

## For the Eyes Only: The Sensory Politics of Japanese Modernism

Irena Hayter (Leeds)

### Abstract

Japan's modernization entailed, amongst other things, a new distribution of the sensible and the privileging of visuality by the state's regimes of power and knowledge. Larger historical and technological forces demanded the specialization and commodification of the senses: photography and film froze sight and detached it from the totality of experience, while the radio, the phonograph and the telephone separated hearing from seeing.

It is tempting to see literature and especially the modernist movement of Yokomitsu Riichi, Kawabata Yasunari and Kataoka Teppeï from the 1920s as a site of resistance against these historical processes and the gradual specularization of experience: after all, they called themselves "shinkankaku-ha", "New Perceptionists". Close readings of their fictional and critical texts, however, reveal a much more ambiguous stance. *Kankaku* ("sensation", "perception", "sense impression") emerges as purified from the fleshy materiality of the body and reduced to the visual only. Regardless of whether they wrote on literature or on film, the modernists emphasized a new sensation that was free from the mediations of the writer's psyche, in the case of literature, and purged from intertitles and the narration of the *benshi*, as far as cinema was concerned. Their ideas about sensation and perception resonated with the so-called "pure film movement" (*jun'eigageki undō*) from the 1910s and with later debates on "absolute cinema" (*zettai eiga*), which argued for a disembodied, intensely absorbed spectatorship that focused on the visual. The fragmented syntax, distorted temporalities and deinteriorized characters of Kawabata and Yokomitsu owe a lot to technologized visuality. This alienation of the self and its split into pure consciousness and objectified body, motifs that we find in both writers, could be ideologically problematic.

In the cultural histories of modern Japan, the 1923 Tōkyō earthquake is always seen as a point of rupture; a figure for radical urban, social and cultural change. The appearance of the journal *Bungei jidai* ("Literary Age") in October 1924 stands for the waning of literary naturalism and the birth of a new literature.<sup>1</sup> The first issue carried work by young writers

---

The author wishes to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments. Research for this project was supported by grants from The Japan Foundation, The Japan Foundation Endowment Committee and The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation. Some sections

like Kawabata Yasunari (1898–1972), Yokomitsu Riichi (1898–1947) and Kataoka Teppei (1894–1944), who experimented with startling shifts of perspective and endowed mundane objects with life, completely indifferent to the divisions between organic and inorganic, subject and object. The critic Chiba Kameo (1878-1935) welcomed them enthusiastically and called them “shinkankaku-ha”, “New Perceptionists”. The response of the *bundan* (“literary establishment”) as a whole, however, was outright hostile. Prominent critics dismissed “New Perceptionism” as modish-sounding and vaguely decadent. But the term was eagerly taken up by the newspapers, despite the initial misgivings of the writers themselves. Yokomitsu, for example, was uncomfortable with a label thought up by an outsider; at the same time he felt compelled to explain this potent, but ambiguous slogan of a name.<sup>2</sup> Some literary historians have seen the name as arbitrary: an attempt to impart some sort of identity to a gathering of heterogeneous talents and sensibilities united only in their opposition to the older naturalism and to the proletarian literary movement that was gathering momentum at the time.<sup>3</sup>

The heated exchanges between the *Bungei jidai* writers and their critics are preoccupied with attempts to define and philosophically anchor the meanings of *kankaku* (“sensation”, “new sensation” and “perception” in general). This essay will argue that far from being arbitrary, the concern with perception is deeply motivated, in a way symptomatic of the technological and cultural moment of 1920s Japan. As Jonathan Crary argues in his transdisciplinary studies of the historical constitution of perception and the relationships between visual technologies and modern subjectivity, the dynamic logic of capital undermines any stable and enduring structure of perception.<sup>4</sup> In Japan the interwar years represent a particularly intense moment in these processes. The appearance of *Bungei jidai* and the controversy around it happened at a time of intense visual modernization and reorganization of sensory experience. My essay will focus on perception and the senses in some key texts of New Perceptionism: the editorial statement in the inaugural issue of *Bungei jidai* and other important theoretical pieces on both literature and film, as well as some of Kawabata’s early *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories* (*tanagokoro no shōsetsu*) from 1923–1925 and Yokomitsu’s novel *Shanghai* (1928–1932).

---

of the textual analysis of Kawabata’s and Yokomitsu’s works have been published under a different title in *positions: asia critique* (25:2), 2017, by Duke University Press.

<sup>1</sup> In his literary memoir *Shōwa bungaku seisuishī* (1952; “The Rise and Fall of Shōwa Literature”), Takami Jun describes the excitement of the literary youth when *Bungei jidai* appeared: “Our eyes were shining when we bought the inaugural issue [...]. I opened it straight after I left the bookshop and began to read whilst still walking. Here was the literature we, the young generation, had been passionately seeking; the literature we were hungry for” (TAKAMI 1967: 24). All translations from the Japanese in the main text and in the footnotes are mine, if not stated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> TOEDA 2002: 123.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, ODAGIRI 1975: 347 and ISOGAI 1967: 54.

<sup>4</sup> CRARY 1995: 47.

The aim is to grasp the sensory politics of these texts in an attempt to elucidate how literary modernism related to the technologized viscosity of cinema.

The essay follows earlier work by Seiji Mizuta Lippit (2002), William Gardner (2006) and Gregory Golley (2008) that situated 1920s Japanese literary modernisms in their cultural, political and technological contexts, instead of discussing them within a framework of influence and dismissing them as secondary gestures, as previous scholarship had often done. Japanese writers, artists and intellectuals were certainly aware of Western modernist and avant-garde movements.<sup>5</sup> However, we should be wary of the trope of “influence”: influence is always linear and one-directional, with the West as the sole origin of modernity and modernism; it implies mimicry and colonial inauthenticity. As a concept it cannot do justice to the multiplicity and diversity of cultural flows and appropriations that we find in 1920s Japan. It cannot capture the active agency involved in interpreting, re-casting, citing and even parodying Western works. Rather, like William Gardner, we should be thinking of practices of flexible and strategic citation that were employed by writers and artists for their own purposes, as interventions in their own cultural and (geo-)political context that was marked by the presence of the hegemonic West as well as Japan’s own colonial adventures.<sup>6</sup>

### Modernity, Perception, Visuality

The upheavals of modernity always meant a gradual tearing of older perceptual formations and a new distribution of the sensible. The very idea of separating the senses and thinking them as discrete entities in shifting hierarchies implies modern analytical thinking, very different from that primordial connection between self and world that the sensorium supposedly represents. The Western philosophical tradition denigrated touch and taste, because they necessitated contact and bodily engagement. Edmund Burke, for example, excluded them from the romantic sublime because the sublime necessitated distance. Smell was also considered too primal and too feminine. While hearing can also imply distance, it is more pervasive and penetrating, more proximate and suggestive than sight. Sight, on the other hand, *demand*s distance; it can analyze and measure, it is objectifying and judgemental. The perceptual field of modernity is therefore “fundamentally nonreflexive, visual and quantitative”, the domain of the mechanical sciences and the logic of capitalism that reduces everything to monetary value and exchange, as Donald Lowe

<sup>5</sup> For accounts of the reception of Western avant-garde movements in Japan see CHIBA 1978: 13–14 and SAITŌ and KAGAMI 1987. In the case of the *Bungei jidai* writers, the publisher of their journal, Kinseidō, also produced a series of translations of German expressionist drama that included works by Georg Kaiser and Reinhard Goering, as well as Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R.* (SAITO and KAGAMI 1987: 4–5).

<sup>6</sup> See GARDNER 2006: 47–8.

describes it in his ground-breaking reconceptualization of Western intellectual history, *History of Bourgeois Perception* (1982).<sup>7</sup> Reflexivity for Lowe means “conscious[ness] of the interacting, interdependent relationship between self and world”.<sup>8</sup> The modern visual regime, exemplified by Alberti’s perspective and Cartesian dualism, posits an observer who is not an embodied subject, but a disincarnate eye/I, occupying a fixed and static viewing position. These perceptual divisions engender the other divides that are central to Western modernity: between mind and matter, subject and object, humanity and nature. Lowe’s ideas about the historical shifts in perception and the bourgeois compartmentalization of embodied life under the effects of industrialized modernity, positivist philosophy and the mechanical sciences, can be traced back to the early Marx: “The forming of the five senses”, Marx asserts, “is a labour of the entire history of mankind down to the present”.<sup>9</sup> Other scholars have brought in some nuance and complexity to the argument: Martin Jay, for examples, writes about plural “scopic regimes of modernity” and traces tensions between Cartesian visuality and other, alternative modes.<sup>10</sup>

The epistemological shocks of Japan’s aggressive modernization extended also to the field of perception. The ideology of the Meiji state emphasized utilitarian knowledge and moral training and discouraged the indulgence of the more corporeal senses. The version of Western science imported during the Meiji era and internalized through school education and university study was emphatically positivist, cut off from its rich roots in Pythagoras and Newton.<sup>11</sup> Visuality was privileged by the state’s regimes of power and knowledge. Under the influence of the work of scientists such as Hermann Helmholtz and Wilhelm Wundt, in Japan as well sensuous experience was carved into discrete objects of scientific study that were assigned to disciplines such as physics and experimental psychology. Motora Yūjirō (1858-1912), the pioneer of experimental psychology in Japan who established it as an academic field, regarded vision and hearing as superior. Touch, smell and taste, on the other hand, were low in his epistemological hierarchy, because their representations were incomplete and diffuse.<sup>12</sup>

The academic partitioning of the senses paralleled other perceptual changes brought about by industrialization, urbanization and the state-orchestrated movements for the rationalization of everyday life, especially in the years after the 1923 Tōkyō earthquake. The earthquake sped up the transformation of Tōkyō from a historical city into a functionally planned modern metropolis dominated by the visual register, with wider

---

<sup>7</sup> LOWE 1982: 6, 13.

<sup>8</sup> LOWE 1982: 162.

<sup>9</sup> MARX 1978: 89.

<sup>10</sup> See JAY 1988.

<sup>11</sup> ICHIYANAGI 1994: 85.

<sup>12</sup> MOTORA 1907: 129–137.

streets and open vistas. The shift in urban entertainment from Asakusa to Ginza also implied a new perceptual relationship to the city. Asakusa's traditional *misemono* side shows retained something tactile and corporeal; it was all about being amongst people and jostling in crowds. In the first decades after its arrival in Japan, the cinema was often associated with the *misemono*, which modernizing discourses saw as outdated and unhygienic. Watching a film was a raucous and distracted affair, an embodied experience that did not privilege the visual: there were the famous *benshi* narrators, the music band, the food sellers, and the waitresses serving beer. There was eating, talking, shouting at familiar actors on screen, even flirting: a contemporary observer wrote about the "fallen women" (*daraku shita onna*) (maids, bar waitresses, low-grade geisha, nannies) who went to the pictures to chat up men, and the students, idlers and gamblers who were there to pick up women.<sup>13</sup> Spectatorship became more settled and disciplined after the late 1910s, when regulations concerning film exhibition were introduced. The audience was segregated along the lines of gender and age – there were separate areas for men, women and children. On the other hand, highbrow critical discourses argued for the modernization of Japanese film and its purification as an art form and called for the removal of the *benshi*. They demanded that films tell their stories with intertitles and through properly filmic techniques such as parallel editing and variations in camera distance and angle. The ideal of the "pure film movement" (*jun'eigageki undō*) in the late 1910s was a disembodied, intensely absorbed spectatorship that focused on the visual. After the earthquake, new cinemas with functional modern designs appeared in new urban centers such as Shinjuku and Ginza. Ginza, with its department stores, show windows and neon lights was the space where the spectacle of modern life was unfolding; its dynamic, unlike that of Asakusa, was largely visual.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1920s, *pure film* and the emerging mode of absorbed spectatorship remained largely a discourse; in reality, the institution of the *benshi* persisted well into the 1930s, after the introduction of the talkie. Even as a discourse, however, it was a potent manifestation of the larger historical forces that further separated the senses and amplified certain single sensory pathways. The senses were to be managed by different media and included in capitalist circulation and exchange. If cinema was becoming an intensely visual experience, then the telephone, the phonograph and the radio, on the other hand, were working to detach hearing from seeing. I do not mean to affirm a certain technological determinism here, but to emphasize the forces of specialization and abstraction. The film camera was an *agent* of perceptual transformation, not a cause. It *validated* the perceptual dislocations of modernity: the Taylorization of labor and time against lived temporality and the organic body, the industrial and urban environments that

---

<sup>13</sup> See KITADA 2004: 213.

<sup>14</sup> See YOSHIMI 2008: 228–253.

assaulted the senses. It is important to historicize cinema in 1920s Japan as this was the time when different discourses were trying to define what the cinema was.<sup>15</sup> Rather than see it as a fully formed, self-evident and distinctive medium or art form, it might be more productive to think of it as an element of the mobile spectacle of modernity that also included railway stations, exhibition halls and department stores: all these places encouraged a mobilized gaze, real or imaginary, that created new, montage-like perceptual connections.

How did Japanese cultural producers think these perceptual transformations? In 1919 the respected journal *Chūō kōron* ("Central Review") asked prominent writers, artists and critics for their thoughts on the motorcar, the moving pictures and the café: proof, if one were ever needed, that the cinema indeed was not thought in isolation, but within the new urban culture. The novelist Tanaka Jun (1890–1966) wrote that life was becoming more disjointed in both form and spirit; the cars, the cinemas and the cafés were the modern institutions of pleasure and pleasure itself was becoming technologized and fragmented.<sup>16</sup> In the view of another writer, Nagata Mikihiro (1887–1964), busy urban people could no longer watch the long and slow-moving kabuki plays, dense with traditional elements; instead they sought "the condensed diagram of life that is film".<sup>17</sup> Rather surprisingly, some contributors expressed an intense, almost visceral dislike for the *benshi*. The painter Ishii Hakutei (1882–1958) insisted that the cinema needed to be cleansed of the *benshi*, and the sooner, the better.<sup>18</sup> The writer Satō Haruo (1892–1964) agreed: regardless of how good they were, the *benshi* were superfluous and unpleasant. Satō Haruo stressed that he actually liked the absence of the voices and sounds of everyday life: this absence brought a certain special flavor to silent film. The experience of watching a film for him meant being in a crowd of people, but still retaining one's solitude. The feeling of a familiar actor appearing on screen, on the other hand, was for him like an encounter with a close friend.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, cinema had to be for the eyes only, purified from the contamination of other sensory experiences. Satō Haruo makes it clear that the visual intensity of film originates in sensory divisions. Paradoxically, this perceptual dismemberment makes the distance between the spectator and the world on screen evaporate and arouses feelings of intimate proximity to the star. The fragmentation of experience seems to go hand in hand with artificial intimacies, with new affective unities.

---

<sup>15</sup> See GEROW 2010.

<sup>16</sup> YANAGISAWA *et al.* 1919: 78.

<sup>17</sup> YANAGISAWA *et al.* 1919: 89.

<sup>18</sup> YANAGISAWA *et al.* 1919: 83.

<sup>19</sup> YANAGISAWA *et al.* 1919: 76.

## The Controversy around New Perceptionism

How did the non-visual arts react to this partitioning of the senses and hegemony of the eye? It would be tempting to see literature and especially the modernist movement of Yokomitsu, Kawabata and Kataoka as a site of resistance against the gradual specularization of experience: after all, New Perceptionism seems to imply a focus on the senses. The first issue of *Bungei jidai* carried a collective editorial statement in which the young writers announced their break with literary naturalism in a language libidinally invested in the new: the statement is titled “New Life and New Literary Arts” (*Atarashii seikatsu to atarashii bungei*). Kawabata declared their resolve to create new literature and emphasized the unity of art and life.<sup>20</sup> The other contributions echo this call for regeneration through literature. The young writers did not actually welcome unequivocally the new and the modern; on the contrary, in this text modernity is often figured negatively and in purely biological images, as sickness and decadence. There is criticism of Western materialism and a call to the Japanese people to rediscover their spirituality. The modern condition is diagnosed as existential homelessness, as exhaustion of body and spirit. Nakagawa Yoichi’s (1897–1994) contribution is structured around the metaphors of sickness and health and the motif of decadence.<sup>21</sup> There is hope in literature: it is compared to an open wound from which the sick tissue has been excised.

Nakagawa’s nuanced optimism is in sharp contrast to Kataoka Teppei’s negative views. For Kataoka, culture and civilization are unavoidably heading for destruction; today’s decadence comes after two millennia of historical necessity. His unease is revealed to be about class and gender: the threat of class struggle, the uncoupling of sexuality from the consciousness of sin. In the 1920s especially, capitalist modernity in Japan brought about dramatic reconfigurations of gender and sexuality and Teppei’s anxieties are not difficult to understand, but at times the tone becomes openly misogynist: birth control, he writes, “can be called a movement to expel maternal women and increase the number of women of the prostitute type (*shōgatafu*)”. Modern people have abandoned the spiritual communion with God, Kataoka laments; “they live only with sensations and nerves, the organs of pleasure”.<sup>22</sup>

In his article on the birth of New Perceptionism, Chiba Kameo describes the contemporary literary field as a conflict between “pure realists” (*jun genjitsuha*) and modernists, the latter focusing their efforts on technique and artifice. The pure realists stand on the pinnacle of a visual field and from this vantage point they aim to penetrate all surfaces of life and express them in concrete form. The *Bungei jidai* writers, in contrast, peep into existence as if through a keyhole, using symbol and delicate allusion. The young

<sup>20</sup> KAWABATA *et al.* 1973 [1924]: 423

<sup>21</sup> KAWABATA *et al.* 1973 [1924]: 423.

<sup>22</sup> KAWABATA *et al.* 1973 [1924]: 427.

writers want to “extract the sensations of the moment”; they are “most sensitive to mood, emotions, nerves, feelings”.<sup>23</sup> Chiba admires the freshness of their perception, the vividness of their leaps. But he also warns that “perception is nothing more than one of the human functions; there is the danger that the intoxication with sensation will turn into pure play, becoming autonomous from the life force of the whole (*zentai no seimeiryoku*)”.<sup>24</sup> It is notable here that Chiba conceives of literary method through visual metaphors: he associates realism with a panoptic gaze that objectifies and dissects, while the more restricted viewpoint of the modernists is compared to peeping.

Chiba's article was followed by some heated exchanges between the young writers and more established literary figures. In an essay in the December 1924 issue of *Bungei jidai*, Kataoka Teppei takes Chiba's New Perceptionism and makes it his own in an attempt to define a theoretical stance and a method. His focus is on the beginning of Yokomitsu Riichi's story “Heads and Bellies” (*Atama narabi ni hara*, 1924): “It was high noon. The crowded express train ran at full speed. The small stations by the tracks were ignored like stones”.<sup>25</sup> Here, according to Kataoka, the author was not content with simply stating the facts: he willed to convey the relationship between the express train, the small stations and his own perception: “The writer's life breathing in the material object: the most direct and realistic power source for this intervention is sensation”.<sup>26</sup> If the author's psyche and mind mediate between him and the express train, this would be a secondary experience, coming *after* the sensation. In the passage from Yokomitsu above, the author's (and the reader's) sensation lives, merging with the thing. Here we find a vitalist fusion between life and technology (the train is humanized), between reader, writer and depicted object. Kataoka insists on an immediacy that is stripped of phenomenological hierarchies of sensing, feeling, emotion and expression and cut off from the psyche and the truth of the body; camera-like: an idea that will be taken up by Kawabata and Yokomitsu as well.

Kataoka's close-up on the three opening sentences of the story is typical of the radically fragmented aesthetics of the group. Indeed, the critics Hirotsu Kazuo (1891-1968) and Ikuta Chōkō (1882–1936) took him to task for isolating this passage and putting it under a magnifying glass, as it were. For Hirotsu, Kataoka's elevation of heightened sense experience is sick; what is needed instead is a healthier perception, one that can grasp the spirit of the age. While in the past art used to have relative autonomy from “the stench of the rotting flesh of an overripe capitalism”, now it is permeated by it.<sup>27</sup> It is quite striking that Hirotsu's language here is one of smells and textures, in contrast to the rather abstract ideas of sense and sensation of the *Bungei jidai* writers. Hirotsu is aware of the

<sup>23</sup> CHIBA 1956 [1924]: 194.

<sup>24</sup> CHIBA 1956 [1924]: 195.

<sup>25</sup> KATAOKA 1956a [1924]: 198.

<sup>26</sup> KATAOKA 1956a [1924]: 198.

<sup>27</sup> HIROTSU 1956 [1924]: 242.

historical and social embeddedness of art, but he also remains within the rhetoric of sickness and health, decay and renewal.

This rhetoric reveals the hybrid and contradictory effects of modernity. Modernity does involve the forces of rationalization and bureaucratization, but it is also profoundly uprooting: it destabilizes traditional economic and social forms. It involves what Jonathan Crary, *pace* Deleuze and Guattari, calls the deterritorialization of bodies, objects and relations: making them abstract and interchangeable, before fixing them into new hierarchies, orders and institutions.<sup>28</sup> From the position of established social norms, especially the rigidly gendered divisions of public and private promoted by the Japanese state, modernity could mean disorder, hedonism, androgyny. Kataoka's focus on birth control is symptomatic because decadence is often associated with excessive femininity; female sexuality out of control can threaten rationality. The literary suprematism passionately advocated by the young writers is a typical modernist defense in which the pure work of art would provide transcendence and redemption from a degraded reality.<sup>29</sup>

Ironically, however, although in their editorial statement the young writers called for regeneration against the decadence of modernity, their opponents would always associate them with an unhealthy hedonism. An interesting moment in the critique of Ikuta Chōkō is his claim that such writing achieves its effects not through vision and hearing, the superior sense of classical aesthetics, but through the lower senses. For him the singular pursuit of sensuous joy has a disjunctive effect on experience – it reduces human beings to biology.<sup>30</sup> Kataoka Teppei, in a response to Ikuta, rejected the group's putative pan-Perceptionism (*hankankakushugi*): "It is true that for us sensations are more important than for previous literary movements, but we have not said that everything in life is sensation. We believe, however, that the liberation of the senses is the first step towards a new life".<sup>31</sup>

### Kawabata's Sensuous Immediacies

In his essay *Shinshin sakka no shinkeikō kaisetsu* ("New Tendencies in the Emerging Writers"; hereafter "New Tendencies"), published in January 1925, Kawabata juxtaposes the radical experimentation of the *Bungei jidai* group with the methods of realism, following the line of argument established in the earlier interventions of Chiba Kameo and Kataoka Teppei. "Sugar is sweet", Kawabata writes, "in the literature we have, sweetness is taken from the senses to the head, and it is the head that writes 'sweet'. Now, the aim is to write 'sweet' with your tongue".<sup>32</sup> It is not difficult to see here why the New Perceptionists

<sup>28</sup> See CRARY 1992: 10n8.

<sup>29</sup> For a development of this argument see HAYTER 2014.

<sup>30</sup> IKUTA 1956 [1925]: 221.

<sup>31</sup> KATAOKA 1956b [1925]: 242.

<sup>32</sup> KAWABATA 1982a [1925]: 170.

were criticized for their “sensualism” and de-intellectualization, which Ikuta Chōkō regarded as regressive and almost animalistic. The image of close contact between the sugar and the tongue is vaguely erotic in its immediacy. Interestingly, it privileges that quintessentially primal sense, taste, invoking a mode of sensory cognition.

The essay is an ambitious attempt to articulate not only a literary approach, but also a theory of knowledge (*ninshikiron*). In Kawabata’s example, a lily can be perceived, known and depicted differently: in literary naturalism or what he calls “old objectivism”, *furui kyakanshugi*, the lily is separate from the writing subject. New Perceptionism adopts a different position: “I am the lily. The lily is inside me. These two are ultimately the same thing”.<sup>33</sup>

There is a striking disregard for Cartesian distinctions in this epistemology. These ideas of immediacy are also present in an essay published five months later, in which Kawabata explains his approach in the *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories*, short elliptical pieces close to poems in prose. Rejecting a removed intellectualist stance which judges life through the operations of “wit, satire, irony, dissection, synthesis”, Kawabata writes, “I scoop life in my hands and this is how I comment on it [...]. I shorten even more the distance between life and the writer’s interpretation of it. I colour life with my interpretation; I assemble them together and treat them as one pattern”.<sup>34</sup>

It should be stressed, however, that in the actual stories this annihilation of distance and the affirmation of contagion and immediacy are achieved through devices typical for the European avant-garde cinema at the time: shifts of point of view, unstable subject positions, fragmented temporal and spatial patterns. There is a certain mobility and fluidity to the central narrative perspective, although this does not imply multiple points of view: on the contrary, the other characters can be very flattened. Thus mobile perspective can jump from a panoramic shot to a close-up in a free play of dimensions, loosened from specific time and space. The first piece in this cycle, *A Sunny Place*<sup>35</sup> (*Hinata*, 1923), performs some abrupt shifts in the first couple of sentences:

In the autumn of my twenty-fourth year, I met a certain girl at a seaside inn. It was the beginning of love.

With her head held high, the girl suddenly lifted her kimono sleeve and hid her face.  
(23)<sup>36</sup>

Here we have a leap, both in terms of temporality and from one type of narrative to another, from the abstract and condensed to the concrete. The story itself is centered on

<sup>33</sup> KAWABATA 1982a [1925]: 170.

<sup>34</sup> KAWABATA 1982b [1925]: 202.

<sup>35</sup> KAWABATA 1988: 3–4.

<sup>36</sup> Figures in brackets indicate page numbers in KAWABATA 1980.

the return of the past in the present. The narrator's habit of staring back at people, which makes the girl feel so awkward, comes from his orphaned childhood and the hours spent staring at his blind grandfather. Past and present can co-exist together, spatialized. Temporality can be annihilated and scenes can be frozen in still tableaux or, contrarily, time can proceed in jumps and jolts, as in *The Girl Who Approached the Fire*<sup>37</sup> (*Hi ni yuku kanojo*, 1924):

The lake looked small in the distance, the water shimmering. It had the colour of a decaying spring in an old garden on a moonlit evening.

The trees on the far bank of the lake were burning silently. The flames unfurled as I watched. It looked like a forest fire.

The fire engine, hurrying along the far bank like a toy, was reflected vividly in the surface of the water. The hill was black from the swarm of people endlessly climbing up [...].

A girl cut smoothly through the crowd and walked down the slope alone [...].

When I saw the girl heading directly towards the sea of fire, I could not bear it. (28).

The narrator talks to the girl, entering what had been previously described as a removed panoramic scene. After that, the perspective pulls back, in a camera-like movement, and the girl becomes again a black dot in the narrator's field of vision. Then comes the big reversal: he wakes up – the preceding scenes have been a dream. The story also presents one of the central figures in modernist writing: the divided self. Kawabata's narrator can smile bitterly at his naïve self: "Even as I sneered at this self, I secretly wanted to bring it to life" (29).

The ontological reversal between dream and reality – a prominent motif in European cinema at the time – also structures other stories from the same period such as *The Weaker Vessel*<sup>38</sup> (*Yowaki utsuwa*, 1924) and *A Saw and Childbirth*<sup>39</sup> (*Nokogiri to shussan*, 1924), both published a month before the launch of *Bungei jidai*. The title of the latter is a montage-like juxtaposition of the abstract (childbirth) and the stubbornly material (the saw). In *The Weaker Vessel*, the reversal is less abrupt because the dream is explicitly marked as such: "So this is the dream I had" (26), "I tried to interpret this dream" (27). The writing is emphatically paratactic rather than syntactic, no causal or temporal relationships are there to anchor it. In the dream a statue of the Buddhist deity Kannon, as tall as a girl of twelve, comes alive: "The Kannon's body was about to fall straight on me. The statue

<sup>37</sup> KAWABATA 1988: 7–8.

<sup>38</sup> KAWABATA 1988: 5–6.

<sup>39</sup> KAWABATA 1988: 9–11.

suddenly reached out with its long, full, white arm and embraced my neck. The sheer uncanniness of something inanimate coming to life and the cold feel of the porcelain against my skin made me jump” (26). The language oscillates between the literal and the figurative. The story does not unfold via the linear movement of plot, but through free association. The narrator tries to interpret his dream along Freud’s psychoanalytic method, through a verse from the Bible: “‘Give honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel’. These words from the Bible often came to my mind. I always associated the words ‘weaker vessel’ with a ceramic vessel. And with her” (27). The divisions between the inorganic and the animate are blurred. The statue *is* the girl, they are interchangeable. The story ends with the striking image of the girl gathering the shards of her own fall. This happens in dreams, but it is also a conscious gesture that empties out interiority, a larger reflex present in these stories.

In *A Saw and Childbirth*, the language itself is explicitly filmic: “What happened after that? The scene changed to my native village.” (30); “I continued my duel with the woman with the feeling that I was just watching distractedly a fight scene from a film” (31). This last sentence again draws on that central trope of modernist writing: the split self. What is notable here is that the alienation of the self is conceived in very visual terms: “Suddenly, I looked back over my shoulder and I saw myself in the middle of the garden, flashing a shiny sword and already fighting with the woman. I knew this was a dream, but the sight made my heart leap” (31).

The dream is about a duel with a woman; like many of Kawabata’s stories from the mid-1920s, the focus is on bodily interactions and physicality. The dialogue is very sparse, as if again deliberately refusing straightforward psychological interiority, that haloed trope of modern Japanese narrative. This can be seen as a return to the senses, especially since there are some striking sensory images interspersed through the stories: in *The Silverberry Thief*<sup>40</sup> (*Gumi nusutto*, 1925), for example, the sour coldness of the berry makes a woman think of her native village (105); a child walks, rolling a metal hoop that makes the sound of autumn (106). In *A Saw and Childbirth*, however, vision remains the dominant perceptual framework. “The smell of the surf was like green light” (32): this synesthetic image is again dominated by the visual.

### ***A Page of Madness***

Any discussion of Japanese modernism and the cinematic should mention *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta ippēji*; Kinugasa Teinosuke, 1926), the film in which Kawabata, Yokomitsu and Kataoka were actively involved and which announced itself as created by the “New Perceptionist Film Alliance” (*shinkankaku-ha eiga renmei*). Aaron Gerow has

---

<sup>40</sup> KAWABATA 1988: 45–48.

situated the film in the context of what is loosely described as French impressionist cinema and the elaborations of pure or absolute film (*junsui eiga*, *zettai eiga*). In 1925–26, film journals were dominated by rapturous reviews of Alexandre Volkoff's *Kean* and Jacques Catelain and Marcel L'Herbier's *La Galerie des monstres*. Early 1926 saw the Japanese release of another L'Herbier film, *L'Inhumaine*, and of Abel Gance's *La Roue*.<sup>41</sup> All of these featured dynamic cutting whose principle was rhythm rather than plot. A variety of camera techniques – lens distortions, overlaps, and especially flashbacks and point-of-view editing – were used to express inner psychological states, dreams and fleeting sensations. Together with Murnau's *Der letzte Mann* (released in Japan in 1926), which notably did not use intertitles, these films were often discussed in debates about cinematic essence. It was argued not only that cinema was primarily a visual medium that had to be returned to its origins, to itself, but also that it was a unique form of art that had to free itself from literature and drama and rely on purely cinematic devices. The most important among those was rhythm, in editing as well as in visual composition.

The writings of both Kawabata and Kataoka about *A Page of Madness* and about film in general resonate strikingly with these discourses of purification. In an essay from February 1925, Kawabata described “cinematic art” as equal to but distinctive from both drama and literature; reigning over a different realm. Openly hostile to Japanese cinema, Kawabata stated that simply filming a theatre performance and projecting it on screen was just a flawed imitation of stage drama. Film is conceived within a developmental, almost teleological narrative. There is a clear consciousness in the piece of high art and popular culture; Kawabata distinguishes between the pictures (*katsudō shashin*) and film (*eiga*) (albeit admitting then when in Tōkyō, he goes to the pictures almost every evening).<sup>42</sup>

Writing about the discussions with director Kinugasa in April 1926, Kawabata stresses that they intend to make not a literary film (*bungei eiga*), but a proper, film-like film, liberated from literariness. For Kawabata, cinema is radically different from literature because it affects perception directly; it can be regarded as the art of perception (*kankaku geijutsu*). The idea behind the “New Perceptionist Film Alliance” is to produce aesthetically superior films; their concern is artistic conscience rather than profit, exploration rather than spectacle.<sup>43</sup> There is again the modernist motif of redemptive, non-instrumental high art opposed to a degraded commercial culture, in which Kawabata includes Japanese

<sup>41</sup> GEROW 2008: 10.

<sup>42</sup> KAWABATA 1982c [1925]: 29–33. Kawabata is somewhat skeptical towards claims that identify popular culture with Americanism, “the enemy invading art”, but he does muse on its effects on both art and society. Like Kataoka, he brings up birth control, mentioning the prominent American activist Margaret Sanger (1879–1966), and wondering if it represents another instance of Americanism. Although the piece is titled *Nonkina kūso* (“Careless musings”), it is possible to detect an undercurrent of anxiety: about the advancement of science undermining traditional sexual roles; about population growth and the spread of socialism.

<sup>43</sup> KAWABATA 1982d [1926]: 511–513.

cinema. Each art form should achieve uniqueness, but Kawabata also asserts that the New Perceptionists' collaboration with Kinugasa will reinvigorate their literature cinematically.<sup>44</sup>

Around this time Kataoka also suggested that the direction in which film art should advance coincides in spirit with that of New Perceptionism. Most contemporary films, according to Kataoka, have abandoned the artistic and productive elements of cinema and have been defeated, in a depressingly trivial way, by a utilitarian theory of literature.<sup>45</sup> Writing about *A Page of Madness* before it opened, he insisted that viewers should not look for narrative and stated that the film was a work of art, indifferent to people who demanded plot.<sup>46</sup>

It is striking indeed how much *A Page of Madness* has in common with new perceptionist writing from that time, both fictional and critical. It is difficult to piece together, especially in the extant version, this story of a janitor in a mental hospital, his wife, who is a patient there, and their daughter. *A Page of Madness* exploits to the full the newly found abilities of the medium to fragment perceptual and ontological planes. The film flaunts almost perversely its indifference to linear time and spatial continuity through the rhythmic editing and the dizzying variety of camera techniques it employs. One of its famous moments is the superimposition, through double exposure, of a wedding car onto a funeral hearse. Like Kawabata's *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories* from that time, *A Page of Madness* features reversals between dream and reality, but it also goes further and blurs the distinctions between daydream and recollection. At times the film refuses the cinematic cues that demarcate subjective visions from objective reality and even implicates the viewer (through camera position and movement) into this radical ontological uncertainty, as Aaron Gerow has shown in his analysis of the dancer sequence from the beginning of the film.<sup>47</sup>

*A Page of Madness* played a role not only in the debates on cinematic essence, but also in discourses of sense purification in general. William Gardner has stressed the film's attention to the gaze and its reliance of optical effects: lens distortions, double and multiple exposures, jarring camera movements.<sup>48</sup> When it opened in September 1926, the film was shown with *benshi* narration but without intertitles. It was Yokomitsu who recommended removing the intertitles. The film critic Iwasaki Akira hailed it as "the first film-like film produced in Japan", closer to absolute film than *Der letzte Mann*, and predicted that from now on plot will not be a major concern for cinema; instead the focus will be on more intuitive things (*chokkantekina mono*).<sup>49</sup> Others were more ambivalent:

<sup>44</sup> KAWABATA 1982d [1926]: 512.

<sup>45</sup> KATAOKA 1926: 10–11.

<sup>46</sup> See KATAOKA 1926a: 31 and 1926b: 87.

<sup>47</sup> See GEROW 2008: 72–83.

<sup>48</sup> GARDNER 2004: 69.

<sup>49</sup> KINUGASA *et al.* 1926: 61.

the lack of plot could mean too much reliance on the *benshi*; too much literature was still left in the film; it differed too radically from mainstream Japanese films; it was just an extravagant game, a series of transient impressionistic scenes that didn't form a whole.<sup>50</sup> Most critics, however, situated *A Page of Madness* within the lineage of French impressionist films and recognized it as a groundbreaking achievement for the Japanese cinema.<sup>51</sup> Critics praised the makers for the courage to address it to viewers other than young boys and housemaids, different from the usual noisy and excited audience of Japanese film.<sup>52</sup> In other words, *A Page of Madness* demanded a mode of spectatorship that was disciplined, focused on the visual only, liberated from the body.

Kataoka Teppei defended robustly the decision not to use intertitles: films with intertitles were simply bad novels with moving illustrations. Cinema, according to Kataoka, had to break free from immature literature and from narrative in general; the age of narrative film was coming to an end.<sup>53</sup> This was, of course, a motif typical of the discourses on absolute cinema: "Oh film, may you escape from the shackles of narrative, from being a slave to literature!...", pleaded in 1925 the critic Okada Shinkichi, who introduced a lot of French impressionist cinema to Japan.<sup>54</sup> Kataoka stressed that film had to rely solely on "the mutual understanding that arises between the moving images and the sensation of watching them".<sup>55</sup> This emphasis on visual comprehension purged from both intertitles and *benshi* echoes Kataoka's own earlier ideas about the New Perception, also abstract and disembodied, and Kawabata's radically immediate perception.

### Yokomitsu Riichi and Technologized Visuality

Yokomitsu Riichi's essay *Shinkankakuron* ("Theory of the New Perception") was published in February 1925 and is conscious of its coming after Kawabata's 'New Tendencies'. In both texts questions of narrative form and perspective are elevated into larger epistemological problems. Both are concerned with the literary and both figure it in visual terms. There are also differences: the theoretical density and obscurity of Yokomitsu's text is often noted. The style is provocative, deliberately terse and unabashedly abstract. The tone becomes easier to understand if we see the essay as a response to the criticisms hurled at *Bungei jidai*. Yokomitsu's agenda is to give a certain philosophical clout to New Perceptionism and rescue from the associations with base sensuality. The essay shares with Kawabata's text a historical understanding of the shift of perception from objective to subjective, an

<sup>50</sup> See KINUGASA *et al.* 1926: 60; FUJIMORI 1926: 15.

<sup>51</sup> See FUJIMORI 1926: 15; TATEISHI 1926: 43; MIYAMORI 1926: 55.

<sup>52</sup> MIYAMORI 1926: 55.

<sup>53</sup> KATAOKA 1926: 33.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in YAMAMOTO 1983: 151.

<sup>55</sup> KATAOKA 1926: 33.

emphasis on intuition (*chokkan*, literally “direct feeling”) and a belief in unmediated understanding. “Perception”, Yokomitsu writes, “is an intuitive explosion of subjectivity that rips off the external aspects of nature to give direct access to the thing itself”.<sup>56</sup> But while Kawabata seeks a form of cognition that would mystically transcend rationality, with Yokomitsu things are more complex: for him cognition is a synthesis of intellect (*gosei*) and affect (*kansei*). He stresses the rational in response to the claims that the *Bungei jidai* writers are concerned only with instinct. Sense impressions are received intuitively, but they need to be reworked by the intellect. “Without this work of the intellect, we remain at the level of animals”. He rejects the sensualisation of life (*seikatsu no kankakuka*) and calls for its intellectualization instead (*seikatsu no riseika*).<sup>57</sup>

For Yokomitsu, as for Kawabata, New Perceptionism is a revolution in *literary* form: “It is the lines of words on the page and the rhythm of poetry that incite this new perception”.<sup>58</sup> Inverted, made-strange perspectives; condensations, repetitions and reversals of the plot; a non-linear and three-dimensional cubist perception that aims for simultaneity of mental images: these are the techniques that for Yokomitsu unite the different European avant-gardes. He uses Kawabata’s *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories* as examples of such writing because they ignore progressive temporality for a more dynamic constructivist form. Yokomitsu also focuses on manipulations of narrative time and perspective and declares his admiration for Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s *In a Grove* (*Yabu no naka*, 1922; tr. 1952), in which a rape and a murder are narrated from seven different points of view without privileging any account as the truth.<sup>59</sup> It is remarkable that the devices awakening New Perception are in a way quite cinematic, similar the techniques of French impressionist film: rhythm instead of plot, distortions of temporality, shifts of point of view. In order to describe their effects, on the other hand, Yokomitsu refers to the visual modernisms (cubism, constructivism).

The senses, however, are strangely absent from the essay. Instincts are denounced as too primitive, while the reliance on the senses – here Yokomitsu is in accord with Ikuta Chōkō – is animalistic. The huge intellectual presence looming behind the essay seems to be that of Kant. Yokomitsu uses Kantian terms like *mono jitai*, the thing in itself and *shukan*, the Kantian epistemological subject. (The Japanese translation of Kant’s first Critique, *Critique of Pure Reason*, was published in 1921). In the first Critique, as Susan Buck-Morss has pointed out, the senses are the source of all cognition, but in the second Critique (*Critique of Practical Reason*) they play no role at all and in the third Critique (*Critique of [the Power of] Judgement*) the aesthetic judgement is robbed of the senses.<sup>60</sup> The moral

<sup>56</sup> YOKOMITSU 1982: 76.

<sup>57</sup> YOKOMITSU 1982: 78.

<sup>58</sup> YOKOMITSU 1982: 78.

<sup>59</sup> YOKOMITSU 1982: 79–80.

<sup>60</sup> BUCK-MORSS 1992: 9.

will is cleansed from the uncivilized residue of the senses, from messy entanglement in the world. Kant's aesthetic ideal is not the artist, who still works with representations, but the statesman and the general who shape reality itself or the warrior who ignores the signals of danger given by the senses.<sup>61</sup>

Yokomitsu's ideas about an abstract and disembodied "new perception" come across in his first novel *Shanghai*, a tale of expatriate experience in the eponymous city during the anti-colonial riots in May 1925 that employs cutting-edge new perceptionist techniques of disjointed sentences and shifts of perspective. The novel describes almost obsessively debris and decomposing organic matter, but odors and bodily sensations curiously do not affect the reader. There are hardly any references to how these may assault the senses of smell, touch or taste. The guiding perceptual mechanism of the work is vision. Yokomitsu's descriptions are overwhelmingly visual. "Chinese cabbages, mangos, candles, beggars": in this sentence, for example, the juxtaposition of objects detached from any natural orders or hierarchies recalls the non-selectivity of the camera.<sup>62</sup> Anthropocentrism is refused: the beggars are just another element in this montage. The camera-eye, like capitalism itself, equalizes what in essence is radically heterogeneous. Later in the novel, the protagonist Sanki would attempt to determine the position of his own heart "as if bringing a blurred film into focus".<sup>63</sup> Yokomitsu did not write on film as much as Kataoka and Kawabata, but in a rare contribution to a roundtable discussion in 1929, he described the cinema as "an assemblage of the movements of physical objects seen through the lens", stressing how much this perception differed from that of the human eye. He emphasized that this was an entirely new assemblage of sensations (*kansei no raretsu*) and that was why it was natural for theories of absolute film to appear.<sup>64</sup>

This cinematic perception is behind the shifts of point of view and the staccato style of his novel; behind the blurred dichotomy between life and technics, geology and flesh:

A crumbling brick neighborhood. In the narrow streets a crowd of Chinese men in black long-sleeved robes rhythmically rose and then stood still like seaweed on the bottom of the ocean. Beggars crouched on the cobbled street. From the shop counter above their heads hung fish bladders and the bodies of carp, blood dripping from them. In the fruit shop next door, piles of mangos and bananas spilled onto the pavement. Next to it was a pig butcher. Numerous skinned pigs hung by their hooves, forming a dark meat-collared cave. Deep inside this hollow, between the walls of densely packed pigs, the white face of a clock shone like an eye.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> BUCK-MORSS 1992: 9–10.

<sup>62</sup> YOKOMITSU 1981: 27.

<sup>63</sup> YOKOMITSU 1981: 174.

<sup>64</sup> YOKOMITSU *et al.* 1929: 134. See also TOEDA 1992.

<sup>65</sup> YOKOMITSU 1981: 7.

In an eloquent analysis of this passage, Gregory Golley has written: “[I]nert matter bleeds (even literally, in this scene), into the realm of human commerce, which, in turn, takes the appearance of a natural phenomenon”. While for him “the gratuitous precision [...] both repels and informs the reader”, I would argue that, on the contrary, it does not produce a strong affective response because it remains too *cinematic*, clearly an image.<sup>66</sup> The sheer number and uniformity of pigs suggest technology; in the mechanized environment of the slaughterhouse the organic morphs into the inorganic or the technologized. The next image compares the clock to an eye and the logic is reversed: a mass-produced mechanical object is endowed with life.

The disjunctive effects of industrialized modernity on human perception and subjectivity come across most strikingly in the scene where Sanki is thrown by a group of Chinese men in the river, landing in raw sewage:

Suddenly, Sanki became aware that his body had stopped moving and was holding on to the edge of a piece of wood [...]. He looked around and saw his body immersed up to his neck in the soft surface of the night soil. He tried to raise himself up [...]. He fell back in the night soil, his face turned up; closed his eyes and began to feel his head moving freely again. He followed the action of his own head, wondering how far it would move. Then he realized that his body, as if measuring its own specific gravity, was lying completely submerged in excrement, and grinned.<sup>67</sup>

Yokomitsu’s protagonist is so detached from his bodily sensations that he can laugh at the situation. Sanki does not recoil in primal horror at this immersion in the unclean. There are hardly any references to smell or texture. The description is emptied of affect. Sanki becomes aware that his body has stopped moving and that it clutches a piece of wood; the waste soaks it up to his neck; he feels his head moving and follows its motion. The split between Sanki’s consciousness (*kare*) and his objectified body (*jibun no karada* or *kare no karada*) is quite unsettling. Unlike the rioting bodies around him, at certain moments Sanki can be pure consciousness unencumbered by corporeality. Even his appearance is not described, despite the novel’s frequent shifts of point of view. In this passage sensation is raw and disarticulated, divorced from the totality of experience. Such a split might be common to the modern – and modernist – subject in general: witness this from Husserl’s *Ideen II*, originally published in 1913:

---

<sup>66</sup> GOLLEY 2008: 135. Cf. BUCK-MORSS 1994: 56–57: “Sitting, facing forward, in the darkened theatre, totally subjected to what [Valerii] Podoroga calls the ‘tearless eye of the camera’, the viewer is bombarded by physical and psychic shock, but feels no pain... In the cinema, we endure the most erotic provocations, the most brutal acts of violence, but we do nothing.”

<sup>67</sup> YOKOMITSU 1981: 232.

If I cut my finger with a knife, then a physical body is split by the driving into it of a wedge, the fluid contained in it trickles out, etc. Likewise, the physical thing, 'my Body', is heated and cooled through contact with hot or cold bodies [...]. and one can elicit noises from it by striking it.<sup>68</sup>

Here, as Susan Buck-Morss writes,

The separation of the elements of the synesthetic experience would have been inconceivable by Kant. Husserl's description is a technical observation in which the bodily experience is split from the cognitive one, and the experience of agency is split from both of these. An uncanny sense of self-alienation results from this perceptual splitting.<sup>69</sup>

The passage from *Shanghai* describes similar self-alienation brought about by the split between cognitive and perceptual experience. It is close to the idea of self-consciousness advanced by another contemporary of Yokomitsu's, the German writer Ernst Jünger (1895–1998), in a text from 1932. Technology for Jünger brings a second nature and a second consciousness that should not be confused with the self-reflexive stance of traditional psychology: "[T]his second, colder consciousness shows itself in the ever more sharply developed ability to see oneself as an object".<sup>70</sup> We encountered this motif with Kawabata as well, in the protagonist from "A Saw and Childbirth" who in his dream could see his second self, as if he was watching absent-mindedly a film. With both Kawabata and Yokomitsu, the extreme alienation of the self is rendered in visual terms, explicitly cinematic in Kawabata's case.

Earlier in Yokomitsu's novel, Sanki thinks of his body as a territory, the territory of Japan, and imagines it flowing out of his mother's flesh. When smell appears in the passage in which he is submerged in excrement, it is the smell of his village.<sup>71</sup> If the monad is now split into objectified body and alienated consciousness, what becomes important are aggregates bigger than the individual. Modern media technologies were indispensable for this dissolution of the ego into a bigger sphere of significance; as Buck-Morss has pointed out, "the mass as a coherent visual phenomenon can only inhabit the simulated, indefinite space of the cinema screen".<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> HUSSERL 1989: 168 quoted in BUCK-MORSS 1992: 30–31.

<sup>69</sup> BUCK-MORSS 1992: 31.

<sup>70</sup> JÜNGER 1987 [1932]: 207.

<sup>71</sup> YOKOMITSU 1981: 49, 174, 232.

<sup>72</sup> BUCK-MORSS 2002: 147.

## Conclusion

Close readings of the New Perceptionism debate reveal some deeper discursive unities behind the disagreements between the *Bungei jidai* writers and their critics. Both sides regard modernity as a social and cultural malaise. All bemoan the loss of spirituality and see sensuous experience as a regression to some sort of base corporeality. Sensuality is conflated with sexuality; the senses seem to represent a dangerous, feminized excess. It is symptomatic that both Kataoka and Kawabata bring in birth control and the potential release of female sexuality in essays that are otherwise focused on the modernist purification of the arts. Perhaps the controversy about the “new perception” can be understood as a symbolic response to the threats presented by the rioting bodies of women, workers and colonial subjects thronging the streets of imperial Japan in the 1920s. There is also a palpable urge to dissociate highbrow modernism from the embodied, noisy, messy delights of mass culture.

The new perception of Kataoka and Yokomitsu emerges as somehow purified from the fleshy materiality of the body, reduced to the visual only, camera-like. Both stress a unity with the object of perception. With Kawabata things are more complex: the visual is held in tension by more embodied modes of experience, as seen in his insistence on writing sugar with one’s tongue and in his synesthetic images. There are contradictions and ambivalences at the heart of the New Perceptionist project, but there also is a shared will to immediacy.

The unravelling of interiority, a motif present in the work of Kawabata and Yokomitsu, could free new immediacies and libidinal intensities, a pleasurable loss of self, but such states could be ideologically vulnerable: these destructured subjects could be manipulated into different political assemblages. Walter Benjamin was the thinker most sensitive to the contradictory effects of modern technologized visibility and the reorganization of perception. For Benjamin, the old structure of aesthetic contemplation was giving way to new visual experiences. Instead of distance, the cinema brought proximity and institutionalized perception in the form of shocks. Benjamin, as we know, had high hopes for the politically emancipatory effects of cinematic perception for a new subjectivity (not immersed, but distracted), especially in the work of the Soviet avant-garde. At the same time he was conscious of the disengaged, alienated stance from which humanity could watch its own destruction with aesthetic enjoyment.<sup>73</sup>

The cultural politics of the 1920s and 1930s in Japan are often read, rather predictably, as the anxieties of high literature menaced by the technologically enhanced visibility of photography and film. But perhaps we need to go beyond ideas of modernism that privilege the medium, demanding that each art strive towards its own essence and

---

<sup>73</sup> BENJAMIN 1999 [1936].

distinctiveness. We need to conceive of modernism more broadly and examine its relationships to all those historical and technological regimes that involved the specialization of the senses and the disciplining of bodies, relationships that include tension and resistance, but also alignment and complicity.

## References

### Abbreviations

|      |   |
|------|---|
| GNBR | <i>Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsōshi</i> 現代日本文学論争史. 3 vols. Tōkyō: Miraisha, 1956.                    |
| KYZ  | <i>Kawabata Yasunari zenshū</i> 川端康成全集. 35 vols. Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 1980–84.                      |
| KBHT | <i>Kindai bungaku hyōron taikai</i> 近代文学評論体系. 10 vols. Tōkyō: Kadokawa shoten, 1971–75.           |
| TYRZ | <i>Teihon Yokomitsu Riichi zenshū</i> 定本横光利一全集. 16 vols. Tōkyō: Kawade shobō shinssha, 1981–1983. |

### Primary sources

CHIBA, Kameo 千葉龜雄 (1956 [1924]): “Shinkankaku-ha no tanjō 新感覚派の誕生”. In: GNBR. Vol. 1: 193–196.

FUJIMORI, Seikichi 藤森成吉 (1926): “‘Kurutta ippēji’ o miru 「狂った一頁」を見る”. In: *Eiga jidai* 映画時代. Vol. 1, No. 3: 14–15.

HIROTSU, Kazuo 廣津和郎 (1956 [1924]): “Shinkankakushugi ni tsuite 新感覚主義について”. In: GNBR. Vol. 1: 202–207.

IKUTA, Chōkō 生田長江 (1956 [1925]): “Bundan no shinjidai ni atau 文壇の新時代に與ふ”. In: GNBR. Vol. 1: 214–222.

KATAOKA, Teppei 片岡鐵兵 (1926): “Furasshu bakku フラッシュ・バック”. In: *Engeki eiga* 演劇映画. Vol. 1, No. 4: 8–12.

KATAOKA, Teppei 片岡鐵兵 [1926a]: “Bundan hadōchō 文壇波動調”. In: *Bungei jidai*. Vol. 1, No. 4: 86–87.

KATAOKA, Teppei 片岡鐵兵 [1926b]: “‘Kurutta ippēji’ ni tsuite 「狂った一頁」について”. In: *Engeki eiga* 演劇映画. Vol. 1, No. 7: 30–34.

KATAOKA, Teppei 片岡鐵兵 (1956a [1924]): “Wakaki dokusha ni uttau 若き読者に訴ふ”. In: GNBR. Vol. 1: 197–201.

- KATAOKA, Teppei 片岡鐵兵 (1956b [1925]): “Shinkankaku-ha wa kaku shuchō su 新感覺派はかく主張す”. In: GNBR. Vol. 1: 241–246.
- KAWABATA, Yasunari 川端康成 (1980): KYZ. Vol. 3.
- KAWABATA, Yasunari 川端康成 *et al.* (1973 [1924]): “Atarashiki seikatsu to atarashiki bungei 新しき生活と新しき文藝”. In: KNBT. Vol. 6: 419–29.
- KAWABATA, Yasunari 川端康成 (1982a [1925]): “Shinshin sakka no shinkeikō kaisetsu 新進作家の新傾向解説”. In: KYZ vol. 30: 172–182.
- KAWABATA, Yasunari 川端康成 (1982b [1925]): “Tanpen shōsetsu no shinkeikō 短編小説の新傾向”. In: KYZ vol. 30: 198–203.
- KAWABATA, Yasunari 川端康成 (1982c [1925]): “Nonkina kūsō のんきな空想”. In: KYZ. Vol. 30: 29–36.
- KAWABATA, Yasunari 川端康成 (1982d [1926]): “Shinkankaku-ha eiga renmei ni tsuite 新感覺派映画連盟について”. In: KYZ. Vol. 32: 511–515.
- KAWABATA, Yasunari 川端康成 (1988): *Palm-of-the-Hand Stories. By Yasunari Kawabata.* Transl. Lane Dunlop and J. Martin Holman. San Francisco: North Point Press.
- KINUGASA, Teinosuke 衣笠貞之助 *et al.* (1926): “‘Kurutta ippēji’ gappyōkai sokkiroku 「狂った一頁」合評会速記録”. In: *Eiga jidai* 映画時代. Vol. 1, No. 2: 59–63.
- MIYAMORI, Kikujirō 宮森菊二郎 (1926): “‘Kurutta ippēji’ no chiiteki kachi 「狂った一頁」の地位的価値”. In: *Eiga ōrai* 映画往来. No. 24: 54–55.
- MOTORA, Yūjirō 元良勇次郎 (1907): *Shinrigaku kōyō* 心理学綱要. Tōkyō: Kōdōkan.
- TATEISHI, Seifū 立石成孚 (1926): “Watashi wa hajimete ‘Nihon eiga’ no yoi mono o mita 私は初めて「日本映画」の良いものを観た”. In: *Eiga ōrai* 映画往来. No. 23: 43–47.
- YANAGISAWA, Takeshi 柳澤健 *et al.* (1919): “Shinjidai ryūkō no shōchō to shite mitaru ‘jidōsha’ to ‘katsudō shashin’ to ‘kafē’ no inshō 新時代流行の象徴として観たる「自動車」と「活動寫眞」と「カフェー」の印象”. In: *Chūō kōron* 中央公論. Vol. 33, No. 10: 67–96.
- YOKOMITSU, Riichi 横光利一 *et al.* (1929): “Kakujin kakudai mandankai 各人各題漫談会”. In: *Shinchō* 新潮. Vol. 26, No. 5: 125–146.
- YOKOMITSU, RIICHI 横光利一 (1981): TYRZ. Vol. 3.
- YOKOMITSU, RIICHI 横光利一 (1982): “Shinkankakuron 新感覺論”. In: TYRZ. Vol. 13: 75–82.

## Secondary sources

- BENJAMIN, Walter (1999 [1936]): “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”. In: *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico: 211–244.
- BUCK-MORSS, Susan (1992): “Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin’s Artwork Essay Reconsidered”. In: *October* 62: 3–41.
- BUCK-MORSS, Susan (1994): “The Cinema Screen as Prosthesis of Perception: A Historical Account”. In: SEREMETAKIS, C. Nadia (ed.): *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity*. Chicago: Chicago University Press: 45–62.
- BUCK-MORSS, Susan (2002): *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- CHIBA, Sen’ichi 千葉宣一 (1978): *Gendai bungaku no hikaku bungakuteki kenkyū: modānizumu no shiteki dōtai* 現代日本文学の比較文学的研究: モダーニズムの史的動態. Tōkyō: Yagi shoten.

- CRARY, Jonathan (1992): *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- CRARY, Jonathan (1995): "Unbinding Vision: Manet and the Attentive Observer in the Late Nineteenth Century". In: CHARNEY, Leo and Vanessa SCHWARTZ (eds.): *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 46–71.
- GARDNER, William (2004): "New Perceptions: Kinugasa Teinosuke's Films and Japanese Modernism". In: *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 43, No. 3: 59–78.
- GARDNER, William (2006): *Advertising Tower: Japanese Modernism and Modernity in the 1920s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.
- GEROW, Aaron (2008): *A Page of Madness: Cinema and Modernity in 1920s Japan*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Japanese Studies.
- GEROW, Aaron (2010): *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation and Spectatorship 1895–1925*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- GOLLEY, Gregory (2008): *When Our Eyes No Longer See: Realism, Science and Ecology in Japanese Literary Modernism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- HAYTER, Irena (2014): "Ishikawa Jun, the Logic of the Gaze and the Bodies of Modernism". In: *Japanese Language and literature*. Vol. 48, No. 1: 129–149.
- HUSSERL, Edmund (1989): *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Vol. 1. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- ICHIYANAGI, Hirotaka 一柳広孝 (1994): "Kokkuri-san" to "senrigan": *Nihon kindai to shinreigaku* 「こっくりさん」と「千里眼」日本近代と心霊学. Tōkyō: Kōdansha sensho métier.
- ISOGAI, Hideo 磯貝英夫 (1967): "Modanizumu bungakuron no kiso: shinkankakuha o chūshin ni モダニズム文学論の基礎：新感覚派を中心に". In: *Nihon kindai bungaku* 日本近代文学. Vol. 7: 54–66.
- JAY, Martin (1988): "Scopic Regimes of Modernity". In: FOSTER, Hal (ed.): *Vision and Visuality*. New York: Bay Press: 3–23.
- JÜNGER, Ernst (1987 [1932]): "Photography and the 'Second Consciousness'". In: PHILLIPS, Christopher (ed.): *Photography in the Modern Era*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art: 207–210.
- KITADA, Akihiro 北田暁大 (2004). "'Kino gurāsu' no seijigaku: Nihon senzen eiga ni okerushintai, chi, kenryoku 〈キノ・グラス〉の政治学：日本戦前映画における身体・知・権力". In: *"Imi" e no aragai: mediēshon no bunka seijigaku* 「意味」への抗い：メディアエーションの文化政治学. Tōkyō: Serika shobō: 205–237.
- KRAUSS, Rosalind (1988): "The Impulse to See". In: FOSTER, Hal (ed.): *Vision and Visuality*. New York: Bay Press: 51–78.
- LOWE, Donald (1982): *History of Bourgeois Perception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- MARX, Karl (1978): "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844". In: TUCKER, Robert (ed.): *The Marx-Engels Reader*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 66–125.
- ODAGIRI, Hideo 小田切秀雄 (1975): *Gendai bungakushi* 現代文学史. Vol. 3. Tōkyō: Shūeisha.
- SAITŌ, Jōji 齋藤襄治, KAGAMI, Kunihiko 鏡味國彦 (1987): "Shōwa shoki no bundan to yōroppa no modanizumu bungaku: shinkanakuha kara shinshinrishugi bungaku e 昭和初期の文壇とヨーロッパのモダニズム文学：新感覚派から新心理主義文学へ". In: *Risshō daigaku jinbunkagaku kenkyū nenpō bessatsu* 立正大学人文科学研究所年報別冊. No. 6: 1–34.

- 
- TAKAMI, Jun 高見順 (1967): *Shōwa bungaku seisuishi* 昭和文学盛衰史. Tōkyō: Kadokawa bunko.
- TOEDA, Hirokazu 十重田裕一 (1992): “1930-nen zengo no Yokomitsu Riichi to eiga 1930 年前後の横光利一と映画”. In: *Nihon no bungaku* 日本の文学. Vol. 12: 163–183.
- TOEDA, Hirokazu 十重田裕一 (2002): “Shinkankakuha no hikari to kage 新感覚派の光と影”. In: *Bungaku* 文学. Vol. 3, No. 6: 123–132.
- YAMAMOTO, Kikuo 山本喜久男 (1983): *Nihon eiga ni okeru gaikoku eiga no eikyō: hikaku eigashi kenkyū* 日本映画における外国映画の研究：比較映画史研究. Tōkyō: Waseda daigaku shuppanbu.
- YOSHIMI, Shun'ya 吉見俊哉 (2008): *Toshi no dramaturugī* 都市のドラマトゥルギー. Tōkyō: Kawade bunko.