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Celluloid Masks: The Cinematic Image and the Image of Japan

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Shoten. The second part was also presented at the conference on "Image Theory, Image Culture, and Contemporary Japan" at the University at Iowa.

2: The term "*outsushi*" literally means "large copy" or "large reflection." Throughout the essay, I have left "*outsushi*" untranslated and rendered the Japanese "*kurōsu appu*" as "close-up" [Trans.].

3: Shigeno Kōkei (3 August, 1914), "*Nihon shashin no genjō o hyōsuru koto*," *Kinema record*.

4: Bela Balazs (1986), *Shikakuteki Ningen* (Sasaki Kiichi and Takamura Hiroshi, trans.), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, pp. 83-86.

5: Siegfried Kracauer (1960), *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Reality*, London: Oxford University Press, p. 48.

6: Tanaka Hisao (1975), *Nihonbi no kōzō*, Tokyo: Kōdansha, pp. 61-62.

7: See Eisenstein's 1929 essay in Eisenstein, S. M. (1949), "*The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram*," in *Film Sense* (Jay Leyda, trans.), New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

8: Noël Burch (1979), *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, Berkeley: University of California Press and Earle Ernst (1974), *The Kabuki Theatre*, Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii.

9: As noted by Takashina Shūji and Haga Tōru in Takashina Shūji and Haga Tōru (1976), *Geijutsu no seishinshi*, Tokyo: Tankōsha.

10: Quoted in Victor Freeburg (1918), *The Art of Photoplay Making*, New York: Macmillan, p. 2.

11: In conversation, Iwamoto has offered the example of the raising of the bridges sequence in Eisenstein's *October*, where the same temporal instant is shown from different angles [Trans.].

12: Ogura Rō (1977), *Nihon no mimi*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, pp. 166-167.

Afin de définir les caractéristiques particulières du cinéma japonais avant 1930, cet article analyse deux éléments formels: le gros plan et le montage. L'auteur suggère que la rareté relative du gros plan dans le cinéma japonais tient aux traditions culturelles japonaises et à un effort de réduire les effets dramatiques. Liant le manque de gros plans au problème du montage dans le cinéma japonais, l'auteur suggère aussi un rapport entre le montage "invisible" du cinéma japonais d'avant-guerre et les conceptions japonaises de la perspective, de la narration et de la musique.

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Celluloid Masks: The Cinematic Image and the Image of Japan

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's *In'ei raisan* (*In Praise of Shadows*, 1933) and Kawabata Yasunari's *Utsukushii Nihon no watashi* (*Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself*, 1967), despite their differences, are usually located within the canon of texts that have functioned discursively to produce the image of an unchanging, essential Japan. The two, both treatises on traditional Japanese aesthetics, discuss the artistic image in order to produce an image of Japan that transcends history. While dominant readings of these texts often duplicate this bracketing out of history, I would like to complicate these interpretations by inserting another set of texts into the discursive field, ones also produced by Tanizaki and Kawabata, but focusing on a modern medium, the cinematic image.

Tanizaki mentioned film only once in *In'ei raisan*. In commenting on how the adoption of Western technology had forced Japan to abandon the cultural course it had followed for thousands of years, Tanizaki related technology to the issue of national culture:

one need only compare American, French, and German films to see how greatly nuances of shading and coloration can vary in motion pictures. In the photographic image itself, to say nothing of the acting and the script, there somehow emerge differences in national character. If this is true even when identical equipment, chemicals, and film are used, how much better our photographic technology might have suited our complexion, our facial features, our climate, our land. . . . We distort the arts themselves to curry favor with the machines. These machines are the inventions of Westerners, and are, as we might expect, well suited to the Western arts. But precisely on this account they put our own arts at a disadvantage.¹

On the one hand, this is not an argument against technological modernization *per se*, but rather against the national aesthetics embodied in certain technologies. Instead of denying history, attempting to turn back the clock, Tanizaki was only hoping for an alternative history in which it was the Japanese who invented the cinema. On the other, the passage still seems to invite a reading that constructs this portion of *In'ei raisan* as

Tanizaki's condemnation of the mechanics of cinema as a mode of production alien to Japan.

This interpretation of *In'ei raisan* appears anomalous, however, when one learns that the work was produced by the figure formally most prominent in advocating Western cinema within the *bundan*, the Japanese literary establishment. Not only was Tanizaki an early popularizer of the motion pictures through his essays on cinema, he even entered the world of film production, joining the Taikatsu studio in 1920 to write scripts for two films by Thomas Kurihara. His later position is even more peculiar in light of the fact that Tanizaki was a proponent of ridding Japanese cinema of the remnants of traditional theater, such as the *onnagata* and the *benshi*, and saw film as one of the best means of exporting Japanese culture.²

A similar contradiction can be located in the history of Kawabata's literary production. Given that Kawabata, in *Utsukushii Nihon no watashi*, his speech accepting the Nobel Prize for literature, undertook not only to describe the "beauty" of Japan by audaciously predicating those qualities to his own self (*Utsukushii Nihon no watashi*),³ it certainly comes as a shock to read him admit of an earlier opinion that "Western films surpass pure Japanese art and Japanese films outrival the popular literature of Japan."⁴

This apparent change in attitude on the part of both Kawabata and Tanizaki is usually explained in terms of a narrative of "*fukkō*" (revival)—a "return to Japan"—in which the immature writers of the 1920s, once intoxicated by the supposedly "superficial" and "faddish" Westernization of Taishō culture (1912-1926), later overcame such failings in their more "Japanese" works of the 1930s.⁵ Such a history, however, assumes an originary "Japan" to which these writers return; it reproduces that vision of an essential national identity that brackets out the modern, and thus cinema, that *In'ei raisan* and *Utsukushii Nihon no watashi* have been used to construct. It is my desire to ask whether the Japan to which Tanizaki and Kawabata purportedly "returned" was not in some ways already irrevocably shaped by the cinema they earlier held so dear. Analyzing the two writers' seldom appreciated works on film, considering Tanizaki and Kawabata separately in order to maintain the differences between them, I wish to consider the relation between their images of Japan and their images of cinema.

Tanizaki in praise of shadows

Tanizaki did not simply produce film criticism early in his career, he was one of the several writers, including Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Satō Haruo, who wrote fictional works in the late teens that featured representations of cinema. These were not just texts to which was appended a cinematic context in order to increase the story's cachet and marketability, they were discursive attempts not only to define the relation between film

and literature, but to articulate the place of cinema in a changing Japan. Tanizaki's "*Jinmenso*" ("*The Boil with the Human Face*," 1918) is one significant example.⁶

"*Jinmenso*" is an extraordinary fantastic tale centered on the appearance of a film that even its lead actress could not remember making. An account of that film's narrative, a traditional ghost story featuring an ugly beggar who wreaks revenge on a courtesan and her European lover by "re-presenting" himself after his suicide as a huge boil on her knee, is framed by a discussion of this bizarre film without origin.

Cinema figures in "*Jinmenso*" as part of the fantastic, the text adopting that hesitation between belief and disbelief that Tzvetan Todorov argued as definitive of the genre.⁷ Film is rendered fantastic through a questioning of the realistic quality of film, the story centering on the issue of the indexicality of the cinematic sign by focusing on the primary mystery of how the film *Shūnen* came into being. While the film expert featured in the story reveals those processes, such as editing and special effects, through which film can create a "reality" that never existed for the camera to record, in the end he admits that one of the scenes in the film—one of the most grotesque and supernatural images—could not possibly have been created by any known special effect or editing process.⁸ Although "*Jinmenso*" repeatedly questions the authenticity of film as an indexical sign, by the conclusion, it is precisely that indexical quality that provides indisputable proof for the expert that the film must be a true recording of an image that, paradoxically, could not possibly have happened. This echoes the impression of some that the film itself is a kind of ghost.⁹ In "*Jinmenso*," not only the epistemology, but the ontology of cinema is rendered ambiguous.

Far from authenticating the image, it is the scientifically rationalized aspect of the technology that makes cinema fantastic. In Tanizaki's version, film production is a system in which films are assembled from fragments as if on an assembly line so that what is created is less the product of individuals than of a large, factory-like institution in which actors are merely cogwheels belonging to a great machine.¹⁰ Echoing representations of cinema produced by Akutagawa and others, Tanizaki portrays film as less a product of human consciousness than of an abstract objectivity somehow other to the personalized modes of enunciation founded in the *bundan* (the Japanese literary establishment) and in the "I-novel" (*shishōsetsu*). With *Shūnen* being an American film (albeit with a Japanese actress), film's origin in "*Jinmenso*" is in the space of the Other.

In the end, however, "*Jinmenso*" uses cinema to complicate previous conceptions of a Self/Other dichotomy. It is significant that "*Jinmenso*" is based on parallel tales of the fantastic, one modern and one traditional, the problem of the film and of the story it depicts. In Tanizaki's discourse, the two are not disconnected but in fact depend on each other. The traditional tale is powerful to the degree it has been authenticated by a seemingly objective technology. Conversely, the film is fantastic to the extent that it reveals traditional Japanese ghost tales as truth, not myth—as knowledge, not superstition.

In this light, *In'ei raisan* can be reread as not simply rejecting the cinema as foreign, but as continuing the earlier attempt in "*Jinmenso*" to assimilate a modern, foreign technology to the traditional, at the same time rewriting the notion of the traditional—and thus conceptions of national identity—to include the changes represented by the cinematic image. "*Jinmenso*" can be taken as the attempt in discourse to make the cinematic machinery Japanese that *In'ei raisan* could not locate in Japanese science or industry.

"*Jinmenso*" does not simply articulate the cinema as fantastic, however; it is also a discourse on the problematic relation between spectatorial subjectivity and the filmic image, locating in that image a possible confusion between representation and the real. The text describes the feelings an actor experiences when seeing himself on screen. The impression is not that the figure on the screen is a shadow of the real self, but rather the reverse: that the image in the film is somehow more alive than the being in the theater. The enigmatic film *Shūnen* generalizes this experience, especially when the spectator is alone. Then, amidst all the action on the screen, the viewer is described as feeling as if he himself is about to disappear.¹¹ Tanizaki's text portrays a cinema in which the sign is more real than the referent and in which the subjectivity of the view is overcome by the power of the cinematic sign.

In Tanizaki's depiction of the cinematic, the barriers that divide the image first from reality and then from the viewer's subjectivity on the other are breached. As the image becomes more real, replacing reality, it dissolves the subjectivity of the viewer. The spectatorship implied in this indeterminate system was not unattractive to Tanizaki, however. Tanizaki revelled in cinema's dual quality as reality and dream precisely to the degree that it played with the boundary between those two realms.¹² Echoing the surrealists, Tanizaki repeatedly confessed that, while he admired more artistic films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), he found the most vulgar (*zokuaku*) films more interesting because, with plots that could be ignored, they clarified the uniquely dreamlike quality of cinema.¹³

In one of his 1921 essays, Tanizaki offered an evocative account of his most memorable film-going experience: watching a couple of shorts on a sunny summer day with Kurihara in a small building in the foreign section of Yokohama. Since the passage is indicative of the passion Tanizaki held for cinema-viewing, I cite it at length:

[Kurihara and the technician] placed a portable Acme projector on the desk, turned on the lamp, and pulled the shades in both windows. The room that was filled with light from a blue sky in one second, suddenly became pitch black the next. The film was projected from one side of this thin room onto the opposite wall. I saw two films there. One was of the cherry blossoms at three famous parks, the other detailed the stages of silk production from the cocoon to women wearing their Sunday best.

Although these were certainly ordinary films, in this brilliant room suddenly turned dark, those

small moving shadows boldly sparkling on the wall like jewels gradually lured me into a trance. As I stared at that small world of light, a 3 by 4 rectangle etched out of the dark with silent, moving images of silkworms, I forgot that there was anything else in the world outside of this small universe. It felt as if the street outside, the train at the station at Sakuragichō, my far-away house in Odawara—the fact that it even was my house—were all just lies.

After the screening ended and we left the office for the Yamanote studio, I breathed the air, first inhaling deeply. With a feeling of distrust for my own eyes, I looked on everything as if it were new and rare.¹⁴

Significantly, it is neither cinematic language nor the apparatus itself that was attractive to Tanizaki, but rather the experience of viewing. The worse the film and the situation, the better. As with the French surrealists, what seemingly mattered was not the perfection of the illusion of the spectator's entry into a realistic world (many would consider these viewing conditions as in fact upsetting that illusion), but rather the invasion of the filmic image into the world of the spectator such that the viewer's world itself became nothing but a cinematic image. It was not an experience of escape, but of the transformation of the viewer's space by the film; even when the film was over, the world seemed quite different.

Tanizaki's emphasis on the contrast between light and dark is crucial, because what lies at the center of his version of the cinematic is a radical undermining of binary oppositions. Tanizaki fixates on neither the dark nor the light, but rather on the abrupt shift from one to the other that helps create the impression that the oppositions between reality and dream, reality and image, have been blurred. The dichotomies are not eliminated, they are rather problematized, played with, one term—the dark, the image, the dream, etc.—threatening, but never completely succeeding, to overflow and drown the other.

If this aesthetic subversion of binary oppositions was a product of Tanizaki's literary encounter with cinema, it is interesting to note how much this aesthetic informs Tanizaki's peculiar version of Japanese tradition in *In'ei raisan*. For Tanizaki's praise of shadows relies on an opposition between a Western preference for separation and a Japanese appreciation for mixtures. To Tanizaki, the Western national character—perhaps white racism itself—is a product of the desire never to see the white sullied by any color or shade.¹⁵ The Japanese, on the other hand, create a "world of confusion where light and dark are indistinguishable"¹⁶ and where "the distinction between clean and unclean is best left obscure."¹⁷ Tanizaki's world of shadows is not a space without light, but one where light and dark co-inhabit, playing off each other in a space of ambiguity.

Clearly the ascription of a binary consciousness to the West and a monistic outlook to the East was common at the time in Japanese intellectual circles. But what is peculiar in Tanizaki's case is the existence of an earlier account of cinema's unique ability among the arts to present both dream and reality at the same instant—his description of a

Western technology as epitomizing this supposedly Japanese aesthetic. While one could argue that he only saw in cinema what he first noticed in traditional arts, seemingly the contrary is just as plausible: that he only favored the traditional because of what he noticed in film.

Consider, for instance, Tanizaki's account of Kaname's growing attraction to the Bunraku theater in *Tade kuu mushi* (*Some Prefer Nettles*, 1928). Tanizaki describes Kaname's impression of the Awaji play as "a succession of flickering images quite detached from any narrative. . . . It hardly seemed necessary to worry about the plot. Just to lose oneself in the movements of the puppets was enough."¹⁸ Needless to say, this is not dissimilar to Tanizaki's experience in front of the screen in Yokohama. In Tanizaki's work, the distinction between viewing film and watching Bunraku becomes blurred. Film is not the modern Other of the tradition constructed in *Tade kuu mushi*, but rather the unspoken intertext that less distinguishes Bunraku from the modern than actually defines it in contemporary terms. It is not the nature of an aesthetic inherent to the Japanese race that helps construct tradition as attractive, but rather its similarity to the flickering images of cinema.

In'ei raisan can then be reread as marking not a departure from Tanizaki's earlier work and a "return" to Japan, but rather a continuation of "*Jinmensei*"'s project, attempting to dissolve the boundaries between traditional and modern by expanding what can be included in the Japanese narrative of national identity. Reading the text with cinema in mind allows one to excuse one of the apparent contradictions in the work: that a tract celebrating the undermining of opposites in fact seems founded on an ineluctable division between East and West. Cinema figures as the technology that can occlude even that boundary, playing with the terms "Japan" and "the West" in the brilliant spectacle Tanizaki found so enthralling.

Kawabata and the celluloid mask

Kawabata was an avid film-goer throughout his early years, publishing several essays of film criticism which evince a perceptive analysis of the films of many nations.¹⁹ As with Tanizaki before him, he both involved himself in film production, writing the script for Kinugasa Teinosuke's 1926 film *Kurutta ippeiiji* (*A Page of Madness*), as well as composed short stories utilizing the cinema as subject matter. These texts all evince a singular conception of the cinematic image and its relation to spectatorial subjectivity.

For instance, much of the script for *Kurutta ippeiiji*, relating the story of an old janitor working at an insane asylum where his wife has been committed, centers on acts of viewing that are frequently implicated in projects of fantasy or wish fulfillment (the janitor "viewing" through the window his desire to win an elaborate wedding gift for his

daughter) or of scopophilic desire (the male inmates aroused by the dancing girl's performance). This desire as specular desire is intimately enmeshed with Kawabata's particular definition of the visual filmic sign. What is intriguing about Kawabata's use of the cinematic figures of the flashback and the insert in *Kurutta ippeiiji* is how he undermines their coded alterity through depictions of specular fantasy. In two of the janitor's fantasy sequences (winning a prize at the lottery and the "second" attempt to flee with his wife), the beginning of the sequences is left unmarked; it is not until the end of the fantasies that their "unreal" quality is definitively indicated.²⁰ While the subversion of the narrative boundaries between past and present, the diegetically real and the diegetically unreal, in no way eliminates narrative itself (the janitor's fantasy is, after all, his preferred narrative), it does point to a situation in which the cinematic sign is not hierarchically subordinated to narrative, reduced to functioning as a coded marker of narrative difference, but gains a status equal to that of the narrative because narrative has been redefined as the associative flow of images. The first of the janitor's fantasies can be seen as a compact allegory of cinema, not only through its articulation of desire and specularly and through its use of the frame and regimes of light and dark, but also in the way one image (for instance, the band) leads to another (the janitor winning the lottery the band advertises) through systems of specular fantasy. The filmic sign as spectacle is not wholly reducible to narrative functions precisely because all the different narrative projects it can perform (signifying past and present, reality and fantasy) ultimately become equivalent in their reduction to the same material, specular sign.

One of Kawabata's *Tenohira no shōsetsu* (*Palm-of-the-Hand Stories*), "*Teki*" ("*The Enemy*"), written about the same time as the script, echoes this interpretation of filmic representation. The two page sketch centers on an actress watching one of her films in a dark screening room. As Kawabata describes it, however, when the scene is projected in which her character loses her virginity (*shojo o ubawareru*):

the two of them—the person watching the film and the person being watched—cry at the same time. As the film turns, the women again feel together the sorrow of the loss of maidenhood. Rather than remembering that past horror, the actress senses it now as if tasting it with her own body. Even when the scene was filmed, she was not acting, but rather repeated with her own body that past fearful event. In other words, up to this moment she had lost her virginity three times. She was a maiden three-times over.²¹

This depiction of cinematic spectatorship is both a marvelous evocation of the power of film to rewrite history (to make what can only happen once, happen again) as well as an acknowledgment of the material power of the specular sign. If by watching the motion picture image the actress can re-enact her past experience as if for the first time, it is less because the image's indexical quality effaces the signifier in a perfect re-

presentation of the profilmic event, than because the cinematic sign has itself become a reality and has its own existence apart from the actress—it is the actress doubled. This quality of the cinematic image to exceed its denotative function through spectacle—image as image—governs the metaphoric cinematicity of “Teki” and *Kurutta ippei*.

The actress in “Teki” is not simply overcome by the image of herself: her subjectivity is fissured and rendered problematic. What appears to structure “Teki” is not the narrative of Western film theory in which the film sutures a unified, mastering subject, but rather its opposite. The power and materiality of the cinematic sign exceed any fiction of control by the spectator and thereby undermine any construction of a unified subject around a mastering viewpoint. With the film in *Kurutta ippei* imbricated in projects of wish fulfillment and desire, “Teki” implies that what is enunciated always exceeds the control of any unified enunciator. In both works, film spectatorship is not unlike being insane, something *Kurutta ippei* implies by having the spectator share in the dancing girl’s reverie at the film’s start before it is coded as only a fantasy. What makes film both fascinating and frightening in Kawabata’s version of cinematicity is the ability of the associative flow of specular images to take on a life of its own, beyond narrative or the command of an enunciative subjectivity (the spectator or the narrator), leaving the spectator passive (mastered) but (madly) ecstatic.

These issues of representation and subjectivity are metaphorically expressed in the icon of the mask that appears both in the film and at the center of another one of Kawabata’s *Tenohira no shōsetsu*, “*Warawanu otoko*” (“*The Man Who Does Not Smile*,” 1929), which takes the filming of *Kurutta ippei* as the subtext for its fiction. In the film, the smiling masks appear at the end in the epilogue to the janitor’s last fantasy, the janitor handing them out to his wife and the other inmates to provide the imaginary solution he was unable to create in reality. In the story, the masks figure as the scriptwriter’s attempt to provide a *happi endo* to a genuinely dark narrative, to “wrap,” in his own words, “all of reality in these beautiful, smiling masks.”²²

Note that in “*Warawanu otoko*,” if real *Nō* masks could not be found, the proposed alternative was to use ones made of celluloid;²³ the masks function to analogize film’s promise of wish fulfillment. The text uses this analogy to comment on the cinematic image. It is apparent that while the masks represent the scriptwriter’s hope for the future (where all will equally sport faces similar to that of the mask), they are as much his attempt to literally cover up a darker reality.

Kawabata’s text does not stop there. The writer visits his wife in the hospital where his children make her put on one of the masks. When she removes it, the contrast between her face and the mask exaggerates her ugliness to the writer. When the children attempt to force the mask on him, he refuses, noting both his desire not to appear ugly to the others, as well as a certain fearfulness embodied in the beautiful mask. In the writer’s words, “that frightfulness spawned a doubt that the face of the wife who had, until that moment, always smiled so gently by my side, may have been a mask—that her

smile was only an art (*geijutsu*) like a mask.”²⁴ The implication is that the danger of cinema embodied in the mask derives not only from its escapist gilding of reality, but also from the strength of its mode of signification to turn reality into merely another image. But while Tanizaki was enthralled by this aspect of cinema, the attitude towards cinema Kawabata evinces in these three texts, embodied in the mask, is more fundamentally ambivalent: at the same time film provides specular seduction, it is seen as threatening to undermine the subject and the division between sign and referent, subject and object.

In spite—or perhaps because—of this ambivalence towards cinema, film did not figure in the history of Kawabata’s literary production merely as a brief flirtation, but as a fundamental influence on his style and content. One need only look to the most celebrated portion of what is Kawabata’s most famous text, the beginning of *Yukiguni* (*Snow Country*, 1935-1947), to see the reappearance of Kawabata’s conception of cinema. Cinema frames *Yukiguni* by appearing in both the first and the last episodes (the burning movie theater at the end), but it is in the first scene that Kawabata most forcefully focuses on the practice of cinematic spectatorship. He foregrounds the cinematic allegory in Shimamura’s act of watching Yōko by likening the scene in the mirror to a “double exposure in film” (*eiga no nijū utsushi*) featuring both landscape and *dramatic personae* (*tōjō jinbutsu*).²⁵ The allegory is enhanced by the spatial configuration of the gaze: the ability of Shimamura to play the voyeur, looking without being looked at.

If what Shimamura sees in the window is a kind of film, it is a film defined by an associative flow of images imbricated in scopophilic desire that exceeds the mastery of the subject—the version of cinematicity apparent in *Kurutta ippei* and the two *Tenohira no shōsetsu*. Like a mask superimposed on a face, the scene inside the train is placed over the scenery flowing past the window, the two melting “together into a sort of symbolic world not of this world.”²⁶ Just as the wife’s face threatens to become a mask in “*Warawanu otoko*,” what is on top and what is on bottom in this layering of images—what is the real and what is a re-presentation—is put in doubt. The vision of images that “seemed to flow along in a wide, unformed emotion” of “inexpressible beauty” becomes pure spectacle to the degree that “Shimamura came to forget it was a mirror he was looking at.”²⁷ This forgetting does not signify the transparency of the sign before the referent but rather the opposite: the power of the image to occlude the means by which it is indexically related to its referent. But while it is clear that Shimamura possesses a sort of guiltless power of the gaze through his voyeuristic apparatus, exemplifying his effort to establish control over the world around him by reducing it to an object of distanced contemplation, his specular pleasure is paid for by—or even derives from—a certain castrated passivity, Shimamura being “taken by the unreal, other worldly power of his mirror in the evening landscape.”²⁸ The film mirror image exceeds any enunciating subject, gaining its power over Shimamura through the sheer specular

fascination of its presentation. If Shimamura is an exemplary Kawabata hero, it is because most of his heroes are similarly cinematic spectators, able to confront the world only by treating it as a visual spectacle to be passively enjoyed. The text itself is then a record of the flow of images that passed in front of their eyes.

Japan as the image of cinema

If Kawabata's literature is fundamentally tied to his view of cinema, again we must question his connection to Japanese traditional values laid out in his Nobel speech. Cinema has disappeared from his self-presentation, just as it has been left largely unspoken in Tanizaki's *In'ei raisan*. One must ask where has cinema gone to when we read Kawabata and Tanizaki's versions of Japanese aesthetics.

One can possibly address this issue by first looking to Kawabata's critical writings on film. While Kawabata confessed to watching films with the question "Can this be expressed in literature?" in mind,²⁹ he also acknowledged that film, being more modern than literature, had "made literature insecure" (*bungaku o fuan ni shita*).³⁰ Kawabata took an ambivalent stance towards the relation of film and literature. On the one hand, he implied that both film and literature would benefit from concentrating on developing their own proper modes of expression.³¹ On the other hand, in another context, he also declared that for film to regain the excellence it had lost after the silent era, it had to study and learn from literature, in effect becoming more "literary" (*bungakuteki*).³² In fact, by the 1930s, one can sense the effort in Kawabata's writings on film to control the desire for cinema by repressing its object, to restrict film's power by redefining it through the known, especially through the literary.

"*Warawanu otoko*" provides an example of this attempt simultaneously to segregate film and literature while also making cinema literary. Although the scriptwriter, the literary figure, is content to have others wear the mask (those acting in his creation), he refuses to wear it. For him to don the mask would be for him to become ugly, for him to become subject to, not in control of, the cinematic; wearing the mask would mean the filmic has surpassed the literary by turning even the authorial subject into an image. Remember that Shimamura in *Yukiguni* is perfectly willing to reduce the world around him to an image, relating to Komako and Yōko in a way analogous to his "study" of Western dance which he has not seen and would prefer never to see; both the women and the dance he would rather treat as images under his control than as real things. What disturbs Kawabata about cinema is then less that it transforms reality into an image (which is not without its attractions for the creator of Shimamura), but that it may turn himself into an image.

"*Warawanu otoko*," in a curious fashion, provides a history of Kawabata's relationship with cinema. As film offered the writer a source of new forms of literature, it also

presented a threat that called for a reassertion of authorial subjectivity, for literature to reassume mastery by disengaging the filmic from the literary through marking it as Other while simultaneously taking the Other into itself. For Kawabata, film must become literary not only by learning from literature, but by being incorporated within the realm of literature, an incorporation that is perfected as soon as it becomes unacknowledged—as soon as Kawabata can declare he is only a traditional Japanese artist without past involvement in a modern mass medium.³³ It was as if cinema as an influence had to be forgotten for it to be fully assimilated into Japanese national identity.

But while Kawabata denied the mask of cinema in order to maintain his identity as an author, the irony of his Nobel speech is how much his assumption of the mantle of Japaneseness is itself a mask. By rejecting cinema, he attempted to rid Japan of the impurity that threatened to taint the ahistorical cultural homogeneity of which he claimed to be representative. But in rejecting the filmic mask for fear that it would efface the real and turn everything—including himself—into mere images, he only denied his own historical reality and that of his cultural context to adopt another set of images, reducing himself and his work to the mere image of a Japanese essence.

Tanizaki, as we have seen, can be read differently. He utilizes the cinema to play with both the image of tradition and his subjectivity as an author. One can perhaps see this playful irony in *In'ei raisan*'s strategy of basing a construction of traditional Japanese aesthetic on an appreciation of the toilet. This sly parody, however, does not figure in dominant readings of *In'ei raisan* and of Tanizaki's later work in general.³⁴ Tanizaki is portrayed as a traditional artist whose work has no connection with the cinema.

The paradox of using both Kawabata and Tanizaki's writings to justify the existence of an ahistorical Japanese aesthetic, however, is that, while this interpretation tries to suppress the cinematic, denying it ever influenced the "beautiful Japan" or the world of "shadows," it does so only to validate the world of images without referents that cinema and a mass image culture bring. Cinema was lost in the construction of Japanese identity because the filmic image had been resurrected as the image of Japan. But a Japanese aesthetic, molded by its encounter with cinema, had to suppress the cinema in order to construct itself as Japanese. Thus Kawabata adopted the same forgetfulness in front of the mirror of Japaneseness that Shimamura did before his own cinematic mirror. As the cinematic image had earlier overcome reality, the image of Japan had exceeded the boundaries of its screen to overwhelm the real.

To return to *Yukiguni* for a moment, Karatani Kōjin has argued that the mirrored window at the opening of the text is not only Shimamura's means of effacing the reality of his Other (those in the snow country), but is also the best technique at Kawabata's disposal of bracketing out modern reality in order to construct the illusion of a "beautiful Japan"³⁵—an unchanging Japanese identity. Now we can see that the model of this technique—where Kawabata learned it—is the motion picture medium. It is the cinema embodied in that mirror that is essential not in discovering a Japanese essence, but in

formulating it as an image. Kawabata's act of donning the cinematic mask of representative Japaneseness is not a return to that premodern definition of the mask that Karatani speaks of—in which “it is the mask which is the face, or rather creates the face”³⁶—but only the simulacrum of that system now doubled by and mediated through the image represented by cinema.

The location of film within the texts of Tanizaki and Kawabata not only reminds us of the impossibility of marking an unbroken chain between premodern literary forms and representation of tradition in modern Japanese literature, it stresses the fact that the notion of tradition itself is a twentieth-century construct. The elimination of the Other from the Japanese Self that according to Harry Harootunian, is largely perfected in the 1980s³⁷ is paradoxically only possible through both interaction with and appropriation of technologies initially defined as Other. Only in a modern image culture is tradition figured not only as composed of images (the Japanese aesthetic) but as an image itself.

Since the tradition operating in modern Japanese culture must always forget the history of its interaction with the cinematic Other in order to present itself as without a history, cinema is then, to borrow a term from Pierre Macherey, a kind of structuring absence to twentieth-century Japanese cultural history. Discussing the role of cinema in modern Japanese culture both reveals the importance of its role, as well as destabilizes and deconstructs those visions of national essence that are successful only to the degree that they succeed in forgetting their cinematic upbringing. Film is important to the study of Japan not simply because the Japanese industry was a world leader in feature production, but because contemporary Japan is itself fundamentally a product of the cinematic image.

notes

- 1: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1977), *In Praise of Shadows*, (Thomas Harper and Edward Seidensticker, trans.), New Haven: Leete's Island Books, p. 9.
- 2: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1982), “Katsudō shashin no genzai to shōrai,” in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū* (Vol. 20, pp. 11-21), Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha.
- 3: Kawabata Yasunari (1969), *Japan the Beautiful and Myself* (Edward Seidensticker, trans.), Tokyo: Kōdansha.
- 4: Kawabata Yasunari (1936), “Gensaku to eigaka ni tsuite: Watashi no baai,” *Shinchō* 33(11), p. 149.
- 5: See, for example, Edward Seidensticker's introduction to his translation of *Tade kuu mushi* (1928): Seidensticker (1960), introduction, *Some Prefer Nettles*, by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, New York: Berkeley Publishing, pp. 5-12.
- 6: Akutagawa's “Katakoi” (“Unrequited Love,” 1916) and “Kage” (“The Shadow,” 1920) and Satō's “Shimon” (“The Fingerprint,” 1918) are other examples.
- 7: Tzvetan Todorov (1975), *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Richard Howard, trans.), Ithaca: Cornell UP.

- 8: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1982), “*Jinmenso*” in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū* (Vol. 5, pp. 321-26), Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha.
- 9: Tanizaki, “*Jinmenso*,” p. 318.
- 10: Tanizaki, “*Jinmenso*,” pp. 314-315.
- 11: Tanizaki, “*Jinmenso*,” p. 324.
- 12: Yanagisawa Ken, et al. (1918), “*Shin jidai ryūkō no shōchō to shite mitaru 'jidōsha' to 'katsudō shashin' to 'kafe' no inshō*,” *Chūō kōron* 33(7), setsuen 96. To Tanizaki, it was that dual aspect of film that made it the broadest of the arts.
- 13: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1982), “*Eiga zakkan*” in Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *Tanizaki Jun'ichirō zenshū* (Vol. 22, p. 100).
- 14: Tanizaki, “*Eiga zakkan*,” pp. 101-102. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.
- 15: Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, p. 32.
- 16: Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*, p. 22.
- 17: Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*: p. 5.
- 18: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1960), *Some Prefer Nettles* (Edward Seidensticker, trans.), NY: Berkeley Publishing, p. 104.
- 19: See, for instance, Kawabata's “*Eiga kenbutsu ki—Konogoro no eiga (1)*,” *Shinchō* 26(11) (1929), pp. 124-129; and “*Eiga kenbutsu ki—Konogoro no eiga (2)*,” *Shinchō* 26(12) (1929), pp. 111-115.
- 20: Kawabata Yasunari, “*Kurutta ippeiji*,” in Kawabata Yasunari, *Kawabata Yasunari zenshū* (Vol. 1, pp. 422, 432), Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- 21: Kawabata Yasunari (1971), “*Teki*,” in Kawabata Yasunari, *Tenohira no shōsetsu* (p. 56), Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- 22: Kawabata Yasunari (1971), “*Warawanu otoko*,” in Kawabata Yasunari, *Tenohira no shōsetsu* (p. 270), Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- 23: Kawabata, “*Warawanu otoko*,” p. 272.
- 24: Kawabata, “*Warawanu otoko*,” p. 275.
- 25: Kawabata Yasunari (1969), *Yukiguni*, in Kawabata Yasunari, *Kawabata Yasunari zenshū* (Vol. 5, p. 269), Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- 26: Kawabata Yasunari (1960), *Snow Country* (Edward Seidensticker, trans.), New York: Berkeley Publishing, p. 15.
- 27: Kawabata, *Snow Country*, pp. 15-16.
- 28: Kawabata, *Snow Country*, p. 17.
- 29: Kawabata Yasunari (1969), “*Bungei jihyō—Eiga Ikeru ningyō*,” in Kawabata Yasunari, *Kawabata Yasunari zenshū* (Vol. 17, p. 51), Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- 30: Kawabata, “*Bungei jihyō*,” p. 52.
- 31: See Kawabata, “*Gensaku to eigaka ni tsuite*.”
- 32: Kawabata, “*Gensaku to eigaka ni tsuite*,” p. 150.
- 33: That Kawabata rewrote his personal history to efface his involvement in film is evident in the fact that the *zenshū* he prepared before his death (published between 1969 and 1973) contains *Kurutta ippeiji* but little of his film criticism. One can see evidence of a similar elision of the historical influence of film in the omission of film criticism from the *zenshū* of many of Kawabata's literary contemporaries, including Satō Haruo, Kume Masao, and others.
- 34: See, for instance, Thomas Harper's afterword to his translation of *In Praise of Shadows*, pp. 43-48. I should note that it is not my intention to prove readings such as Harper's as “untrue” to the “real” Tanizaki. Without asserting an essential meaning to the work, I only hope to contest existing readings of the work—which are never external to the text itself—by advancing an alternative interpretation.
- 35: Karatani Kōjin (1991), “*Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen saikō*,” *Hihyō kūkan* 1, p. 98.
- 36: Karatani Kōjin (1980), *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen*, Tokyo: Kōdansha, pp. 58-62. Quoted in Brett de Bary (1989), “Karatani Kōjin's *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*,” *Postmodernism and Japan* (Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, eds.), Durham: Duke UP, p. 252.

37: H. D. Harootunian (1989), "Visible Discourses/Invisible Ideologies," *Postmodernism and Japan* (Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, eds.), Durham: Duke UP, p. 66.

La culture japonaise a souvent été définie sans référence à l'image cinématographique. Par opposition à cette définition anhistorique de la culture japonaise, gommant toute référence aux médias modernes, cet article analyse l'oeuvre de deux représentants de la culture japonaise, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō et Kawabata Yasunari, pour y trouver un rapport intime non seulement entre leur production littéraire et leur rencontre avec le cinéma, mais aussi entre leur conception du Japon et leur définition du cinéma. Le cinéma japonais n'a pas simplement aidé à former une culture japonaise moderne, mais il a participé à la création d'une identité culturelle japonaise de plus en plus définie par l'image.

Kondo Masaki

The Impersonalization of the Self in an Image Society

I The substance of images

In the preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Walt Whitman said, "Who knows the curious mystery of the eyesight? The other senses corroborate themselves, but this is removed from any proof but its own and foreruns the identities of the spiritual world."¹

The substance of images has historically undergone various changes. In prehistoric times paintings and reliefs were imprinted on rock, clay, or stucco cave walls. In ancient times images became decorations for the stone or stucco walls of dwellings and temples. By the Middle Ages, images were mosaics of marble and glass located on the domes or upper walls of cathedrals. During the Renaissance, tempera and oil painting was invented. This painting style was based on board and canvas. It was a movable part of a wall and as such became a sort of window through which the Renaissance painter could shape his ideal form of representation of the outer world. As the painter observed the subject as if seen through a windowpane, the painting was produced as an image on a pane. When a person looks through a windowpane, he sees the scene beyond the windowpane as well as his self-image half-reflected on the windowpane. The actual perception is composed of the world seen through the viewer's out-of-focus reflection along with a hollow distance between the observer and the observed world. To put this phenomenon in a psychological context, a person sees the world reflectively and the image of the world is fixed through his mentality, bearing his invisible self-image on it as the seer's unconscious imprint.²

Based on the apparatus of the Renaissance *camera obscura* and the chemical processes developed in later periods, photography was invented in the 19th century. Photographs were developed on silver plate, paper, glass, and film. The technology of the photogravure allowed ephemeral silhouettes, moving images of a magic lantern, or an obscure reflection on a windowpane to be fixed on thinner materials. These images were reproduced in great quantities in illustrated journals and newspapers. Later in the