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## Text and Film in Interaction – A Critical Introduction to Selected Papers of the International Japanese Studies Conference in Berlin 2016

Martha-Christine Menzel and Oliver P. Hartmann (Berlin)

### Abstract

This paper introduces a group of five articles dealing with interrelations of text and film in the field of Japanese studies. The articles are based on presentations given in February 2016 at a Japanese studies conference hosted by the Seminar of East Asian Studies (Japanology) of Freie Universität Berlin.

On two days in late winter 2016, February 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, researchers from Britain, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Japan and Germany convened in Berlin to launch a new research initiative. Operating under the title “Text and Film in Interaction”, the participants of the international Japanese studies conference explored various kinds of correlations between text and film, both on a theoretical and practical level.

Questions relating to the interdependence of text and film are nearly as old as the medium film itself.<sup>1</sup> In Western literary and cultural studies this topic first emerged in the so-called cinema debate of 1909–1929 between authors, film scholars, and critics of literature and culture. Later, in the academic discourses of the 1960s and 1970s regarding analogies and entanglements of film and literature, the continued significance of this line of inquiry was expressed in the development of terms such as the filmic writing style, the literarization of film, or the field of Film and Literature Studies.<sup>2</sup>

Looking at the literary and cultural history of Japan, it is possible to assert that due to the arrival of the kinoscope of Thomas A. Edison in November 1896 and the cinematograph of the Lumière brothers in February 1897, the medium of film developed in Japan in a more or less parallel manner to Hollywood or Western film, drawing as it did on comparable artistic features, technical devices and structures of production, distribution and institutions.<sup>3</sup> In Japan, early film was indeed confronted with a similar set of problems and critical debates as the film in the West. Established Nō and Kabuki actors initially viewed film as a rival to the traditional Japanese arts and thus widely dismissed it. Nevertheless, at

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. RAJEWSKY 2002: 29.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. RAJEWSKY 2002: 30–31, RAJEWSKY 2014: 203–204.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. YOMOTA 2007: 18–19, 35.

the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the moving pictures of film had come to reflect the “aesthetics of modern culture”<sup>4</sup>, not to mention represent “together with modern literature a symbol of the prevailing Western culture”<sup>5</sup>. It is hardly surprising that notable Japanese authors and literary critics began to embrace and develop an interest in the new evolving medium of film, as did the writer Tanizaki Jun’ichirō 谷崎純一郎 (1886–1965).

In her article “The Novel *Ave Maria*: The Legacy of Cinema in the Construction of Tanizaki’s literary World of Dreams”, Luisa Bienati from the Università Ca’Foscari in Venice focuses on a text that had been neglected by Western academia for many years. Using *Ave Maria* アヴェ・マリア (1923) as a case study, a novel of Tanizaki’s Yokohama period (1921–1923), she explores various ways of interactions between this work of literature and film. She starts with an introduction of Tanizaki’s view on the new evolving medium by referring to some of his essays on film. In particular, she demonstrates that Tanizaki was well aware of international cinematic discourses and philosophical debates (i.e. Henry Bergson). In the second section of her article, Bienati investigates references to specific Hollywood movies and actors as well as to the apparatus and techniques of the moving pictures in *Ave Maria*. After analyzing the impact of black and white movies and the influence of cinema on the construction of the narrative in this text, she sums up Tanizaki’s experience as a screenwriter and film director and concludes that his art of storytelling is an inversion of the relation between image and reality.

Tanizaki’s interaction with the medium film was threefold: He was deeply engaged in his studies of early Western cinema, experimented with filmic techniques in his writing, and was continuously confronted with adaptations of his novels to the movie screen,<sup>6</sup> even though he rarely appreciated these film versions.<sup>7</sup> One can only wonder what he would have thought of Liliana Cavani’s Italian movie version of his novel *Manji* 卍 (“Swastika”, 1928–1930) with the title *Interno Berlinese* (*The Berlin Affair*, 1985). In his article “Transculturally Visualizing Tanizaki: *Manji* in Liliana Cavani’s *Interno Berlinese*”, Daniele Resta of Daitō Bunka University in Tōkyō explores if and how Cavani tried to adapt the aesthetic pattern of exoticism prevailing in Tanizaki’s original work into her movie, which changes the setting quite drastically from Ōsaka of the late 1920s to Berlin in Nazi Germany. Resta compares storyline, character-constellation and narrative structures of both novel and movie. The case study concludes with a detailed evaluation of Cavani’s discussion and interpretation of Tanizaki’s aesthetics and poetological conceptions. Resta’s observations regarding a Japanese novel and its Italian adaptation successfully combine intermedial and transcultural aspects.

<sup>4</sup> CAVANAUGH/WASHBURN 2001: xxiv.

<sup>5</sup> YOMOTA 2007: 36.

<sup>6</sup> For a list of movies based on Tanizaki’s novels, see RICHIE 1998: 167–169.

<sup>7</sup> RICHIE 1998: 163.

Of course, Tanizaki was not the only prominent writer fascinated by the emergence of film as a new medium. Led by Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899–1972), Yokomitsu Riichi 横光利一 (1898–1947) and Kataoka Teppei 片岡鉄兵 (1894–1944), members of the group Shinkankaku-ha 新感覚派 (“New Perceptionists”) centered around the magazine *Bungei jidai* 文芸時代 (“Literary Age”) theorized about the medium of film and even produced a notable film example entitled *Kurutta ippēji* 狂った一頁 (*A Page of Madness*, 1926). In her article “For the Eyes Only: The Sensory Politics of Japanese Modernism”, Irena Hayter of Leeds University gives a detailed analysis of the differing philosophical concepts of sensation and perception of the three main Shinkankaku-ha members. Focusing on a variety of literary and theoretical texts, she discusses Japanese literary modernism as a phenomenon strongly interconnected with the “technologized visuality of cinema” as a new medium. Her analysis reveals the aim of the sensory theories of the Shinkankaku-ha to propagate a disembodiment of the senses with a strong focus on visuality as the primary and most important mode of perception. Hayter intertwines these ideas with the “pure film movement” (*jun'eigageki undō* 純映画劇運動), in which the Shinkankaku-ha writers actively participated in both theory and practice. In her discussion, she also takes the capitalist socialization of Taishō Japan into consideration, which sets the stage for the Shinkankaku-ha writers dealing with the new medium film.

The contribution of Reiko Abe Auestad from the University of Oslo leads us from the 1920s and 1930s to Postwar Japan. Her investigation entitled “Ibuse Masuji’s *Kuroi Ame* (1965) and Imamura Shōhei’s Film Adaption (1989)” deals with different modes of perception and the converting of Japanese memories of the Pacific War. She compares Ibuse Masuji’s 井伏鱒二 (1898–1993) novel *Kuroi ame* 黒い雨 (*Black Rain*, 1965) with Imamura Shōhei’s 今村昌平 (1926–2006) film version *Kuroi ame* (1989) by focusing on three central aspects: the historical context of their production, the specificities of the media text and film as a frame for their range of expression, and the artistic strategies of both Ibuse and Imamura. In Ibuse’s novel, the memories of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were still a vivid topic in the Japanese society, whereas in Imamura’s case, the majority of the Japanese people had started to lose their memory of the horrific consequences of the bombing and the radiation. In her analysis, Abe Auestad draws our attention to the strategies of Ibuse as an author and Imamura as a filmmaker. She detects a predominantly historical documentary style in the novel and a rather dramatizing way of storytelling in the movie. Abe Auestad further concludes that Imamura’s version follows mainly the original story, but also includes another novel written by Ibuse for an additional emotional plot line in order to “strick[e] emotional chords in the traumatic war memories of the Japanese people”. The article offers a noteworthy example of the transfer processes involved in any adaptation from text to film and elaborates on how the presentation of a specific historical topic or trauma takes form in accordance with the options and limitations of the chosen medial form.

In his paper “Miyazaki Hayao’s *Kaze tachinu* (*The Wind Rises*) as an Homage to Hori Tatsuo”, Niels H. Bader of Freie Universität Berlin expands the interrelation of text and film to the medium of Japanese animation. Bader offers a detailed analysis of the various biographical and literary sources which form the basis of Miyazaki Hayao’s 宮崎駿 (\*1941) animated movie *Kaze tachinu* 風立ちぬ (*The Wind Rises*, 2013). While the film is widely discussed as an homage to the engineer Horikoshi Jirō 堀越次郎 (1903–1982), the article points to another, so far rather unnoticed source of inspiration for the animated movie: The writer Hori Tatsuo 堀辰雄 (1904–1953) and his novel *Kaze tachinu*, which shares not only the title of the movie but also major motives and themes. The article explores how Miyazaki based its main character Jirō on the biography of not one but two real persons (Horikoshi Jirō and Hori Tatsuo) as well as on a fictional narrator from the works of Hori’s novels. Bader’s paper also discusses an earlier comic version of *Kaze tachinu* drawn by Miyazaki Hayao as an intermediate step between text and film which allows interesting conclusions on Miyazaki’s approach to the topic. In his reflections on story and storytelling of novel, manga and animated movie, Bader takes the specific possibilities and limitations of each medium into consideration, including their treatment of the predominant theme of wind as a metaphor based on the famous verse by Paul Valéry and other works of world literature.

The five selected papers presented here explore a wide range of examples for text and film interacting with each other. They investigate the extent to which literary texts refer to films, actors, and moviemakers, the way texts address and experiment with the perception of the new evolving medium film at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the way texts relate to film techniques and vice versa, and the objective with which literary texts are adapted into movies or even animations across time, space and cultures.

In Japan’s modern cultural history, the medium of film emerging in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century provided a new source of inspiration for writers of the Taishō and early Shōwa period. In this time, when the confessional autobiographical novel (*shishōsetsu* 私小説) became the leading genre of Japanese prose literature, promising objectivity in the form of utmost subjectivity of the self-revealing narrator, the technical objectivity of the camera perspective called for a new discussion of the process of perception itself. It questioned existing narrative techniques and modes of artistic expression which had formed a basis for literary writing and theatrical acting. Hence, the early medium film competed with these established art forms, but due to its technical possibilities such as blending visual images, montages and cuts, it also provoked and inspired many writers to experiment with new styles of literary expressions, not only in Japan but worldwide.

After film had freed itself of the additional voice narrators (*benshi* 弁士) and started to establish itself as an independent, autonomous art form in Japan, more and more literary works were adapted to the movie screen. While early moviemakers experimented with

entirely new narrative strategies unique to the medium of film, the adaptations of literary works challenged them to find cinematic effects equivalent to certain literary modes of expression. As with all adaptations, however, the increasing intervals between the publication of the original work and its new version in another – or even the same! – medium, necessitate the infusion of a certain amount of background knowledge into the medial transformation process to allow the audience to understand certain information it might be no longer familiar with. This process becomes even more complicated when the time gap is combined with a cultural one in form of a transcultural adaptation as the articles by Resta and Abe Auestad demonstrate. A comparative study on text and film in interaction must take this transfer of knowledge into consideration, because it constitutes one of the factors determining the choice of narrative strategies of moviemakers and writers.

Finally, when we discuss media such as text, film, anime or the sometimes quite cinematic, yet written, drawn and printed form of manga, we should keep in mind that our understanding of these media relies on constructions and distinctions.<sup>8</sup> The character of a medium is not static, but rather flexible. Every single medium is subject to a constant change, which is often accompanied by technical improvements, and is nothing but a historical reflection of a specific medial conception of a certain time. The historicity (*Historizität*)<sup>9</sup> of media is an important aspect that should be reconsidered when discussing media and intermedial phenomena. Furthermore, the way in which we perceive media products highly depends on our own experience with media and our media-recognition (*Medienerkenntnis*)<sup>10</sup>. As Irina Rajewsky highlights:

In fact, the criterion of historicity is relevant in various ways: with regard to the historicity of the particular intermedial configuration itself, with regard to the (technical) development of the media in question, with regard to the historically changing conceptions of art and media on the part of the media's recipients and users, and finally with regard to the functionalization of intermedial strategies within a given media product.<sup>11</sup>

If we consider the history of film, its beginning as silent movie in black and white, its further development to sound and color films and finally to animated movies, 3D and dolby digital, it becomes very clear how dramatically this medium changed over the last century. But not only the properties and the technical tools of the medium film have progressed. Our habits of consuming movies have changed as well, from public movie theatres to TV sets at home and online video data. As André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion point out, “a good understanding of a medium [...] entails understanding its relationship to other me-

<sup>8</sup> Cf. RAJEWSKY 2014: 198.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. HELLER 1986: 279–280.

<sup>10</sup> RAJEWSKY 2005: 51.

<sup>11</sup> RAJEWSKY 2005: 50–51.

dia”<sup>12</sup>. Especially when dealing with film, a comparative look at the older but equally narrative medium of literary texts enables us to identify various cultural practices of storytelling and sheds light on the functions of these media and their interdependence. It can be assumed that the relationship of text and film in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s differs decidedly from the interactions of these two media in the Postwar era and even more in post-modern literature and film production at the turn of the millennium. The study of all these various phenomena regarding text and film in interaction represents (or remains) a very comprehensive and promising project in the field of Japanese film, literature and media studies in the future.

The selected papers of this section are the result of a first attempt to bring together an international group of researchers who share an interest in text and film studies in order to intensify joint research on these medial interactions. As organizers of the conference in Berlin, we would like to express our deepest thanks and appreciation to all our participants, especially to the submitters of these five papers. We are proud to present this first group of articles of this fruitful scholarly dialogue and hope that readers will feel inspired and motivated to conduct intermedial or transmedial research in the vibrant interrelations of text and film.

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