

The Cinema of Virtuality:  
The Untimely Avant-Garde of Matsumoto Toshio

by

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Abstract:

Scholarship on the avant-garde in Japanese cinema tends to focus on the 1960s. Many scholars believe that the avant-garde vanishes from Japanese cinema in the early 1970s. This study aims to disrupt such narratives with the example of filmmaker/theorist Matsumoto Toshio. Matsumoto is one of the key figures of the 1960s political avant-garde, and this study argues that his 1970s films should also be considered part of the avant-garde. Following Yuriko Furuhata who calls the avant-garde of the 1960s “the cinema of actuality,” this thesis calls the avant-garde of the 1970s “the cinema of virtuality.” The cinema of virtuality will be seen to emphasize a particular type of contiguity with the spectator. This strategy will be discussed in relation to four of Matsumoto’s short films: *Nishijin* (1961), *For the Damaged Right Eye* (1968), *Atman* (1975), and *Sway* (1985) and a brief discussion of *Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969).

### Acknowledgements:

In the classical world, artists often had their pupils do the actual work, while they took all the credit for the original idea. Working with Aboubakar Sanogo is almost the opposite. No words can express my gratitude towards his generous commitment of time and energy towards this project, and his nurturing open-mindedness to my more abstract ideas. Without his gentle criticisms, this thesis would be an infinitely obscure piece of writing. I must also give a sincere thank you to Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, who gave me a great surprise when—after I gave a presentation on Matsumoto in her class—she told me that she knew Toshio personally, and had just recently published an essay on his film *Nishijin*. She was also gracious enough to translate some of Matsumoto's films, which have no subtitles. I would also like to thank Marc Furstenau for some much needed guidance at the inception of this project, Ming Tiampo for an inspiring discussion on Japanese art, and Charles O'Brien for helping me compose the proposal which earned me a research grant. I should also thank my fellow graduate students Matthew Sanders, Evan Armstrong, and David Jackson, for their encouragement; my roommate Goran Bacic for repeatedly watching *Atman* with me; my girlfriend Kerianne Shepley for repeatedly watching *Atman* with me; and basically everyone I know for repeatedly watching *Atman* with me. And above all, I'd like to thank my mother Laurie Jaeger for reminding me every day for a year that I have a deadline coming up. (Note: my mother did not watch *Atman* with me).

### Note on the text:

All Japanese names follow East Asian naming conventions: surname first, given name second. Exceptions are made for writers who live outside of Japan and who write their own names following Western convention. All Japanese words appear in italics, except for proper names. All Japanese words appear without diacritical marks.

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Mutation of Europe after the war, mutation of an Americanized Japan, mutation of France in ‘68: it is not the cinema that turns away from politics, it becomes completely political, but in another way.  
—Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 19

## introduction: Two Cinemas?

This thesis investigates the cinema of Matsumoto Toshio, with an emphasis on the transition in his work from the 1960s to the 1970s. This transition is often seen in relation to a general “narrative of decline” occurring within the Japanese political avant-garde, itself in relation to the broader decline of leftist politics in Japan. Against this backdrop, Matsumoto’s 60s films are often characterized alongside the political avant-garde, while his 70s films are not. In contrast, this thesis argues that Matsumoto’s 70s films are not to be understood as apolitical, but as political in another way. Rather than focus on the politics of the object they depict, these films focus on the politics of subjectivity. This thesis will offer historical and theoretical foundations for this argument, and substantiate it with close readings of four of his films: *Nishijin* (1961), *For the Damaged Right Eye* (1968), *Atman* (1975), and *Sway* (1985), along with a brief discussion of *Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969).

Following Yuriko Furuhashi, who names the Japanese political avant-garde of the 60s “the cinema of actuality,” this thesis names the Japanese political avant-garde of the 70s “the cinema of virtuality.” This move no doubt amounts to a reframing of Furuhashi’s use of the word “actuality.” For her, actuality refers specifically to journalistic topicality, while, on the other hand, its contrast with “virtuality” invites a metaphysical connotation. The gambit of this reframing is to shift the discussion from one kind of temporality to another, with a commensurate shift from one kind of politics to another. For, as the first chapter of this thesis argues, the politics of virtuality is the politics of subjectivity.

In order to define the cinema of virtuality as a political avant-garde, this thesis contests the conclusion of Furuhashi’s book where she makes a theoretical distinction between the open image and the closed image. Using the term “contiguity” to refer to the

proximity of an image to the world, she claims that Matsumoto's 60s films are contiguous with contemporary reality, and are thus open, while his 70s films turn away from the present (2013, 197) and close upon themselves (2013, 199). Chapter one demonstrates that Furuhashi's notion of contiguity is deeply ambiguous, and two kinds of contiguity will be distinguished: one between the spectator and the reality depicted in the image, and the other between the image itself and the immediate reality surrounding its projection. While Matsumoto's post-1970 films may not depict a contemporary reality, they remain radically "open" towards their spectator, and this is the starting point for their politics of subjectivity. The cinema of virtuality's political strategy involves the transformation of subjectivity in the spectator outside of the image, rather than depicting political events inside of the image.

However, after a closer look at Matsumoto's films from the 60s, it is clear that the politics of subjectivity are already in place there. More specifically, these films combine both types of contiguity, and politics resides at both levels. Chapter two considers the politics of subjectivity in two of Matsumoto's 60s films in order to trace a continuity between the actual phase (60s) and the virtual phase (70s and on) in Matsumoto's output. Next, chapter three will demonstrate how exactly the cinema of virtuality is contiguous with the spectator. It will analyze two of Matsumoto's supposedly apolitical films of the 70s, showing how they challenge habituated modes of subjectivity in the spectator, and thus may be seen as political. In conclusion, this thesis will gesture towards other filmmakers who may also be included in the "cinema of virtuality."

To substantiate these claims, this introduction will first situate Matsumoto within a history of Japanese avant-garde and oppositional filmmaking, which was to some extent divided throughout the prewar period, only merging significantly in the late 1950s. On the

one side was a political documentary wing, and on the other a subjectivist fiction wing.<sup>1</sup> Although this difference cannot be reduced to the question of political engagement, the two wings remained largely divided in prewar Japan. The purpose of this history is to demonstrate that Matsumoto's project does not emerge *ex nihilo*, but that antecedents exist in Japanese cinema for the politicization of projection, as well as the politics of subjectivity.

The question of subjectivity has been central to Japanese cinema from its earliest days. Cinema arrived in Japan in 1896, shortly after the country had ended a two-century period of isolation and was rapidly "transforming its economic base and society into that of a major international power" (Standish 2006, 18). In other words, capitalism and cinema share an almost parallel history in Japan.<sup>2</sup> What this parallel history means for the current study is simply that the cinema was present at the very moment that a new social order was materializing, and, as Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano argues, cinema contributed to the actualization of a "modern Japanese subjectivity" (2008, 6) to go along with this new order.

Beginning in the mid-1910s, Japanese cinema was dominated by a small number of major studios who thus set the course for this "modern subjectivity." Some independent studios appeared in the 1910s and 1920s, including the Proletarian Film League of Japan (Prokino), which challenged the commercial direction that cinema was taking. Prokino was eventually outlawed by the government, but it remains the most significant example in prewar Japan of both anti-capitalist cinema, and the politicization of projection. For these reasons Prokino deserves a closer look.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the same gap Peter Wollen (1975) sees in European cinema between films that explore the signifier ("formalism"), and films that explore novel configurations of signifier-signified ("contentism"). He does not reduce their difference to the question of political engagement. See page 132.

<sup>2</sup> This is Eric Cazdyn's first proposition in "The Flash of Capital," where he writes: "Unlike the West, where capitalism proper is about two hundred years old and the history of film is only half that long, in Japan the two histories share about the same span of time" (2002, 2).

Abé Mark Nornes notes that Prokino emerged from an era marked by strikes on an unprecedented scale in Japanese history, concomitant with “a growing politicization of the working classes” (2003, 19). Prokino began in earnest when Sasa Genju filmed the 1927 May Day events, but their roots reach back to a theatre troupe known as Trunk Theatre. They were so named for their mobility: all props and costumes could fit into a trunk. This freed them to perform at strikes, in workplaces, and enter “the swirl of activity” (Nornes 2003, 20). Sasa was a member of the troupe, and he envisioned a role for cinema along similar lines.<sup>3</sup> This vision involved a proximity between the screen and the streets, by transforming screenings into political events. Roland Domenig highlights Prokino’s belief that “cinema must go to the people, and not the other way round” (2005, 7). Toward that end, they screened their films in workplaces and non-commercial venues. In 1930, the group planned their First Film Night. On the night of the event, the police would only allow 225 people enter the 450 seat theatre (2003, 36), but the screening was still a success:

The spectators laughed, cheered, and clapped throughout the screening. They jeered at police in the films as well as the ones lining the aisles of the hall. When the last film—*May Day*—played, the theater surged with energy as the spectators clapped and sang along with the music. Even after the lights went up, the audience demanded an encore of *May Day*. The end of the screening was not the end of the event. Audience members continued to sing as they filed out of the theater and poured onto the street. As they joined the less fortunate thousand outside [who were denied entrance by the police], their excitement was infectious, and the crowd spontaneously transformed into a demonstration that made its way through the streets of nearby Ginza. The police could only look on (Nornes 2003, 36).

Such events underscore how Prokino conceived the projection of a film as a catalyst for actual political activity. But Sasa’s vision of the proximity between screen and street was doubled by another proximity between the camera and the street. Nornes notes that

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<sup>3</sup> See Nornes (2003, 22-24) where he compares Sasa’s 1928 manifesto to Vertov’s writing. However, it also anticipates Third Cinema for opposing both commercial cinema and art cinema.

Prokino's films were mostly non-fiction, and shot on the 9.5mm Pathé Baby, which was mobile enough to capture the events on the street as they unfolded. Nornes writes that during its existence from 1927 until 1934, Prokino produced "eleven newsreels, nineteen films of incident reportage, twelve documentaries, two fiction films, two agitprop films, an animation film, and a film mixing animation and live action" (2003, 37). Sometimes Nornes even refers to these films as "documents" rather than "documentaries" (2003, 25).

In addition to the few animated films, there was at least one other exception to Prokino's realist aesthetic: Iwasaki Akira's avant-garde documentary, *Asphalt Road* (1930). Nornes describes how Iwasaki "gathered his images into a city symphony that emphasized the contradictions of the modern city..." and adds, "had it survived, it probably would be considered a landmark in Japanese avant-garde cinema" (2003, 42). However, Iwasaki was unsure of the value of his own film. Nornes quotes him as saying, "I aimed to make a film as a weapon of the proletariat, but ended up with a typical estrangement of technique and aim" (2003, 42).<sup>4</sup> Iwasaki's attitude towards his own film perhaps hints at the more general gap between Japan's political and artistic avant-gardes in this era.

Prokino's films do not appear to share the same formalist preoccupations of the European avant-gardes of the 20s. In other mediums (such as painting and poetry) there were significant avant-gardes in Japan, comparable to European Surrealism and Dada.<sup>5</sup> However, in prewar Japanese cinema, there is only one major (extant) example: *A Page of Madness* (1926), produced by the literary collective *Shinkankakuha* and directed by the

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<sup>4</sup> For Nornes, "The estrangement was more likely located between the film and its audience" (2003, 42), meaning, perhaps, that the screen did not depict the audience members themselves, as *May Day* had.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Sas, "Fault Lines" (1999) for a discussion of surrealism in prewar Japanese literature.

semi-independent Kinugasa Teinosuke.<sup>6</sup> *A Page of Madness* takes place in a mental asylum, and has received comparisons to German Expressionism, French Surrealism, and even Soviet Montage for its non-realist lightning, abstract sets, and ambiguous editing.<sup>7</sup> However, quite unlike the films of Prokino, which were often realist reports on protests and strikes, *A Page of Madness* contains no such “actual” political content.

Thus, there may appear to be a gap between the two avant-gardes in prewar Japanese cinema. But this apparent gap between Prokino and Kinogasa may be smaller than it first seems. First, Prokino owed its very existence to the donations and assistance from sympathetic professional filmmakers including Kinogasa himself.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, *Asphalt Road* may have been closer to Kinogasa’s project than to Prokino’s. Lastly, *A Page of Madness* can, in fact, be seen to have vaguely political aspirations.<sup>9</sup>

These aspirations become clearer when the film is put in conversation with the literary collective who produced the film, *Shinkankakuha* (or The School of New Perceptions). These writers challenged the conventions of the *Shishosetsu* (I-novel) writing style, which validated the subjective first-person. The rise of *Shishosetsu*, James Fuji writes, occurs in the middle of the Meiji Restoration, a time when “Japanese writers and critics eagerly accepted these realist-mimeticist conventions, which rely upon the notion of the individuated subject as the originary source of meaning in literature” (1993, 1). The individual was not only the first-person narrator, but also the source of its meaning. This embrace of the individual, Fuji notes, must be seen within the context of a “renewed social

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<sup>6</sup> Gerow writes: “[Kinugasa] got help from...a managing director at Shochiku...[who] had an empty studio on his hands, and he offered it to Kinugasa free of charge. Shochiku’s assistance did not stop there; it also invested financially in the project” (2008, 24).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Jasper Sharp (2002) makes all of these associations.

<sup>8</sup> Kinogasa gave Prokino both equipment and assistance. See Nornes (2003, 34-35).

<sup>9</sup> Gerow nicely outlines the potentials and pitfalls of political readings of *A Page of Madness* (2008, 84-99).

contest over the status of the subject in a society that had newly restored the emperor and urgently needed new social arrangements to secure and manage its populace” (1993, 16).

*Shinkankakuha* make their intervention in this context. Fuji notes that, in their time, *Shinkankakuha* were called “the literature of the end of capitalism” (1993, 80). Aaron Gerow describes how they aimed to “decenter the human subject and undermine the textual pretension toward a stable voice tied to the author” (2008, 14). This may seem like a contradictory project: at once stimulating subjectivity while decentering it. Seiji Lippit explains that *Shinkankakuha* “do indeed focus on the representation of sensation, but it is often a sense perception that is shifted away from human consciousness” (2002, 78). In this sense, *Shinkankakuha* can perhaps be seen as an intersubjective intervention: at once an emphasis on the subjective dimensions of reality, and a rejection the individual.<sup>10</sup> Thus, even without explicitly political topics, *Shinkankakuha*’s project can be seen as a politically motivated response to the new modern subjectivity of capitalism.<sup>11</sup>

*A Page of Madness* fits nicely into this conversation. The film leaps rapidly from scenes of reality to scenes of memory, dream, and fantasy, which cannot be easily assigned to a single character. What is decentered in *A Page of Madness* is the private individual, whose dreams seem to spill out onto reality. In this way, *A Page of Madness* might be seen to be a critique of the “modern Japanese subjectivity,” as a challenge to the spectator’s habits of perception, or, as Gerow describes *Shinkankakuha*, as a “response to the inherent alienation of an urban, capitalist society” (2008, 15).

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<sup>10</sup> Critic Sekii Mitsuo explained that in *Shinkankakuha* individuals “ceased to have distinct faces because, in consumerist society, humans were increasingly converted into mere commodities” (qtd. in Omori 2003, 38).

<sup>11</sup> Azusa Omura makes this clear in her essay “The Birth of *Shinkankakuha*” (2012) where she claims that *Shinkankakuha* wrote “in order to describe the reality of Capitalist society,” yet she also highlights how some critics believed that *Shinkankakuha* lacked social consciousness at the level of content.

However, this may not have been the dominant reading of the film at the time of its release.<sup>12</sup> The status of *A Page of Madness* as avant-garde must be understood as a result of its second life. The film was thought to be lost shortly after its release in 1926, and was only rediscovered in 1971, exposed to a young counter-culture who, in Scott Nygren's words, "refigured the 1900-1930 era as a period of radical potential never achieved" (2007, 42). This counter-culture was primed by student protests and the oppositional filmmaking of the 60s to see *A Page of Madness* as subversive and oppositional.

One thing that changed in Japanese cinema between the years 1926 and 1971 was that the two avant-gardes were no longer so divided. Indeed, one of the key figures working towards their union was none other than Matsumoto himself. This is true not only of Matsumoto's filmmaking, but also his film theory. Nornes sees Matsumoto's writing as a "turning point for documentary in Japan" (2002, 46). In 1957, he published his first essay, "On the Subject of the Filmmaker," which introduced the question of subjectivity into documentary discourse. Furuhashi describes Matsumoto's theory as a synthesis of "the documentary approach to the external social reality with the historical avant-garde—or more precisely, the surrealist—approach to the internal psychic reality" (2013, 29).

Because Matsumoto was one of the key figures uniting the two avant-gardes during the 60s, then the status of his work in the 70s carries implications that exceed him as an individual artist. If Matsumoto's political project can be seen to extend into the 70s, then this might be the first step towards rethinking the history of the political avant-garde in postwar Japanese cinema. Matsumoto's work can help answer the following question:

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<sup>12</sup> Aaron Gerow cites reviewers who did not see *A Page of Madness* as an avant-garde film. He argues that this is due to the *benshi*, who interpreted films for audiences, speaking on behalf of mute characters, thus overriding the shocking newness of the form, and by clearly distinguishing between reality and fantasy. While some critics in the 1920s saw the film as being too formalist, others saw the film as realist (2008, 58-61).

Does the merging of the two avant-gardes outlast the 60s in Japanese cinema? Before approaching this question, it is necessary to review the history of the political avant-garde up until 1970. This is a complex tale, with two different strands that eventually merge. The first strand follows the evolution of avant-garde documentary out of wartime propaganda. The second strand follows the evolution of the New Wave out of the major studios. In both cases, the avant-garde does not emerge out of an independent studio, as both Prokino and Kinugasa did, but from the mainstream and the commercial.

During wartime, government programs entailed a flow of propaganda. Every film screening was preceded by both a newsreel and a “culture film,” or *bunka eiga*. This was directly inspired by Nazi Germany’s film policy.<sup>13</sup> With the beginning of the US Occupation after Japan’s defeat in the war, the *bunka eiga* films vanished. The filmmakers in this field migrated into the second genre of nonfiction shorts: “educational film,” or *kyoiku eiga*, previously relegated to non-theatrical settings like classrooms. In the 1950s, these short films were produced by small private studios, like *Shinriken Eiga*, who hired Matsumoto in 1955. Other soon-to-be avant-garde documentarists were hired by another firm, *Iwanami*. Matsumoto’s first published essay, “On the Subject of the Filmmaker” (1957) opens with a bold provocation of this older generation of documentary filmmakers, many of whom were his colleagues at *Shinriken* at the time:

During the war [filmmakers] uncritically produced films collaborating with the war, changing course because of absolutely external power and transitively switching directions without any serious internal criticism... Lacking principles, they subsequently adapted to the PR film industry in a period of retreat. Here, consistent from start to finish, there are only slavish craftsmen lacking subjectivity. One might say that, from the beginning, there were no artists here (qtd. in Nornes, 2002, 44).

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<sup>13</sup> Reference for this entire paragraph can be found in Wada-Marciano (2014, 378).

Although Matsumoto is clearly addressing those filmmakers who collaborated with the government during the war, his critique was more generally of “craftsmen lacking subjectivity.” In Furuhata’s words, Matsumoto opposed “an instrumental view of nonfiction filmmaking as an empirical mode of knowledge production” (2013, 29), whether this view was actualized by ex-propagandists, or by another group of his colleagues at *Shinriken*: the leftists, whether veterans of Prokino, or exiles of the studios’ red purges in the mid-50s (Raine 2012, 144). Even though Matsumoto shared their politics,<sup>14</sup> he did not share their aesthetics. Matsumoto’s project of merging the two avant-gardes perhaps had more in common with the fiction film directors who were emerging from the major studios.

The major studios at the time of Matsumoto’s first publication were at the height of their “golden age.” Between 1950 and 1958, the Japanese film industry produced more films than any other industry in the world (Berra 2010, 6). 1958 was the year Japanese theatres had the highest attendance rates in the country’s history. But from 1959 on, theatres saw attendance drop at an alarming rate due to the rise of television. In an attempt to regain the popularity they were quickly losing, David Desser writes, “the studios tried a number of things besides wide screen, and among them was the promotion of younger assistants to the ranks of directors” (1988, 9). This generation of young auteurs—many of whom were already established as critics—would come to be known as the New Wave.<sup>15</sup>

The competition with television was only one context for rise of the New Wave, however. It must also be seen alongside the student protest movements which were gaining incredible popularity with the youth counter-culture. Massive protests were becoming a

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<sup>14</sup> According to Michael Raine, “he was a member of the communist-affiliated student union *Zengakuren*, and took part in the 1952 Bloody May Day protests” (2012, 144).

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that the term “New Wave” is used to encompass both documentary and fiction.

common occurrence in the days before the 1960 renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty, which permitted a significant US military presence to remain in Japan after the Occupation. This was the beginning of Japan's "season of politics," in concert with a global moment referred to (retroactively and metonymically) as May '68.<sup>16</sup> According to John Berra, this was another reason for the decline in film attendance, namely, "the rejection of studio-sanctioned cinema by the all-important youth market" (2010, 7). The studios initially supported the New Wave radicals only in order to profit from the untapped market of oppositional young people who were no longer interested in the mainstream. David Desser sees this context as central to understanding the rise and popularity of the New Wave. He writes that these filmmakers aimed to create "a film content and form capable of revealing the contradictions within Japanese society and with isolating the culture's increasingly materialist values and its imperialist alliances" (1988, 4).

But even if the political counter-culture was instrumental to the rise of the New Wave, some key New Wave filmmakers did not make explicitly oppositional films, and therefore one hesitates to call the New Wave an avant-garde. For this reason, Yuriko Furuhashi proposes a different term for the political avant-garde vein of the New Wave, which cuts across fiction and documentary: the cinema of actuality (the title of her book). She writes: "The timely appropriation of sensational news, high-profile media events, and other topical images widely circulating in the press by filmmakers such as Oshima Nagisa,

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<sup>16</sup> Furuhashi notes that the word "synchronicity" was in use in 60s Japan: "Around 1968, the historical awareness was often expressed by the term *global synchronicity* (*sekai dojisei*)" (2013, 74).

Matsumoto Toshio, Wakamatsu Koji, and Adachi Masao in the 1960s and early 1970s points to a collectively shared concern with journalistic actuality” (2013, 2).<sup>17</sup>

The cinema of actuality thrived throughout the 60s, with many of its stars making both fiction and documentary films, often blurring the boundaries between them. But at the end of the 60s, as Nornes neatly puts it, “something happened” (2002, 41). The early 70s saw a steep decline in both the avant-garde arts and in student protests. Once having a central place in the social climate, both were now fading into the background. Furuhata refers to this trope as “the narrative of decline.” Simply put, “the narrative of decline” sees a simultaneous end to the New Wave and the New Left. Matsumoto’s aesthetic transition coincides closely with this decline, and it is therefore essential to review some of the factors at work behind the waning of “the season of politics.”

One common explanation for the decline is the boom in the consumer economy: the so-called “Japanese miracle.” According to this explanation, protestors were no longer motivated because they were growing more prosperous.<sup>18</sup> Yet this explanation has a number of problems. First, it risks reducing oppositional mass movements to the private interests of their participants. But more importantly, the moment of the “miracle” does not coincide with the decline of the protest movement. As Daliot-Bul writes, “Between 1953 and 1965, Japan’s Gross Domestic Product expanded by more than 9 percent annually,” (2015, 162) peaking in 1968 which was also perhaps the peak year of protests. In fact, it is not an economic boom, but a recession which coincides with the end of the New Left.

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<sup>17</sup> Furuhata does not mention the precedents for the cinema of actuality from the commercial “humanist” filmmakers of the previous generation, such as Masaki Kobayashi, whose *The Thick Walled Room* (1956) was adapted from the actual diaries of prisoners under the US occupation and remediated newsreel footage.

<sup>18</sup> Harry Harootunian, who does not endorse this argument, summarizes it: “The dreams of social democracy and the heroism of rational subjectivity were said to vanish in the din of pronouncements promising higher standards of living, greater opportunities for domestic consumption, and affordable housing...” (2012, 20).

Daliot-Bul writes, “In 1973, the worldwide economic crisis triggered by the global oil crisis, decreased the productivity of Japan’s industrial sector” (2015, 166). Daliot-Bul makes the obverse of the “miracle” argument: that the economy of 1973 put financial pressure on protestors. Oshima Nagisa remarks in an essay from 1984 that this pressure was corroborated by corporations: “Beginning in 1969, Japanese corporate employers systematically excluded ex-student activists in their recruitment, a practice upheld by a 1973 Supreme Court ruling” (qtd. in Desser 1988, 195). Lastly, state repression was increasing, culminating in the Law for Temporary Measures Concerning University Management (*daigaku no un'ei ni kansuru rinjisochico*), which “came into effect by the end of 1970, allowing universities to call upon the riot police to intervene on campus” (Daliot-Bul 2015, 166). In light of these facts, we may reframe the “miracle” argument. Rather than a loss of urgency, the decline in the movement was a result of an increasing pressure on activists. This pressure had three main pillars: the global recession of 1973 (pushing protestors into financial need), corporations (who excluded protestors from work), and the state (who repressed such movements while using TV news to influence public opinion about them). These trends together begin to account for the decline of the New Left, although its connection to the political avant-garde’s decline remains to be made.

Furuhata gives the narrative of decline a nuance by adding another context: the corporate co-opting of avant-garde arts. This was embodied most monumentally by EXPO 1970.<sup>19</sup> Furuhata writes that Matsumoto’s “participation in [EXPO 1970] is often narrated as [his] sell-out moment” (2013, 199). Kuro Dalai Jee, discussing the nature of the

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<sup>19</sup> A similar event from the year before (Cross Talk Intermedia 1969) was also criticized for similar reasons. Julian Ross notes that Cross Talk was criticized “for succumbing to mass sponsorship (including Pepsi and Sony) as well as for its ties with the U.S embassy during the peak of the Anti-Anpo protests” (2012, 91). Matsumoto presented *Projection for an Icon*, a site-specific expanded cinema installation, at this event.

expanded cinema at such events, suggests that it, “gradually became an apolitical spectacle” (2010, 82). Yet, by the year 1973, all the stars of the cinema of actuality had already changed styles. Oshima was an art-house filmmaker with great success in Europe, Wakamatsu a *pinku* (soft-core porn) filmmaker, and Adachi quit cinema, moving to Beirut where he joined the Palestinian Liberation Front. But besides these few, Furuhata sees “an increasingly inward turn to the realm of private visions, away from the realm of collective struggle” (2013, 198) in the 70s avant-garde in general.

Nornes uses a similar language to describe “a retreat from the world,” or a “turn inward” (2002, 67) in documentary filmmaking.<sup>20</sup> However, Nornes uses these terms to describe a much later wave of private films (*kojin eiga*) from the 1990s, not those of the 1970s that Furuhata is referring to in the quote above. Nornes positions as “transitional figures with feet in both camps” (2002, 66) some of the very same people Furuhata sees as “turning inward.”<sup>21</sup> However, Nornes does not name Matsumoto as a transitional figure, and Furuhata sees Matsumoto as the protagonist of this “personal and formalist turn” (2013, 199). Furuhata writes that “The first to turn away from the immediate present was Matsumoto” (2013, 197). The transition in Matsumoto’s work is indeed pronounced: in the 60s he was one of the foremost documentarists of the political avant-garde, and arguably its most prominent theorist, but from around 1971 on he devoted himself to oneiric videos and opaque fiction films. This is why Furuhata sees in Matsumoto’s 70s work a “clear break” (2013, 197) with the cinema of actuality. And if all those filmmakers surrounding Matsumoto are also seen to turn away from actuality, then the marriage between the two avant-gardes becomes a brief one, ending somewhere between 1970-1973.

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<sup>20</sup> James Fuji uses the phrase “inward turn” (1993, 17) to refer to the individuality of the *Shishosetsu* writers.

<sup>21</sup> Hara Kazuo and Suzuki Shiroyasu are the two documentary filmmakers they disagree on.

However, the political avant-garde is a broader concept which is not beholden to the model of the cinema of actuality. The “disengagement with actuality” (Furuhata 2013, 198) does not equate to turning away from the political avant-garde. Moreover, to “disengage from street politics” (Furuhata 2013, 200) does not equate to turning away from all politics. But if Matsumoto turns away from actuality, what does he turn *toward*?

In order to answer this question, the film on the cusp of this transition must be scrutinized. Furuhata sees Matsumoto’s first feature film as his last actuality film: *Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969). While it can be seen as the peak of Matsumoto’s engagement with actuality and street politics, it can also be seen as a pivot towards Matsumoto’s engagement with virtuality and subjective politics. In other words, it can be seen as either a barrier between the two cinemas, or as a bridge between them.

*Funeral Parade of Roses* synthesizes the avant-garde documentary of his 60s films with the avant-garde abstraction of his 70s films, all contained within a narrative about a single protagonist (the transgender character Eddy, played by the transgender actor Peter). Felicity Gee describes the film as “a treatise on the subject of modernity and the inner life of its subjects” (2014, 60). Although the film follows a vaguely conventional plot (based on Oedipus Rex) it is profoundly non-chronological. The documentary scenes (including interviews with drag queens, drug users, and the film’s cast) stage sudden ruptures with the fictional diegesis. One of these, an actual street protest by the performance art collective *Zero Jigen*, shows the fictional characters mingling with actual bystanders. But the diegesis of *Funeral Parade* is also ruptured by the daydreams of numerous characters (recalling the intersubjectivity of *A Page of Madness*) as well as sudden bursts of abstraction, which arrive without warning and are only later contained retroactively within the diegesis. One

of these bursts of abstraction is, in fact, one of Matsumoto's stand-alone short films, *Ecstasis* (1969), which is revealed to be a short film made by one of the characters within the diegetic world of *Funeral Parade of Roses*, a guerilla simply named Guevara. The following scene reveals the varied responses that *Ecstasis* elicits from the characters, who watched it together in a small basement, perhaps anticipating Tess Takahashi's argument that the screening of avant-garde films at home transforms them from "obscure, difficult, and hermetic" to "rich site[s] of community, movement, and exchange" (2012, 167).

Yet, rather than a bridge, *Funeral Parade* can alternatively be seen as the final film in Matsumoto's oeuvre before a "clear break," as Furuhata puts it (2013, 197). In arguing for this "clear break" in Matsumoto's work, Furuhata draws a theoretical line between his 60s films, which "open onto the world," and his 70s films, which "close upon themselves." The first, the open image, she names the cinema of actuality, emphasizing its contiguity with contemporary reality. The other, the enclosed image, is given no name. This distinction is expressed in her conclusion, where she writes of Matsumoto's video art:

The prominence of self-referentiality and formalist repetition in many of [these video works] suggest an increasing enclosure of the image onto itself. That is, the images on screen become both temporally and spatially separated from the world outside the screen, often retreating inside the sanctioned space of museums and galleries (2013, 199).

This is a rich passage containing two confluences. The first conflation is between the "enclosure" of a certain cinematic style (constituted by formalist repetition and self-referentiality) with the "enclosure" of a particular exhibition space. Furuhata offers no argument why museums and galleries should be considered separate from "the world," while a theatre should be considered contiguous with it.

The second conflation in the above quote is between theory and historiography. Matsumoto's video art is not considered part of the cinema of actuality specifically because (in Furuhata's account) it is temporally and spatially separated from the world. This argument places the crux of the movement's historical parameters squarely in the theoretical distinction between the openness and enclosure of the image. Furuhata performs this maneuver in order to emphasize the contiguity of the cinema of actuality to the street politics of its time. Furuhata hence denies the quality of "openness" to films created outside of the historical boundaries of those street politics. But in the 70s, such street politics were not nearly as "present," and thus to remain political meant rethinking "politics" as well as rethinking "presence." This is the logic of Matsumoto's untimely avant-garde.

This thesis will illustrate how Matsumoto post-1970 work rethinks politics as well as presence. This thesis will demonstrate that Furuhata's characterization of Matsumoto's work in the 70s as "enclosed upon itself" is unjustified. On the contrary, these films will be shown to be radically open. To claim that the cinema of virtuality is open rather than closed may disrupt the "narrative of decline" in avant-garde filmmaking by tracing the political imperatives of the cinema of actuality well into the 70s, and beyond, even if such imperatives are transformed. But the political imperatives of the cinema of actuality cannot be reduced to journalistic topicality—they also include a general challenge to habituated modes of perception within the spectator, therein inviting the spectator to alter their subjectivity. If such politics of subjectivity can be shown to form a major way that the cinema of actuality gains its political potential, and if similar strategies are found within the cinema of virtuality, then it will be much easier to trace a continuity between the two

cinemas, and characterize the transition in Matsumoto's work from the 60s to the 70s as a loss of journalistic topicality, but not as a loss of political engagement.

Furuhata's account of the "landscape" tendency within the cinema of actuality supports this argument. She contends that these films externalize the spectator in relation to the image,<sup>22</sup> and that the political potential of these films is only actualized by this external spectator. She writes that, "The spectator must actively 'create' her or his own reading...of the relations of power that are neither immediately legible nor visible onscreen" (2007, 361). Just like the cinema of virtuality, therefore, the politics of these landscape films does not simply lie within the frame. Furthermore, Furuhata writes that "in order to complete the critical reading of these landscape shots in relation to the actual workings of power, the spectator needs the assistance of *fukeiron*" (2013, 142). *Fukeiron* here refers to a school of Japanese theorists who speculated on the politics of the landscape film in the 60s. In other words, Furuhata is saying that the political potential of the landscape film—a major tendency within the cinema of actuality—is only unlocked if the spectator has been primed by those theoretical debates that surround the films. In still other words, the political power of these films lies somehow *outside* of the films themselves.

To unlock the cinema of virtuality as political, it also helps to put such films in conversation with the theory surrounding them. A good place to start is Matsumoto's own writing. In 1960, he published an important essay entitled "Record of the Hidden World" (*kakusareta sekai no kiroku*) where he employs the Freudian concept of the uncanny in combination with a Marxist theory of alienation. He writes:

If we were to understand the question of the 'hidden world' as strictly belonging to the inner problem of the mind, that would be one-sided and indeed inverted. For

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<sup>22</sup> Furuhata writes, "The flatness and stillness of landscapes shots—which are structured like the shots in early actuality film—force the spectator to stay outside the screen space" (2007, 359).

the hidden distortions of the inside are ultimately determined by and reflect the hidden distortions of the outside. If we speak more precisely in the materialist manner, the inside is an extension of the outside; there is nothing that absolutely separates the two. Indeed, the condition of alienation is first and foremost that which exists in the outside world (qtd. in Furuhata 2013, 32).

Furuhata sees this essay as a move away from Matsumoto's prior existentialism. Rather than being more abstract, Furuhata sees the concept of the "hidden world" as a concrete conceptualization of the "historically determined condition of alienation under capitalism" (2013, 32). Matsumoto insists that his concept of the "hidden" or "invisible" world does not "strictly belong to the inner problem of the mind," but rather belongs the outer problem of social contradiction. He makes such statement even in the 1990s. For example, speaking to Aaron Gerow on the "Japanese miracle," Matsumoto says,

In reality, you can't say that contradictions have disappeared just because the economy has improved—there are still plenty of them. You can say that people can now eat, or have things to wear, or that cities have been rebuilt, but if you don't try to grasp *less visible* contradictions such as emotional and spiritual poverty or emptiness, you can't deal with the new age, can you? I was constantly thinking about this problem at the time [of "the miracle"]. From that point, I asked whether there wasn't a need for documentary to assume a subjectivity that *could make visible what was invisible* (my emphasis).

It is unlikely that Matsumoto would openly speak about the "less visible contradictions" in the social world in the 90s if he had abandoned his political project twenty years earlier. Perhaps the political imperatives of the cinema of virtuality are difficult to see because they themselves respond to a political order that is invisible.

In light of Matsumoto's proclaimed project of "making visible what was invisible" (proclaimed in the 60s and the 90s) it becomes hard to deny that the political avant-garde outlived the "season of politics" in Japanese cinema. Rather than seeing Matsumoto's transition as an abrupt retreat from politics, there is reason to reevaluate Matsumoto's 70s films. Although this thesis agrees with Furuhata that Matsumoto's 70s films "disengage"

from journalistic actuality and its “present,” this thesis proposes that Matsumoto’s 70s films can be seen to engage instead with a different “present”—namely, the “actual” duration of their projection, and the spectator’s “present.”

The motivation for this project is *not* to oppose the selective validation of certain avant-gardes against others on the basis of their politics. Rather, it is to expand the notion of “the political” in order to expand what avant-gardes are validated.

To advance this argument, chapter one will define two terms: subjectivity, and virtuality. Then, these concepts will be brought to bear upon Furuhata’s notion of contiguity. Two types of cinematic contiguity will be distinguished, one virtual (*image of the world*), and the other actual (*image in the world*). To give this framework historical grounding, the chapter will draw parallels to the theory and practice of postwar avant-garde visual arts, which theorized the encounter between artwork and spectator and the new forms of subjectivity that might emerge from this encounter. This discourse will be traced back to the debate on subjectivity (*shutaisei ronso*) that shook postwar Japanese philosophy. This debate will be briefly reviewed through J. Victor Koschmann, who highlights how vastly different positions emerged from within the Marxist discourse.

Chapter two will analyze two short films from Matsumoto’s actual phase: *Nishijin* (1961), and *For the Damaged Right Eye* (1968). They will be discussed in relation to the surrealist concept of defamiliarization borrowed from Shklovsky, in order to show how the politics of the cinema of actuality is, actually, quite virtual.

Chapter three will analyze two short films from Matsumoto’s virtual phase: *Atman* (1975) and *Sway* (1985). These films will be discussed in relation to the theory of contiguity discussed in chapter one, in addition to Deleuze’s notion of the crystal-image.

The concept of the virtual has been chosen as the foundation for a theory of Matsumoto's post-1970 films because it links Matsumoto to the thought of Bergson and Deleuze on the concept of duration, which is one of the key concerns of these films.

But this thesis may have also inherited from Deleuze what Stam calls his "heroic version of auteurism" (2000, 259). However, it does so only to the extent that Matsumoto is already well established in Japanese cinema as one of the leading figures of the postwar political avant-garde, in both theory and practice, and this thesis simply aims to extend that status into the post-actuality avant-garde.

## chapter one: The Politics of Subjectivity

This chapter explores the question of the spectator as the site of politics. Its argument is that the cinema of virtuality stages an encounter between the image and its spectator, having the potential to transform the latter in unpredictable ways. Although this might be true of any film, the cinema of virtuality accentuates this transformative potential. This chapter demonstrates that there is a range of figures in postwar Japan who theorized the avant-garde in this way, and that their ideas are vital to a theory of the cinema of virtuality. One of these figures is, of course, Matsumoto himself. In interview with Aaron Gerow, he argues for the need to oppose “invisible” forms of power:

Power is also what systematizes our thought, feelings, art, and culture in invisible ways. If we don’t become aware of this and shake its foundations, we cannot move the structure of power in a real sense. That’s why, after an immediate postwar period in which things were largely put into motion by the direct collision of the political dynamics of authority vs. anti-authority, we came to be controlled by more invisible things like human consciousness, feelings, points of view, or values. I thought that the most pressing issue facing art was how to become aware of this and work to undermine the system as a form of customary inertia. Films that startle and arouse self-awareness of that kind of internal distortion change the condition of cinema itself—this I think is art’s form of struggle against authority (Gerow).

Matsumoto clearly believes in art’s transformative dimension; its power to “arouse self-awareness” and catalyze a change within the spectator. Such an approach can be generally called “the politics of subjectivity,” but this phrase is ambiguous. It might refer to the politics of the personal, as discussed by Michael Renov in “The Subject of Documentary.” Or it might refer to the politics of identity, which no doubt plays a role in Matsumoto’s fiction films, whose protagonists tend to be marginal or underrepresented.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For example, the protagonist of *Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969) is transgender; the protagonist of *Dogra Magra* (1988) is an inmate of a mental asylum and the victim of two psychoanalysts’ mind games.

However, what this chapter sets forth as “the politics of subjectivity” does not refer to the subjectivity of the author, nor of the character, but of the spectator. Specifically, this chapter sees the politics of subjectivity beginning when the spectator’s duration is brought to their attention, rather than being subordinated to the duration of a diegesis. In a way, this is a self-reflexive politics, in keeping with global trends in post-1968 film studies,<sup>24</sup> albeit in a specific way: not by exposing the apparatus of cinema directly, but by revealing how the cinema manipulates the spectator’s subjective experience of duration.

As the previous chapter traced Matsumoto’s predecessors in Japanese cinema, this chapter will trace Matsumoto’s predecessors outside of cinema, in order to better develop a theory of the cinema of virtuality. However, before doing so, this chapter will first leave Japan to develop a few concepts, namely: subjectivity and virtuality. This chapter will then use these concepts to describe the precise theoretical differences between the cinema of actuality and the cinema of virtuality. Building on Furuhata’s work, this difference will be reduced to two kinds of contiguity. Then, the cinema of virtuality will be shown to share its approach to contiguity with major turns in postwar Japanese visual arts. Then, the visual arts will be linked to a particular debate in Japanese philosophy and literary theory known as the *shutaisei ronso*. The contours of this debate will be highlighted, while focusing on one theorist named Hanada Kiyoteru, who directly inspired Matsumoto’s project of uniting the two avant-gardes. What unites all the examples offered in this chapter—from Bergson, to Furuhata, to environmental art, to Hanada—is the concept of the “open” image.

To begin, this chapter will define subjectivity—a complex term sometimes taken for granted. Kaja Silverman in *The Subject of Semiotics* distinguishes the term “subject”

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Stam writes, “The left wing of 1970s film theory... came to regard reflexivity as *political* obligation. Some version of this idea pervades the 1970s and 1980s...” (2000, 151).

from “individual” insofar as the latter is associated with the European Renaissance and, more specifically, Descartes’ *cogito* (1985, 126-127). The term “subject” on the other hand

helps us to conceive of human reality as a construction, as the product of signifying activities which are both culturally specific and generally unconscious. The category of the subject thus calls into question the notions both of the private, and of a self synonymous with consciousness. It suggests that *even desire is culturally instigated, and hence collective...* Finally, by drawing attention to the divisions which separate one area of psychic activity from another, the term “subject” challenges the value of stability attributed to the individual (1985, 130, my emphasis).

Far from claiming that the individual’s immediate sensation is the only locus of true reality, the concept of the “subject” reveals that the individual’s most directly experienced reality is itself a construction, contingent upon language, culture, and the economy—in a word, ideology. There are, of course, various versions of this theory. One figure that informs much postwar theory on subjectivity is Jacques Lacan, who, in Luke Caldwell’s words, saw the subject’s unconscious as “permeated by lack,” and the subject’s desire as an effort to regain “a completeness that is impossible to attain” (2009, 22).

Deleuze and Guattari in their first collaboration, *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), reformulated Lacan<sup>25</sup> in order to arrive at a concept of desire as “a form of productivity rather than a manifestation of lack” (2009, 22), and thus the subject’s unconscious is seen as “a factory mobilized toward continual transformation and social revolution” (2009, 27).

Much later, in *Chaosmos*, Félix Guattari arrives at a concept of subjectivity which is highly open to change. While still taking into account the determinations of the above mentioned fields, Guattari draws upon his experience as a practicing psychiatrist to see subjectivity as the site of creative self-fashioning, and therein, the site of political

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<sup>25</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s work cannot be simply seen as either an opposition to Lacan or a continuation of his ideas. Žižek, for example, sees Deleuze and Guattari as turning their backs on Lacan, while Daniel Smith sees more of a continuity. Caldwell (2009) summarizes the debates on this point concisely.

resistance. This is what Guattari calls “the artificial and creative character of the production of subjectivity” (8). The production of subjectivity is thus understood as a political act.<sup>26</sup>

Guattari’s theory of subjectivity is useful for this chapter because it highlights the temporal aspect of subjectivity. In a musical metaphor, subjectivity is compared not to a symphony, but to a polyphony: “The polyphony of modes of subjectivation actually corresponds to a multiplicity of ways of keeping time” (1995, 15). However, the phrase “ways of keeping time” is not a metaphor. Indeed, for Guattari the shape of a particular subjectivity is rooted in its relationship to duration. Guattari writes: “Time is not something to be endured; it is activated, orientated, the object of qualitative change” (1995, 18). For Guattari, therefore, subjectivity refers to how one “activates” or “keeps time.”

This insistence on the temporal dimensions of subjectivity is something that Guattari shares with Deleuze, whose philosophy of time is significantly influenced by Henri Bergson. Deleuze writes that “Subjectivity is never ours, it is time, that is, the soul of the spirit, the virtual” (1989, 80). Temporality and subjectivity are thus linked through the Bergsonian notion of the virtual, which becomes the site of transformation.<sup>27</sup>

The virtual is a complex concept that emerges from Bergson’s metaphysics. Bergson understands reality as a flux of images. The word “image” in this context refers to individuated objects in the broadest sense, insofar as they can be seen to have a “frame” that closes off an “inside” from “outside.” However, (as Deleuze puts it) every image is

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<sup>26</sup> However, the production of subjectivity does not simply refer to the efforts of an “individual” to create themselves in opposition to an environment that shapes them, although this is sometimes the case. In other cases, “Subjectivity is collective—which does not, however, mean that it becomes exclusively social. The term ‘collective’ should be understood in the sense of a multiplicity that deploys itself as much beyond the individual, on the side of the *socius*, as before the person, on the side of preverbal intensities” (1995, 9).

<sup>27</sup> Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* books aim to “diagram the different kinds of relation an individual might have with the virtual, or simply an ‘outside’ to themselves” (O’Sullivan 2009, 158).

only “*artificially* closed” (1986, 10). All images affect and are affected by the images outside of them in this constant flux. In other words, images are contiguous.

The categories of “virtual” and “actual” are two aspects of an image. The actual refers to a state of affairs in a given moment; an arrangement of matter within the frame. However, the actual is unthinkable except in motion, that is, in duration. If the image had only an actual side, how would it ever change? Bergson’s answer is that time is an immanent dimension of images—that difference is already there.<sup>28</sup> The virtual, as opposed to *the possible*, recognizes that difference exists even before it is actualized.<sup>29</sup>

The concept of the virtual can be reduced to *difference*. The virtual is different from the present, as it encompasses both past and future. But the virtual can also refer to the difference “outside” of the frame, which may actualize change “inside” the frame. The openness of the image, in this context, refers to the capacity for the image to be affected. Actual images only change insofar as they are open to their outside, to the virtual.<sup>30</sup> Bergson even defines consciousness itself as only existing insofar as it is open.<sup>31</sup>

But time is neither something “internal” to, nor external to, the image. Bergson writes that “interiority and exteriority are only relations among images” (2004, 13), and Deleuze adds that “through relations, the whole is transformed... We can say of duration

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<sup>28</sup> Bergson writes that “images act and react upon one another in all their elementary parts according to constant laws which I call laws of nature, and, as a perfect knowledge of these laws would probably allow us to calculate and to foresee what will happen in each of these images, *the future of the images must be contained in their present* and will add to them nothing new” (2004, 1, my emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> Smith and Protevi write: “[Deleuze] tries to develop a metaphysics adequate to contemporary mathematics and science—a metaphysics in which the concept of multiplicity replaces that of substance, event replaces essence and *virtuality replaces possibility*” (2015, my emphasis).

<sup>30</sup> Deleuze writes: “Each time we find ourselves confronted with a duration, or in a duration, we may conclude that there exists somewhere a whole which is changing, and which is open somewhere” (1986, 9).

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze claims that Bergson “demonstrated that [consciousness] only existed insofar as it opened itself upon a whole, by coinciding with the opening of a whole” (1986, 10).

itself or of time, that it is the whole of relations” (1986, 10). It is the immanent relationship between an interior and exterior which accounts for *difference*—that is, time.

With this brief definition of virtuality in mind, we can return to the object of this study. To name a certain type of filmmaking “the cinema of virtuality” is not to suggest that it privileges the subjective perspective of a character or an author, but rather that it privileges the “outside” of the frame. In this sense, Nam June Paik’s *Zen for Film* (1964) might be the model example.<sup>32</sup> *Zen for Film* is an “empty” film that consists of a strip of unexposed celluloid, which depicts nothing, and simply illuminates the room. The film occurs entirely “on the outside” because the image does not open onto a diegesis. The spectator does not simply watch the film—they watch themselves endure outside of it. In this sense, the subject of the film is the very relationship between the spectator and the screen.<sup>33</sup> Although Matsumoto’s films are not quite so “empty” as *Zen for Film*, their construction greatly privileges the duration on their “outside.” The artwork, therefore, is not simply “within” the frame, but is a virtual event actualized by living spectators as much as the running projector. In other words, these films are radically “open” to their outside.

The “openness” of the image is a central aspect of the cinema of virtuality. But it is also a central characteristic of the cinema of *actuality*. However, the cinema of virtuality and the cinema of actuality can be seen as “open” in two different ways. In order to define the cinema of virtuality more specifically, this difference will now be outlined.

Furuhata develops a concept of contiguity to elaborate on the openness of the cinema of actuality, although most of her examples come from the tail end of the

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<sup>32</sup> Matsumoto and Paik had a correspondence. See Tate interview, 2015.

<sup>33</sup> Along similar lines, Heiki Helfert describes *Zen for Film* as an “anti-film,” which “is meant to encourage viewers to oppose the flood of images from outside with one’s own interior images” (2004).

movement, around 1969 (2013, 189-190). The earliest example Furuhata describes is from 1967: a short film called *Switch* by Azuchi Shuzo Gulliver. The film shows a hand flipping a light switch, which is synchronized with the switching of the lights inside the theatre. Furuhata writes: “In his discussion of *Switch*...Matsumoto argues that Gulliver’s work refuses completion by performatively opening up the situation presented on the screen to the situation outside it” (2013, 190). *Switch*, therefore, stages a direct encounter between the inside of the image (its content) and its outside (the spectator) which allows Furuhata to argue that the cinema of actuality more generally transforms films into events. Although *Switch* has no diegetic content that could be called political, it forms an integral part of Furuhata’s concept of the cinema of actuality because it typifies cinematic contiguity.

However, this concept of cinematic contiguity must be problematized. Immediately before her description of *Switch*, Furuhata writes that “Oshima’s *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, Matsumoto’s *Funeral Parade of Roses*, and Wakamatsu’s *Season of Terror*” (all from 1969) are films wherein the “diegetic world presented on the screen was not only contemporaneous to the spectator, but also contiguous to the world just outside the door of the theatre” (2013, 189). She chooses these three films as examples because they all include scenes where the actors play their roles in public, where the camera captures the spontaneous reactions of actual bystanders on the streets, who were not a part of the production. However, from the perspective of the spectator in the theatre, this is a very different type of film than *Switch*. The three films mentioned above depict events filmed on the streets in the contemporary world, whereas *Switch* creates the illusion that the light switch on the screen controls the lights in the theatre. Thus, the projection of

*Switch* creates a unique event, where the direct relationship between the “inside” of the image and its immediate “outside” itself becomes the object of the spectator’s awareness.

The contiguity of *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, *Funeral Parade of Roses*, and *Season of Terror*, on the other hand, is not between spectator and the actual environment of the projection space, but rather between the spectator’s daily “world” and the diegetic “world” represented on screen. During their shooting, these films constituted “live” events in the here and now, but from the standpoint of the audience, they are always in the past, always somewhere else, no matter how recent or nearby. What this reveals is that diegetic contiguity refers to a “just outside,” and a “just before,” and is thus a virtual contiguity. The contiguity in *Switch*, on the other hand, is one between the interior of the image and its immediate exterior. This is *actual* contiguity.

It is possible, no doubt, for a film to combine or traverse both types of contiguity. From a certain perspective, every film does: to the extent that it is projected, it creates a projection event; to the extent that it represents anything, it represents diegetic events. However, a film may still *emphasize* either the duration of its diegetic event, or the duration of the projection event. And with this in mind, it can be said that the scenes shot on the streets in *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, *Funeral Parade of Roses*, and *Season of Terror* emphasize diegetic duration, and thus their virtual contiguity, while *Switch* emphasizes the projection duration, and thus actual contiguity.

This distinction between virtual contiguity and actual contiguity allows for a specific description of Matsumoto’s aesthetic transition from the 60s to the 70s. The transition from the cinema of *actuality* to the cinema of *virtuality* follows a de-emphasis

on *virtual* contiguity, and a greater emphasis on *actual* contiguity. In other words, the spectator's duration, rather than the diegetic duration, becomes the focus.

Certainly, Matsumoto's cinema of actuality was also rich with *actual* contiguity, and these films draw much of their political potential from the way they address their spectator (this is the topic of the next chapter). However, Matsumoto's cinema of actuality also places its politics within the diegesis (by depicting workers in factories, for example).

Around the year 1970, such diegetic politics are substantially subtracted from Matsumoto's work. Like *Switch*, Matsumoto's cinema of virtuality draws its political potential in "performatively opening up" to the situation on its outside, but in a very particular way—by emphasizing the duration on its outside, and, moreover, by drawing the spectator's attention toward the ways that a cinematic image might impose its own temporal existence onto theirs. By bringing this relationship to the spectator's attention, these films open a space where the spectator may willingly choose a number of ways to respond. For example, the spectator may contemplate such durational domination, or they may actively resist it, or they may submit to it willingly in order to practice the variations of subjectivity. In any case, a transformation of subjectivity is invited.

*Switch* is a paradigmatic example for both this chapter and for Furuhata's book. The fact that its filmmaker, Azuchi Shuzo Gulliver, was better known as an artist (working in printmaking, photography, installation, and performance) is not to be glossed over. This signals the fact that the cinema of virtuality—and, indeed, certain aspects of the cinema of actuality, too—are closely linked to the avant-garde visual arts of the same era.

Indeed, Japanese artists and art theorists in this period can be shown to share an emphasis on the image's "openness" to the viewer. The artists and theorists argued, without

using such language of course, that artworks emphasizing their actual contiguity can generate a kind of transformative, regenerative experience for their spectators.

Matsumoto's link to these discourses is not always stressed, but his political strategy resonates strongly with theirs. Matsumoto was concerned from the very beginning of his career with the status of the cinema as an artistic medium, and he believed that a transmission model of documentary cinema prevented it from becoming more than mere journalism.<sup>34</sup> His degree in art history from the University of Tokyo, the exhibition of his video works in galleries and museums, his own writing on contemporary art, and his collaboration with artist Yamaguchi Katsuhiko on his first film *Ginrin* (1955), all confirm that Matsumoto was well versed in this world from the very beginning of his career.

It is no accident, then, that Matsumoto proclaims that “the task of contemporary art must be to set itself to finding ways to destroy that naïve faith in the object” (1958, 149). This proclamation, made in 1958, at the inception of the cinema of actuality, must be understood as a direction not only for cinema, but for “contemporary art” as such. And indeed, surpassing the depiction of “closed” objects was already becoming the paradigm for this generation of avant-garde artists, who instead opted for “open” encounters.

This paradigm can be seen to emerge largely as a reaction to the inheritance of Japan's wartime regulation of the arts. During the war, many surrealist painters and poets had been imprisoned.<sup>35</sup> The style of painting embraced by the state was called *senso-ga*,

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<sup>34</sup> Matsumoto writes: “As long as the film is confined to being a means or tool of representationally transmitting reality, it can be journalism or propaganda, but not art” (interview with Gerow).

<sup>35</sup> One of many possible examples: “The consequences of painting like a ‘lunatic’ were severe. From February to November 1941 ... the Surrealists Takiguchi Shuzo and Fukuzawa Ichiro were kept in police custody under suspicion of violating the Security Preservation Law, and Fukuzawa was forced to publicly recant his commitment to Surrealism, asserting that it was ‘tinged with communism’” (Tiampo 2011, 38).

which Asato Ikeda defines as “propaganda war painting” (2009, 5). After the war, many artists continued to paint in this style, changing only the objects their paintings depicted.

Over the next decades, a number of art collectives would emerge in opposition to this style and its inheritance of wartime propaganda. Although many of these collectives were decidedly non-figural, openly clashing with the aesthetic program of the Japanese Communist Party,<sup>36</sup> most of them still shared a political vision. Mika Yoshitake describes this vision as “a desire to create a corresponding oppositional public” (2012, 123). In order to create this public, artists made works that directly challenged and confronted their spectators. In other words, their works emphasized their actual contiguity.

This emphasis on actual contiguity—and the “desire to create a public”—can be traced back to certain statements made by political theorist Murayama Masao, who, according to Ming Tiampo, argued in 1946 that “Japan became a totalitarian nation due to a lack of democratic subjectivity” (2011, 40). Following Murayama, the general project for contemporary Japanese art became, in the words of writer Odagiri Hideo, “conquering what is feudalistic within ourselves” (qtd. in Koschmann 2011, 180). This goal, which might be called subjective transformation, was taken up by artists across many mediums. Many of these artists shared the concept of “the encounter” as a way to instigate transformation.

Miryam Sas writes that “One of the key issues in the thought of postwar artists and theater practitioners centers on the idea of the encounter” (2011, 97).<sup>37</sup> There was already an established canon of thought in Japanese philosophy related to the idea of the encounter

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<sup>36</sup> A program of socialist realism, which Havens refers to as “reactionary modernism” (2006, 35).

<sup>37</sup> Matsumoto was one of these theatre practitioners. Between his films *Song of Stone* (1963) and *Mothers* (1967), Matsumoto directed theatre. However, very little is known about these plays (see Gerow interview).

(*deai*), and related terms like climate (*fudo*), from philosophers like Watsuji Tetsuro<sup>38</sup> and Nishida Kitaro, a coterie commonly called the Kyoto school. Echoing this tradition, artists and theorists conceived of “the encounter” as a way to transform the climate of the social subject, and thus transform the subject. Sas argues that “the concept of an encounter [was being] theorized through an understanding of the workings of subjectivity” (2011, 97). Often this link between art and subjectivity was discussed in explicitly political terms.

Take for example Gutai-member Shiraga Kazuo’s early action-painting *Challenging Mud* (1955) where the artist thrashed around in a mess of mud and rock, emerging bruised and bloody. Tiampo writes that, “For Shiraga, the purpose of *Challenging Mud*, in fact of all artmaking, was to develop, understand, and express the personal material of the individual for the purposes of creating a society of politically, ethically, and aesthetically independent individuals” (2011, 42). For Shiraga, art plays a central role in promoting “strong subjectivities,” which is “of the utmost significance in preserving political freedom and preventing totalitarianism from rising again” (Tiampo 2011, 42). However, this display of a “strong subject” raging against its environment was centered on the artist’s own subjectivity, their own struggle, while the audience witnessed his transformation from the outside.<sup>39</sup> Other artists in the late 50s and early 60s would see the “subject of transformation” not in the artist but in spectator, who was increasingly becoming implicated within the artwork itself.

For example, take Yamaguchi Katsuhiro’s *Vitrine* (*Vitorinu*) series from 1954. These works were composed of watercolour and oil paint on wood and paper, mediated by

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<sup>38</sup> Sas writes that Watsuji “pursued a philosophical inquiry into the nature of the environment and its relation to the social subject; in this sense, he wrote an interwar Kyoto theory of the subject’s encounters” (2011, 99).

<sup>39</sup> This is especially true of the audience who was not present, but saw the work in its photographed form much later, thus quite far “outside” of the performance itself.

“diamond-cut or corrugated glass” which created a “multiplicity of perceptual experiences” (Sas 2012, 147). Matsumoto would later write that the movement of the spectator around the glass results in a series of completely different impressions. “It is not a matter of asking which is the *real* picture, but rather that the scenes unfolding with the movement of the gaze, the totality of the experiences of continuity of seeing by the viewers are themselves the work” (2006, qtd. in Sas 2012, 147).<sup>40</sup> The work is thus “outside” of the image.

In the early 60s, the spectator was afforded still more importance. In the debate between *mono* vs *koto*, artists argued that what was depicted in art was not the thing (*mono*) but rather the event (*koto*). This attitude culminated in “various violent stylistic strategies, including the physical assault against representation, the obliteration of the permanence of the self-enclosed object, the rupturing of form” (Yoshitake 2012, 123). This shift from *mono* to *koto* would crystallize in what is called the “optical turn,” where contemporary art acquired a “new stance of political skepticism...explored through a renewed emphasis on the destabilization of vision” (2012, 127). The optical turn of the early 60s set the stage for numerous intermedia experiments. Yoshitake writes that “Japanese artists in this period were pushing the limits of their audiences’ perceptive capabilities—and further, newly defining the very nature of the art-spectator relationship” (2012, 121).

The nature of the art-spectator relationship would mutate again in the mid-60s. This would become known as the environmental turn, which, Tiampo writes, “sought to integrate art, architecture, technology, and urban design to create new participatory environments that engaged the viewer” (2011, 162). Yoshitake links this wave of

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<sup>40</sup> This nicely echoes Watsuji. Sas writes, “Contrary to the conceptual notion that the self moves forward in time, Watsuji proposes that it is relationality itself that approaches the future. What takes on the future is, here, not a person, nor a collective ‘we,’ however inclusive or exclusive, but relationality itself” (2011, 109).

environmental art to the previous optical turn: “Distortion would come to be reinterpreted through a renewed concept of the relation (*kankei*) between art and viewer, and, by extension, the world as a condition that characterized the possibility of present experience as a regenerative site of historical experience” (2012, 132).

This leap from “present experience,” to “historical experience,” is the kernel of the environment (*kankyo*) discourse, which imagined the artwork not to be an object within a frame, but the very relationship between objects within an environment, where boundaries between subject and object melt. The environmental turn culminated in the exhibition called *From Space to Environment* in 1966. The pamphlet of this event reads:

“We are conscious of the idea of environment...not as a whole made of fixed parts...but rather as a single subject (*shutai*) called ENVIRONMENT...Our work is never complete on its own, and it is made only when it pulls the viewer into the ENVIRONMENT as it becomes something turned outward and open. Participate and become entangled in the ENVIRONMENT we have created—it is your self-destruction that is the objective” (Environment Society 1966, 238-240).

This link between the environment as essentially “open”—and inexistent until the viewer is pulled into it—and the environment as a “collective subject” is stirring. This gesture towards an environmental subjectivity—actualized only when the individual is “destroyed”—is one important theoretical backdrop for Matsumoto’s political project.

Like cinema, the avant-garde in the visual arts had been relatively split,<sup>41</sup> but the artists surveyed here sought ways to unite the political with the aesthetic, specifically through the notion of the spectator’s subjective transformation, conceived as an effect of the artwork’s actual contiguity. Matsumoto’s cinema of virtuality can be seen to create transient environments in the lived space and time of their projection—in the sense that

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<sup>41</sup> Yuri Mitsuda discusses art critics associated with the Japanese Communist Party who in the postwar years “rejected what [they] saw as the excessive subjectivity and flight from reality in modern art” (2012, 49).

work of art lies not simply *within* the frame, nor simply *outside* of it, but in the living relationship between the two. In other words, the artwork is a virtual entity, actualized only by the presence of attentive spectators. Although the spectator's "participation" refers to something very specific in environmental art—a type of participation that the cinema audience cannot match—the connection between environmental art and the cinema of virtuality is still fruitful because both movements understand the topic of their works to be not just something for the spectator to engage with, but that engagement itself. The subject of their artworks, in other words, is subjectivity.<sup>42</sup>

The question that makes these discourses political is: How does one leap from "present experience" to "historical experience"? For environmental art, the answer is found in the individual's "self-destruction" and their integration into a collective subjectivity. However, this gap between the "present" and the "historical" caused other schools of thought more anxiety. Some were more willing to embrace individualism as a response to the totalitarian subjectivity (which was still a recent memory in postwar Japan). Far from belonging to art critics alone, these gaps between present and historical, individual and collective, also animated much postwar Marxist writing in Japan.

Indeed, it is very unlikely that these artists and theorists were not deeply influenced by the philosophical currents in Marxism around the same time. Although philosophical Marxism existed in force in prewar Japan, it was suppressed by a hostile state while simultaneously eclipsed by the popularity of the Kyoto School philosophers, who were the philosophical voice of wartime imperial ideology. In the 1950s, a new wave of thinkers came to prominence. They inherited the Kyoto School's thought on subjectivity and the

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<sup>42</sup> The connection between Matsumoto's film *Song of Stone* (1963) and Japanese environmental art has already been made by Miryam Sas (2014, 391).

environment, but were also increasingly attracted to Marxism. Their relationship to Marxism, however, is often ambivalent. For example, in Victor Koschmann's words, literary theorist Umemoto Katsumi saw a "lack of a theory of subjective commitment to action" in Marxism (1996, 106). In the immediate postwar years, Umemoto published a number of essays, sparking a debate on the politics of subjectivity. Writers were asking: How does history act through individuals? How could the subject precipitate the revolution if the subject is determined by its material existence? This came to be known as the *shutaisei ronso*.<sup>43</sup> Before discussing the arguments, the debate must first be historicized.

The immediate postwar era saw "sustained public exchanges between Marxists and non-Marxists" (1981, 611) on how the Japanese people could reconstruct society and themselves. What made this exchange possible was, in fact, the US Occupation, which began the process of "democratic revolution" in Japan after its century-long pact between modernity and feudalism. The Occupation immediately legalized political parties, labour unions, and released many political prisoners. This resulted in a fraternity between liberals and communists of all kinds, and gave birth to a powerful labour movement that seized control of numerous workplaces. This threatened the Occupation to such an extent that in early 1947 it entered what Koschmann calls its "reactionary phase" (1996, 22). This transclass moment of alliance—what Koschmann calls the "honeymoon" (1981, 611)—made actual as well as virtual political progress: "Most important, however, were the opportunities such movements offered the workers to empower themselves as social subjects" (1996, 20). Even after the honeymoon had ended, with liberals and communists

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<sup>43</sup> Koschmann writes "A good deal of ambiguity in meaning surrounds the term *shutaisei*" (1981, 609). Koschmann translates *shutaisei* as subjectivity, *ronso* as debate. These are imperfect translations.

more or less divided, and a greatly weakened labour movement, the fallout of this utopian moment would influence decades of political theory.

In the debate that ensued, the Occupation's so-called "democratic revolution from above" was greeted with a multitude of reactions. Some intellectuals praised the ascension of an individualist spirit after centuries of a "concentric ideology," wherein, according to Sakuta Keiichi, "The individual is so submerged in community—from family all the way out to the state—that identity and autonomy are almost entirely obscured" (1978, 226). In the interest of rejecting the feudal past, many Japanese authors embraced this line of argument, lionizing the private self against national identity. Yet others saw the budding postwar individualism as "an amorphous form of selfish privatism that would most likely entail apathy toward public affairs" (Koschmann 1981, 613). The *shutaisei* debate, therefore, was a response to the swift shift from one extreme to another, from the complete effacement of the individual, to its absolute importance.<sup>44</sup>

One of the key arenas where this debate played itself out was literary theory. Critics positioned themselves with regards to the question of subjectivity in art. Whether explicitly or implicitly, these writers argued that literature could help generate a revolutionary subjectivity, although they disagreed sharply upon how. These critics split into two camps.

One was centered on the journal *Shin-Nihon Bungaku*, which endorsed a program of literary naturalism in concert with the Japanese Communist Party's artistic program, where the goal was to transmit the reality of class exploitation in unambiguous terms for a

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<sup>44</sup> Gutai artists were some of those seeking a balance. Ming Tiampo calls this their "collective spirit of individualism." She paraphrases Shiraga Kazuo: "Without community, therefore, the individual is solipsistic, locked in a vacuum and unable to progress. This is not, however, a feudal notion of community in which the will of the individual and the group are indistinguishable, a microcosm of the nation as a whole. It is a conception of community in which the egotistical individual is paramount for the formation of a group that is itself autonomous" (2013, 393).

proletariat audience. Miyamoto Yuriko, one of these critics, suggested that writers “cultivate in themselves only as much sophistication and insight as was necessary to perceive reality correctly” (qtd. in Koschmann 1981, 616). One of the most prominent theorists in this camp was Kurahara Korehito, who claimed (in Koschmann’s words) that the writer “must serve...by means of objective literature, as an instructor to the people in order both to give voice to their standpoint, and to show them the way to a new life” (1996, 45). Kurahara, in Thomas Havens’ words, “denounced apolitical modernists for privileging personal subjectivity over class struggle” (18). These *Shin-Nihon Bungaku* writers were more hesitant to accept postwar individualism.

The other camp was centered on the journal *Kindai Bungaku*, and advanced a very different idea. One of the leading theorists of *Kindai bungaku* was Honda Shugo, who described his approach as “an all-out effort to escape from Kurahara’s theory and bring about a rebirth of the self” (qtd. in Koschmann, 1996, 42). Koschmann writes that the critics at *Kindai Bungaku* believed that “the construction of a democratic society and literature necessitated the parallel development of a new human subject” and accused the other camp of “seeking to ignore or suppress the legitimate individuality of the artist in order to enforce a form of objectivity that required ‘immersion’ in the life of the masses” (1981, 616).

The writers of *Shin-Nihon bungaku* accused these *Kindai bungaku* writers of an inward turn away from external reality. Kurahara (according to Honda 1946, 9) condemned those “writers who had lost the freedom to portray objective reality [and who] turned instead to the elucidation of subjective reality” (qtd. in Koschmann 1996, 50). Ara Masato, a prominent critic for *Kindai bungaku*, defended this inward turn at a roundtable discussion with Kurahara and other writers in 1946, arguing that: “To thoroughly investigate oneself,

not as an observer, but with attention to various elements of one's inner self—this should be the starting point of literature from this moment forward, and ultimately it is this endeavour which will connect us in a literary sense with the people” (qtd. in Koschmann, 1996, 53). Ara, in Koschmann's paraphrasing, claimed that Kurahara and the *Shin-Nihon bungaku* writers were mistaken for treating “the people as the objects, rather than the subjects, of revolution” (1996, 83).

This debate ended in a stalemate that deepened the convictions of both sides. The *Shin-Nihon bungaku* writers championed the Japanese Communist Party's artistic program of socialist realism, while the *Kindai bungaku* writers were more likely to endorse an apolitical, spiritual task for art—although both groups saw themselves as Marxist. According to Koschmann, the debate reached a stalemate because both sides had a rather narrow concept of politics: “they interpreted [politics] as party domination expressed through the demand for unconditional partisanship, rather than as the conflictual, social process of subject-formation itself” (1996, 83). Hence, the *Shin-Nihon bungaku* writers “failed to note that the ‘politics’ of party control was in fact antipolitical,” and the *Kindai bungaku* writers “were unable to theorize productively the politicality of their interventions in culture” (1996, 83). However, there was at least one important figure who transcended this all-too-familiar rift between the two avant-gardes: Hanada Kiyoteru.

Hanada's positions on these issues were complex. Although he was a member of the Communist Party, Furuhashi writes, he was skeptical of the Party's “dogmatic endorsement of socialist realism” (2009, 18). Hanada endorsed instead what Kurahara deemed to be apolitical modernism, praising the European 1920s avant-garde for visualizing “the realm of the unconscious and abstract intellect” (Furuhashi 2009, 19).

Although this position would align Hanada with the modernism of *Kindai bungaku*, he was the editor-in-chief of *Shin-nihon bungaku* throughout the 50s (Furuhata 2009, 18).

Hanada transcended the gulf between the two journals by doing what the others had not—theorizing how the subjective “inward turn” was itself the site of the avant-garde’s political power. The inner world was one half of a dialectic, and for Hanada, the “political” avant-garde had only hitherto grasped the “exterior” half.<sup>45</sup>

One of the motifs of Hanada’s writing is this relationship between interior and exterior. For example, as Furuhata notes, Hanada sees the metamorphosis of the subject as “generated by the encounter between opposing forces of contraction and expansion” (Furuhata 2009, 31). Hanada uses the Bergsonian notion of *élan vital* to articulate what he means by “expansion.”<sup>46</sup> The mutuality between two extremes is crucial for Hanada, and thus he was as skeptical of a purely internal (subjective) literature as he was of a purely external (realist) one. His colleagues at *Shin-nihon Bungaku* considered “interior” literature to be solipsistic, but Ken Yoshida writes that “Interiority, in the Hanadean sense, is not necessarily solipsism, for it was equally alien and ambiguous even to oneself” (2014, 795).

It may not be a surprise, with these points in mind, that Hanada endorsed a surrealist conception of art, capable of defamiliarizing both the external world and the internal world. For Hanada, art’s role was simply “to confound the mind” (Yoshida 2014, 787) as well as the senses. Furuhata writes, “Under the influence of habit and ideology, reality may appear concrete, obvious, even self-evident. However, it is such self-evidentiality of perception

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<sup>45</sup> Furuhata writes that there were artists in prewar Japan who “tried to bring together artistic experimentations and Marxist politics, [but] arguably Hanada was the first Japanese critic to articulate the connection between the two in the most persuasive theoretical manner” (2009, 20).

<sup>46</sup> Furuhata writes: “Contraction and expansion are in turn joined by one more conceptual pair: Henri Bergson’s evolutionary concept of “vital force” (*élan vital*), which he links to expansion, and Irving Babitt’s conservative concept of “vital control” (*frein vital*) which he links to contraction” (2009, 30).

that needs to be questioned in the first place” (2009, 24). This impetus for de-naturalization was linked to politics through Hanada’s complex notion of the plasticity of the masses, whose metamorphosis (*hankei*) must be brought about by the avant-garde (Furuhata 2009, 19). The importance of this metamorphosis becomes heightened during certain “critical transitional moments in history” (Furuhata 2009, 27). Hanada saw the early postwar period as one such “transformative age” (Furuhata 2009, 26).

Hanada’s prescription for cinema was the merging of documentary and avant-garde arts, although what he had in mind by “documentary” was extremely ambiguous. While discussing examples of avant-garde documentary, he praises even Walt Disney for taking steps towards avant-garde documentary film (Furuhata 2009, 44-46).<sup>47</sup> It is within the context of this extremely broad conception of avant-garde documentary that the cinema of virtuality can be understood as an expansion of Hanada’s project.

Matsumoto’s theoretical writing, as well as his filmic practice, reveal a significant debt to Hanada’s thought.<sup>48</sup> However, the inheritors of Hanada’s prescriptions can also be found in environmental art. Nakahara Yusuke, one of Hanada’s students, “went on to become one of the most influential critics during the postwar decades...theorizing environment art and conceptual art in Japan of the 1960s” (Yoshida 2014, 781).

We can also see in the *shutaisei* debate a specific precedent for seeing subjective politics as a “turn” away from the world. Kurahara, for example, in defending his endorsement of an “objective literature,” historicizes postwar anti-realism in literature back

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<sup>47</sup> It was a common for Disney animators to film an animal to study its movements. Furuhata writes: “Dialectical movement of metamorphosis for Hanada starts with the observation of the concrete phenomenon, reaches an abstract understanding, and then returns to the concrete phenomenon. His interpretation of Disney’s animation follows a similar trajectory...” (2009, 46).

<sup>48</sup> This has been noted by Furuhata (2009, 10) and Furuhata (2013, 29) and Yoshida (2014, 796).

to the 1930s, a time when, Koschmann writes, “writers under government pressure turned away from social objectivity, toward the portrayal of a subjective, entirely mental, form of reality” (1996, 43). In contrast to such claims, Hanada saw the external and internal worlds in dialectical relationship. From this perspective, the “closed” image is one that explores *only* the inside world or the outside world, without putting them into dialectical contact.

Since Matsumoto can be placed in a direct lineage with Hanada, and stood in close proximity to the environmental turn in the visual arts, it becomes very easy to see his films as catalysts for encounters, wherein the spectator’s subjective relationship with the film becomes the artwork in itself. The following chapters will look closely at some of Matsumoto’s short films to see how exactly this is accomplished.

## chapter two: The Virtual in the Actual: Subjectivity in the 1960s

This chapter investigates two films from Matsumoto's cinema of actuality. The first, *Nishijin*,<sup>49</sup> is from 1961, and the second, *For the Damaged Right Eye*, is from 1968. Taken together, they are meant to represent the formal extremes of Matsumoto's 60s filmmaking. This chapter argues that the political strategies of Matsumoto's 70s films are already in place in these 60s films. More specifically, this chapter argues that the cinema of actuality is political in ways other than the politics of its content. Like the cinema of virtuality, Matsumoto's cinema of actuality creates a transformative encounter with its spectator. Moreover, Matsumoto has framed his work in similar terms. Speaking on the state of documentary filmmaking in the early 1960s when he began making *Nishijin*:

In those days, a good documentary was defined as something that, first of all, had a poignant subject, and then was socially or politically controversial. In other words, something that had information value even before the film was shot. But one wondered how much value beyond that the film created on its own as a film. There was something that bothered me about this. I asked how one could establish the value of the work in the expressive power and reality of cinema as cinema itself, instead of leaning on a comparison between the film and reality. As long as film is confined to being a means or tool of representationally transmitting reality, it can be journalism or propaganda but not art (in interview with Gerow).

In light of Matsumoto's professed disdain for "transmitting reality," there is reason to doubt Furuhata's claim that Matsumoto's "turn to video art...coincided with his turn away from journalistic actuality and street politics" (2013, 197). Already in the early 60s, Matsumoto's films were much closer to the visual arts than to journalism. As the previous chapter discussed, many in the visual arts during this time were rejecting realist art while conceiving of "the encounter" whose effects were hoped to be nothing less than the

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<sup>49</sup> In English this film is sometimes called *The Weavers of Nishijin*, but its Japanese title is simply *Nishijin*.

transformation of the spectator. Hence, the politics of Matsumoto's 60s films were already quite far from those of journalistic actuality and street politics.

In other words, Matsumoto aimed to go beyond the "information value" in these films. Nonetheless, these films do relate information. Both *Nishijin* and *For the Damaged Right Eye* are indebted to the documentary tradition, exhibiting various aspects of its expository, poetic, and observational modes.<sup>50</sup> Yet, there is something deeply ambiguous about their voice. At first glance, *Nishijin* seems to be a critique of commodity fetishism, while *For the Damaged Right Eye* seems to be a celebration of the 60s counterculture. Yet *Nishijin* contains no explicit opposition to the capitalist mode of production, and *For the Damaged Right Eye* dissolves the counterculture into a stream of spectacle without distinguishing them. In both cases, the politics of these films is absent from the image itself, and must be actualized by the creative work of the audience.

The origins of *Nishijin* attest to Matsumoto's desire to place politics outside of the frame. After his first film *Ginrin* (1955), Matsumoto made a few short films on contemporary issues. Although they are currently unavailable, these films are said to be radical, both stylistically and politically.<sup>51</sup> After making *The Record of a Long White Line* in 1960, "he was suspended from his company [*Shinriken*] because of his unwillingness to give in to demands for changes from the sponsor" (Wada-Marciano 2014, 366). *Nishijin* was the first film made after leaving *Shinriken*. It was commissioned by The Association for Viewing Documentary Film in Kyoto (henceforth "the Association"), who hired Matsumoto to make a documentary on the textile industry of Nishijin, a town within the city of Kyoto. Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano writes: "Making a film upon request from a

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<sup>50</sup> These terms are taken from Bill Nichols. See "Introduction to Documentary" (2002, 210-211).

<sup>51</sup> Nornes claims *Security Treaty* (1959), one of these films, "politicized film style itself" (2002, 46).

particular group was not...so unusual in the 1950s” (2014, 365), although it was more common that a labour union or a political party make such commissions. To fund the film, Matsumoto “recruited Nishijin’s textile companies as sponsors” (2014, 379), who were unhappy with the finished film and its “depiction of an industry in decline” (2014, 380), and decided to release their own edited version of it. However, the Association also gained funding from the citizens of Nishijin themselves, “selling micro shares...to the local people to help fund the film” (2014, 379). In this way, creating a direct relationship with the spectator can be seen as the goal of the film from the very start. According to Wada-Marciano, the Association “wanted to create a progressive film movement...encouraging community participation in cultural production and the circulation of texts, and local discussion forums” (2014, 379). In Wada-Marciano’s words, the film “functioned as a medium transmitting knowledge,” (2014, 378) but this transmission was in service of the goal of creating a new public sphere. Matsumoto says of this Association:

Of course, in terms of awareness, they were left-wing, but still not what you call a political organization. I think they were the first to try to cultivate new spectators and make the kind of films they wanted to see on their own. As an initial plan, I proposed something like what I've just been talking about and got their approval to address Kyoto's Nishijin with the aim of giving form to something more deeply submerged within the situation, something warped and hard to express. I wasn't trying to depict the place called Nishijin or show people weaving, but to give shape to the thick, silent, unvoiced voices lurking beneath Nishijin (Gerow).

There was, therefore, a marriage between the Association’s goals of grassroots organization, and Matsumoto’s new approach to documentary, recently expressed in his written theory. Matsumoto’s goals were ostensibly the same as those of the Association: to create a new spectator. According to Furuhashi, the new cinematic direction that Matsumoto was theorizing was “first and foremost a method of challenging habituated modes of perception. In his insistence on breaking down perceptual habits, Matsumoto’s

conceptualization of documentary echoes the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky's understanding of art as a technique of defamiliarization [*ostranenie*]" (2013, 28). A brief review of Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* will help us understand *Nishijin*'s virtuality.

For Shklovsky, who influenced the Surrealists (who in turn influenced Matsumoto), defamiliarization refers to the potential of artworks to de-automatize perception and thought in the spectator. This insight comes to Shklovsky from a relevant source. He writes, "The discovery that there are sounds in the Japanese poetic language that have no parallels in everyday Japanese was perhaps the first factual indication that these two languages, that is, the poetic and the practical, do not coincide" (1990, 4). For Shklovsky, we tend towards the practical in everyday life through the use of short cuts, which encourages a slow slide toward the loss of consciousness. To characterize these short cuts, he uses the terms automatization, algebrization, symbolism, and abstraction.<sup>52</sup> According to Shklovsky, art can offer a shock to this automatization with non-practical language or unusual imagery, thus escaping our ready-made categories of interpretation and creating a shock which demands full consciousness—or, to be more precise, what Bergson calls *attentive* recognition, in contrast to *habitual* recognition.

Douglas Robinson links Shklovsky's insights to Bergson's philosophy, from whom Shklovsky borrows the term "algebrization." Robinson writes that *ostranenie* "bears comparison with Bergson's concept of 'real' or 'living' time, *durée*, his quasimystical antidote to the automatizing effects of 'false' or 'mathematical' time" (2008, 112). It is essential, then, that the temporal dimension of defamiliarization be emphasized. It is the manner in which something is represented that creates the shock to the spectator, not the

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<sup>52</sup> Matsumoto seems to use the term "inertia" in his writings to refer to the same phenomenon.

inherent aspects of the thing represented. By extension, it is the particular moment of the encounter between spectator and artwork where the shock is felt. Shklovsky writes that “the mark of the artistic” is the removal of an object “from the domain of automatized perception,” so that the perceiver might “dwell on the text” in time: “The object is perceived not spatially but, as it were, in its temporal continuity” (1990, 12).

Likewise, the political dimension of defamiliarization must be emphasized. Against the common notion that Shklovsky’s concept of art is ahistorical, Cristina Vatulescu historicizes this very reading.<sup>53</sup> The concept of defamiliarization, she claims, underwent considerable transformation over Shklovsky’s career. In Vatulescu’s words, Shklovsky noted in the early 1920s how “The revolution has turned life into art in the same way that the artist hitherto used to turn material into art—by making it strange and thus capable of intensifying sensation” (2006, 41). Hence, even from the progenitor of the concept, defamiliarization was not simply a device for artists, but an effect of encountering a “new world.” It follows that the methods for making this “new world” are also artistic.

The concept of defamiliarization resonates with *Nishijin* in a number of ways. Certainly the use of poetic language is present both at the level of visual composition as well the voice over. The cinematographer of the film was the legendary Miyajima Yoshio (who had worked with Kobayashi Masaki, and would later work with Oshima Nagisa) and was “the head of Toho’s union during the notorious strike from 1946 to 1948” (Wada-Marciano 2014, 365). Miyajima often shoots from obscure angles, distorting or isolating objects, making their identification “difficult, laborious, impeding” (to borrow Shklovsky’s

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<sup>53</sup> Vatulescu writes: “These charges against estrangement are part of a larger critique of Shklovsky’s Formalist school for what has been long seen as its championing of an autonomous art divorced from life, history, and politics. This critique was already well in place in the 1920s” (2006, 37).

definition of poetic language, 1990, 13). The voice over was co-written by the surrealist poet Sekine Hiroshi, who, according to Thomas Havens, was the founder of the erstwhile Century Association (a cross-medium association of avant-garde artists) and “was interested in Proletarian theater” (2006, 26). Far from offering explanatory commentary on the art of weaving, let alone an explicitly political argument about capitalism, the narration waxes on the “rain of old memories” and the spiritual state of the people in and out of Nishijin’s factories. In these ways, the film can be said to defamiliarize the capitalist mode of production itself.

The film opens with several shots of the city seen from high above. The shingles of the houses are in casual decay. This aerial perspective makes a textile design out of the city itself, immediately drawing a parallel between the product of Nishijin’s workers, and the architecture of the town. From this transcendent perspective we subtly transition into the immanent. The camera pans across a string of yarn into the textile factory. In tightly framed shots, we see fragmented aspects of the production process: a left hand repeating a movement, a right hand repeating a movement, a foot stepping on a pedal, buttocks shifting in their seat. No worker’s face is clearly seen throughout the film, constructing the workers as a collective body rather than a collection of bodies. The movement of the machines and the movement of the humans seem inseparable, bound by the same ceaseless rhythm. The film intercuts between machines swaying back and forth in a hypnotic rhythm, and the bodies of workers moving in perfect time with this mechanical automation. The interchangeability of the human and the mechanical is offset, however, by the poetic language of the film itself: its high contrast lighting, stylized framing, and visual fragmentation, which results in a loss of scale, and a complete lack of spatial clarity.

However, if the shots are not bound by a spatial logic, they are bound by a rhythmic montage, whose rhythm is never quite that of the machine itself. The *practical* rhythm of the machines is at odds with the *poetic* rhythm of the film, in other words.

Wada-Marciano argues that *Nishijin* deliberately discourages character identification, and that the humans in the film are represented as incomplete subjects (2014, 370). In this way, rather than simply using practical cinematic language to depict individual workers within oppressive environment, the film uses the poetic language of montage to construct a human-machine environment called “factory.” The thread linking images of the city to images of workers to images of machines, is extended further to link the factory itself to the finished commodity, and further, to the marketplace. The film cuts from the hands that weave the commodity, to the hands that load it into trucks, to the hands that inspect it after its delivery, to the hands that calculate its cost on an abacus, and, finally, to the public face of the entire process: an advertisement. This opening sequence, which joined the city to the factory, sale to retail, ends with a vertical tilt over an advertisement for the textiles, freezing on the face of a young woman who, exposed as the frayed end of the commodity’s thread—the spectacular surface for the entire process—looks quite strange indeed. The tilt from the model’s feet to her face allegorizes the course that the film has just taken: from the base (production) to the superstructure (advertisement).

After this advertisement, the film suddenly cuts to a handheld shot of the messy street markets of Nishijin, a far cry from the bourgeois shops just shown, where the textiles had been delivered. These vendors lay out their wares on rugs in the sun. Hands dig through the piles of used commodities, pulling out wrinkly aprons, inspecting shoes, exchanging folded money for a bundle wrapped in newspaper. However, there is a striking absence in

this scene: the textiles themselves. Matsumoto's decision not to show the selling of textiles in the shop where they were shipped, but to cut instead to the lower class street market, where other commodities are being exchanged, is a decision to suddenly leap out of the causal chain of the production line. To investigate the world outside of this linear chain is to tacitly acknowledge that these different worlds, these different classes, and these different economies, are interwoven.

In the next sequence, the film interweaves still more distant worlds with the production line. From the street market, the film cuts to a shot moving through an alley. The absence of humans in the alley gives a sudden awareness of the autonomy of the camera. The unseen factory looms over these empty spaces, laden with signs that read "help wanted, high salary." The decline of the textile industry has symptoms even here, in Nishijin's deserted streets. The film evokes the decline of the industry with its montage, rather than declaring it through evidence, testimonials, or the voice over, which instead recounts the city's prehistory: telling how this very spot was once a battleground between two warring clans. The following shot shows hands painting a textile design: a graphic match of the square architecture of the previous shot. This cut draws a parallel between the town's prehistory and the prehistory of the textile. After cutting in to a closer shot of the painter's hands carefully dotting out the design, the film cuts back to the heart of the factory, where the hands of workers actualize this design. We watch four hands work together in perfect synchrony and symmetry. The next shot is a steady pan (right to left) across spinning wheels, followed by a shot of another steady pan (again, right to left) of the empty alley, with more signs reading "weavers wanted." This refrain to the alley makes the physical architecture of the city rhyme the physical architecture of the factory, as if to

show that even in these empty spaces, the mode of production is present—or maybe the opposite, that the factory full of faceless workers is as empty as the streets.

In the following shots, the careful hands of workers, performing the most delicate procedures of weaving are juxtaposed with shots of Buddhist shrines, as the narration speaks of “bodies praying to survive in this square town.” The battle in Nishijin’s prehistory is compared to working in a factory: “Life is a constant fight against enemy attacks.” There is a vertical tilt which ends on a Buddha’s face, rhyming the prior tilt which ended on the face of the woman in an advertisement, as if saying: the commodity is sustained by its spectacular appearance in the advertisement, and the worker is sustained by prayer for good health and prosperity. The audio in this sequence is harsh and dissonant, with deep voices speaking backwards, lending a sinister air to the shrines, which are all the more defamiliarized by the incense burning without any humans present.

Up until this point, *Nishijin* has shown the “practical” world of the economy in poetic tones. By contrast, the next sequence highlights the “poetic” world which exists within this economy. It begins with a child’s hands playing with clay, digging out two holes that become eyes, and a third hole that becomes a smile. Then we see a room full of children playing. We cut across the faces of children, some innocently staring back into the camera. These are the first clear faces in the film. The last of these close-ups seems to be just like the others, until the camera tilts down to reveal the child is not at play, but spinning silk like the workers in the factory. In this shot, the film has “played” with the audience’s expectations, thoroughly defamiliarizing the quite familiar image of silk spinning, reversing the prior tilt “up” from base to superstructure, tilting back “down” from the children’s play to the work of weaving. The narration highlights the relation between their

innocent play and the context of the economy: “The children do not understand what is invisibly dominating; but they sense that there is something invisible.”

The film suddenly cuts to the faces of an audience, all looking blankly in the same direction as shadows pass over their faces. The film withholds the object of their gaze for a few shots, as if to remind the film’s audience of their condition as an audience. Then the film reveals what they have been watching: a fashion show, where models show off new kimonos from Nishijin’s factories. The narration speaks perhaps to the audience seen on the screen, or perhaps directly to the audience of the film itself: “You could be as beautiful as them [the models]. Discover your own charm.” This ambiguity in who the narrator is addressing emphasizes the Association’s goal of creating a film *about* Nishijin *for* Nishijin. But in the context of the theory discussed in the previous chapter, this ambiguity recalls the duality between the film as *virtually* contiguous with a diegesis (addressing the people on screen) and simultaneously *actually* contiguous with the world (addressing the audience). This ambiguity is never solved, of course.

A rapid stream of images follow: people strolling through displays of the newest fashions; an office building seen from outside (perhaps the factory offices); a storeroom full of the textiles. Over these images we hear the voices of managers at a conference, although the recording has been edited to extract fragments. The word “modernization,” is repeated many times among other phrases: “bring costs down,” or “weaving is the same as philosophy,” or “we have to...mechanical,” etc. There is a series of shots of the factory emptied of human bodies; steel machines given movement only by the panning of the camera. “No machine can do what a human can do.” The word “product” is repeated three

times, followed by laughter. The mottos of management, shorn of context and set against the empty factory, appear equally empty of meaning; defamiliarized.

Next is a sequence depicting the poetry of weaving itself. We see weavers in a far less modern factory, using machines of rope and wood. The voice-over emphasizes Nishijin's weaving "tradition." The process suddenly appears unfathomably complex when the camera pans slowly from a tangled mess of a textile in progress, to the figural design it will take upon its completion: a simple forest. However, to supplement this respectful depiction of labour, the film next reveals the pain that labour entails. The voice over assumes the subjectivity of a worker's child, complaining about how little money his father makes, and how long his hours are. Anonymous hands caress their own legs, easing the tension after a day of work. The pain is collectivized by the narration: "Something unseeable: pain is in my body, is in the smoke at the shrine, is in someone else's body." Shots of offerings to gods are accompanied by a voice that says "Please protect history; please protect Nishijin." Is this an injunction to the audience in the theatre, or a prayer to the gods in the image? The ambiguity is what gives the film its richness. The film then cuts to a room full of merchants in western clothing inspecting textiles and writing down costs. This is what comes of all the workers' pain. The narration speaks of the "workers carrying on a tradition that cannot be weighed," as the merchants pin price tags to the textiles.

In the next sequence, we see a number of interesting remedies for the workers' pain. Moxibustion therapy (mugwort burned directly on the back) is cut together with a weaving machine at rest—which could signify either the peace at the end of a shift, or the anxiety before the start of the next. Then we see the children playing a game that consists of throwing nails into the soil. In the first shot is an extreme close-up on the soil where the

nails land, but the reverse shot shows the soil's perspective, where it seems the children are throwing nails directly into the camera. The sound of the nails flying through the air accompanies an extreme close-up of a pinch of mugwort burning on a worker's back. But what links these two activities? One seems violent (throwing nails) while the other seems peaceful (moxibustion). To speculate: they are both homeopathic, strictly in the sense that both therapies relieve tension by causing more tension: nails wound the earth, entertaining the children; mugwort slightly burns the skin but relaxes the whole body. By extension, this apposition echoes the purpose (and problem) of Shklovsky's defamiliarization. Robinson writes: "If your idea is to de-alienate audiences by infecting them with a homeopathic and hypermimetic dose of alienation, it is crucial, obviously, to titrate your dosage just right, or you *will* just alienate them further; but given the complexity of the somatics of literary response, such precise regulation of estranging dosages is impossible" (2008, 97). Although this reading is speculative, it does shed light on the shot which comes directly after the nails/mugwort dyad: the terrifying mask of an Oni (demon) looking straight into the camera. The film seems to ask the audience: does not the pleasure of horrific entertainment stem from a "homeopathic dose" of repulsion?

This particular Oni is a character of Noh drama called Tsuchigumo (land-spider). The name Tsuchigumo is derived from an older word, *tsuchigomori*, which means "those who hide in the ground," and was used as a derogatory term to refer to rural clans that did not swear allegiance to the emperor. Like the nails in the previous shot, this Oni is said to burrow in the earth. And like a spider, Tsuchigumo shoots a web of silk at its victims—in this case, directly into the camera. Here it becomes clear that Matsumoto is linking these cultural objects of enjoyment to the "deeper" structure of society rooted in the mode of

production—in other words, the textile industry throws its “web” over the town, which even theatrical entertainment cannot escape. The framing of the shot implies that *even the audience* is caught in this web. The film then cuts to the temple of Kuginuki Jizo in northern Kyoto, “a guardian deity for people who are suffering pain” (Wada-Marciano 2014, 373), launching a series of images of workers praying for their pain to end. This temple features a giant statue of metal pliers, used to remove nails. In a popular legend, the god Jizo removed two nails from the hands of a suffering merchant in a dream, and when the merchant awoke, his actual pain was gone. Indeed, the word “Kuginuki” means “removing nails,” but is also a play on the word “Kunuki,” which means “removing pain.”

Throwing nails and moxibustion therapy are both homeopathic, causing pain either sadistically or masochistically, in order to relieve pain. But the dyad between the demon (Tsuchigumo) and the god (Kuginuki Jizo) is different. As a character within its dramatic setting, Tsuchigumo certainly does not cure pain like Kuginuki Jizo does, but by splicing the two together, the film reveals how both Tsuchigumo and Kuginuki Jizo can play similar therapeutic roles for their audiences, although using quite different strategies. The Oni relieves pain by striking terror, by adding pain (and simultaneously reflecting the real cause of the pain: silk); while the other directly manifests a restorative power (as if by “removing the nails”). However, by playing the sounds of nails striking the earth over the images of the workers praying to Kuginuki Jizo, the film is perhaps casting doubt on this strategy, which involves restoring pain without addressing “the demon” that causes it.

The final sequence of the film focuses on the modernization of the workplace, and the new relationship this entails between management and labour—what Michel Foucault

may have called “pastoral power.”<sup>54</sup> It begins in the factory again, with two nails sticking out conspicuously from the wood. After a sign that reads, “weavers wanted,” signaling the dependency of the industry on human labour, we return to the factory which has been renovated with machines of steel. We see the busy offices of secretaries, and then a “party” that management has thrown for their workers. The voice-over speaks on behalf of the union, or the management, or perhaps the town itself: “The whole town will welcome you. Nishijin appreciates your hardship.” The newly hired workers, some of them incredibly young, are shown amid the new machines, working at much faster pace than before. The management, desperate to keep these workers, lays out lunches for all of them, wrapped like gifts. Even the children have new games: realistic toy guns, skeleton masks, skipping rope. But still the streets are filled with signs calling for more weavers.

The penultimate scene of the film takes place at a long table in a boardroom. The managers and the owners of the company are assembled around a long table drinking tea and smoking cigarettes. Their meeting is shot from directly above, concealing their faces entirely. This defamiliarizing angle discourages identification and makes the meeting seem contrived. A panning shot showing the backs of their heads moves from right to left (echoing the previous shot over the anonymous workers). This time, the camera pauses on each of them in turn, as if the backs of their heads could signify some kind of individuality. Then there is a series of individual close-ups of the managers, seen from above, with the camera centered on their balding heads. An extreme close-up shows a pair of lips taking a relaxed drag from a cigarette. The audio in this sequence is composed of fragments of their

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<sup>54</sup> Foucault writes: “Pastoral power is not merely a form of power that commands, it must also be prepared to sacrifice itself for the life and salvation of the flock. Therefore, it is different from royal power, which demands a sacrifice from its subjects to save the throne” (2000, 333).

conversation, strung into non-grammatical constructions. Some intelligible fragments come out: “Even though salaries are low,” or “We have to create a new environment of happiness, cleanliness,” or “Youngsters would rather work in a modern factory.” This climactic sequence shows the “brain” which directs the factory “body” without consulting it. But rather than transcribing their thoughts (and faces) clearly, the film scrambles them, making the individuals interchangeable and their ideas out of order.

All in all, this sequence reveals a kind of “automatism” existing even within management. Without proper context, their mottos appear hollow: “We company owners have to change our way thinking.” This scene, far from engaging rationally in the discourse of capitalism, instead presents capitalism in such a way that it seems meaningless, a form without content, or in a word, defamiliarized. Indeed, *Nishijin*’s ability to make capitalism appear strange, arbitrary, or artificial, does not emerge from the logos (or “practical language”) of an argumentative polemic. Instead it emerges from the pathos (or “poetic language”) of suffering bodies and broken sentences. In other words, the political power of *Nishijin* does not simply emanate from the image itself, or the proximity of its referent to the film’s intended audience. It is the expressive language of montage, which precisely by lacking an explicit position allows a critique of capitalism to emerge from the audience themselves, from their creative engagement with the film. It could be argued that this effect comes from the logos of the “intellectual” montage of the film, but this is perhaps the very lesson of the Kuleshov effect: meaning is not within the image itself, but between images—in other words, the logos must come from the audience.

The final sequence of the film seems to emphasize this point. The camera dollies through a pile of picket signs in the office of the worker’s union. The signs complain of

working conditions, long hours, low pay. “Even the owners don’t want their kids to work here,” the voice says. But this sequence, short of being an obvious endorsement of the union, is left ambivalent, since camera rests on the empty seats of the office, echoing the emptiness of the alleyways, and the emptiness before the shrine.

Overall, *Nishijin* veers from the sensorimotor narrative of the commodity, while simultaneously employing a free indirect discourse in the voice-over. There thus is “an outside” to the images “which is inserted between them” (Deleuze 1989, 187). This outside, like the ambiguous addressee of the voice over, could either be the wider world of Kyoto represented in the film, or (perhaps simultaneously) any *actual* audience of the film. In Bergsonian terms, the real duration of the audience of *Nishijin* is not subordinated to the duration of the real weavers of *Nishijin*. The film could have simply showed the causal chain that leads from the factory to the shop, and it would make visible one level of invisibility (the invisible “mode of production” in commodity fetishism). But the film breaks this linear causal chain—or rather, expands it—to include the broader economies and cultures that surround the textile industry in a more lateral, tenuous, but a no less real way. The film, in other words, exposes the virtual effects of capitalism.

The breaking of the sensorimotor schema, and the resultant emphasis on the projection event, reaches an even greater intensity in Matsumoto’s remarkable work, *For the Damaged Right Eye*. Created for the event EXPOSE 68 (inspired by Expo 67 in Montreal), the event was a festival of avant-garde plays, poems, panels, as well as expanded cinema. Despite the implication of monocular vision in the film’s title, it required three independent projectors to be shown. Perhaps “performed” is a better word than “shown”: the projectors were set to different speeds, and thus went “out of sync” with each

other, making each projection a unique event. The two main projectors run side by side, each presenting their own montage of images which at times show similar images, and at other times create evocative juxtapositions. A third projector is layered on top of these two, although for most of the film's runtime it projects nothing at all.

The film's "content" (like *Nishijin*) is a nebulous entity which exceeds the individual images that actualize it. If *Nishijin*'s subject was the web that links the "base" of society and its superstructure, then *For the Damaged Right Eye* seems to be almost the opposite: a popular culture isolated from its base. Yet, the logic of the film's montage is more than simply ambiguous—it is contingent upon the conditions of each screening, since each screening might juxtapose different images. Thus any "reading" of the film can be at best provisional (in this case, based on the DVD version of the film). In other words, the film's meaning is constructed anew every time by the actual spectator of a particular "performance." It is possible, therefore, that a viewer may read *For the Damaged Right Eye* as a celebration of late 60s counterculture, or, for example, as a demonstration of the futility of an oppositional politics which addresses only the superstructure.

The film begins with a rapid defamiliarization of language. A few words flash too quickly to read, and a gauge (whose reference is unknown) fills up from empty. Then we see the baroque title card on the left screen, wherein the film's title is woven into a flowery design so abstract that the words are barely noticeable. The "practicality" of language is here stretched to its absolute poetic limit. At the same time, the right screen graphically represents the meaning of the words in the left screen: there is an image of a man with his right eye concealed by a patch (presumably because it has been damaged). These introductory images set up a fascinating juxtaposition: the left projector leads the audience

to see the graphic element of a text, and the right projector leads the audience to see the symbolic meaning contained within an image (the man whose right eye is damaged). In other words, the materiality of the text in the left screen mirrors the textuality of matter in the right screen, effectively “equating the power of the phrase with the power of a sensibility” (2004, 12) to borrow from Rancière’s discussion of Deleuze’s aesthetics.

Both projectors then cut to different shots of the same party. Counterculture youths dance in a stuffy room with harsh lighting. The camera wanders from their faces, adorned with flowers and smiles, to their bodies, wearing jeans a t-shirt printed with the flag of the United Kingdom. But instead of pop music, the soundtrack is a jarring and abrasive wailing, a sound so distorted that it’s impossible to tell what instrument created it, perhaps asking the audience to imagine a world where young people dance to arrhythmic noise. The third projector flashes abstract moving colours over the black and white footage of the party, which is itself periodically interrupted by the clichéd iconography of psychedelia: men in top hats, colourful spirals, marijuana joints. Although there is a contrapuntal relation between images and the sounds, it should be noted that there is a multiplicity of sound tracks, just as there is a multiplicity of image tracks. As the distorted drone continues, a garbled voice comes through the left speaker, and a second voice speaks in the right speaker. Just as there are three image tracks that refuse to coalesce, there are (at least) three sound tracks that remain equally in tension.

The projectors become more and more syncopated, displaying a dizzying deluge of magazine advertisements, TV commercials, stills from manga, the English word “pop,” an arrow pointing to the left, a drawing of lips smoking a cigarette, the title card from the beginning of the film, etc. Images flow freely through each projector, tethered neither to

the prior image in the same projector, nor the concurrent image in the other projectors. The images come to be connected only in an indirect way, as belonging to the same general cultural “moment.” The images emerge out of the general zeitgeist, rather than tracing a thread through that zeitgeist. The film, therefore, offers a condensed experience of the intense speed and fragmentation of modern technological consumerism—presenting, rather than representing, the dissonance of cultural life in late capitalism.

Throughout the moving palimpsest, the footage of the party becomes a refrain, while pre-existing images are remediated *ad nauseum* to the sounds of The Rolling Stones, Aretha Franklin, and the Beatles (played backwards). Images connoting the sexual permissiveness of the 60s (a nude photograph, the glossy lips of a model) are suddenly offset by shots of mangled flesh (perhaps disfigured by atomic radiation) before suddenly leaping to a shopping centre, where a ‘happening’ is happening, perhaps one of the ‘rituals’ performed by *Zero Jigen*: a shopper is being tied to a pillar. Both the person and the pillar are covered with newsprint. A crowd of onlookers watch while the opposite projector shows us typical images of television spectacle: a motorcycle race, an advertisement for bowling, the words “Stop Winter Cold,” dolls placed in sex positions, the partiers (still dancing), a still image of Kim Hiro (the Korean-Japanese political activist).

Here the film’s ambiguous politics emerge. Far from praising the new liberal freedoms of sex, drugs, and rock and roll, the film places the partiers into a rapid montage of consumerist distraction and political agitation, where there is no clear line drawn between what is repressive and what is progressive. On which side of this divide do the partiers land? Is such a simple divide possible? These are the questions the film asks its audience. As the left projector leaps from the partiers, to a painting of a woman removing

her clothing, to an army of riot police running through the streets of Tokyo, the film's tone makes a decisive leap from a playful evocation of the new zeitgeist, to a major (implicit) critique of the way such changes are presented as unambiguously progressive. By the time that a JFK speech demonizing communism plays in the left channel, simultaneous to the voice of a Japanese politician in the right, there is little likelihood that the audience will be able to hear such rhetoric as anything but more voices contributing to the sea of noise.

One of the key images in the film is that of crossdressing men. The right projector begins this sequence with an intimate close up on a man speaking directly into the camera (we don't hear his words, of course). Later on, the right projector returns to the crossdresser, watching him put on a wig and lingerie, while the left projector continues to leap madly from deformed fetuses to protests. It is impossible to claim that this representation of the queer underground is either sympathetic or critical, prefiguring the equally ambiguous depiction of the "queens" in *Funeral Parade of Roses*.<sup>55</sup> *For the Damaged Right Eye* could be read as either linking the subversion of gender codes to the protest movement, or linking their sense of fashion to consumerism, or perhaps both. At the end of this sequence, one projector shows the queen in full drag, while the other shows riot police beating up students, meanwhile the soundtrack combines the voice of Hitler with a pop song. "Ambiguous" is not a strong enough word.

The effect of this strategy is that it makes the spectator confront their own habitual reactions to such images. For example, if a spectator normally identifies with images of partiers, but not with the voice of Hitler, then their superimposition and juxtaposition invites the spectator to consciously navigate the maze of spectacles presented indifferently.

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<sup>55</sup> "Queen" is the term used in *Funeral Parade of Roses*.

In other words, *For the Damaged Right Eye* invites the spectator to master the spectacle, rather than letting it master them.

The end of the film comes after an intensely abrasive voice interrupts the music, followed by the frantic cries of protestors. In the left projector, there is handheld footage from the front lines of a violent encounter between protestors and riot police, while the right projector shows the man in drag and the party. The third projector engulfs the other two in a fire. Then, suddenly but indifferently, the fire ends and both images return to the partiers, who are dancing to a triumphant military march, which merges with Aretha Franklin's voice. The merging of the military march with Aretha Franklin perfectly expresses the impossibility of seeing the party as either a consumerist dystopia, or a progressive utopia. Instead, the audience is left overwhelmed, bewildered, and without answers, but (hopefully) willing to speak and draw something meaningful out of their impressions.

Multi-screen films demand the audience to actively direct their attention from screen to screen. But this does not eliminate the possibility of any individual screen suturing the spectator just as a Hollywood film might. This is why the inclusion of the third projector in *For the Damaged Right Eye* is significant: it makes the audience's activity more than a mere choice between the left and the right—instead, the audience is constantly being pushed “outside” of each screen. And, regardless of whether an audience chooses to see the counterculture as revolutionary or reactionary, this is where the film's politics lie. Rather than inviting a subject who is a student of the film, the film invites a subject who is on the same plane as the film; in dialogue with it.

This indeterminacy of the image may leave the film so open to be harnessed by any political ideology, including the right wing, which may interpret the film as celebrating the police triumphing over the protestors, who represent modern decadence and deviancy. This may seem to be seen as a weakness of Matsumoto's strategy. However, it is precisely this precariousness that entails the spectator's freedom, their activity, which entails that the production of subjectivity comes from them. It is this precisely this precariousness which places politics between the spectator and the film, and not simply "within" the image. Otherwise (to quote Ara once more, in Koschmann paraphrasing) the film would treat spectators "as the objects, rather than the subjects, of revolution" (1996, 83).

Therefore, the film does not transmit a political message, but rather invites the spectator to consciously practice their own political subjectivity. It asks the audience to distance themselves from the image created by another; to detach themselves from the mystifying rhetoric of politicians; the interpolative power of advertisements; the hypnotizing power of the spectacle. The film does not offer conclusions about the events in the images, but rather invites a skepticism of them in the spectator.

At the screenings in 1968, Matsumoto flashed bright white lights into the audience so they would shield their eyes from the direction of the screen (Ross 2012, 87). This assault on the senses was emptied of all content. But the moment the work was the most "emptied" was also the moment it pressured the audience to be most active: by looking away from the image, by remaining fully "outside" of it. According to the commonplace interpretation, Matsumoto's 1970s films would be more like the white lights, emptied of content. However, this "white light" was already flashing in Matsumoto's actual phase.

This chapter has argued that *Nishijin* and *For the Damaged Right Eye* place politics outside of their content; in the activity they provoke in their spectator. These films contain a minimal amount of argumentation and information that could be used to mobilize an oppositional political movement. Indeed, in some ways, they pre-require a familiarity with their topics, rather than generating this familiarity (for example, *Tsuchigumo* or *Kim Hiro*). Instead, these films become political at the point when the audience becomes aware of themselves on the “outside” of the film; aware of themselves as the authors of their own political positions; aware of themselves grappling with the ambiguities of the film. To claim that Matsumoto’s 70s films are apolitical because their content lacks politics, then, is to completely misunderstand how his 60s films were political in the first place.

### chapter three: The Actual in the Virtual: Politics in the 1970s

This chapter investigates two short films from Matsumoto's cinema of virtuality. The first, *Atman*, is from 1975, and the second, *Sway*, is from 1985. Taken together, they are meant to indicate the general strategy of Matsumoto's post-60s avant-garde filmmaking. This chapter argues that even during Matsumoto's virtual phase, there is still an actuality—though not in the “journalistic” sense. The actuality of these films resides in their actual contiguity, rather than their representation of its recent events. The purpose of this argument is to show that the cinema of virtuality can be called political. In order to substantiate this claim, this chapter will first review how Furuhata characterizes these films, then briefly situate them historically. This chapter will then analyze the two films, arguing that their contiguity invites the transformation of the spectator.

This contiguity will be discussed slightly differently in this chapter. This chapter will invoke Deleuze's crystal-image to elaborate how the films are constructed. For Deleuze, the crystal-image refers to an image whose virtual and actual aspects are in a reversible relationship. The classic example he offers is when a character looks into a mirror. If the shot is composed in such a way that it is impossible to tell the difference between the character and their reflection, then the image becomes crystalline. However, if we return to Bergson's temporal understanding of the virtual as past or future, then we can reframe the crystal as a film whose temporal structure itself is reversible—in other words, a crystal is an image with no discernible forward or backward in time.<sup>56</sup>

However, Deleuze also describes the crystal as “the internal disposition of a seed in relation to the environment” (1989, 71). If we understand the “environment” to

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<sup>56</sup> “We see in the crystal the perpetual foundation of time, non-chronological time...” (Deleuze 1989, 81).

encompass the actual spectator, then the crystal becomes another way of framing the contiguity of the image, and thus relates to the political strategy of transforming the spectator—although this time, in a specifically temporal way.

This political strategy should not be conceived as an extension of post-68 theory on the powerless subject interpellated by the text; the spectator-in-the-text.<sup>57</sup> Because the films under discussion direct the spectator's attention toward the very process of a film "directing attention," the cinema of virtuality can be seen as the exact opposite: the spectator-outside-the-text.<sup>58</sup> This chapter will demonstrate how a number of possible subject-positions may result from this seed-environment relationship. However, in order to underscore the stakes of this thesis, namely, the status of the cinema of virtuality as political, this chapter will begin by returning to Furuhata's characterization of these works.

Yuriko Furuhata characterizes this period of avant-garde filmmaking in Japan as "an increasingly inward turn to the realm of private visions" (2013, 198). She calls Matsumoto's 70s filmmaking more specifically "the personal and formalist turn" (2013, 199). Without explicitly saying so, Furuhata implies that this is a turn towards the apolitical. Furuhata comes closest to phrasing her argument in such terms in her discussion of Matsumoto's participation at EXPO 70, which she sees "as a continuation of his growing interest in the medium of video and the realm of private vision on the one hand, and his increasing distance from politics and the street on the other" (2013, 199). Although her notion of politics is more complex throughout her book, in her conclusion Furuhata equates

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<sup>57</sup> This is a phrase coined by Nick Browne in an essay from 1975 called "The Spectator in the Text."

<sup>58</sup> However, this entails a paradox. To put it schematically: these films invite that the spectator deny the film's own invitations. To avoid this paradox, this chapter discusses the effects of a film without ever implying a guarantee of outcome. The film may be a "forceful summoning" (Casetti 2011, 55) but this thesis chooses instead the language of "invitation" (Deleuze 1989, 109).

“distance from politics” with “distance from the street.” Thus, within the logic of this equation, “political filmmaking” refers only to that filmmaking which represents the politics of the street. On the final page of her book, she gives perhaps the most succinct definition of the cinema of actuality: as the “desire to link what unfolds on the screen with actions on the street” (2013, 201).

In order to carry this concept of politics to its conclusion, Furuhata characterizes all else as apolitical, or what amounts to it: “inward,” “private,” or “personal.” However, there is a vital distinction that needs to be made between the “subjective” and the “personal.” A number of independent filmmakers beginning their careers in the 70s made films about their own personal biographies or their own bodies. This is certainly not what Matsumoto was doing in the 70s—or even in the 80s. These films are not about an individual subject, but about subjectivity as such. To fail to see the distinction between Matsumoto’s work, and the autobiographical work of a younger generation of documentarists, is to fail to see the political imperative behind Matsumoto’s films.<sup>59</sup> Matsumoto also distances himself from such autobiographical filmmaking. In interview with Gerow, Matsumoto speaks of “the danger that these films will connect with a kind of closed-off individuality.” Indeed, for Matsumoto the personal becomes apolitical not when it closes itself off from the streets, but when it closes itself off from its “outside” in an epistemological sense:

The reason [for opposing the “I-films”] relates to the “I” found in Descartes’s “I think therefore I am,” the “I” in a modernist cogito establishing an independent self through opposition with the world. Well, there are problems with an “I” which doesn’t doubt its “self” and the so-called “I-films” (*watakushi eiga*) share those: they never put their “I” in question. Since they don’t attempt to relativize themselves through a relationship with the external world, they gradually become

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<sup>59</sup> There is, of course, a case to be made for the political value of the autobiographical. For example, Kazuo Hara’s documentary *Extreme Private Eros* (1974) follows his feminist ex-wife whose daily activities revolve around political action. Also, see Renov, “The Subject of Documentary” for an exploration of this point.

self-complete—a pre-established harmony. Fidelity to this self-identical self is connected to something like the modern myth of individuality (Gerow).

Matsumoto's post-60s films, although lacking journalistic actuality, can be seen as “actual” in this sense: their goal is for the spectator to put their “I” in question, and to shatter the fidelity to a self-identical-self constituted autonomously of the external world. In this way, these films are deeply political. It is not a politics of the street, nor a politics of the personal, but a politics that relates to how the spectator's subjectivity forms in relation to its environment. Moreover, if one looks closely at the historical context of the early 70s, when Matsumoto began this shift, the politics of subjectivity takes on an urgency.

Although they disagree on the specific dates, both Furuhata and Nornes argue that the mid-1970s was a time when Japanese political filmmaking was in decline. But this calls for clarification: the 1970s was a time when *leftist* filmmaking was in decline. It was also a time when the state became increasingly manipulative in their deployment of journalism, and was nearing a monopoly on the mediatisation of political events. For example, the broadcasting of the Asama Sanso incident in 1972 on television was orchestrated in such a way that, according to Furuhata, it created a strong identification effect. She notes that “many of the high-profile media events in Japan had interpellated the audience as national subjects, but the Asama Sanso Incident was particularly effective in aligning the position of the reporter and the audience with that of the state” (2013, 186).<sup>60</sup> Furuhata cites critic and theorist Nakahira Takuma who claims that the timing of the massacre was carefully orchestrated (by the collaborating forces of the media and the state) so that the viewer would approve of the massacre (2013, 187).

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<sup>60</sup> In the case of Kim Hiro's hostage crisis in 1968, things were different. Some reporters, and certainly the protagonists of the cinema of actuality, supported Hiro against the state.

The state media industry can be seen to appropriate some of the very techniques established by the cinema of actuality towards these goals.<sup>61</sup> This is the context that Matsumoto's 70s films aimed to disrupt. His intervention did not consist in openly disputing the state's role in such events, nor in explicitly opposing how the state media represented such events. Instead, Matsumoto's cinema of virtuality becomes political by encouraging the spectator to gain an awareness of how such images might manipulate their awareness, and to encourage the spectator to engage with images in ways other than simple identification. To suggest that these films encourage "new ways of seeing" is not a metaphor. At the very level of perception, these films invite the spectator to have a mastery over the image, rather than it over them.

Before getting more specific, it must be stressed that *Atman* and *Sway* are both *films*—even though, from 1971 onwards, Matsumoto's creative output was equal parts film and video. In style, Matsumoto's video art is quite heterogeneous. The earliest of these (other than the brief video experiments featured in *Funeral Parade of Roses*, 1969) is *Metastasis* (1971), which features a still photograph of a toilet subjected to modular effects giving it a specific duration. This is quite different from *Enigma* (1978) which shows a digital design literally closing upon itself to form a sphere, which then rotates and recedes into the distance as other designs bend into a cone and vanish into an "event horizon." Still different from both of these is *Ki* (1981), which follows a mysterious figure moving at a hypnotic pace through a lush forest full of tombstones. Because of the heterogeneity of styles in Matsumoto's video work, his short films from the same period, like *Atman* and

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<sup>61</sup> For example, compare Furuhata's discussion of "eventless landscapes" (2013, 139) and her description of the extended cabin landscape of the Asama Sanso broadcast (i.e. "the lack of drama," 2013, 186). However, the goal of fostering the spectator's identification is the very opposite of the landscape film.

*Sway*, can be considered part of the same cinema of virtuality. What unites these films and videos is the way their duration does not correspond to, nor represent, the duration of a diegetic world (fictional or not), but unfold alongside the duration of their outside.

It is significant that *Atman* is a film and not a video work, because it can be seen as a simple meditation on the basic cinematic illusion, which begins from stillness, but shows the spectator movement. *Atman* begins with an overwhelming opening sequence: a camera in rapid orbit around a sitting Oni. But the film immediately shows the same sequence again, much slower, so that the audience can see that they had just been tricked: the camera was not in movement at all. The technique is very simple: a series of still photographs are edited together in sequence around the figure. Each still is held for an equal number of frames before moving on to the next, an equal distance around the figure.

This is already enough to create the illusion of the camera spinning around the figure. But another element is added: within the duration of each still, there is an artificial zoom (created in editing, not in camera), so that the camera seems to be zooming towards the figure at each step around it, giving it a double movement impossible to capture within the camera. But after slowing down the illusion so that the audience sees a series of stills rather than movement, the film gradually speeds up until movement is again seen. The film seems to be asking the audience: At what point do you no longer see a series of stills, but a moving camera? At what point are you tricked? In other words, *Atman* is asking the spectator to become aware of how the film manipulates their awareness. Although it has the potential to reify this manipulation, it also creates the potential for the spectator to resist it. Moreover, in making the spectator aware of this process, it enables the viewing of *Atman* to become an exercise in sharpening the skills of “resistance” for future use.

However, the manipulation that needs resisting is not simply the cinematic illusion as such. One is typically aware that a film is composed of still frames in rapid succession, giving the illusion of movement. This knowledge does not stop a spectator from identifying their gaze with that of a character, who may tacitly embody values of the dominant culture. However, one can resist this identification by imagining the real cause of the illusory movement: the camera itself. Even if one “feels” movement, they can “read” the camera. However, this strategy amounts to displacing character identification to the camera, which does not stave off manipulation. In the case of the Asamo Sanso incident, the manipulation resided precisely in the viewer’s identification with the camera, and by extension, with the absent agency which created the images. As if responding to this dynamic, *Atman* puts the illusion precisely in the camera: there was no actual camera moving through the profilmic space. *Atman* constructs an artificial movement and an artificial duration out of a series of still photographs, which is something very different than running the frames of a filmstrip (captured consecutively) through a projector. In this sense, *Atman* is a film with a *virtual camera* moving towards and away from the object of its gaze, in a ceaseless but accelerating dance around it, while the *actual camera* was motionless. However, this term “virtual camera” needs to be specified. During the projection of any film, there is no camera actually present. Therefore, every camera can be seen, from the standpoint of projection, to be virtual. *Atman* is unique in this case, not simply because the spectator must retroactively imagine the camera, but because this camera retroactively imagined was at no point actualized. *Atman*’s moving camera is not recalled, but constructed by the montage of still frames, and actualized for the first time in the film’s projection. The moving camera exists only as a potential of the filmstrip before the screening begins.

In this sense, *Atman* is similar to stop-motion animation. However, the difference between stop-motion animation and *Atman* is that the former usually creates the impression of figures moving in continuous time through legible space—whereas *Atman* creates a figure flowing through discontinuous time. Indeed, if the spectator pays close attention to certain anodyne details within the frame, they will see the markers of the discontinuous: both the clouds in the sky and the figure's hair seem to leap into completely different positions with each cut. The sense of continuity from one still frame to the next is purely generated by this virtual camera, constructed by the film's montage. It is possible the stills were not even shot in the same order they are shown. Thus, the time captured by the camera is completely subordinated to the time that emerges from its projection. It is this emphasis on the projection duration against diegetic (or profilmic) duration which has the potential to lead the audience to realize they are the ones constructing the *virtual camera*, and choose not to identify their gaze with it. While some spectators of *Atman* may feel themselves flying around an object, others may see an object rotating before them. The audience may see the markers of the discontinuous as a sign that the film is reversible; that the previous still frame is still to come; that the past and the future are indiscernible. In other words, the audience may see *Atman* as a crystal image rotating before them, and “One can only just turn in the crystal” (Deleuze 1989, 83). The sensation of momentum is, of course, an illusion. A powerful one, no doubt, but compared to the basic cinematic illusion, it is weak. The spectator is capable of resisting it. As if challenging the audience to resist its own illusion, the film speeds up its montage to a feverish pace, while adding still more layers of rhythm: sudden leaps towards and away from the figure; the dyeing of frames yellow and purple; bursts of over-exposure; and lastly, the haunting and dissonant soundtrack, with

its own multiple layers of rhythm. These latter rhythms are asignifying, making the screen more and more opaque, and thus impeding identification even further.

As previous argued, there are at least two completely different ways that the audience can see *Atman*: the rotation around a stationary figure, or a figure rotating in place. A spectator may not even realize there was any other way of seeing the image until they discuss the film with other spectators afterwards, or they may leap back and forth between the two affects. This parallax reveals that the spectator's reflective thought, far from being in opposition to their immediate experience, directly shapes it.

These two ways of seeing *Atman* cannot really be called "readings," since they do not only relate to interpretation. Nor can they be called "feelings," because this fails to account for the immediate feedback between interpretation and experience. These are two distinct affects, and they seem to express Matsumoto's *shutai* theory.

According to Michael Raine, "Rather than a self-contained subject (*shutai*) describing a stable object (*taisho*), Matsumoto conceived of subject and object in dialectical relation, in orbit around each other" (2012, 145). In the first affect, the subject (the camera) is in orbit around the object (the demon); while in the second affect, the object (the image itself) rotates in front of the subject (the spectator). The first affect is seductive, revealing the power of images to pull the spectator into their orbit. An act of will on the part of the spectator is required to position themselves outside of that orbit. If nothing else, *Atman* shows the spectator how difficult it is to resist this gravitational pull of an image, and invites them to practice this oppositional gaze.

The two affects are immanent to the image, but must be activated by a spectator. The spectator who activates the first affect by identifying with the camera, relates to what

Rancière called the Artaudian subject, who is “drawn into the magic circle of theatrical action where she will exchange the privilege of rational observer for that of the being in possession of all her vital energies” (2009, 4). On the other hand, the spectator who activates the second affect by resisting identification, or noticing the reversibility of the images, is the Brechtian subject who is “roused from the stupefaction of spectators enthralled by appearances and won over by the empathy that makes them identify with the characters on the stage. He will be shown a strange, unusual spectacle, a mystery whose meaning he must seek out” (2009, 4). These are two different forms of subjectivity, and thus two “ways of keeping time.” They each identify with a different durational side of the crystal: Artaudians the virtual diegesis, Brechtians the actual outside. But rather than simply demanding one or the other, *Atman* simply shocks the spectator’s attention so that they may detach from the spectacle’s demands and navigate between the two.

The Artaudian subject might be hypnotized by the spinning camera, putting all rational thoughts aside, while the Brechtian subject might contemplate the seductive power of the technique, or they may try to figure out how the film was made. But the Artaudian and the Brechtian are ideal subjects. It is thus likely that an actual spectator would traverse these ideal points, possibly even watching themselves move from point to point, and thus mastering their subjective engagement with images, rather than simply letting images master their gaze. This does not mean that the Brechtian subject wins in the end: it simply means that the spectator will gain practice navigating these positions.

The first affect is “individualist” insofar as it sutures a single spectator’s gaze to the gaze of the virtual camera. A corresponding interpretation might see the demon as a representation of the eternal soul (*Atman* is the Sanskrit word for the individual’s soul).

The second affect is “environmental” insofar as the gaze breaks off from the straight line that goes from the spectator to the camera to the figure, instead grasping the relation between the diegetic interior of the image and its actual exterior, thus rupturing the illusion of a closed image. To put it bluntly, the first affect is *suture*, the second *rupture*.

What is meant by the word “image” here is significant. If it means simply the cinematic image, then it is the “affect” of the film *Atman* in question (and the terms interior—exterior refer to the spectator’s gaze in the theatre). But if “image” refers more broadly to the Bergsonian image, that is: objects in their unfolding, then the remarks above can refer in a more general way to the relation between Atman and Brahman, outside of this cinematic specificity (where the terms interior—exterior refer to where one image ends and the next begins). However, one can see how easily one meaning of the word “image” slips into the other, and how the openness or closedness of the film *Atman* reflects the openness or closedness of the spectator’s Atman. In this way, how a spectator chooses to engage with the film may reveal, or nurture, their subjectivity.

This recalls Bergson’s claim that the interior and the exterior are merely “relations among images” (2004, 13). In this sense, what is at stake in the two affects is whether the spectator privileges the interior of the image (individual) or its exterior (environment). The stakes of this distinction seem to be none other those of the *shutaisei ronso*: the limit of the individual subject within the horizon of a world. Rather than taking a stand in this debate, Matsumoto instead creates a sensory experiment wherein spectators might rapidly move from one extreme type of subjectivity to the other with ease. One might watch *Atman* and not even notice how one’s attention leaps between the interior and the exterior of the image; the interior and the exterior of the self.

This distinction between the interior and the exterior of the image becomes a far more literal dimension of *Sway*, a film made ten years later. Unlike the simplicity of *Atman*'s single technique, *Sway* employs many techniques in combination. The film opens with a slow reverse zoom out of a framed image of pliers. This image lines the outer walls of the inner temple of Kuginuki Jizo, the same temple in *Nishijin*. The reverse zoom reveals the wall of the temple, made of many identical images. Suddenly, the frame begins to twitch into and out of the image. In one frame the image of pliers is seen among many, and in the very next frame, only the interior of one image is shown. Hence, this "sway" technique can be seen as both a rapid movement backwards and forwards in time (as if traveling sporadically backwards along the reverse zoom), as well as inward and outward in space.

The film then cuts to a stationary shot of the temple exterior. From a distance, the camera watches visitors circle the temple. This is a tradition at Kuginuki Jizo: visitors walk around the temple exterior once for every year of their lives, dropping a wooden stick into a bin after every completed circuit. This tradition asks visitors to represent the duration of their lives, and to reflect upon their own past. The film likewise asks its spectator to meditate on the past, but a far more immediate one. In this sequence, two images are superimposed which differ only temporally. One shows the visitors encircling Kuginuki Jizo, while the other shows the same people a second later. This can either be grasped as a present chasing its immediate future, or the present chased by an immediate memory. This indiscernibility makes *Sway*, like *Atman*, a crystal, but of a different kind. Where *Atman* was a crystal with a central "seed," *Sway* is a crystal with a series of faces, although their effects are more or less the same: the manipulation of the spectator's awareness becomes clear at the expense of the image becoming opaque. Both films, by making past and future

indistinguishable, reveal the “split” at the heart of time. Deleuze writes: “[Time] splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Times consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we see in the crystal” (1989, 81). The film’s technique, in combination with its content (people reliving their past), makes the present different to itself. In other words, the film asks the spectator to disengage their gaze from the present. As they circle the temple, the visitors may imagine a different past from the perspective of their present, but the spectator of the film may imagine a different future from the perspective of their present. Deleuze writes, “What we see in the crystal is always the bursting forth of life, of time, in its dividing in two or differentiation” (1989, 91). In this sense, by allowing the spectator to “enter the virtual” and to see “the bursting forth of life” the spectator is asked to imagine real difference, true newness, the potential for transformation. This is the starting point for any politics.

The danger is unavoidable that this imagined difference will be appropriated into a regime of “more of the same.” As if reminding the spectator of this danger, a glass lens crosses the screen now and then, distorting the image greatly, and reminding the spectator that the image is always manipulating their awareness. This foregrounding of manipulation reminds the spectator that real difference comes from them, and asks them to disengage their gaze even from that image which asks them to disengage their gaze from the present. As if making this very point, the film performs another reverse zoom, wherein the camera doesn’t simply zoom out of an object within the frame, but out of the cinematic image itself, so that the spectator can suddenly see the outlines of the filmstrip, with sprocket holes and the edges of both the previous and next frames. Thus there are two “sway” techniques in *Sway*: the first one “sways” into and out of the actual objects within the frame,

putting them into contact with their surrounding “images” (in the Bergsonian sense). The second technique, on the other hand, “sways” into and out of the cinematic image, with the sprocket holes rapidly flashing into and out of view, putting each individual frame in immediate contact with its surrounding frames on the film strip. In both the Bergsonian sense and the cinematic sense, the film rapidly opens and closes the individuated image. But the film gets still more complex by having the two “sways” overlap and interact: as the frame zooms into and out of the film strip itself, simultaneously the film strip zooms into and out of the objects therein. The chaos created by this double “sway” in effect encapsulates the contradiction of the “image” itself, which exists only insofar as it is “artificially closed” and yet is incapable of fully closing itself.

The next sequence is a time-lapse shot of a large metal sculpture of pliers. Many visitors come to pray at this sculpture, touching it with their hands. A span of an hour is condensed into only a few seconds, so that the individuals melt into each other, blurring the “image” of one person with the “image” of the next. During this sequence, the frame is fully “swayed out” so that the spectator can see the film strip itself. But within the frame, the sway technique continues, emphasizing the impossibility of autonomy between individual “images” in both cinema and life. The film suddenly cuts from this sequence, where individuals blend and become a collective body, to a slow-motion shot of a single individual praying, whose face is clear. The leap from the faceless crowd to the separate man is a large one, and implies (like *Atman*) that there is no choice between a collective subjectivity and the individual subject, but that these are poles to traverse.

The next sequence adds yet another technique in combination with the previous ones. The sequence depicts visitors in slow-motion encircling the temple, but the frame

itself has been broken in half: the bottom half of one frame, and the top half of the next both occupy the screen. Although this is an imitation of the filmstrip jumping off its sprocket holes, it creates the uncanny feeling of time being “out of joint.” While this is happening, the image is still “swayed out” so the spectator can see the previous and next frames on the screen. A side-effect is created by the synthesis of the “sway” technique and the broken frame: we actually *do* see two full frames at once. The central frame is horizontally broken into two incomplete halves, but the next frame above it completes the top half, and the previous frame below completes the bottom half. This gives a full embodiment of how any image or event is never really individual, but is as it were broken in half, and only ever completed by other broken images.

The film then cuts to a sequence where the same technique from *Atman* is used, although here the virtual camera does not complete even a single circuit around its centrifugal figure (the pliers) before cutting away. This direct reference to *Atman* calls for their comparison. If *Atman* is a film about how easy it is to place one’s centre outside of one’s self (the essence of identification), then *Sway* seems to be a film about the very lack of centre, or in Bergsonian terms, the fiction of a fully closed image. Linking *Atman* and *Sway* with this technique recalls how Matsumoto, 25 years earlier in *Nishijin*, juxtaposed an Oni with the same pliers. In *Nishijin*, the two images were contrasted as two different ways the working class managed their “pain.” In these films, it seems they contrasted as two different ways that spectators might see images. With *Atman* the spectator might enter into the image, or resist its gravity, or both. With *Sway*, the dynamic is between seeing the individual image versus the broader set of which it is a part. Thus *Sway* challenges spectators to see an acentered flow of images rather than a series of individual ones. But

because of the intense speed of the “swaying” from one image to many, the film is not inviting the spectator not to see the inside *and then* the outside, just as we don’t see the present *and then* the future, but to see both at the same time, interwoven.

Both films become political not by saying political things, or showing political deeds, but by producing subjectivity; by inviting the spectator to produce subjectivity. The spectators of these films, in this sense, are not the actual ones in the theatre, but virtual ones on the cusp of becoming. In Deleuze’s words, the political strategy of modern cinema is “not that of addressing a people, which is presupposed already there, but of contributing to the invention of a people” (1989, 217). This does not mean that the spectator becomes a political subject when they reject the Artaudian option and detach their gaze as a true Brechtian, nor vice versa. On the contrary, there is the potential for both to be political—indeed, the political subject may be the one can traverse the two with ease. This may be what Matsumoto prescribed as remedy for the state of political subjectivity in this period.

David Desser cites several directors who blame the decline of the New Wave on the emergence of Stalinism in their activist audience. These New Wave directors felt they could no longer communicate with these orthodox subjects. Desser writes, “This feeling of being unable to communicate with contemporary youth begins to explain the dissipation of the New Wave. And it also helps explain the need Oshima, Yoshida, and Hani obviously felt to re-examine their politics and its relationship to their cinema” (1988, 196). Matsumoto can perhaps be counted among these names. He may have seen this Stalinist subjectivity as pointed solely towards the exterior, without putting their “I” in question—that is, without dialectically moving from interior to exterior. Rather than addressing these pre-existing people, Matsumoto addressed a people still to come, that is, a virtual people.

This is why these films should not be understood as simply promoting the Brechtian subjectivity. Rather, what they promote is the spectator who willingly traverses positions. Deleuze writes that “the agitprop is no longer a result of becoming conscious, but consists of *putting everything into a trance*, the people and its masters, and the camera itself, pushing everything into a state of aberration, in order to communicate violences as well as to make private business pass into the political, and political affairs into the private” (1989, 219). “The people to come” are not those who “choose” the political *over* the private, nor vice versa, but those who can place the political *in* the private, and vice versa. “The people to come” that these films invite are subjects who move from the virtual diegesis to the actual environment, and thus people who traverse the two subjectivities. One needs to be Brechtian when watching the Asama Sanso broadcast, but Artaudian when performing a street protest. The difficult task is knowing what type of awareness the immediate context demands, and to do this, one must look to the outside of the spectacle, to its context.

In this sense, opening the self-identical image might be the political act *par excellence*, whether it be a commodity pried open to the relations which created it, the opening of a news story to its historical context, a cinematic image opening towards its spectators, or a person grasping their contiguity with other people, with whom they share a world. This is not to say that all political problems are rooted in seeing closed images instead of a flux of openness, but simply that the opening of the self-identical is a basic prerequisite for imagining difference, and imagining difference is a basic prerequisite for actualizing it. This is the foundation of a subjective paradigm which must be nurtured; a way of keeping time which must be activated; a self that must be rehearsed. These films become political by creating an environment for the rehearsal of this subjectivity.

## conclusion: To the Delayed Observer

This thesis has argued that the avant-garde cinema of Matsumoto Toshio carried on its political aspirations well after the “season of politics” of the 1960s. These films are political because they can be used very pragmatically as practice for a certain type of subjectivity (such as the Brechtian or the Artaudian), or more generally as practice for the very process of traversing subject positions. But if the political avant-garde did not vanish, then we must return to Nornes’ question: “What happened?” The hypothesis of this thesis is that around the year 1970 there was a schism in the political avant-garde, which moved in two directions, equally motivated by political aspirations.

In one direction, filmmakers placed a greater importance on the information value of their films, while the act of filmmaking became a means of direct engagement with actual political struggles. This can be found in the films of Ogawa Shinsuke, like *Sanrizuka: Heta Village* (1973), as well Wakamatsu and Adachi’s film *The Red Army/PFLP* (1971). Furuhata describes the latter as an “attempt to create an alternative circuit of information that circumvents the existing system of journalism. It aims to *produce* news rather than simply appropriate it” (2013, 150).

The other direction had a closer affinity with the visual arts than it did with journalism. The avant-garde visual arts, as chapter one demonstrated, placed the political potential of art in the transformation potential of the “encounter” and thus emphasized actual contiguity. Matsumoto took a similar approach in his film and video work after 1970, and indeed, this strategy informed his 60s films as well. However, he was not alone in this project. This thesis has focused on Matsumoto, but the cinema of virtuality is a broader movement in these decades. Connections with other avant-garde films of the 70s and 80s,

including Yamaguchi Katsuhiro's *Girl in Vortex* (1977), Iimura Takahiko's *I am a Viewer*, *You are a Viewer* (1981), and Takashi Ito's *Devil's Circuit* (1988) are waiting to be made.

The 60s, the 70s, and the 80s are, no doubt, extremely different decades. One thing that clearly differentiates them is the role of popular protest in Japan. As the tides of protest receded, and the mass movements of the 60s became a distant and fond memory, it grew more and more untimely to make political cinema.

Elizabeth Grosz defines the untimely as a future-oriented becoming that is paradoxically permitted by the past. The untimely involves “placing ourselves outside the constraints, the limitations and blinkers of the present. This is precisely what it means to write for a future that the present cannot recognize: to develop, to cultivate the untimely, the out-of-place, and the out-of-step” (2004, 117). Matsumoto's untimely avant-garde cinema is not to be conceived as a reprise of the strategies of the previous political moment, but rather as calling forth the next moment. These films can be seen as an invitation for the subject to change; as “contributing to the invention of a people” (Deleuze 1989, 217); as aiming for the reinvention the “modern Japanese subjectivity” (Wada-Marciano 2008, 6).

In what ways this succeeded is another question altogether. This thesis has simply argued that by affording the spectator an awareness of the power of the image—and by creating a “duration” for the spectator to practice subjective transformation—the cinema of virtuality can be seen as a political avant-garde. Its politics reside in nurturing a subjectivity that masters, rather than being mastered by, spectacle. It is a politics with no guarantee of success, with no inherent immunity to the trappings of the dominant culture—no guarantee, in other words, that the spectator will not identify with “the demon.” But it is a politics which generates the potential, simply the potential, to produce subjectivity.

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