heterogeneous genres of the documentary film as “the objective record of the exterior world” and the avant-garde film as “the subjective expression of interiority” (3). These quoted phrases used by Chûjô, which recapitulate Matsumoto’s argument in his book, clearly testify to the influence of Hanada’s theoretical framework. See, Chûjô Shôhei, “Kagayaki o ushinawanai shin no kotentekimeicho” [A Truly Classical Masterpiece with Ever-Shining Brilliance] in *Eizô no hakken: Avangyarudo to dokyumentarii* [The Discovery of the Mechanically-Produced-Image: The Avant-garde and Documentary] (Tokyo: Seiryû shuppan, 2005), 1-9.

What were these events? Namely, the emergence of what I call an “avant-garde documentary movement” initiated by Hanada’s group at the end of the 1950s; the well-known “Debate over Pure Literature,” which took place in 1961-1962; and finally, the increased use of the extreme close-up, the freeze-frame, and the still photograph, which became conspicuous among the works of notable Japanese filmmakers in the 1960s. The aim of this chapter is to explore the relations among these three events, relations which are by no means reducible to a linear, chronological order of causality. The conceptual thread I will use to explore the connections between these events is that of actuality. Actuality is the expression of the elliptic-dialectic, which contains two focal points; the first focal point is “journalistic currency” of the mass media and the second focal point is the “avant-garde” as an artistic practice that emphasizes defamiliarization. Together, these two poles, their tension and the ellipse they form give rise to a new sense of “actuality” that is not reducible to the sensation of journalistic topicality and fashionable up-to-dateness, nor to the claim to factuality; rather, the third sense of actuality generated by the elliptic-dialectical tension is what we might provisionally call “critical relevance.” This critical sense of actuality has been articulated by avant-garde critics and artists such as Hanada Kiyoteru, Matsumoto Toshio, and Abé Kôbô, and will be explored further in this chapter.

The three events cited above are different responses to the prominence of the documentary genre and the lure of its “actuality-effect” in mainstream Japanese society starting in the 1950s.¹⁰¹ Looking at these three events together enables us to situate historically the apparently abrupt turn of the postwar Japanese avant-garde critics, writers

¹⁰¹ I am using the term “actuality-effect” to designate the sensation of having access to the current, up-to-date, or timely information and events, which the media constructs and relays. I hence differentiate this notion of the actuality-effect from a multifaceted concept of actuality.

and filmmakers towards the practice and concept of documentary. Moreover, it enables us to draw a more accurate genealogy of postwar Japanese filmmaking, one that is open to the inter-medial connections and interactions. Lastly, examining these three events together allows us to see how Japanese intellectuals and artists variously responded to the increasing prominence of visual media over print media. The anxiety of literary critics involved in the Debate over Pure Literature is symptomatic of this historical tension between visual and print media.

Another point I want to make in this chapter concerns the bifurcating tendencies in interpretations of the key concept of actuality, and by extension, in the divergent means by which Japanese critics and artists attempted to articulate the relationship between artistic and journalistic practices. Importantly, for the participants of the Debate over Pure Literature the relation between literature and journalism was essentially static. An either/or schema determined this relation; either journalism appeared as its foe, or it was its double. Within this scheme the self-evidentiality of the categories of literature and journalism was left unquestioned. In contrast, the avant-garde documentary movement began by questioning the self-evidentiality of the categories of art and journalism. In so doing the participants of this movement activated Hanada's elliptic-dialectic scheme. This produced a far more dynamic relation between artistic and journalistic practices. Indeed, as I will show more in detail, avant-garde documentarists refuted both the aestheticist isolationism of art from mass culture, and journalism's axiomatic claim to factuality and common sense. As its etymology suggests, journalism has a strong affinity with everydayness. Its intelligible appeal resides in the common, quotidian, and habitually enforced perceptions of reality: journalism in its widely accepted form affirms

common sense. Moreover, journalism at its basis affirms mass distribution; its practice is thus inseparable from the apparatuses of mass media. In contrast, since Russian Formalism various avant-garde movements have taken the commonsensical modes of human perception as their principal objects of criticism and subversion. The avant-garde practice of the twentieth century has held the view that commonsensical judgment is learned through habits. Hence comes the difficulty of defining the avant-garde's political position in relation to mass culture, a difficulty that Marxist critics such as Hanada tried to overcome by appropriating the Marxist theory of interdependence between the vanguard and the masses (see Chapter One).

In short, the practices of journalism and the avant-garde have traditionally appeared antithetical in their respective relations to habits and commonsense. However, they are *not* antithetical in their avowed engagement with the temporality of the present. The avant-garde and journalism both affirm a relevance of their practice to contemporary social, political, and cultural conditions. The question then becomes: how could the avant-garde practice differentiate itself from practices of journalism and mass media without giving up its *timely* engagement with the present? Is the temporal sense of actuality construed as journalistic currency applicable to the practice of avant-garde art and criticism? If so, what becomes of the strategy of defamiliarization that undergirds the avant-gardist contestation of habits and common sense? These are questions that the participants of the avant-garde documentary movement inevitably faced in their endeavor to appropriate and criticize existing modes of documentary practice. In what follows, I will examine how they negotiated the demand for and negation of journalistic actuality in theory and practice, paying particular attention to the filmic work of Matsumoto Toshio,

the activities of the avant-garde group *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* (Association for Documentary Art), and the contrasting response of pure literature critics, which will serve as a counterexample to the works of the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai*.

Freeze-Frame, Still Frame, and Extreme Close-Up

I want to begin my investigation by turning to the rise of certain visual and stylistic characteristics in the filmmaking practices of the 1960s in Japan. Although chronologically these tendencies appear after the rise of the avant-garde documentary movement and the Debate over Pure Literature, it is helpful to start with this readily “visible” event. In fact, despite their visibility, it is not easy to understand the historical significance and implications of these visual and stylistic changes. Their significance becomes only legible when we draw connections between their concurrent appearance as constituting an innovative event in history of filmmaking in Japan and the other two aforementioned events. What are these visual and stylistic changes that took place in the field of filmmaking practice in the 1960s? They derive from the increased use of two particular cinematic devices: the use of freeze- and still-frames on the one hand, and the use of extreme close-ups on the other.

As is widely acknowledged, at the beginning of the 1960s Japanese cinema underwent remarkable changes not only in terms of its industrial structure (the collapse of its studio system), but also in terms of its formal style. The most conspicuous stylistic changes first appeared in the field of commercial narrative film. It is a commonplace for film historians to attribute this change to the rise of the postwar generation of studio filmmakers, such as Nakahira Kô, Masumura Yasuzô, and Ichikawa Kon, who began experimenting with formal elements (such as fast cutting, the 360 degree pan, abrupt

editing, the long take, and the freeze-frame), and narrative elements (such as stories of contemporary youth and delinquents) in the 1950s. However, the generation commonly credited with most significantly altering the path of Japanese cinema is the next generation of the filmmakers generally known as the “New Wave”: namely, Oshima Nagisa, Yoshida Kijû, Shinoda Masahiro, and Imamura Shôhei. To this list of we can also add the names of leftist documentary filmmakers, such as Ogawa Shinsuke, Tsuchimoto Noriaki, and Kuroki Kazuo, who form the documentary counterpart to this New Wave generation.

The problem with this standard (and hegemonic) film historical narrative is, however, that it leaves out the critical achievements of filmmakers such as Matsumoto Toshio and Wakamatsu Kôji, who only get passing remarks as filmmakers of the artistic avant-garde or the profit-driven “pink” film genre. Their works rarely figure in theoretical or historical writings on Japanese cinema, and when they do, they are treated as isolated sparks of achievement from experimental spirits. But if we were to put this hegemonic perspective aside, a different constellation of Japanese cinema becomes visible.

First, we should note that some postwar commercial filmmakers’ formal experiments directly intersected with experiments by independent avant-garde filmmakers and documentary filmmakers of the same generation. For instance, if we focus on the use of the freeze-frame we can find definite formal affinities among Oshima, Imamura, Matsumoto, and Teshigahara – affinities that would not be clear if we were to adhere to the traditional boundary between the commercial “New Wave” and non-commercial experimental and documentary filmmaking. Matsumoto and Oshima, in

particular, made highly comparable experimental shorts by using only still photographs: Matsumoto made *Ishi no uta* (The Song of the Stone, 1963) using photographs shot by a *LIFE* magazine cameraman, and Oshima made *Yunbogi no nikki* (The Diary of Yunbogi, 1965) using photographs shot by himself during his trip to South Korea. By the mid-1960s, this trend towards the use of photographic stillness became more conspicuous among commercial filmmakers: Fukasaku Kinji and Wakamatsu Kôji often open their narrative films with lengthy sequences composed of journalistic still photographs, such as Fukasaku's *Hokori takaki chôsen* (The Proud Challenge, 1962) or Wakamatsu's *Teroru no kisetsu* (The Season of Terror, 1969).

Topical references to then current social issues, such as the closing down of coalmines, migrant workers, and radicalizing student movements also became extremely frequent among the narrative, non-documentary filmmakers during this period. In some cases, these references were made by directly “citing” press photographs published in newspapers and magazines, as in the case of Wakamatsu's *Okasareta Byakui* (Violated Angel, 1967), or Oshima's *Shônen* (Boy, 1969). In other cases, a stylistic homage to photojournalism is made through the use of grainy snap shots, as in the case of a still frame sequence in Teshigahara's *Tanin no kao* (The Face of Another, 1966) and Wakamatsu's *Kyôso jôshikô* (Running in Madness, Dying in Love, 1969), or the repeated use of freeze-frames in Imamura's *Nippon konchûki* (Insect Woman, 1963). While scholars often attribute the increased use of the freeze-frame in Japanese cinema to the impact of French *nouvelle vague*, especially that of François Truffaut – the canonical reference usually given to the final shot of *Les quatre cents coups* (1959) – it seems that the widespread cultural obsession with documentary in postwar Japan already paved the

way for these Japanese filmmakers to pick up this formal technique. It is no coincidence that their use of the freeze- and still-frames is overwhelming *journalistic* in its content. It was thus not the French *nouvelle vague* that solely influenced the sudden increased appropriation of the photographic stillness in Japanese cinema. Neither could its increased use of the freeze- and still-frames be explained by reference to cinema's purportedly ontological fascination with death and stillness.¹⁰²

It would be more productive, and thought-provoking, to relate the sudden explosions of freeze- and still-frames in 1960s Japanese cinema to the intensified journalistic-turn of intellectuals and artists in the postwar period, of which the avant-garde documentary movement and the Debate over Pure Literature are symptomatic examples. In all three cases what we witness is an increased demand for journalistic actuality *in art*, and the subsequent tension created therein. These three events are not isolated from one another; rather they arise from the same historically conditioned epistemic and cultural milieu: they belong to the same historical strata. However, this is not to say that the participants of these events responded to this demand for actuality in art in a uniform manner. As we shall see shortly, some responded in a pro-journalistic manner and others in a counter-journalistic manner.

¹⁰² Recently, film theorists such as Garrett Stewart and Laura Mulvey have put forward this connection between cinematic stillness and death. For Stewart and Mulvey, who represent what might be called the ontological theory of the cinematic appropriation of the photographic stillness, the trope of death – mediated by Roland Barthes's theorization of photography, André Bazin's theorization of cinema, and Freudian psychoanalysis – figures predominantly. The problem with this vein of theorizing cinema's relationship to photography by privileging the trope of death (analogically linked to stillness) is its generality. The trope of death is not always useful in analyzing particular instances of the cinematic appropriations of photography. In the case of 1960s Japan, it is the tradition of photojournalism and news photography (not photography *in general*) that played the most significant role in this appropriation of the photographic image. See, Garrett Stewart, *Between Film and Screen: Modernism's Photo Synthesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

The use of the freeze- and still-frames in the aforementioned films appears as a more or less pro-journalistic appropriation of the “actuality-effect” of the media, especially that of photojournalism. That is, the frequent use of freeze- and still-frames in 1960s Japanese films appear to emulate the actuality-effect characteristic of journalistic media. Yet, extreme close-ups, which flourished concurrently with this journalistic-turn of the Japanese filmmaking represents a decidedly counter-journalistic approach to the demand for actuality.

The extreme close-up, like the freeze- and still-frames, appears prominently in 1960s narrative and documentary films. Its sudden visibility is as conspicuous as that of still images. Unlike the freeze- and still-frames, however, these extreme close-ups are not coded as “journalistic.” That is to say, they do not refer back to the formal stylistics of the mass media and photojournalism, as it is the case with many of freeze- and still-frames. Instead of evoking journalistic referentiality, the extreme close-ups in fact counteract referential functions of filmed images: they defamiliarize the referent.

Take the iconic example of the opening shot of the film *Suna no onna* (Woman of the Dunes, 1964), a work of collaboration between Teshigahara and Abé, which I will analyze further in the next chapter. The image of a glittering jagged shape in black and white appears (Figure 4). At first glance, it is difficult to identify what the object is. The image is visible, but it is not immediately recognizable. It turns out that the image is a microscopic close-up of a grain of sand. The film cuts gradually from this microscopic view of one grain of the sand to several grains, and from a flurry of sand forming ripples to an expansive view of soaring sand dunes. These gradual changes in scale materially

demonstrate how the desert is an aggregate of countless sand grains. The stereotyped image of the desert as a vast smooth landscape is rejected from the very beginning.

In the essay titled *Sabaku no shisô* (“The Thought on Desert”), Abé discusses the difficulty of filming the desert. He warns filmmakers not to fall into the trap of filming stereotyped images of the desert landscape, which would end up serving only as the plain backdrop for narrative actions. “It is difficult not to resort to generality when one depicts such plastic landscapes as those of the desert,” writes Abé. “Everywhere you turn your camera, the same monotonous look of the desert appears, and the image starts to look like the desert in general, like the desert in the picture frame.”¹⁰³ According to Abé, in order to escape this trap of representational generality or stereotyping, which classical landscape paintings have instilled in us, it is necessary to find an alternative method that allows the filmmaker *to get as close as possible to the desert*.¹⁰⁴ It should come as no surprise, therefore, that the technique of the extreme close-up is used at the opening sequence of *Woman of the Dunes*.

Since the advent of cinema, the visual effect of the close-up has been linked to a particular epistemic function: it allows human eyes to discern aspects of reality that otherwise elude them. The close-up has been thus regarded as particularly apt for destabilizing habituated modes of visual perception. As Béla Balázs reminds us, the close-up captures, frames, and reveals the “little things” in life that go unnoticed:

[T]he magnifying glass of the cinematograph brings us closer to the individual cells of life, it allows us to feel the texture and substance of life in its concrete detail. It shows you what your hand is doing, though normally you take no notice when it strokes someone or hits out at them. You live in it and pay no attention to it. The magnifying glass of the film camera will show you your shadow on the wall,

¹⁰³ Abé Kôbô, “Sabaku no shisô” [The Thought on Desert], *Sabaku no shisô* [The Thought on Desert] (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1973), 268.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 269.

something you live with without noticing, and it will show you the adventures and the ultimate fate of the cigar in your unsuspecting hand, and the secret – because unheeded – life of all things that accompany you on your way and that taken together make up the events of your life.¹⁰⁵

There is no doubt that Teshigahara and Abé were aware of these perceptual effects of the close-up. Abé's avant-gardist obsession with the effects of defamiliarization is, as I will argue more in depth in the next chapter, inseparable from his interest in visual media. He often claimed that artists must “discover new meanings of reality through the process of decomposing reality into naked things and reconstructing them.”¹⁰⁶ It is precisely this decomposition of familiar reality into defamiliarized states of naked “things” that the technique of the extreme close-up allows. As one Japanese critic puts it, Teshigahara's use of the extreme-close up in *Woman in the Dunes* “turns the filmed object into an *objet* by severing it from conventional system of signification.”¹⁰⁷ That is to say, Teshigahara's use of the extreme close-up destroys conventional circuits of signification between the sign and the referent. It reveals, in other words, hitherto overlooked aspects of ordinary “things,” making them visible as if for the first time.

As is often pointed out, the defamiliarizing effect of the extreme close-up becomes most palpable when it is applied to the human figure. It was the French Surrealists who first experimented with this effect; the best example is Jacques-André Boiffard's famous photograph that accompanied George Bataille's “The Big Toe.” If it is true, as Rosalind Krauss suggests, that “[p]hotographic cropping is *always* experienced as

¹⁰⁵ Béla Balázs, “Béla Balázs, *Visible Man, or the Culture of Film* (1924),” trans. Rodney Livingstone, *Screen*, 48.1 (Spring 2007), 103.

¹⁰⁶ Abé Kôbô, “Mazu wa kaibô tô o,” 147.

¹⁰⁷ Tomoda Yoshiyuki, “Fûkei toshintai: Abé Kôbô/ Teshigahara Hiroshi eiga ‘Suna no onna’ ron” [The Landscape and the Body: Abé Kôbô and Teshigahara Hiroshi's film, *Woman of the Dunes*], *Nihon kindai bungaku* [Japanese Modern Literature], 74 (May, 2006), 274. Tomoda is using the French word *objet* here in the artistic sense, in particular the sense given by Surrealists.

a rupture in the continuous fabric of reality,” then, we may surmise that the extreme close-up intensifies this effect.¹⁰⁸ One shot in the film *Woman in the Dunes* particularly exemplifies this defamiliarizing effect of the extreme close-up upon the human body. It begins as a leisurely pan over a woman’s facial profile. The camera slowly moves along her parted lips down to the gentle slope of her neck. The undulating movement of her throat and the uneven texture of her skin fill up the entire screen. Cropped and magnified, the object inside the frame no longer presents any resemblance to what we know as the human face (Figure 5).

Similar instances of the excessive magnification of ordinary objects can be found in the works of Imamura and Kuroki, as in the case of the opening sequence of *Insect Woman* and recurring extreme close-ups of a caterpillar in Kuroki’s *Silence Has No Wings*.¹⁰⁹ In the films of Imamura and Kuroki, however, the use of extreme close-ups does not extend to human figures; they remain at the level of insects and thus evoke the stylistic conventions of the scientific or nature documentary. By appealing to such conventions, these films diminish the perceptual threat otherwise generated by the close-up. In contrast, the films of Teshigahara and Matsumoto notably extend the use of extreme close-ups to human figures. For instance, in his experimental documentary film, *Nishijin* (Nishijin, 1961) Matsumoto makes a deliberate effort *not* to show faces or entire bodies of the weavers in their entirety. Partial framing crops bodies, faces are hidden; if the heads of human actors appear, only their backs or partial profiles are shown.

¹⁰⁸ Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 115.

¹⁰⁹ This was Kuroki Kazuo’s first narrative feature. The original title in Japanese is *Tobenai chinmoku* (1966).

Moreover, as Matsumoto acknowledges in his interviews, *Nishijin* deliberately avoids having establishing shots inside the workshop, and thus discourages spectators from spatially orienting their gaze. Instead of establishing a normative sense of space the camera relentlessly crops and fragments human bodies and machines (Figure 6). The camera takes decidedly unconventional angles, and closes in on the hands, feet, and hips of the weavers. The film also utilizes the colliding effects of montage. Compositionally dynamic shots of traditional wooden looms and mechanical looms alternate, and geometric shapes and diagonal lines predominate the screen, evoking the stylistics of earlier avant-garde films such as Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* and films of Sergei Eisenstein. Despite its predominance, moreover, the close-up is not the only component of the film's characteristic visuality. It is also punctuated by the more normative use of long and medium shots from the images of children playing in alleys to those of old residents piously praying at a local shrine to annual exhibitions of traditional textiles. In this film as well as in his other experimental shorts, Matsumoto strives to achieve an elliptic-dialectical tension between the documentary recordings and avant-garde defamiliarization of reality stylistically.

A similar but more complex process of activating the tension between recording and defamiliarization appears in his next film, *The Song of the Stone*. Here Matsumoto uses only the still photographs shot by *LIFE* cameraman, Ernest Satow. Satow took hundreds of photographs documenting Japanese stonemasons on the island of Shikoku (Figure 7). Initially, Matsumoto was asked to make a TV documentary program about Satow, using these photographs shot in the Japanese quarry. However, instead of simply presenting Satow's work in the conventional expository documentary style, Matsumoto

decided to re-shoot Satow's still photographs frame-by-frame. Matsumoto put the film together by meticulously using the techniques of in-camera-editing, and asked Akiyama Kuniharu, who belonged to the artistic collective, *jikken kôbô* ("experimental workshop"), to create the soundtrack. Akiyama used the sounds recorded in the quarry to make a *musique concrète* piece for *The Song of the Stone*. The result is an astonishingly dynamic animation film, which uses all kinds of visual techniques – stop animation, pan, zoom, rotation, dissolve, fade, loop, and solarization – as well as "documentary" sounds distorted to the point of unrecognizability, to transform these static photographs into visual elements that produce an overall impression of movement. Overcoming the challenge of the twofold stillness and silence – of stone and of still photography – through the technique of animation (frame-by-frame shooting), Matsumoto thus turned photographs into a motion picture replete with sound. According to Matsumoto, in describing the processes of cutting and polishing stonecutters say, "the stones are coming to life." Like stones, he says, the still photographs came to life; he calls this experimental documentary short a *cine-poem*.¹¹⁰

The elliptic-dialectical process of recording and defamiliarization, which already characterized *Nishijin*, is thus strengthened and doubled in *The Song of Stone*. The photojournalistic materials, which are themselves documentary recordings of stonemasons, are first decomposed into fragments (still photograms), and then reassembled into movement (animation film) by Matsumoto. The filmed photographs of Satow retain their original photojournalistic quality, but no longer in the same manner as they would if they were printed in the pages of the *LIFE* magazine. *The Song of the Stone*

¹¹⁰ From Matsumoto's voice-over commentary in Matsumoto Toshio, *Jikken eizôshû* [Experimental Film Works], DVD-BOX (Tokyo: Uplink, 2005).

thus attests to Matsumoto's will to translate his own theory of neo-documentarism into practice.

In Matsumoto's work the tension between avant-garde and documentary proves productive, and the stillness of the frame and the extreme close-up complement one another. Arguably, the logic of the elliptic-dialectic as envisioned by Hanada finds its highest cinematic expression in *The Song of the Stone*. In this underappreciated work by Matsumoto, the avant-garde documentary's counter-journalistic approach to actuality comes to the fore. The film retains the journalistic referentiality of the original photographs, but the overall appearance of the film no longer resembles that of photojournalism. The film is neither a documentary about stonemasons nor about Ernest Satow; instead it presents itself as a new kind of document: it is a document that itself documents the discursive and the non-discursive processes of re-defining documentary as an avant-gardist practice. The film's critical relevance derives from its particular status as *the* exemplary document of the avant-garde documentary movement. It functions as visible evidence of critics and artists' collective efforts to find alternative ways of appropriating and incorporating documentary traditions into avant-garde artistic practices. But how did Matsumoto arrive at this point? What does his "counter-journalistic" approach to the dominant practice of documentary journalism tell us about the avant-garde documentary movement as a whole? In order to answer these questions, we need to return to the formative years of the late 1950s, when a number of avant-gardist critics, writers, and filmmakers turned to the documentary genre as a method of critical engagement with their present.

The Emergence of the Avant-garde Documentary Movement

While Matsumoto's *Song of the Stone* may be the most successful case of dialectically synthesizing documentary and avant-garde techniques and stylistic conventions, Matsumoto was certainly not the only one to attempt to carry out this project. Though different in degree, filmmakers such as Teshigahara Hiroshi, Oshima Nagisa and Wakamatsu Kôji also carried on comparable projects of incorporating topical journalistic materials into the realm of fiction in ways that similarly highlight the tension between the actuality-effect constructed by the mainstream media and the avant-garde effects of defamiliarization. They did so not because they happen to adopt the same stylistic conventions, such as the use of freeze- and still-frames and extreme close-ups, but because they come out of the same cultural milieu, where Hanada's theorization of the dialectical synthesis of documentary and avant-garde had already taken root.

In order to investigate this historically specific cultural milieu, we need first to turn to the formation of the exemplary avant-gardist group: *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* (Association for Documentary Art). *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* not only brought together notable intellectual and artistic figures such as Hanada Kiyoteru, Abé Kôbô, Teshigahara Hiroshi, Sasaki Kiichi, and Haryû Ichirô, but also it gave rise to the discourse on "actuality," which produced a considerable impact outside their immediate group. The initial impetus for its creation came from their monthly group discussions of film, which were published serially in the Marxist literary journal *Shinnihon bungaku* (New Japanese Literature). The association was officially launched in May 1956. From the very beginning, the association was known for building an inter-medial community of artists and critics. It enlisted a variety of writers, poets, filmmakers, photographers, painters, and

critics. In this sense its organizational policy was a continuation of earlier postwar avant-garde collectives such as *Yoru no kai* (also founded by Hanada together with abstract painter Okamoto Tarô). What was unique about this new group, however, was its avowed interest in documentary.¹¹¹ Its statement of purpose published in 1957, specifies that the *Association for Documentary Art* is an artists' collective based on the "spirit of documentary." The spirit of documentary is, moreover, defined as "a consciousness of methodology" that aims "to fight any attempts to fixate art, to destroy conventional ideas about beauty, to revolutionize, reorganize, and expand artistic means in order to explore ever-new artistic terrains." The statement also adds that its methodology, though based on documentary, "does not exclude fictional devices in art." What it rejects is, however, "aristocratic aestheticism."¹¹²

As one of its members Tamai Goichi puts it, the principal aim of the association was to *reinvent* the concept of documentary itself. As they saw it, there was a problem with the "booming popularity of documentary" in postwar Japanese society, which was instilling stereotyped conceptions of the documentary and other non-fiction genres in the public consciousness. During the 1950s and early 1960s mainstream Japanese society embraced mass media's representation of the "real" world. Literary reportage and non-fiction literature made a big comeback, and productions of documentary programs on television soared. Meanwhile, as pure literature critics have grudgingly acknowledged, crime fiction based on real life incidents swept through the literary market. In short, documentary journalism was in the midst of its heyday. People were fascinated with the

¹¹¹ By "documentary" these writers refer not only to documentary film but also to reportage writing.

¹¹² Tamai Goichi, "Kiroku geijutsu no kai: Geijutsu undô shôkai I" [The Association for Documentary Art: Introductions of Artistic Movements I], *Shinnihon bungaku* [New Japanese Literature], 12.11 (October 1957), 127.

lure of actuality and the actuality-effect constructed by the media became the key ingredient in Japan's booming culture industry. The media latched onto the public's desire for the factual – and sensational – accounts of real life incidents. In short, the actuality-effect constructed and relayed by the media was becoming a renewed attraction for the entertainment as well as journalistic sectors of the culture industry. It is probable that the intensified mediatization of actuality owes a lot to the rise of television, whose capacity for live broadcasting undoubtedly contributed to the public's heightened interest in the unfolding of unscripted reality in front of the camera. But the television could not have been the sole cause of it. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to pin down exactly which cultural and social factors contributed this widespread obsession with the real. Instead, what I want to do is to analyze different artistic responses to this historical situation. The emergence of artist collectives, such as *Kiroku geijutsu no kai*, was one such response. The aforementioned stylistic change in 1960s filmmaking (i.e. the appropriation of the documentary technique of incorporating still photographs and the direct citation of topical journalistic materials by filmmakers, such as Matsumoto, Teshigahara, Oshima, and Wakamatsu) was another such response. Similarly, I regard a literary critic Hirano Ken's appeal to the notion of "novelistic actuality," which constituted the kernel of the Debate over Pure Literature, as a different kind of response to the same historical situation. (I will come back to Hirano's argument and the relevance of this literary debate later.)

Against the grain of the mass media facilitated cultural obsession with actuality, those involved in the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* remained suspicious of the self-evidentiality of fact implicit in the journalistic presentation of actuality. Instead of riding along with

the general sentiment, avant-garde critics and artists hence proposed a rethinking of the very concepts of actuality and documentary. For instance, in his 1958 essay titled *Shin kiroku shugi no teishô* (“In Support of the New Documentarism”) Abé Kôbô defends the activities of *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* by noting how the members of this group are opposed to “the existing concept of documentary.” Curiously, instead of emphasizing the factual, in his definition of documentary Abé draws readers’ attention to the primacy of the accidental and the unpredictable, that is, to events that evade the control of human consciousness. In this manner he foregrounds the elements of chance rather than factuality in documentary:

If I were to simplify it, the spirit of documentary is a respect for the accidental elements that fall outside our consciousness. When this method was exclusively targeting the interior world, it was called the method of Surrealism. Hanada Kiyoteru predicted a long time ago that the development of a new realism is possible if we inverse the direction of this special method of Surrealism; that is, if, instead of aiming at the interior world, we aim towards the exterior world in the corresponding manner. The documentary method today needs to follow Hanada’s earlier suggestion.¹¹³

What he calls the “spirit of documentary” is thus defined here first and foremost by its respect for the accidental, the contingent, and chance. Abé metonymically links the elements of chance, which French Surrealism valued, to the method of documentary, and he does not seem to see any discrepancy between the practice of documentary and that of surrealism. The method of documentary thus defined in terms of unpredictability is further linked to the world *beyond* the control of human consciousness. It is not hard to detect in this definition Abé’s deep-seated distrust of the habitual – and hence predictable – understanding of reality. Not surprisingly, instead of affirming documentary’s claim for the factual, he therefore posits the defamiliarization of habitual, familiar, and predictable

¹¹³ Abé Kôbô, “Shin kiroku shugi no teishô” [In Support of the New Documentarism], *Shisô* (July 1958), 98.

experiences as the fundamental characteristics of documentary. The concept of the documentary is thus severed from the positivist task of pursuing facts, and grafted onto the typical avant-gardist mode of destroying perceptual habits. This dislocation of the concept of the documentary, from the generic terrain of the non-fictional presentation of facts to the avant-garde contestation of perceptual habits, constitutes both the strength and weakness of Abé's theory, and by extension, of the avant-garde documentary movement.

However, instead of simply pointing to the theoretical limitations of this avant-gardist reconceptualization of the documentary, I want to historicize the significance and timing of this reconceptualization of documentary within the larger context of Japan's postwar avant-garde movement and film practice. Here, Abé's direct reference to Hanada's theory of the avant-garde in his discussion of the documentary proves crucial. As I have suggested earlier, Hanada promoted the idea of a dialectical synthesis of the avant-garde and the documentary in the early 1950s. Unfortunately, however, he never presented his theory in a systematic manner. He wrote about it sporadically in dozens of his critical essays. As a result, the examples of avant-garde and documentary art he uses vary from time to time. Sometimes Hanada refers to the surrealist love for *objets trouvés*, or British documentary films of the 1930s; other times he refers to Disney's animation and photojournalism. Occasionally he even discusses Japanese graffiti of the Edo period and Mayakovsky's poetry as examples of the documentary spirit. The examples he uses to explain the tension between the avant-garde and documentary thus vary, but the basic tenet of his theory remains consistent. It always emphasizes the importance of keeping an elliptic-dialectical tension between what he sees as avant-garde elements and

documentary elements. Specifically, the kernel of Hanada's argument concerns an elliptic-dialectical tension between the process of defamiliarization and the process of recording. As I argue in the previous chapter, Hanada's conception of the dialectic should be understood as a dynamic-differential process, which does not arrive at a complete unification of the opposing terms. There is no moment wherein the opposing forces dissolve into a single focal point. Instead Hanada understands the dynamics of the dialectic through the tension-filled poise of the ellipse. The constant differential movements of two opposing forces hence sustain the elliptic-dialectic, forcing each to occupy the separate focal points of an ellipse. According to this understanding of the elliptic-dialectic, the avant-garde technique of defamiliarization must be always accompanied by the documentary technique of recording and vice versa. Neither technique can stand alone. It is what might be called "differential-complementarity" that characterizes Hanada's vision of the avant-garde documentary.

The 1950 essay titled *Kagami no kuni no fûkei* ("Landscapes in the Land of Mirrors") sets this theoretical vision to work. In this essay Hanada elaborates Breton's definition of surrealism as "pure psychic automatism." He compares the surrealist method of automatic writing, which presumably "records" the trace of the unconscious, to the factual reporting of the natural world by travelers. Both are said to be documentary recordings of two complementary realities: one psychic and the other physical, one interior and the other exterior. Hanada draws his analogy between the surrealist method of automatism and the documentary method of travelogue from Breton's own analogy of pure psychic automatism as "dictation," the act of faithful recording word by word.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*, 36.

In his 1953 essay on European avant-garde films of the 1920s, Hanada again compares the automatic method of surrealism to that of documentary. This time he calls the surrealist approach to psychic reality “reportage.”¹¹⁵ The general tendency of European avant-garde art of the 1910s and 1920s is further described in terms of “internal realism.” Yet Hanada’s understanding of realism here is not reducible to that of the nineteenth century literary and the pictorial practices grouped under that term. Documentary, reportage, and realism – terms which carry the conceptual baggage of nineteenth century positivism – are redefined in relation to what is generally thought as positivism’s adversary: the historical avant-garde of the early twentieth century.

Hanada’s vision of the dialectical synthesis of avant-garde and documentary was given a new name in 1958: *sur*-documentarism. He coined this term in his essay titled “On *Sur*-Documentarism” published in the February issue of *Eiga hihyô* (Film Criticism). The timely publication of this essay must also be noted. It came out two years after the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* was launched, and in the same year when two other important essays on similar topics were published. One was the aforementioned essay “In Support of the New Documentarism” by Abé Kôbô, published in the July issue of *Shisô* (Thought). The other was Matsumoto Toshio’s essay, “A Theory of the Avant-garde Documentary Film,” published in the May issue of *Kiroku eiga* (Documentary Film). All three advocated a rethinking of the documentary from the avant-garde perspective, and the creation of an innovative kind of documentary art. Taken together these three essays attest to the historical emergence of what I have been calling *the avant-garde documentary movement*.

¹¹⁵ Hanada Kiyoteru, “Nijûnendai no ‘abangyarudo’” [The ‘Avant-garde’ of the 1920s], *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushû* [Selected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol.3, 203.

While Matsumoto was not an official member of *Kiroku geijutsu no kai*, he clearly belongs to Hanada's circle of avant-garde critics and artists. In the aforementioned essay, Matsumoto writes:

To use the expressions of Hanada Kiyoteru, the avant-garde films [of the 1920s] boldly visualized the movement of the non-concrete but rational world of ideas on the one hand, and the movement of the concrete but irrational world of the unconscious on the other. But there is a definite limit to this historical avant-garde method. Given the various transformations that took place both in the social realm and in artists' subjectivities since the 1930s, the method of the historical avant-garde is no longer relevant to the problems that contemporary avant-garde artists face today.¹¹⁶

Not surprisingly, when Matsumoto published this essay in the documentary film journal it was greeted with skepticism. Japanese documentary filmmaking at the time was still following the dominant stylistics of Griersonian realism and the propagandist "culture film" (*bunka eiga*) of the wartime period. His suggestion that documentary filmmakers must pay attention to the psychic realm of the unconscious was groundbreaking, but it was not easily acceptable.

Echoing the view of Abé, Matsumoto also argues for the importance of defamiliarizing familiar perceptions of reality. Documentary, he argues, needs to become the artistic method of "unveiling" the veil of conventional meanings attached to things. Facts are not to be embraced, but interrogated. Discovering "the naked state of things" and destroying the perceptual stereotypes that cover them over must become the primary tasks of documentary filmmaking. He contends, "If we strip off commonsensical cause-effect relations from the surface of reality, I guarantee that our contemporary reality will appear surreal."¹¹⁷ Clearly, Matsumoto's understanding of the documentary and its capacity to "unveil" the pre-signifying ("naked") state of things approximates the

¹¹⁶ Matsumoto Toshio, "Zen'ei kiroku eiga ron," *Eizô no hakken* [The Discovery of the Mechanically-Produced-Image] (Tokyo: Seiryû shuppan, 2005), 58.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 62.

argument put forward by the Russian formalists. For instance, in his discussion of Shklovsky's famed concept of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) Boris Éjxenbaum claimed, "Art is conceived as a way of breaking down automatism in perception."¹¹⁸ The aim of art as understood by the Russian formalists was to bring about "a special perception of a thing" by breaking down the automatism of habituated perception. Matsumoto too holds a similar view that documentary filmmaking is an artistic mode of undoing perceptual automatism. Its aim is to enable its spectator (and filmmaker) to perceive "things" in their "naked states." But the question is *how* one can take down the automatized façade of commonsense and habit, and bring about this special perception – a perception that does not recognize, but only prehends – all the while claiming to be critically relevant to contemporary society. In fact, defamiliarization alone is not enough to make a work of art "actual" to the specific historical situation or to make it politically relevant. Excessive destruction of perceptual habits would simply recede into abstraction, causing a work to lose any referential anchorage necessary to comment upon the given present-day actualities.

Matsumoto clearly grappled with this dilemma of how to induce such pre-signifying perceptual states through the processes of filming and editing, while retaining the fundamental trait of documentary practice: referentiality. He not only wrote about the difficulty of synthesizing avant-garde and documentary practices, but, as we saw earlier, he also experimented with it in his own work. However, while *The Song of the Stone* might be a successful instance of this synthesis, not all of his works are. Given the arduous challenge of synthesizing the avant-garde and the documentary, it is not

¹¹⁸ Boris M. Éjxenbaum, "The Theory of the Formal Method," in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, eds. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorka (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002), 13.

surprising that Matsumoto's experimental documentary filmmaking practice gradually shifted away from a politicized mode to a more aestheticized mode. In the late 1960s and 1970s, Matsumoto began experimenting with multiple-projection, video, and the computer; his work increasingly centered on the task of manipulating the legibility of images generated by filtering processes made possible by optical printers and computers. His eventual interest in the materiality of cinematic and electronic media led him to leave behind his earlier interest in the relation between visual media and journalistic actuality; but this transformation falls outside the purview of the present dissertation project. My task here is to uncover Matsumoto's earlier theoretical interest in the elliptic-dialectical tension between the avant-garde and documentary through his writings and filmic works.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Matsumoto, Hanada and Abé, were still hopeful about avant-garde documentary's potential to record reality and defamiliarize it at the same time.¹¹⁹ In asking what elements in filmmaking would help us challenge perceptual stereotypes, Matsumoto answers "framing, montage, and construction." These three aspects are essential in his view because they are the most basic elements of the cinematic form that pertain to the processes of recording and defamiliarization. However, according to Matsumoto, the existing traditions of documentary and narrative filmmaking failed to challenge perceptual stereotypes because of their inability to interrogate the ways in which cinematic form reinforces habituated modes of human perception. He

¹¹⁹ Given their overemphasis on the technological foundation of visual media's intervention into human perception, one may be tempted to compare their enthusiasm to that of the European and Japanese futurists; however, their interest in visual media was accompanied by their acute awareness of the structuring function of language in the process of human cognition, a point to which I will come back in the next chapter. If they insisted on the notion of "things," it is because for them the central concern was the *unlearning* of habit, as mediated by language, in human perception. Their interest in visual media was thus directed neither at the technologically induced shock-effects nor at the aesthetic and visceral fascinations with the speed of machines but rather at the undermining of perceptual automatism through the technical mediation of another kind of automatism: mechanical recording.

argues that the conventional codes of filmmaking rest too comfortably upon the mechanical reproduction of phenomenological impressions of reality. In so doing film uncritically accepts mechanical realism as the given and, as a result, the cinema continues to mimic our everyday perceptual experience. When documentary filmmaking falls prey to this mimetic reproduction of perceptual reality, it naïvely affirms the self-evidentiality of the mechanically produced image. However, it is precisely the self-evidentiality of the image that needs to be interrogated first.¹²⁰

Hence, in order to interrogate this self-evidentiality, argues Matsumoto, the filmmaker must attain self-reflexivity. The process of making a documentary film could *then* become a dialectical process of recording external physical reality as well as internal psychic reality. He writes, “What I call documentary is . . . to record the trajectory of the filmmaker’s gazing, that is to say, the gazing of reality with naked eyes devoid of preconceptions.”¹²¹ Elsewhere Matsumoto calls this dialectical process of recording and defamiliarization “neo-documentary.” The neo-documentary filmmaker is someone who is endowed with the awareness that “reality can be recorded only as the document of the filmmaker’s will to ‘see’ it.”¹²² To put it differently, neo-documentary filmmaking would incorporate the elliptic-dialectical tension between the self-evident appearance of reality and the filmmaker’s negation of it.

This is where Matsumoto comes closest to Abé Kôbô. Both thinkers regard the avant-garde documentary processes of recording and defamiliarization as ways of destabilizing established circuits between perception and signification. From time to time

¹²⁰ Matsumoto Toshio, “Hôhō to imêji” [The Method and the Image], *Eizô no hakken* [The Discovery of the Mechanically-Produced-Image] (Tokyo: Seiryû shuppan, 2005), 66.

¹²¹ Matsumoto Toshio, “Neo-documentarizumu to wa nanika” [What is Neo-Documentarism?] *Eizô no hakken* [The Discovery of the Mechanically-Produced-Image] (Tokyo: Seiryû shuppan, 2005), 74.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 75.

Matsumoto's vocabulary overlaps with that of Abé. The questions of automatized human perception, language, mechanically-produced-images (*eizô*), and "things" are elements that recur in both of their writings. As I will discuss more in depth in the next chapter, for Abé the term "things" stands in for a not-yet-named state of existence. Similarly, for Matsumoto, "things" are also that which eludes the double snares of signification and human consciousness:

When we use the expression such as external "things" or internal "things," it means "reality consciously perceived for the first time." This naked reality becomes an object of consciousness for the first time when the consciousness encounters the not-yet-conscious reality of the external world or the internal world. Because this is the not-yet-named and the not-yet-experienced reality, it cannot help but to destroy conventional ideas and perceptual stereotypes. As a result, the correspondent relation between consciousness and reality gets transformed; this transformation occurs because the fissure opened up between consciousness and reality needs to be corrected with critical awareness.¹²³

I want to highlight phrases, such as "naked reality," "the not-yet-experienced reality," "things," and "stereotypes." These are exactly the same phrases that appear in the writings of Abé Kôbô. Because of their disciplinary difference – Matsumoto being a filmmaker and Abé being a writer – their theoretical similarities have hardly attracted the attention of scholars (whether in literary studies or in film studies). However, the discursive connection between Matsumoto's and Abé's theorization of the avant-garde documentary must be acknowledged and investigated in order to understand the interlocking strata of postwar Japanese literary and film theories. This connection between the literary and filmic discourses can be even more clearly understood if we turn to the Debate over Pure Literature, which erupted at the beginning of the 1960s.

¹²³ Ibid., 80.

The Actuality of Pure Literature

The term *junbungaku* is often translated as “pure” or serious literature, and generally designates a canon of modern Japanese prose writings regarded as worthy of being called art. But the taxonomic efficacy of this term remains suspect today. As Edward Seidensticker puts it, “The expression *junbungaku* (pure literature) is as shift and elusive as most critical terms, but it obviously has reference to something admired by the critic who makes serious use of it.”¹²⁴ I am evoking this term here neither to debunk its ideological implications (that is, its indebtedness to eighteenth century European aesthetics and its advocacy of art’s autonomy), nor to affirm it by rehashing a textbook history of the modern Japanese literary canon (which is too often conflated with the development of the pure literature). Instead, what I want to provide here is a context and vocabulary to understand the argument for the “novelistic actuality,” put forward by the postwar literary critic Hirano Ken, which gave rise to the historical event of the Debate over Pure Literature. As we shall see shortly, Hirano’s argument borrows its most crucial terms from Hanada’s earlier theorization of documentary. In fact, Hirano appropriates the concept of actuality, but only in order to advance an argument quite different from that of Hanada. Their shared interest in the concept of actuality notwithstanding, the disparity between these two theorists must be acknowledged and carefully examined.

As its adjective indicates, the concept of pure literature has its definitive correlate: mass or popular literature (*taishū bungaku*). Over the years, however, the purported difference between pure and mass literatures has been repeatedly questioned, discarded, resurrected, and rejected again. Today, it is often argued, the difference between the two

¹²⁴ Edward Seidensticker, “The ‘Pure’ and The ‘in-Between’ in Modern Japanese Theories of the Novel,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 26 (1966), 175.

– qualitative and otherwise – is a topic only academics discuss, and is something writers are no longer concerned about, as they had been in the prewar period. It is indeed tempting to dismiss this category of pure literature as an outmoded discursive construction altogether; yet its historical development is worth review, since it informs the full implications of the Debate over Pure Literature, itself a memorable discursive event in the history of Japanese literary criticism.

While the idea of literary purity had existed since the Meiji period (1868-1912), when arguably the modern conception of literature as art took root in Japan, it was during the massive urbanization of the 1930s that the literary establishment (*bundan*) pitted the aesthetic autonomy of pure literature against the growing market for mass literature. But the boundary between the two was never absolute, and writers and critics at the time were constantly divided in their opinion over this ideological distinction. Just to give some examples, eminent writers, such as Tanizaki Jun'ichirô (1886-1965), prioritized the intrigue of plot and thus the entertainment value of the novel over its purported purity. Others such as Yokomitsu Riichi (1898-1947), another canonical writer, promoted a compromise with the idea of the “in-between” novel (*chûkan shôsetsu*).

In principle, the classification of a novelistic work as “pure,” “in-between,” or “mass” literature depended upon its publication venue; literary coterie magazines were usually reserved for pure literary works, and general-interest magazines and newspapers for in-between and mass literature. Yet as Hirano points out in the Debate over Pure Literature, the material basis for this distinction had long been inaccurate by the beginning of the 1960s, since most pure literature writers *did* write for newspapers and

general-interest magazines.¹²⁵ The exponential expansion of the publishing industry in the postwar years, not least in the area of weekly magazines, contributed to this accelerated professionalization of pure literature writers.¹²⁶ By the end of the 1950s it became painfully clear to most that pure literature writers – like mass literature writers – made their living by *selling* their writing: pure literature was a commodity, just like any other product. Added to this already dubious status of pure literature in the postwar period was the unabashed commercialism of younger generations of writers, such as Ishihara Shintarô.¹²⁷ Ishihara's career is just one of many examples that attest to the glaring ideological contradictions surrounding the purported purity of pure literature. Out of this climate came Hirano's statement that the concept of pure literature was already bankrupt.

¹²⁵ Hirano Ken, ““Gunzô jûgoshûnen ni yosete” [For the 15th Anniversary of *Gunzô*], *Sengo bungaku ronsô* [Postwar Literary Debates], eds. Usui Yoshimi, et.al. (Tokyo: Banchô shobô, 1972), 475-476.

¹²⁶ In the Meiji and Taisho periods prominent pure literature writers often held jobs in academia or the press. Of course, there were also writers who enjoyed the fortune of inheriting large sums of money and did not have to work. For this reason, some critics have argued that the best pure literature should be considered a product of *avocation* rather than *vocation*. The flipside of this argument entailed the idea that the production of pure literature should not become a means of earning income. The most widely known argument in this vein is Kume Masao's essay, “Junbungaku yogisetu” [A View on Pure Literature as Avocation], published in the literary journal *Bungei shunju* in 1935. Kume proposed this view in order to warn pure literary critics and writers who were stuck in the double bind of trying to professionalize pure literature (as a means of making living) on the one hand, and to differentiate pure literature from mass literature on the other. See, Kume Masao, “Junbungaku yogisetu,” *Gendai nihon bungaku ronsôshi* [A History of Modern Japanese Literary Debates], Vol.1, eds. Hirano Ken, et. al. (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1956), 132-134.

¹²⁷ Ishihara received the prestigious Akutagawa prize for his bestselling novel *Taiyô no kisetsu* (Season of the Sun) in 1956. While he was elevated to the level of pure literature writer, he also entered into a contract with the Nikkatsu film studio to make its filmic adaptation. To the dismay of the older generations of pure literature critics and writers, Ishihara's work succeeded in attracting widespread support from youth, literally expanding the market for pure literature. Ishihara was both chastised and admired for his audacity. He once even claimed that if he made some money off selling his novels, he would “give up writing novels and play the stock market instead.” What was particularly offensive in this comment was that the amount of money he cited (five million yen or approximately fifteen thousand U.S. dollars) was not a large sum. In the words of critic Togaeri Hajime, “Such a manner of speaking invited antipathy from the grownups in the literary establishment” since the old moral of spending one's entire life writing novels – not writing novels to make one's living – was still persistent among the Japanese literary establishment. See Togaeri Hajime, *Bundan no hôkai* [The Breakup of the Literary Establishment], Tokyo: Murayama shoten, 1957, 55. He indeed gave up writing, and became a politician at the end of the 1960s. Ishihara has been the mayor of Tokyo since 1999.

In December 1961, Hirano published an essay in the literary coterie magazine, *Bungakukai* (The Literary World), wherein he introduced the concept of “actuality” into an on-going discussion of pure literature. This essay was originally part of his serialized survey of the literature of the 1930s. Through this essay Hirano attempted to respond to his critics, who were already taking issue with Hirano’s statement (made a few months earlier) that the concept of pure literature was obsolete. In this follow-up essay, however, instead of simply doing away with the concept of pure literature, Hirano proposed to re-think the historical development of the category of pure literature. Drawing on the literary climate of the 1930s, the era already marked by the full-fledged appearance of mass consumer society in Japan, Hirano suggests that there are indeed three competing ways of defining prose literature.¹²⁸ The concept of purity is just one kind, which is primarily supported by those who believe in art for the sake of art. Against this view of “the novel of purity,” he argues, there also exist two other kinds, one of which is the view of “the novel of amusement,” and the other is the view of “the novel of actuality.”

Hirano claims to have drawn this third model – the novel of actuality – from the writings of Kikuchi Kan and Hirotsu Kazuo, both of whom argued in the mid-1930s that the most important value of the novelistic writing lies in its proximity to “life, reality, and society.” According to Hirano:

Kikuchi and Hirotsu liberated the literary genre of the novel from the existing theories of art in general. In so doing, they tried to find the defining characteristics of the novel in its adherence to life, reality, and society. Hirotsu defined the novel as something that is adjacent to life, and Kikuchi emphasized the value of subject matter over everything else. This was, in a way, *a non-artistic view of the novel*. This view is completely opposed to today’s conception of pure literature.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ For an extensive analysis of the historical emergence of mass culture in Japan, see Marilyn Ivy, “Formations of Mass Culture,” *Postwar Japan as History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 239-258.

¹²⁹ Hirano Ken, “Chûkan no shimekukuri” [An Interim Wrap-up], *Sengo bungaku ronsô* [Postwar Literary Debates], eds. Usui Yoshimi, et.al. (Tokyo: Banchô shobô, 1972), 492. The emphasis is mine.

Hirano makes great effort to emphasize the importance of Kikuchi and Hirotsu's non-artistic conception of the novel in this essay. Instead of positing the value of artistic purity or entertainment, this way of conceiving the novel centers on its journalistic referential capacity; that is, it prioritizes the novel's ability to depict, report, and analyze present-day actualities. Importantly, neither Kikuchi nor Hirotsu used the specific term "actuality" (*akuchuariti*) to describe their views of the novel. As Hirano acknowledges in passing, the term itself is "a contemporary idiom," which he is only borrowing in order to make sense of Kikuchi and Hirotsu's positions.

Importantly, Hirano's subtle reference to the contemporaneity of this term has been glossed over by the scholars of Japanese literature. However, despite scholarly dismissals of this reference, it proves indispensable for the analysis of Japanese theoretical discourses on literature and visual media in the postwar period. First, it helps us to see how the entire debate over pure literature was *historically conditioned* by the prior avant-garde discourse on actuality, which Hanada's group generated in the late 1950s. Second, it makes clear that actuality is a transversal concept, which straddles the heterogeneous discourses of avant-garde art and pure literature. As I mentioned above, this historical connection between the avant-garde and pure literature has been overlooked in the established literary history of Japanese literature, which dogmatically polices its disciplinary boundaries. The avant-garde discourse circulated by Hanada's group, with its heavy focus on visual media (film in particular), is hence excluded *in advance* from the proper domain of Japanese literary history. However, we could gain a more nuanced understanding of the intellectual and artistic climate of postwar Japan,

when we take an interdisciplinary approach to it. Before I comment further on this point, however, a brief examination of key responses given to Hirano's theory is in order.

Understandably, many critics raised objections to Hirano's claim that actuality could be considered the most important factor for revitalizing pure literature, and that pure literature writers should learn from the writers of crime fiction and political novels, which take real life incidents as their primary referents. One of those who squarely opposed this suggestion was Nakamura Mitsuo. According to Nakamura, actuality is only a temporary attribute of a literary work, which evaporates over time. He suggests that works such as *Shinjû ten no amijima* (The Love Suicides at Amijima) by Chikamatsu Monzaemon or *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert were "actual" at the time of their publications because of their topical references to then current social situations. To the readers of their time the novels would have appeared timely and relevant, but not to those who came after. But the fact they remain admired by posterity means that the true literary value of these works resides elsewhere.¹³⁰ Nakamura writes: "For me actuality means factuality, or reality in its most basic sense. Actuality also means topical sociality, or even sensational novelty. This is why I do not think this could become such an important element, which constitutes the 'central axis' of the history of the novel, as [Hirano] suggested."¹³¹

As is evident from Nakamura's argument, the focus of the Debate over Pure Literature quickly shifted from the initial question of whether or not pure literature still existed, to the question of whether or not this journalistic concept of actuality could be used to define pure literature. Other critics followed Nakamura's lead and debated the

¹³⁰ Nakamura Mitsuo, "Kenka dewa naku giron o" [Let us debate instead of fighting], *Sengo bungaku ronsô* [Postwar Literary Debates], eds. Usui Yoshimi, et.al. (Tokyo: Banchô shobô, 1972), 515.

¹³¹ Ibid.

inappropriateness of this concept. One of those who rejected it outright was Yoshimoto Takaaki, a left-wing literary critic and poet known as the intellectual foe of Hanada Kiyoteru. In his 1962 essay titled *Sengo bungaku no genjitsusei: Akuchuariti wa kanôka* (“Realness of Postwar Literature: Is ‘Actuality’ Possible?”), Yoshimoto directly attacks Hirano’s use of actuality as a criterion for literary judgment. For Yoshimoto novelistic actuality is dependent upon fact-based truth claims. But the valorization of facts over other elements, such as literary style and the self-reflexivity of the author, would be simply “regressive.” For it would mean forfeiting the autonomous, “internal” reality of a work of literature. He writes, “Whether you call it actuality or documentary does not matter; the dissolution of expressive consciousness into raw materials means a regression of pure literature. But for pure literature to go through a positive ‘alteration,’ expressive consciousness must be elevated beyond the knowledge of given conditions. In other words, it should lead to revolutionary changes in literary style itself.”¹³²

Yoshimoto’s objection thus presented the orthodox view of literary criticism: a work of literature should be judged by its intrinsic quality, especially through its formal elements, and not by its topical relevance or factual accuracy.¹³³ Importantly, however, Yoshimoto was not alone in pointing out the inadequacy of Hirano’s theory. Hirano himself wavered about his own argument. As early as December 1961, Hirano admitted that he was not entirely comfortable with his initial remark. For instance, in a published dialogue with the writer Haniya Yutaka, Hirano expresses his ambivalence as follows:

¹³² Yoshimoto Takaaki, “Sengo bungaku no genjitsusei: Akuchuariti wa kanôka” [“The Realness of Postwar Literature: Is ‘Actuality’ Possible?”], *Mosha to kagami* [The Copy and The Mirror] (Tokyo: Shunjûsha, 1976), 7.

¹³³ It is worth noting that American New Criticism reached its height in the 1950s, and was introduced to Japan in the early 1960s by critics such as Etô Jun.

On the whole, I dislike what has been referred to as actuality. I have been feeling that actuality is a problem that belongs to the stage prior to what might be called the moment of artistic filtration, and we critics should discuss what has been artistically filtered. You know, in recent years young critics have been saying this and that about actuality, which I never liked. But somehow, under the circumstances, my argument ended up that way.¹³⁴

I want to highlight the passage wherein Hirano suggests that actuality is a concept that “young critics” have been using before he introduced it. This comment deserves attention, since it solves the riddle why he has referred to the term as “a contemporary idiom” in the first place. Elsewhere he also notes, “I initially was of the opinion that Hanada Kiyoteru and others in the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* should handle the issues of actuality and documentary.”¹³⁵ In other words, Hirano admits that he was directly borrowing his key concept of actuality from contemporary avant-garde discourse.

This may appear to be a deceptively simple point to make, but it contains key information that overturns past interpretations of the pure literature debate. To pay attention to Hirano’s reference to Hanada is not a matter of philology; it is a matter of unearthing the historical conditions of possibility for his statement. Here I am using the term “statement” in the specific sense defined by Michel Foucault. A statement is a component of a discourse that is “neither visible nor hidden.” There is nothing hidden behind the statement (Hirano means what he says: actuality is a useful concept for the revitalization of pure literature). But to analyze its epistemological significance requires something more than the usual hermeneutic digging for meaning. As Foucault suggests,

¹³⁴Haniya Yutaka and Hirano Ken, “Teitai no naka no kanôsei” [Possibilities in the State of Stagnation], in *Haniya Yutaka zenshû* by Haniya Yutaka. Vol. 13 (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 2000), 55.

¹³⁵Hirano quoted by Satô Izumi in “1960 nen no akuchuariti/riariti” [Actuality/Reality of 1960], *Gendai shisô* [Contemporary Thought], 33.3 (March 2005), 188.

to analyze a statement's historically determined epistemic conditions "requires a certain change of viewpoint and attitude to be recognized and examined in itself."¹³⁶

If Hirano's deployment of the term "actuality" had long puzzled some of the participants of the debate as well as scholars of Japanese literature, it is because they did not dare to go beyond the prescribed boundaries of literary criticism. Seidensticker, for instance, is perplexed over the ambiguity of the term, but reassures English language readers that neither Hirano nor his interlocutors seemed to know what the term really meant. He writes:

It cannot be said that Hirano is a paragon of lucidity, and the foreign reader may take comfort in the fact that Japanese readers seem to have trouble too. In a dialogue between Hirano and Matsumoto Seichô, published in *Gunzô* for June 1962, Matsumoto asked Hirano to define once and for all what he meant by actuality. Hirano answered that it was very simple and talked on for a closely printed page, concluding his discourse thus: 'I but use 'actuality' tentatively to refer to the problem of how to discover something more universal, something that does not immediately fall into patternization.' And so the problem begins and ends in a peculiar Anglo-Japanese jargon, for the last word is the English 'pattern' made abstract by the Japanese suffix *ka*.¹³⁷

The semantic difficulty posed by the term is similarly addressed by Matthew Stretcher, who writes: "Clearly Hirano wishes to use the term 'actuality' as something related to, but not synonymous with, 'realism'; the term 'actuality' seems to encompass both realism in terms of probability and plausibility (that is, people who fall off mountains die), and also the accurate representation of the actual world, including real people and places."¹³⁸

As is evident from Hirano's aforementioned comment that actuality is something that exists *prior* to the artistic process of "filtering" raw materials, realism may not be the

¹³⁶Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse of Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 111.

¹³⁷Seidensticker, 184.

¹³⁸Matthew C. Stretcher, "Purely Mass or Massively Pure? The Division Between 'Pure' and 'Mass' Literature," *Monumenta Nipponica*, 51. 3 (Autumn 1996), 361.

best way to explain his understanding of this concept. Elsewhere Hirano also suggests that the only way to revitalize pure literature is to “socialize” it; pure literature writers must attain “actual interests” in their society.¹³⁹ It is not difficult to detect a similarity between Hirano’s call for the socialization of literature and nineteenth century “realist” literature, especially the work of Balzac. We may recall how Balzac made great use of journalistic coverage of topical scandals, social issues, and up-to-date cultural trends (gleaned from the newspaper repository of *fait divers*). If the term realism were to be used to describe Hirano’s position, then, it should be made clear that it is *not* probability and plausibility that matter, but rather *journalistic interests* that matter. Strecher’s second interpretation (“the accurate representation of the actual world”) seems to fare better, but this also needs modification. It should be made explicit that “the actual world” at stake in Hirano’s argument is located in the present, not the past.

Pushing his argument that pure literature must socialize through its engagement with actuality, Hirano further suggested that politics is the most “actual” matter. This reliance on politics as the criteria of defining pure literature infuriated many of his colleagues, who interpreted Hirano’s argument as a strategic attempt to subordinate literature to politics. As Yoshimoto’s objection demonstrates, critics found Hirano’s overvaluation of the factual (what they called “documentary”) elements in literature unacceptable, and as Nakamura’s reference to the work of playwright Chikamatsu indicates, they particularly disliked Hirano’s elevation of the topical sensational elements in literature.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Hirano Ken, “Chûkan no shimekukuri,” 493.

¹⁴⁰ Chikamatsu’s *jôruri* (puppet) play, *The Love Suicide at Amijima*, is said to have been written in the wake of a tragic double-suicide, which became the news of the day in 1720. The fact that the play was written within a few weeks after the real incident was important in the publicity as well as the popularity of

If Hirano's theory of novelistic actuality caused such negative reactions among literary critics of his time, it was not because he simply endorsed "realism" but because he virtually affirmed political journalism as the model of pure literature. His repeated emphasis upon the medium specificity of prose thus makes sense only when this absent term of journalism is inserted. Although the direct reference to journalism is symptomatically absent from the whole debate, it is the promise of the temporal immediacy and mass appeal of the journalistic mode of communication (something that the purported aesthetic timelessness of pure literature negates) that looms large.¹⁴¹ In order to understand the full implications of Hirano's argument, however, we need to look beyond the limited scope of the pure literature debate, and go back to the avant-garde documentary discourse of the 1950s.

Despite Hirano's conscious borrowing of the term from Hanada's group, the concept of actuality did not signify the same thing for these two parties. In fact, their interpretations are diametrically opposed. I will call Hirano's theory "pro-journalistic." It is pro-journalistic not because it simply appropriates journalistic elements but rather

the work. Its temporal proximity to the real event was as important as its factual reference. It should also be noted that already in the early eighteenth century, when Chikamatsu wrote this play, Japan enjoyed a considerable circulation of printed news. Although Chikamatsu's work belongs to the Edo period (1600-1867), that is to say, the period prior to Japan's modernization, his work is clearly journalistic.

¹⁴¹ The relevance of journalism to this debate becomes even clearer when we take into consideration the general intellectual climate at the beginning of the 1960s. Within fifteen years or so after the end of WWII Japan has undergone dramatic changes, among which was the accelerated pace and the expanded scale of its mass media. From weekly magazines to weekly screenings of films, from hourly radio shows to daily broadcasts on television, the pace life in postwar Japan was firmly set by the media. If the 1930s was the first phase of Japan's transformation into a media society, the 1950s was the second. Added to this was the public's renewed interest in documentary genres, a point that will shortly be discussed further. Intellectuals and artists responded to this changing media environment; some nervously, and others enthusiastically. As in the 1930s, Japanese intellectuals and artists of the 1950s underwent what I have called the journalistic-turn. The Sartrean ideal of social *engagement* found sympathetic supporters among Japanese intellectuals and artists, who, like their French counter-parts, felt a pressing need to break away from the socially inept traditions of aestheticism and academicism. The relation between art and the journalistic media became the question of the day. Given this historical context the seemingly sudden intrusion of documentary journalism into the discourse of pure literature is not as surprising as it may first appear.

because he sees the journalistic mode of reportage as the model of pure literature. As his comment that prose literature is by nature adjacent to reportage suggests, he sees the relation between literature and journalism in terms of resemblance.¹⁴² Pure literature's relation to journalism hence remains mimetic, and the actuality-effect of journalism is transposed onto the realm of literary production. In contrast, I will call Hanada's theoretical model of actuality "counter-journalistic," in which the affirmation of actuality as the "critical relevance" of a work of art to its contemporary social conditions displaces the sensation of the mediatized actuality-effect.

As we saw earlier, the avant-garde discourse on documentary, which Hanada initiated in the 1950s, did not simply affirm journalistic referentiality. Instead, it questioned existing modes of documentary film and literary reportage. In particular, it rejected the self-evidentiality of fact and commonsense. While affirming the referential capacity of journalism to address the immediate present-day actualities, this group of avant-garde documentarists therefore remained skeptical of the overall actuality-effect constructed by the mainstream media. Arguably, it is their skepticism towards the lure of the actuality-effect that pushed them to re-define the concepts of actuality and documentary. After all, the question of documentary composed only half of their theoretical and practical concerns; it occupied one pole of their elliptic-dialectic vision of the avant-garde activism.

¹⁴² Hirano Ken, *Shōwa bungaku no kanōsei* [Possibilities of Shōwa Literature] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1972), 26.

From Material Existence to the Temporal Presence of Actuality

But how, one may ask, did the concept of actuality enter into avant-garde documentary discourse in the first place? As Hirano acknowledges, the popularity of the term “actuality” (*akuchuariti*) largely owes its circulation to the works of Hanada’s group loosely associated with the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* in the 1950s. To understand why this concept became so important among this particular group of avant-garde critics and artists, I will provide a historical perspective from two different angles: the first is the work of Marxist philosopher Tosaka Jun, and the second is the reception of the British documentary film theory by Japanese film critics.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, Hanada and Tosaka share Marxist concerns with the interdependence of the avant-garde (or the vanguard) and the masses, a concern that also manifests in their shared interests in journalism and the mass media. Against the grain of Japanese philosophers immersed in their pursuit of “timeless” truths, Tosaka often argued that philosophy must share a historically situated perspective on journalistic practices, since criticism is what constitutes the kernel of philosophy. He argued: “Whether the period lasts for a day or for a century does not matter, but [philosophical] criticism can function as criticism only when it takes as its point of departure the current-ness (*jijisei*) rooted in a certain period of time or a season. In this sense all criticism – insofar as its value lies in its social function – is a topical commentary upon current affairs.”¹⁴³ Echoing Tosaka, Hanada too emphasizes the importance of re-conceptualizing the avant-garde critic through the figure of the journalist in contradistinction to the transcendent figure of the academician or aesthete

¹⁴³ Tosaka Jun, “Nichijōsei ni tsuite” [On Everydayness], *Tosaka Jun zenshū* [Collected Works of Tosaka Jun], Vol. 4 (Tokyo: Keisōsha, 1966), 140.

who remains aloof to worldly affairs.¹⁴⁴ Tosaka's distinction between journalism and academicism indeed warrants close attention, as it sheds light on Hanada's conception of avant-garde activism.

In his critique of the institutional academic discipline of philosophy, Tosaka argues that philosophy needs to be "actual," and must make itself relevant to the time of the present. Writing in the 1930s against the rise of ethnocentric fascism in Japan, Tosaka fervently argues that the discipline of philosophy must begin to integrate the criticality of journalism, instead of allowing philosophers to avert their gaze from the current political situation and retreat into the safe haven of ideational abstraction. For Tosaka, academicism and journalism form two principal ideological apparatuses, which can be dialectically synthesized to produce a viable critique of existing conditions that will lead to social transformations.¹⁴⁵ He therefore defines philosophy first and foremost as a practice of *timely criticism situated in the present*.¹⁴⁶

Like his European Marxist contemporary Theodor Adorno, Tosaka's interest in historically situated philosophical criticism was also accompanied by his distrust of the transcendental idealist dispositions of a phenomenology that was in vogue at the time. "All branches of phenomenology remain a-historical," writes Tosaka in his *On Japanese Ideology* (1935).¹⁴⁷ In a similar vein Tosaka criticizes Heidegger's philological approach to phenomenology: "Of course nothing is wrong with the existence of philology as a discipline, but the *actuality* of the present world cannot become an object of philological

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Tosaka Jun, "Ideorogii gairon" [General Remarks on Ideology], *Tosaka Jun zenshū* [The Collected Works of Tosaka Jun], Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Keisōsha, 1966), 118.

¹⁴⁶ Tosaka Jun, "Jaonarizumu to tetsugaku no kōshō" [The Encounter between Journalism and Philosophy], *Tosaka Jun zenshū* [The Collected Works of Tosaka Jun], Vol. 4, 148.

¹⁴⁷ Tosaka Jun, *Nihon ideorogiiron* [On Japanese Ideology] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1977), 46.

inquiries.”¹⁴⁸ Here he deliberately uses the loanword *akutuaritii* (“actuality”) to underscore his point. As his earlier works on newspaper journalism and literature make clear, the loanword *akuchuaritii* for Tosaka encompasses both the temporal immediacy and practicality characteristic of journalism. Tosaka’s critique of phenomenology and philology and his affirmation of journalism thus complement one another. Neither phenomenology nor philology offer a philosophical mode of critique that allows critical engagement with present-day actualities.

The dialectical synthesis of philosophy and journalism in turn becomes possible when the critic takes his or her historical relationship to actualities as the necessary condition of criticism. In his writings this particular term “actuality” is hence used in conjunction with related terms, such as “quotidian,” “practical,” “current,” and “topical.”¹⁴⁹ It is a term that is strongly associated with Marxist critiques of present-day conditions. Pointing out Tosaka’s Marxist preoccupation with the temporality of the present, Harry Harootunian also comments upon this concept of actuality and its temporal specificity:

To envisage the current situation – the now – philosophically opened the way to evaluating and even judging those “journalistic phenomena” that concentrate on daily eventfulness (*jijisei*) and to explaining why, therefore, they are necessarily a problem of actuality for both literature and philosophy. Hence, the problem of everydayness was intensely bonded to the question of the “situation” (*jikyoku*), implying, of course, the recognition of a specific temporality.¹⁵⁰

Though Harootunian does not elaborate here, Tosaka draws his temporally specific concept of “actuality” from contemporary academic discourse on newspaper journalism, which was quickly taking shape around 1930.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.48. The emphasis is in the original.

¹⁴⁹ Tosaka, “Jaanarizumu to tetsugaku no kôshô,” 150.

¹⁵⁰ Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 132.

Indeed it is crucial to note that Tosaka devotes several paragraphs in this 1934 essay to explicating this elusive concept of actuality, which he describes alternately by using the Japanese loanword *akuchuaritii* and the English word *actuality*. While Harootunian focuses solely on the Japanese translation (*jissaisei*) for the English word *actuality* used by Tosaka in this essay, it is worth pointing out that Tosaka suggests a more appropriate translation for this English word *actuality* is not *jissaisei* but *jijisei* (“topicality” or “eventfulness” in Harootunian’s translation).¹⁵¹ Tosaka writes: “If we equate the term *akuchuaritii* with the term *jissaisei* [‘practical-facticity’], it unnecessarily invites arbitrary metaphysical interpretation. But if we write it in a more quotidian manner as *jijisei* [‘topicality’] or *jikyokusei* [‘current affairs’], its intended meaning becomes clearer.”¹⁵² My cumbersome literal translation notwithstanding, what I want to highlight in this particular passage is that Tosaka brings up notions of topicality and current affairs that bear strong journalistic overtones. At stake here is the centrality of journalism and its attendant concept of actuality (understood here as timeliness and topical relevance) in Tosaka’s re-conception of the philosophical practice of criticism.

As the historian of journalism Wada Yôichi points out, the academic study of journalism in Japan flourished at the beginning of the 1930s, and Tosaka was one of the first among his contemporaries to write theoretical essays on the topic of newspaper journalism. Another point of interest here is the discursive influence of the German *Zeitungswissenschaft* (newspaper science) upon this generation of Japanese intellectuals

¹⁵¹ I translate *jijisei* (時事性) as “current-ness” or “topicality” in order to emphasize its distinctly temporal and journalistic connotations instead of following Harootunian’s translation (“eventfulness”).

¹⁵² Tosaka, “*Nichijôsei ni tsuite*,” 138.

and media critics.¹⁵³ It is no accident that almost all the bibliographical references in Tosaka's essays on newspaper journalism are German, and that Tosaka uses the German word *Aktualität* interchangeably with the English word *actuality* and the Japanese loanword *aktuaritii* in these essays.

In fact, the concept of actuality was indispensable for many prewar Japanese intellectuals and scholars of the mass media, though its currency weakened when the new generation of the media scholars trained in American theories of mass communication displaced the previous generation that was conversant with the German discourse of *Zeitungswissenschaft*. Tosaka was among the older generation that paid heed to the concept of *Aktualität*.¹⁵⁴ More importantly, he also developed his own Marxist conception of philosophical criticism around this particular concept of actuality. In so doing Tosaka brought together the journalistic concept of *Aktualität* (timeliness and contemporary relevance) and the materialist concept of *Wirklichkeit* (the actually existent reality) in order to express his conviction that the philosopher-critic must engage with temporally present and materially existent reality.¹⁵⁵ The loanword *akuchuaritii* is thus used to convey this view of critical engagement with the present-day reality.

¹⁵³ Wada Yôichi, "Meiji/Taisho ki no jaanarizumuron" [Theories of Journalism During the Meiji and Taisho Periods], *Shinbungaku hyôron* [Newspaper Studies Review] 18 (March 1969): 70-75.

¹⁵⁴ It is worth pointing out here that this particular concept of *Aktualität* also occupies an important place in the philosophical writings of Walter Benjamin, another Marxist critic who was interested in the political use of journalism and the rise of mass media in the 1930s. Another Marxist critic who evoked this concept of *Aktualität* in relation to philosophy is Theodor Adorno. We find a comparable repositioning of philosophy in Adorno's 1931 lecture delivered at the University of Frankfurt, which is aptly titled "The Actuality of Philosophy" (*Die Aktualität der Philosophie*). Like Tosaka, Adorno offers a historical materialist critique of Husserlian phenomenology and Heideggerian ontology for their shared disposition towards a-historical approaches to being and reality. See Theodor Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 29.

¹⁵⁵ Tosaka uses these German terms to clarify his ideas. For instance, he argues that academicism (a term which includes the professionalized fields of literature and art for Tosaka) functions in a contrasting manner to journalism, and is said to embody the quality of *Unaktualität*. It is characterized, in short, by its *in-actual* engagement with reality. Tosaka Jun, "Shinbun genshō no bunseki," 125.

Hanada's frequent deployment of the loanword *akuchuaritii* ("actuality") in his discussion of the avant-garde and documentary suggests the influence of Tosaka's earlier theorization of actuality. What unites these two Marxist thinkers is their particular understanding of cultural criticism; it is a historically determined, time-bound act addressing the present. Neither of them takes criticism to mean simple commentary or exegetic acts performed in the abstract realm of theory. Their shared interest in the concept of actuality indicates their Marxist conception of criticism *as* a mode of praxis firmly rooted in the present.

Secondly, but also in a related manner, "actuality" (*akuchuariti*) became a key word among the postwar avant-garde critics and artists gathered around Hanada because of its semantic difference from the word "reality" (*riariti*). The term reality was too close to the connotations of philosophical idealism and socialist realism, from which these avant-garde critics and artists wished to move away. They thus enlisted the term actuality in order to part ways from the existing discourses on artistic realism while they ventured to redefine the concept of documentary.

In a roundtable discussion held in 1957, for instance, Hanada suggests that a clear distinction must be made between "reality" and "actuality." He notes, "There has been a tendency to contrast reality to actuality; in order to shatter socialist realism we should focus more on the latter aspect of actuality."¹⁵⁶ In the early 1950s Hanada also took issue with the well-known film critic Tsumura Hideo's interpretation of British documentary film theory.¹⁵⁷ In his essay on the British documentary film theorist Paul Rotha, Tsumura

¹⁵⁶ Abé Kôbô et. al. "Haado boirudo: Genzai no me" [Hardboiled: the Eyes of the Present], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [The Complete Works of Abé Kôbô], Vol. 7 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1998), 25.

¹⁵⁷ Hanada Kiyoteru, "Gûzen no mondai" [The Question of Chance], *Hanada Kiyoteru chosakushû* [Selected Works of Hanada Kiyoteru], Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Miraisha, 1963), 35.

argued that Rotha deliberately used the word “actuality” instead of “reality” in his definition of documentary film as the “creative dramatization of actuality.” He proclaimed, “Rotha does not use the expression *dramatization of reality*; instead he says *dramatization of actuality*.”¹⁵⁸ At first sight, this may appear to be a pointless argument, since Rotha was directly quoting this phrase from John Grierson, who indiscriminately used both “reality” and “actuality” in *his* definition of documentary. But in the course of Tsumura’s (mis)reading, a heavily philosophical interpretation of documentary was produced. In his interpretation of Rotha, Tsumura introduced the philosophical categories of reality and actuality; he argued that the conceptual difference between reality and actuality (made by Rotha, according to Tsumura) can be better understood if we translate these English words into German: *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit*.¹⁵⁹

As Tsumura points out, the term *Realität* in German philosophy signifies the metaphysical realm of “truth” or “essence.” By contrast, the term *Wirklichkeit* signifies reality in the sense of concrete material or sensual “existence.” Marx, for instance, used the term *Wirklichkeit* to discuss his materialist understanding of reality in *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845). The intellectual history surrounding these two German words is quite complicated, as Heidegger’s interpretation of Kant suggests.¹⁶⁰ It is not my intention here

¹⁵⁸ Tsumura Hideo, *Zoku eiga to hihyō* [Revised Film and Criticism] (Tokyo: Koyama shoten, 1940), 144.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. These two German words were indiscriminately translated into Japanese using the same word *genjitsu* during the prewar period. It was Tosaka Jun who put an end to this indiscriminate mixing of two terms— *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität* —from a Marxist point of view. As Harry Harootunian suggests, “For Tosaka, *genjitsu* acted as a code for idealist philosophers who envisaged reality at a higher plane of existence than at the level of mere, actual occurrences of society” (*Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*, 129). Tosaka thus began using the loanword *akuchuariti* instead of *genjitsu* in order to attenuate the philosophical baggage of idealism attached to the latter word.

¹⁶⁰ In *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Martin Heidegger warns “not to take the Kantian term ‘reality’ [‘*Realität*’] in the same sense as modern ‘epistemology’ does, according to which ‘reality’ [‘*Realität*’] means the same as ‘actuality’ [‘*Wirklichkeit*’] — which Kant indicates with the terms ‘*Dasein*’ or ‘existence’ [‘*Existenz*’]” (61). In other words, while a finite human existence (*Dasein*) pertains to the existing phenomenal world of “actuality,” pure reason can transcend the limit of empirical knowledge (derived from the phenomenal world) by means of pure concepts. That is, the analytical power of pure reason tries to

to recount all the philosophical debates pertaining to the difference between *Realität* and *Wirklichkeit*. But this distinction is important here, since Tsumura's argument became a direct object of critique in Hanada's theorization of the documentary genre. To sum up, the concept of actuality in Japanese film theory was already heavily inflected by philosophy by the time the avant-garde documentary movement arose.

Importantly, when Hanada challenged Tsumura's interpretation of Rotha's theory in the 1950s, he provided a new interpretation of the key concept of actuality. For Hanada the difference between reality and actuality was not only existential, but also temporal. In his discussion of documentary film theory and its usefulness for avant-garde art, Hanada brought to the forefront the journalistic connotations of actuality as timeliness and relevance, connotations that are present in the German word *Aktualität*. In so doing he followed the suit of Tosaka, redefining the concept of actuality in direct relation to the existing conditions of the present time.

The present is, in turn, defined by chance or accidentality, the potential for an utterly unpredictable change. Explaining this view of the present, Hanada writes, "I think we can regard actuality as accidentality. Reality is what dialectically synthesizes possibility and necessity, but accidentality would be the middle term that mediates both."¹⁶¹ Actuality here is thus envisioned in relation to the openness of the present to unpredictable changes in the future; it becomes the mediating term for the Marxist dialectical conception of history.

"know the supersensible being rationally" by demonstrating the "objective reality" of the conceptual categories, which belong to ontological knowledge and not empirical knowledge. See Martin Heidegger, *Kant and The Problem of Metaphysics*. Fifth Edition. trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 61.

¹⁶¹ Hanada Kiyoteru, "Eiga kantoku ron" [On Film Directors], *Bungakuteki eigaron* [Literary Theories of Film], eds. Noma Hiroshi, et. al. (Tokyo: Chûôkôron, 1957), 76.

However, the theoretical implication of this concept of actuality for the avant-garde documentary movement does not end here. For it brought forth another problem: the *perception* of actuality. As Hanada suggests in the 1954 roundtable discussion aptly titled *Akuchuariti no tame no kadai* (“The Challenge For Actuality”) it is not enough for artists and critics to simply pay attention to their immediate present, to the “here and now.”¹⁶² For the human perception of this immediate present is always already mediated by automatized perceptual habits, ideologies, and technologies of perception. The task of avant-garde documentary thus becomes an interrogation of what immediately appears actual to our sense perceptions. This is why the elliptic-dialectic process of recording and defamiliarization becomes necessary. Documentary practice understood in this way no longer affirms journalistic modes of engagement with the present in a wholehearted manner. Instead it takes *what passes as actuality* as its object of critique, and by extension, the actuality-effect produced by journalism and the mass media. It is for this reason I call the avant-garde documentary approach to actuality “counter-journalistic.”

Here it is instructive to contrast Hirano’s pro-journalistic defense of pure literature and Hanada’s counter-journalistic critique of documentary again. In Hirano’s circular theory of novelistic actuality journalism and art are simply superimposed to form a single static center. In Hanada’s elliptic theory of the avant-garde documentarist actuality journalism and art constitute a veritable dialectic. The secret of the dialectical critique of the present thus resides in the elliptic tension between the journalistic pole of documentary practice and the artistic pole of avant-garde practice.

¹⁶² Hanada Kiyoteru, et. al. “Akuchuariti no tame no kadai” [The Challenge for Actuality], *Bijutsu hihyō* [Art Criticism], 25 (January 1954): 15-31.

As I argued earlier, this elliptic-dialectical tension between the journalistic-documentary pole and the artistic-avant-garde pole also helps us understand sudden stylistic changes occurring in the filmmaking practice of the 1960s. The sudden explosion of the use of the freeze- and still-frames on the one hand, and the use of extreme close-ups on the other, are indicative of this tension. Not all filmmakers attempted to build their work upon this tension, but, as demonstrated, this tension proves productive in the works of Matsumoto Toshio and Teshigahara Hiroshi, two filmmakers who belong to the avant-garde documentary movement. In a different manner, this tension also proved productive for filmmakers who are not directly associated with the avant-garde documentary movement (see Chapter Four and Chapter Five). Importantly, the members of the avant-garde documentary movement articulate this tension more forcefully in their writings than in their artistic works. While this movement did not produce many concrete works that actualized their theoretical viewpoints, their discourse is worth returning to because it addressed the challenges of making avant-garde art “relevant” to its present-day, social, cultural, and political conditions.

The next chapter will turn to the literary and filmic works of Abé Kôbô, another key member of this avant-garde documentary movement, in order to approach this question of the critical relevance of avant-garde practice from a different angle. While this chapter focused on the centrality of documentary practice for this group, the next chapter will focus on the problematic of perceptual habits that constitutes the other pole of the elliptic-dialectic of the avant-garde documentary. In doing so, we will revisit the quintessentially avant-gardist question of habit in relation to the micropolitics of

perception; that is, politics that operate at the molecular level of organizing and delimiting the horizon of our sense perceptions.

CHAPTER THREE

The Wall of Language and the Micropolitics of Perception

In this chapter, I want to examine the question of habit in relation to the micropolitics of perception, and in so doing revisit the most contested notion associated with the practice of avant-garde art: defamiliarization. This notion of defamiliarization has become, arguably, a clichéd tactic belonging to the bygone eras of avant-garde activism and film theory. There are two reasons for revisiting this apparently outmoded tactic: one is historical and the other is theoretical. First, while defamiliarization is often categorically aligned with the legacy and the conceptual limits of the “historical avant-garde” of the 1920s and the politicized film theory of the 1970s, its attendant questions of habit and sense perception appear relevant to current discourses on the correlation between the aesthetic and the political. The recent upsurge of academic interest in the aesthetic theory of Jacques Rancière offers a case in point.

Rancière’s principal notion of the “distribution of the sensible” (*partage du sensible*) emphasizes the policing and ordering of our sense perception, which subsequently delimit what is “visible” and what is “sayable,” and in turn attests to the haunting presence of the seemingly outmoded concept of defamiliarization. In its radically democratic stance of affirming the common, Rancière’s theory of the sensible revisits the question of perceptual habit from the other side of the avant-garde. Instead of simply equating the notion of commonness with the dominant structure of control and regulation over what is sensible or perceptible (as the historical avant-garde did), his theory brings it to the side of its contestants: the common is no longer the object of critique and skepticism, but the site of struggle and an object of affirmation. In this sense

his theory presents an inverted model of the historical avant-garde's affirmation of defamiliarization, in which the very notion of commonness was aligned with habituated orders of sense perceptions (e.g. common sense), and therefore the target of subversion rather than affirmation. But Rancière's reformulation of perception as the ground of politics is not necessarily opposed to avant-gardist contestations of perceptual habit. Though differently inflected, it grapples with the same set of problematics that surround discourses of avant-garde art practice and political vanguardism. For the distribution of the sensible ultimately brings the question of "the common" back into the discourse of art and politics. In so doing, Rancière's theory reformulates the political contestations of the avant-garde in their efforts to disrupt the perceptual habits that support the existing order.¹⁶³

Keeping in mind this renewed interest, on the part of recent leftist theories of art and visual media, in the problematic of sense perception, I want to examine the works of Abé Kôbô from the 1950s and early 1960s, the period when he was involved in what I call the avant-garde documentary movement, whose critical relationship to journalism (the practice that affirms the notion of commonness at its foundation) was discussed in the last chapter. The works of this seminal postwar avant-garde writer provide us with the opportunity to probe some of the actual products of the avant-garde documentary movement, especially of its literary wing. This is the second reason for taking up the notion of defamiliarization and going back to the problem of perceptual habit. Abé's

¹⁶³ For Rancière's conceptualization of politics in relation to commonness, democracy, and policing, see Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). For his discussion of different regimes of art and attendant distributions of the sensible, see Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of the Aesthetics: the Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), and Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007).

work in particular demonstrates how avant-garde contestations of perceptual habits are fundamentally linked to the problem of language. Since, as we will see in this chapter, habit was aligned with the order-giving function of language, visual media became a central mode of exploring alternative modes of perception for this group of postwar artists and critics. Abé's work particularly attests to this type of exploration.

However, as we saw in Chapter One, the elliptic-dialectical understanding of avant-garde activism does not envision the dismissal of order as such; the process of formation as much as that of deformation is necessary. Abé's works attest to the difficult theoretical necessity of sustaining the elliptic-dialectical tension between the formation of habit and the deformation (or defamiliarization) of it. In order to highlight the trajectory of Abé's gradual involvement in visual media, which occurred alongside his involvement in the avant-garde documentary movement, I will start with an analysis of his literary and theoretical writings, and then move onto a close reading of the film, *Suna no onna* (Woman in the Dunes, 1964). This exemplary film provides a concrete platform for interrogating the micropolitics of perception that informs Abé's avant-gardist interest in defamiliarization. Particular attention will be paid to the film's obsession with minute, microscopic modes of perceptions.

The Generality of Language and the Specificity of the Mechanically Produced Image

In the short story titled *Itansha no kokuhatsu* ("Prosecution of the Heretic," 1948), Abé makes the self-proclaimed "jury of humanity" character ask the "I" character the following question: "Do you believe in the existence of things which humans cannot

name?”¹⁶⁴ A few pages later, the “I” defiantly asserts his solidarity with “things and beasts that lurk inside an existence which has yet to become a verb.”¹⁶⁵ According to the logic of this story, the existence that is yet to become a verb remains outside the snare of language. It is yet to be determined, designated, and divided by the copular verb. The existence that is yet to become a verb, in short, belongs to the state of indeterminacy. Crucially, however, Abé aligns this not-yet-named existence with an artistic potentiality on the one hand, and a cognitive threat on the other.

One of Abé’s short essays from 1964, the year when he made the film *Suna no onna* (*Woman in the Dunes*) with his long-time filmmaker friend Teshigahara Hiroshi, briefly returns to this question of naming. While it is safe to say that Abé was concerned with the nominal dimension of language throughout his career, the particular timing of this brief essay warrants attention. In it Abé remarks on the power of language to tame an otherwise threatening existence. Language is a medium by which indeterminate “things” get transformed into determinate objects. Taking the example of a lion, he writes: “At the time when the animal we usually call lion was not yet given this particular name, *it* must have remained a strange monster . . . every time someone encountered *it*, it appeared as an unknown entity.”¹⁶⁶ Only when humans introduced generality through language to designate “it” as a “lion,” were they able to overcome their fear of this unnamed beast.

Language for Abé thus not only provides a grid of intelligibility but also enables one to subsume otherwise dissimilar things under the general category of the same. The price of generalization through language is, of course, the disappearance of the

¹⁶⁴ Abé Kôbô, “Itansha no kokuhatu,” *Abé Kôbô zensakuhin*, Vol. 1 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1972), 154. My translation.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁶⁶ Abé Kôbô, “Kareobana no jidai” [The Era of Dried Pampas Grass], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [The Complete Works of Abé Kôbô]. Vol.18 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1999), 273.

immediate, material, sensual traits of each individual thing: language replaces sensual materiality by conceptual generality. Indeed, the generalizing tendency of language is so ingrained in us that we may no longer perceive the immediate materiality of things. Take the example of a cup on the table. When I *recognize* it as a cup, with which I habitually drink my coffee every morning, it loses its subtle sensuous materiality; the sensation imparted by its color, form, and texture recede into the background as the concept of “a coffee cup” comes to the fore. The relation between words and things for Abé is fundamentally affected by this tension between generality as the habituated mechanism of recognition and the singularity of the sensuous materiality of the not-yet-named. Once taking on the names given by humans, things lose their sensual materiality as if wearing veils. Perceptual habits are precisely that: imperceptible veils thrown over the sensuous bodies of things. Language is what enables perceptual habits to form; language is the veil thrown over things. Photographic or cinematic images, on the other hand, and as we will see in this chapter, offer the tantalizing possibility of making the immediate sensation of things perceptible again.

Ever since the Russian formalists’ suggestion that art is a contestation of the automatism of perception, various avant-garde movements have emphasized the artistic disruption or destabilization of perceptual habits. In his inaugural essay “Art as Technique” (1917) Viktor Shklovsky famously argued: “Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife, and the fear of war . . . And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are

known.”¹⁶⁷ The famed technique of *ostranenie* (“making-strange” or “defamiliarization”) was thus theorized in order to promote art that was capable of destabilizing the perceptual automatism formed through habits. Elsewhere Shklovsky suggests, “A phenomenon, perceived many times, and no longer perceivable, or rather, the method of such dimmed perception, is what I called ‘recognition’ as opposed to ‘seeing.’”¹⁶⁸ To see something without recognizing it, to see it as if it were not-yet-named, is an experience Abé also believed that art was capable of bringing forth. The artist is someone who resists the temptation of naming and the security it provides, and who embraces “herds of ghosts and nameless lions in spite of their fearfulness.”¹⁶⁹

As we can see from the above brief examination, habit undergirded by the generality of language appears as a principal object of criticism and artistic disruption for both Abé and Shklovsky. Habitualization is the process that is diametrically opposed to the process of artistic production. But what is habit? How do we understand this banal concept of habit in relation to techniques of art, such as defamiliarization? Provisionally, we may call habit a micro-technique of perception that imperceptibly forms through the process of repetition, and that supports our global or macro perceptions of reality.¹⁷⁰ Abe’s conception of language as a system of generality, which erases material, sensual specificities of “things” brings forward the question of a difference between what might be called the global macro-perceptions of reality and the fragmentary micro-perceptions

¹⁶⁷ Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

¹⁶⁸ Viktor Shklovsky, *Mayakovsky and His Circle*, trans. Lily Feiler (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1972), 114.

¹⁶⁹ Abé Kôbô, “Kareobana no jidai,” 274.

¹⁷⁰ I am using the term “global” in the general sense of encompassing or relating to the whole rather than the specialized sense of relating to the whole world, which has become more common through contemporary political and cultural theories of globalization.

of it. Defamiliarization can be then redefined as a counter-technique to habit: both are techniques of perceptions but their functions and effects are opposite. This problem of defamiliarization and its relation to different scales of sense perceptions will be further examined through a close reading of the film *Woman in the Dunes*.

Perhaps there is no other Japanese film that has solicited more allegorical interpretations from scholars than *Woman in the Dunes*. Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie call it “an existential parable.”¹⁷¹ Noël Burch calls it “a sumptuous adaptation of Abe Kobo’s symbolic fantasy.”¹⁷² David Desser notes how various film scholars read this film as an allegory of everything from existentialism to Japan’s supposedly traditional cooperationism.¹⁷³ Abé’s identically titled original novel has invited similar interpretations.¹⁷⁴ My aim here is not so much to discredit this massive body of allegorical readings, but rather to approach this film from a different angle, that is, from the angle of the aforementioned techniques of perception: defamiliarization and habit.

Before I embark on the close reading of the film *Woman in the Dunes*, however, I want to offer a brief historical contextualization of his works and close reading of his key literary and theoretical texts. In the late 1950s Abé became involved in *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* (Association for Documentary Art), and started to write more prolifically on cinema and visual media. After four years of prolific activity, *Kiroku geijutsu no kai*

¹⁷¹ Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 469.

¹⁷² Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, 347.

¹⁷³ David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, pp.78-79. As Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano points out, some film scholars go as far as to read the film through the dichotomy of “Eastern” metaphysics versus “Western” metaphysics. See Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, “Ethnicizing the Body and Film: Teshigahara Hiroshi’s *Woman in the Dunes* (1964),” in *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*, eds. Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2007), 183.

¹⁷⁴ For instance, Mutsuko Motoyama sees a direct causal correspondence between the narrative of *Woman in the Dunes* and Abé’s rejection of communist ideology in early 1960s. Motoyama notes how other critics have variously interpreted the “symbolism” of sand. See Mutsuko Motoyama, “The Literature and Politics of Abe Kôbô,” *Monumenta Nipponica*, 50.3 (Autumn 1995), 305-323.

disbanded in 1961. In the following year, the novel version of *Woman in the Dunes* was published, and Abé's first filmic collaboration with Teshigahara was released.¹⁷⁵ A filmic version of *Woman in the Dunes*, which came out in 1964, was their second collaborative work. In 1959-1960, Abé also participated in a series of debates over the difference between language and the "mechanically produced image" (*eizô*); these debates are generally known as the *eizô ronsô*.

While Abé's writings on cinema and visual media are neither widely known nor available in English translation, they offer crucial insights into his otherwise well-known collaboration with Teshigahara. Equally important is Abé's ambivalent attitude towards the representational generality of language and its complicity in the formation of perceptual habits, which manifests most acutely in his conceptualization of naming as a linguistic modes of capturing and subjecting of "things" to the measurement of the human. In contrast, he offers the possibility of escape from the entrapment of language, and by extension, from perceptual habit, through two contrasting methods of defamiliarization. The first is an intensification of the abstracting power of language, which reveals the incorporeal dimension of sense severed from the empirical referent. This play on the abstract, incorporeal dimension of language is best expressed in his short stories that engage with the theme of metamorphosis. The second method is visual. The cinematic device of the close-up and its ability to focus on details rather than a whole becomes crucial for his theorization of this second mode of defamiliarization. As we shall see shortly, Abé's interest in fragmentary details that do not add up to the whole

¹⁷⁵ This is the film *Otoshiana* (*Pitfall*, 1962), which is based on an actual incident that occurred in a declining mining community of Southern Japan in 1960. Abé first dealt with this historical incident in his script written for a television drama called *Rengoku* (*Purgatory*). Teshigahara saw the program, and suggested remaking it into a film, because he thought the visual quality of the original televisual version was inadequate to Abé's story.

antedates his involvement in the practice of filmmaking; however, it was his theorization of the mechanically produced image that gave him the opportunity to develop and refine his idea of disrupting power of details.

While Abé's conception of art resonates well with Shklovsky's theoretical insight, it is not fair to say that he simply followed the path of this Russian formalist. Abé's background in the field of medicine and his lifelong interest in science uniquely inflect his understanding of the artistic process of defamiliarization. It is not accidental that he is known in the West first and foremost as a science fiction writer. Abé was particularly drawn to the study of language dysfunction and perceptual disorders caused by the conditions of aphasia, agnosia, and schizophrenia. Also, one of his stable points of reference is the work of a Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov, whose idea of human language as the second-order signal system he much admired. Throughout his oeuvre Abé makes repeated references to Pavlov's conception of conditioned stimulus as a signal and his idea of language as a secondary system of learned signals, which are built upon the primary signal system (i.e. an organism's conditioned responses to external sensory stimuli). According to one of his friends and a fellow member of the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai*, Abé turned to Pavlov in the 1950s because he was convinced that scientific approaches to language and human perception offered an indispensable insight to revitalize avant-garde art. Abé even persuaded his friend to raise a dog in order to practice Pavlovian reflexology at home.¹⁷⁶

Medical studies of aphasia, agnosia, and schizophrenia, on the other hand, offered him opportunities to rethink the purported normality of habituated modes of human

¹⁷⁶Masaki Kyôtsuke, "Jôkenhansha" [Conditional Reflexes], *Nisegeppô* [A Fake Monthly Report] included as an appendix in *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [The Complete Works of Abé Kôbô]. Vol.8 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1998).

perception. Abé was of the opinion that language inevitably intervened in the process of organizing our sensory perceptions and greatly affected our everyday apperceptions of things. Our ability to assemble fragmentary bits of sensory impressions into a coherent whole, according to Abé, hinges upon the syntactic structure of language. Language is what offers a fundamental order to our perceptual and cognitive syntax, with which we constantly but unconsciously navigate through our everyday activities. As Abé's 1948 short story titled *Na mo naki yoru no tame ni* ("For Nameless Nights") illustrates, when this grid of language is lost even the most banal act of reaching out to a teacup becomes an excruciating experience. This cup is no longer a familiar instrument, but a strangely monstrous "thing."¹⁷⁷

In the slightly revised version of the 1960 essay, titled *Eizô wa gengo no kabe o hakai suruka* ("Do Mechanically-Produced-Images Demolish the Wall of Language?") published in 1965, Abé writes: "Humans have given a name to almost every kind of existence. Not only did they give names, but they have also expressed various relations among things through the articulation of words. An evolution of grammar is then nothing but the evolution of natural, cognitive faculties of human." Conversely, when this essentially syntactical nature of language is disrupted by language disorders, one may lose a sense of even the most basic spatial coordination: "In the severe case of aphasia it is said that patients lose their sense of angles and can no longer use a ruler to cut a piece

¹⁷⁷ Abé makes the narrator of the story say that the man in question who cannot reach and grasp a teacup because he suffers from "the excess of existence" (558). See Abé Kôbô, "Na mo naki yoru no tame ni" [For Nameless Nights], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [Complete Works of Abé Kôbô]. Vol.1 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1997), 486-558.

of wood at the right angle.”¹⁷⁸ The validity of this seemingly “scientific” information is open to debate, but this passage helps illuminate Abé’s decidedly unromantic conception of language.

In a similar manner Abé discusses the difficulty of experiencing a pristine state of perception that is not yet or no longer mediated by language. In order to underscore this point, he makes a further comparison between the perceptual experiences of infants and those of aphasiacs and schizophrenics:

Robbed of the armor of language, patients who suffer from aphasia become as vulnerable as infants. To put it differently, a frightening world composed of naked things that are no longer mediated by language appears. These naked things lack meanings; there is no causality, no connection, no association or induction of ideas. We can only imagine the eerie outlook of these naked things through an analogy of the world of infants, made up of disconnected fragmentary impressions that are experienced as an extension of their oral sensations, or through an analogy of the world of schizophrenia, which is fragmented, deformed, and has lost connections among objects and events.¹⁷⁹

The perception of “naked things” dislocated from the grid of language is here presented as not only threatening, but also sensual. It is a kind of perception that falls short of reaching apprehension. We may use the word *prehension* to describe this immediate state of perception that is not yet anchored in the grid of language. The sensual immediacy of the world experienced by pre-linguistic infants and overwhelmingly fragmentary perceptions of schizophrenics is said to approximate this state of prehension. Nakedness is a trope that stands in for such sensual immediacy of being immersed in the state of prehension rather than apprehension. It is not difficult to hear the resonance between this notion of naked things and the notion of the not-yet-named existence mentioned earlier.

¹⁷⁸ Abé Kôbô, “Eizô wa gengo no kabe o hakai suruka” [“Do Mechanically-Produced-Images Demolish the Wall of Language?”], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [The Complete Works of Abé Kôbô]. Vol.11 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1998), 451.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 452. This comparison may appear uncannily Lacanian in its insistence upon the order-giving nature of language.

This suggests that the trope of nakedness operates closely with the trope of namelessness in his lexicon.

Importantly, Abé published the original version of this essay on the image as a direct response to the claim made by some of the Japanese film critics and filmmakers in 1959-1960. During this time several members of the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* – a media critic Okada Susumu, a documentary filmmaker Hani Susumu, and a literary critic Sasaki Kiichi and Abé – engaged in a series of debates, which came to be known as *eizô ronsô*. Against those who suggested that image-based media, such as cinema, allowed immediate and sensuous communication of thoughts by way of images alone, Abé maintained that every image-based medium activates language without fail. As we saw earlier, language for him is what mediates immediate receptions of sensual data and its subsequent cognition. The moment when the content of an image is recognized, for instance, the image has already solicited language. The imperceptible operation of language infiltrates every medium, including “even the silent 8 mm film that records a simple movement of an insect without the help of an inter-title or a *benshi* [commentator].”¹⁸⁰ Even when it is silent, spectators are able to recognize or identify an image projected on the screen because they are already equipped with the representational grid of language. And this moment of recognition is the indication of spectators’ reliance on the interface of language to sort out and make sense of otherwise amorphous beams of lights and shadows flickering on the screen.

Since perception and signification operate in such an inextricable manner Abé opposed those who believed that cinema instantiates a purely visual mode of communication, in which images speak *like* words and transmit thoughts and ideas

¹⁸⁰ Abé, “Eizô wa gengo no kabe o hakai suruka,” 453.

without the mediation of language as such.¹⁸¹ In particular he disagreed with Okada who posited the autonomy of “language” of visual media, suggesting that his view of visual media was merely analogical. “Most theorists of mechanically produced images,” complained Abé, “stop at the level of an analogical understanding of language and image, trying to set the mechanically produced image on even ground with language.”¹⁸² Then, what *is* language for Abé? He defines language as a mechanism of “synthesis,” which structurally ensures perceptual and cognitive receptions of sensual stimuli: “What I call language is of course neither dialogue nor intertitle, but a deeper and more essential kind of mechanism that is immanent, albeit in the potential form, in all artistic expressions.”¹⁸³

Curiously, however, Abé’s argument becomes noticeably ambivalent when it comes to the potentially disrupting – or defamiliarizing – power of the mechanically produced image. This ambivalence positively distinguishes him from his fellow film critics associated with the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai*, but at the same time, reveals certain limitations of his theorization of the image that comes dangerously close to valorizing defamiliarization as an end in itself. His is essentially a position that refuses to posit the complete autonomy of visual media separate from the influence of language, while asserting the unique capacity of the image to induce a state of prehension. In short, Abé remained suspicious of the idea that image-based media create a completely autonomous

¹⁸¹ Abé’s criticism is directed against other members of *Kiroku geijutsu no kai* who espoused the view that cinema, as a purely visual and gestural mode of communication, could convey thoughts and ideas without the intermediation of language. His principal opponent was Okada Susumu, who insisted on the autonomy of the visual communication from spoken or printed language with an enthusiasm reminiscent of early film theorists, in particular, Béla Balázs. Perhaps it should be added that Sasaki Kiichi, who showed sympathy with Okada’s euphoric view of visual media, was a translator of Balázs and one of the first Japanese theorists to make reference to the work of Walter Benjamin. For Balázs’ discussion of cinema’s capacity to resurrect “the language of gestures” of visual media that threatens to replace the print-based “culture of words,” see Béla Balázs, “Béla Balázs, *Visible Man, or the Culture of Film* (1924), *Screen* 48:1 (Spring 2007): 91-108.

¹⁸² Abé, “Eizô wa gengo no kabe o hakai suruka,” 452.

¹⁸³ Abé Kôbô, “Jikken eiga no shinario” [A Script for An Experimental Film], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [The Complete Works of Abé Kôbô], Vol.11 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1998), 448.

system of communication, but he supported the idea that the mechanically produced image may escape the representational generality of language through its capacity to defamiliarize reality: “When a mechanically produced image does not narrate and just throws grotesque fragments of images it becomes a pure mechanically produced image. If an image starts narrating, however, from that moment on it becomes a mere medium that only solicits language.”¹⁸⁴ In other words, it is difficult but not impossible for the mechanically produced image to strike a viewer in its sensuous immediacy, even if momentarily. The mechanically produced image retains this potential for halting or suspending the signifying operation of language. A rare event, perhaps, but nonetheless a possible one.

Therefore, while Abé maintained his view that film and visual media theorists could not afford to ignore the constitutive nature of language for the human perception, he equally insisted that filmmakers must explore the maximum potential of the cinematic image to destabilize spectators’ perceptual habits. An essay titled *Jikken eiga no shinario* (“A Script for An Experimental Film”) also published in 1960 advances this line of argument: “The reason why I took an oppositional stance towards [Hani Susumu and Okada Susumu], who advocate for mechanically produced image media, is that I wanted to show that I took these images more seriously than they did. They contend that mechanically produced images can construct the world of abstraction just as language constructs it. But this is not possible. In fact, the power and strength of the mechanically produced image resides in *not speaking* like language.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Abé, “Eizô wa gengo no kabe o hakai suruka,” 452.

¹⁸⁵ Abé, “Jikken eiga no shinario,” 447. The emphasis is mine.

Throughout its history, continues Abé, humanity has indeed repeated the same dialectical process, which has propelled its perceptual and cognitive syntax to change and grow over time. This is due to a desire to ward off anxiety and threats posed by the unknown. When we encounter images that disrupt our perceptual and cognitive habits, our natural reaction is to secure and habituate these threatening images. Naming is one of such defense mechanism against the threats of the unknown. This dialectical conception of disruption and habituation – the unknown and the named – constitutes the kernel of Abé's theory of language and image. In fact he would go as far as to argue that the disrupting power of the mechanically produced image is indispensable for the rejuvenation of literature, which is increasingly caught in a stale cycle of rehashing shopworn conventions.

The following remark with which Abé ends the revised version of the 1960 essay, "Do Mechanically-Produced-Images Demolish the Wall of Language?" is particularly noteworthy in this regard. It reveals his skepticism towards a contemporary state of literature. Content with the repetition of conventions and ignorant of the changing media environment, he argues, this old language-based medium has fallen into an apparent deadlock. Its reliance on language also compounds the problem; its medium provides the very condition of possibility for the imperceptible process of habituation to take place. The ending remark of the essay goes as follows:

Regardless of the genre, the original task of artistic creation is to plunge a scalpel into the adhesion between language and reality – the comfort zone of stereotypes fortified by the wall of language – and to produce a different kind of a language system. This is of course applicable to prose art as well. In order for the novel to recover its energy enough to shock and rejuvenate language (and consciousness), it needs first to depart from the established framework of the novel and attends this common task of art in general.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 454.

This common task of art is to destroy what he calls “the wall of language.” The force of “shock” is necessary, because the whole point of art is to induce rupture, interruption, crisis. And it is precisely through the process of interruption that art opens up a space of critique.¹⁸⁷

Given the fact that Abé is a writer by profession, his suggestion that literature needs to break away from its own comfort zone (because it has already lost its critical power to rejuvenate language) and thus needs visual media to assist its survival may come as a surprise to some. But, like Hanada Kiyoteru, with whom he had many theoretical and artistic interests in common, Abé supported the idea that Japan was undergoing a radical change in its media environment, namely, a new cultural hegemony of audio-visual media (or mechanically produced image media) was quickly displacing the old cultural hegemony of print media, and that writers needed to respond to this historical condition.¹⁸⁸

It is precisely at this historical juncture that Abé turned to the notion of the “documentary” as an umbrella term that encompassed both literary and filmic productions. In the original version of the 1960 essay, he notes that his promotion of “documentary art was nothing but an attempt to destroy existing systems of language that fortify our perceptual habits.”¹⁸⁹ Here the method of documentary and the notion of the mechanically produced image are treated as if they were conceptual equivalents. But then

¹⁸⁷ As it is often pointed out, the philosophical notion of critique, whose etymological root lies in the Greek word *krinein*, carries the connotation of crisis.

¹⁸⁸ Abé was the first professional Japanese writer to use a word processor to write his novels. He also wrote a number of screenplays for films and television programs and eagerly incorporated his own photographs to illustrate his novels. Furthermore, he was a professed cinephile and a semi-professional photographer on top of being a director of his own theater company. His voracious interest in newer technologies and media forms is fairly well documented, yet its significance is rarely acknowledged. Exceptions to this trend are recent works by two Japanese scholars: Toba Kôji and Tomoda Yoshiyuki.

¹⁸⁹ Quoted by Toba Kôji in *Undôtai: Abé Kôbô* [Abé Kôbô: A Body of Movement] (Tokyo: Ichiyôsha, 2007), 259.

a question arises: why would he treat the documentary and the mechanically produced image as conceptual equivalents? What led him to confer the effects of defamiliarization (i.e. destabilization of perceptual habits) upon these two notions, which are not usually associated with or treated in the same manner in the discourse of avant-garde art praxis?

As we saw in the last chapter, for Abé and others who participated in the activities of *Kiroku geijutsu no kai*, the notion of documentary refers neither to Griersonian documentary filmmaking nor to conventional journalistic reportage, but is redefined in accordance with their avant-gardist goal of overturning perceptual habit.¹⁹⁰ It is therefore worth going back to an earlier instance of Abé's first non-fiction "reportage" (about the brutal suppression of the workers' May Day protest in 1952), which already indicates his desire to situate what he calls reportage and documentary in opposition to the conventional practices of factual reporting.

The first half of this reportage piece incorporates quotations gleaned from newspaper articles. Commenting on this stylistic strategy, Toba Kôji writes: "Abé created collisions among quotations in order to emphasize their internal contradictions. The first strategy he used was, therefore, to construct a reportage in the form of a collage of quotations, a strategy which exposed the invalidities of these newspaper reports."¹⁹¹ Through the constructivist strategy of creating a collage out of direct quotations, Abé thus succeeds in foregrounding the internal contradictions among these news reports. Subsequently, the news media's timely construction of actuality, presumably based on

¹⁹⁰ As phrases such as *sur*-documentary (Hanada), *neo*-documentary (Matsumoto), and *new*-documentarism (Abé) suggest, their understanding of documentary is dialectical. Yet precisely because they often emphasized the elliptic-dialectic tension between two kinds of automatism – the automatism of mechanical recording and the automatism of habituated perception – it is arguable that their conception of the avant-garde documentary does not escape the trap of technological determinism.

¹⁹¹ Toba, 172.

the faithful documentations of facts, is called into question. As we shall see in the next chapter, later generations of filmmakers such as Oshima Nagisa and Wakamatsu Kôji take up this avant-gardist strategy of directly quoting journalistic materials in order to interrogate the actuality-effect produced by the media.

If the notions of the documentary and the mechanically produced image became conceptual equivalents in Abé's writings, it is because his interest in the documentary genre directly arose from his Marxist engagement with the reportage movement. This vital connection between his theorization of documentary in the late 1950s and his involvement in the production of literary reportage in the early 1950s must not be overlooked.¹⁹² Albeit in incipient form, the idea that art needs to restore its criticality through the method of documentary is already present in his 1955 essay titled *Mazu kaibôtô o* ("First A Scalpel"), an essay that specifically addresses challenges faced by the writers of the literary reportage movement. Comparing the scalpel, a medical instrument, to the method of reportage, he writes: "I imagine the role the scalpel played in the revolutionary development of medicine; it cut open the everydayness called skin in order to expose the darkness beneath it."¹⁹³ These metaphors of incision and skin clearly align reportage with the avant-gardist contestation of perceptual habit. True reportage, he argues, relies neither on "the skin of the common sense" nor does it privilege timely news

¹⁹² Even after Abé's commitment to Marxism had subsided his interest in documentary did not simply disappear. Even films such as *Woman in the Dunes*, which appear to be detached from contemporary social situations and events, are in fact in dialogue with the journalism of the time. Abé suggests that the original idea for the novel *Woman in the Dunes* came from a journalistic photograph reporting on the damage caused by windblown sand. In the 1965 interview, he notes: "While I was heading to Hirosaki to lecture at a local university, I bought a weekly magazine. A photogravure included in the magazine reported on the windblown sand damage in the city of Sakata. Something was sparked inside me at that moment" (209). See Abé Kôbô, "*Suna no onna to shousetsu sahou*" [*Woman in the Dunes* and the Method of Writing Novels], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [The Complete Works of Abé Kôbô], Vol.19 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1999), 207-210.

¹⁹³ Abé Kôbô, "*Mazu kaibôtô o: rporutajū teishō to dasoku ni yoru sono hitei*" [First A Scalpel], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [Complete Works of Abé Kôbô], Vol.5 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1997), 283.

values. Rather, it is a means to “disrupt habituated responses in order to heighten our sensibility to a hitherto unknown level.”¹⁹⁴ His conception of reportage is here clearly envisioned along the line of the avant-garde technique of defamiliarization.

“My promotion of documentarity [*kirokusei*] in every genre and form of art including fiction means something more than a mere respect for facts. We need first to sever these facts from their surrounding meanings and concepts, differentiate them into the grotesque world of meaningless ‘things,’ and from there reconstruct the plane of meanings once again.”¹⁹⁵ Seemingly heterogeneous notions, such as reportage, documentary, and the avant-garde indeed form intrinsic connections in Abé’s theory. I want to conclude this section with the following quotation: “In order to restore actuality [*akuchuaritii*] to art, let us discover new eyes and new words. If an ordinary celluloid film proves insufficient, we must invent an infrared film, and if a light-sensitive telescope proves insufficient, we must invent a radio-wave telescope.”¹⁹⁶ In accordance with the discourse of actuality generated by the avant-garde documentary movement, we may interpret what Abé calls actuality to mean “critical relevance” rather than “journalistic topicality.”¹⁹⁷ Importantly, Abé frames his call for the restoration of critical relevance of art to present-day social reality as a dual search for “new eyes and new words.” This

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 284.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. There seems to be a logical connection between the notion of meaningless things and that of naked things, which appears in his later writing on the mechanically produced image. One may ask: why puts such an emphasis on this notion of the “thing” [*mono*]? For one, the word *mono* is a kind of placeholder, an empty signifier whose signified is yet determined. It is like what Roman Jakobson called a “shifter,” whose meaning is only determinable in the context in which it is used, and includes words such as “this,” “now,” “here,” “I,” and “you.” In Japanese, the word *mono* functions like the English word “thing,” a kind of an empty placeholder. Yet, as is evident from classical expressions such as *mono no aware* [the pathos of the ephemeral things] and *mononoke* [unknown spirit], which are frequently used in classical prose literature and poetry, the word *mono* written in *hiragana* (Japanese syllabic orthography) tends to connote beings that are unidentifiable, unnamable, even other-worldly. Historically, then, the word “thing” [*mono*] has functioned as a signifier that exposes a veritable fissure between language and reality. To say something is “unnamable” is an acknowledgment of the failure of the representational function of language.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 285.

¹⁹⁷ For the discussion of this interpretation of actuality as “critical relevance,” see Chapter Two.

twofold conception of vision and language deeply informs his own artistic practice, including his fictional writings and later filmic collaborations with Teshigahara.

Naming and Metamorphosis

But how does Abé introduce the question of vision or a visual mode of perception into writing? His treatment of the problematic of naming, which variously appears in his essays and fictional pieces, offers one answer. In many instances, challenges posed by the linguistic operation of naming appear alongside those posed by the visual operations of perceiving distortion and metamorphosis. In an essay published in 1955, Abé rearticulates the critical link between art and crisis by turning to the exemplary crisis of madness. The bulk of this essay explains the strategic reasons behind his use of “materially non-existent things” in his plays; namely, ghosts in *Seifuku (Uniform)*, animals that look like humans in *Doreigari (Hunting Slaves)*, and a drug that can make any dream come true in *Kaisokusen (A Fast Sailing Boat)*. Again evoking Pavlov’s notion of “stereotype,” Abé discusses a precarious equilibrium between sensibility and reason. When this state of equilibrium is completely lost, a pang of madness may hit. “Symptoms of madness are distorted reflections of the external world in the internal world,” writes Abé. “And because the axis linking the inside and the outside for humans is language, the *human madness* represents the unique instance of *the collapse of language*.”¹⁹⁸ Clearly, that which lies outside language’s control poses an imminent threat to cognition, and thus constitutes something fearful.

An exemplary literary “description” of this fear is, according to Abé, Jean-Paul Sartre’s classic text, *Nausea* (1938). Again the 1960 essay on the mechanically produced

¹⁹⁸ Abé Kôbô, “Shinin no tôte: jitsuzai shinai mono ni tsuite” [An Entrance of the Dead: On Not-Actually Existent Things], *Abé Kôbô zenshû*, Vol. 5, 200. The emphasis is in the original.

image offers an insight: “Sartre described the impact and distress inflicted upon a man by the not-yet-named thing (i.e. actual existence).”¹⁹⁹ In *Nausea*, Sartre has the protagonist Antoine Roquentin say the following lines: “Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of ‘existence.’ I was like the others, like the ones walking along the seashore, all dressed in their spring finery. I said, like them, ‘The ocean *is* green; that white speck there *is* a seagull,’ but I didn’t feel that it existed or that the seagull was an ‘existing seagull’; usually existence hides itself.”²⁰⁰

Clearly, Sartre is opposing what he calls “existence” to the copular verb “to be” here. Moreover, this difference between “existence” and the copular verb “to be” corresponds to the difference between the frightening perception of the world outside the comfort zone of language and the habituated perception of reality through concepts. When one says, “The ocean *is* green,” does he or she really experience the greenness of the color green? Or is it the word green supplanting, standing in for the immediate sensation of greenness? These are the questions which Abé shares with Sartre, and which hark back to Shklovsky’s call to restore the sensation to life, “to make the stone *stony*.”

“The existence which is yet to become a verb” – the phrase from Abé’s short story “Prosecution of the Heretic,” with which I opened my investigation of his works concerns this ontic dimension of reality that escapes the grasp of clichéd statements such as “the ocean is green.” To put it differently, the ontic existence Abé is concerned with here is an existence that has yet to be incorporated into the order of language, wherein the copular verb *to be* divides and connects a subject (e.g. ocean) and its attribute (e.g. green). Language flattens and diminishes concrete sensations of life – be it the greenness

¹⁹⁹ Abé, “Eizô wa gengo no kabe o hakaisuruka,” 451.

²⁰⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1964), 171.

of the color green or the stoniness of the stone. Naming, in Abé's view, is the first step towards the destruction of such immediate sensations, for it is the most basic way of securing our epistemic hold over the actually-existing, ontic dimension of reality.

As we saw earlier, what Abé calls "the wall of language" corresponds to this habitual conditioning of perceptual reflexes. And such habituation of human perceptions begins with the inaugural act of naming: "Humans could subjugate, domesticate, and render safe the external beings by naming and thus incorporating them into the order of language."²⁰¹ Consequently, general nouns start to operate like the universal under which one can subsume particulars. "Humans gave a piece of stick the name 'stick,' and thenceforward recognized it as such. They thus succeeded in attaining an abstract concept of 'stick' in general (that is, an infinite numbers of sticks)."²⁰²

The 1949 short story titled *Yume no tôbô* ("A Runaway Dream") presents another variant of this same problematic, that is, the problematic of subjugating the singular existence of "things" under the generality of "names." It opens with an explicitly biblical reference to Adam's act of naming, that mythical origin of the irreparable rift between words and things. The prologue notes: "You who insist that happiness exists only in the Garden of Eden know nothing about the misfortunes of wearing an unsuitable costume. You do not know we are just beasts wearing constricting costumes . . . and how names, which are provisional and trivial conventions, bring great sorrow to our daily life."²⁰³ On the surface the story recounts the mishaps of a boy who is accidentally given a "wrong" name. The prologue leading up to the main body of the narrative, however, makes it clear

²⁰¹ Abé, "Eizô wa gengo no kabe o hakaisuruka," 451.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Abé Kôbô, "Yume no tôbô" [A Runaway Dream], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [The Complete Works of Abé Kôbô], Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1997), 297.

that he never had a “correct” name in the first place. Since everyone around him recognizes his proper name as *not properly his* (because it is his neighbor’s nickname), this protagonist comes to embody the arbitrariness of naming. “Everyone hesitated to call his name. If an occasion demanded that one call his name, everyone got angry and frowned.”²⁰⁴ His very existence becomes an unpleasant reminder of the arbitrary relationship between words and things.

As he grows older, his sense of the inadequacy of his own name increases. “His inner beast avoided the name, and the name which only had the power of a borrowed name . . . was too weak, too fragile, to hold this beast soaked in the color of shame; it constantly escaped him like the water spilling out of a broken jar.”²⁰⁵ While his inner “beast” strives to escape the shackles of his borrowed “name,” the protagonist’s body begins to lose weight, as if the only way to sever itself from language is to make itself disappear. Paradoxically bearing the unbearable lightness of his inadequate existence, he finally succeeds dispelling his name from the inside. When his name vanishes, however, his body also disappears. No longer grounded in its concrete material substance, his “beast” becomes a materially non-existent “dream.” Having become a nameless existence without substance, he is now destined to “run through a myriad of endless and infinite nights.”²⁰⁶

A similar concern is expressed in another short story entitled *Dendorokakariya* (“Dendrocacalia”) published in 1949. This story introduces a protagonist named Mr. Komon who constantly suffers from unspecified seizures that cause him to experience the strange sensation of becoming a plant. Whenever a seizure suddenly overtakes him, he

²⁰⁴ Abé, “Yume no tôbô,” 298.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 326.

feels the uncomfortable sensation of his face turning inside out. When this happens Mr. Komon desperately grabs onto his face with his hands in order to prevent it. “Becoming a plant means . . . your face turns inside out, and your consciousness constantly falls over to the other side of your face.”²⁰⁷ Curiously, moreover, when his consciousness and his face turn inward, his body loses its human form:

Just as it had happened the year before, the fault line of his consciousness – a very high wall – was rising up, a face vaguely reflected on its surface. When he looked closely, it appeared to be his face turned inside out. Moreover, his whole body had become a plant. A strange plant: it was neither a grass nor a tree. Fingers became chrysanthemum-shaped leaves. It was both unattractive and unfamiliar looking.²⁰⁸

One day an old man finds Mr. Komon in his bushy plant form. The man tries to thrust a military knife into the ground to uproot Mr. Komon. Startled, Mr. Komon reverts back to his human form and narrowly escapes. But the old man seeks him out and sends a letter, introducing himself as the director of a botanical garden. To Mr. Komon’s chagrin the director insists on calling him *Dendrocacalia*, the taxonomic name of a tropical plant family, and invites Mr. Komon to live in the corner of his botanical garden. The story ends with Mr. Komon’s final capture by the director. Under director’s watchful gaze, Mr. Komon undergoes a complete metamorphosis. When Mr. Komon is transformed into a plant, the director jots down the name *Dendrocacalia crepidifolia* on a piece of paper, and nails it onto the stem of the plant.

Not surprisingly, this fascinating fable has invited various critical and scholarly interpretations. The reading I want to offer here is the story of resistance against naming, which by no means excludes other kinds of interpretations. It is crucial that the whole process of Mr. Komon’s metamorphosis into a plant is underscored by a series of

²⁰⁷ Abé, “Denderokakariya,” *Abé Kôbô zenshû*, Vol.2, 235.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 242.

linguistic captures. His archenemy, the director of the botanical garden who collects rare specimens of humans-turned-plants for the Japanese government, is the authorized name giver. As Hegel reminds us, the act of naming has long been understood as an instance of exerting power. Naming is first and foremost a means of subjugation: “The first act, by which Adam established his lordship over the animals, is this, that he gave them a name, i.e., he nullified them as beings on their own account.”²⁰⁹ As we saw earlier, the explicit reference to Adam’s name-giving act appears in the short story “A Runaway Dream.” The story of “Dendrocacalia,” in contrast, turns to Greek myths to stage another drama of linguistic capture and resistance.

It is significant that it is the authoritative character of the director who draws connections between plant and language. When he first sends a letter to Mr. Komon, he notes that Mr. Komon is a type of a tropical plant called *Dendrocacalia crepidifolia*, which grows only in the remote region of Ogasawara islands. This signals the first stage of Mr. Komon’s entrapment by the linguistic system of classification. The second time when the director speaks to Mr. Komon he analogizes plants to schizophrenia, calling schizophrenia “a hope of the contemporary age.” This time it is not plant taxonomy but medical classification that is mobilized. It is worth recalling here that Abé explicitly links schizophrenia to the collapse or dysfunction of language. The final analogy of plants to language occurs when the director asserts that the plant is a root of *logos*.²¹⁰ As Mr. Komon gradually realizes, his metamorphosis into a plant does not, therefore, represent salvation from his illness (the presumed cause of his seizures) but rather a permanent

²⁰⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, trans. and eds. H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox (Albany: State of University of New York Press, 1979), 221.

²¹⁰ Abé, “Denderokakariya,” 250-251.

entrapment.²¹¹ Through this series of analogies, “Dendrocacalia” clearly highlights the intimate connection between the politics of subjugation and the subject’s taxonomic capture by language.

The 1951 short story titled *S. Karuma shi no hanzai* (“The Crime of Mr. S. Karuma”) is another fable that highlights the correlation between linguistic capture and the politics of subjugation. While this story problematizes naming, it further satirizes the complete reversal of the power relationship between “things” and “humans.” If naming is what instantiates the subjection of non-human things to the authority of humans, as Hegel suggests, this story takes as its point of departure the revolt of things themselves against this subjection. Recall that in the story of “Prosecution of the Heretic,” the “I” who calls himself an enemy of humanity declares his alliance with “things and beasts” that resist being named and becoming “useful” to humans.²¹² In “The Crime of Mr. S. Karuma” mundane objects that have already become useful reject their usefulness and revolt against their subjection to the protagonist named Mr. Karuma. The story begins with Mr. Karuma finding out that his business card has become his doppelganger. This business card appears as a mere piece of paper when Mr. Karuma looks through his left eye, but

²¹¹ Mr. Komon comes to believe that the director is a modern incarnation of a mythological vulture that tormented Prometheus for stealing fire from Zeus and identifies with Prometheus punished for his hubris. Mr. Komon decides to liberate others who are trapped inside the botanical garden, but he fails. The narrator then interjects this note: “Mr. Komon, you were wrong. You didn’t know that your seizure was not just an indication of your illness. You didn’t know that the whole world is infected by this illness!” (“Dendrocacalia,” 253). The failure of Mr. Komon’s attempt to resist linguistic capture thus derives from his inability to affirm commonality, a very quality that is expressed by his own name (“Mr. Common”). As Toba Kôji has recently suggested, the commonness of Mr. Komon is also linked to historical memories of Japan’s colonial legacy. Toba calls attention to the fact that the director says, “It is rare to find *Dendrocacalia* in domestic territory [*naichi*].” The word *naichi* is often used in tandem with the word *gaichi* (external territory). These words belong to the vocabulary of Japan’s colonial period. The exotic status of the tropical plant *Dendrocacalia crepidifolia* to which Mr. Komon metamorphoses thus conjures the memories of colonial expansion. Mr. Komon’s subjection to the director who is an agent of the Japanese government is an acute reminder of Japan’s military and political subjugation of Asian nations during the war, a war that had just ended four years before the story was published. See Toba Kôji, *Undôtai: Abé Kôbô*, 95-96.

²¹² Abé, “Itansha no kokuhatsu,” 140.

when looking through his right eye the card appears as his double. Furthermore, every single object that used to belong to Mr. Karuma (e.g. business card, hat, notebook, jacket, pen, and tie) becomes animated and obtains subjectivity:

‘Our materiality has degenerated,’ muttered the tie in a husky voice, ‘Just like me – such a despicable degeneration, all because of the humans. Damn it! Why don’t I let them know what it means to choke a neck?’ Then other personal belongings got excited and began shouting. ‘Even if we are useful to them, they are useless to us!’ ‘One sided exploitation . . . we cannot compromise!’ ‘Yes, we material things should recover our subjectivity.’ ‘Take back our right to live. From dead organic matter to living inorganic matter!’ ‘Let’s sing our revolutionary anthem.’²¹³

While the revolt of these anthropomorphized objects against the human character Mr. Karuma conjures the Marxist concept of reification (“thing-fication” [*versachlichung*]), the story does not advance a straightforward interpretation of it.

Take the example of Mr. Karuma’s relationship to his business card. The business card tells him how ashamed “he” is for being related to someone like Mr. Karuma. Hearing this, Mr. Karuma thinks to himself in amazement: “It is pretty ridiculous that things look differently from the right eye to the left eye: it must be the influence of Marx.”²¹⁴ This tongue-in-cheek reference to Marx offers an insight into the aforementioned passage, wherein Mr. Karuma’s personal possessions mount their complaints against humans for causing their degeneration. One of the complaints voiced is that even though they (the inanimate objects) are useful to humans, humans are useless to them. Their imminent revolution, in other words, is predicated upon their rejection of being useful to humans. In so doing, the inanimate objects resist their subjection to humans and challenge their proprietary rights over them; these objects reject their “objecthood” and assert their autonomous “thinghood.”

²¹³ Abé Kôbô, “Kabe: Dai ichi bu, S. Karuma shi no hanzai,” *Abe Kôbô Zensakuhin*. Vol.1 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1972), 43. My translation.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 11.

In *Capital*, Marx notes, “The utility of a thing makes it a use-value.”²¹⁵ As it is often pointed out, this concept of use-value is underpinned by anthropocentrism. The very concept of “use” is defined from the point of view of human: a thing is useful *for* a human and not vice-versa.²¹⁶ It is precisely the complicity between the anthropocentric view of the world and the subjugating power of naming that “The Crime of Mr. S. Karuma” satirizes. In referencing Marx’s use of the metaphor of the table mysteriously transforming into a commodity (which is, of course, doubled with the reference to the spiritualist practice of “table-turning”), Jacques Derrida calls the mystical transformation of “things” into commodities a *Coup de théâtre*, a dramatic turn.²¹⁷ The theatricality implicit in this process is literalized in the anthropomorphication of Mr. Karuma’s personal belongings. The most dramatic turn of Mr. Karuma’s life occurs, of course, when the inanimate object of his business card sheds its use-value and assumes an apparent autonomy. In this manner, the story plays on the “literalization” of metaphors and analogies used by Marx in order to expose the operations of commodity fetishism.²¹⁸

However, the critical import of this story goes beyond the playful appropriation of Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism. Abé pushes the dramatic effect of personification a step further in order to expose the abstracting tendency of language. When his business

²¹⁵Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Edition. ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 303.

²¹⁶Jacques Derrida writes, for instance, “If one keeps to use-value, the properties (*Eigenschaften*) of the thing (and it is going to be a question of property) are always very human, at bottom, reassuring for this very reason. They always relate to what is proper to man, to the properties of man: either they respond to men’s needs, and that is precisely their use-value, or else they are the product of a human activity that seems to intend them for those needs” (150). See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

²¹⁷Derrida writes: “For example – and here is where the table comes on stage – the wood remains wooded when it is made into a table: it is then ‘an ordinary, sensuous thing [*ein ordinäres, sinnliches Ding*].’ It is quite different when it becomes a commodity, when the curtain goes up on the market and the table plays actor and character at the same time, when the commodity-table, says Marx, comes on stage (*auftritt*), begins to walk around and to put itself forward as a market value. *Coup de théâtre*: the ordinary, sensuous thing is transfigured (*verwandelt sich*), it becomes someone, it assumes a figure” (*Specters of Marx*, 150).

²¹⁸Toba, *Undōtai: Abé Kôbô*, 129.

card “steals” Mr. Karuma’s name, Mr. Karuma is suddenly struck by a strange sensation of hollowness in his heart. His feeling of hollowness, furthermore acquires a concrete material existence, since his heart begins to generate “negative pressure,” as if to reverse a law of physics. It turns into a vacuum, and starts “sucking” material objects. The logical absurdity of such an event nonetheless highlights language’s ability to generate “sense” independently of any empirical referent.

As Gilles Deleuze suggests in his study of Lewis Carroll, sense is an “incorporeal” event that arises on the surface of language. Let us take the example of the Cheshire Cat from Carroll’s *Alice in the Wonderland*.²¹⁹ As Alice recognizes, it is easy to imagine a cat with a grin, but not the grin without the cat. The grin without the cat belongs to what Deleuze calls impossible objects (e.g. “square circles,” “matter without extension,” “mountain without valley,” and so on). Mr. Karuma’s feeling of hollowness, that is, his feeling of negative physical pressure similarly belongs to this category of impossible objects. Mr. Karuma’s inner void sucks in a photograph of a desert landscape. This photographic desert, in turn, begins to expand inside his chest, attracting all the wild animals at a neighborhood zoo. The “crime” of Mr. Karuma finally takes place when a camel at the zoo gets sucked in and disappears into his inner desert. Mr. Karuma is accused of theft and brought to trial. The story ends with Mr. Karuma turning into a wall that grows infinitely in the midst of a silent desert. The whole narrative hinges upon an impossible object, his feelings turning into a literal vacuum. The absurdity of this event is further linked to the absurdity of mundane objects revolting against the human

²¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze writes, “Extracted from the proposition, sense is independent of it, since it suspends its affirmation and negation, and is nevertheless only its evanescent double: Carroll’s smile without the cat or flame without a candle” (32). Critics have commented on Abé’s similarity to Carroll. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

protagonist. Yet precisely through these absurdities, the story sheds light on language's complicity in the subjection of things to humans.

Importantly, "The Crime of Mr. S. Karuma" also insists on incorporating references to cinema and proto-cinematic media. These recurrent references to cinema and proto-cinematic media point to Abé's thematic preoccupation with visual media long before his turn to filmmaking practice. For example, let us turn to Mr. Karuma's description of his encounter with his business card, which has become his doppelganger:

The other 'I' heard my voice. He looked back with a stern expression in his eyes, and met my gaze. At that moment I saw right through his disguise; it was my business card. Once I realized it, there was no way of mistaking that business card for something else. It couldn't have been anything but the business card. I quickly closed my right eye and then my left eye in turn to discover the double nature of this shadow image [*eizô*]. With my right eye, it was clearly my reflection [*utsushie*] as if it was in the mirror, but with my left eye, it was unmistakably just a piece of paper.²²⁰

I want to draw attention to the devices of optical illusion alluded in the above quotation: stereoscope, camera obscura, and magic lantern. As is well known, each human eye sees objects from a slightly different position; this produces an effect of binocular parallax. This binocular parallax allows human eyes to create the perception of depth, an effect through which the optical device of the stereoscope functions. When Mr. Karuma sees with his left eye, the business card appears as it is: a piece of inanimate paper. But, when Mr. Karuma uses his right eye, it appears as an animated double of his self.²²¹ The parallax distance between the two eyes is thus used to illustrate his business card's two modes of appearance.

Two more particularly proto-cinematic terms are used here to describe Mr. Karuma's parallax experience. For instance, the word *eizô* [影像], which I translate in

²²⁰ Abé Kôbô, "Kabe: Dai ichi bu, S. Karuma shi no hanzai," 10. My translation.

²²¹ As the aforementioned reference to Marx makes it clear, this play on "left" and "right" seems intentional; while the right sees hallucinatory appearance of the business card as his doppelganger, the left eye sees it as its "false" appearance.

the above quotation as “shadow image” is written here with the Chinese character for “shadow.” It is an old term that is usually used to describe a mental image or a pictorial representation, such as an image of god or Buddha as well as the inverted image generated by the *camera obscura*. After the invention of the cinema, however, the homonymic word *eizô* [映像] using the Chinese character signifying “projection” or “reflection” has become more popular. This second term is explicitly tied to technologically mediated visual images (such as images produced by cinema, television, and video), and hence my translation of it as “mechanically produced image.” Here in the story, however, Abé opts for the first word (“shadow image”), alluding to the up-side-down image generated by the *camera obscura*. The inversion connoted by the *camera obscura* is particularly illuminating in this dramatic confrontation wherein Mr. Karuma is ousted by his own business card. For the chiasmic inversion between Mr. Karuma and his business card is indicated by the word “shadow image,” evoking the *camera obscura*, which is the metaphor Marx and Engels use in *The German Ideology*, to describe the working of ideologies.²²² The former stability of Mr. Karuma’s life – one might call it its stereoscopic unity – is shattered when he can no longer suppress the material disparity inherent in binocular parallax.²²³

This visual effect of parallax (which etymologically means “to change, alter, or alternate”) offers another insight.²²⁴ In Abé’s story, the literal alteration of Mr. Karuma

²²² Marx and Engels write, “If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process” (47). See Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The German Ideology: Part One*, ed. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1970).

²²³ As Toba suggests, the story effectively “literalizes” the Marxist analysis of commodities, in particular, the idea that a commodity is both sensible and supersensible thing, since Mr. Karuma grudgingly remembers how much money he had to pay to purchase his business card (*Undôtai*, 128).

²²⁴ The word *parallax* comes from the Greek word, *parallassein*, “to change, alter, or alternate” (*para-* “beside” and *allassein* “to change or exchange”). From the online *Oxford English Dictionary*, and *The*

and his business card occurs concomitantly with Mr. Karuma's ability to see things differently with his left and right eyes. This supplanting of Mr. Karuma's social identity by his card is followed by his physical transformation into a wall, an inanimate object that he used to inspect as an employee of an insurance company. Importantly, it is cinema that sets up this second phase of his metamorphosis. Mr. Karuma is invited to a film screening one night. The film consists of only two shots; the first is an image of the desert and the second is an image of his room. Mr. Karuma is pushed into the screen and *passes through it*. Once he passes through the screen, he returns to his room. He stares at the wall, which gets sucked into Mr. Karuma's inner desert, which, as we recall, was only the photograph before it started growing inside his chest. Mr. Karuma's final transformation into a gigantic wall growing on the desert completes the whole process of inversion, an inversion which is underscored by a series of references to visual media: stereoscope, camera obscura, magic lantern, photography, and cinema. Importantly, however, these references to visual media remain at the level of motif and metaphor, and are thus subordinated to the operation of language. At this point in Abé's oeuvre, a properly dialectical relation between language and vision has yet to be established.

In the aforementioned 1960 essay, "A Script for An Experimental Film," Abé speaks of his methodology of artistic experimentation in the following manner: "My own method can be schematically summarized as follows: to destroy the old, stable system of language through the use of mechanically produced images, so that the impact of this destruction stimulates and activates new potentials in the function of language."²²⁵

Although this statement needs to be read in its specific historical context (i.e. his plan to

American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 1274.

²²⁵ Abé, "Jikken eiga no shinaro," 448.

write an experimental film script), we can extrapolate a methodological principle apparent in his filmic works: the actualization of the potential of language must take place through the mediation of the defamiliarizing image. As Abé conceives of this process, the mechanically produced image actualizes a dialectical transformation of language by constantly destroying and reconstructing its modes of operation. Crucially, *the mechanically produced image must function as the medium of this dialectical transformation*. In the last section of this chapter I will examine the film *Woman in the Dunes* in relation to this theoretical framework as well as the question of the micropolitics of perception.

Minute Perceptions and *Woman in the Dunes*

In the 1960s Abé and Teshigahara collaborated on five films: *Otoshiana* (*Pitfall*, 1962), *Suna no onna* (*Woman in the Dunes*, 1964), *Shiroi asa* (*Ako/White Morning*, 1965), *Tanin no kao* (*The Face of Another*, 1966), and *Moetsukita chizu* (*The Ruined Map*, 1968). Except for the short film, *White Morning*, the rest of the films were feature-length. I am focusing on *Woman in the Dunes* not because it is the most well known, but because it helps illuminate Abé's conception of the dialectical tension between the disruptive power of the image and the order-giving power of language. Following Hanada's theory of the avant-garde documentary, we may call it an elliptic-dialectical tension between the image and language.²²⁶ The film follows the trajectory of the elliptic-

²²⁶ It is also worth pointing out an apparent connection between Abé's interest in the thematics of sand and Hanada's theoretical interest in them (e.g. his essays on plasticity of sand and "sand-like masses"). However, this is not to suggest a simple influence model. It would be more accurate to say that Abé and Hanada *shared* thematic and theoretical concerns about the formal plasticity of sand. It is indeed fascinating to see so many of Abé's and Hanada's writings communicate and complement one another. For instance, as the novel and the film of *Woman in the Dunes* clearly indicate, Abé's focus is on different modes of perceiving sand rather than different modalities of sand (which is the concern of Hanada). We can observe a similar complementarity in their treatments of metamorphosis.

dialectical movement that oscillates between the defamiliarizing operation of the image and the familiarizing operation of the narration. In so doing the film enacts and substantiates Abé's theory of language as that which gives an overarching syntactic order and generality to perception, and his theory of the mechanically produced image as that which disrupts this syntactic order and generality through the presentation of details.

The two elements or stages are involved in this elliptic-dialectic: first, the defamiliarization of habituated, general perception; and second, the reintegration of the unfamiliar into a new perceptual order of generality. The notion of the dialectic is indispensable here because, as we have seen in this chapter, Abé is not content with the mere presentation of images that disrupt general modes of habituated perception; he is equally invested in the process of rejuvenating language. A similar process is at work in *Woman in the Dunes*, whereby the aim of the film is not simply the disruption of habituated perception, but rather the reorganization of perception through a new framework. This process takes place both on the narrative and the formal levels of the film.

No doubt most viewers would notice the particular emphasis given to haptic sensations derived from sharp-focused textures and details of filmed objects in *Woman in the Dunes*. At first sight the film appears to be concerned with the sheer magnification of miniscule objects: grains of sand, bodies of insects, skin pores, beads of sweat, fingers, glass beads, water droplets. These close-ups effectively function to make familiar objects, such as human fingers, appear unfamiliar and monstrous. As Mary Ann Doane points out,

various film theorists have indeed linked the close-up to “the invocation of an otherwise unknown dimension, a radically defamiliarized alterity.”²²⁷

Abé himself often acknowledges the importance of the close-up insofar as its defamiliarizing tendency disrupts the mechanism of recognition. In 1954, for instance, he published a brief essay on cinema in which he discusses the power of “meaningless objects,” which threaten to “remove the veil of meanings.”²²⁸ One disruptive image he mentions is the opening close-up of Henri-Georges Clouzot’s film *Le salaire de la peur* (*Wages of Fear*, 1953). The film begins with a few seconds of a static close-up of cockroaches wiggling on the ground. According to Abé, during these few seconds of duration the viewer is momentarily prevented from grasping the meaning of the image. It is only when the film cuts to a medium shot of a boy playing with these cockroaches that the diegetic setup of the film is disclosed.

Given the prominence of the close-up images of insects in *Woman in the Dunes* and given Abé and Teshigahara’s professed interests in surrealist filmmaking, it is difficult not to draw a connection among the close-ups of insects in *Woman in the Dunes*, the opening close-up in *Le salaire de la peur*, and numerous instances when close-ups of insects appear in Luis Buñuel’s films, as in the case of scorpions in the celebrated opening sequence of *L’age d’or* (1930). But Abé’s interest in the defamiliarizing force of the close-up is neither limited to the images of insects nor to cinema. In fact, the close-up often appears as *the* metaphor of an extraordinary perceptual experience in his fiction and essays.

²²⁷ Mary Ann Doane, “The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 14:3 (Fall 2003), 91. This essay inspired my argument for this section of the chapter.

²²⁸ Abé Kôbô, “Obuje zakkan” [Miscellaneous Thoughts on *Objet*], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [The Complete Works of Abé Kôbô], Vol.4 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1997), 343.

A notable reference to the close-up appears in the short story “Dendrocacalia” when Mr. Komon experiences a rare moment of ecstatic happiness: “Perhaps every thing looks larger at moments like this; it’s like looking through a magnifying glass.”²²⁹ The extraordinary perception of things in minute detail is further linked to the breakdown of language in the 1966 essay titled *Eizô to gengo* (“The Mechanically Produced Image and Language”). Abé discusses the anxiety caused by the fragmentary perception of details that do not add up to a coherent whole or totality. When routine habits suddenly break down due to some kind of disorder, such as amnesia or aphasia, “the details of images swell up beyond the threshold of the global whole.” In other words, detail overwhelms and shatters totality. Noting the generalizing and totalizing tendency of language in opposition to the specific and singular details of mechanically produced images, he asks:

What is this fear or anxiety that the mechanically produced images generates? It speaks of the discovery of the unusual because [these images] force us to gaze directly, in close-up, at things that are habitually processed. Sartre’s *Nausea* too describes an extreme state of such fear arising from this condition, wherein language collapses and things that used to be controlled by conceptualization come to the surface. In other words, by suddenly severing the image from the language that tames and stabilizes it, and by bringing this image into a close-up, we can discover unexpected and hitherto overlooked aspects within everyday processes.²³⁰

I want to highlight the last sentence, in which Abé turns to the device of the close-up to talk about the sudden defamiliarization of quotidian objects and routine habits. Here the collapse of the order of language is explicitly equated with the device of the close-up.

A similar use of the close-up as the principal metaphor of defamiliarization also appears in the writings of other members of *Kiroku geijutsu no kai*. Sasaki Kiichi in his 1958 essay titled *Kirokuteki houhou ni tsuite* (“On the Documentary Method”) turns

²²⁹ Abé, “Denderokakariya,” 239.

²³⁰ Abé Kôbô, “Eizô to gengo” [The Mechanically Produced Image and Language], *Abé Kôbô zenshû* [The Complete Works of Abé Kôbô], Vol.20 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1999), 140.

specifically to the close-up to discuss his idea of documentary as the critical method for contesting stereotypes and preconceptions. Documentary for Sasaki is, just as it is for Abé, Matsumoto, Hanada and others involved in the *Kiroku geijutsu no kai*, inseparable from the avant-gardist contestation of perceptual automatism. In order to support his argument, Sasaki turns to Masaki Kyôichi's reading of the close-up in the genre of the thriller film. Since the device of the close-up transforms familiar objects into "horrid things," when used in documentary it functions to undermine the apparent factuality of filmed objects. Sasaki concludes that the demand for documentary is therefore ineluctably linked to the demand to break away from such perceptual automatism.²³¹

As I have already mentioned in the last chapter, the film *Woman in the Dunes* frequently resorts to the extreme close-up, which threatens to undermine the legibility and recognizability of filmed objects. From monstrously enlarged fingers peppered with dark grains of sand to microscopic views of water droplets and sand grains, the film self-consciously and insistently deploys the device of the close-up. Yet, this move towards defamiliarization is only one aspect of the film's overall strategy of contesting perceptual habits reinforced by the anthropocentric measurement of scale.²³² Set in the midst of a remote rural beach area, surrounded by vast sand dunes, the film lacks the familiar architectural cues that metonymically function to signal the human body as the measurement of scale. Sometimes the film deliberately plays on this lack of visual cues. For example a shot may begin with the image of ripples of sand, which confound the

²³¹ Sasaki Kiichi, "Kirokuteki houhou ni tsuite" [On the Documentary Method], *Geijutsuron nôto* [A Note on Art], Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Gôdôshuppan, 1968), 227. Sasaki cites Henri Bergson's comment on the automatism of perception from *Matière et mémoire* in this section. An in-depth analysis of the apparent similarity between Bergson's interest in perception, memory, and habit and the Russian formalist-inspired understanding of perceptual automatism is beyond the scope of this chapter.

²³² As Doane suggests, the scale is "a concept in general [which] can only be understood through its reference to the human body" ("The Close-Up," 108).

viewer who is unsure of the actual scale of the scenery. It is only when the tiny figure of the protagonist enters the frame that the viewer becomes spatially oriented in her imaginary relation to the diegetic world and able to gauge the scale of the landscape presented on screen. Other times the film prolongs confusion by preventing the viewer from recognizing the human body – the very measurement of the scale – disembodied and fragmented in extreme close-ups. To wit, it is not the close-up as such that contributes to the overall defamiliarization effects of the film, but rather abrupt and constant oscillations between differently scaled shots that produces these effects.

As many critics have noted, the film version of *Woman in the Dunes* also makes conscious efforts to convey the sensuous textures and haptic sensations produced by the sharply focused images of skin, sand, and water. The images of these textured materials are often superimposed or graphically matched in composition and framing, giving rise to a state of indiscernibility. The differences between flows of sand and flows of water, or undulating bodies and undulating sand dunes, become indistinguishable at the level of haptic sensation. This indiscernibility of otherwise heterogeneous objects contributes to further confound the viewer and defamiliarize filmed objects. The sensual immediacy of “things” dislocated from the grid of language – and perceptual and cognitive habits – is recovered therefore in exchange for the discernibility and recognizability of each image. We may recall here how Abé opposed the generalizing tendency of language, especially the function of naming, to the sensual immediacy of material “things” in his 1960 essay. The film’s play on indiscernibility and unrecognizability of the image is clearly strategic. If the strength of the cinematic image lies, as Abé argues in his essays, in its potential to

actualize the prehension of things in their pre-signifying (“not-yet-named” or “naked”) state, *Woman in the Dunes* appears to maximize this potential.

Importantly, however, the film does not remain at this level of the immediate prehension of things. It also has an analytical trajectory that aims to show the correlation between prehension and apprehension. Instead of resting upon the defamiliarization of familiar objects, the film draws attention to the workings of what German philosopher G. W. Leibniz termed small or “minute perceptions” (*petite perceptions*). While many critics interpret the story of *Woman in the Dunes* as an existential allegory of the man who is trapped in a sandpit, I believe that there is also an underlying narrative of the discovery of minute perceptions and their relations to what might be called “global perceptions” that make up our consciousness. The film might be read, in this respect, as an allegory of *becoming conscious of the relationship between minute and global perceptions*. Moreover, it is through the alternating uses of the close-up and the long shot that the film guides the spectator through the shifting scales of its filmed objects. Not only does the film take the spectator through different scales of vision, it also thematizes this difference in scale as a movement of going below or beyond the threshold of “natural” perception, that is, perception unmediated by the camera. One particular thematic element that plays a key role is the protagonist’s discovery of the capillary action of sand and water. It is precisely when the protagonist gives up his preconceived ideas about sand and water that he is able to shift the scale of his perception to the molecular level.

Turning to the writing of Leibniz illuminates the operation at work here. Leibniz, in his *New Essays on Human Understanding*, writes that our conscious perception of reality is composed of countless minute perceptions of elements that usually go

unnoticed, as in the case of the roaring noise of the ocean. “To hear this noise as we do, we must hear the parts which make up this whole, that is the noise of each wave, although each of these little noises makes itself known only when combined confusedly with all the others, and would not be noticed if the wave which made it were by itself.”²³³ In order for our conscious perception of hearing the sound of roaring waves to take place we have to first perceive little noises that make up this sound, though this level of perception may remain unconscious. The sensations of these little noises are registered through what Leibniz calls minute perceptions that in turns compose conscious or global perceptions.

Yet the relation between minute and global perceptions is a relative one insofar as even global perceptions can become unconscious or imperceptible through the process of habituation. As Deleuze writes: “[A]lthough Leibniz states the point in terms of totality, the question involves something other than a sum of homogenous parts. We are not dealing with a relation of parts-and-wholes because the totality can be as imperceptible as the parts, as also when I *do not* sense the grinding noise of the water mill to which I am overtly accustomed.”²³⁴ In other words, habits can turn conscious perceptions into unconscious perceptions irrespective of antecedent composing elements. Our perceptions of noise, color, and other sensations emanating from a familiar environment become imperceptible precisely because of our habituation to them.²³⁵

²³³ Quoted by Nicholas Rescher in his *G.W. Leibniz's Monadology: An Edition for Students* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1991), 95.

²³⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 87. The emphasis is in the original text.

²³⁵ Balázs also notes in his discussion of the close-up, which makes the territory of “little things of life” make visible, “even the biggest things of life consist of these ‘little things,’ individual details and single moments, while the larger contours are mainly the result of the insensitivity and sloppiness with which we ignore the little things and blur their outlines. The abstract picture of the big things of life arises mainly from our myopia” (Balázs, *Visible Man, or the Culture of Film*, 103).

Deleuze's point about the inadequacy of the parts-and-wholes model in understanding various modalities of perceptions is useful in thinking through Abé's interest in details that do not add up to a whole. When the syntactic grid of language is in place, details become parts that constitute a whole. But without being buttressed by this grid of language, these details remain disconnected and fragmentary. Taking the example of amnesia, he writes, "Because the quotidian process loses its everydayness under this condition one is forced to start everything again from concrete details."²³⁶ The loss of memory produces anxiety because memory helps to connect fragmentary perceptions of details and organize them so that reality appears as a meaningful, coherent whole.²³⁷

If cinematic images are more prone to generate such anxiety about details than literature, as Abé suggests, it is because cinema is capable of presenting reality in concrete specificities rather than abstract generality. Not only is cinema capable of presenting fragmentary details of reality through the use of the close-up, the use of discontinuous editing can maintain these fragments *as* fragments. Details in this sense are no longer subsumable to the model of parts-and-wholes. These details do not provide a coherent apprehension of the whole, but rather, they plunge the spectator into a state of prehension. Cinematic details that do not add up to a whole thus actualize the disrupting potential of the mechanically produced image to defamiliarize, a potential that Abé links directly to the destabilization of the order-giving function of language.

So how does this observation help us understand the visual strategies of *Woman in the Dunes*? As I mentioned earlier, the film opens with a microscopic close-up of sand

²³⁶ Abé, "Eizô to gengo," 140.

²³⁷ As Leibniz notes along with other philosophers such as Hegel and Bergson, memory and habit allows one to organize perceptual experiences according to the order of similarities. Even animals are capable of forming habituated perceptions. Leibniz writes in his *Monadology*: "[W]hen one shows a stick to dogs, they recall the pain that it has caused them and whine and run off" (*G.W. Leibniz's Monadology*, 20).

grains. In this opening sequence, the film gradually cuts to shots of sand in larger scales, ending with the long shot of expansive sand dunes. It thus moves from the miniscule details of sand grains to the whole of a desert. This sequence visually and narratively sets up the film's subsequent play on the relation between minute perceptions and global perceptions. Crucially, the film stages its visual play on differently scaled perceptions along the line of its narrative development. That is, the film parallels its own visual play on different scales of images with the protagonist's discovery of the capillary action of sand and water. This motif of discovering the capillary action is key to the overall narrative development of the film.

To better understand the narrative significance of this motif of the capillary action, I will briefly summarize the plot of the film. After the opening sequence the film introduces its protagonist, an amateur entomologist. He is dressed in hiking gear, and is looking for a rare breed of tiger beetles. At dusk he seeks a lodging for the night, and the local villagers take him to the decrepit house of an attractive widow. The house is decayed and half buried in sand at the bottom of a huge sandpit. The only way to get out of the house is to use a ladder, which villagers take away in order to capture the unfortunate entomologist. Confined in a sandpit evocative of the meager glass jars where he keeps his captured insects, the entomologist is forced to live with the widow, who appears to be resigned to repeat the futile, Sisyphean task of digging and emptying buckets of sand every night in order to keep her house from being completely buried under the sand. The entomologist tries to escape, but fails several times. However, one day he accidentally discovers a device that allows him to collect pure water by taking advantage of the mechanism of capillary action, that is, the attraction of water molecules

to sand particles. He buries a leaky wooden bucket in the sand, covers it with a lid, and inserts bait in the hope of catching a crow. This simple, crude trap, turns out to be a marvelous water-collecting device. This discovery completely transforms his perception of his environment, which he initially considered to be dry, barren, and lifeless.

While the film presents this Copernican moment of the protagonist's discovery of capillary action through a series of visually striking close-ups, the novel version of *Woman in the Dunes* resorts to a lengthy and explicit explanation of it:

There was only one answer he could think of. That was the capillary action of the sand. Because the surface sand had a high specific heat, it was invariably dry, but when you dug down a little the under part was always damp. It must be that the surface evaporation acted as a kind of pump, drawing up the subsurface water In short, the dryness of the sand was not due simply to a lack of water, but rather, it would seem, to the fact that the suction caused by capillary attraction never matched the speed of evaporation. In other words, the water was being constantly replenished. But this water circulated at a speed unthinkable in ordinary soil.²³⁸

With hindsight, we realize that the microscopic close-ups of sand grains in the opening sequence of the film have already foreshadowed this molecular level of understanding of the sand. But it is only after the protagonist struggles and learns to live with the sand that he finally arrives at this molecular level of perception.

Interestingly, the novel version of *The Woman in the Dunes*, which lacks the immediate visual means to convey different scales of sense perception, explicitly states this problem of scale. Take the passage where the protagonist realizes the significance of his discovery. No longer afraid of being cut off from his supply of water by manipulative villagers, he is filled with happiness and begins to laugh: "Turning around, he could see the whole scene. You can't really judge a mosaic if you don't look at it from a distance. If you really get close to it you get lost in detail. You get away from one detail only to get

²³⁸ Kobo Abé, *The Woman in the Dunes* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 233-234.

caught in another. Perhaps what he had been seeing up until now was not the sand but grains of sand.”²³⁹ Clearly, the novel suggests that the protagonist’s discovery of capillary action is analogous to his recovery of global perceptions. Until then, he saw his immediate surroundings as if they were all in close-up. That is to say, he was caught in micro-perceptions of details that did not add up to the whole.

It is not coincidental that the novel analogizes the myopic perception of detail to the microscopic perception of sand grains: fragmentary details that do not add up to the whole are analogous to grains of sand. This emphasis on the analogy between details and sand grains explain why the filmic version of *Woman in the Dunes* opens with a microscopic close-up of sand grains. In a 1965 interview with Teshigahara and Abé, Teshigahara comments on the difficulty of translating Abé’s novels into visual terms of the film. He notes how Abé’s novels “cannot be represented through quotidian experiences or very simple, ordinary experiences.” Precisely because Abé’s novels often play on the gap between the most ordinary situations and extraordinary conceptual absurdities, films that simply rely on dialogue would fail to translate his novels. The attraction and challenge of Abé’s work, argues Teshigahara, derive from the demand it puts on the filmmaker to translate abstract conceptual issues into concrete visual images.²⁴⁰

An excellent example of such translation appears in the scene where the protagonist knocks over several boxes of glass beads in frustration. Tiny glass beads scatter on the ground. In order to separate the beads from the grains of sand, the widow takes out a sieve, bends down, scoops up handfuls of sand, and pours them into the sieve.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Abé Kôbô, “Bungaku no sekai / Eizô no sekai” [The World of Literature and the World of the Mechanically Produced Image], *Abé Kôbô zenshû*, Vol.19, 321.

The fixed camera holds the sieve in close-up and shows sand the grains shifting through it (Figure 8). A mound of sand quickly diminishes and glittering beads remain on the surface of the sieve. The process is repeated several times, and through this repetition the film draws the spectator's attention to the minute difference between the size of sand grains and the size of glass beads.

Although this scene occupies a very small space in the novel, it becomes an important visual analogy for the molecular composition of sand and water, and hence the analogous to the capillary action in the film. Just as water molecules pass through grains of sand, grains of sand get filtered through the mesh of a sieve, leaving behind grains of beads too large to pass. Lacking the eloquence of the novel, the film nonetheless presents the workings of these molecular forces through the sensual immediacy of the visual image. In so doing the film allows the spectator to *experience* the protagonist's gradual understanding of sand beyond the threshold of the habituated global perceptions. These numerous grains of sand, which the film relentlessly and insistently presents, are the visual equivalents of the minute perceptions that constitute our global perceptions of the sand. Yet, it is only when the film takes us through the dialectical process of moving from the microscopic to the macroscopic, and back to the microscopic again we finally realize the interlocking relation between minute perceptions of miniscule details and global perceptions of the whole.²⁴¹

"Microperceptions" according to Deleuze, "are minute, obscure, confused perceptions that make up our macroperceptions, our conscious, clear, and distinct

²⁴¹ It is crucial that the film relies on the device of the close-up to guide the spectators through this process. As Balázs once noted, the close-up is "the art of emphasis" (*Visible Man, or the Culture of Film*, 104).

apperceptions.”²⁴² What the film *Woman in the Dunes* makes “sensible” and “perceptible” is precisely this interlocking relation between global macroperceptions and minute microperceptions. The perceptibility of this relation is, however, inseparable from the order-giving function of the film’s narrative, which anchors the spectator’s overall sensory experience of the film. Here I want to go back to my opening remark about the contemporary relevance of the avant-gardist contestations of perceptual habits.

At the beginning of this chapter I questioned the view that takes defamiliarization to be a politically obsolete tactic belonging to the bygone eras of avant-garde activism and film theory. Against this view I also suggested that current academic interest in Rancière’s aesthetic theory indicates that, to the contrary, the question of defamiliarization is in fact a very current concern. The problems of sense perception and habit, as Rancière and the current interest in his work suggest, are still worth thinking through. If the ordering and policing of sense perceptions are still part of our political struggles today, as Rancière suggests, what Abé’s work shows us is the way there is a politics to be found in the artistic process of making “perceptible” the relation between macroperceptions and microperceptions, a process that I analyzed through my reading of the film *Woman in the Dunes*. That is to say, what Abé points out is not only the politics of perception, but also the politics of the very relation between the perceptible and imperceptible elements that make up perceptibility itself. In this sense, Abé’s artistic work urges us to intervene in politics at the “molecular” level, and to engage our senses

²⁴² Deleuze, *The Fold*, 86.

at a level and with a strategy that accords with what Deleuze and Guattari have called the micropolitics of perception.²⁴³

As we turn to the next chapter, and back to the question of the relation between journalism and avant-garde art practice, the similarity between the imbrication of these two practices and the imbrication between microperceptions and macroperceptions highlighted in this chapter will also become important. As I will show, the relation between journalism and the avant-garde is not a simple opposition, but is rather concerned with making the imperceptible, or, the habituated order of “common” sense, perceptible. In this sense, the relation between the avant-garde and journalism is a mutually constitutive one. The next chapter will turn to the filmic works of Oshima and Wakamatsu, who stage encounters between journalism and the avant-garde in order to approach the problems of commonness and sense perception. Their approaches to these problems notably emphasize the mediatized sensation of actuality and the production of actuality-effects by the media. The works of Oshima and Wakamatsu, two filmmakers who are on the margin of the postwar avant-garde movements, will help us think through the relation between the journalistic *sensation* of actuality and the avant-garde’s demand for actuality to exceed the level of mere sensation. In short, the next chapter will return to the micropolitics of perception as it appears in the form of competing practices of

²⁴³ In their discussion of politics and social relations, Deleuze and Guattari differentiate what they call “molar” and “molecular” levels of organization or segmentation of elements. Societies, political regimes, individuals, and even perceptions and feelings are fundamentally affected by these two modalities of organization. The molar segmentation refers to a rigid, centralized, and totalizing kind of organization, while the molecular segmentation refers to a supple, diffused, and often an unconscious kind of organization. What I have been calling the global, macro-perceptions of the whole belongs to the molar level of organization, and the minute, micro-perceptions of details belongs to the molecular level of organization. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the difference between “macropolitics” and “micropolitics” of forces and relations corresponds to this difference between the molar and the molecular levels of organization. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), especially 213-217.

engaging with actuality, understood in a broader sense of what is happening – or *in actu* (“in the very act”) – in the present.

CHAPTER FOUR

Artifactuality, Periodicity, and Cinema

Midway through the commercial narrative film, *Rokudenashi* (*Good for Nothing*, 1960) directed by Yoshida Kijû, a short sequence of actuality footage abruptly appears. It shows what has come to be seen as an icon of the Japanese sixties: college students protesting against the imminent renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (ANPO). The students move in clusters, streaming through the streets: anonymous faces, none of which is looking back at the camera. On the soundtrack, we hear the voice of an unidentified lecturer, presumably an archeology professor, discussing the apparent difficulty of partitioning historical time into distinct periods: what are the criteria by which we divide history into a succession of epochs and periods? When the periodization of the historical time is associated with what would later become the iconic images of the Japanese sixties, it acquires a significance that spills over this film's narrative edge. Viewed decades later, the image of this former present exerts a force of historicity. Its value as archival footage of the past compensates, however, for the loss of its immediate sensation of actuality, of its journalistic currency.

Because of its dual status as a journalistic document of present-day actuality and an archival document of the past that has become history, this brief footage forces us to reflect upon the ontological indeterminacy of the present in relation to the conception of time that is based on historical periodization, without which categories such as “the sixties,” “postwar,” or “postmodern” do not exist. The notion of periodization by definition posits a time punctuated by breaks on both sides. Like the grammatical marker of the same name, the temporal concept of the *period* presupposes an act of arresting, an

interruption. Yet if, as Fredric Jameson suggests, “the present is not yet a historical period,” how might we reconcile a periodic conception of time with that unique temporal dimension called the present?²⁴⁴ Is it even possible to speak of the present within the conceptual framework of periodicity?

In this chapter I want to return to the questions of the elliptic-dialectical tension between journalism and the avant-garde and the increased demand for actuality in art. As we saw in previous chapters, figures associated with what I called the avant-garde documentary movement (i.e. Hanada Kiyoteru, Abé Kôbô, Teshigahara Hiroshi, Matsumoto Toshio) problematized this demand for actuality – or the temporal currency of a work of art in relation to contemporary social reality – through their efforts to redefine the concept of documentary. This chapter and the following chapter will expand the scope of investigation from the works of these self-proclaimed Marxist avant-garde critics and artists to the works of filmmakers who called themselves neither avant-garde nor Marxist. The filmmakers whose works I would like to focus on in this chapter are Oshima Nagisa (1932-) and Wakamatsu Kôji (1936-).

In spite of their willingness to push the envelope of narrative cinema towards an experimental pole and their commitment to vanguard – and often militant leftist – politics, the works of Oshima and Wakamatsu critically differ from those of the avant-garde documentary group: the difference is marked, first and foremost, by their proximity to the film industry. Yet, they too responded to the demand for actuality, to the demand for contemporary relevance and timeliness within a given work in relation to its “present,” or, the historical moment of production. Moreover, the strategies they took to

²⁴⁴ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essays on The Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002), 25.

respond to this demand expose a particular aspect of actuality, which remained latent in the works of the avant-garde documentary critics and artists: that is, the *artifice* at the heart of actuality.

While the works of the avant-garde documentary artists, such as Matsumoto and Abé, rely on the technique of defamiliarization, the works of Oshima and Wakamatsu, as we will see, deploy instead the techniques of citation, recycling, and even piracy. A certain repetition with difference marks Oshima and Wakamatsu's exposition of what Jacques Derrida calls "artifactuality" and cinema's complicity with it. Instead of questioning the order of sense perception and the formation of perceptual habits, the works of Oshima and Wakamatsu make explicit the artifice of the actuality-effect produced by journalism *and* commercial cinema, and in so doing bring to the fore the question of temporality. This in turn will enable us to approach the problem of actuality from a different dimension, that of time. In this chapter, we will thus engage with the works of these two filmmakers which, in contrast with the artists from the avant-garde documentary movement, cleave more closely to the side of journalism and its particular temporality, even as they maintain a critical stance against the common practice of journalism.

Let us return to the film with which we opened this chapter. The placement of the aforementioned brief actuality footage in *Good for Nothing* catches our eyes in the midst of an otherwise formulaic story of a group of delinquent youths. Yet this film is not alone in incorporating actuality footage into narrative fiction. There is in fact a small but significant body of postwar Japanese films that not only incorporate actuality footage, but also include a wide range of newspaper clippings, press photographs, cartoon images

published in weekly magazines and newsreel sequences.²⁴⁵ Materials directly lifted off the pages and reels of journalistic media contribute to these films' distinct visual compositions. Moreover, thanks to the legibility of these grafted materials, we are even able to pinpoint the exact dates of the events referenced in the fragments of news reports, or, by noting the periodicals' publication dates.

At first glance, this exactitude would appear only to serve the films' "reality-effects." It makes fiction look like the documentary reproduction of reality. Certainly, some of the films that directly incorporate journalistic materials do this purposefully: they mimic the look of the documentary film to achieve the effect of verisimilitude. However, a closer look at various films from the 1960s shows the situation to be otherwise. Films by Oshima and Wakamatsu, in particular, evince a citational usage of journalistic materials whose significance is not reducible to the production of reality-effects.

Above all, the direct incorporation of journalistic materials brings into play two principles that characterize the general practice of journalism: timeliness and periodicity. My objective in this chapter is hence twofold: to examine the effects produced by Oshima and Wakamatsu's cinematic citations of journalistic materials, and to use the examination of these effects as the basis from which to further reflect upon narrative cinema's relationship to the particular temporality of journalistic actuality. As we will see shortly, the historical timing of the spread of this citational strategy within narrative cinema, and the films of Oshima and Wakamatsu in particular, is critical. This timing is critical precisely because this citational strategy corresponds to a structural crisis, which had befallen the existing system of production, distribution, and exhibition of narrative films

²⁴⁵ I distinguish here between "actuality" footage and "newsreel" footage. While *newsreel footage* refers to images that are part of news film, or film used on the TV news, *actuality footage* refers to any filmic recording of unscripted events, and does not require this document to be used for news purposes.

in the 1960s, and its aftermath.

The particular dimension of actuality I want to discuss in this chapter, therefore, hinges upon the journalistic conception of it. One of the senses of the term “actuality” designates this journalistic temporality, which can be variably expressed by terms such as “newsworthy,” “current affairs,” and “up-to-dateness.” As I discussed in Chapter Two, while these temporal connotations are less explicit in English, the sense of “happening in the present” is strongly expressed in the Japanese loanword, *akchuaritii*, as well as in the French (*actualité*) and the German (*Aktualität*). The “actual” in this journalistic sense designates what is current, topical, and newsworthy. As we know from the general practice of journalism, moreover, this sense of actuality prizes the novelty of information, the topicality of events and the up-to-dateness of trends. From political scandals to the latest fashions, the primary concern of journalistic media is what is happening in the present moment, that is to say, the present that is yet to become history. Yet, this alone does not explain why journalism must always concern itself with the present and the ever-faster logic of expiration. In what follows I will thus examine the logical presuppositions that underpin this temporally bound conception of journalistic actuality, and then move on to a close reading of several films of Oshima and Wakamatsu in which we find exemplary instances of the cinematic citation of this journalistic actuality.

Periodicity and Expiration

In order to understand the implications of the citation of journalistic materials for cinema’s relation to actuality, it is necessary to pay attention to two distinctive, if not opposing, ways of conceiving periodicity. The first concerns the historical or archaeological model of periodization, which divides time into segments that are *not*

equidistant. One period or era may last more or less time than the other. An important characteristic of this model is this: each segment remains non-equidistant and the interval is determined retroactively. For this reason the determination of a historical era or period is irreducible to cyclical order. An era is often determined retroactively by its content, by events taking place within its time frame.²⁴⁶ In contrast, the cyclical order of natural seasons and the punctual order of journalistic publications such as newspapers and magazines follow a different logic of periodicity, that of the programmatic kind. In this second model, segments remain equidistant, and the arrival of the next interval is always already anticipated. Periodicity in this case hence connotes an empty form, a pre-determined program.

Whether its subject matter is politics, fashion, or crime, or whether its communicative venue is print, film, or electronic media, the second model of programmatic periodicity underpins the basic practice of journalism. Admittedly, not all forms of journalistic reporting operate within a strictly periodic cycle. On-line journalism, for instance, certainly has revolutionarized the speed and the circulation of information, to which traditional models of periodic cycles are, arguably, no longer applicable. Nevertheless, as its etymology makes it clear – the word *journal* derives from a Latin word *diurnalis*, meaning “daily” (or diurnal) – journalism at its most fundamental level presupposes a cyclical conception of time. When journalistic information is consumed, it creates anticipation for the arrival of the next round. The attitude implied by this conception of periodicity is, however, by no means the same as the attitude involved in the historiographic conception of it. A historical era is determined *ex post facto*. It is

²⁴⁶ Tosaka Jun, for example, articulates this conception of a historical period. See Tosaka Jun, “Nichijōsei no genri to rekishiteki jikan” [The Principle of Everyday and the Historical Time], *Tosaka Jun zenshū* [The Collected Works of Tosaka Jun], Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1966), 98.

not given programmatically.²⁴⁷ This distinction between the two conceptions of periodicity is crucial in putting into perspective the citational strategies used by Oshima and Wakamatsu.

As it is often argued, journalistic information loses its value as time passes, and quickly becomes obsolete. Walter Benjamin puts it succinctly: “The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new.”²⁴⁸ What defines the obsolescence of journalistic information is, first and foremost, its status of being out-of-date. That is to say, journalistic actuality is governed by its expirability. The possibility – and threat – of expiration is hence constitutive of its existence. Journalistic actuality is, by extension, defined primarily by its capacity to expire. For this reason, saying that something is “dated” in the journalistic context has implications that are twofold; it means both bearing a date and having undergone the erosion of time (and thereby becoming obsolete). Within the innocuous use of this idiom we can thus discern a certain epistemic presupposition, that is, a presupposition of this logic of expiration. In short, journalistic actuality (in which informational novelty is prized) operates in a particular mode of temporality defined by the potential expirability of its terms.

Crucially, it is through visual citations or quotations of journalistic materials that the films of Oshima and Wakamatsu expose the hidden anxiety of narrative cinema, an anxiety that the cinema too is haunted by its potential to expire, to become obsolete. Yet, at the same time, these films make perceptible the difference between the temporality of cinema and that of journalism. The effect of repetition produced by the quotational use of

²⁴⁷ Though it should be said that the zeal of many historians and cultural critics for periodization betrays a formal impulse, rather than a pure interest in the content-based differences between particular periods.

²⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 90.

journalistic materials is key to this operation. As Niklas Luhmann points out, the temporal structure of repetition is detrimental to journalistic information.²⁴⁹ It follows, then, that Oshima and Wakamatsu's appropriation of journalistic materials do not carry the same informational values as the originals. Quotation, by definition, implies repetition; it reproduces a passage or an image lifted from elsewhere. The parenthetical status of the reproduced text or image *as* repetition is often grammatically and visually marked. Oshima and Wakamatsu's cinematic citations operate in a comparable manner. Unlike the experimental breed of found footage cinema, which similarly appeals to the structure of repetition, Oshima and Wakamatsu's citational use of journalistic materials (newspapers, magazines, newsreels) does not forfeit the referential ties to the original contexts from which the images are taken.

Moreover, instead of recycling archival footage (as most of found footage filmmakers do), Oshima and Wakamatsu choose to focus on materials whose production dates are not so distant from the production dates of their films. This tendency is more pronounced in the works of Wakamatsu. For instance, his experimental "pink" film, *Yuke yuke nidome no shoujo* (*Go, Go, Second Time Virgin*, 1969) makes extensive use of images taken from tabloid-style weekly magazines, many of which reference the murder of an American actress Sharon Tate that took place in August, 1969. The film was released one month after this much publicized murder. The time lag between the release of Wakamatsu's films and the media events cited in his films become even shorter with the film, *Segura magura: shinitai Onna* (1970), which takes on another media event: the spectacular suicide of writer Mishima Yukio. The death of Mishima took place in

²⁴⁹ Luhmann writes, "A news item run twice still has its meaning, but it loses its information value" (19). See Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*, trans. Kathleen Cross (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000)

November 25, 1970. Wakamatsu and his scriptwriter Adachi Masao finished writing the script by November 29, shot the film, and released it by early December. In this case, the interval between the time of the production of quoted journalistic materials and the time of the film's release is less than a month. As one Japanese critic puts it, the speed of Wakamatsu's filmmaking is almost on par with the turnover of the weekly magazines.²⁵⁰

What do we make of this close temporal proximity between the time of the original construction of the event by the media and the time of its cinematic repetition? If the sensation of actuality or temporal immediacy is so crucial to the operation of journalistic media, what happens to this sensation when the information is repeated? Does the affective valence of actuality wane in the course of cinematic repetition because the information value of the original expires, as Luhmann suggests, as soon as it is repeated? What would be the temporality specific to films that insist on quoting journalistic materials?

In order to answer these questions, we must first look to the anxiety of cinema that imitates journalism, the cinema that follows its programmatic order of periodicity. As we saw earlier, the programmatic periodicity brings with it the threat of expiration. The cinema that replicates the temporal structure of journalism always faces this threat, but the postwar implementation of the infamous system of "program-pictures" particularly heightened it. In fact, it is not coincidental that Oshima and Wakamatsu, two filmmakers who deploy this citational strategy, worked on the periphery of the declining postwar studio system. At the time when Oshima and Wakamatsu deployed this strategy, the film industry in Japan, was undergoing a radical restructuration that eventually led to the

²⁵⁰ Hiraoka Masaaki, *Umi o miteita Zatôichi* [*Zatôichi* Who Was Looking At the Sea] (Tokyo: Izara shobô, 1973), 135.

differentiation of cinema's temporality from that of journalism.

As a point of departure, let us turn to an essay titled *Eiga zokusetsu e no chōsen* (“A Challenge to Vulgar Beliefs about Cinema”) written by Oshima. In this short essay published in the magazine *Gendai no me* (Eyes of Modern Times) in 1961, Oshima insists that the very conception of cinema as temporary entertainment suitable for short-term consumption must be contested.²⁵¹ In order to gauge the weight of his statement, some historical contextualization is required. In Japan, well into the 1960s, it was a commonplace to regard films as commodities virtually branded with expiration dates: mass produced films (known as “program-pictures”) were delivered weekly by the major studios and routinely shown for a week or two. After their week-long play they became obsolete.²⁵² According to Oshima, filmmakers who are accustomed to this programmatic structure of filmmaking have internalized a “pessimistic” view of cinema as short-lived entertainment. Yet, argues Oshima, “the cinema does not simply get old after one or two weeks.” For films with artistic integrity are capable of offering long-lasting impressions that would live on, perhaps not forever, but definitely longer than one or two weeks.²⁵³

Given the conditions of the Japanese film industry around 1961, Oshima's argument warrants careful attention, for it helps us understand the growing tension between conflicting views of narrative cinema. On the one hand, a majority of films – because they were program-pictures – were regarded as temporary amusements prone to expiration. On the other hand, there existed an alternative view of films as enduring works of art that defy the very concept of expiration, a concept which governs the life of

²⁵¹ Oshima Nagisa, “Eiga zokusetsu e no chōsen” [A Challenge to Vulgar Beliefs about Cinema], *Sengoeiga: hakai to sōzō* [Postwar Cinema: Destruction and Creation] (Tokyo: San'ichi shobō, 1963), 80.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid, 81.

both commodities and journalistic materials.

As it is well known, after reaching the astonishing record of 110 million moviegoers in the year 1958, the Japanese film industry began to decline. Cinema gradually lost its hegemonic position as peoples' favored pastime to television, which was rapidly disseminated nationwide from the late 1950s to mid-1960s. With the rise of television, the "Golden Age" of the commercial cinema supported by the postwar studio system thus came to a close. One of the consequences of this was a gradual weakening of the programmatic mode of exhibition called "block booking."

During the 1950s, not only mass-produced program-pictures not only dominated the market, but a monopoly by the six major studios (that produced these program-pictures) also held effective controls over distribution and exhibition. Japan's postwar studio system thus hinged upon the fast-paced production of program-pictures and the prearranged distribution of these films to theaters under contracts. In 1960, Japan produced 547 films, of which ninety-nine percent were program-pictures.²⁵⁴ At the time, the average production rate of each studio was two films per week. Theaters under contract with the major studios then received these program-pictures weekly, and played them for one or two weeks, often in the double feature format.

However, the weaker the film industry became overall, the easier it became for low-budget independent production companies to distribute and exhibit their works. By the mid-1960s talented young filmmakers like Oshima had also left studios and established their own production companies, while others coming out of either the documentary sector or other arts started their film careers outside the existing studio

²⁵⁴ Yomota Inuhiko, *Nihon eigashi 100 nen* [100 years of Japanese Cinema: A History] (Tokyo: Shûeisha, 2000), 160.

system. One of the most important outcomes of this flourishing current of independent filmmaking was the establishment of a new style of exhibition, which allowed more flexible booking and longer screening.²⁵⁵ As exemplified by the effort of the Art Theater Guild (ATG) – the first independent distributor, exhibitor and later producer of art films founded in 1962 – for the first time, “long-run” screenings of small budget films (lasting for more than a month at a single theater) became not only possible but also desirable.

It is hence crucial to situate the aforementioned essay, wherein Oshima contests the commonplace view of films as commodities suited for one-time-use, within the larger shift towards flexible screening times. No longer subordinated to the centralized machinery of the studio system, there emerged a small and diffuse network of companies involved in the production, distribution, and exhibition of independent films in the 1960s. This was also the time when the emergent model of “long-run” screening, which broke away from the periodical cycle of the weekly turnover, took off. Commenting on this emergent form of exhibition, Oshima argues that the demand for the “long-run” (which not only came from the producers but also from the audience) should be taken as proof that the cinema has the potential to produce works of art suited for long-term appreciation.²⁵⁶

Of course, Oshima was not alone in espousing the cinema’s aesthetic value over its entertainment value. As I have discussed in preceding chapters, the theoretical discourses of the late 1950s and early 1960s had already laid the intellectual ground to appreciate and analyze film as the art of the “mechanically produced image” (*eizô*). The emphasis on the artistic potential of the cinematic medium, which was generated by avant-garde

²⁵⁵ Satô Tadao, “Eiga sangyô” [“The Film Industry”], *Gendai eiga jiten* [Dictionary of the Contemporary Cinema], eds. Okada Susumu, et.al. (Tokyo: Bijutsu shuppansha, 1973), 53-54.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

critics such as Hanada Kiyoteru in the 1950s, was clearly passed onto the next generation of critics and filmmakers, including Oshima. However, this view of the cinema – as an art of the mechanically produced image – was by no means popular among the general public, or among the majority of filmmakers. As Oshima himself notes:

Around 1960 the film industry was still powerful, and the cinema as mass entertainment was going strong, but culturally and intellectually it was considered to be crap. A few men of letters such as Fukuda Sadayoshi and Hanada Kiyoteru produced film criticism – not in the sense of fine commentaries on film, but rather in the sense of criticism as a work of art in itself – yet these were exceptions. Generally, the cinema is not regarded as culture or art, let alone as thought.²⁵⁷

Oshima's statement might be read as an indication of the collective desire of filmmakers and critics with avant-garde dispositions to liberate cinema from its conformity to the journalistic production and the consumption of novelty. But with the autonomy of cinema also came the loss of its journalistic currency and its direct appeal to the general public.

According to Gabriel Tarde, the “sensation of actuality” (*sensation de l'actualité*) derives from the virtual assurance of one's belonging to the greater community of the addressees of journalistic media.²⁵⁸ The sensation of the urgency, topicality or timeliness of the journalistic information presumes its simultaneous mass reception. The impression of actuality conveyed by the media hinges upon the recipient's belief that the mass reception of the same information is taking place concurrently. The sensation of actuality

²⁵⁷ Oshima Nagisa, *Oshima Nagisa: 1960* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1993), 33

²⁵⁸ Gabriel Tarde, *L'opinion et la foule* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989), 9. Tarde describes a hypothetical situation in which a person is reading a newspaper with great pleasure; events recounted and information laid in the pages of the newspaper grip this hypothetical reader. He finishes reading it, and realizes that the newspaper he has just read is completely out of date. Whether it is from yesterday or last month does not matter. He feels disgusted. Where does this disgust originate, asks Tarde, which we feel at the moment when we discover that the newspaper we are reading is out of date? According to Tarde, it does not originate from our awareness that the information contained in the newspaper is simply old. Instead, it originates in the sense of exclusion, a feeling of being-left-out of the public composed of the reading masses.

or actuality-effect imparted by the media is underwritten by this subjective sense of belonging to objectively verifiable time.

This immediate appeal to the time of the present that is coextensive with the entire social field is, however, something the avant-garde has traditionally lacked. Its vanguardist position affirms a present that is in the process of *arriving*. Yet, its desire to be at the forefront of historical time is also haunted by a corresponding anxiety for becoming obsolete, outmoded, *passé*. The anxiety of the avant-garde is essentially temporal, and this temporal anxiety of becoming obsolete is inseparable from its contradictory desire to appropriate *and* differentiate itself from the mass media practices that incessantly incite sensations of actuality. If the public that the avant-garde addresses is unformed and not given outright, as Jean Cassou once noted, its temporality cannot escape an anticipatory structure.²⁵⁹ Like journalism, the avant-garde is caught in an anticipatory temporality. It expects and desires the arrival of the new. Moreover, if the task of the avant-garde is to participate actively in the formation of this unformed public, it must appeal to the masses.

However, it is precisely competing conceptions of the masses that distinguish the avant-garde's relation to time from journalism's relation to it. As I argued in Chapter One, when the avant-garde introduces the concept of plasticity to define the potentially malleable nature of the masses, it also opens up a different conception of time. The concept of plasticity signifies the dual capacity to form itself actively and receive a given form passively. This dynamic nature of plasticity exceeds programmable form and resists fixation. As Hanada suggests, understood through this plastic potentiality, the masses

²⁵⁹ Jean Cassou, "From Avant-Garde to Popular Art," *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907-1939, Volume 2: 1929-1939*, ed. Richard Abel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 218.

undergo constant metamorphoses. The avant-garde that accepts this plastic dimension of the masses and its openness to the temporal movement of metamorphosis, then, affirms a temporality that is open to utterly unpredictable changes. If we follow this argument, the avant-garde's relation to time appears radically different from that of journalism; it is incompatible with the programmatic cycle.

If there indeed was an event that turned “the sixties” into a period of its own in the history of Japanese cinema, it was not simply the emergence of the so-called “New Wave.” Rather, the event consists of more fundamental material as well as conceptual transformations that took place in the production and reception of narrative cinema. The avant-garde resistance against the programmatic conception of periodicity associated with journalism (of which Oshima's aforementioned statement is exemplary) played an integral part of these transformations. Scholars on Japanese cinema, however, have systematically overlooked this point by relying on the conventional framework of the “New Wave.” In fact, one might go so far as to say that the term “New Wave” has blinded scholars to other changes not encompassed by the stereotyped understanding of the term.

Here it would be useful to briefly examine the common assumptions that go along with the invocation of the “New Wave.” Its use originates in the Japanese media, which drew a comparison between younger directors at the Shôchiku Studio (such as Oshima Nagisa, Yoshida Kijû, and Shinoda Masahiro) and its eponymous counterpart: the French *nouvelle vague* filmmakers (Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, etc). Yet the conventional use of this category falls short of offering an appropriate conceptual framework that could illuminate the epochal shift in the history of Japanese cinema,

which took place in the transitional years between the late 1950s and the 1960s. In its general use, the term “New Wave” is thematically associated with sex, politics, and violence, and it is formally associated with Brechtian self-reflexivity. We may recall an exemplary role Oshima’s films played in the Western film theory; the list of theorists who turned to Oshima would include prominent figures of the 70s film theory, such as Stephen Heath, Noël Burch, and Edward Branigan.

Scholarly treatments of the “New Wave” both in Japan as well as in the West have also been dominated by two contrasting approaches: a thematic approach (dealing with the representations of sex, politics and violence), and a theoretical approach (which privileges formal experiments and self-reflexivity). Raising similar concerns about the “New Wave” films, David Desser notes, “[w]hile few film scholars read the New Wave in such overtly reductive terms, those who have dealt in passing with the New Wave simply acknowledged the sociocultural context and then proceeded to examine the films from their more preferred, narrow viewpoint.”²⁶⁰ Desser thus argues that existing studies of Japanese cinema of the 1960s by Western scholars have one-sidedly tended towards theoretically informed readings, which make exclusive use of Western film theory influenced by structural and post-structural Marxism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics. As Desser rightly suggests, this has resulted in the systematic de-historicization of Japanese cinema.

My current study joins Desser in his attempt to historicize postwar Japanese cinema, but my approach also parts ways with Desser’s in a fundamental manner. Desser aims at contextualizing “how certain Japanese filmmakers used cinema as a tool, a weapon in a cultural struggle,” but preserves the self-explanatory category of the “New

²⁶⁰ Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to The Japanese Cinema*, 2.

Wave.”²⁶¹ The purported novelty as well as the implicit comparability of the Japanese filmmakers with their French counter-parts are, therefore, taken for granted. His contextualization also overlooks a body of theoretical texts on film and visual media produced *by* Japanese critics and filmmakers. By contrast, I argue that the transitional years between the late 1950s and early 1960s form a turning point in the history of Japanese filmmaking *and* theory, whose ramifications cannot be fully assessed as long as we cling to this category of the “New Wave.” For this term, through its traditional association with a limited number of celebrated *auteurs*, prevents us from seeing larger transformations that equally affected filmmaking, film theory, and avant-garde art practice.

Indeed, if we were to consider an intensified demand for actuality that affected various cultural practices, from literature to film, a differently configured history of postwar Japanese cinema appears. Long before the media construed the emergence of the “New Wave,” critical changes were already taking place in the circulation and reception of narrative cinema. These changes gave rise to a new temporal logic of *durability* specific to the cinema. This logic of durability was opposed to the logic of expiration that characterized journalistic practice and its structure of periodic consumption. To wit, during the late 1950s and early 1960s Japanese cinema underwent fundamental transformations not only in the practical dimension of its production, circulation, and exhibition, but also in its theoretical and conceptual dimensions. I have already discussed the social demand for actuality, and the film theoretical response to this demand in the form of the avant-garde documentary in the previous chapters. The overturning of the journalistic conception of periodicity that long defined the temporality of cinema

²⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

(regarded as a short-term entertainment) was another key component of these transformations.

Accordingly, I take the so-called crisis of Japanese cinema induced by the rise of television – which effectively ended the “Golden Age” of commercial cinema – as a mixed blessing rather than an outright misfortune. It is a blessing precisely because it prompted a re-conceptualization of the temporality – and the obsolescence – specific to narrative cinema. It is hence all the more important, at this particular historical juncture, that the formal strategy of directly incorporating and citing journalistic materials became frequent among filmmakers with avant-garde dispositions, such as Oshima and Wakamatsu.

News vs. Archive

But what were the effects of Oshima and Wakamatsu’s citational use of journalistic materials? How did they differ from the works of other filmmakers, who similarly incorporated materials gleaned from the journalistic media? A good place to start is the opening sequence of the 1953 film *Nihon no higeiki (A Japanese Tragedy)* by Kinoshita Keisuke. Not only does Kinoshita’s use of newspapers and newsreels precede those of Oshima and Wakamatsu, but it also serves as an instructive counterexample. Moreover, to look closely at the respective uses of this technique by Kinoshita, Oshima, and Wakamatsu will give us a comprehensive view of the changing status of journalistic actuality in the films of the 1950s and the 1960s. A point to keep in mind is that the technique itself was by no means new. Rather, directly incorporating actual newspapers and newsreels had been fairly common in the field of documentary filmmaking. We may think of, for example, the insertions of pages from wartime newspapers in Kamei

Fumio's polemical documentary film also titled *Nihon no higeki* (*A Japanese Tragedy*, 1946).

However, the documentary techniques of reproducing actual pages of newspapers and incorporating newsreel footage became both conspicuous and frequent in the field of narrative filmmaking in the 1950s. This was also the time when the general public's appetite for investigatory journalism, literary reportage, and detective novels grew rapidly. Actuality in the sense of both journalistic topicality and factual reporting became a key to various forms of cultural production and media practice. Meanwhile, many of left-wing filmmakers were "purged" from major studios under the General MacArthur's anti-Communist policies. Those who were excluded from the studio system then formed small production companies, and resumed filmmaking.²⁶² Importantly, many of these independent filmmakers chose "actual" court cases and political scandals as subject matters in order to express their ideological convictions. Despite being overtly political in its theme and oppositional in the conditions of their production, however, these films resorted to the established formal norms of cinematic realism.

Among them, we find an exemplary instance of directly incorporating journalistic material in Yamamoto Satsuo's 1950 film, *Bôryoku no machi* (*Town of Violence*). The film's narrative closely draws on the written reportage about an actual crime syndicate, which was in cahoots with the local police. Written by journalists affiliated with the

²⁶² Roland Domenig writes: "The outbreak of the Cold War led to a change in occupation policies and to the suppression of the communist-dominated labor unions. In 1950, members and sympathizers of the Communist Party were removed first from official positions and later from the private sector by order of General MacArthur. More than 300 people in the film industry lost their jobs in this way" (7). See Roland Domenig, "A Brief History of Independent Cinema in Japan and the Role of the Art Theatre Guild," *Minikomi* 70 (Vienna: Akademischer Arbeitskreis Japan, 2003).

major newspaper Asahi, the reportage dealing with this political scandal was published in 1949, and its filmic adaptation appeared in 1950. In the close-up presenting the page of newspaper, for instance, we can recognize the actual reporting on this political scandal (Figure 9).

It is important to be aware of these preceding examples because later generations of filmmakers such as Oshima and Wakamatsu rejected the political activism of the old Left as well as humanist realism, both of which characterized the work of filmmakers such as Kinoshita and Yamamoto. Of course, this is not to say that Kinoshita and Yamamoto shared the exact same ideological convictions. Unlike leftist independent filmmakers such as Yamamoto, Imai Tadashi, Shindô Kaneto, and Kamei Fumio, who leaned heavily towards documentary and reportage, Kinoshita stayed well inside the established studio system and came to be known as a master of melodrama at the Shôchiku studio. The epitome of his work is his widely acclaimed anti-war melodrama, *Nijûshi no hitomi* (*Twenty-Four Eyes*, 1956), which Oshima pointedly criticized as an exemplary celebration of the postwar “victim mentality” of the Japanese.²⁶³ Yet, in his ambitious work, *A Japanese Tragedy* (1953), Kinoshita attempts to meld the documentary and news film approaches with melodrama.

Made one year after the end of the Allied Occupation (which imposed strict censorship over the Japanese film industry), the film *A Japanese Tragedy* affirms the victim status of the people of “Japan” and attempts to render visible the after-effects of

²⁶³ In his essay titled “Sengonihoneiga no jyôkyô to shutai” (“The Situations of the Postwar Japanese Cinema and Subjectivity”), Oshima notes that the film *Twenty-Four Eyes* operates through empathy among victims: “To cry together, this is exactly Kinoshita’s idea and the position he takes in this work. Only because he could regard himself as a victim just like the people of Japan, who suffered as victims of the war and feudalism, was Kinoshita able to stake his own subjectivity on it and cry with them” (*Sengoeiga: hakai to sôzô*, 198).

the Pacific War (1937-1945). Formally, it combines the cinematic codes of the maternal melodrama with the codes of the documentary and news film. The story is about the life of a war widow, who commits suicide after being mercilessly abandoned by her children. The film's rendition of the postwar cultural milieu is one that unabashedly celebrates American-style democracy, interpreted as a fierce individualism which is ever at odd with the old fashioned idea of filial piety. Keeping to the codes of maternal melodrama, Kinoshita allegorizes the "victim mentality" of the plebian populace through the figure of the suffering mother. She devotes her entire life to her children's survival during the war and their social ascendancy after the war. Her ultimate sacrifice, however, is her suicide, since it alone lifts the burden of filial piety off the shoulders of her children.

Consisting of numerous inserts of newspaper headlines, newsreel footage and written titles accompanied by instrumental music, the overall look of the opening sequence of *A Japanese Tragedy* mimics that of newsreel and documentary films. Indeed, there is an unmistakable visual similarity between the opening sequence of Kinoshita's film and Kamei's documentary film with the same title.²⁶⁴ The impression is corroborated by its use of written titles. Commenting upon Kinoshita's strategy of crosscutting between inserted news materials and fictive events, Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie note that it is reminiscent of the literary technique used by John Dos Passos in his *U.S.A.* trilogy.²⁶⁵ This comparison is a useful one, though one should not conclude that literature was the origin of this technique. As is evident from Dos Passos' own terms to describe

²⁶⁴ This similarity suggests Kinoshita's conscious "citation" of Kamei's film, a gesture that deserves analysis that is beyond the scope of this chapter. I just want to point out that Kamei's *A Tragedy of Japan* also makes frequent uses of the technique of direct insertions of newspapers. I also want to add that Kamei's film was banned after one week of screening and the Allied Occupation Force confiscated the print.

²⁶⁵ Anderson and Richie, *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, 188.

his technique – “Newsreel” and “Camera Eye” – this particular writing style was already a literary appropriation of cinematic techniques. In *A Japanese Tragedy*, however, Kinoshita opts for a chronicle-style representation of history that combines direct citations from the news media with fictive storytelling, which as Anderson and Richie point out is similar to the way Dos Passos composes his *U.S.A.* trilogy.

By combining actuality and fiction, *A Japanese Tragedy* thus attempts to historicize the general socio-political conditions of the immediate postwar years. In so doing, Kinoshita treats newspapers and newsreels primarily as archival records. That is, the inserted materials do not give much of a sense of immediacy as that of historicity. There is no better example that this to highlight the fundamental difference between news and archive, or journalism and historiography. To supplement Benjamin, who argues in the quotation cited above that the information only lives for the moment when it was new, I would like to suggest that only the *news* lives for the moment. In other words, the life of news *as* news expires after a certain passage of time. However, the same piece of information, which once was called news, attains a different kind of value once it is received as an archival record or document. To put it schematically, the difference between the news and the archive, in part, corresponds to the difference between journalism and historiography. Where journalism deals with the present moment, historiography deals with the past – that is, the archived former-present. Journalism and historiography thus privilege different modalities of time: the present for one, and the past for the other.

Kinoshita’s treatment of newspapers and newsreels in *A Japanese Tragedy* veers towards historiography rather than journalism, as it is evident from the allegorical

structure of the narrative. This allegorizing impulse can be further evinced by the title. *Nihon no higeki* can be read both as *A Japanese tragedy* and *The Tragedy of Japan*; it is a film about *a* tragedy of an individual (i.e. the character of the mother) in Japan, but it is also *the* tragedy of Japan as a nation. It is appropriate, therefore, that the very first shot of *A Japanese Tragedy* is the close-up of the Yomiuri newspaper's front page, which gravely announces the Shôwa Emperor's "sacred decision" to accept Japan's unconditional surrender on August 15th in 1945 (Figure 10). This event was *the* event that changed the course of Japanese history in the twentieth century. It cannot be overlooked that Kinoshita consciously opens up *A Japanese Tragedy* with this particular shot, the shot of the newspaper, which no doubt had attained a significant archival value by 1953.

The following shot is also that of a newspaper, its headline reporting on the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, the trial for class-A war criminals. The film then cuts to the newsreel footage of the war trial. On the soundtrack, we continue to hear dramatic instrumental music and no spoken commentary. The next insert of a newspaper headline announces the exemption of the Emperor from being tried for his war responsibility, and the film cuts to newsreel footage of the Emperor walking towards a car. In this manner, the film continues to show major events and incidents that punctuate the history of the immediate postwar years, a period marked by the Occupation. The film's first written title, which appears superimposed over a shot of the Japanese flag, sums up its historical perspective: "Eight years after the ending of the war." The next shot is of a National Diet session with the written title, which reads: "But the political poverty still exists." Fragments of newsreel footage about the 1952 May Day protest, (which is known in Japan as the "bloody May Day" because of the physical confrontation between

protestors and the police force) ensues. The intertitle “Anxiety of Living” accompanies the following shot of disheveled female workers. More shots of newspaper clippings appear, reporting variably the suicide of an unknown mother, the killing of a taxi driver, and juvenile crimes. Among other images, we also see newsreel footage of students protesting the first ratification of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (ANPO) in 1952. More than three minutes into the film, the main title *A Japanese Tragedy* appears on the screen, and the narrative action finally begins.

The Citation of Journalistic Actuality

In contrast to Kinoshita’s *A Japanese Tragedy*, Oshima’s 1960 film *Seishun zankoku monogatari* (*Cruel Story of Youth*) refuses to treat journalistic materials as archival records and historical documents. The film refuses to historicize the time of its setting. Instead, Oshima emphasizes the temporal immediacy of cited materials, their referential capacity to evoke present-day actualities. While both films incorporate visual elements that are borrowed straight from the pages of newspapers and frames of newsreels, their positions with regard to historical time diverge significantly. Since Kinoshita is a filmmaker with whom Oshima worked at the Shôchiku studio – Oshima’s criticism of Kinoshita as well as his admiration for him is fairly known – it is particularly useful to compare their respective ways of incorporating newspapers and newsreels into narrative film.

Thematically both films present generational conflicts. Yet the privileged points of identification in these films differ markedly. Young protagonists in *Cruel Story of Youth* violently reject the generation of the 1950s, whose youth was spent in pursuing political ideals under burgeoning postwar democracy. In rejecting the moral defeatism and

shattered idealism of those who came before them, the protagonists chase after a life filled with shocks and thrills only to be killed at the end of the film. The brutal deaths of Makoto and Kiyoshi in *Cruel Story of Youth* are hence diametrically opposed to the altruistic suicide of the mother at the end of *A Japanese Tragedy*. Unlike *A Japanese Tragedy*, moreover, no flashbacks are used in *Cruel Story of Youth*. Neither recollection nor nostalgia for bygone days is given any space on the screen. But the most striking difference between the temporal attitudes of two films lies in their respective ways of directly citing journalistic materials.

The opening credit sequence in *Cruel Story of Youth* consists of a series of thirteen black and white shots, presenting intricate collages of hand-torn newspaper clippings as the background for the credits. Except for the title shot, each shot lasts for three to four seconds, which is long enough to register the information presented on the screen before the legibility of letters and graphics are lost. Each shot ends by going out-of-focus, and the screen fading to black, after which the next shot appears. At the end of the film, an imprint of the character for “The End” also appears against a background, again composed of newspaper clippings. Placed at the beginning and the end, these collages of newspaper clippings bracket the main body of the film like bookends. These bookends emphasize the temporal setting of the diegesis; it is set in 1960, the year of the film’s release. The inserted newsreel reporting the April 1960 Student Revolution in Korea shot by the Daimai news team, and the actuality footage of the 1960 May Day protest shot by Oshima’s own crew further support this.

Such direct references to contemporary events occurring less than two months before the release of the film (which opened in June) attest to Oshima’s avowed intention

to make a film that does not transcend the present age.²⁶⁶ In the journalistic sense of the word, the film's references are quite actual, up-to-date. Indeed, when we look carefully at the images of newspaper clippings included, several items bearing the undeniable trace of the year 1960 can be glimpsed. For instance, in the shot introducing the names of the producer and the cameraman (rendered in red brushstrokes), several iconic advertisements from this year can be discerned. An exemplary one is a newly launched advertisement for the Shiseidô's perfume *eau de luxe*. Designed by the famous graphic artist Yamana Ayao this particular advertisement was widely circulated at this time (Figures 11 and 12). In other shots, we see advertisements for both Japanese and foreign films, which had premiered a few months or weeks earlier than *Cruel Story of Youth*. Among these we find titles such as *Shizukana Datsugokusha* (*Quiet Prison-breakers*, Iwai Kameo, 1960), *Guns of the Timberland* (Robert Webb, 1960), and *Jigoku no watarimono* (*A Drifter from Hell*, Nezu Noboru, 1960). Also included are numerous headlines for sports news and major political events of the year. In one of the headlines, for instance, we read the announcement about Khrushchev's approaching visit to the United States and Eisenhower's plan to visit the Soviet Union in return.²⁶⁷ There is little doubt that the contemporary audience was able to recognize, if only partially, these inserted headlines, photographs, and advertisements as signs referencing their own present-day actualities.

What is crucial, then, is not just the specificity of the dates given by the cited newspapers but also the temporal proximity between the occurrences of events referenced

²⁶⁶In his production notes for *Cruel Story of Youth*, Oshima writes that the film cannot be *chôjidaiteki* or supra-historical that is detached from the present era. See, *Sengoeiga*, 224.

²⁶⁷With hindsight we also know that these visits were swiftly cancelled after the crisis over a U.S. spy plane destabilized the relationship between these two superpowers in May 1960.

by these newspapers and the film's appearance in theaters. These newspapers are not included for visual impacts alone. Instead they are graphic signifiers of present-day actualities. The fact that the film weighs in the present and not the past is also evinced by the use of actuality footage wherein the film directly puts actors playing the roles of Makoto and Kiyoshi in the midst of the May Day student demonstration.

The complete script, dated from May 30th 1960, also makes explicit that the uses of the actuality footage and newsreel are not accidental but carefully planned. Under the heading "the screen of a newsreel," for instance, we read notes: "newspaper article" and "insert." There is also a written transcription of the voice-over from the inserted newsreel on the Korean students' uprising. In the direction to the following scene, we also find the reference to the May Day demonstration.²⁶⁸ Oshima himself confirms in one interview that the film's depictions of the political climate surrounding the young protagonists were intended to be *timely*.²⁶⁹ Indeed, twelve days after the film's release the Japanese students stormed the Diet in protest against the renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (ANPO). As Oshima notes, the newsreel of Korean students' uprising and the May Day demo were not only relevant to the political climate at the time, but also foreshadowed what was to come.²⁷⁰

Far from simply adding the look of verisimilitude to a fictional text, the direct incorporation of newspapers, newsreel, and actuality footage in *Cruel Story of Youth* points to Oshima's determination to make a film that was both timely and critical at the same time. However, his determination to make a film that is timely in its referential

²⁶⁸ Shôchiku inc., *Seishunzankoku monogatari* [A Script for Cruel Story of Youth], scene 1-8. 1960.

²⁶⁹ Oshima Nagisa, *Oshima Nagisa: 1960* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1993), 120-121.

²⁷⁰ Oshima revisits the historic event of the ratification of the ANPO on June 15th in 1960 in his next film, *Nihon no yoru to kiri* [Night and Fog in Japan].

relation to contemporary social reality contradicts, even undermines, his avant-gardist desire to liberate narrative cinema from its conformity to journalism. If narrative cinema wishes to keep up with the times and comment on the present-day actualities, it cannot but conform to the ever-faster logic of expiration that governs the production and dissemination of journalistic information. The works of Oshima are instructive precisely because of this contradiction, a contradiction common to all avant-garde practices that wish to make timely interventions in the present.

The films of Wakamatsu Kôji, whose works Oshima applauded at a time when mainstream film critics ignored them, present a similar tension between narrative cinema's conformity to the journalistic sensation of actuality and its resistance against it. Because of Wakamatsu's engagement with the despised genre of commercial erotica (or "pink" film, a genre that became vital to the thriving system of "program-pictures" in the mid-1960s), his films highlight this tension more starkly than those of Oshima. Take the exemplary use of contemporary newspapers in the 1965 pink film, *Kabe no naka no himegoto* (*Secrets Behind the Wall*). The film's relationship to journalistic actuality is particularly complicated, because it immediately attained significant news value of its own. The film was perceived as a scandal.

It all began when the German distribution company named Hansa-Film bought *Secrets Behind the Wall*, and sent it to the Berlin Film Festival in 1965. The film was then chosen as the official Japanese entry for the competition, a decision that infuriated the conservative Motion Picture Producers Association of Japan. The Association deemed the film as a "national disgrace" (*kokujoku*) and publicly denounced it. A newspaper report from July 7th 1965, for instance, notes: "It is perceived as unacceptable

that, of all things, the *eroduction* film is submitted as the official Japanese entry for the competition.”²⁷¹ An official letter of protest was then sent to the festival committee through the Japanese Consulate. Despite this protest, however, the film was submitted and much publicized debates ensued. Wakamatsu himself appeared on television alongside critics from the Motion Picture Producers Association. The film, which meticulously incorporates shots of newspapers and magazines, thus took part in the very production of journalistic actuality of the year.

The film begins with an extreme close-up of an eye, which we come to realize the eye of a young voyeur, a high school student who spends his days secluded in his room reading newspapers, porn magazines, and entertainment weeklies. When he is not reading, he picks up a telescope and watches another protagonist, an ex-activist now turned housewife living in the apartment building across his own. She is having an affair with her lover, also an ex-antiwar activist, who is now shamelessly turning a profit by investing stocks in companies linked to the Vietnam War. As if to amplify the sense of confinement, static exterior shots of homogeneous-looking apartment complexes punctuate the narrative, which culminates in the shocking scene of the high school student stabbing the housewife to death. At first glance, the film thoroughly conforms to the generic codes of the “pink” film, which spectacularizes sexual violence inflicted upon inert women’s bodies.

Yet arguably what sets the visual style of *Secrets Behind the Wall* apart from other “pink” films is its insistent use of newspapers, periodicals, and newsreel footage. For

²⁷¹ Quoted by Suzuki Yoshiaki in *Pinku eiga suikoden* [The Pink Film’s Outlaws] (Osaka: Puraza kikaku, 1983), 32. The emphasis is mine. The term “eroduction” was used previously to designate a group of films, which came to be known as “pink” films. I use the term “pink” to describe Wakamatsu’s films, since he is often referred to as “the king of the Pink.”

instance, the newsreel footage of the 1960 ANPO protest is superimposed on the ecstatic face of the housewife when she is having sex with her ex-activist lover in front of a framed photograph of Stalin. This is the first instance we notice the intrusion of newsworthy events into the otherwise monotonous lives of these two protagonists. The second direct citation of journalistic materials also occurs in the interior scene, which opens up with a medium close-up of the pages of a porn magazine leaning against the student's bookshelf. The film then cuts to an array of journalistic materials spread over the desk, among which we see a Mainichi newspaper with a headline that reads, "First Nighttime Air-raids on North Vietnam." The camera slowly pans to the right, capturing press photographs of the assassination of Malcolm X (who was killed in February of that year), and the photograph of the Imperial family (Figure 13).

The third instance of legible newspaper headlines appears in the scene in which the ex-activist housewife's husband is reading a newspaper in bed. Framed as a point-of-view shot of the husband, it reveals the news of Japanese shipmen's refusal to transport American ammunition to Vietnam, an actual incident that occurred in April 1965. There are several more instances in which the film presents close-ups of actual newspapers: we even learn about the election fraud that took place in March and Japan's impending ratification of a convention proposed by the International Labor Organization. From the standpoint of *our* present, all the news referenced in this film may well be taken as archival documents recording the events of 1965. But we must keep in mind that *in* 1965 these were still contemporary; they would have been seen as actual in their temporal immediacy. The Vietnam War had not yet ended; it had yet to become history.

The last instance of newspaper inserts can be found in the final shot sequence right

after the murder scene. On the soundtrack, we hear the live coverage of a baseball game either from the radio or television. The camera mimics the point of view shot of an unidentified reader of the newspaper. Then, the sound gradually diminishes, as the hand-held camera slowly zooms onto the page. The focus goes in and out, but finally, the camera gets close enough so that we can discern a small headline on the bottom of the page. It reads, “Housewife in housing projects killed!” The headline then quickly goes out of focus, and the film ends.

As was the case in *Cruel Story of Youth*, the visual incorporation of newspapers in *Secrets Behind the Wall* rhetorically grounds the temporality of diegetic events in the year 1965. In both films, the emphasis is on the contemporaneity of fictionalized events and journalistic actuality as referenced by the newspaper inserts. Yet, the last shot in *Secrets Behind the Wall* goes a step further than *Cruel Story of Youth*, adding an ironic commentary on the media’s role in the production of actuality, or more precisely, the production of the *sensation* of actuality. Take the use of the slow zoom in the final shot. The camera deliberately draws our attentions to the surface of the newspaper. Consequently, we come to learn, albeit partially, that on this particular day, there was a brawl among baseball players (which actually took place on April 12th, 1965), a fight among drunken cherry blossom gazers, a minor earthquake, and an incident involving a mentally ill female patient slashing her family to death. The last shot thus takes the spectators away from the realm of fiction with which the preceding scene ended, and throws them into the realm of journalistic actuality. The tabular form of the newspaper further stresses its adherence to the present, as if to say, “all these events happened just in one day!” To use the phrase popularized by Benedict Anderson, such a tabular image of

the newspaper visualizes the synchronic connectivity among otherwise unrelated events through the logic of “meanwhile.” The last shot brings to the fore this journalistic temporality of the meanwhile.

The signifying function of the last shot is, however, not exhausted here. There is something more to it than being a mere visual signifier of simultaneity, the synchronic time of the meanwhile. It also functions as a supplement that destabilizes the economy of its narrative. Read as a recapitulation of the event of the murder, the headline simply reports what happened in the preceding sequence. But precisely because it is a recapitulation in the form of a newspaper headline, it tells nothing about the political past of the ex-activist housewife or the sexual frustration of the student; the past is markedly absent in the newspaper headline. What this supplementary insertion of the newspaper headline effaces, in its singular attention to the present, is the very desire of these two protagonists, which has driven the narrative forward. Stripped of its sexualized spectacles, the film is about the desire of these protagonists to escape monotonous temporality, a temporality that is punctuated by the periodic consumption of newspapers, magazines, and television programs.

On separate occasions, the protagonists voice their desire to escape the monotonous cycle of their daily lives. After being scolded by his mother for not studying hard enough, the student murmurs that he wants to go to Vietnam. Meanwhile, the housewife pleads to her lover to take her away with him, away from the horrid prison of her generic apartment complex. She is met by his flat rejection: “Japan is like this room no matter where you go.” The film’s ultimate violence – the murder of the housewife by the student – is thus positioned as a long-awaited rupture, an end to the monotonous repetitions of the

same routines.

Ironically, however, this final event of the murder brings them right back into the cycle of periodic repetition, once the event enters the economy of news journalism. It is ironic precisely because the protagonists are moved from one side of journalism to the other, from the side of consuming newspapers to becoming part of the newspaper-cum-commodity. The purported singularity of the event – the murder – is thus negated at the very moment when it is turned into news. The ultimate irony expressed in the final shot of *Secrets Behind the Wall* is hence this: the protagonists have only moved from one order of repetition to another by failing to escape the trap of journalistic periodicity.

Let us pause here and think through the concept of news and its relation to journalistic periodicity. The first premise of news-oriented journalism is to deliver information about singular, contingent, and even unexpected events. If it reports on everything that is foreseeable and calculable, it loses its attraction: novelty. The second premise is that it will do so regularly. Here comes the tension internal to the practice of the news media; the unpredictability of events is contained by and subjected to the pre-determined programmatic system of news reporting. Events, in this journalistic sense, are no longer absolutely but only relatively new. In his discussion of newspaper journalism, philosopher Tosaka Jun aptly points out that the entire practice of journalism is in fact predicated upon two complementary but opposing imperatives: *timeliness* and *periodicity*.²⁷² The paradox of journalism is, however, that the speed of reporting news affects the temporal validity of the news: “The duration of the validity of a news item is

²⁷² Tosaka Jun, “Shinbun genshō no bunseki” [An Analysis of the Newspaper Phenomenon], *Tosaka Jun zenshū*, Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1966), 132.

diminished in inverse proportion to the speed of its reporting.”²⁷³ In other words, the very conception of news as something timely is already implicated in the periodic structure of journalism. Therefore, “The faster the reporting of news becomes, the sooner the expiration dates of the reported news as news.”²⁷⁴ The concept of expiration is, indeed, a byproduct of journalistic periodicity.

We all know from experience that yesterday’s newspaper gets old when today’s newspaper arrives. The same can be said about weekly, monthly, or yearly cycles. Take the example of fashion; when the coming year’s trends are announced, the current ones become outmoded. The modern conception of newness as well as our understanding of what is “actual,” timely, and up-to-date is dependent upon this journalistic conception of periodicity. It is no accident that cultural trends, politics, and the economy – three terrains of social activity that are targeted by the journalistic media – are also staple points of reference in defining present-day reality. To put it differently, our general understanding of the *time* of present-day actuality is heavily influenced, if not dictated, by what Jacques Derrida calls the “actuality-effect.” That is to say, journalistic components of the mass media often directly determine our conception of actuality in the general sense of “what is happening today.” According to Derrida, in this mediated state actuality no longer designates what is truly “existing now”: “No matter how singular, irreducible, stubborn, distressing or tragic the ‘reality’ to which it refers, ‘actuality’ comes to us by way of a fictional fashioning.”²⁷⁵ The present mediated by the journalistic conception of

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 132.

²⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*. trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002), 3. Clearly, playing on the semantic ambiguity of the French word *actualité*, Derrida in his typical manner extends his argument about actuality produced by the media’s tele-technology to a philosophical meditation upon the non-coincidence of the presence of the present.

temporality is, in other words, already an artifact, temporally and existentially one step removed from reality; it is what he calls “artifactuality.”²⁷⁶

The final shot of *Secrets Behind the Wall* prompts us to think about the cinema’s relationship to the *artifactual* dimension of actuality. What the final shot of the newspaper headline shows is the film’s own complicity in producing “artifactuality,” actuality mediated and constructed. It shows, in other words, that the film is complicit in capitalizing on events, on the “actuality-effect” of constructed events. This awareness of the cinema’s complicity with journalism is something Oshima and Wakamatsu’s films bring to the fore. Kinoshita’s *A Japanese Tragedy*, as we have seen, does not show such awareness. In Kinoshita’s film, the incorporation of “actual” newspapers only serves to validate the film’s referential claim to history. The direct citation of journalistic materials is used for the production of its reality-effects. By contrast, Oshima and Wakamatsu’s films deploy this technique both to appropriate *and* reflect upon the actuality-effects produced by journalistic media. This strategy is, however, not risk-free. Precisely because these films draw so heavily on current media events, and the latest news and cultural materials, the *legibility* of these journalistic references withers as time passes. The critical relevance of these films, in turn, faces the threat of expiration.

The Art of Artifice

Throughout the 1960s Oshima and Wakamatsu continued to make films that dealt with an artificial fashioning of actuality. Time and again, Oshima and Wakamatsu take up actual crimes and incidents as their subject matters. However, the emphasis of their appropriation of journalistic materials shifted from conveying temporal immediacy to

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

exposing the inseparability of the artifice of fiction from the actuality-effect of non-fiction. This tendency is more pronounced in Oshima's case. What do we make of this shift towards the emphasis on artifice – rather than the sensation of immediacy – of actuality? One way to answer this question is to interpret it as resistance against the anxiety associated with the threat of expiration. If the cinematic repetition of journalism risks compounding such anxiety, emphasizing the artifice of fiction might be a way to make explicit this repetition *as* difference. Another way to answer this question is to consider changes in the conditions of independent filmmaking in the 1960s, including the weakening of the rigid periodicity embodied by the system of “program-pictures” and a corresponding demand for the more flexible screening time.

Let us take the example of Wakamatsu's 1969 film, *Go, Go, Second-Time Virgin*. As in the case of his other films such as *Okasareta Byakui* (*Violated Angel*, 1967) and *Teroru no kisetsu* (*Season of Terror*, 1969), Wakamatsu incorporates journalistic materials in the form of a montage sequence composed of stills. As in the case of *Violated Angel*, the montage sequence of the inserted stills in *Go, Go, Second-Time Virgin* holds a tenuous connection to the overall narrative, and the stills stand out as immobile spectacles. The images included are pages of *manga* (comic books) featuring violent scenes of killing, photographs of Sharon Tate, and caricatured images of Tate and other victims slaughtered by Manson Family in August 1969 (Figure 14 and 15). Again, Wakamatsu recycles elements of journalistic actuality whose “topicality” has yet to wane.

Interestingly, scholars who have commented on Wakamatsu's insistent reference to journalistic actuality have been either dismissive of it or overtly psychological in their

interpretation. For instance, in his analysis of *Violated Angels* (a film based on actual incident of homicides that took place in Chicago in 1966), Noël Burch writes: “Actual, recent events have often provided raw material for Wakamatsu’s fantasies, as they now did for Adachi Masao, his new script-writer.”²⁷⁷ Speaking about *Go Go Second-Time Virgin*, Desser on the other hand argues: “As in *Violated Women* [*Violated Angels*], Wakamatsu shows still images drawn from commercial exploitation forms, except in this later film, he shows them at the end, forcing a kind of retrospective understanding of the hero’s motivations.”²⁷⁸ According to Desser, the graphic violence contained by the included stills of the *manga* and the photographs of Sharon Tate explains the “motivations” of the protagonist. However, as I argued in my reading of *Secret Behind the Wall*, the use of journalistic materials in Wakamatsu’s films is not reducible to such simple psychological explanations.²⁷⁹ Rather, what is at stake is the temporal proximity between journalism’s presentation of actuality and cinema’s repetition of it, which in turn exposes this actuality as artifact.

Indeed, visual and audio materials recycled in *Violated Angels* make it clear that the film is self-consciously building itself on the already mediated – and spectacularized – images of pornography, violence, and political protest. The opening montage sequence of the film, which is composed entirely of still frames and still photographs, juxtaposes close-ups of nude female models and those of the male protagonist who buries his face in the pages of softcore pornographic magazines. This opening sequence is symmetrically

²⁷⁷ Burch, *To the Distant Observer*, 352.

²⁷⁸ Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre*, 104.

²⁷⁹ Moreover, given the fact that the script was largely written by Kara Jûrô, the legendary performance artist (and the founder of the *Jôkyô gekijô* [the Situation Theater]) who plays the leading character of the young killer, it is not accurate to solely attribute the film’s imagery to Wakamatsu and Adachi. See “Hontô no imi de no nokosareta comyunikeeshon: Kara Jûrô intabyuu” [“Remaining Communications in the True Sense of the Word: Interview with Kara Jûrô”], Pamphlet for DVD, *Okasareta Byakui* [*Violated Angel*] (Tokyo: Kinokuniya, 2006), 7-10.

balanced by the closing sequence, which is again composed of still images. But this time Wakamatsu alternates the freeze-frame close-up of two police men coming at the protagonist with a series of press photographs, comic strips, and newspaper articles, all of which deal with the issues of Vietnam war and student protests. Taken together, the opening and closing sequences serve as visual equivalents of quotation marks, reminding the viewer of the film's citational strategy. In emphasizing the spectacular status of the quoted journalistic materials through stillness, the film foregrounds the *mediatedness* of the three kinds of spectacles, which its narrative appropriates and dramatizes: sex, violence, and politics. It is precisely the film's self-conscious use of the stilled images taken from the media that heightens our awareness of the mediated status of these spectacles, and the fact that the media is responsible for producing these sensational spectacles. The film's conscious repetition of journalistic materials, including the much publicized murder incident that serves as the basis of the narrative, hides neither its complicity with the sensation of actuality produced by the media nor the fact that the actuality is an artifact.

Oshima's 1968 film, *Kôshikei (Death By Hanging)*, similarly draws on highly mediatized materials. The film takes as its basis the Komatsugawa Incident, an actual murder case committed by a residential Korean student named Ri Chin-U (Li Jin Wu) in 1958. The incident received wide press coverage because Ri himself called up the Yomiuri newspaper, offering information about the murder as a scoop. The police asked radio stations to broadcast the taped conversation in order to identify the perpetrator. Ri was also writing a short story based on an earlier murder he had committed, and sent it to a literary competition hosted by the Yomiuri newspaper. After his arrest Ri was

sentenced to death, and was hung in 1962. While being held in prison, Ri corresponded with another residential Korean journalist; their letters were subsequently published in 1963. Accordingly, the case maintained a high profile, igniting public debates on surrounding political issues (e.g. capital punishment, Japan's colonialism, the power of the state, the ethnic identity of the residential Koreans, discrimination against Koreans, and so on).

Although the film occasionally includes references to the published correspondence, its set-up is completely *fabricated*: the narrative is built upon the impossible premise that the execution fails because the protagonist R's "body refuses capital punishment." R, who fails to die does not remember his identity. The narrative henceforth focuses on Japanese officers' collective effort to bring back his memory, to remind R of his identity and his crime. It is not my intention here to provide an in-depth analysis of this much discussed film, but I do want to point out that Oshima's continued interest in exposing the imbricated relation between journalistic actuality and cinematic fiction.²⁸⁰ To extrapolate from Derrida, we might say that Oshima's interest lies in *artifactuality*, the artifice of fiction that already integrated into the fabric of actual life.

It is hence all the more appropriate that Oshima's next film, *Shōnen (Boy)*, 1969, is about a family of imposters who make their living by faking car accidents. The film repeatedly inserts shots of actual newspaper articles about the real life "crime" of this family, which became a short-lived media sensation in September 1966. Like *Death By Hanging*, the focus of the film *Boy* is again on the character whose life is already marked

²⁸⁰ Newspapers again appear as graphic elements, though this time they are used as wallpaper that covers a makeshift house, a setting presumably signifying where Ri has grown up. Of course, newspapers are often used as insulation: given the media's heavy involvement in the whole process of arresting and executing Ri, it is hardly accidental that Oshima uses newspapers as only decorations of Ri's house.

by the art of fiction. The real life model of the ten-years-old protagonist of the film “acted” in order to make his living. He pretended to be hit by cars so that his parents could extort compensation from the drivers; artifice was his reality. The film *Boy* brings to light the impossibility of categorically separating actuality from fabrication, reality from fiction.

Importantly, unlike his earlier film, *Cruel Story of Youth*, Oshima’s later films such as *Death By Hanging* and *Boy* no longer adhere to journalistic references that are “current.” The journalistic materials recycled in these two films are, strictly speaking, *inactual*. They are out-of-date. Yet, in spite of their dated status, the materials reproduced in these films do not carry the weight of archival documents. Rather, the apparent obsolescence of the formerly actual news (which no longer are *news* in the strict sense) makes perceptible the difference between cinema’s fictive treatment of mediatized events and the original media coverage of these events. In other words, the strategic use of the belated repetition of journalistic actuality makes it possible for narrative cinema to signal its difference from the practice of journalism. This temporal non-coincidence between narrative cinema and journalism, in turn, exposes a constitutive difference in time construed as present. That is, it exposes how the present time is always *inactual*; it is always non-coincident with itself.

The Emergence of the Art Theatre Guild

Oshima’s belated repetition of journalistic materials in his films, such as *Death By Hanging* and *Boy* also compels us to reflect upon the historical timing of narrative cinema’s separation from journalism. Importantly, the shift in emphasis from temporal proximity to the temporal non-coincidence between the journalistic production of

actuality and the cinematic repetition of it in Oshima's works overlaps with his move away from studio-based to independent filmmaking. Given Oshima's dissatisfaction with the fast turnover of "program-pictures" and their periodic consumption, it is worth thinking through this shift in emphasis on actuality alongside larger historical transformations occurring in Japan's film culture. For, as I noted earlier, the 1960s was also the time when the "long-run" style of showing films became possible through alternative exhibition venues, such as the Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka (the principle theater of the Art Theatre Guild), and the Underground Theater Sasoriza. Not surprisingly, the works of Oshima and Wakamatsu, which became increasingly experimental throughout the 1960s, became favorites of these alternative theaters.²⁸¹

Established in 1962, the Art Theatre Guild (ATG) was the first company to experiment with an alternative mode of producing, distributing, and exhibiting films. Unlike the studio-based distribution companies, ATG set up an independent committee mainly composed of film critics who chose films "with artistic instead of commercial considerations in mind."²⁸² Under the auspices of the cinephilic committee, ATG distributed the works of numerous filmmakers, including Eisenstein, Welles, Bergman, Cocteau, Antonioni, Buñuel, Fellini, Resnais, Kawalerowics, Wajda, Godard, Truffaut, and Varda.²⁸³ Apart from the distribution of these foreign films, ATG also embarked on distributing, exhibiting, and later funding the works of Japanese filmmakers and avant-garde artists, such as Teshigahara Hiroshi, Matsumoto Toshio, Oshima Nagisa, Imamura Shōhei, Yoshida Kijū, Hani Susumu, Terayama Shūji, Kuroki Kazuo, and Mishima

²⁸¹ Many of Wakamatsu's films from the late 60s were screened at the Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka, instead of the commercial theaters for "pink" films.

²⁸² Roland Domenig, 11.

²⁸³ Ibid., 12.

Yukio.

Other alternative film exhibition venues, which functioned as multi-purpose event spaces for avant-garde performances, music events, and film screenings, also emerged at this time: these include the Underground Theatre Sasoriza and the Sôgetsu Art Center.²⁸⁴ These alternative venues not only changed the culture of film viewing in a fundamental manner, but they also helped foster vibrant interactions among avant-garde artists, filmmakers, and critics. In 1966, for instance, the first massive screenings of avant-garde and experimental films were held at the Sôgetsu Art Center. The center, founded by the Teshigahara family, frequently invited contemporary artists and filmmakers such as Michel Tapié, Robert Nelson and Stan Brakhage.²⁸⁵ Meanwhile, Teshigahara's own film, *Otoshiana* (*Pitfall*, 1962), which he made in collaboration with Abé, became the first Japanese film to be distributed by ATG.

Besides fostering close interactions among avant-garde artists and independent filmmakers, ATG also made one particularly significant contribution to the transformation of Japan's film culture: it revolutionized the screening time of films, making the "long-run" possible. According to Roland Domenig: "One of ATG's basic rules was to show each film for at least a month, irrespective of attendance. In the 1960s, the repertoire was usually changed weekly, and a four-week run was exceptional even for box-office hits."²⁸⁶ ATG thus helped filmmakers with artistic ambitions to challenge programmatic periodicity that dictated the exhibition of narrative films. Oshima's desire for the cinema that does not expire after one or two weeks became a fact with ATG.

²⁸⁴ In discussing the history of ATG, Hirasawa Gô notes a crucial role played by Kuzui Kinshirô, the manager of the Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka. See Hirasawa Gô, "ATG's Early Years and Underground Cinema," *Minikomi* 70. (Vienna: Akademischer Arbeitskreis Japan, 2003), 18.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Roland Domenig, 11.

In fact, Oshima's own works played a key role in bringing about this change. The impetus for ATG to finance independent filmmakers (rather than just distributing them) came out of successful experiences with the "long-run" showing of low-budget films. For instance, in 1965, the Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka held an eight-day event, which included the screenings of Oshima's experimental short, *Yunbogi no nikki* (*Yunbogi's Diary*, 1965), his first commercial film, *Ai to kibô no machi* (*A Town of Love and Hope*, 1959), and his lectures. According to Hirasawa, it was because the event was so well attended that "people started to believe that for a low budget independent productions, funds could be recouped even with screenings at just the Shinjuku Bunka, as long as a long run was possible."²⁸⁷ Hirasawa's observation attests to the fact that low-budget independent filmmaking and the rejection of the programmatic periodicity associated with studio-based filmmaking were critically linked. ATG and its central theater, the Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka, thus helped Japanese cinema to break away from its subordination to the logic of expirability and the temporal structure of programmatic periodicity associated with journalism. *This* was an event.

Perhaps it is appropriate to mention here that one of Wakamatsu's recent books is provocatively titled *Jikônashi* (*No Statute of Limitations*, 2004). The title itself is a quotation from Wakamatsu's statement that "there is no statute of limitation or parole for the filmmaker."²⁸⁸ Wakamatsu's statement is a simple one: filmmakers must take responsibility for their works as long as they exist. But to say that the films and filmmakers have no statute of limitations also means that they are exempt from the logic of expiration. Statutes of limitations in legal discourse mean that there are pre-determined

²⁸⁷ Hirasawa, 20.

²⁸⁸ Wakamatsu Kôji, *Jikônashi* [No Statute of Limitations] (Tokyo: Waizu shuppan, 2004), 202.

periods of validity. Some crimes, just like edible commodities and medical prescriptions, “expire” after the statutory period of limitation: they are branded with expiration dates. According to Wakamatsu, however, films do not have expiration dates.

When read together Oshima’s earlier suggestion that films should not be subjected to the threat of expiration, which journalistic commodities such as weekly magazines face, Wakamatsu’s statement recaps a crucial transformation that took place in narrative cinema’s temporal relation to journalism. As I argued in this chapter, at the basis of this relation between narrative cinema and journalism is a claim to actuality. This claim to actuality is, moreover, inseparable from the anxiety of the avant-garde to differentiate itself from journalism.

By engaging with the works of Oshima and Wakamatsu, two independent filmmakers with avant-garde dispositions whose works fall in-between the commercial and experimental poles of filmmaking, I have tried to articulate this paradoxical desire of the avant-garde to adhere to the present. The works of these two filmmakers who started their careers within the stratified system of “program pictures,” and who later moved towards the experimental side of independent filmmaking, allow us to see the problematic of actuality in its temporal dimension. In the next chapter, I will turn to another dimension of this problematic, that of the politics of power. This question of power in relation to actuality will take us to the film-theoretical discourse of the *fûkeiron* (“theory of landscape”) that emerged at the end of the 1960s, and the appropriation of the pre-classical genre of *actuality* films by Japanese filmmakers of the time, namely Oshima, as well as one of Wakamatsu’s key collaborators, Adachi Masao.

CHAPTER FIVE

Returning to Actuality: *Fûkeiron* and The Landscape Film²⁸⁹

The late 1960s occupies a unique place in the history of political filmmaking, not only in Japan, but also in the world, for, during this period, numerous alternative film movements worked to intensify the alliance between formal experimentation and political radicalism. At the same time, however, “politics” started to lose its visibility, since what constituted as “political” in the very notion of politics became ambiguous. It became increasingly difficult to track macro-level politics, that is, political operations of state legislature, government organizations, the police, the military, educational institutions, world capitalism and so on. In turn, leftist intellectuals were growingly frustrated with the clichéd definition of political resistance as nothing other than an antagonistic opposition to those macropolitical entities. This frustration increasingly led filmmakers, theorists, and activists to attempt to make micropolitical relations of power visible.

In short, the practice of filmmaking had come to a crossroads. It was no longer enough for cinema to deploy the now-clichéd images of student protesters confronting riot police in gear, and expect these images to represent politics adequately. In fact, the practice of filmmaking had become too bound up with the clichéd representations of “politics” that had become the mainstay, not only of political filmmaking, but also the sensationalist news media. Clichés are the rigidification of image-making practices into the well-worn roads of representational habits. In other words, these macropolitical representations of large-scale demonstrations (e.g. the masses confronting the state apparatus embodied in the form of riot police) no longer gave an adequate picture of the

²⁸⁹ An earlier version of this chapter has been published in *Screen* 48.3 (Autumn, 2007): 345-362.

actual state of power relations. New ways of representing relations of power had to be invented. This was the challenge that leftist filmmakers, especially ones who engaged in documentary practice, were facing.

In Japan, several filmmakers actively responded to this challenge by refusing to document macropolitical events, such as public demonstrations, student protests, barricades, picket lines, riot police in action, and other such large scale, dramatic scenes. For they understood that politics at this level of visibility was akin to news events accompanied by press photographs or broadcasted over dinner tables; that is, these events had already become the substrate of the actuality-effect produced by the media. As we saw in the last chapter, one way to respond to this mediatized “actuality” was to repeat it with difference. Yet another way to respond to it was to avert the camera’s gaze away from the spectacular events themselves. This chapter will turn to two independent films that exemplify, albeit in a different manner, this shift away from politicized spectacles packed with human actors to eventless – and often deserted – quotidian landscapes, and the important current of a theoretical discourse called *fūkeiron* (“theory of landscape”), which emerged alongside these two films.

As an example of the political documentary film practice of this period, I cite Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino’s 1968 film manifesto, *La Hora de los Hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*), a celebrated cornerstone of Third World Cinema. Here we have the sound of machine guns firing in perfect synch with a rapid montage of fashion models, Batman, cowboys, and bleeding Vietnamese children; this famed sequence emblemizes the activist notion of “film as a weapon,” a militant ideal engraved so

deeply in the history of world cinema.²⁹⁰ To quote Solanas and Gettino, “The camera is the inexhaustible *expropriator of image-weapons*; the projector, *a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second*.”²⁹¹ Of course, this militant vision of film activism thus analogized to armed resistance was not limited to Argentina, but was common to a wide range of leftist political filmmaking of the 1960s.

For instance, 1968 also saw Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin form a militant film collective, the Dziga-Vertov Group, as a critical response to the insurrection of May '68. In Japan, documentary filmmaking exemplified by the work of Ogawa Shinsuke and Tsuchimoto Noriaki responded to the increasing demands to document and support intensifying student protests and other forms of political activism. Like Newsreel, the New Left documentary collective founded in New York in 1967, Ogawa and Tsuchimoto turned their camera to students and workers behind barricades. The most emblematic examples of such direct participation in political activism are perhaps Ogawa's *Gennin hôkoku: Haneda tôsô no kiroku* (*Report from Haneda*, 1967) and Tsuchimoto's *Paruchizan zenshi* (*Prehistory of the Partisan Party*, 1969).²⁹²

Yet at the height of such political upheaval and the spread of activist documentary filmmaking, another group of Japanese leftist filmmakers was traveling through Japan. They filmed only the quotidian scenery of more than thirty-three cities in order to trace

²⁹⁰ In the United States, Newsreel is most closely associated with this militant vision of “film as a weapon.” For instance, in discussing Newsreel's strategic differences from other documentary filmmaking of the period, Thomas Waugh notes, “Such spokespeople as New York's Robert Kramer (before he turned to fiction) rejected analysis as a goal entirely, championing instead the notion of film as a weapon. . . . The early Newsreel film-weapons were often criticized by radicals for an ‘ultra-left disdain for quality (the larger the grain, the better the politics)’” (237). See Thomas Waugh, “Beyond *Vérité*: Emile de Antonio and the New Documentary of the Seventies,” *Movies and Methods: An Anthology II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 233-258.

²⁹¹ Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino, “Towards a Third Cinema,” *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, Ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1976, 58.

²⁹² For a comprehensive account of the works of Ogawa and Tsuchimoto, see Mark Abé Nornes, “The Postwar Documentary Trace: Groping in the Dark,” *Positions* 10.1 (Spring 2002), 39-78.

the footsteps of a nineteen year old, Nagayama Norio, who was charged with serial murder, and who immediately gained the media's attention upon his arrest in April, 1969. The film is titled *Ryakushô: renzoku shasatsuma* (*A.K.A. Serial Killer*, 1969). While taking on one of the most "actual" news materials of the time, *A.K.A. Serial killer* refuses to reproduce the sensation of actuality conveyed by the news media.

Furthermore, while *A.K.A. Serial Killer* presents itself as non-fiction, its approach to its subject matter is antithetical to the Griersonian ideal of classical documentary filmmaking practice, famously defined as "the creative treatment [or dramatization] of actuality." Nothing dramatic happens or appears in *A.K.A. Serial Killer*. In its insistence on the lack of drama and its focus on the eventless landscape, the film's strategy appears comparable to the works of certain European filmmakers, such as Chantal Akerman and Danièle Huillet/Jean-Marie Straub from the 1970s.²⁹³ Yet *A.K.A. Serial Killer* critically differs from the latter precisely because of its temporal and referential proximity to a contemporary media event: Nagayama's crime.

Neither incorporating journalistic materials nor showing images of Nagayama and his victims, the film refuses to reduce the crime to the level of individual human agents. Instead it strings together 90 minutes of fragmentary actuality footage, presenting both urban and rural landscapes taken in the cities from the tip of the northern island of Hokkaido to the southwestern prefectures of the mainland Japan. Yet, because of its peculiar obsession with the eventless images of quotidian landscapes, *A.K.A. Serial Killer* stands apart from the majority of militant, political documentaries of the time, which emphatically turn the camera towards the individual faces of social agents in the midst of

²⁹³ I am thinking of films, such as *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975) and *Moses und Aron* (Danièle Huillet/Jean-Marie Straub, 1974-1975).

macropolitical events. Where does this refusal to focus on individual actors come from? Why was it necessary to turn the camera towards banal cityscapes instead of dramatic actions? In order to answer these questions, we need to turn to the discourse of the *fûkeiron* and, to another important film that presents a similar strategy of documenting eventless landscapes. This is Oshima Nagisa's *Tokyo sensô sengo hiwa: eiga de isho o nokoshiteitta otoko no monogatari* (*The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War: The Story of A Man Who Left His Will on Film*, 1970).

We may start by noting the contextual relation between these two films. *A.K.A. Serial Killer* is the collaborative work of several filmmakers, most of whom worked for either Oshima Nagisa or Wakamatsu Kôji (or for both). The film has gained its legendary status in the history of Japanese cinema for various reasons; but most of all, the film's legendary reputation grew because of its proximity to the concurrent discourse of the *fûkeiron*. Although the film itself was not officially shown to the public until 1975, the handful of critics and filmmakers who had seen it engaged in heated debate over the film's focus on landscape.²⁹⁴ Moreover, *fûkeiron* critics such as Matsuda Masao (1933-) explicitly made connections between *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and Oshima's *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*. Made one year after *A.K.A. Serial Killer*, this black and white narrative film is dedicated to the failed revolutionary "War of Tokyo." In Oshima's view, the radical student movements that intensified during 1968-69 and culminated in the occupation of Tokyo University and in the anti-war demonstrations in Shinjuku constituted a failed revolution. This revolutionary struggle, "at its peak, was dubbed the

²⁹⁴The film was never screened in the United States until recently, and the U.S. premiering of the film by was made possible by the joint efforts of Japanese scholars, such as Hirasawa Gô who has been working on the theory of *fûkeiron*, as well as non-Japanese scholars, such as Mark Abé Nornes, Aaron Gerow, and Harry Harootunian. In addition, what set off this revived interest in *A.K.A. Serial Killer* was, at least in part, the return of Adachi Masao to Japan from Lebanon in 2000.

War of Tokyo by the Red Army Faction,” and it ended “in a mood of defeat.”²⁹⁵ Importantly, this filmic requiem dedicated to the post-Tokyo War period includes a film-within-a-film, which presents a remarkable formal similarity to *A.K.A. Serial Killer*. This film-within-a-film of *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* and the entire film of *A.K.A. Serial killer* are characterized by the visual predominance of static long shots of banal cityscapes often devoid of human figures. Japanese critics and filmmakers who became involved in the discourse of the *fūkeiron* therefore called these two films “landscape films” (*fūkei eiga*).²⁹⁶

While the main theorist of the *fūkeiron* was Matsuda Masao, who was one of the crew members of *A.K.A. Serial Killer*, a former professional Marxist revolutionist and an editor of literary and film journals, other well-known figures contributed to its formation, such as the filmmaker Hara Masataka (a.k.a. Masato, co-scriptwriter for Oshima’s *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*), photographer Nakahira Takuma, and other critics associated with journals such as *Provoke* (1968-1969) and *Eiga Hihyō II (Film Criticism II, 1970-1973)*. Perhaps the most well known participant of the *fūkeiron* is, however, Adachi Masao (1953-), a “filmmaker-activist,” who began his filmmaking career while he was a student at Nihon University. Since so little is written in English about Adachi’s filmmaking career, I will offer a brief overview before turning to an analysis of the *fūkeiron* and the two “landscape films.”

Adachi worked for Wakamatsu Production throughout the 1960s. In 1971, Adachi and Wakamatsu filmed a polemical propaganda “newsreel,” *Sekigun – PFLP*

²⁹⁵ Oshima Nagisa, “How to die in the 1970s.” Commentary included in the DVD, *The Post-Tokyo War Confidential: The Story of A Man Who Left His Will on Film*. (1970).

²⁹⁶ While the term “landscape film” was initially used to describe just two films (*A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story*), it has been applied to other films such as Hara Masato’s *Hatsukuni shirasumera mikoto* (1973) and Takamine Gô’s *Okinawan Dream Show* (1971-1974).

Sekai sensô sengen (*The Red Army/ PFLP: Declaration of World War*), in Lebanon and Jordan through the help of the Marxist Leninist militant organization Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).²⁹⁷ Wakamatsu and Adachi's documentation of the Palestinian struggle took place shortly after the Dziga Vertov Group's documentary project commissioned by Al Fatah was shot in Jordan.²⁹⁸

Before he joined the Wakamatsu Production, Adachi made an experimental short film *Wan* (*Bowl*, 1961), which was followed by another experimental film, *Sain* (*Closed Vagina*, 1963). He was then a member of the student-initiated film collective *VAN* (*VAN eiga kagaku kenkyûjo*), which took part in various avant-garde art activities, such as the annual Yomiuri Indépendant exhibition. From the mid-1960s, Adachi worked for Wakamatsu mostly as a scriptwriter. It was during this time that he directed several feature-length films, including *Hinin Kakumei* (*Contraceptive Revolution*, 1966), *Gingakei* (*Galaxy*, 1967), *Seichitai: Sexzone*, (*Sexzone*, 1968), and *Jogakusei gerira* (*School Girl Guerilla*, 1969). Adachi also worked as a scriptwriter for Oshima's independent production company Sôzôsha, which Oshima founded after he left the Shôchiku studio.²⁹⁹ Adachi's involvement in the making of *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and the discourse of the *fûkeiron* came after these years of close collaborations with Oshima and Wakamatsu.

²⁹⁷ The making of this film was a turning point for Adachi's career as a filmmaker-activist. After a several more years of filmmaking and grass roots activism, he left Japan for Lebanon. Adachi was arrested in Lebanon in 1997, and deported back to Japan in 2000. Adachi has directed a new film, *Yûheisha, terorisuto* (*The Condemned: Terrorist*, 2007). For more information on Adachi and the political avant-garde and experimental film movements in Japan from 1960s onward, see *Underground Film Archives* [Andaaguraundo firumu aakaibusu] ed. Hirasawa Gô (Tokyo: Kawaide shobô, 2001).

²⁹⁸ However, the Dziga Vertov Group's project did not materialize until Godard reconstructed the documentary footage with Anne-Marie Miéville, and released it as *Ici et ailleurs* (*Here & Elsewhere*) in 1974.

²⁹⁹ Oshima established his own production company Sôzôsha after he left the Shôchiku Studio in 1960. The Oshima's films to which Adachi contributed as a scriptwriter are *Shinjuku dorobô nikki* (*Diary of A Shinjuku Thief*, 1968) and *Kaette kita yopparai* (*Three Resurrected Drunkards*, 1968).

It is also known that Sasaki Mamoru, co-scriptwriter for Oshima's film, *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*, was involved in the production of *A.K.A. Serial Killer*. But the nexus between the relatively unknown *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and the internationally renowned *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* that I want to foreground in this chapter does not focus on the crewmembers but rather the form of the film. My argument is that in their exclusive focus on the quotidian landscapes of Japan *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* not only re-conceptualize the militant ideal of "film as a weapon," but also offer an implicit critique of documentary film as a genre. Moreover, they do so by appropriating the pre-classical cinematic genre of the *actuality* film (or *actualities*). To assess their implicit critique, however, requires an extended examination of *fûkeiron*, which will provide an indispensable theoretical framework for understanding why these particular films emerged at the end of the 1960s in Japan.

In the words of Matsuda, what these critics commonly shared was an "obsessive propensity towards landscape."³⁰⁰ As I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, their interest in the concept and image of landscape points to their collective awareness of a particular historical conjuncture of political, cultural, and economic transformation. Very schematically, we can identify at least three interlocking changes happening at the end of the 1960s in Japan: the waning of a centralized mode of political resistance (the masses vs. the state); an increasing skepticism towards the centrality of the revolutionary subject

³⁰⁰³⁰⁰ Matsuda Masao, "Ûtopia no hango," *Fûkei no Shimetsu*. (Tokyo: Tabata shoten, 1971), 134.

(*shutai*) among leftist filmmakers and activists; and Japan's economic shift from industrial to postindustrial capitalism.³⁰¹

More concretely, I am arguing that the faltering of the centralized mode of thinking about political resistance and subjectivity led these Japanese leftist filmmakers to discover the problematic of landscape. That is, the increasing interest in the semiotic functions of quotidian landscapes in Japanese cinema marks a crucial transition from a centralized subjectivist mode of thinking about political resistance – anchored in the revolutionary acts of human agents – to a de-centralized analytic mode of investigating a structural dimension of what Gilles Deleuze calls the “diagram” that conditions and actualizes invisible relations of power.³⁰²

“Homogeneous Landscapes” and the Cartography of Power

Among the classical images presented by the documentary films of the 1960s are those of police brutality, picketing workers, marching students; images, in other words, that convey a sense of eventfulness and human action. As Michael Renov writes in his discussion of early Newsreel, “there was a perceived need for immediate coverage of events from a left perspective.”³⁰³ Similarly, in a 1967 interview Ogawa speaks of the sense of urgency he felt about getting involved in the filming of student activism: “I had a gut-level fear that I was becoming apathetic towards politics while making PR films [public relations films] no matter what I said about them . . . And when I saw the struggle

³⁰¹ For the Marxist discourse on the active, revolutionary “subject” (*shutai*) and the debate over subjectivity (*shutaisei ronsô*) that took place in the immediate postwar years, see J. Victor Koshmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1996.

³⁰² Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1986), 80-81.

³⁰³ Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 11.

of student protesters at Meiji University, I felt strong urge to do something about the reality presented there from my own [professional] position.”³⁰⁴

This interview took place immediately after Ogawa finished the making of *Assatsu no mori* (*Forest of Pressure*, 1967), an acclaimed documentary film about students at Takasaki City University of Economics. It is worth noting some of the critics’ responses to the film in order to highlight the sense of urgency aimed at and conveyed by Ogawa’s film. In a 1968 review of the film, Matsuda, for instance, describes the sequence from *Forest of Pressure*, wherein student protesters violently clash with police in front of the courthouse: “A riot policeman reaches his hand forward with the intention of taking off the white cloths masking the students’ faces. Even a piece of white cloth, here, can become a weapon. And when the documentarist gives up his camera and tries to guard the masked fighters – the student troopers – with his own body, this documentary is promised to appear as masterpiece in front of our eyes.”³⁰⁵ To turn to more recent responses, a comment by Mark Abé Nornes expresses a similar appraisal: “All of these films rejected the rhetoric of objective reportage used by the television news documentary to veil its alliance with the government and big business. Ogawa and Tsuchimoto’s films documented the thrill of independence, of crossing barricade lines and taking sides. This bold move attracted the burgeoning student movement, making the filmmakers cultural heroes of the left.”³⁰⁶

Contrary to this tradition, however, there are no such iconic, urgent images of historic events or heroic figures that would easily identify *A.K.A. Serial Killer* as a

³⁰⁴Ogawa Shinsuke, “Daigaku tōsō o toraeru me,” *Eiga o toru: dokyumentarii no shifuku o motomete*, ed. Yamane Sadao (Tokyo: Satsuma shobō, 1993), 82.

³⁰⁵Matsuda Masao, “Ajitēshon no ne: Assatsu no mori san” [The Roots of Agitation: Praise for *Assatsu no mori*], *Bara to mumeisha* [A Rose and The Unnamed] (Tokyo: Haga shoten, 1970), 215.

³⁰⁶Nornes, “The Postwar Documentary Trace,” 52.

political documentary film. While it is true that several long shots of tanks and the feet of marching soldiers from the Self-Defense Forces briefly appear on screen, these are no more privileged than the neighboring shots of anonymous boys delivering milk cartons or bundles of newspapers. Unlike Solanas and Gettino's *La Hora de los Hornos* (1968), no indictment of cultural imperialism and neo-colonial capitalism is explicitly articulated. Unlike Newsreel's *Columbia Revolt* (1968) or Ogawa's *Report from Haneda* (1967) the film steers away from focusing on epoch-making events, and towards the recording of the eventless everyday (Figure 16).

In the case of *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*, the militant ideal of “film as a weapon” is diegetically incorporated by the use of inserted documentary footage of student protests against the U.S. Occupation of Okinawa. Yet it is critically juxtaposed against the film-within-the-film, which contains nothing but several static long shots of peaceful townscapes of residential areas within Tokyo. At one point in the film, the voice-overs of student activists loudly denounce this inserted film-within-the-film, which they interpret as the testament of an unidentified member of their activist group who presumably committed suicide. These student characters complain that this film-within-the-film does not convey any clear political message or vision; it is a waste of time and money to document sporadic vehicle traffic around a guardrail or an underpass, or to document peaceful scenes of immobile rows of houses and television antennas. Their conclusion is that such generic scenes of urban life can be filmed “anytime, anywhere.”

The actuality footage in this film-within-the-film is thus rejected for its lack of local and temporal specificity. These militant students do not see any need to document such non-dramatic scenes precisely because, according to their political vision,

documentary films are supposed to capture the historic moments of specific struggles. And this is exactly what these characters do in filming student protests against the U.S. Occupation of Okinawa on April 28th in 1969.

However, given the thematic and visual primacy of the film-within-the film in *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*, it would be a mistake to simply endorse the political point of view of these student activist characters. Rather, I want to argue that the film's main critique is inversely aimed at the established mode of political documentary filmmaking itself, which privileges epoch-making revolutionary events while focusing on the human actors. The revolutionary view of history, which privileges dramatic moments of rupture and change, is also called into question by the everyday temporality of eventless landscapes. *A.K.A. Serial Killer* enacts a similar critique by deliberately avoiding the narrative dramatization of Nagayama's crime. In contrast to the images of dated, localized, and eventful space-time that appear in conventional documentaries and newsreels, what *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and the film-within-the-film of *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* present, therefore, are decidedly unmarked images, which show completely banal space-time of the everyday. These images are devoid of chronological markers and local specificities. What, then, one may ask, would be the political efficacy of making such films?

Despite being called "landscape" films, what *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and the film-within-the-film of *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* present are neither the pastoral nor the sublime. Here it is banality that counts. But why emphasize the banality of everyday scenery? At one level, as I have mentioned already, the foregrounding of everydayness counteracts the revolutionary temporality that structures political

documentary films of the 1960s. But, there is another level of critique at work in these two “landscape films,” a critique that engages with the question of *space*. Before I analyze this spatial critique in the films’ landscape images, a brief contextualization of the life of Nagayama Norio – the inspiration for *A.K.A. Serial Killer* – is in order.

Nagayama Norio (1949-1997) was born into a poor working-class family in the northern island of Hokkaido. As he recounts later in his novelistic works, poverty forced him and his family to move around, preventing him from attending school regularly. In 1968 he stole a pistol from the U.S. navy base in Yokosuka, and killed two security guards and two taxi drivers. He was arrested and sentenced to death. While he was imprisoned he learned to read, turned to political philosophy, and began to write. In 1971 he published his first autobiographical novel, *Muchi no namida (Tears of Ignorance)*, which became an instant bestseller, gaining enthusiastic support from left-leaning youth. Nagayama continued to publish novels from prison, sending his royalties to the families of his victims.

But more than anything, Nagayama became an icon of radical leftism and the agitating voice of the so-called lumpenproletariat, by putting forward statements such as “The bourgeoisie does not have the right to pass judgment on the proletariat.” In so doing he laid his indictment at the feet of the capitalist State. When he wrote, for instance, “At midnight on a certain day of a certain era/ a fool who knew neither East nor West/ declared war in solitude/ against the Japanese capitalist State,” Nagayama retrospectively positioned himself the solitary rebel.³⁰⁷ Consequently, numerous writers, filmmakers and

³⁰⁷ Cited by Matsuda Masao in “Misshitsu no teroru” [Terror In The Closed Chamber] *Fûkei no shimetsu* [The Extinction of the Landscape], (Tokyo: Tabata shoten, 1971), 238. My translation.

intellectuals turned to Nagayama in order to speak *for* and *about* him, as if he were the symbolic nodal point of the political, economic and cultural strata of postwar Japan.

The filmmaker Shindô Kaneto (1912-), for instance, turned the life of Nagayama into a sentimental narrative film, *Hadaka no jûkyûsai (Live Today, Die Tomorrow!)* in 1970. Unlike *A.K.A. Serial Killer, Live Today, Die Tomorrow!* focuses on Nagayama's social and familial relationships. It tells a heartrending story by articulating a chain of dramatic events propelled by the main characters' actions. In contrast, *A.K.A. Serial Killer* refuses this narrative impulse towards dramatic storytelling. In recalling the making of *A.K.A. Serial Killer*, Adachi notes that they resisted the temptation to *narrate* Nagayama's life. Landscape, according Adachi, emerged as an alternative way of organizing the film while they followed the migratory footsteps of Nagayama from one location to another:

The impression that every city is just like the same city did not disappear. While I held my breath, stood still, and wondered about the origins of this stifling feeling in these cities, the landscapes in front of my eyes appeared as beautiful as postcards. Yet precisely because their beauty was like that of picture postcards, I realized that this was the source of our suffocation. Perhaps everyone knows about this suffocation, yet it continues to spread everyday while people walk through the city in order to survive. I felt that perhaps these suffocating landscapes had been Nagayama's enemy. Then, we thought we could turn these landscapes that keep stealing from us into a method of interrogating landscapes, ourselves, and the images of Nagayama.³⁰⁸

Adachi's visual analogy between the clichéd images of picture postcards and homogeneous local scenery is indeed translated into the formal style of *A.K.A. Serial Killer*, in which the majority of shots appear as composed as the static view of picture postcards.

Adachi's reference to the clichéd images of picture postcards thus sheds light on the question of the uniformity and banality of the images at the heart of these two

³⁰⁸ Adachi Masao, *Eiga/ Kakumei [Cinema/Revolution]* (Tokyo: Kawaide Shobô, 2003), 290. My translation.

landscape films. However, Adachi also regards the uniform impression of the landscape that changes so little from one city to another as “Nagayama’s enemy.” But what does it mean to say that the generic landscape is an enemy, a source of suffocation?

Interestingly, referencing Walter Benjamin, who argues that Eugène Atget photographed the deserted landscapes of nineteenth century Paris as if they were deserted crime scenes, Matsuda discusses the making of *A.K.A. Serial Killer* in the 1970 essay titled *Fûkei to shite no toshi* (“City as Landscape”) as follows: “We filmed crime scenes just like landscape.”³⁰⁹ But, one might ask, which scenes are the crime scenes? Undoubtedly, Matsuda would say all the scenes in *A.K.A. Serial Killer*; that is, all the landscapes. In noting that the only point of intersection between the journey taken by Nagayama and that of filmmakers a few months later was the “homogeneous landscape,” Matsuda too draws our attention to the correlation between the uniformity of the landscapes of various cities and Nagayama’s migratory footsteps through them.³¹⁰ In the essay titled *Waga rettô, waga fûkei* (“My Archipelago, My Landscape”) Matsuda puts forward another statement that resonates well with Adachi’s observation:

When we tried to see another Japanese archipelago with visionary eyes by following the footsteps of a member of the masses who grew up in the lower-class strata of society, and who had to form his own class position through constant vagrancy as his only state of being, surprisingly or not surprisingly, we ended up discovering a common element that cannot be called anything but *landscape*, which existed like the end point of a segment of a line.³¹¹

As Matsuda writes in another essay, the “common elements” that repeatedly appear like equidistant points on the line of their journey precisely constitute the uniformity of the

³⁰⁹ Ibid. Hirai Gen at the Kinema Club IV conference (June 22-26, summer 2005) also pointed out this intriguing passage in his analysis of Nagayama Norio through the framework of the historical disintegration of the welfare state.

³¹⁰ Matsuda Masao, “Fûkei to shite no toshi” [“City as Landscape”] *Fûkei no shimetsu*, 16. The essay was originally published in April issue of journal, *Gendai no me* in 1970.

³¹¹ Matsuda Masao, “Waga rettô, waga fûkei” [“My Archipelago, My Landscape”] *Fûkei no shimetsu*, 92-93.

homogeneous landscape.³¹² What is important to note is that Matsuda and Adachi both emphasize their awareness of such uniformity of landscapes at the profilmic level as well as the compositional level of effects produced by the camera; that is, what already exists before the camera's gaze and what appears after the camera captures it.

Here it would be helpful briefly to consider what is generally meant by the term "landscape" to think through the correlation between the production of homogeneous landscapes and the structure of domination, in particular that of a class society, which underlies Adachi's and Matsuda's discussion of Nagayama. The term landscape, usually encompasses two different levels of the organization of space: the first is the physical space seen from a particular point of view; the second is the framed space of a visual representation (e.g. in painting, photography, and cinema). In both cases, the emphasis is on an expansive space relatively devoid of human figures. Similarly, Japanese critics use the term *fûkei* ("landscape") in order to refer to profilmic physical space as well as the representational space inside the screen.

The representational practice of landscape as well as the landscaping of physical space have increasingly been theorized (since the 1980s) by cultural geographers and art historians through the frameworks of modern subjectivism, colonialism, market capitalism, urban development, and so on. For instance, W. J. T. Mitchell has argued that landscape at the physical or concrete material level already constitutes "a medium of cultural expression."³¹³ Mitchell writes:

Landscape may be represented by painting, drawing, or engraving; by photography, film, and theatrical scenery; by writing, speech, and presumably even music and other 'sound

³¹² Matsuda Masao, "Fûkei no shimetsu no tame ni" [For the Extinction of the Landscape] *Fûkei no shimetsu*, 280.

³¹³ W. J. T. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," *Landscape and Power*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 14.

images.’ Before all these secondary representations, however, landscape is itself a physical and multisensory medium (earth, stone, vegetation, water, sky, sound and silence, light and darkness, etc) in which cultural meanings and values are encoded, whether they are *put* there by the physical transformation of a place in landscape gardening and architecture, or *found* in a place formed, as we say, ‘by nature.’³¹⁴

Mitchell thus expands the notion of landscape to include semiotic functions of physical space itself. Similarly, Denis Cosgrove defines landscape as *a way of seeing*.³¹⁵ Landscape as a way of seeing the external world, moreover, gave rise to a “practical appropriation of space,” which has taken as diverse modalities as urban planning, garden architecture, and colonial expropriations of land. For Cosgrove, the dominant representational practices of landscape – be they painting or photography – are hence inseparable from the economic and social expansions of the urban property owners that emerged in fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Europe.

Most importantly, many critics have argued that landscape needs to be understood as an ideology, as well as a technique of vision, which has its basis in linear perspective. It is argued that the apparatus of the camera itself, with its built-in linear perspective, falls within the purview of the ideological construction of human vision that coincides with the rise of Renaissance humanism. This is a view corroborated by the apparatus theory of 1970s film studies, such as that of Jean-Louis Baudry.³¹⁶ When we turn to the specificities of Japan, however, we find that not only cinema but also the entire practice of European-style landscape painting and photography (along with philosophy) was

³¹⁴Ibid.

³¹⁵Following the lead of John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (1972), Denis Cosgrove defines landscape as *a way of seeing*. He writes, “Landscape first emerged as a term, an idea, or better still, *a way of seeing* the external world, in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. It was, and it remains, a visual term, one that arose initially out of renaissance humanism and its particular concepts and constructs of space” (46). See Denis Cosgrove, “Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea,” *Transactions of the Institute of the British Geographers*, New Series, 10.1 (1985): 45-62.

³¹⁶Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus,” in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 286-298.

imported in the late nineteenth century. Hence, for critics like Karatani Kôjin, the semiotic “discovery of landscape,” which entailed a perspectival inversion of the world, took place only in the nineteenth century, the era of Japan’s intensive industrial and cultural modernization.³¹⁷

Whether it is analyzed in the Euro-American context or the Japanese context, critics seem to agree upon one thing: landscape as an idea as well as a practice is inseparable from the emergence of the modern epistemic subject who, as Martin Heidegger has argued, sees the world as if it is a “picture.”³¹⁸ “The fundamental event of the modern age,” writes Heidegger, “is the conquest of the world as picture.”³¹⁹ However, what remains implicit in Heidegger and Karatani, who are concerned with the epistemic ramifications rather than the specific political and economic implications of modernity, is the question of the control over space as tied to the expansion of modern state capitalism.

It is precisely the interdependence between the increasing control over territorial space and the consolidation of postwar democratic state capitalism that the critics of *fûkeiron* problematize. In other words, the central concern of *fûkeiron* (as articulated by Adachi and Matsuda in the above quotations) is neither the aesthetic production of picturesque scenery nor the metaphysical divide between subject and object, but rather the immanent relations of power that produce homogenized landscapes. In their view, the very uniformity of the landscape of rural and urban cities throughout Japan corresponds to the serial mass production and standardization of commodities, which, in turn,

³¹⁷ To quote Karatani, “The philosophical standpoint which distinguishes between subject and object came into existence within what I refer to as ‘landscape.’ Rather than existing prior to landscape, subject and object emerge from within it.” (34). See Karatani Kôjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. Forward by Frederic Jameson. trans. Brett de Bary (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 34.

³¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 132.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

reproduce unskilled manual laborers like Nagayama Norio. Thus, “the enemy of Nagayama” of which Adachi speaks is not simply the homogenized landscape itself, but rather the invisible relations of power that produce such homogenized landscapes.

Given these critics and filmmakers’ topographical interests in the politics of landscape, it is worth examining closely how Matsuda turns to the cartographic practice of mapping to describe the process of tracing the migratory footsteps of Nagayama while filming *A.K.A. Serial Killer*. For instance, Matsuda begins his essay, “My Archipelago, My Landscape,” with some reflections upon cartography:

It is well known that the atlas made in Japan and the atlases made abroad, let’s say in London, have different compositions. That is, Japan is placed at the center in the former, and England in the latter. As a result, the Pacific Ocean spreads vastly, with North and South America placed on the right side and Africa on the left in the former atlas, while South America and Africa face one another closely across the Atlantic Ocean in the latter atlas. Of course the Pacific Ocean gets divided in half, and if you look for Japan, it barely retains its trace, like a stretched scar at the top corner on the right. As I write this, it may appear commonsensical and hence not move you at all, but, by way of experiment, I suggest actually buying two maps and place them on both sides of the wall for comparison. When placed between two maps, we would actually feel the transformation of our own *worldview*. In my case, when a printing gets shifted slightly, things whose existence I took for granted are transformed into a source of tremendous shock that even causes a sensation of nausea.³²⁰

Of particular interest here is Matsuda’s recognition that the cartographic practices of different nation-states reflect different “worldviews” (*sekaikan*). The innocuous surface of a page from an atlas might be read as the symbolic mapping of different geopolitical imaginations at work.

An especially important passage, which leads Matsuda’s thinking from cartography to the making of the film *A.K.A. Serial Killer*, appears immediately afterwards. In noting how Africa and South America show up like severed “Siamese twins” in the atlas made in London, Matsuda shifts his cartographic meditation from the

³²⁰Matsuda, “Waga rettô, waga fûkei,” 91. My translation. The emphasis is in the original.

comparison between Japan and England to the formation of the “Third World.” He writes: “The innocuous existence of the map made in London triggered me to think the meaning of the ‘Third World’ as *another world*. I felt that the entire history of the ones who made the map and the ones who were made into the map crystallized there.”³²¹ In other words, Matsuda pays attention to the peripheral positioning of both Africa and South America in the maps made in two former imperial nation-states –Japan and England – and reads “Third World” politics into it. In so doing he links his shock at seeing Japan marginalized in the map made by British cartographers to a self-reflexive observation about the equally marginalizing attitude of Japanese cartographers towards Africa and South America (which are placed at both edges of the map). Matsuda thus moves away from the dualistic comparative schema of Japan versus the West towards a tertiary schema in order to highlight the interrelation between the cartographic imagination and the politico-economic constitution of the “Third World.”

Matsuda’s evocation of the “Third World” in this essay is not surprising given his political interest in anarchism and anti-colonialism, particularly the works of writers such as Louis Auguste Blanqui, Jules Régis Debray, Che Guevara and Franz Fanon.³²² But what I want to emphasize here is how Matsuda uses the conceptual framework of cartography to discuss the culturally and historically conditioned ways of seeing the world (worldview), and especially the ways of seeing that are directly linked to the colonial and imperial relations of power. Although an in-depth analysis of Matsuda’s conceptualization of the “Third World” is outside the scope of this chapter, we can at least grasp from this brief passage how Matsuda introduces the notion of the “Third

³²¹Ibid., 92. The emphasis is in the original.

³²²For his detailed discussion of the concept of the “Third World” (as an imaginary space), see his essay, “Sien no kûkan” in *Fûkei no shimetsu*, 165-182.

World” in order to offer a global perspective on the disenfranchised, migratory “lumpenproletariat” populace that forms a symbolic “Third World” within Japan. Nagayama’s plight (to which he is clearly sympathetic, though this sympathy itself may deserve criticism) is thus framed against the worldwide division between those who dominate and those who are dominated. Then, how does this understanding relate to the film, *A.K.A. Serial Killer*?

In the passage following the reference to the “Third World,” Matsuda notes, “I could not help but wonder whether it is possible for us to discover *another Japan*—another Japan which is expressible as a concrete material map.”³²³ Matsuda then describes his desire to re-write the official map of Japan as his personal premise for becoming involved in the making of *A.K.A. Serial Killer*. The discovery of homogeneous landscapes, which exist like equidistant points of a line that constitute an alternative “map” of the Japanese archipelago, is therefore explained, at least in part, as an antistate cartographic endeavor. Other critics of the *fûkeiron* have also suggested (albeit implicitly) that the homogenization of landscapes in rural and urban cities of Japan must be read as visible symptoms of the consolidation of postindustrial capitalism. In other words, the concept of landscape for these Japanese theorists writing at the end of the 1960s meant something more than picturesque scenery. When read critically, landscapes enabled them to see a visual “diagram” of social and economic relations, especially those of domination, at work. Despite their apparent privileging of class over other modes of disempowerment, their reconceptualization of landscape as a diagrammatic mapping of power relations thus deserves attention.

³²³ Matsuda, “Waga rettô, waga fûkei,” 92.

Since a map, by definition, is a non-mimetic (and hence literally a diagrammatic) mode of representation, Matsuda's introduction of cartography into the theoretical discourse of the *fūkeiron* would naturally complicate our reading of *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*. The general understanding of cinema as a photo-realistic medium, which presumably reproduces the phenomenological impressions of reality is clearly not compatible with the non-mimetic, diagrammatic practice of cartography. The question then becomes: how do we understand the relationship between these two modes of conceiving landscape as the photo-realistic "document" and the non-mimetic "diagram"? In order to answer this question, we need to examine the formal characteristics of the filmic texts themselves.

Formal Appropriations of Actuality Films

As I have mentioned, despite being called landscape films, *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* present neither pastoral nor sublime scenery, but rather generic urban and rural townscapes. In *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and the film-within-the-film in *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*, one immediately notices the discontinuous shot transitions. Moreover, the shots themselves appear self-contained and static, like meticulously framed postcard photographs. This is more strongly demonstrated by the film-within-the-film of *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*. Here the camera holds a fixed position, keeping the "tableau"-like appearance of shots. For instance, the main body of the film-within-the-film of *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* is composed of six long-takes with a fixed camera position, each shot lasting more than 60 seconds.

Although the reel that includes these “tableau” shots also contains a few jerky hand-held shots of cityscapes, its main body consists of these fixed-frame shots of highly composed “landscapes.” These long-takes present a view of rooftops, a small shopping street and pedestrians, a guardrail occasionally obscured by passing cars, a viaduct and a mailbox beside it, a small tobacco shop filmed across railway fences, and television antennas and telephone lines filmed against the empty sky. Nothing spectacular or dramatic happens in any of these shots. Similarly, *A.K.A. Serial Killer* consists of a series of actuality shots: train stations, airports, docks, railway tracks, and back alleys, occasional glimpses of newspaper delivering boys and school girls commuting by bicycle in distance. Without an identifiable human actor holding a central position inside the frame, shots begin to bleed into one another, while an endless score of improvised jazz plays on the soundtrack. Even with the occasional male voice-over, which states the basic facts of Nagayama’s journey (moving from one city to another), the film as a whole seems to lack a coherent narrative.

Moreover, to emphasize the flatness of the surface of the screen, these two landscape films maximize their use of the horizontal axis. In *A.K.A. Serial Killer*, the camera often pans laterally, along the wall, along the streets, along the movement of vehicles. The spectatorial desire to hold objects in deep focus is constantly thwarted by the obtrusive lateral blurs of shadows, fences, and trains running across the frontal plane, thus momentarily, but repeatedly, blocking the complete view of the objects in deep focus. Shots are discontinuously edited together, and repetitive closeups of partial views of vehicles, such as the wheels of airplanes or trucks are abundant. The result is a uniquely frustrating experience for the spectator, forced to take an external position to the

unsutured screen space. Similarly, the six “tableau” shots of *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* offer no narrative logic to explain their successive placement. Taken together, these shots present all the characteristics of early cinema, which Noël Burch defines in terms of “the autarchy of tableau,” “horizontal and frontal camera placement,” “maintenance of shots,” “centrifugality,” and “narrative non-closure.”³²⁴

The crucial effect of these formal devices is the externality of the spectator’s position in relation to the screen space. The transition from what Burch calls the “primitive mode of representation” of early cinema to the “institutional mode of representation” of mainstream narrative cinema occurs when the spectator, who was externally positioned in relation to the screen space, becomes emplaced within it. This “psycho-physiological orientation of the spectator” is done through a combination of narrative and formal devices, such as the use of the axial match, the eyeline match, the shot/reverse shot, and narrative closure. In other words, the historical emergence of mainstream narrative cinema is marked by “the cinema’s *centering* of the spectator” which makes him or her the point of reference around which the narrative space-time is structured.³²⁵

We can infer from this that *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and the film-within-the film in *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* are neither narrative films nor even documentary films, if we understand the term “documentary” as the established genre of filmmaking structured by what Philip Rosen calls “the centralization of meaning through internal

³²⁴ Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. and ed. Ben Brewster (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

sequenciation.”³²⁶ Rosen’s phrase refers to the way in which shots are organized, such that this centralization delimits and regulates meanings communicated by the filmic text. This characteristic applies to both mainstream narrative cinema and documentary. Importantly, Rosen also argues that documentary film (as theorized by John Grierson and others since the 1930s) and mainstream narrative cinema have something in common: just as narrative cinema “ejected the actuality film” from its proper terrain, documentary film came into existence by rejecting newsreels and actuality films.³²⁷ In other words, it was not enough either for institutional narrative cinema or for documentary film to simply set up the camera “in front of an unprepared chunk of reality, [turn] it on for a few minutes, and then [present] the result to audiences,” as early actuality films had done.³²⁸

Similarly, in his discussion of early cinema, Tom Gunning notes that early trick films and actuality films markedly lacked the “dramatic articulation of a story.”³²⁹ It is precisely this lack of the dramatic articulation of a story that characterizes both *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and the film-within-the-film of *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*. These two landscape films thus undertake a curious formal appropriation of the pre-classical cinematic genre of actuality films. What would be the reason for this appropriation? Before I answer this question, I will present a brief overview of the actuality genre would be helpful.

The term *actualities* or *actuality* film refers to a genre of preclassical, pre-institutional silent cinema that was very popular during the first decade of cinematic

³²⁶ Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 245.

³²⁷ Ibid., 242.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Tom Gunning, “‘Primitive’ Cinema: A Frame-up? Or the Trick’s on Us,” *Cinema Journal* 28.2 (Winter 1989), 8.

production roughly between 1895 and 1904.³³⁰ The best examples are those of the Lumière brothers, inventors of the cinematographe. Among numerous actuality films produced during this period, the ones shot outdoors, such as *New York: Broadway at Union Square* (1896) by the Lumière brothers and *Skyscrapers of New York City from North River* (1903) by G.A. Smith, bear striking similarities to these two Japanese landscape films. Take the example of the second “tableau” shot in *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*, in which the camera is set at one end of a narrow shopping street; pedestrians walk in and out of the frame while a small pickup truck passes slowly. Though different in time and place, the fixed frame of *New York: Broadway at Union Square* similarly shows the movement of pedestrians walking in and out of the frame. Unlike scripted films, they contain neither elaborate narratives nor dramatic events.

Although such actuality films are considered the precursors of documentary film, the documentary as a genre first came into existence by rigorously differentiating itself from the actuality.³³¹ When Grierson defined documentary film as the “creative treatment of actuality,” what he had in mind was clearly not a simple assemblage of actuality footage. For instance, in his critical assessment of various “shorts,” Grierson argues: “They do not dramatize, they do not even dramatize an episode: they describe, and even expose, but in any aesthetic sense, only rarely reveal. Herein is their formal limit, and it is

³³⁰In reference to the Lumière brothers’ actuality films, Mary Ann Doane writes, “The actuality dominated the first decade of film production” (22). See Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, The Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). According to Philip Rosen, “the commercial heyday of the actuality in various forms was 1896-1903. Preclassical narratives emerged as one of the leading products during 1903-4, but actualities remained a common component of the film viewing experience until around 1908” (164, *Change Mummified*).

³³¹ Philip Rosen writes, “In its own originary self-definitions, the documentary tradition shares the denigration of preclassical cinema as primitive with its putative other, mainstream fictional filmmaking. If proponents of documentary banished the newsreels that became a secondary mainstream product from their realm, it is all the more clear that actualities could not be admitted. In the 1930s Grierson himself associated actuality films with an outgrown childhood – his own as well as the medium’s.” Ibid., 243.

unlikely that they will make any considerable contribution to the fuller art of documentary.”³³² In his emphasis on drama, Grierson thus shares the same ideology of narrativity that characterizes mainstream narrative cinema. It is an ideology of unity and coherence; both documentary film and narrative cinema emphasize narrative coherence and control over the production of meaning. The actuality film, in contrast, tends to *display* the scene, captured by the camera as if to show a slice of life. The production of meaning in actuality film is, in short, not as rigidly controlled as in the documentary or mainstream narrative cinema.

If *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* return to the formal stylistics of actuality film, it is because of their openness of the textual production of meaning and the external positioning of the spectator in relation to the screen space. That is, the very absence of narrative in the landscape films deliberately forces the spectator to remain at a distance outside the screen space. These landscape films’ appropriation of the actuality genre could thus be read as an indirect critique of documentary filmmaking practice, including the politically committed kind. As I mentioned earlier, this critique is built into the diegesis of *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* through an opposition between the documentary footage of armed student protests and the actuality footage of quotidian landscapes. The documentary footage sequence that the activist characters aim to shape into a coherent narrative is clearly linked to the militant ideal of “film as a weapon,” while the actuality footage of eventless landscapes remains its antithesis. Similarly, *A.K.A. Serial Killer*’s refusal to dramatize

³³²John Grierson, “First Principles of Documentary,” *Grierson on Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), 146.

Nagayama's life and its decision to focus on homogeneous landscapes takes a strong stance against political documentary filmmaking of the time.

In the 1969 essay titled *Misshitsu, fûkei, kenryoku* ("Closed Chamber, Landscape, and the Power of Domination") Matsuda uses the term *jikkei eiga* ("actual-scenery film" or "actual-landscape film") to describe *A.K.A. Serial Killer*:

The reason why we, including Adachi Masao, in making a strange work –which can only be called an 'actual-landscape film' [*jikkei eiga*] rather than a documentary film – followed the footsteps of the 'serial killer' Nagayama Norio by passing through the eastern half of Japan; Abashiri, Sapporo, Hakodate, Tsugaru Plain, Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Kôbe, and even through Hong Kong; and filmed only the local landscapes, which Nagayama would have seen with his own eyes – is because we became conscious of the landscape as the antagonistic 'power' itself.³³³

Of particular interest for us here is Matsuda's suggestion that the film *A.K.A. Serial Killer* should be aligned with the genre of actuality rather than that of documentary. This corroborates the landscape films' formal appropriation of the pre-classical genre of actuality film that I have suggested. But let us come back to the question of the political efficacy of this formal critique of documentary film: why was it necessary for filmmakers of *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* to criticize the dominant mode of documentary filmmaking in the first place? This question takes me back to the point discussed earlier in relation to the cartographic imagination tied to the relations of power. It is not accidental that Matsuda connects the notion of landscape to the notions of antagonism and the power of domination (*kenryoku*). This relation between landscape and antagonism is a key to the film's investigation of the micropolitical level of power relations, which remain latent or imperceptible beneath the clichéd images of macropolitical events.

³³³Matsuda Masao, "Misshitsu, fûkei, kenryoku" ["Closed Chamber, Landscape, and the Power of Domination," *Bara to mumeisha*, 123.

In the above quotation, Matsuda also writes that after following in the footsteps of Nagayama in the process of making *A.K.A. Serial Killer*, he became conscious of “the landscape as the antagonistic ‘power’ itself” (*tekитай shitekuru ‘kenryoku’ sono mono*). Landscape is a way in which the economic and political relations of domination and subjection become visible to the observing eye. The mediating act of filming, however, must also allow the spectator to experience the same revelation while viewing the filmed landscapes. How does a film allow the spectator to pay attention to banal landscapes, from which familiar, recognizable markers and agents of macropolitical activities are absent? The answer lies in the flatness and stillness of landscapes shots, structured in a manner comparable to shots of early actuality films, for such formal devices prevent the spectator from being emplaced within the imaginary screen space. This externalization of the spectator positions her as a kind of a distant observer. Of course, this strategy may risk putting the spectator into the position of the “transcendental” subject, a position which Baudry and other apparatus theorists have already criticized. But it is precisely because the form (actuality film) is not inherently critical that the attendant discourse of *fūkeiron* must be introduced in order to complete the political efficacy of *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*. A lack of attention to the theoretical discourse on landscape at the time of these films’ production would hinder our comprehension of the scope of their political trajectory. Indeed, the work done by Western scholars – from that of Edward Branigan to Burch, from David Desser to Maureen Turim – on *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* (often said to be Oshima’s “most difficult” film) has collectively missed the significance of the film’s peculiar treatment of landscape.³³⁴

³³⁴Edward Branigan, “Subjectivity Under Siege: From Fellini’s *8 1/2* to Oshima’s *The Story of a Man Who*

When viewed in relation to the film-theoretical discourse of the *fūkeiron*, however, the shots of landscapes in *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* attain a dual visibility: they become both a document of homogeneity and a diagram of economic and political power relations. In short, the homogenization and the standardization of the various landscapes become visible evidence of Japan's postwar economic development, concentric labor migrations and the correlative circulation of standardized commodities. Nagayama's class background as a temporary migrant is indeed already engraved in the landscapes of the cities he had traversed.

The Landscape as Diagram

The film-theoretical concept of the landscape, which Japanese critics discovered at the end of the 1960s through the mediation of *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*, thus offered them a new way of seeing landscapes as manifestations of structural changes occurring in Japan as it reached its postindustrial phase. These films document increasingly homogenizing urban and rural landscapes, but their documented landscapes also reveal what Deleuze calls the diagram, that is, the arrangement of historically specific, invisible relations and functions of power coextensive with a given social field.

In his reading of Michel Foucault, Deleuze explicates Foucault's concept of power as function, not as form. Deleuze thus uses the term diagram (which Foucault initially used in his discussion of the panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*) to explain the

Left His Will on Film," Screen 19.1: 7-40; Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Maureen Turim, *The Films of Oshima Nagisa: Images of A Japanese Iconoclast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

specific arrangement (*agencement*) of power, which can be applied to various instances and locations (from prison to school, from hospital to military training camp). It is important to distinguish the dynamic mechanism of power, which Foucault and Deleuze express by the term diagram, and the architectural blueprint of the panoptic prison drawn by Jeremy Bentham in 1791. While it is this flat, diagrammatic figure that enabled Foucault to exemplify the mechanism of disciplinary power and to gain knowledge of its workings, the term diagram as used by Deleuze refers to the pure function of such disciplinary power (and not to the diagrammatic representation of architectural design).

In the words of Deleuze: “The *diagram* is no longer an auditory or visual archive but a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field.”³³⁵ What Deleuze calls the diagram in its strict sense is the invisible abstract functioning of power in a given social field; it is a term that refers to the nondiscursive mechanism of relational forces, not to the strata of knowledge formed by visibilities and statements. Bentham’s drawing is only a visual aid to understand the mechanism of the panopticon as a generalized model of the functioning of power in a disciplinary society. Furthermore, there is not just one but multiple diagrams; every society at any given moment operates through a set of diagrams, some of them more dominant than others.

Similarly, when taken together the discourse of *fūkeiron* and landscape films might be read as interlocking sites of visibility and invisibility. The assemblage of filmic images of homogeneous landscapes in *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* would correspond to the form (a blueprint), which allows the spectator to conduct a certain critical “reading” of the diagram that is at work in Japanese society at the end of the 1960s. But this is not to say that the knowledge of the diagrammatic

³³⁵ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 34.

functions of power is immediately *given* to the spectator. The spectator must actively “create” her or his own reading – we may call this activity diagramming – of the relations of power that are neither immediately legible nor visible onscreen. This is why the concurrent formation of the discourse (which belongs to the dimension of knowledge) by the *fûkeiron* critics deserves attention, and is essential for the understanding of these two films.

What are the diagrams of power that the spectator may infer from *A.K.A. Serial Killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*? Let us take the six “tableau” shots from *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* (Figure 17). We immediately notice the telephone lines, mailbox, railway and bridge, all of which constitute invisible networks of information and commodity circulation. Moreover, these networks are sustained by what Paul Virilio calls the “policing” of open space by the state: “The State’s political power . . . is only secondarily ‘power organized by one class to oppress another.’ More materially, *it is the polis, the police, in other words highway surveillance.*”³³⁶ Indeed, the invisible yet immanent presence of the state control over the open space of quotidian life is exactly what Matsuda articulates in his writings on landscape: the “power” in his essays is a synonym for “state-power.”

However, this is precisely where Matsuda’s theory of landscape falls short of grasping the real workings of power, which is no longer centralized under the sovereign control of the state. The image of landscapes in *A.K.A. Serial killer* and *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* clearly indicate that power is not synonymous with police,

³³⁶ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), 14.

military, or parliamentary power, but with transportation and infrastructure – in short, pathways of commerce and information.

By “documenting” the existence of this infrastructure, the films point to the state’s role as secondary support for commerce rather than as the primary sovereign power. This may also indicate the shift from the 1960s – the era of the anti-state political movements emblemized by the mass protests against Japan-U.S. Security Treaty (ANPO) – to the 1970s, an era marked by the consolidation of Japan’s late capitalist consumer society and by diffused networks of resistance and subversion. This is where I also locate the symptomatic waning of the centralized mode of imagining political resistance, which had been anchored around the figure of the subject [*shutai*] that had so long dominated the political imagination of postwar Japanese intellectuals.³³⁷ While Matsuda and other critics associated with *fūkeiron* may still think of political resistance within the classical Marxist (and anarchist) framework of repressive state power, the “landscape films” themselves have already suggested, albeit implicitly, the necessity of dislodging the concept of power from the central authority of the state. In short, in terms of questioning and making visible the micropolitical level of power, the films were more insightful than the actual theory produced through them.

Against those who may argue that the “actuality” captured by these films is already a historical document of a bygone era – and therefore devoid of any actuality or contemporary relevance – I would suggest that the films are not just documents but in

³³⁷The discourse on subjectivity (*shutaisei*), which was first articulated by critics and writers associated with the literary journal, *Kindai bungaku*, in the immediate postwar period, and which was carried on by the Marxist critics (such as Yoshimoto Takaaki) well into the 1960s lost its currency by the end of the 1960s. Given Oshima’s earlier stance – his emphasis on the cinema of subjectivity and his critique of war responsibility of the earlier generations – it is also worth considering Hara Masato’s critique of Oshima specifically on this point of privileging subjectivity. Arguably, the film *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War* reflects Hara’s perspective as much as that of Oshima.

fact part and parcel of the larger theoretical practice of analyzing the relationship between cinematic visibility and historically specific diagrams of power. As I have shown in this dissertation, this theoretical practice is an endpoint of a longer trajectory of the analysis of image-production and avant-garde activism, centered on the question of actuality. I term this an endpoint because the trajectory of avant-garde activism and film theory in Japan took a radically different route after the collapse of student movements and the New Left at the beginning of the 1970s. This collapse coincided with the rejection of the centralized mode of resistance among critics and activists, and the gradual waning of film as the privileged medium of avant-garde art practice. Nonetheless, it is important to revisit this particular trajectory of Japan's politic-aesthetic vanguardism with its theoretical concern with actuality, since it offers a valuable counterpoint to the current academic and activist with the concept of the "common."

As I suggested in the introduction, works that analyze and theorize the complex relation between the avant-garde art and the politics of the "common" are urgently needed at a moment when being political is increasingly becoming synonymous with a categorical rejection of vanguardism. Yet it is the historical legacy of the Marxist notion of vanguardism and its productive tension with aesthetic avant-garde practice that not only offers us a means of re-examining the relation between art and politics, but also suggests the importance of questioning the purported givenness of the "common," a recent theoretical keyword among contemporary leftist critics and artists. It is with this goal in mind that this dissertation excavates and explores vital connections among the writings and filmic works of those who were associated with the avant-garde

documentary movement, those who were influenced by it, and those who came after but engaged with the same set of problematics, organized around the question of actuality.

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ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. A portrait of Hanada Kiyoteru (1909-1974).



Figure 2. A fantastic figure of *rokurokubi* by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)



Figure 3. An image of Sea Bonz (*Umibôzu*) by Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798-1861)

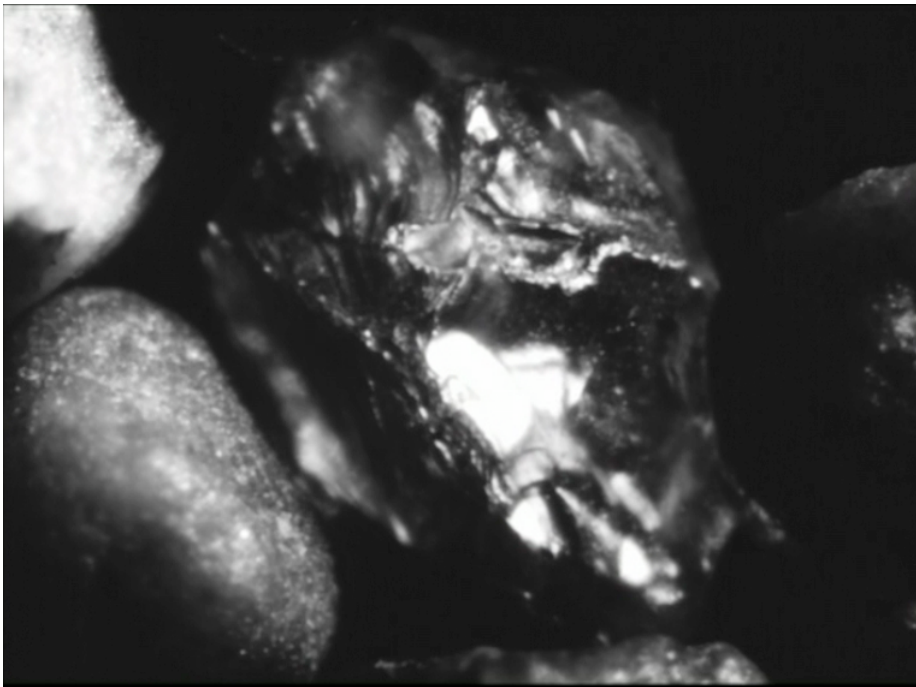


Figure 4. The opening shot of *Woman in the Dunes*.



Figure 5. An extreme close-up of a woman's throat in *Woman in the Dunes*.



Figure 6. A weaver's body in *Nishijin*.



Figure 7. A stonemason at work in *The Song of Stone*.



Figure 8. A shot of sand grains passing through a sieve in *Woman in the Dunes*.

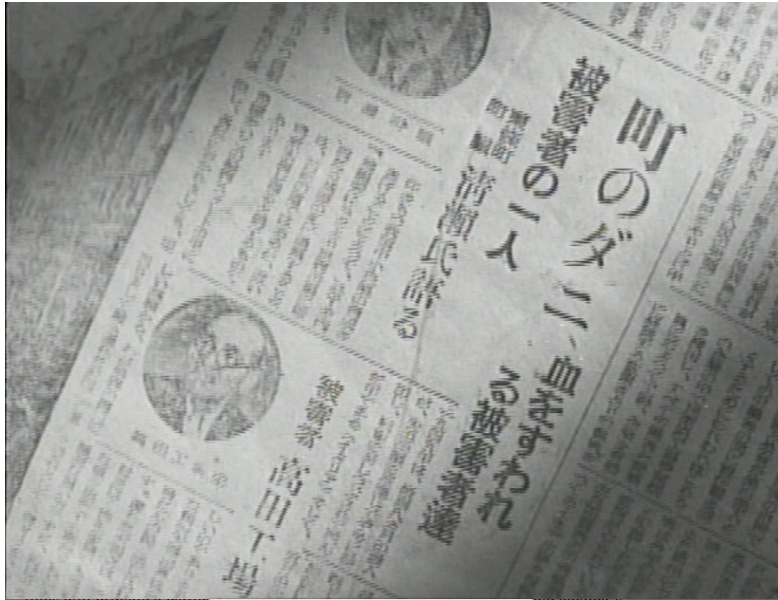


Figure 9. A shot of the newspaper from *Town of Violence*.



Figure 10. The opening shot of *A Japanese Tragedy*.

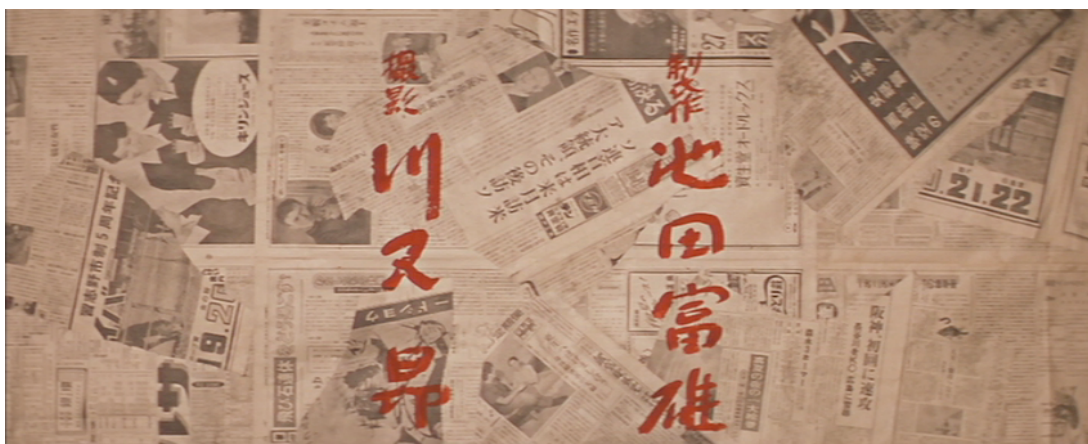


Figure 11. A shot from the opening credit sequence in *Cruel Story of Youth*.



「資生堂オールドルックス」新聞広告 1960

Figure 12. *Shiseido* advertisement designed by Yamana Ayao.



Figure 13. Shot of newspapers and magazines from *Secrets Behind the Wall*.



Figure 14. One of the inserted stills from a *manga* in *Go Go Second-Time Virgin*



Figure 15. Inserted image of Sharon Tate in *Go, Go Second-Time Virgin*



Figure 16. A landscape shot from *A.K.A. Serial Killer*. Courtesy Hirasawa Gô



Figure 17. A landscape shot from *The Secret Story of the Post-Tokyo War*.