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The Word Before the Image: Criticism, the Screenplay, and the Regulation of Meaning in Prewar Japanese Film Culture

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Word and Image in Japanese Cinema

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CHAPTER ONE

The Word before the Image

Criticism, the Screenplay, and the Regulation
of Meaning in Prewar Japanese Film Culture

Aaron Gerow

RENAMING THE UNNAMED

Despite the predominant tendency to term motion pictures an image medium both in the West and in Japan (where *eizô* [image] is in fact coming to supplant the word *eiga* [film] for many educational institutions offering film courses), the word both spoken and written has played a central role in the history of the art.¹ This is not simply due to the perfection of sound technology in bringing speech to the screen; there is also a long history of cinema inspiring, and in turn being inspired by, writing. The relationship between film and literature is certainly the most prominent example of such interaction between word and image, but it would be restricting to reduce our conception of such intercourse to only literary adaptation in cinema or to the "visuality" of the modern novel. Both inquiries assume a cinema-image/literature-word dichotomy that occludes the historical role writing and speaking about cinema has played in the constitution of the medium itself and of how it has operated in prewar Japanese film culture.

One could consider, for instance, the history of the importation and assimilation of cinema in Japan itself as the attempt to articulate a foreign object into the domestic language, of naming what had not yet been named. The creation of the medium's initial Japanese appellation, *katsudô shashin* (literally, "moving photographs"), or the lectures given by the first *benshi* (*benshi* is another term for "Katsuben" the film explainer or narrator whose words accompanied a film) to explain the newly arrived wonder, can be taken as manifestations of this discursive process of introducing audiences to an unknown technology. Words were essen-

tial in forming a conception of the medium itself, in making it accessible to audiences unfamiliar with its operations.

Yet it is clear that words did not simply supplement a preexisting, non-linguistic object (e.g., the moving image) that needed a linguistic window to be seen. This is evident from the fact that the motion pictures did not arrive on Japan's shores completely unknown. Given that one of the early appellations for the movies was *jidô gentô* (self-moving magic lantern – an appropriation of the already existing name for the magic lantern), it is not surprising that some like Terada Torahiko saw it as merely a technologically more precise, yet aesthetically less interesting version of the popular lantern shows;² or that others like Kubota Utsubo could state, upon first entering a cinema hall, that motion pictures “were the most interesting of the *misemono* of that kind”³ – as if both men were familiar with the medium before they had even seen it. Words used to name the medium were then not just articulating what was unknown, but redefining what had already been shaped by words.

This tension between the processes of naming the unnamed and renaming the already named is an example, I believe, of the shifting relationship between the image and the word in the prewar Japanese film world. Writing and speaking on the cinema were certainly essential in explaining a new, difficult-to-understand object, but that writing was, at the same time, already an essential part of the object itself. Discussions carried on in critical writings were not so much concerned with coming to grips with a static-object cinema as they were with transforming it precisely by altering the way words already operated in the cinema, primarily, as we shall see, through the establishment of film criticism and the screenplay as cinematic practices. In the end, the history of the word and the image in prewar Japanese cinema is less of a Manichean conflict between diametric opposites than of a struggle over the very nature of language and signification and its function in the social sphere. As will become evident later, by *word* and *image* I do not simply mean the types of signs used in writing and cinema, respectively: they are as much metaphors for different possibilities with regard to signification, figures at the center of a larger struggle in prewar Japan over the regulation of meaning itself.

A CHORUS OF VOICES: NOVELIZATION AND EARLY CINEMA

One of the dominant early models of the relationship between the cinema and the spoken or written word was that of explanation, of providing

knowledge of the new medium to viewing audiences through printed matter or lectures. This function was not confined to the process of familiarizing the Japanese with a foreign medium, for it continued well after most urban Japanese were well aware of the moving pictures. Rather, it became part of the apparatus itself, becoming essential to how films operated and how spectators read their content. The example of the *benshi*'s role in narrating silent cinema is well known, but I would first like to focus here on a related phenomenon: the practice of novelizing films, carried out by a nascent film journalism.

The first film magazine in Japan, *Katsudô shashinkai* (Moving Picture World), listed, in its initial issue in June 1909, the three reasons it was being published:

First, it is because interest in the moving pictures is growing ever greater. Their recent development and popularity is truly surprising: films span many fields and, needless to say, are becoming quite varied and complex. . . . Yet since they are shown one after the other in the space of two or three hours, there is no time to fully explain them. One can only sit back and gaze because there is no time to take them in as one switches to the next. Therefore, knowing or not knowing the story beforehand (or even after seeing it) may make a considerable difference in how deeply interested one is in the movies. For this reason, this magazine will compensate for the lack of explanation and offer knowledge necessary to enjoy watching the movies.

Second, this will serve as a souvenir. There is no more convenient way of sharing the pleasures of the day than giving this as a souvenir to friends after the family goes out together to see the movies, or to those in the family who stayed home. Not only that, but is not reading the explanations and the summaries and narrating the scenes of the film one of the pleasures of a peaceful home?

Third, it is a means of obtaining new knowledge about the world. As just mentioned, the moving pictures . . . are a means of equally and pleasurably injecting the freshest knowledge into people's minds. However, not even the smartest and most quick-thinking of persons, when viewing them only at a glance, could possibly taste and digest everything. Even if he could digest it, it would be difficult for him to remember it for long. Because of that, it is very necessary to put this information in a magazine to help viewers both understand and forever remember the world's new knowledge.⁴

Two of the above *raison d'être* concern the role of film journalism in augmenting a lack in the signifying process of the cinematic apparatus. The presumption is that films, either through their formal style or mode of exhibition, cannot be understood as is. To alleviate this problem, *Katsudô shashinkai*, as well as its other fellow film magazines, concentrated on printing plot summaries and novelizations in order to help spectators either prepare themselves before the film or find out what they missed

afterward. This in fact would become one of the major functions of Japanese film journalism up until the late 1910s (as was the case in other nations as well).

It is also evident that from early on, these plot summaries, or novelized versions of film stories, functioned as another important part of the film industry's apparatus: advertising. The very first film magazines, *Katsudô shashinkai*, *Katsudô shashin* (Moving Pictures), and *Katsudô shashin taimuzu* (Moving Picture Times), were operated by the motion picture companies themselves (Yoshizawa Shôten, M. Pathé, and Yokota Shôkai, respectively); novelizations functioned to announce the latest films, lure audiences to the theater, and prepare them to watch the movie. Summaries continued to dominate the pages of even the more independent film magazines produced by the commercial publishing industry that began appearing in the mid-1910s. These new magazines may have been owned by publishers structurally separate from the studios, but they were not free of the influence of their advertisers and supporters. Perhaps it was due to the fact that Tenkatsu studio founder Kobayashi Kisaburô helped finance *Katsudô no sekai* (The Movie World), a major proponent of reform, that the periodical was relatively favorable to (though not wholly uncritical of) his activities – as well as his company's films.

Novelizations did retain their function as advertising, but it would be inaccurate to claim that was their only role: one would suppose that making available a plot summary beforehand, complete with an exact explanation of the ending, would spoil the picture for many potential paying patrons.⁵ Perhaps we do have to lend credibility to the statement by *Katsudô shashinkai* that novelizations were essential in helping spectators understand the film plot and access the often foreign world depicted therein. The discourse of novelization could be posited as one of the primary forms of cinematic knowledge in 1910s Japan, exemplifying how the motion pictures were defined, the process of meaning production, and the relationship between the image and the word.

Novelizations in the early film days in Japan were apparently not provided by the film company or based on the script, but rather composed by the magazine itself, which sent a reporter to the theater to watch the film several times and copy down the story.⁶ Especially in the case of Japanese films, this was necessary because full-fledged film scripts were not yet in existence. The plot of a film was available only after being

shown in the theater because the ultimate creation of narrative meaning still occurred in the sphere of exhibition, not production, especially given the role of the *benshi*. By being written following both production and exhibition, novelizations reflected the dominance of the latter in the creation of filmic meaning. Some plot summaries also bolstered the role of *benshi* by transcribing less the flow of filmic images than the rhetoric of their narration, sometimes word for word.⁷

Novelizations did, however, work against the localism of exhibition. When dependent upon a *benshi* for its final meaning, the same film could pose different effects according to where and with whom it was shown. By recording a version of what one *benshi* said, and distributing it to many locations via the print media, film magazines were helping to standardize the film text by creating a rendition of the plot that was supposed to hold true for all exhibition sites. Novelization also aided the process of shifting the load of cinematic meaning from the space of the theater to the filmic text itself, as well as centering the pleasures of cinema on the enjoyment of narrative, as opposed to less narrative thrills such as pure visual fascination and enjoying the *benshi's* playing with words.

The practice of novelization still presumed that even this more universal filmic text was dependent upon discourses external to itself. As evident in the logic of *Katsudô shashinkai*, it was assumed that means other than the film itself were needed after the production stage to assist viewers in understanding the text. One of these was the *benshi*, who explained what Japanese spectators were unfamiliar with or could not understand on their own. The other was novelization, which in many ways assumed the same function of the *benshi* in providing information to filmgoers. The analogy is important because even those novelizations that did not adopt the oratorical style of the *benshi* were considerably long and detailed, and, especially by the mid-1910s, sometimes reached ten pages in length. The presumed necessity of the *benshi* and of novelization was a declaration that the cinematic image on its own was insufficiently meaningful without the supplementary power of the word.

Yet the independence of the discourse of novelization rendered unclear the location of the source of narrative enunciation in motion pictures. It did not seem to reside either in the film, the magazine, or the sphere of production, reflecting the fact that movies in this era offered less a unified, univocal textual experience than a chorus of voices. Note

that most of the novelizations were not only authorless, but they also rarely – especially in the case of Japanese films – cited any production information other than the film's title, genre, and studio. Interpenetrated by the words of the novelization, it was as if the film, somehow devolving from a production company, was in the end the product of a faceless amalgamation of discourses with no specific source. Never entirely the product of its producers, the *benshi*, or its novelization, the film text lacked self-sufficiency and depended upon the fact that any and all these various sources of enunciation would intertwine and mold the final cinematic meaning at the point the film was shown.

The cinematic text's lack of independence reflected on film journalism itself. The practice of novelization made film magazines one of the essential supplemental discourses, particularly in relation to the sphere of exhibition. It is important to note the similarity between film magazines and the programs distributed at some of the more high-class foreign-film theaters. Many of these free, four-page programs were in fact weekly periodical publications that, while centered on plot summaries and credit information for that week's program, also included articles and letters from film fans. Programs like the Teikokukan's *Daiichi shinbun* (Number One News, begun in March 1916) became an important center of debate on the cinema and, for some young critics like Iijima Tadashi, the first place to publish their thoughts on the medium.⁸ The fact that the most important film journal in Japanese history, *Kinema junpô* (The Movie Times), started out as a four-page pamphlet with a layout similar to that of the theater programs indicates how closely early film journalism was tied to programs and the discourse of exhibition. Journalism was simply one facet of the cinematic apparatus, one of the means by which filmic meaning was transmitted to the audience.

That did not mean that the word was beholden to the operations of the image. Rather, the cinematic image, unable to transmit its meaning without the aid of such linguistic rhetors as the *benshi* and film magazines, was not defined as a mode of signification that was other to the word. Leaning on the shoulders of its older generic cousins like the novel and forms of oral storytelling such as *kôdan*, film was not yet constructed as an independent art possessing its own, unique forms of signification. Cinema had to rely on discourses outside itself because there was still no definition of what delineated the internal of the medium from the external. The word, even if it existed in an entirely different medium (e.g., the

print medium), was still an essential element in how cinema operated and in how audiences understood it, so much so that *Katsudô gahô* (Movie Graphic) advertised its novelizations as the equivalent of the experience of going to the movies: "We believe that reading them in conjunction with the illustrations definitely produces a feeling similar to watching a moving picture."⁹ The word was so central to the motion picture experience that seemingly the image itself was unnecessary; how the film presented its story, using formal devices defined as being particular to cinema, was less important. In the discourse of novelization, image and word were inseparable in creating an experience called the moving pictures, one that was itself difficult to distinguish as a signifying practice from other *misemono*.

REGULATING A NEW DISCOVERY: THE IMAGE

Another major discourse that initially treated the word as equivalent to the cinematic image was that of law. At first motion pictures were treated no differently from other *misemono* under censorship regulations, usually being covered by, but remaining unnamed within, old laws that covered fairground entertainments. Under these regulations, those wishing to present some form of entertainment publicly were required to obtain prior permission from the police station having jurisdiction over the area involved, a procedure that required submission of the names of those responsible, details about the performance space, and a summary of the entertainment itself.¹⁰ Films were not viewed beforehand and were rarely, if ever, checked after opening. In the technology of censorship at the time, the written synopsis was considered sufficient for judging the film itself; it was the words that were the object of censorship because there was no conception of any form of meaning other than that.

This relation of the image and the word begins to change after 1908 when the film industry finally begins to regularize production and the medium itself experiences a boom, a change that is first apparent in how the state regulated the motion pictures. Right around that time, cinema became an object of concern for educators and regulators worried about film's corrupting influence on children, and it was these public leaders who started to form a discourse distinguishing film and its effects from those of other media. In this way, it was only by becoming a "bad object" that the motion pictures gained an identity.¹¹ As I have argued elsewhere,

much of this transformation was symbolized in the debates over the immensely popular French film *Zigomar*, directed by Victorin Jasset.¹² In deciding to ban the film in October 1912, the police acknowledged a problem in the way they were censoring films:

At police headquarters, looking at the original story of the French *Zigomar*, it was thought that there was nothing much to it. Even among works of this kind, if you inspect the moving picture license, you would think it is only a kind of child's play. That's why we approved it up until today thinking it had no effect on public morals. However, looking at the actual film, there is a world of difference from the explanation in both the scenery and the characters.¹³

The Tokyo police were admitting to a difference between the filmic text and its synopsis, in effect "discovering" the existence of the cinematic image: a semiotic experience apart from that offered in words, one accessible only through the "actual film" and its projection.

Yet the discovery was less that of a new, but stable form of signification, asserting its presence in the face of established ones, than that of an undefined force that itself posed a problem for the powers charged with regulating meaning in society. The influential newspaper *Tokyo asahi shinbun*, which campaigned first against the movies and then against *Zigomar*, had complained in general about the "unnaturalness" and incomprehensibility of such new film techniques as ellipses and cutting within the scene.¹⁴ The cinematic image seemingly presented an experience that threatened the disintegration of meaning itself. As commentators also "discovered," this experience was not wholly a problem of the text, but also of the culture that surrounded it. Much of the criticism of *Zigomar* was devoted not to the film, but to a new culture of image consumption, of neon-lit entertainment districts and dark theaters that, it was feared, undermined the normal processes of reasoning and understanding and was antithetical to the established structures of meaning. New meanings could arise from this realm in the interaction of space, audience, *benshi*, and text, meanings that were not to be found in the summaries offered to police censors and that were thus difficult to regulate.

Through the discovery of cinema as a problem, police, educators, and other social leaders articulated definitions of cinema different from the one offered by the discourse of novelization. These mostly focused on film as image and as exhibition. Much of the history of the discourse on cinema in the 1910s centers on efforts to counter the threat of the filmic image by attempting to control the cinema depicted in these other defin-

itions. Film as a product of the realm of exhibition became the object of study of such sociologists as Gonda Yasunosuke, while police and educators, in part using Gonda's findings, began to regulate the theatrical space with new laws such as Tokyo's 1917 Moving Picture Regulations. Some of these restricted film viewing by those, like children, who were deemed incapable of reading the image; others tried to reduce the cacophony of "voices" typical of entertainment districts (by regulating film theater billboards, for instance). Educators and the Ministry of Education also joined in this larger project of molding spectators whose reading strategies were socially responsible – that is, predictable and controllable – by recommending films (starting in 1916) or through banning film attendance by schoolchildren unless accompanied by a parent or a teacher on school outings.

Most efforts, however, centered on trying to stabilize and regulate the semiotic process of the image. This was first manifest in new requirements that films be prescreened as part of the censorship process, but it was also evident in strategies having recourse to the word. Central to the latter was the *benshi*, who still dominated both the exhibition space and the reading of the image. The *benshi's* presence was required at screenings in some localities,¹⁵ and they were licensed (starting in 1917), tested (after 1920), and educated as part of the effort to make sure that proper knowledge was being transmitted to the audience. Told not to deviate from the summaries the police received, *benshi* were to act like novelizations – positing a universal text whose meanings did not deviate from theater to theater, or from police viewings to the paid screening. Fearing the lack of the importance of the word in the cinematic experience – its incomplete ability to regulate meaning – authorities often sought solutions that reinstituted the word as central to the act of watching cinema.

FILM CRITICISM AND THE INDEPENDENT TEXT

The difficulty confronting those in the 1910s who were concerned with the problem with cinema was that the dominant mode of writing on cinema, novelization, was clearly inadequate as a means of controlling the filmic image. Not only was it unable to grasp those other meanings emerging from the image and the theater, but it was also too much a part of the cinematic apparatus to fully act as its regulator. In a sense, this was

the context behind the appearance of film criticism and, with it, the Pure Film Movement, in the 1910s. The Pure Film Movement, which was less a real movement than a general shift in the 1910s and the 1920s in how cinema was made and conceived, was an effort in criticism, and then in production, to first eliminate the "uncinematic" elements of Japanese film, such as the *onnagata*, and to then import filmic techniques such as close-ups and parallel editing so as to create a more purely "cinematic" Japanese film. At first glance, it would seem odd to locate such pure film reformers as Kaeriyama Norimasa and Shigeno Yuki Yoshi in the effort to reword the image: their call for a pure film, starting as it did with the argument to eliminate the *benshi*, demanded a cinema centered on the image, not on the word. Their proposal was for a filmic text that was sufficient in itself, that could enunciate its meaning on its own without the intervention of the supplementary word.

Yet in spite of Kaeriyama's forays into film production (starting with *The Glow of Life* ["Sei no kagayaki," produced in 1918, released in 1919]), the Pure Film Movement was first and foremost a development in film criticism, centered on determining what constituted good cinema and how to write about it. How they staked out a territory for writing on film reiterated the primacy of the word in the film image. The definition of criticism became an issue with the first film magazines as young film aficionados took to task such older critics as Yoshiyama Kyokkô (usually cited as the first film critic¹⁶) for their relative sympathy to the "canned-theater" style, which dominated Japanese productions. The September 1910 issue of *Katsudô shashinkai* included a piece written by Higashiyama Gaishi that signaled a transition toward different standards for critical writing. Setting the stage for much later criticism in coterie magazines, Higashiyama called for an impressionist style of criticism and for more criticism written by fans. Yet his emphasis on the space of exhibition is revealed in the matters he lists for critics to discuss:

1. Evaluation of the script
2. The actor's performance methods (costumes, expressions)
3. Scene selection (scenery, lighting)
4. Photography (lightness/darkness, linking)
5. Projection (electric power, shaking of the machine, size of the screen)
6. Skill of the *benshi*
7. Use of music¹⁷

While Higashiyama's prayer for the appearance of "true moving picture critics" helped set the stage for later developments, his attention to the

benshi and the projector reveals that his film criticism was not significantly different from the evaluation of a live theater performance.

The critics that were gathering around such reformist journals as *Kinema rekôdo* (started in 1914) began postulating a definition of film criticism as an independent mode of discourse. On an economic level, this independence was represented by the creation of coterie magazines less reliant upon industry support. *Kinema rekôdo* and *Kinema junpô* (started in 1919) were both the equivalents of college literary magazines, the brainchildren of groups of young friends who started publishing on their own. Not begun as commercial ventures, these journals brandished their independence from the industry and rigorously lambasted Japanese films for their lack of cinematic essence. With their success, many others followed in their path. According to Makino Mamoru's monumental, soon-to-be-published index of prewar film periodicals, while there were only seven magazines listed as having published articles on film in 1918, there were a total of sixty-seven in 1924, a significant number of which were coterie magazines.¹⁸ While the boom also coincided with the rise of mass journalism, it also reflected the grass-roots nature of criticism within the Pure Film Movement. Criticism was to be written by dedicated members of the audience who had no connection to the industry, whose role, in fact, was to communicate the ideas of the audience of film producers. As such, criticism was a kind of "idealistic amateurism."¹⁹

Reformist critics also sought independence on the level of their mode of discourse, positing a mode of evaluation specific to the screen. Writing under one of his pseudonyms, Kaeriyama asserted that there were two meanings of the phrase "a good film": "One is 'value as a work of art' and another is 'value as a photographic picture.'" While the latter criterion was mostly centered on technique, the former he defined as "the value when looked at from the pure standpoint of the moving pictures."²⁰ The central tenet of the new criticism was to judge film as film, not just as a story or a performance, and emphasize whatever cinematic modes of signification were used to transmit that narrative. As the critic and film censor Tachibana Takahiro argued, "Photoplays possess their own terminology. Those who cannot read those terms I ask to think about the act of viewing and criticizing a photoplay. To put it bluntly, I want them to cut all relationships with the stage and see photoplays as photoplays."²¹

In discussing how to evaluate Japanese films, *Kinema rekôdo's* Shigeno Yuki Yoshi countered Yoshiyama Kyokkô by arguing that the standard of cinema was universal and specific to the medium: "Judging

'Japanese pictures as Japanese pictures,' as Yoshiyama urges, may be appropriate for discussing drama, but . . . to criticize moving picture technique, one must first compare it to foreign works in general."²² To reformers like Shigeno, Yoshiyama's call to compare Japanese films with one another was equivalent to making theatricality the standard for cinema; to them, cinema could only be judged as cinema by comparing Japanese films to works that represented a more universal standard of cinema, that is, foreign films.

The critic, then, had to be knowledgeable of these universal standards, but it was such knowledge that qualified the critical populism of the Pure Film Movement. The prominent critic Mori Iwao castigated some of his colleagues for lacking qualifications. Critics, he charged, "do not seem to have even thought about what the moving pictures are. . . . One can say there is not one who criticizes and appraises the entirety of the film from the standpoint of moving picture 'art.'"²³ Becoming a film critic, in Mori's mind, required a special relationship with the medium, a love and deep appreciation of its unique beauty and charms; it demanded a particular form of spectatorship able to enter the world created by the film, yet serious and studied enough to pronounce judgment on the work's quality. As *Kinema junpô* argued: "While an article of criticism is nothing but the expression in words of the comments in the mind of the critic – who himself is no different from a mature spectator – we hope that the critic's attitude is very serious."²⁴ Critics had a grave responsibility toward other spectators and the cinema. "Critics are people who lead; they cannot be led," wrote Tachibana. "Their responsibility is considerable."²⁵

If there was one individual who was not allowed to criticize the film, it was the *benshi*. Judging from complaints at the time, it was not unheard of for *benshi* to insert critical commentary into their narration of a film, a practice for which they were roundly condemned by reformers. Ishii Meika, editor of *Katsudô gahô*, added, "Since explanation is neither a lecture nor a speech, it should not in the least separate itself from the film and mix in subjective criticism or arguments."²⁶ In such comments, one sees an attempt to eliminate the very "fragmentation of the signifier" that Noël Burch claims as a central facet of the *benshi* phenomenon.²⁷ As I have argued elsewhere,²⁸ much of reformist discourse on the *benshi* was directed at creating a cinematic text that was whole and self-sufficient, which narrated itself without the need of such supplementary discourses as the *benshi* or novelizations. This involved tying the *benshi* to the text as an

enunciative tool subservient to the transmission of the text's unified meaning, in effect inserting the *benshi*'s narrative enunciation into the text and eliding the *benshi*'s presence in order that the text could speak for itself.

The creation of the self-sufficient cinematic text and the founding of film criticism are not unrelated. Restricting the *benshi*'s explanation to serving the film was in many ways a precondition for founding film criticism as an authoritative institution, allowing reformist critics to monopolize the right to speak on the text. Recall that under the discourse of novelization, journalism was the printed equivalent of the *benshi*, functioning as part of the cinematic apparatus in ensuring the transmission of filmic meaning. By negating the double of its former self, film criticism then asserted both the particularity of its discourse and its own independence from the textual apparatus. While an uncritical *benshi* was not to stray from the film, criticism could firmly assert its distance from the process of narration. To reform Japanese cinema, progressive critics created a form of discourse capable of aiming not at the furtherance of narrative comprehension, but at the negation of certain modes of narration altogether.

THE PURE, WORDLESS IMAGE

Asserting the independence of criticism was an important step in declaring the liberation of the image from the word. If the first conceptions of the moving pictures failed to distinguish between the filmic image and the word as modes of meaning production, the rejection of certain forms of speaking as parts of the cinematic experience (e.g., the critical *benshi*) postulated a difference between word and image (in which the former could harm the effect of the latter) at the same time that it asserted the primacy of the image in filmic signification. Establishing criticism as the legitimate arena for speaking on cinema completed this division between word and image by in effect removing the word from the process of cinematic signification and depositing it in the critical field. Film journalism was to be separate from the cinematic apparatus, earning its independence both because the image was now considered self-sufficient, and because that self-sufficiency established film journalism as a legitimate mode of writing distinct from other forms of art criticism.

Film criticism in effect depended on the conception of the image as pure. Much of the discourse of the Pure Film Movement was deeply con-

cerned with distinguishing the cinema as an inherently silent visual medium that produced meaning through pantomime, its silence and visuality distinguishing it from other arts such as the theater. Even while positing the screenplay as the centerpiece of reform, *Kinema rekôdo* argued that screenwriting must be pursued "without leaving the limits of pantomime" and went on to cite *The Student of Prague* as a particularly commendable example of honoring the uniqueness of the image: "This is what only the moving pictures can represent. Although it is words that express in the theater, it is certainly difficult to know such things as [that film's] form [through words]. It is only the moving pictures, creating titles with words when pantomime is insufficient, . . . only such a composite form of moving picture that has the greatest value as a photoplay."²⁹ Many recognized that pantomime was occasionally insufficient to communicate narrative meaning and they thus acknowledged the supplementary role intertitles must play. Yet Kaeriyama, in his *How To Produce and Photograph Moving Picture Dramas* ("Katsudô shashingeki no sôsaku to satsueihô") took pains in his chapter on the screenplay to counsel his readers on the need to keep titles to a minimum by using parallel editing and other cinematic devices. Also cautioning against making the script too literary, he maintained a clear distinction between the cinema and its more literary cousins like theater and the novel.³⁰

The early 1920s featured several debates on the legitimacy of using intertitles in the film. Fans joined in, and one reader, in countering the argument of a fellow magazine contributor, offered a succinct summary of the reasons for eliminating titles and the *benshi*:

The photoplay itself is essentially a silent drama. Silent drama does not need words or writing. Therefore, in place of the words of the theater, it emphasizes skillful expression and a clever attitude and makes use of liberal editing, close-ups, and cutbacks which are understood by all. If, as you claim, the *benshi* is useful, then how can you argue with a straight face that close-ups and cutbacks are necessary? . . . By concretely expressing any kind of event, the photoplay occupies a completely different field than the stage. The more you watch a film and apply your imagination, the more the value of a photoplay appears. Therefore, words and titles, which are unnatural and greatly damage the true value of cinema, should naturally be eliminated.³¹

Film purists understood the lack of words as the basis for cinema's development of a unique mode of signification. Adding words to the film in any manner, either through the *benshi*, the titles, or elements in the die-

gesis, was seen as preventing filmmakers from seeking out more filmic solutions to narrative problems. While admitting that it was inevitable that the name, for instance, of a train station would appear within the frame, Midorikawa Harunosuke, for one, went to the extreme of arguing that "it is absolutely unforgivable for that station name to offer some kind of explanation of the plot."³² In defining the cinema as pure and unique, it appears that for some it was intolerable to supplement the filmic text with any linguistic signs. This attitude was not uncommon in world cinema in the silent era – movements such as French Impressionism (Germaine Dulac's *The Smiling Madame Beudet* in 1922) and German Expressionism (F. W. Murnau's *The Last Laugh* in 1924) featured efforts to produce titleless films – but the Pure Film Movement was more influenced by early American attempts in this direction.³³ Cinema was defined by the pure image, which itself was seen as inherently devoid of the influence of words.

ANTERIOR CRITICISM, OR THE WORD AS CINEMA'S SUPEREGO

With journalism and the operations of the word now divorced from the cinematic apparatus, the question of what role was left for writing to play in the filmic experience remained. If the pure motion picture text was supposedly complete in itself, without need for linguistic explanation, writing on cinema could no longer play the part novelization did. Nevertheless, in the authority concomitant to reformist discourse, criticism found a role for itself that reversed the hierarchy it forced upon the *benshi* (in which the *benshi*'s words could only serve the image) and reestablished writing as cinema's leader. Reformers like Mori portrayed the role of criticism as analogous to that of a loving adult raising an infant through education and punishment.³⁴ A *Kinema junpô* editorial, summarizing the duties of critics, declared that "one of their most important missions" is to "explain the impressions given to them by the film and prompt self-examination on the part of all those involved in that film: the producers, exhibitors, *benshi*, and spectators."³⁵ "The function of film criticism," another critic added, "lies in both judging the value of produced pictures as well as in correcting and aiding films and filmmakers, offering the driving force for reconstruction."³⁶ In this manner, film journalism shed its role of transmitting narrative meaning and presented itself as a guide for cinema.

Reformist journals were peppered with comments on how their critical activities had prompted changes within the Japanese industry. Criticism had presumably inspired such transformations not only through the power of its specific judgments, but also through offering itself as a model for practical action; as a form of practice, it became the mold into which cinema would be poured. Film production and distribution were asked to do as film journalism did: if film criticism was independent and foregrounded the uniqueness of its discourse, so should film practice; if criticism shed the requirements of commercialism to pursue film art, so should the motion picture industry. Ultimately, if criticism was to act as a driving force in the production of the image, it was through postulating an authorial source for its meaning. Early cinema in the era of novelization was the product of no specific individual but rather of a faceless amalgam of intersecting genres and discourses. Reform, however, required a subject responsible for the film if the critic were to lay blame on individuals who should act differently in the future. The very act of criticism made no sense if there were no author accountable for making the film incorrectly.

The model for this necessary subjectivity was to be found in criticism itself. In the narrative of reform, critics first had to assume an independent position and bear responsibility for their own role in bettering the motion pictures. As in the case of Mori Iwao's writing, criticism of film criticism became an important activity for journals like *Kinema rekôdo* and *Kinema junpô*, which castigated film critics for lacking knowledge of cinema and for not realizing the gravity of their role in raising an infant cinema. The two magazines thus made a point of attaching the author's name to most of their printed film criticism.³⁷ Dissenting with Hugo Freedburg's assertion that it was the task of fans and film authors to lead the cinema, Mori argued that such people could not be trusted: "The author is, if anything, a person who, excused as an insider, tends toward mistakes by waving around art, art, and art, and fans are conceited, smug, and irresponsible. In the end, I think both the cool intelligence which correctly penetrates the truth of things and the authority to work for complete progress cannot be had without critics."³⁸

While clearly it was film producers who had to change their practices to realize reform, Mori's statement implied that the reformist subjectivity that bore "intelligence" and "authority" had to originate in critics first. The authorial subject in production would, in a sense, only inherit the

responsibility for proper cinematic creation from the critic. In understanding the transformations in early Japanese cinema, it is crucial to see how the birth of criticism was not only antecedent to, but a necessary condition for, the development of the ideologies of the film auteur or the film star. Authorship had to be injected into cinema from without. This may seem like the bravado spouted by any critic, but criticism's central role in Japanese film history is best exemplified by the large number of critics and writers who entered the film industry to put into practice their newfound reformist agency, individuals such as Kaeriyama Norimasa; Mori Iwao (who later became vice president of Tôhō); Midorikawa Harunosuke (Noda Kôgo); Furukawa Roppa; Takada Tamotsu (a *Katsudô kurabu* [Movie Club] reporter who later became a prominent film and theater director and essayist); Kishi Matsuo (a *Kinema junpô* writer who later joined Tôhō as a scriptwriter and director); and even Tanizaki Jun'ichirô (who supported film reform and became an adviser and screenwriter at Taikatsu) – to name just a few.³⁹

The assertion of the reformist authority of the word in effect transformed the temporal relationship between writing and the image. In novelization, word and image may have functioned in parallel to produce what in the end was a narrative deemed equivalent to a written story, but the linguistically composed text was always somewhat temporally behind the film. With no real script having been written before the film was produced (or a script unavailable in the case of foreign films), the actual transcription of the film into words or its explanation by the *benshi* took place afterward. In criticism, with its supposition that adding words after the fact could do nothing to change a completed film (except, of course, damage it), writing that took place after the film's completion was in some sense redirected toward a point theoretically before cinematic meaning was created. This was paralleled by the assertion that cinematic meaning was established not postproduction, in the sphere of exhibition, but in the temporal space, before the film was completed, where those authors responsible for the film acted. Film journalism directed its focus toward those subjects – the filmmakers, exhibitors, and spectators – who played a role in producing cinematic meaning. The film was fait accompli, but if it was lacking in artistic quality, the castigation of past acts would provide the rules by which future films would be made. Superlative films were to be praised, but in the dominant critical discourse of the time, usually termed "impressionist" criticism, this did not

involve offering explanations of hidden meanings or helping readers further understand the text, but rather evoking the critic's impressions of the text's cinematic excellence. Since nothing could be added to the text, criticism merely focused on indicating how such texts exemplified "cinema" itself, again as a guide to future films.

Criticizing the past in order to direct the future, the words of criticism were to assume centrality in the film world. Film producers (or even spectators) were supposed to read film criticism to learn what they had done wrong and to keep those lessons in mind when approaching their next film. Criticism and the warnings of the word then found residence inside the minds of producers, acting as the superego that would regulate their future desires. In creating authorial subjects responsible for cinematic meaning, film reformers also carved out an internality to themselves complete with a conscience that would correct and censor the creation of the image. While pronouncing the self-sufficiency of the image, reformers always presumed that the word would act as the symbolic warden regulating the cinematic imaginary.

THE IMAGE AS CODE

This conclusion should prompt us to look again at the Pure Film Movement's effort to separate word and image and to make the latter the definition of a pure cinema. Reformers' criticisms were directed at a *mise-mono* brand of cinema that made the *benshi*, novelization, and the film itself all indistinguishable elements in the production of cinematic meaning. Radically separating the image text from the other written or spoken texts was intended to distinguish cinema as a unique art, but not, it must be stressed, in the way police censors sensed was occurring with *Zigomar*. There, amid a chorus of different voices, police noticed an image text that was operating on its own, dangerously out of control and seemingly beyond reach of the confining influence of words. Reformers may have desired an independent image text, but as can be seen from their discourse on intertitles, it was not one to be unrestricted and undefined.

Purists' complaints against the existing Japanese fare were often centered on the fact that they were narratively unclear or hard to understand. While critics like Midorikawa flatly rejected the use of intertitles in the early 1920s, it is important to note that at the beginning of the Pure Film Movement, intertitles were something Japanese cinema was faulted for

not having. In listing the deficiencies in the Japanese product, a 1916 article in *Kinema rekôdo* charged: "The titles are far too simple and there is a great need to write them more carefully so that viewers can understand the plot . . ." ⁴⁰ Intertitles in Japanese films in the mid-1910s were faulted for failing to assist the film in communicating narrative meaning; they were more properly subheadings, largely confined to announcing the titles of each scene. The reformers' emphasis on intertitles and the narration contained therein transformed the *benshi*'s relation to the film text. The illustrious *benshi* Somei Saburô noted how early *benshi* for foreign film, without good translations of the intertitles, would often simply "look at the image and give an explanation that roughly fit." Advances in both cinematic form and spectator knowledge rendered such practices untenable. *Benshi* now, he claimed, use better title translations and "correlate them with the film as a framework, adding appropriate accompaniment and explanation as a form of coloration." ⁴¹ Explanation was not just of the image, but of the titles, in effect treating the film as a narration embodied in linguistic enunciations. ⁴²

The effort to eliminate titles should not be seen as a rejection of this process of adding intertitles, but as its extension. Midorikawa wrote, in upholding the silent, titleless film, that "even if silence is meaningless, . . . the silent drama of pantomime is meaningful. At times, it possesses much deeper meaning than a drama with dialogue." ⁴³ The image in a pure film without titles represented not a return to the narratively ambiguous image of early Japanese cinema, the semiotically undefined text that concerned censors, but rather the complete internalization of narrative enunciation within the text. Titles were to be eliminated only insofar as the image could equally or better handle the same narrative load, and had assumed the same certainty of signification as writing or speech. As such, the titleless film was not allowed to be ambiguous or open to different spectator readings. The metaphor *Katsudô no sekai* used to describe the meaning uniquely expressed by cinema was, in the end, "the words of the moving pictures" (*katsudô shashin no kotoba*), defined as the "words which substitute for the words of theater." ⁴⁴ The definition of the cinematic sign was, in the end, to be found in an analogy with the word. ⁴⁵

The vision of a pure cinema in the 1910s was always one in which meaning was stable, univocal, and understandable. Kaeriyama stressed that the filmmaker must have a reason or an opinion behind every shot: "Even in shooting a scenic picture, the producer must approach the cre-

ation of each and every scene with a viewpoint and judgment: Does this have value as an image? What is the relationship between the mood on the spot and the status of film's color or image?"⁴⁶ In the film theory of the reformers, each and every shot must bear a meaning or intention founded in the choice and judgment of the filmmaker. Even a titleless film has to carry the burden of meaning, yet to be as univocally meaningful as reformers desired, it must obey a strict and unified semiotic code that centrally grounds meaning. One can say that progressive critics objected to existing Japanese cinema precisely because it lacked such a code; or, more specifically, because it featured a hodgepodge of codes and voices (which enabled the pleasure of experiencing their conflict, as, for instance, when *benshi* criticized the film they were explaining). Neither reformers nor film censors countenanced a film with multiple meanings. As purists, reformers demanded the separation of these codes according to media and type of sign (image, speech, music) but never gave up the conception of the code as the systematic reduction of potential meaning down to single decisions for each semiotic situation.

The word may have been divorced from the image, but the image was to be coded like the word. It should be evident that here I am not using *word* to simply refer to written signs of language, but to refer also to a code modeled on the form of language in which signs are ideally regulated, univocal, and unambiguous. The image was to be freed of signs of speech and writing only at the price of the image internalizing a code as "linguistic" as writing and speech, something similar to the narrator system Tom Gunning outlines.⁴⁷ The externalization of the word from the image made possible a code other than that of the word, but it was nevertheless a code, and one in which meaning took precedence over the image. This is evident from the fact that many reformers still allowed for the use of intertitles if the image could not sufficiently narrate by itself, since such narrational devices ensured that the image properly operated as part of a unified code and that there were no ambiguities in its reading. The advantage the coded image had over the previous cacophony of Japanese cinema was that narration could now emerge from within the text; whereas one once had the *benshi* narrating the text from without, the film image was now narrating itself from within, but only by reinternalizing the word as code to function as the linguistic center of semiotic control.

KURUTTA ICHIPEIJI AND THE HYBRID IMAGE

Tensions did exist, however, between the valorization of the image and the concomitant emphasis on univocal meaning. These surfaced at times, particularly in the 1920s when the ideals of the Pure Film Movement merged with theories about cinema imported from France, Germany, and later the Soviet Union. The movement, while declaring as its goal the attainment of a pure cinema, should not be confused with the experimentalism of French film purists like Louis Delluc and Léon Moussinac. Especially in the 1910s, reformers were focused largely on a commercial and narrative cinema, one that made understanding central. But in the 1920s, when the ideas of Delluc started entering Japan along with the films of Marcel L'Herbier and of Abel Gance, and news arrived of the German absolute films, some critics began asserting a purity of the image that rejected not only the word, but narrative and the restrictions of reason as well. They were not in the majority, however, and this growing split within the critical establishment surfaced, in particular, in the debates over Kinugasa Teinosuke's 1926 film *Kurutta ichipeiji*, or *A Page of Madness*.⁴⁸

Influenced by both German Expressionism and French Impressionism, Kinugasa's film went without intertitles and was thus hailed by some critics like Iwasaki Akira as "the first film-like film born in Japan."⁴⁹ Its non-narrativity itself was the object of celebration. The emphasis on the film's purity led many to denigrate the contribution Kawabata Yasunari and the Shinkankaku modernist literary group made to the film. This finally was cinema, not literature. But in spite of this praise, many critics complained of the difficulty in understanding the film. If it was a pure film, they argued, one should be able to comprehend it without the explanation of the *benshi* or the help of intertitles. *A Page of Madness*, however, was shown with the *benshi* present and its reliance on them for narrative assistance was severely criticized by such critics as Naoki Sanjugô. Even Iwasaki acknowledged this as a sign of the film's imperfect purity.⁵⁰

A Page of Madness represented an experiment in new forms of both cinematic and literary signification, but the primary expectation that greeted it was that it must, even without intertitles, operate like a complete and efficient semiotic system that ensured the univocality of meaning. Even the Shinkankaku writers, supposedly engaged in a "war of utter rebellion against language," in Yokomitsu Riichi's words, failed to question this view of a strict film language as a means of controlling meaning and readership.

Kataoka Teppeï, for instance, when announcing his own intention to produce a titleless film, described what to him constituted cinematic syntax: "The filmmaker or artist emphasizes seeing this part or that, and gives the order, 'You must look at these parts.' The selection of those parts from the entirety of a certain event, their arrangement in order, and the addition of a continuity are what constitute an artistic progression."⁵¹

This use of close-ups and editing to analyze space and vision, arranging those sections to narrativize the visual field, was certainly attractive to many 1920s novelists interested in new forms of writing and signification, in escaping traditional structures bound in words through a popular art that spoke in pictures. But the fascination exhibited here was not with the subversion of language, but rather with controlling sight so as to produce a new linguistic syntax that, while not using words, still preserved the fundamental structures and order of meaning and understanding. Their literary revolution did not undermine the basic centrality of language based in a unified subject, or the rational word holding sway over the irrational image.

However, what the debates on *A Page of Madness* did reveal was a strong undercurrent in the late 1920s that saw alternatives to this order of language. Writers for the Nagoya film-coterie magazine *Chûkyô kinema*, for instance, defended Kinugasa's film for its nonnarrative aspects, but came down hard on it for what they, in the end, considered its fundamentally literary nature: its refusal to completely do away with story and its subjection of filmic technique to semiotic effect. Cinema, they declared, need not be understood. The statements of these avant-garde cinephiles reveal the contradiction in pure film discourse between its demands for both visual purity and comprehensible narrative. What ultimately suppressed this contradiction, and with it the hope for visual experimentation divorced from semiotic motivation, was the evolution of the screenplay as the realization of the linguistic core ultimately desired by the Pure Film Movement, the word which would finally serve to regulate and contain the image text

FROM NOVELIZATION TO SCREENPLAY: THE LITERARY DEFINITION OF FILM

The development of the motion picture script was seen as the most crucial aspect of the pure film reforms.⁵² Kaeriyama began his chapter on

film scenarios in his *How to Produce and Photograph Moving Picture Dramas* with the following statement: "The moving picture script is the blueprint for the production of moving picture dramas. The value of the drama is largely decided by the scenario because the director determines the actions of the actors and all facets of the work according to it."⁵³ A similar emphasis on the screenplay was visible in the development of the classical Hollywood system and reflects one of the major influences of American practices on Japanese reformers who did read the cinema how-to books in English. I would, however, like to focus on how the scenario was articulated in the Japanese discursive sphere.

It was due to the script's central role in deciding the meaning and quality of the film that Kaeriyama and others repeatedly stressed a difference from its theatrical counterpart, one embodying the visual and pantomimic qualities unique to cinema they demanded the writer be aware of.⁵⁴ The script itself was the starting point for cinematic creation, but as such it was only a brief sketch with no value of its own until filmed. When Mori stressed that "a screenplay is not literature,"⁵⁵ it was understood that cinema was to be the creative art, not screenwriting. Nevertheless, the role of the screenplay in producing the final product was considered immense. At a time when the function of the director was still ill-defined and the concept of editing rudimentary (this was true in the United States as well), the scenario writer was largely assigned the role of planning out the film, from the story and titles to the editing and image composition. This is why early attempts by film reformers to describe authorship in the cinema usually focused on the screenwriter.

The need for authorial writers was, at the same time, related to the requirement to restrict cinematic meaning and control the image.⁵⁶ This is evident in how the history of censorship draws a clear line of progression from written summaries to the screenplay as technologies for regulating the cinema. As mentioned previously, most localities required exhibitors to submit a plot summary or *benshi* script when applying for permission to show a film. The *Zigomar* incident may have exposed the inadequacy of such a policy if it did not include a prescreening of the film itself, but it did not lead to the abandonment of the procedure itself. If there was a change in regulations, it was from requiring submission of the explanation (*setsumeisho*) to demanding the plot summary (*sujigaki*). Very early regulations tended to require either one (in Ôsaka in 1911) or just the explanation (in Shizuoka in 1912; in Aomori in 1914), but toward

the end of the decade, the plot summary became the written form of choice (for instance, in Tokyo in 1917, or in Ôsaka in 1921).⁵⁷

Despite the increased emphasis on prescreenings, regulations, far from ignoring the plot summary, actually placed increased emphasis on it. Most regulations treated it as an authorized record of the film. The codes for Hyôgô (issued in 1911 and revised in 1918) demanded that each page of the summary bear the official stamp of the prefectural police. Article 61, Section 10, of the 1921 Tokyo Performance and Performance Site Regulations obligated exhibitors to keep an approved copy of the summary at the theater for the police officer stationed in the theater to consult,⁵⁸ a requirement also found in the 1921 Ôsaka codes, among others. Since such a summary was presumably to be used by the officer to check if the content of the *benshi*'s narration or the film matched the approved written version, it is evident that censorship codes responded to the problems posed by *Zigomar* not simply by paying more attention to the image, but also by attempting to reassert the accountability of the filmic text to the word. While moving picture regulations reduced the definition of individual films to a content summary in part out of bureaucratic necessity, authorities, confronted with a semiotically unpredictable visual medium, could also be seen as attempting to constrain that through the word. The centrality of the word is exemplified by the rather curious requirement found in many regulations demanding that exhibitors reapply for permission to show a film even if they only made changes in the plot summary.⁵⁹ Even if the celluloid remained untouched, one change in the synopsis was enough to obligate reapproval since it had been designated the official version of the text's meaning. Censorship codes thus reduced film to a literary text, in effect offering a literary definition of the cinema.

Censorship regulations did evince an increased interest in the screenplay as an extension of plot summaries. Hiroshima's Moving Picture Regulations of 1920 demanded that a plot summary accompany applications, but stated that a script was also acceptable. A glance at regulations like those of Tokyo (1921), Hyôgô, and Fukushima (from 1917), which covered both film and stage, reveals how the synopsis was treated as the equivalent of the theater script and subject to the same approval and reapproval procedures, an equivalence which represented increased attention to the possibility of film scenarios at a time when the practice of screenwriting had not yet been established. Calls for script censorship

were voiced in film magazines early on, but these would not be answered until the 1939 Film Law, which instituted preproduction censorship as a cornerstone of thorough state intervention in the industry.⁶⁰

Before then, a major change in censorship procedures was represented by the Moving Picture Film Inspection Regulations issued in May 1925, which finally nationalized film censorship under the jurisdiction of the Home Ministry.⁶¹ These codes required submission of the *benshi* script for approval, but within the structure of the new censorship procedures, this took on a meaning different from regulations fifteen years before. The regulations were remarkably short – only fifteen articles – since clauses concerning the theater, the audience, and the *benshi* that dominated local film codes had all been eliminated. The 1925 censorship codes were the first in Japan to truly define the moving picture text as separate from the realm of exhibition, the regulation of which would now be left up to local police. National censorship in effect declared exhibition irrelevant in judging the meaning of the film; the *benshi* script was taken as an authentic representation of the content of the film text that was the same no matter which *benshi* read it and where. The locus of meaning had significantly shifted from the *benshi* at the site of exhibition to the film and the realm of production. Although the codes themselves did not require that *benshi* keep to the approved version of the film's meaning, Home Ministry officials made clear their desire to local officials that prefectural laws should ensure that *benshi* did not engage in "explanation" that differed from the script.⁶² The *benshi* script was then assumed to be a reflection of the film's intention as it was produced, approximating in many ways what would become the film scenario.

The gradual progression from the plot summary to the screenplay is also visible in film journalism. One could say that magazines never abandoned novelization because they simply switched from synopses to scenarios in offering reading matter for their buyers. *Katsudô shashin zasshi* ("Moving Picture Magazine"), which in its first year in 1915 was mostly devoted to novelizations, was also printing original, unproduced screenplays as if they were merely another form of novelization. By the mid-1920s it became quite common for magazines to regularly print the screenplays of actual films just as they were being released. When famous writers like Tanizaki and Kawabata started trying their hand at penning scripts for production,⁶³ the film scenario itself began to acquire literary status, and some novelists like Akutagawa Ryûnosuke tried writ-

ing them with no intention that they be filmed.⁶⁴ In the 1930s, journals entirely devoted to publishing screenplays, like *Shinario* (Scenario) and *Shinario kenkyû* (Scenario Research), began appearing, laying the institutional foundation for what would be called *shinario bungaku* or "scenario literature."

When a six-volume series entitled *Shinario bungaku zenshû* (Complete Works of Scenario Literature) was published in 1937, the prominent critic Iijima Tadashi declared: "With us unable to be pleased at Japanese cinema, it has become necessary for us to try cinematic creation through the printed word. While planning the artistic establishment of Japanese film though 'scenario literature' may seem like a rather long road, from the standpoint of those appreciating cinema, it is necessary for us to take these measures."⁶⁵ Nearly twenty years had passed since Mori Iwao had declared that the screenplay was not literature and now the literariness of the film's blueprint was deemed necessary to render Japanese cinema more artistic. Iijima felt that writing in the form of the scenario was necessary for film reform. But as a leading reformist critic since the early 1920s, he did try to distinguish the cinematic aspects (camera, editing, etc.) from the literary aspects (mainly focusing on dialogue) in the scenario. The former, developed to their fullest in the silent film script, would actually be harmed, he argued, if written in too literary a fashion since their destiny was properly in the hands of the director, not the screenwriter. The coming of sound, however, opened up an avenue for the cinematic pursuit of literature in the form of dialogue. The split between dialogue and cinematic form allowed Iijima, in his post-talkie theorization of motion picture art, to claim for film both cinematicity and literariness without having to question their distinction or advocate their mixture.

It is important to note that in describing the need for literature in cinema, Iijima ultimately shifted his focus to the issue of the permanence and control of meaning. In complaining about contemporary film production, he argued: "Strangely, it seems that the literary value of dialogue is the most neglected aspect in Japanese talkies. This is because the words on screen disappear after an instant and do not possess the quality of permanence. In this regard, one cannot but recognize the superiority of literature composed in written words" (SBJ, 10–11). Literature possessed permanence, a "privilege" and condition for artistic greatness that Iijima felt had long escaped cinema. To him, the promise of scenario literature lay pre-

cisely in its ability to finally make the motion pictures eternal and thus art. But in saying so, Iijima was only articulating the sense immanent to the discourse of most intellectual critics that cinema could only be artistic and socially respectable if it became literary.⁶⁶ This permanence also reflected on the issue of cinematic meaning: "The talkie scenario possesses a central element which will never differ from that of the film made from it, no matter who reads it. It is the dialogue that, just as on screen, will be read by us when printed in the scenario as written words which do not vary whatever the conditions may be" (SBJ, 20). This was not simply an issue of printed dialogue: even when spoken on screen, words to Iijima promised to finally give cinema that self-contained textuality, that unchanging and univocal meaning that pure film reformers had desired since the 1910s. The scenario thus became the ground of meaning that rendered the conditions of reception irrelevant to signification, reasserting certainty to the transmission and control of cinematic meaning.

Iijima was writing only of the dialogue when he said that it permanently expressed the will of the author and "could not be changed in any way by any foreign element" (SBJ, 23), but the existence of the talkie scenario clearly changed cinematic textuality as a whole. While to Iijima one could only "imagine" (*sôzô*) a silent film from reading its script, with a talkie screenplay one could "make presumptions" (*oshihakaruru*) to a considerable degree about the film itself" (SBJ, 21). Despite his efforts to distinguish literary from cinematic elements in the scenario, Iijima, in his desire for a permanent cinematic text, rendered the script largely equivalent to the moving picture, perhaps not in the signifiers used, but in the experience they both shape – a conclusion that recalls *Katsudô gahô*'s boast that reading its novelizations was much like going to the movies.

CONCLUSION: FILM IN THE IMAGE OF THE WORD

Much had changed from the time *Katsudô shashinkai* could claim its synopses were sufficient for those who had not seen the film to when Iijima praised the talkie scenario as a way to "presume" what the final film was like. In the former case, novelizations could be said to record the cinematic experience because that experience made no distinctions between word and image. The sense remained, however, underlined by the *Zigomar* incident, that there was something about that experience that

escaped the words written about the cinema. The problem, after that point, facing those concerned about the motion pictures was then one of rethinking how the word can relate to the filmic image.

As I have shown here, the process was twofold. First, there was the necessity to recognize the problem, to cite the cinematic image as different from the word and articulate its uniqueness by arguing that writing and speech had no part in its operations. This process of divorcing the image from the word had the effect, however, of realigning the word with the image precisely because cinema now became a unique object of knowledge in written discourses such as film criticism. The word had been reshaped to accommodate the image. Reformers may have celebrated the image as different, but that distinction itself made cinema a better object of regulation. Once known, cinema was now subject to prescriptions and proscriptions, its future form beholden to the advice of the word.

This leads to the second aspect of the process: the effort to rework the image for the word. From censors to sympathetic film reformers, many writing on cinema saw it as an object of correction. The problem was precisely the lack of control over film meaning (by either film censors, filmmakers, or critics) and the solution was continually sought in the word. Cinema was to be reshaped in the model of the word: it was to have an autonomous, self-sufficient textuality that spoke for itself; a univocal mode of signification that approximated that of the written language; an author who would produce meaning that spectators would only passively receive. The screenplay became the pivot of this quest to reform cinema and perhaps the fact that it became so central to Japanese film culture indicates how effective this reform was, creating a hegemony in film culture that lasted until the end of the 1950s. By the time Iijima was writing in the late 1930s, the screenplay was in many ways the film – not only because meaning was now produced in the realm of production via the script, but also because the image had been remade in the image of the word.

One need not recall the fact that this equivalence between screenplay and film was the necessary condition for the institution of script censorship in 1939 to realize that the issue of the relation of the word and the image is not merely confined to the motion pictures. My discussions here of the shifting relations between word and image in prewar Japanese film culture point to larger transformations that encompass not only cinema, but also literature, art, and other media as well. At the center was a con-

flikt over the definition of meaning and signification, one that was often complex but which, as we have seen here, could often be characterized as that between the conception of language as bearing an unambiguous, plentiful sign that can enforce its own meaning within a certain semiotic structure, and the vision of the sign as fundamentally ambiguous, countering the order of meaning and reason through a radical decentering of semiosis. Discussing debates over the cinema in twentieth-century Japan, I would contend, illuminates a much larger issue: the struggle over meaning and language in the modern emperor system.

NOTES

1. This essay was originally a chapter in my doctoral dissertation, "Writing a Pure Cinema: Articulations of Early Japanese Film" (University of Iowa, 1996), and at that stage it benefited greatly from the comments of my committee, composed of Dudley Andrew, Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, Lauren Rabinowitz, Stephen Vlastos, and Kathleen Newman. I then considerably rewrote the text after receiving feedback from many of the "Wording the Image" conference participants (at Dartmouth in September 1997), particularly the organizers, Carole Cavanaugh and Dennis Washburn, and my respondent, David Desser.
2. See his essay "Eiga jidai," found in the collection published under his pseudonym: Yoshimura Fuyuhiko: *Zoku Fuyuhiko shû* (Tôkyô: Iwanami Shoten, 1932): 284.
3. Kubota Utsubo, "Hajimete katsudô shashin o mini itta hi," *Shumi* 4.8 (August 1909): 10; the emphasis is mine. *Misemono* are the Japanese equivalent of fairground entertainments. This and all other translations from the Japanese, unless otherwise noted, are my own.
4. Hakkô no shui, "Katsudô shashinkai 1 (June 1909): 1.
5. The danger that giving the audience an excessive amount of explanation before the film might "kill the picture" had already been cited earlier by Eda Fushiki, who wrote a series of essays on the dos and don'ts of *benshi* narration in *Katsudô shashinkai*. See, in particular, his "Katsudô shashin eishahô: zoku," *Katsudô shashinkai* 9 (May 1910): 5–6.
6. See Imamura Miyoo's account of *Katsudô shashin zasshi*: Imamura Miyoo, *Nihon eiga bunkenshi* (Tôkyô: Kagamiura Shobô, 1967): 182–83.
7. Makino Mamoru offers the novelizations printed in *Katsudô shashin zasshi* as one of the sole surviving records of the style of *benshi* oration from that time: Makino Mamoru, "Katsudô shashinban: 'Ametsuchi no majiwarishi koro,'" *Nihon eiga shoki shiryô shûsei 1: "Katsudô shashin zasshi,"* vol. 1 (Tôkyô: San'ichi Shobô, 1990): 10. *Katsudô shashin zasshi* was the journal most oriented toward giving novelizations in *benshi* form, going as far in some cases as including the *maesetsu*, the explanation before the film started.

8. For more on the theater programs and their relation to the history of film criticism in Japan, see Makino Mamoru, "Kinema junpô to eiga hihyô no seiritsu," *Kinema junpô fukkukuban*, vol. 13 (Tôkyô: Yûshôdô, 1995): 19–37. Makino gives a list of some of the critics who got their first chance working as editors with these programs.
9. "Katsudô gahô no go daitokushoku," *Katsudô gahô* 1.1 (January 1917): n.p.
10. See Okudaira Yasuhiro's short history on prewar censorship: "Eiga to ken'etsu," *Kôza Nihon eiga*, ed. Imamura Shôhei, et al. (Tôkyô: Iwanami Shoten, 1985–6): vol. 2: 302–18.
11. For a detailed account of this process, see my dissertation, "Writing a Pure Cinema: Articulations of Early Japanese Film."
12. See my essay, "Swarming Ants and Elusive Villains: Zigomar and the Problem of Cinema," *CineMagiziNet!* (Autumn 1996), available on the net at <http://www.cm.nhs.h.kyoto-u.ac.jp/backissue/no1/Subject1/zigomar.htm>, or the slightly revised Japanese version, "Jigoma to eiga no 'hakken': Nihon eiga gensetsushi josetsu," *Eizôgaku* 58 (1997): 34–50.
13. "Jigoma no katsudô shashin kinshi to naru," *Tôkyô nichichi shinbun*, 10 October 1912: 7.
14. "Katsudô shashin to jidô (ni): jidô no ukuru hirô," *Tôkyô asahi shinbun*, 7 February 1912: 6.
15. A reason Furukawa Roppa cites as an obstacle to efforts by reformers to eliminate the *benshi*: "Setsumeisha no kenkyû: yon," *Katsudô gahô* 5.12 (December 1921): 95.
16. See, for example, Iwamoto Kenji's brief history of film criticism in Japan: "Film Criticism and the Study of Cinema in Japan: A Historical Survey," *Iconics* 1 (1987): 129–46.
17. Higashiyama Gaishi, "Katsudô shashin gekihyôka," *Katsudô shashinkai* 13 (September 1910): 3.
18. Makino Mamoru, ed., *Nihon eiga bunken kômoku sôran* (Tokyo: Yûshôdô [forthcoming]). The list does not cover the many magazines for which copies no longer exist and also includes more general magazines like *Kaizô* that, with the increased popularity and respectability of cinema, began devoting more pages to its presence.
19. To paraphrase Makino on the mood at *Kinema junpô*: "Kinema junpô to eiga hihyô no seiritsu": 33.
20. Mizusawa Takehiko, "Yoi shashin to wa ikan?," *Kinema rekôdo* 50 (October 1917): 31.
21. Tachibana Takahiro, "Eiga hyôron no hyôron," *Kage'e no kuni* (Tôkyô: Shûhokaku, 1925): 114–15.
22. Shigeno Yukiyo, "Nihon shashin o hyôsuru koto," *Kinema rekôdo* 14 (August 1914): 2.
23. Mori Iwao, "Dai-hachi geijutsu hintôroku jûyon: Gendai eiga hihyôka kishitsu 1," *Kinema junpô* 128 (March 21, 1923): 13.
24. "Eiga hihyô to iu koto," *Kinema junpô* 4 (August 11, 1919): 1.
25. Tachibana Takahiro, "Eiga hyôron no hyôron": 119.
26. Ishii Meika, "Eiga setsumeisha hissuron," *Katsudô gahô* 6.2 (February 1922): 29.

27. Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, rev. and ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979): 84.
28. See my "The Benshi's New Face: Defining Cinema in Taishô Japan," *Iconics* 3 (1994): 69–86.
29. "Katsudô shashingeki kyakuhonjô no kenkyû: dai-ikkai," *Kinema rekôdo* 27 (September 1915): 2.
30. See Kaeriyama Norimasa, *Katsudô shashingeki no sôsaku to satsueihô* (Tôkyô: Hikôsha, 1917): 41–88.
31. Nagai Toshirô, "Arakawa-shi no setsumeishi yûyôron o bakusu," *Katsudô gahô* 5.7 (1921): 96.
32. Midorikawa Harunosuke, "Jimaku zakkan," *Katsudô kurabu* 4.7 (July 1921): 41. Midorikawa later came to fame as Noda Kôgo, Ozu's main screenwriter.
33. Eileen Bowser notes that the American efforts began very early, around 1911. See Bowser, *The Transformation of Cinema: 1907–1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 140. Midorikawa's example is *The Old Swimmin' Hole* (De Grasse, 1920).
34. Mori, "Gendai eiga hihyôka kishitsu 1": 13.
35. "Eiga hihyô to iu koto," *Kinema junpô* 5 (August 21, 1919): 1.
36. Izumi Haruki, "Eiga hihyô no hyôjun: ichi," *Katsudô kurabu* 4.6 (June 1921): 20–21.
37. According to Makino, *Kinema junpô*, which originally did not run authored criticisms, began doing so in order to underline who was "responsible" for the piece. The policy, however, met with stiff objections from readers and was abandoned until May 1923, when it was reinstituted for good. Makino, "Kinema junpô to eiga hihyô no seiritsu": 34.
38. Mori Iwao, "Dai-hachi geijutsu hintôroku jûgo: Gendai eiga hihyôka kishitsu 2," *Kinema junpô* 129 (April 1, 1923): 14.
39. Others include Murakami Tokusaburô (a *Katsudô kurabu* writer turned scenarist); Oda Takashi (first a reporter for *Katsudô kurabu* and then a scriptwriter for Shôchiku and Nikkatsu); and Kisaragi Bin (one of the more avid amateur critics who went on to write scenarios at Nikkatsu).
40. "Gujin no guko ka, arui wa Nihon eiga no ketten ka," *Kinema rekôdo* 40 (October 1916): 427.
41. Somei Saburô, "Jimaku to setsumeishi: Setsumeisha no tachiba," *Katsudô no sekai* 2.6 (June 1917): 62.
42. The *benshi* style proposed by many reformers was one in which explanation was restricted to merely reading or translating the intertitles of foreign films.
43. Midorikawa, "Jimaku zakkan," *Katsudô kurabu* 4.7: 41.
44. "Kenkyû: Eigageki to butaigeki: Katsudô shashin no kotoba ni tsuite," *Katsudô no sekai* 2.6 (June 1917): 13.
45. This could also be found in later Soviet montage theory, which emphasized an analogy between the shot inserted in a montage sequence and the word in a sentence. Japanese reformers, however, were more concerned with how to contain the threat of polyphony in the image through what was seen as a more stable semiotic element, the word.

46. Kaeriyama Norimasa, "Katsudô shashin no shakaiteki chii oyobi sekimu," *Kinema rekôdo* 42 (December 1916): 537.
47. Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).
48. For more on these debates and on the context surrounding the production of Kinugasa's film, see my *A Page of Madness* (Flicks Books, forthcoming), or my "Eiga no ta no kanôsei," *Gengo bunka* (Meiji Gakuin Daigaku Gengo Bunka Kenkyûjo) 15 (1998): 66–80.
49. Iwasaki Akira, "Kurutta ichipeiji," *Kinema junpô* 243 (October 21, 1926): 48.
50. Ibid.
51. Kataoka Teppei, "Kurutta ichipeiji ni tsuite," *Engeki eiga* 1.7 (July 1926): 33–34.
52. In *Katsudô no sekai*'s words: "How can we make films that represent true Japanese civilization? Needless to say, it is through a screenplay that represents true Japanese civilization": "Eigageki to butaigeki: Kurubeki Nihon eiga," *Katsudô no sekai* 2.9 (September 1917): 40.
53. Kaeriyama, *Katsudô shashingeki*: 41.
54. For other articles on screenwriting at the time, see Tsubouchi Shikô, "Kyakuhonka no kushinshubeki ten," *Katsudô no sekai* 1.5 (May 1916): 24–28; Ikeda Daigo, "Katsudô shashin to Chikamatsu no fukkatsu," *Katsudô no sekai* 1.5 (May 1916): 28–30; Matsui Shôyô, "Tensai no shutsugen o matsu," *Katsudô no sekai* 1.5 (May 1916): 30–32; Kôda Rohan, "Kyakuhon sakusha ni tsuite," *Katsudô no sekai* 1.10 (October 1916): 2–4; Ide Tetsujô, "Eiga kyakuhonka no yobi chishiki," *Katsudô no sekai* 2.7 (July 1917): 2–4; Akita Ujaku, "Butai kyakuhon to eiga kyakuhon no shimei," *Katsudô no sekai* 2.7 (July 1917): 5–8; and Okamoto Kidô, "Katsudô shashingeki no kyakuhon," *Katsudô no sekai* 2.7 (July 1917): 10–13. It is interesting that most of these were written by established playwrights or novelists.
55. Mori Iwao and Tomonari Yôzô, "Katsudô shashin taikan," *Nihon eigashi sôkô*, ed. Okabe Ryû (Tôkyô: Film Library Council, 1976–1978): supplementary volume 2, p. 65; quoted in Joanne Bernardi, "The Early Development of the *Gendaigeki* Screenplay: Kaeriyama Norimasa, Kurihara Tômas, Tanizaki Jun'ichirô and the Pure Film Movement" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1992): 95.
56. Bernardi writes that, in Kaeriyama's mind, "the best way for a director to realize such a well-rounded narrative was to make the film according to a plan, the screenplay, which would give him greater control over the finished product." Bernardi 47.
57. Many of these regulations are reproduced in Monbushô Futsû Gakumukyoku, *Zenkoku ni okeru katsudô shashin jôkyô chôsa* (Tôkyô: Monbushô, 1921): apps. 1–35. The 1911 and 1921 Ôsaka codes are available in Terakawa Shin, *Eiga oyobi eigageki* (Ôsaka: Ôsaka Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1925): 230–48.
58. In a holdover from established modes of theater censorship, most motion picture regulations in the 1910s and 1920s required that a seat or box be set up at the back of the theater for police officers. Since the officer was often

- charged with checking the *benshi*'s narration and maintaining order in the theater (enforcing seating regulations separating men and women, for instance), the regulation still maintains a vision of cinema as a live performance.
59. See, for instance, Article 16 of the 1920 Hiroshima codes, or Article 13, Section 3, of the 1918 Hyôgô regulations.
60. For more on the Film Law, see Gregory J. Kasza, *The State and the Mass Media in Japan, 1918–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988): 232–51.
61. The regulations are reprinted in *Katsudô shashin "firumu" ken'etsu jihô* 1 (1925): furoku 1–2.
62. See the record of a meeting between local and Home Ministry officials reproduced in *Katsudô shashin "firumu" ken'etsu jihô* 1 (1925): furoku 11–14.
63. For more on Tanizaki and on Kawabata's relation to film, see my "Celluloid Masks: The Cinematic Image and the Image of Japan," *Iris* 16 (Spring 1993): 23–36. Bernardi also discusses Tanizaki's scripts for Taikatsu in some detail: Bernardi 176–87, 251–95.
64. I have discussed Akutagawa's two film scenarios, "Yûwaku" ("Temptation") and "Asakusa Kôen" ("Asakusa Park"), in my "The Self Seen as Other: Akutagawa and Film," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 23.3 (1995): 197–203.
65. Iijima Tadashi, "Shinario bungakuron josetsu," *Shinario bungaku zenshû* 1: *Shinario taikai* (Tôkyô: Kawade Shobô, 1937): 6; hereafter referred to as SBJ in the text.
66. Iijima himself later cited these tendencies in the Pure Film Movement as one reason Japanese silent film was "literary": Iijima Tadashi, "Nihon eiga no reimei: Jun'eigageki no shûhen," *Kôza Nihon eiga* 1: 126.