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CHAPTER 3

CRITICAL RECEPTION: HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF JAPANESE FILM CRITICISM

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CRITICISM AS RECEPTION

JAPANESE film criticism has sometimes provided an important opportunity for foreign scholars of Japanese cinema.¹ Worried that their own readings of a work may impose an external perspective on a film, or miss signs that Japanese spectators would easily catch, they have occasionally cited Japanese critics, ranging from Sato Tadao to Hasumi Shigehiko, to bolster their perceptions or provide a Japanese perspective. Especially as film studies has increasingly focused on reception, particularly the processes by which audiences do not just receive but actively create meaning as they watch a film, criticism can provide one of the few written accounts for how some Japanese spectators understood a historical text. Film critics themselves have indeed sometimes offered themselves as the exemplary instance of film reception, as if their reaction to a work is the standard one. Claims equating critical evaluation to reception, however, have often been made without understanding either the history of Japanese film criticism or conceptualizations of its relationships to spectatorship. How does the critic compare to other viewers, or criticism to other forms of reception? Is the critical mode in fact a model for other forms of reception? And have these relationships changed over time?

Japan has enjoyed a long and vibrant history of film criticism, one so rich Japanese critics themselves could proclaim their work as some of the best film criticism in the world.² Yet in contrast to this proliferation of writing, there has been little written about the history or theory of this critical tradition.³ This, unfortunately, reflects the lack of

theorization in criticism itself,⁴ as well as the absence of critical self-examination by students and scholars who use film criticism. An understanding of the historical trends in film criticism and how critics have conceived their own roles not only can help us frame the conceptual basis for the evaluations critics have offered but also can offer a window onto how spectatorship and film production have been framed and debated within Japan. Through this, criticism can tell us about cinematic reception not just by offering examples of what individuals thought of a film but also by showing us a history of expectations about how viewers should react to a film—what they can or cannot do when viewing—as well as of the ideologies involved in such assumptions about cinema and spectatorship, all of which are also part of the reception of any movie. The ultimately ambivalent place of film criticism in the motion picture industry can also reveal its complex role mediating studio and spectator. That these histories, as I will show, are fraught with conflicts and contradictions regarding both criticism and reception can tell us much about cinematic culture in Japan as well as, perhaps, the problems film criticism has been encountering entering the twenty-first century. In this article I will review this history, less by offering a comprehensive chronology of important names, trends, and magazines than by outlining the conceptual issues that have been central to criticism in Japan over time.

THE PURE FILM MOVEMENT AND THE IMPRESSIONIST PARADIGM

Many accounts of Japanese film criticism tie its commencement with the beginnings of Japanese cinema in the reforms of the 1910s and 1920s, loosely called the Pure Film Movement. Given that some of the reformers began as critics before becoming filmmakers themselves, one can see here the first of many occasions in Japanese film history where writing on cinema intimately intersected with filmmaking. Arguments about what cinema should be, which were applied to criticisms of individual films, would eventually be manifested in film practice. The connection between film reform and criticism also existed on the conceptual level. Togawa Naoki, himself a prominent critic from the 1930s, could begin his historical survey of Japanese criticism with Yoshiyama Kyokko, whom Iwamoto Kenji terms Japan's "first professional film journalist,"⁵ but Togawa declares that "there is no record of him [Yoshiyama] writing film criticism."⁶ Yoshiyama penned film introductions for magazines such as *Kabuki* and newspapers like *Miyako shinbun* around 1910, but Togawa considered these mere journalistic accounts, ones insufficiently aware of the essence of film. Kaeriyama Norimasa, who began submitting criticism to *Katsudo shashinkai* (Moving Picture World) in the early 1910s, becomes the "pioneer of Japanese film critics" to Togawa because "he contributed to the spread of film knowledge" by "introducing and critiquing films on the basis of thorough readings of foreign sources and clear knowledge of the scientific conditions of

cinema."⁷ Film criticism then begins in this narrative, not just with a critical perspective but also with a knowledge of film. This definition underlines the long-standing, yet not always acknowledged, links between film criticism and film theory.

The question is how this conception of cinema—this theory—is formulated in Japan. Writing under one of his pseudonyms, Kaeriyama defined "a good film" as "the value when looked at from the pure standpoint of the moving pictures."⁸ The pillar of the new criticism was to judge a film as a film and emphasize whatever cinematic modes of signification were used to transmit that narrative. This was the critical position of the Pure Film Movement, the effort by young critics in the 1910s and early 1920s to reform Japanese cinema by eliminating what were seen as its noncinematic elements. Perhaps thinking of the kabuki-influenced Yoshiyama, Tachibana Takahiro, who was both a critic and a censorship official, urged critics "to cut all relationships with the stage and see photoplays as photoplays."⁹ This opposition between cinema and theater informed the Pure Film Movement's call for reforming Japanese cinema. They urged the elimination of *onnagata* (male actors specializing in female roles), the introduction of analytical editing, and the restriction of the benshi. Asserting the rights of film critics necessitated usurping the benshi not only in order to present criticism as the rightful authority to speak about cinema but also to prevent the text from changing each time it was shown, which could happen depending on the skill of the benshi. Criticism demanded a text, universal and unchanging, that critics could lay judgment on. To many who envisioned film criticism as an engine of change, the problem of who made the film was central. The space of production, not exhibition, should define the text, and thus criticism foregrounded an authorial subjectivity, one first centered in the screenplay, that would be responsible for the film.¹⁰ A version of auteurism was thus prevalent in film criticism from its first decades. One goal of criticism was then to change not the text but those who made it. "The function of film criticism," said one critic, "lies in both judging the value of produced films as well as in correcting and aiding filmmakers, offering the driving force for reconstruction."¹¹

In this sense, criticism here was more about film production than about reception, aiming to alter the future course of filmmaking rather than how spectators constructed the given text. Film viewing was certainly important to the young film reformers: theirs, in a sense, was a movement of amateur spectators who started their own magazines such as *Kinema Record* and *Kinema junpo* (Movie Times) in the 1910s, the latter of which continues to this day as Japan's most important film magazine. One crucial aspect of the history of film criticism in Japan are the coterie magazines (*dojinshi*) and the amateur film review sections in major magazines that offered a training ground and an entry point for budding critics well into the 1980s, as well as lending a democratic air to Japanese film culture. Yet the writings of pioneering film critics were not meant to change the existing, completed films themselves; the text produced by an author was sacrosanct. The potential for films to be altered in reception was instead part of the problem. Rather than championing the powers of spectatorship, they endeavored to regulate it through criticism. *Kinema junpo* declared that one of the "most important missions" of film critics was 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, and spectators.¹² Critics were also spectators, but, as Tachibana Takahiro asserted, they were “people who lead; they cannot be led.”¹³ Their mode of viewing was by definition elevated and their writing pedagogical. *Kinema junpo* declared that one of the primary tasks of film critics was to direct modes of viewing: “They should improve their own position and teach audiences approaching the film for the first time what to look at.”¹⁴ The first critics thus took an antagonistic stance toward the industry, attacking its vulgar practices on the behalf of cinema and its proper spectators. One saw few figures like the American pioneer critic Frank E. Woods, who praised the cinema in part out of self-interest, hoping to sell his own scripts to the industry.¹⁵ Yet the young reformers still conceived of themselves as engaged with the industry, as both *Kinema Record* and *Kinema junpo* termed themselves trade journals. Their stance was pedagogical, however, standing above both producers and spectators and teaching them how to properly work with cinema. When Kaeriyama went on to direct films, or the critic Midorigawa Harunosuke joined a studio and became Noda Kogo, Ozu Yasujiro’s primary scriptwriter, it was less to join forces with those they had been ingratiating than to ostensibly put into practice cinematic ideas that transcended the economic.

This elevated stance set the pattern for what would be the dominant form of film criticism in twentieth-century Japan: impressionist criticism. Narrating the impressions received during viewing became the centerpiece for evaluating the quality of a film. The experience was individual: as the poet and film critic Kitagawa Fuyuhiko wrote in the 1940s, “Film criticism must be a self-confession born of the confrontation with cinema.”¹⁶ Despite its democratic origins, the assumption of impressionist criticism was always that the critic’s impressions were superior to those of the average viewer because they were more attuned and knowledgeable about cinema; it was such a hierarchy of culture (*kyoyo*), one authorized by a universal cinematic standard, that presumably prevented criticism from descending into mere relativism.

Three issues intersect here with the history of impressionist film criticism. The first is that this hierarchy of sensibility often overlapped with the class dynamics endemic to the Pure Film Movement. As I have argued elsewhere, film reform in the 1910s and 1920s was not simply an effort to render Japanese film more cinematic; it was also a cultural politics deeply concerned with the rise of the urban masses, one that sought out novel modes of cinema in order to control the social production of meaning and shape new forms of subjectivity in line with the creation of the modern nation.¹⁷ Not only was film criticism aligned with the effort to corral the potentially chaotic production of meaning in reception, but it also embodied new subjectivities wherein modern discernment ruled over crass pleasure, an order Hatano Tetsuro has called in his historical analysis of Japanese film criticism “the aristocracy of sensibility.”¹⁸ Impressionist critics long maintained a sense of their elite status, often looking down on popular modes of film criticism such as newspaper film reviews (which came to prominence from the late 1920s) and establishing a hierarchical distinction between professional film criticism and outsider film criticism (*kyokugai hiho*), the latter of which could include film criticism by novelists or literary critics. These distinctions were not always clear—one

of the great critics from the 1930s on, Tsumura Hideo was initially the reviewer for the *Asahi* newspaper—but in general by the postwar, “specialist critics” were the select few in the “eiga rondan” (the film critical equivalent of literature’s *bundan coterie*) centered on *Kinema junpo*, and they made their superiority known by criticizing the cinematic ignorance of “outsider” critics.

This elite status in part derived from the reformist critic’s special relationship to the foreign. *Kinema Record*’s Shigeno Yukiyo rejected Yoshiyama Kyokko’s claim that Japanese films should be evaluated separately as Japanese films:

Judging “Japanese pictures as Japanese pictures,” as Yoshiyama urges, may be appropriate for discussing drama, but when speaking of moving pictures, only comparing them to good foreign works is profitable.¹⁹

There are several reasons pure film reformers like Shigeno could not allow for a separate standard of criticism. It could, for instance, allow for the existence of Japanese films that embodied the cultural and class values that disturbed reformers. Film reform, bolstered by critical standards of good and bad, was a winner-take-all engagement. More importantly, there was no conception of a Japanese difference to cinema; cinema was universal, but as the quote shows, the benchmark resided in the foreign. Criticism was dependent upon European and American standards, a fact that underlines how much cinema itself was defined positively from the 1910s on as a product of the West.

This placed the impressionist critic in a complex position. On the one hand, the “aristocracy of sensibility” was bolstered by its association with a dominant global power, at least culturally. If Japanese films were in fact to be judged by Western standards, the critic in effect assumed the eye, if not the sensibility, of the supposedly culturally advanced foreigner.²⁰ This is one reason the majority of Japanese film critics praised foreign films over the domestic fare up until at least the 1950s, and why some of the more famous critics in the popular press or on television, such as Yodogawa Nagaharu (who edited *Eiga no tomo*, the major foreign film magazine), Futaba Juzaburo, or Ogi Masahiro, rarely wrote about Japanese movies. There was an inherent problem in the Japanese critic playing the foreign spectator, however. The West defined its own centrality and superiority, if not its modernity, through marginalizing the non-West. Even someone as sympathetic to Japanese cinema as Noël Burch, in one of his more orientalist moments, denied the possibility of theory in Japan, asserting that “the very notion of theory is alien to Japan; it is considered a property of Europe and the West,” in a move that, while intended as a critique of Eurocentrism, ironically reasserted the dominance of Western theorists over those from the non-West.²¹

Unable to completely assume the Western gaze, some Japanese perhaps used criticism as an imperfect response to this dominance. It was a practice less defined by theory and thus freer of monopolization by the West; talking about individual films, it did not assert as much command of the universal “capacity” of film, which the West always seemed to claim. When Kitagawa Fuyuhiko celebrated in the early 1950s the world-class level of Japanese film criticism, he interestingly did so by relating that to “Japan’s cultural

position in the world." His declared reasoning was that, unlike the biased criticism found in other countries, Japan's critics could collate the best of world criticism and offer a "fair appreciation of cinematic art."²² Kitagawa thus saw Japan as being able to assume through criticism what could be called a nonaligned position, one that becomes significant against the backdrop of the Cold War's division between East and West.²³ It seemingly could not assume that position in film theory, however. Kitagawa never spells it out, but the implication is that it is because theory to him cannot be unaligned. He claims that an established, programmatic film theory is necessary for good cinema practice and for a Japanese film that makes the best of tradition. Yet this is not a cinema backed by a unique Japanese film theory grounded in a long-standing aesthetics but rather a cinema that "draws on the particularities of traditional art from the standpoint of the modern spirit."²⁴ Theory in Kitagawa's worldview is this spirit on the side of the modern, standing over and above Japan in judgment, seemingly universal yet also analogous to the position of the West in the world system. Both adopting and distancing himself from theory, Kitagawa here embodies many of the contradictions of the Japanese film intellectual, one who is conscious of theory's place in the West yet feels its necessity in local practice, desiring the foreign gaze while seeking alternative forms of theory in film criticism or in modes of creative practice.

Film criticism may have been to some in Japan a different kind of theorizing resisting the West's seeming monopoly over theory, but it was one that was often achieved, in the case of impressionist criticism, at the cost of refusing to theorize itself. When the leftist critic Iwasaki Akira attacked impressionist critics for their lack of self-introspection concerning their role during the war, Kitagawa simply declared that "in the postwar I prepared myself by establishing an unmovable self that cannot be moved by left or right. I earnestly tried to investigate humanity in the arts—a position of humanism."²⁵ This may have been Kitagawa's attempt at establishing his nonaligned subjectivity (at a time when many were debating how to establish the individual subjectivity/*shutaisei* needed in postwar democratic Japan), but this was an "unmovable self" only because it refused any form of self-examination that may threaten the self as given. Hatano sees this as a fundamental problem in impressionist criticism. There, "the film experience may have been the basis for uttering words, but the critical objectification of that foundation was avoided." Such criticism "did not allow for the intervention of any sort of social scientific logic in terms of the self's sensibility or intellect; it instead finished things off without conflict."²⁶ The effect was to naturalize and authorize the critic's impressions: they were to be the reasonable result of the privileged encounter between the text and a cultured eye, not the contingent product of sociopolitical conditions. The nature of reception, as well as the politics of criticism, was never theorized. The dominant form of criticism in Japan, then, essentially denied the power of reception for anyone except the elite critic. Theory in most cases became an absence necessary to legitimize the impressionistic subject in terms of its authority. The more criticism became a central mode of thinking about cinema, the more theory was forgotten within the history of such thinking, and criticism distanced itself from the larger question of film reception.

IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM

One could consider the long history of orthodox leftist film criticism as one counter to this structuring of film, critic, and theory. Beginning with the proletarian film movement in the late 1920s, suffering repression from the militarizing state from the mid-1930s, but reviving after the war, criticism by Marxist influenced critics such as Iwasaki Akira, Uryu Tadao, and Yamada Kazuo was an effort to question the ideological and sociopolitical underpinnings of film production and criticism. While it eventually suffered censure by New Left critics in the 1960s, at the beginning it asked some of the questions impressionist critics did not. If impressionist criticism treated the encounter with the text as an almost intimate affair, with little to mediate the relationship between the given film and critic (the social could at best only appear afterward, as part of the associations the reviewer imagined from the text), ideological critics focused on the social conditions of that encounter. Not only could the film be criticized for reflecting bourgeois ideology or furthering capitalist interests, but the critic could also be blamed for hiding this ideology through valorizing art over all. Ideological critics consciously foregrounded theory as a means of understanding these relationships between cinema, criticism, and socioeconomic conditions, with Iwasaki in particular acting as the conceptual watchdog of the film critical world for many years.

Ideological criticism was thus an effort to deal with one of the primary facets of film: the fact that it was a commercial and mass medium. Literary criticism could avoid the problem of mass culture by focusing on *junbungaku* or "pure literature," but film criticism could not. Some impressionist critics attempted that through ignoring Japanese or Hollywood films and specializing in European cinema. But even then, film was an industry. The question of economics always reared its ugly head, if only as the villain in a narrative in which the individual artist battled against the studio. Ideological criticism attempted to turn these issues on their head: cinema's mass quality was now its political strength, its industrial nature a sign of its modernity.

Leftist critics were not always successful in conceptualizing these issues, however. In fact, ideological criticism shared more with impressionist criticism than it may have preferred. Especially in the late 1920s and early 1930s, journals were full of debates over the standards for Marxist film criticism, at a time when leftist "tendency" (*keiko*) films were in vogue. Were bourgeois films completely worthless or could aspects be recuperated? Should criticism focus on story and content (i.e., accurate descriptions of social conditions), or was there an appropriate proletarian film form? Iwasaki again often served as the adjudicator of these discussions, warning, for instance, of the simplistic dualism of art and industry that some leftist critics proposed in an effort to criticize capitalist filmmaking; the real challenge, he stressed, was confronting their unity.²⁷ But leftists still had a hard time determining what this art should be. The critic Ikeda Toshio confessed in a guide to Marxist film criticism written in 1930 that "we have still not seen the establishment of a clear proletarian film aesthetics. As a result, it is inevitable that the proletarian standards for film beauty are somewhat abstract."²⁸ Montage was supposed

to be one such aesthetic, as was socialist realism, but if the former became subject to charges of formalism, the latter ironically underlined that, at least in terms of sensibility, communist critics were generally products of the Pure Film Movement tradition and its valorization of a transparent Hollywood style. The main difference was if the "absolute other" (to borrow Karatani Kojin's term) of pure film critics was America, for leftists it was Marxism; both were functionally foreign.²⁹ It was in part this aesthetic conservatism that put orthodox leftists in opposition with the New Wave and its avant-garde aesthetic politics in the 1960s.

Ironically, Marxist film critics also failed to escape the hierarchies of criticism. Ideological criticism was supposed to be transformative. To Ikeda, "The duty of criticism is in fact to determine the sociological value of a given film. To determine that value is to correct art, making it a means of transforming human society."³⁰ Yet impressionist criticism, born of a reform movement, was also transformative. Leftist criticism supposedly differed in its aims and class character, but it was the same in its pedagogical approach: teaching less knowledgeable spectators what film should be. The problem is that Marxist critics were unsure of how to treat the object of its pedagogy: the masses and popular cinema.³¹ In a 1933 debate, some, like Ueno Kozo, declared that if a film was a commercial success, it was because it must have connected with the reality of the masses. Iwasaki argued the situation was more complex than that, since multiple historical conditions determine the popularity of cultural products. At the same time, however, he expressed little confidence in the masses' current ability to understand art. Present conditions, he argued, differed little from those of aristocratic cultures like ancient Greece, where "the masses could never possess the desire or sensibility for art." In modern society, "the majority of them do not understand art. Or rather, they are trained not to understand art by the cultural policies of the ruling classes."³² In the end, Iwasaki's discussion not only pictures the masses as helpless victims—a trope that would be repeated by the postwar left—but also conceives of art as a given object that is either understood or not. Art was an issue of "correct critical power and sensibility," of whether the masses "could distinguish between pearls and pebbles."³³ Unlike earlier leftist theorists such as Gonda Yasunosuke,³⁴ ideological critics from the 1930s on mostly did not envision lower class spectators producing culture through their reception or use of cinema, or proletarian masses fundamentally changing—not just understanding—what art is.

Ideological criticism's efforts to conceptualize the ideological aspects of film art were thus severely hampered. The left also suffered through bouts of orthodoxy that marginalized such important leftist theorists as Imamura Taihei, who suffered through blistering debates with Iwasaki and other communist critics over the issue of realism, just when the independent leftist film movement was gathering steam in the 1950s. Like impressionist critics, leftists had a difficult time relinquishing their power of understanding over the cinema: film was mostly what they understood it to be, not what they learned from working-class viewers. It was a top-down conception of culture with the critic (the vanguard intellectual) at the top, one that mirrored the pedagogical stance of many 1950s leftist films. Ideological critics were skilled at analyzing political problems

in dominant cinema, but like their opponents, they rarely turned their gaze upon themselves. This was painfully apparent after the war, as Marxist writers criticized the reigning film critics for their wartime actions without doing the same to themselves, despite their own collaborations. The theorization of the critical subject was as absent as it was before.

ANOTHER NEW WAVE

This system, in which two broad modes of film criticism ostensibly opposed each other but at their base shared unreflective assumptions about cinema, criticism, and the critic, continued well into the mid-1950s, despite the suppression of the left in the 1930s, the mobilization of the film world during the war, and postwar recriminations. The postwar institution of film criticism mirrored the film world during the Golden Age of the 1950s. Just as the major studios had established an oligarchic structure that largely squeezed out or absorbed the independents, *Kinema junpo* forged "a salon-like circle of film critics," in the words of Shirai Yoshio, who later edited the magazine,³⁵ that excluded other forms of criticism while including established leftists like Iwasaki. Dominant and alternative were not that different at this stage.

It was also at this time when criticism had its closest relationship with the industry. The early era of critical yet still paternal opposition to the industry lingered on in the occasional high-cultured lambasting of popular Japanese cinema, but after the 1920s critics were more often than not employed by film companies, especially in the publicity sections of those specializing in foreign film. Yodogawa Nagaharu worked for United Artists and Toho; Hazumi Tsuneo and Shimizu Akira for Towa; Nanbu Keinosuke for Paramount; and Mizuno Haruo for 20th Century Fox. Mori Iwao even rose to become vice-president of Toho. The institutional relation between criticism and publicity solidified in theater pamphlets and advertisements, which could underline the degree criticism was important to the film world. While some of the first high-class theater pamphlets in the 1910s were edited by aspiring critics who were given considerable leeway by the theaters that published them, pamphlets after the 1950s increasingly originated from the distributor's publicity arm and could feature a commentary requested of the critic by the company, one that was rarely critical.³⁶ As in the United States, published advertisements for more artistic films could feature quotations from critics, ones either requested by the company or taken from published reviews.³⁷ Advertising flyers (*chirashi*) could also sport quotations that were made on demand. Finally, with the spread of television, the most prominent critics became those like Yodogawa and Ogi Masahiro, who introduced film broadcasts during primetime and who found a way to say something positive about even the low-budget American films that sometimes were the only movies networks could afford. While not all critics were in effect bought by the industry, and even those who did work for companies could often remain outstanding writers, the relationship between critics and industry mirrored that between impressionist and

ideological criticism: an ostensible opposition that was often embedded in a larger set of institutional unities.

Several factors were central in prompting transformations in this critical system. One, as Shinada Yukichi and others argue, is the 1955 dismissal of Shimizu Chiyota as editor of *Kinema junpo*, an incident that helped break up the "eiga rondan" when many writers left the magazine in protest.³⁸ It became easier for other figures to enter the scene. Important was the work of Tsurumi Shunsuke and the Shiso no kagaku (Science of Thought) study group, which was influential in reconceiving the popular—and thus the notion of the masses—by seeking out the thought (shiso) emerging bottom-up from popular phenomena. This helped reconceptualize another hierarchy, that between Japan and the West. The victory of Kurosawa Akira's *Rashomon* at Venice in 1951, along with the propagandistic rejection of foreign cinema during the war, had already prompted a reconsideration of the long-standing critical privileging of foreign over Japanese film. The elite status of the former would not end, but critics such as Sato Tadao, who came out of Shiso no kagaku and later became editor of *Eiga hyoron* (Film Criticism), moved away from a perpetual reliance on the "universal" standard of cinema and attempted to see how Japanese cinema may have emerged from more local conditions. Evidence that had been hitherto ignored in impressionist criticism's almost myopic focus on the text was also increasingly available for the critic's use. This new mode of argumentation was accelerated by Tsurumi's championing of "the right to misunderstand."³⁹ Elitist standards of proper discernment and correct understanding were relaxed in a strategy that prompted bold new attempts to garner meaning from films.

One who possibly best manifested this trend was Ogawa Toru. As editor of *Eiga geijutsu* (Film Art), he took advantage of the breakup of the *eiga rondan* to promote "outsider film criticism" in the 1960s and publish the critiques of those before and behind the camera and of cultural figures from many fields, ranging from novelists and playwrights to screenwriters and cinematographers.⁴⁰ The result was an eclectic mixture of perceptions and "misunderstandings" that, because they often strayed from the text, might have disappointed some looking for close analysis yet excited others desiring release from the strictures of established film criticism. Ogawa's own criticism, often called "urameyomi" or "reverse reading" criticism, might seem to resonate with ideological criticism in its citation of political conditions, but his audacious exposure of various aspects "behind" the text avoided the political and hermeneutic orthodoxy of the old left. His writing was seen as fresh because it took the "reverse" view of the film, boldly arguing the opposite of what was taken as the common sense interpretation.

Ogawa warned about the "will for power" endemic to criticism and attempted to counter it by emphasizing the "incompleteness" of cinema.

I do not think that the first duty of critics is to judge whether a film is good or bad. I neither believe that you can fully determine a single standard of value for cinema, which is a more "incomplete art" than literature in particular, nor tolerate that kind of political or pseudoauthoritative position in criticism.⁴¹

Cinema's incompleteness facilitated multiple approaches to film, but a political and economic society that Ogawa saw as increasingly "brainwashing" the populace made it such that criticism had to resist at the most basic psychic levels, fighting even criticism's own will for power. One of the "battles" of criticism is thus to "beat back the attempts by political forces to target the subconscious of critics and authors."⁴² Using metaphors of violence, Ogawa argued that "critics must stab the hearts of their opponents through their writings"⁴³ and that such direct action was necessary if society was to change.

This spirit of opposition to not just the institutional but also the conceptual status quo is not difficult to connect to the Japanese New Wave, and it underlines how much the New Wave, if not 1960s Japanese film culture in general, was defined by such a multiplication of perspectives and a resistance to restrictive categories. Of course the New Wave itself was initially part of a critical movement, as artists such as Oshima Nagisa, Yoshida Kiju, and Matsumoto Toshio attacked the established Japanese cinema first in writing. Matsumoto in particular, in part under the influence of the culture critic Hanada Kiyoteru, can be seen as pursuing the project orthodox leftist film thinkers had left incomplete in the prewar: conceptualizing not just what should be shown but also the aesthetics of how it should be shown (his model being a form of avant-garde documentary).⁴⁴ Much of their writing focused on the issue of subjectivity (*shutai, shutaisei*), particularly the conception that postwar Japanese cinema failed not only to depict modern subjects—ones who did not just passively resign themselves to misfortune but acted in history—but also to enable creative subjects who could express themselves beyond the policy of the studio or a political party. Indebted to Jean-Paul Sartre and others,⁴⁵ their focus on establishing the self through self-negation (negating the selves given by external institutions, if not narrative itself) reflects their consciousness of how difficult the problem of the subject was.

Abé Mark Nornes has complained of the absence of theory in these debates:

The fact that various writers and artists did not share a common language and conceptual framework meant the *shutaiseiron* would inevitably splinter into many directions at once. . . . Without the substantial buttressing from an external body of theory, there was no need or pressure to engage in pointed arguments to advance a common line of thought.⁴⁶

Nornes's argument should be qualified with a recognition that the seeming lack of a conceptual framework could itself be a theoretical stance, one that stemmed from resistance to certain kinds of categorical thinking. Matsuda Masao was one radical critic, for instance, who brought up the problem of intellectualization when he pursued the relationship between criticism and the masses. He argued, "The problem comes down to whether or not, when making the non-literate consciousness (*mojinaki ishiki*) of the lower classes the object of academic thought, one can maintain, in one's academic subjectivity, an 'introspection' that can correspond with the object, one that cannot be called anything other than non-literate consciousness."⁴⁷ The question for not

a few radicals in the 1960s was how to theorize without abandoning nontheoretical thought and thus to keep theory in the everyday world. Few, however, were able to meet Matsuda's challenge.

The problem with 1960s film criticism is that it rarely went that far, primarily because it seldom theorized its own subjectivity. As Hatano argues, those inspired by Tsurumi to write on popular cinema rarely conceptualized their relationship to the masses: "They possessed less the perspective of the masses than what should be called their own mass consciousness. At times, this even became the axis for critically approaching a film."⁴⁸ While Tsurumi also wrote about his own impressions, it was always as an individual distinct from the masses; the relationship with the masses was always self-conscious. Many others, however, simply treated themselves as the representative of the masses, without theorizing their own status. One can argue that while Tsurumi's "right to misunderstand" opened up the doors to creative and individual forms of criticism, it also served as an excuse for criticism with little responsibility to the text, the audience, or even the project of criticism. Sometimes this was due to a willful belligerence toward intellectual criticism, but there was often little "self-negation" in this proliferation of displays of "misunderstanding."

At the beginning of the 1970s, writing in the "kaisetsu" for the important anthology of postwar film writing, *Systems of Contemporary Japanese Film Thought* (Gendai Nihon eigaron taikai), Yamane Sadao pondered whether "there was a 'Nouvelle Vague' for film directors, but not one for film critics." Although the New Wave directors quite forcefully put their subjectivity to the fore, "There was no logical grounding of a criticism that could itself correspond to the assertions of the director." Criticism paled in comparison to the authority of the filmmaker. Yamane blamed this on a lack of theorization of reception: "When the issue of the director and the viewer was being debated, people never expounded a theory of spectatorship, one that covered the problem of the reception of cinematic expression and the act of watching cinema. Rather, the subjectivity making the film work came to so monopolize the debate that it could practically be called one-sided."⁴⁹ The subjectivities of the critic and the audience, as well as the complex relationship between them and the text, were never fully conceptualized. This is one reason the culture around New Wave cinema was so auteur focused, but it also provides a key for understanding the problematic relationships between artist, movement, and reception in the politically charged 1960s and early 1970s.

SURFACE CRITICISM AND A RETURN TO VIEWING

One gets a sense, reading the introductions written by Hatano and Yamane in *Systems of Contemporary Japanese Film Thought*, that they were attempting to confront the problem of reception in their own actuality and seek out what to them would constitute a real

New Wave in criticism. The commentaries can seem to serve as arguments for what they were actually pursuing at that moment in *Shinema* 69 (later *Shinema* 70 and *Shinema* 71), one of three influential, but short-lived critical journals that appeared at the end of the 1960s. One can discern in the founding of these magazines both a renewed detachment from the industry and a common dissatisfaction with the state of film criticism, one that may be summarized by Hatano's feeling that there was no "thought" embodied in the criticism of the time.⁵⁰ The projects of these magazines were different, however. *Kikan firumu* (Quarterly of Film), centered on Matsumoto Toshio and featuring avant-garde artists and new critics like Yamada Kōichi, concentrated on experimental cinema; *Eiga hiho* (Film Criticism), edited by Matsuda Masao, pursued a committed radical politics that Matsuda himself willingly called "partisan criticism" (*goyo hyoron*)⁵¹; and the *Shinema* magazines, featuring new critics such as Hasumi Shigehiko, argued for a criticism that focused on discussing film as film. Each were influential in its own way, as *Kikan firumu* stimulated the experimental film movement and *Eiga hiho* promoted the work of Wakamatsu Koji and Adachi Masao. But it was *Shinema*'s influence that lasted longest, as especially Hasumi's criticism came to dominate the film critical world well into the 1990s.

The focus on film as film can be seen as upholding "la politique des auteurs" of the 1950s *Cahiers du Cinéma* in France,⁵² and certainly these critics' predilection for studio directors like Howard Hawks and Makino Masahiro was a strategy to foreground cinematic technique and avoid the narrative content—which was often supplied by the studio—that consumed ideological criticism. It was also an attempt to correct the excess "misunderstandings" of contemporary critics who sometimes seemed to be discoursing about everything but the film. As Yamane Sadao has stressed, *Shinema* was also an effort to see cinema from the viewer's eye; what was outside that perspective, such as the auteur's biography, was irrelevant.⁵³ In a sense this was a return to impressionist criticism, especially as embodied by such text-centered critics as Iijima Tadashi.⁵⁴ At times, Hasumi's thematic criticism does read like a series of impressions, as he notes elements across the text seemingly unrelated to the narrative and comments how we spectators receive such moments.

Where he differs from impressionist criticism is in his conceptualization of the film experience, one that especially stresses the difficulty of writing.

Words should, before anything else, not take the existence of cinema as a given, but must be released towards the path where cinema might exist, and at the moment they manage to illuminate to a certain degree the shell of that point, they must be prepared for their own death.⁵⁵

Criticism, to Hasumi, was a tragic impossibility; he even went so far as to say that "criticism does not exist, because criticism is an experience that can only live as an incident."⁵⁶ It only subsists in the ever-changing (revolutionary) present, as a singular "incident/event" (*jiken*) that cannot be repeated, one that even exists before the categories of subject and object. The critic, as Ryan Cook summarizes Hasumi's radical

use of the Deleuzian concept of "stupidity," "abandons subjectivity and knowledge and submits to cruel stupidity in order to encounter cinema as change and movement."⁵⁷ The problem is that the critic writing about this present cinematic event can only bring it into the past. Hasumi conceived of his criticism as a form of film viewing, a special one distinct from both regular film viewing and most forms of film criticism, both of which focused on narrative. Narrative, however, could not be totally avoided: "Criticism is a labor that bears a fated burden: that its victory against narrative is complete only through its defeat at the hands of narrative."⁵⁸ The best it can do is perpetually battle that "movement of thought" that "robs the quality of transformation from 'culture,' eliminates incident, and expels movement, all the while ultimately building a flat horizon without those moments that expose the present. In other words, it installs before thought a universal and abstract space that will never disturb 'knowledge.'"⁵⁹ It was not uncommon to criticize Hasumi's "surface criticism" (*hyoso hiho*) as a retreat from, if not exclusion of politics in textual reading, but strictly, it was actually a different politics, one that, stemming in part from a disillusionment with orthodoxies of 1960s radical politics and their claims of authority, struggled against universal abstractions, metanarratives, and other forms of categorical meaning that restricted the inherent creativity of criticism and film viewing. In that sense, it shared in Ogawa's fear of the oppression of politics and Matsuda's search for a non-theoretical theory.

In other ways, however, "surface criticism" was a return to impressionist criticism. While being written from the perspective of film viewing, it rarely exhibited a conception of the historical spectator. The viewer was often ideal, one who was pictured (through Hasumi's use of such imperatives as "must" [*nakereba naranu*]) as compelled to react to cinema in a certain fashion and seemingly not free to react otherwise. Spectators were not divided by different historical circumstances, so Hasumi's frequent use of the pronoun "we" (*wareware*) ended up creating a unitary, exclusive group privileged in its access to the ineffable qualities of cinema. If impressionist criticism formulated a hierarchy of critic over audience as a reaction to the rise of mass society, surface criticism fashioned a cinephilic hierarchy that defended the citadel cinema against the onslaught of postindustrial media capitalism. It was more astute than impressionist criticism in theorizing the film experience and the moment of criticism, but it, like its predecessor, did not theorize its own historicity or its own politics. Hasumi could combat the strictures of meaning and narrative by imagining a space "freed of the control of intellectual reflection,"⁶⁰ but that, perhaps unintentionally, bred a band of followers in the 1980s and 1990s who fetishized cinema and their own approach to it freed of the control of intellectual reflection. The exclusivity of his followers, feeding off a hierarchy of cinephilic knowledge (a history of cultured viewing), progressively rendered them as figures as closed off as the cinematic text they were idealizing and made them and their criticism ill prepared for a different media world that, with the rise of television, video, and then the digital in a more globalized mediascape, increasingly seemed to need neither cinema nor criticism.

CONCLUSION

Film criticism in Japan has enjoyed a rich and varied history, featuring a pantheon of astute eyes and sharp minds who have not simply provided evaluations of what is good or bad about a myriad of films but also ventured into the realms of analysis (especially in auteurist terms), political critique, film theory, and even introspection on the nature of criticism. As such, it offers a wealth of knowledge and information about the discursive context of Japanese cinema and how films were received, if not also insight into how they functioned. Yet criticism has historically less reflected film reception than functioned as a site of struggle over the role of reception in film culture, serving as both a force in regulating spectatorship and a vanguard in advancing new modes of viewing that evade or resist existing systems that corral meaning. The problems Japanese film critics have had in conceptualizing their own relationship to reception and other forms of spectatorship actually tell us as much about film culture in Japan as the actual impressions they have registered about certain films or directors.

It is these difficulties that can in fact help us consider not just how much criticism reflects reception but also the historical fate and role of criticism itself. Film criticism has since the 1970s progressively disappeared from public discourse in Japan. Critical magazines such as *Eiga hyoron* and *Cahiers du cinema Japon* have gone under, while new magazines such as *Nihon eiga magazine*, which appeared with the box office boom for Japanese films in the 2000s, completely shun criticism. The number of newspaper reviews has declined while advertisements for movies quote not film critics but television personalities to convince consumers what the representative reception of a film is. The critics who lingered longer in the public mind were those, like Osugi or Komori Kazuko, who themselves became media "talent" (*tarento*), whose value, as Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto has argued in discussing television, lay largely in serving as the currency of television, to be recognized and exchanged, not in their inherent critical skills.⁶¹ While film criticism has not completely lost its value as publicity, its importance for the industry has clearly declined, and its own status as an industry is in danger. The Internet has broadened opportunities for expressing opinions about films, ones reminiscent of the explosion in coterie magazines in the 1920s, but in Japan it has not yet sufficiently sustained forms other than user ratings and brief comments or provided an economic model to support professional critics.

Reviewing the history of film criticism can help less by providing fodder for nostalgic lamentations about how good criticism used to be than by offering clues as to how criticism has functioned (i.e., why it was necessary), how it established or lost its importance, as well as how transformations in the political economy of Japanese culture and media may have rendered criticism relevant or irrelevant to the question of reception. Perhaps the decline in criticism stems in part from the lack of self-theorization about its cinematic and social valences and its inability to reconceive or resist its situation. By reviewing its own history of success and failure, and rethinking its function and its

relation to moving image reception, criticism may itself be able to reassert its role as a crucial facet in how viewers critically negotiate with cinema and media.

NOTES

1. It is difficult to define film criticism, although many have tried. For convenience, I will follow Dudley Andrew's distinction between film theory, whose goal "is to formulate a schematic notion of the capacity of film," and criticism, which is "an appreciation of the value of individual works of cinema, not a comprehension of the cinematic capability" (*The Major Film Theories* [London: Oxford University Press, 1976], 5). This means I will avoid academic film studies. I will also not make a significant distinction between *eiga hiho* and *eiga hyoron*.
2. See, for instance, Wada Norie, "Nihon eiga ronsōshi," *Kinema junpo* 156 (September 15, 1956): 103; or Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, "Nihon ni okeru eiga riron," *Eiga hyoron* 9.5 (May 1952): 32–36.
3. The best examples are the *kaisetsu* of the *Gendai Nihon eigaron taikai* (Tojusha, 1970–1971); Iwamoto Kenji's "Film Criticism and the Study of Cinema in Japan," *Iconics* 1 (1987): 129–146; and a series of articles published in *Kinema junpo* between May and August 1996.
4. For more on the problematic lack of film theory in Japanese film writing, see my "Nihon/eiga/riron," eds. Yomota Inuhiko et al., *Nihon eiga wa ikite iru 1: Nihon eiga wa ikite iru*, trans. Tsunoda Takuya (Tokyo: Iwanami Shobo, 2010), 159–199; and my "Introduction," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 22 (December 2010): 1–13.
5. Iwamoto, "Film Criticism and the Study of Cinema in Japan: A Historical Survey," 129.
6. Togawa Naoki, "Nihon eiga hiho hattatsushi 1: Dai ikki, sairento eiga jidai," *Kinema junpo* 1191 (May 1, 1996): 127.
7. Ibid.
8. Mizusawa Takehiko, "Yoi shashin to wa ikan?" *Kinema Record* 50 (October 1917): 31.
9. Tachibana Takahiro, "Eiga hyoron no hyoron," *Kagee no kuni* (Tokyo: Shuhokaku, 1925), 114–115.
10. For more on the Pure Film Movement and the screenplay, see Joanne Bernardi, *Writing in Light: The Silent Scenario and the Japanese Pure Film Movement* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).
11. Izumi Haruki, "Eiga hiho no hyojun: ichi," *Katsudo kurabu* 4.6 (June 1921): 20–21.
12. "Eiga hiho to iu koto," *Kinema junpo* 5 (August 21, 1919): 1.
13. Tachibana, "Eiga hyoron no hyoron," 119.
14. "Eiga hiho to iu koto," 1.
15. See Jerry Roberts, *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2010), 17–20.
16. Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, "Eiga hiho no hiho," *Eiga hyoron* (February 1948), reprinted in *Gendai Nihon eigaron taikai* (Tokyo: Tojusha, 1971), 1:242.
17. See Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895–1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
18. Hatano Tetsuro, "Kaisetsu," eds. Ogawa Toru, et al., *Gendai Nihon eigaron taikai* (Tokyo: Tojusha, 1971), 1:577.
19. Shigeno Yukiyo, "Nihon shashin o hyosuru koto," *Kinema Record* 14 (August 1914): 2.
20. I have argued elsewhere that the "myth of export"—the dream of sending Japanese films abroad—helped fuel reform by imagining the standards used by the Western gaze that should be imposed on domestic cinema. See my "Narrating the Nation-ality of a Cinema: The Case of Japanese Prewar Film," in *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, ed. Alan Tansman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 185–211.
21. Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 13.
22. Kitagawa, "Nihon ni okeru eiga riron," 33.
23. Kitagawa, one should note, was a persistent critic of film writers associated with the Japanese Communist Party.
24. Kitagawa, "Nihon ni okeru eiga riron," 36.
25. Kitagawa, "Eiga hiho no hiho," 240.
26. Hatano, "Kaisetsu," 576, 577.
27. Iwasaki Akira, "Niritsusei to iu koto," *Kinema junpo* 485 (October 11, 1933): 50.
28. Ikeda Toshio, "Marukusu shugi eiga hiho no kijun," *Eiga kagaku kenkyu* 6 (October 1930): 239–240.
29. Karatani Kojin, "Kindai Nihon no hiho: Showa zenki 2," in *Kindai Nihon no hiho* 1, ed. Karatani Kojin (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1997), 157.
30. Ikeda, "Marukusu shugi eiga hiho no kijun," 230.
31. Hatano found that even after the war, "the word mass (*taishuteki*) roamed through various meanings in concrete cases of criticism, varying from 'the masses as they should be' to the 'the mass in numbers.'" Hatano, "Kaisetsu," 581.
32. Iwasaki Akira, "Awanai kagi," *Kinema junpo* 488 (November 11, 1933): 51.
33. Iwasaki Akira, "Eiga hiho wa dare ga suru," *Kinema junpo* 489 (November 21, 1933): 58.
34. Gonda in the 1910s argued that with the cinema, the masses became the true subject of entertainment through their viewing practices. See his "The Principles and Applications of the Motion Pictures (excerpts)," trans. Aaron Gerow, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 22 (December 2010): 24–36.
35. Shirai Yoshio, "Nihon eiga hiho hattatsushi 6: Nuveru Vagu, ATG no taito," *Kinema junpo* 1198 (August 1, 1996): 100. Shirai was editor of the magazine in the late 1960s and early 1970s.
36. For a brief history of the theater pamphlet, see Hidenori Okada, "Kita, mita, kata—eiga panfureto shoron," *NFC Newsletter* 97 (June–July 2011): 7–9.
37. Shyon Baumann's survey of the use of critical quotations in film advertising discovered that such usage significantly increased at the end of the 1960s in conjunction with the rise of art cinema: "Marketing, Cultural Hierarchy, and the Relevance of Critics: Film in the United States, 1935–1980," *Poetics* 30 (2002): 243–262. My cursory survey of advertisements in the *Asahi shinbun* supports the view that quotations tended to be used for foreign or art films in Japan, but unlike in the United States, the use of quotations from critics declined starting in the 1970s.
38. Shinada Yukichi, "Nihon eiga hiho hattatsushi 5: Sengo no eiga hihyokai chokan 2," *Kinema junpo* 1197 (July 15, 1996): 89–90.
39. Tsurumi Shunsuke, *Gokaisuru kenri* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shobo, 1959).
40. Even today, *Eiga geijutsu*, which is now a quarterly, continues to publish criticism by nonprofessional critics, especially by personnel behind the camera, such as screenwriters, cinematographers, and editors.
41. Ogawa Toru, "Hiho no naimen," *Eiga hyoron* 21.20 (October 1964): 22.

42. Ibid., 26.
43. Ibid., 25.
44. See Matsumoto Toshio, "A Theory of Avant-Garde Documentary," *Cinema Journal* 51.4 (Summer 2012): Ibid., 148–154.
45. For an analysis of the resonances between Sartre and Yoshida Kiju, see Isolde Standish, *Politics, Porn and Protest* (New York: Continuum, 2011).
46. Abé Mark Nornes, "The Postwar Documentary Trace," *Positions* 10.1 (2002): 50.
47. Matsuda quotes his own article in the October 5, 1968 *Tosho shinbun*: "Hihyo no fuzai o megutte," *Bara to mumeisha* (Tokyo: Haga Shoten, 1970), 277.
48. Hatano, "Kaisetsu," 590.
49. Yamane Sadao, "Kaisetsu," eds. Ogawa Toru, et al., *Gendai Nihon eigaron taikai* (Tokyo: Tojusha, 1970), 3:550.
50. Interview with Hatano Tetsuro, April 20, 2010.
51. Matsuda Masao, "Hihyo no rikkyakuten wa nanika," *Bara to mumeisha* (Tokyo: Haga Shoten, 1970), 188–196.
52. Iwamoto "Film Criticism and the Study of Cinema in Japan," 141.
53. Interview with Yamane Sadao, April 22, 2010.
54. "It is interesting drawing everything out of the film work, so I rather do not want to know the intentions of the producer or director, or the circumstances of production." Iijima Tadashi, "Boku no hihyoshi," *Eiga hyoron* 15.6 (June 1958): 19.
55. Hasumi Shigehiko, *Eiga no shinwagaku* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1996), 51.
56. Hasumi Shigehiko, "Eiga to hihyo," *Eiga: Yuwaku no ekurichuru* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1990), 353.
57. Ryan Cook, "An Impaired Eye: Hasumi Shigehiko on Cinema as Stupidity," *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 22 (December 2010): 137.
58. Hasumi, "Eiga to hihyo," 357.
59. Ibid., 358.
60. Hasumi Shigehiko, *Kantoku Ozu Yasujiro* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1992), 138.
61. Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "Image, Information, Commodity," in *In Pursuit of Contemporary East Asian Culture*, eds. Xiaobing Tang and Stephen Snyder (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996): 123–138.