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The Cinematic Subject of Masumura Yasuzo

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ABSTRACT

Although Masumura Yasuzo (1924-1986) worked within a commercial film studio (Daiei) his entire career, he was an intellectual and aesthetic maverick, having studied law and philosophy at Tokyo University and spent two years studying film making and film history in Italy.

He left a substantial body of theoretical writings. This essay is an attempt to extrapolate his theory of a post-war Japanese subjectivity realized in cinema, reading his writings in the context of several of his early major films.

KEYWORDS: Japanese cinema, Masumura Yasuzo, film theory, subjectivity, post-war Japan, film history, gender

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At least since the Soviets, the question of the relation of theory and practice has long been of central importance in cinema. The French New Wave yielded a new counter-canon of theoretically informed cinema that emerged from the directors' prior affiliations as writers and critics for *Cahiers du Cinema*. But from the late 1950s through the 1970s there was also an efflorescence of theoretical writing among three Japanese directors: Masumura Yasuzo (増村保造, 1924-1986); Oshima Nagisa (大島渚, 1932-2013); and Yoshida Kiju (吉田喜重, 1933-).[1] Although all three directors began working for major studios, both Oshima and Yoshida left Shochiku after disagreements with how they were treated, and subsequently became recognized as "art film" directors and politically committed intellectuals. Masumura began with Daiei and remained a "company man" all his life, but the range and depth of his film theoretical writings command respect in their own right, and encourage a serious consideration of his commercial output. The present essay is an attempt to extrapolate a theoretical model from Masumura's writings and to read certain of his films in terms of that model.

Perhaps the lucid ironies of Masumura's films derive from the contradictions he lived through, having studied law at Tokyo University during the final years of World War II, switching to the Philosophy department after the war, and working at Daiei studios.

An essay Masumura wrote in English on the history of Japanese cinema earned him a fellowship to study at the *Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia* in Rome. Masumura was the first Japanese artist to study at the Centro. The Centro is oldest and most prestigious school in Italy for the study of film theory and practice. "Practice" includes every aspect of film art from acting to cinematography to set and costume design.

Returning to Japan in 1953, he became a principle assistant director to Mizoguchi Kenji and Ichikawa Kon. Masumura was the "only person whose opinion the difficult director Mizoguchi took seriously" (Shirasaka, *Fumin* 206).[2] Mizoguchi trusted Masumura so much that, each day during the filming of *Street of Shame*, the cast met with Masumura alone, who wrote each of that

[1] There has been a long and rich history of film theory in Japan since the 1920s through the present day, but for the most part these theorists were not also film makers (some of the Proletarian movement also made films). See, for example: Gerow and Nornes; Gerow et al.; Kaffen.

[2] All English translations from the Japanese are my own.

day's scenes on the blackboard, rehearsed them, and directed each actor in the delivery of their lines before Mizoguchi appeared on the set (Wakao 238).

Masumura's directorial debut, *Kuchizuke* (*Kisses*) in 1957 was a commercial and critical success. Its innovations in style and its focus on youth prompted Oshima Nagisa to anoint Masumura one of the three "breakthroughs" in contemporary Japanese cinema (Oshima 116-17). Masumura's second film, *Aozora no Musume* starred Wakao Ayako, with whom he would make eighteen films. His third film in 1957 was a remake of Yoshimura Kozaburo's 1939 adaptation of Kishida Kunio's novel *Danryu* (*Warm Current*).

Masumura was both cosmopolitan and locally focused in his theoretical formulations. In a critical survey of new film makers on the world stage, he extrapolates certain tendencies from several national cinemas emerging in the aftermath of World War II, from *The Cranes are Flying* (Mikhail Kalatoshov, 1957) to *Elevator to the Gallows* (Louis Malle, 1958):

> The notion that "the new film must be filled with new film technique" has drawn a lot of negative response, characterizing the belief as a superficial technocentric prejudice. However, this statement contains a certain truth. This is because a new technique only is born from a new view of human life. Indeed a new view of human life, a new world view are in themselves new thought. A technique is thought transformed into perception. A true technician is a true thinker. Conversely, a mode of thinking that has not yet been able to realize itself in technique is a rather vague assemblage of concepts that does not possess a clear enough framework to be called a way of thinking. This is because true intellect is a two-phase structure—both perceptual and conceptual. It is precisely the person who considers technique and thought as separate entities who invites superficial error. (Masumura, "Shinjin Sakka" 59-60)

In his comparative essays, Masumura considers Japanese cinema as part of world cinema, while maintaining a consciousness of its differences. Yet within this consciousness, Masumura relies on empirical observation rather than essentialism; his specificity in considering Japanese "difference" never appeals to the exceptionalism of the *Nihonjinron* writers nor the "inscrutability"

conjured by Western Orientalism—even when he speculates on the reasons for early Western misreadings of Japanese film.

Gendaijin (*Modern People*, Shibuya Minoru, 1952) was shown at Cannes in 1953, and *Chikamatsu Monogatari* (*A Tale from Chikamatsu*, Mizoguchi Kenji, 1954) was entered in competition at Cannes in 1955. Although *Gendaijin* was a sophisticated urban comedy set in present-day Tokyo and Mizoguchi's film was an adaptation of an early eighteenth century puppet play, both films were criticized by the French press for their "sleep-inducingly slow tempo" (Masumura, "Eiga" 20) While Masumura admitted that such a critique might be leveled at the latter film, he was astonished that a film as "fast-paced and dynamically cut" as *Gendaijin* would elicit the same complaints (20). In reflecting on this Masumura concluded that "the sense of cinematic speed" is not exclusively dependent on "the functional tempo of action or editing" but also on "the internal factor of the development of emotion" (20). Therefore, the response to *Gendaijin* stemmed from the fact that "for westerners the emotional development of the Japanese characters as depicted in *Gendaijin* was either too slow or impossible to understand" (20).

Masumura's cosmopolitanism guides his analytic surveys of tendencies across national cinemas, including the signification and function of specific representational techniques. He writes:

> The relation between the drama in the film (scene) and the technology of visualizing that drama (shot) is conditioned by the film maker's concept of humanity or society.[3] Mizoguchi Kenji has created a scene with a single crane shot.
>
> The first to use the continuous pan and other camera movements consciously in the history of cinema, were German filmmakers connected to the *Kammerspiel* after World War I: Karl Meyer, Murnau, Fritz Lang. But Mizoguchi's use served a very different intention. In the German *Kammerspiel* the roving camera is used as a means to express the closure and pointlessness of

[3] Remarkably resonant with an observation from Eisenstein: "Photography is a system to fix real events and elements of actuality. These reproductions, or photo reflections can be combined in various ways. Both as reflections and in the manner of their combinations, they admit any degree of distortion—either technically unavoidable or deliberately calculated" (3-4). The mode of combination reflects the class-based orientation of the cinematographer to her/his object.

> bourgeois society. . . . Mizoguchi's camera movement clearly expresses his view of humanity—driven by a blind instinctual force flowing through the psyche. ("Shiin" 43-44)

It was shortly after the release of his third film that Masumura published what could be considered a mini-manifesto of his aesthetic principles in film making. Perhaps influenced by his legal education, he structured the essay as a *benmei*—a defense: "A Certain Defense: Turning [my] back on Emotion, Truth, and Atmosphere" (ある 弁明―情緒と真実と雰囲気に背を向けて). And in another interesting maneuver, Masumura defends himself from the criticisms his films had elicited by pleading guilty to the accusations of his critics.

> People say my work is dry and lacking emotion. Moreover, my characters are criticized as being comically exaggerated; they are frivolous and are insufficiently realistic. And my tempo is too fast, while descriptions of the setting and atmosphere are nil, tasteless and brusque. In some ways these criticisms are correct. I have consciously discarded emotion, distorted truth, denied atmosphere. ("Aru Benmei Shocho" 16)

The essay first lists three terms he rejects: emotion, truth, and atmosphere. His defense is structured around the representational means of those rejections: emotion, exaggeration, and environment. Emotion is the key, because it is both the rejected term and the representational mode of that rejection, and because Masumura's defense of his rejection of emotion is fundamental to the formation of the other two representational strategies. He writes:

> I hate emotion. Why—because emotion in Japanese films means suppression of emotion, harmonizing emotions, giving up on emotions, suffering from unfulfilled emotions, the defeat of emotions, running away from emotions. Dynamic actions, confrontation, fight to the death, or joy in emotion, the victory of emotion, the pursuit of emotional fulfillment, are not associations Japanese make with emotion. (16)

Here Masumura objects to the de facto definition of emotion as depicted in Japanese film—emotion denied or repressed. Any number of Japanese films exemplify this tendency: *The Girl I Loved* (Kinoshita Keisuke, 1946); *Wedding Ring* (Kinoshita Keisuke, 1950); *Fireworks over the Sea* (Kinoshita Keisuke, 1952); *Distant Clouds* (Kinoshita Keisuke, 1955); *Tokyo Story* (Ozu Yasujiro, 1953); *Tsuma* (Naruse Mikio, 1950); *Repast* (Naruse Mikio, 1951); *The Sound of the Mountain* (Naruse, 1954); *Nagareru* (Naruse Mikio, 1956), etc.

In declaring his disdain for "emotion," therefore, Masumura is actually objecting to the limitations on the emotion that can be depicted. In other words, the suppression of emotion is both a psychological tendency in the Japanese social order and a representational tradition in cinema. He then contrasts what has been seen in classical Japanese cinema to what might be shown:

> A woman boldly demanding love and a woman discretely making an appeal for affection—which one feels emotion? Which one attracts attention—the direct expression of love vividly active or the suggestion of a suppressed love? ("Aru Benmei Shocho" 17)

In the first film, *Kuchizuke* (1957), Nozoe Hitomi demands her potential boyfriend Kawaguchi Hiroshi declare his love in unambiguous words. In his third film *Danryu* (1957), Masumura radically updates the long-suffering nurse Ishiwata Gin (Mito Mitsuko) from the 1939 original who longs for the man she loves until he finally notices her. Masumura's Ishiwata (Hidari Sachiko) literally tackles the object of her desire in the middle of a busy train station and offers herself aloud (Figures 1a and 1b).



Fig. 1a.
Yoshimura's Ishiwata Gin.



Fig. 1b.
Masumura's Ishiwata Gin.

The suppression of emotion was not only the generic norm in film, but also a moral imperative. But after acknowledging that the direct expression of

emotion would be seen as "selfish" and "unnatural," Masumura reiterates his preference for the "selfish" and "unnatural" and proceeds to transvalue that choice by reviewing the consequences of the Japanese reverence for self-sacrifice:

> I'm on the side of the direct, the unnatural, the selfish expression. Why—because the Japanese suppress their own desires too much, and they tend to lose sight of their own fundamental psychology. At times, intoxicated by the act of self-suppression, in the auspices of a sacrifice-psychology—they often kill their own desires. It is not the case that there was no democracy in pre-war Japan. At least the Meiji people enjoyed some freedom. But the Meiji government increased its oppression and they began to abandon freedom. In the Taisho and Showa periods treasured desires such as freedom and love—even human life, were coolly—no joyously sacrificed to the Emperor. Therefore we Japanese have to forego self-abandonment and begin to learn from that which we advocate deeply. . . . For these reasons I find no interest or charm in emotions that are intoxicated with defeat and sacrifice. ("Aru Benmei Shocho" 18)

The next two sections of this *benmei*, "On Exaggeration" and "On Environment," move from the portrayal of emotional extremes to a method of representation and the relation between representation and "reality." Although Masumura declares his desire to create characters who dare to "express individual will and desire boldly and vividly," he admits that such a spectacle "will be seen as frivolous, eccentric, and excessive, and at times an unrealistic farce" (18). This is because in "the fundamental structure of the human being all desires are delimited by their environment, and are formed within a balance with those limits" (18). Thus, the brave new character in such a film would be read as a "lunatic . . . divorced from reality, an existence in an extremely unnatural state" and unconvincing as a focus in the fiction since such a distance from the regulations of "reality" would render that figure devoid of "the powers of persuasion that a gentle, steadfast humanity bestows upon a person" (18).

Let us recall that the section on exaggeration corresponds to the second term in the title, "*shinijtsu*" (真実), which means a kind of unvarnished,

uncontextualized "truth." And indeed 真実 does appear, but only embedded in a negated noun compound in this section: the "lunatic" lacks a "sense of truth" (真実感, *shinjitsukan*). The character however, only appears as a "lunatic" and the cinematic text that s/he appears in is rendered "a farce" when it is filtered through Japanese "reality"—*genjitsu* (現実). Throughout this text and others, Masumura uses *genjitsu* not as an objectively acknowledged world but as a collectively experienced one. The *genjitsu* of Japan is the collocation of cognitions, habits of thought, cultural norms, historical legacies, and the internalized calculi of negotiating sanctions and prohibitions. Therefore, "reality" as *genjitsu* is not a world that representation should reflect, nor a stable ontological horizon to which representation submits. The relation of representation to *genjitsu* is not a faithful reproduction but rather a strategic engagement. In his writings on Italian cinema, Masumura describes neo-realism as the filmmakers' response to Italian *genjitsu*; here I contend that "exaggeration" is one of Masumura's responses to Japanese *genjitsu*.[4] Furthermore, the agency that such exaggeration affords the characters is essential to the development of the subjectivity that Masumura's cinema advances.

Indeed, Masumura himself admits: "I understand that depicting the environment faithfully would increase the depth, breadth, and reality of the work, but this is not my goal" ("Aru Benmei Shocho" 18). Here "reality" is rendered with the borrowed term *reariti*. The degree to which a work reflects the object world is "reality"—simply a condition that is epiphenomenal to the representational practice, and neither an aesthetic prerogative nor an ethical priority. And note that this "reality" is a condition of the text but *genjitsu* is the dynamic between experience and a socially conditioned epistemological orientation.

This brings us to the third section, "environment," and here I need to address the communication noise between the 1958 terminology of Masumura and the basic premises of contemporary western critical theory. Masumura's

[4] For example: "In the grey Japanese reality/*genjitsu*, saturated with control" ("抑制に満ちた灰色の日本的な現実の中では" [Masumura, "Aru Benmei Shocho" 18]); "The humans who live in the reality/*genjitsu* of Japan spend a great deal of time considering things and measuring situations, and desires are crushed by reality/*genjitsu* [giving rise] to a condition in which neither individual action nor expression are possible" ("日本に生きる現実の人間たちはあまりにも顧慮し、計算することが多く欲望は現実におしひしがれ、個人的な行動も表現もできないのが現状であり" [18-19]).

ideal aim to create a drama of a subject that would "come into being even without an environment, to describe the universal, essential core of a human being" ("Aru Benmei Shocho" 19) is completely at odds with both Japanese *genjitsu* and Japanese cinematic traditions.

> Most Japanese are in large part under the control of the environment—a wild or extravagant free individual is quite rare. The human is buried within the environment. Thus more than the human itself even a film takes as its main constituent the depiction of the human's environment, and the human is scrutinized for the extent to which it accommodates the demands of that environment. (18)

Contemporary western critical thinking, drawing on Marx, Freud, Saussure, Lacan, and others, has long ago abandoned the *cogito* and variants of the "self" in favor of a socially and semiotically constructed subject. Thus, when Masumura posits an individual either before or somehow apart from the social network that had constructed the others, it can sound not at all radical, but retrogressive to a kind of Cartesianism. Ironically, the conditions and foci of Japanese cinema that Masumura rejects could be seen as both more radical and more resonant with critical theory in the west. To fully appreciate the potential of Masumura's thought, however, requires reading him both a bit more deeply and against the grain at once. Masumura is using the vocabulary available at the time. Instead of aiming for a *transcendent* subject, I contend he is envisioning an *excessive* subject that exceeds the limitations of the system in which s/he is embedded.

Masumura's 1959 essay "Scene and Shot," which I have already cited in a different context, is more theoretically consonant with the radicalization of the subject he had begun to put into practice. Here he calls on filmmakers to refashion cinematic representation to accommodate such excessive subjects:

> Today's films must depict the human of today. But what indeed is today's human?
>
> The classic image of the human being had a central core that was called "personality." However does today's "human being" possess any stable internal structure like a "personality"? . . .

> In the tumult of contemporary Japan, the human being has no margin for nurturing a personality, but rather divides one's self up according to the demands of the time and space—one is fully invested in putting into action various faces and states of mind.
>
> For the contemporary human who has lost the unifying internal structure of a personality—emotions and passions are fragmented like a mosaic. (Masumura, "Shiin" 44)

There are several contradictory positions between the 1958 "Defense" and the 1959 diagnosis of the new human. While the former focuses on the incapacity of the plane of representation to accommodate the free expression of the subject, the latter focuses on the subject's loss of center. Masumura, however, sees even the internal disarray of the subject as a challenge contemporary filmmakers have to meet.

> But this discontinuous human of today is neither frivolous nor unhealthy. They are filled with a sense of life and confidence, they will struggle resolutely and they will strive to make life satisfying. It is the duty of contemporary filmmakers to find new thought and stories from within the mode of life of today's human and through contemporary forms of shots to turn them into films. (44)

The contradictions between the subject championed in 1958 and analyzed in 1959 remain. Although it is possible that such contradictions are part of a process of thinking and rethinking, it is also possible to posit a somewhat synthetic reconciliation which requires considering not only *both* critical positions but also Masumura's films after 1958. Doing this, we can extrapolate two categories of cinematic subject: one that attempts to articulate itself through micropolitical struggle, and one that negotiates "self-realization" through consumer culture. Or, to frame the categories from a more semiotically inflected perspective: one subject who seeks to be recognized as the legitimate subject of the enunciation and one subject who manipulates relations between image and agency. Examples of the former would include Masumura's first three films: *Kuchizuke*, *Aozora Musume*, and *Danryu* (all 1957), as well as *Koi ni inochi wo* (1961) and *Tsuma wa Kokuhaku suru* (1961); examples of the latter include: *Kyojin to Gangu* (1958); *Karakkaze yaroo* [metacinematically]

(1960); "Playgirl," Masumura's contribution to the omnibus film *Uso* (1963); and *Irezumi* (1966). These modes are by no means mutually exclusive; there are frequent crossover variants as well. For the sake of clarity, I will begin with the one easier to recognize, namely the subject that manipulates image and agency.

I. Image and Agency

The earliest and most well-known example of this type of subject is Nozoe Hitomi's character Shima Kyoko in *Giants and Toys* (1958). The film is about the cutthroat world of industrial espionage among publicity departments for rival caramel companies competing for the lion's share of the national market. An ambitious ad executive, Goda Ryuji (Takamatsu Hideo) discovers the naïve working-class girl Shima and signs her to an exclusive contract to represent the everyday person who would "love" World caramels. The campaign shapes an entirely fictional pure girl and eventually changes Shima entirely. Eventually she secretly undergoes a glamorous make-over, acquires a new manager, and finds a way to break her contract and become a celebrity in a completely different mode.

Ironically, the persona she acquires is a cynical cabaret performer and in her song and dance number she embodies the predatory capitalism that had fictionalized her and provided her the means to refictionalize herself (Figures 2a and 2b).



Figure 2a. The "Shima Kyoko" of the World Caramel Ad Campaign.



Figure 2b. The "Shima Kyoko" of her own ad campaign.

In "Playgirl" (1963), Masumura presented a more complex portrait of such a subject in Mori Mariko (Taki Eiko), a young woman who guarded her virginity while changing her appearance and personality for each of twenty prospective husbands while keeping elaborate notes on each of them (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Mariko assesses her body as the platform for her transformations.

One of them, a rich playboy Kikumura Yosuke (Jerry Fujio), had been especially pressuring her for sex but she resisted. Then one night when she arrived late for a date with Yosuke, he had already left. Going to his apartment, she caught him having sex with Takanaka Mie (Enami Kyoko), another woman he was seeing.

At first Mariko watches in shock, then leaves the apartment and walks to the station. The urban landscape of night-time construction with its jackhammers drilling into the sidewalk and other machines pounding the earth rhythmically blend with images of the sexual encounter Mariko had just witnessed. She abruptly returns to Yosuke's apartment and asks him to make love to her. Mie tries to talk her out of it, not only out of jealousy, because even as someone who has broken the moral code she still adheres to it, regarding women on the "right side" of it. But Kyoko persists, and after a night together, she leaves and discards the notebook.

The first part of this film shows a woman adept at using the male fantasies of women to her advantage and her multiple self-construction puts her in control, but only within the larger code of policing female sexuality. When she decides to have sex with Yosuke, it may seem like a victory for him but he was not asking for it at the time. And Mie's role here is the voice of the patriarchy warning of the consequences while Mie's own lifestyle embodies those consequences (Figure 4). In her demand Mariko is not only abandoning her master plan but also rejecting the patriarchy's master plan and allowing herself access to her own sexual agency.

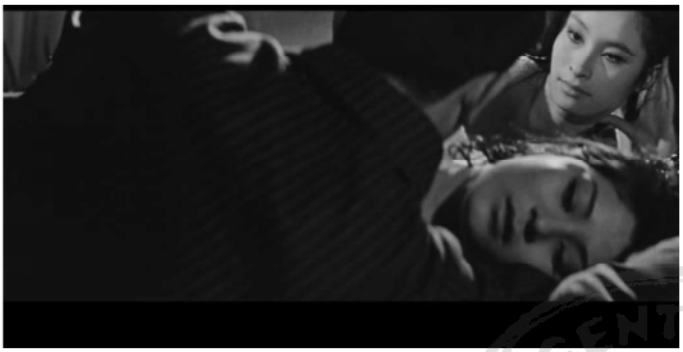


Figure 4. Yosuke agrees to Mariko's demand, while Mie warns her of the consequences.

Mariko's development also clarifies the degrees to which each form of agency can constitute a subversion. When she created a "self" for each suitor, Mariko demonstrated an acute understanding of the patriarchy, but in adapting her image to it, she remained completely within its sanctions and her success was merely an index of her compliance. When she claimed her own sexuality (albeit

within heteropatriarchal contexts) she assumed an agency outside of the social order. While her actions are now clearly a rejection of the terms of that order, it becomes an idiosyncratic one, as she has also exceeded the epistemological limits of that order (in Foucault's terms, the operative episteme of her time). She is now an excessive subject because both her motivation and its meanings for her are illegible within the social codes she had manipulated and now transgressed.

II. *Aozora Musume* (1957)

The protagonist of *Aozora Musume* finds herself excessive quite involuntarily at first, and the conventions of the narrative genre of the film allow her to maintain a sanctioned place in the larger social imaginary even after she achieves a modest self-liberation from her initial oppression.

Ono Yuko (Wakao Ayako) was raised by her grandmother on the Izu Peninsula, but just after graduating high school, her grandmother confessed to her on her death bed that, although Yuko's surname suggests she is a member of the Ono family, only her father is actually her parent. Her mother was his secretary, Mimura Machiko, which is why she was raised apart from the Ono family that consists of the mother and three other children.

Yuko moves into the Ono household while her father is away on business and is employed as a maid and given the storeroom to sleep in. Even kinship terms are barred to her. Upon meeting her older half-sister for the first time, Yuko greets her as "Oneesan," and is immediately told to address her as "Ozyoosan," the word servants would use to address their mistress. In spite of this, Yuko builds a network with the housekeeper (Miyako Chocho), the fish merchant, Hiroshi (Iwatare Yoshihiko), and the youngest son in the family, who is too young to understand the family romance and Yuko's internal exile. This circle expands to include Futami Keikichi (Sugawara Kenji), her former middle school art teacher who has moved to Tokyo, and Hirooka Ryosuke (Kawasaki Keizo), the intended fiancé of Yuko's step sister, who becomes completely smitten with Yuko. Through her many troubles, Yuko persists in asserting her rights for affection from her father (Shin Kinzo), who is more than happy to lavish affection on her, and to search for her actual mother, Mimura Machiko (Miyake Kuniko). In pursuing her own life, Yuko begins as the subject excluded from the order that simultaneously traps and rejects her. Her creation

of her own network and her persistence in finding her actual mother is her insistence on becoming the agent of her own narrative, and her victory is marked by a vehemently anti-sentimental restaging of the trope of a child at a parent's sick bed. To fully appreciate the radical nature of this moment, we need to consider the story behind the screenplay.

Aozora Musume is considered a major moment in the history of Japanese cinema and in Masumura's career as it is the first time he directed Wakao Ayako, beginning a partnership that lasted three decades and nearly twenty films. But there is another important first as well: the first time Masumura worked with the screenwriter Shirasaka Yoshio, who would go on to earn a reputation as a gifted maverick in industry. He would also write thirteen scripts for Masumura, including the "Playgirl" section of *Uso*, discussed above.

Shiraishi joined Daiei in 1956. His first screenplay was an adaptation of the Mishima Yukio novel, *Nagasugita Haru* (*A Spring Too Long*), directed by Tanaka Shigeo. His next assignment was a "Cinderella story" by Genji Keita, a novelist he couldn't stand, but he was in no position to refuse. Since it was slated to be directed by either Tanaka or the equally straight-laced Shima Koji, he churned out a script. But then he got a call that the hot new director, Masumura, whose debut film *Kisses* had caused such a stir, and been given the film. Shiraishi immediately went to see *Kisses*, and then realized that teaming up with Masumura they could "destroy" the original story. He trashed the first version of the script and wrote all night, producing the first one hundred pages of the new version (Shirasaka, *Fumin* 215-17).

The working relationship between Shirasaka and Masumura may have been dynamic during the filming. The sick bed scene as filmed is completely different from and far more radical than the version in the official screenplay published by Daiei Studios. In the original version of the scene, Hiroshi and Nae find Yuko with her mother, Machiko, and her fiancé, Hiraoka. When they tell her that her father is gravely ill and is calling for her, the three of them (even Machiko) go to the Ono house and force their way into the sick room, against the objections of the Mrs. Ono and the adult children. In the exchange, Yuko's father (marked in the script as Eiichi) does not acknowledge the presence of Machiko:

Eiichi: Yuko . . . Yuko, You've come!

Yuko: Father! I was able to meet mother! I was finally able to meet her!

Eiichi: Really? That's wonderful.

Yuko: And mother is exactly the kind of person I thought she would be. So Father, please be happy, please be happy for me.

Eiichi: Is Machiko well?

Yuko: Eh?

Eiichi: Does she hate me?

Yuko: Father, what are you saying?

Eiichi: Yuko, you must cherish your mother. And you must be happy together. Right? And tell your mother I regret my terrible behavior towards her. She should forget me and find happiness elsewhere. And Yuko, I want to apologize to you too. I don't love Machiko any more, I only love you.

Yuko: What? What? Father what are you saying? . . . Mother is right here!

[Machiko leaves quietly, and Yuko follows].

(Shirasaka, *Aozora Musume* f-22–f-23)

This leads to a reconciliation between Mr. and Mrs. Ono, and the older siblings also accept Yuko, who has left by then. Walking away from the house, Yuko's fiancé Hiraoka explains that Yuko's father had to say that about Machiko in order to restore full harmony for everyone, and Machiko would understand that too (f-26–f-27).

The actual scene in the film is far more decisive and does not aim at harmony at all. Furthermore, it is Yuko who does the talking and Yuko who makes demands. First of all, only Hiraoka goes with her, and he waits outside of the house. Once Yuko breaks the resistance put up by the older sister and Mrs. Ono, she leans close to her father's face, forming a typical scene (Figure 5) but with dialogue that immediately undermines it.



Figure 5. Deliberately ruining a sentimental trope.

As her father smiles, happy to see her, she takes his hand and says, "Father, I've come to say goodbye" (Shirasaka, *Aozora Musume*). The dissonance between the sentimental residue of the scene and the coldness of Yuko's speech continues throughout.

> Yuko: [continuing to hold his hand]. I was able to meet mother. She is exactly as wonderful as I thought she would be. From now on we are going to live together for quite a while. That's why I have a favor to ask [puts his hand back to the top of blankets and stands up]. Please forget me entirely.
>
> Eiichi: Yuko!
>
> Yuko: [standing above him] Father, when you saw the family had made me serve as a maid here, you said you felt sorry for me. But all their mistreatment was your fault. You are never honest with anyone. You knew I would love my mother, and yet why did you never help me find her? You were sly, you lied. If you loved my mother, why did you leave her? And you cannot leave your wife, why can't you love her? You lack conviction. Listen, please do this. Please love your wife. There's nothing between you and my mother. And I owe you nothing. Will you promise me, if you love me—promise me that you will love your wife. This is the only way. Believe me.

Eiichi: I believe you. (Masumura, *Aozora Musume*)

The difference between the original script and what was filmed reflects a political decision. In the official screenplay, the situation is controlled by Yuko's father's lie and her fiancé's rationalization of that lie. And Yuko's mother is simply collateral damage to the discourse that concerns her without acknowledging her presence. In the filmed version, the situation is resolved through Yuko's truth-telling, and the Ono family's recovery is up to them, while her actions are primarily an extraction of herself from a system in which she is rendered an index of its disfunction.

Yuko rejects the family that interpellated her as an outsider, and rejects the family narrative of the father's self-deception. She assumes her agency in her own narrative with a goodbye. Shima Kyoko's victory over World Caramels was entirely on the level of image and will prove to have a short shelf-life. While Mori Mariko's agency moves from image to action, she places herself outside of the available narratives of legitimation. In rejecting the Ono family narrative, however, Yuko remains firmly within the resolution of the film's narrative and its reassurance of a happy ending, albeit one arrived at through a destruction of a narrative trope (the sick bed reconciliation) and one which includes an alternative family structure (which includes Yuko's unmarried former art teacher). The final example takes its risks within more unforgiving narrative institutions.

III. *Tsuma wa kokuhaku suru*

Tsuma wa kokuhaku suru (*A Wife Confesses* is based on the novel *Murderous Intent on the Hodaka S Cliff Face* [《穂高 S 壁の殺意》], by lawyer and one-time supplemental judge, Maruyama Masaya, comprised of three murder cases led by a fictional defense attorney, Irie Sadao. Masumura's film shifts the focus from the attorney to the client, reducing the lawyer to a colorless "Lawyer Sugiyama," and changing the name of the defendant Takigawa Noriko to Takigawa Ayako, perhaps to underscore how much the version on screen is a creation of the actress Wakao Ayako.

Takigawa and her much older husband, Professor Takigawa Ryokichi (name also changed from the novel) went mountain climbing with one of his associates, Koda Osamu. Koda is closer to Ayako's age and there is a suspicion

that they are romantically involved even though he is engaged to Munekata Rie. During the climb the husband slipped, and as the three were tied together, he and Ayako dangled in midair while Koda on a ledge tried to hold on. The pain of the husband's weight and wild swinging was too much to bear and threatened to throw them all to their deaths, so Ayako cut the rope, which sent her husband plunging to his death. But the rumors of her love for Koda and the fact that she was the beneficiary of a five-million-yen life insurance policy led the police to charge her with murder. The trial is to determine her guilt.

Koda on the witness stand is asked to describe "objectively" what happened, even though he could not see the couple dangling below him. When Ayako is called to the witness stand, she immediately admits to cutting the rope, but that is not the same thing as confessing to murder (Figures 5a and 5b).



Figure 5a. The prosecutor confronts Ayako with the "evidence."



Figure 5b. Ayako recognizes the tools but denies their status as evidence.

The court attempts to delve into her motives and always presumes the worst. But in terms of "factual history" Ayako's "confession" is an indictment of the system that brought her to this point. She was orphaned at eleven during the war and was brought up unhappily by an uncle. In an attempt to make her own way, she went to the university to become a pharmacist and worked for

Takigawa as a research assistant. But he paid so little and demanded so much that she was malnourished and so depressed that she kept a vial of poison with her to give her the option of suicide. One night in Takigawa's office he raped her and asked her to marry him. She decided she might as well, so she left school and became his wife. He was cold and abusive, yet when she asked for a divorce, he refused, and Japanese law would not allow her to get a divorce without his agreement. He even admitted to friends he intended to make her suffer as long as possible. Into this situation, she encountered kindness from Koda, but nothing romantic happened while the husband was alive. Note that her "confession" is another agrammatical subject position: one can only confess one's own crime; her confession is of the crimes that the system committed against her.

The prosecution's inability to hear the significance of the testimony it had elicited occurs with witnesses besides the defendant. One expert testified that there was a chance that if Ayako had withstood the pain for several more minutes, Takigawa might have been able to swing himself to a safe ledge. However, this same expert admitted that not only did that swinging make it less possible for Ayako to bear it, but given the difference between male and female physiology and the way the ropes bound her chest, Ayako would have likely lost consciousness before Takigawa could have reached the cliff.

One of Ayako's husband's friends recalls that the husband had told him he had invited Koda and forced Ayako to accompany him so that he could terrorize and torment them with the climb. The court, however does not take this into consideration, ignoring the possibility that Takigawa's fall might have been because of his deliberate risk-taking to torment the other two.

Although Koda's fiancé Rie had little direct contact with Ayako, in her conversations with Koda she made her understanding of Ayako and empathy clear. But part of the understanding included her certainty that Ayako indeed did love Osamu, and that Osamu had feelings for her that he hadn't admitted to himself. This made her a dangerous witness. But when she was on the stand, she testified that Osamu was deeply in love with her, that he was a great and attentive fiancé, and that he only felt sympathy for Ayako, not love. Afterward Osamu thanked Rie for defending Ayako, but she corrected him: she was defending herself. She understood that her life and value were on trial on the witness stand, and indeed all women in this system were constantly under the threat of a potential judgment against them (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Both women understand how deeply they are on trial.

Toward the end of the trial, the browbeating and other emotions overcame Ayako, and during her final cross-examination she said to the prosecutor, "What do you want me to say? That I killed my husband? I did! I killed my husband!" (Masumura, *Tsuma*). Nevertheless, she was found innocent and awarded the five million yen. It is interesting to note that her confession admits a fact but does not subscribe to the judgment it implies. This resonates with Masumura's "confessions" in his *benmei* of being guilty of several things his critics had leveled against him.



Figure 7. Ayako's confession is an indictment of the system that judges her.

Between the time of the final cross examination and the verdict, Koda and Ayako went to Atami and confessed their love for each other. He asked to marry her and said he would wait for her if she were found guilty. But when she buys a fancy apartment with the money that is rightfully hers and invites Koda to celebrate, he objects to her attitude and her use of the money. During their argument, he breaks a wine bottle, and the sight of his cut hand triggers Ayako's memory of the fatal climb, and recalling it to him makes him reject her.

Her narration of the event does not significantly depart from Koda's own testimony in court, nor does it differ from what the pair knows. She merely states clearly that she had saved Koda's life and did it from love. This he cannot accept. His rejection is sudden, cold, and bespeaks a kind of individual courtroom that is as ideologically committed to the patriarchy as the courtroom where Ayako's first confession had won her a not-guilty verdict.

In her ground-breaking study of Wakao Ayako as actress, Ayako Saito offers a very compelling formulation of the operative positions among the characters in *A Wife Confesses*:

> The three men in the film—Takigawa, the husband who robs Ayako of her freedom in order to possess and control her; [Kasai], the prosecutor who condemns her for not following her husband in death in a mountain-climbing expedition; and Koda, the young man whom Ayako loves and who is unable to stray from the prescribed common knowledge and morals of society and love Ayako independently—all function as social, legal, and moral agents. Takigawa's position as a university professor and the legal authority of the prosecutor represent the symbolic institution of law, and Koda, in the name of common knowledge, falls under the influence of the community that identifies with these institutions. (162)

And it is Koda's reliance on "common knowledge" that proves the most intransigent. It is this failure to get through to Koda that most viscerally illuminates the illegibility of the excessive subject Ayako has become. When she appeals to him, his refusal to accept what she has gone through and the justice of the court's verdict throw her into despair. Koda leaves her apartment and breaks off all ties; he even calls his now ex-*fiancé* suggesting a reconciliation.

The possibility of a reconciliation may be the reason that Rie was in Koda's office building the day that Ayako appears, rain-drenched and desperate, pleading with Koda to see her, which he absolutely refuses. She then retreats to the women's lavatory where she takes a fatal overdose.

In the novel, Ayako commits suicide months later, after Koda and his original fiancé had reconciled and married. In the suicide note, she included a

check for the five million won to the newlyweds, and the new Mrs. Koda accepted it (Maruyama 252-53).

In the film, when Rie sees that Ayako has died, she confronts Koda and accuses him of murder and breaks off all ties with him, thus concluding the empathetic understand she had with Ayako that eluded both the court and Ayako's sometime lover.

The significance of these excessive subjects lay not in a utopian gesture toward revolution but precisely in the underlying pessimism. One of the major differences between Takagawa Ayako and her predecessors is the tragic closure to her rebellion. Shima Kyoko's celebrity is not so much a rebellion as a compromise with the system. And while we do not see what happens to Mori Mariko after taking charge of her sexuality, both witnesses, the "lucky" guy and the "fallen" woman, represent different aspects of the larger social delegitimation that awaits her. There is an enormous difference between the meanings of Mariko's actions in the world of the plot and the meanings which emerge from a critical reading of the film. The epistemic divide between the film's narrative and the film's address to the spectator suggested in "Playgirl" is more fully realized in *A Wife Confesses*.

Interviewed the day after filming was completed, Wakao Ayako was asked to summarize the plot of *A Wife Confesses*. She responded:

> The plot is very simple. A child, a young girl who grew up in terrible circumstances decided to become a pharmacist under her own power and become independent, and so she studied on a scholarship. She worked part time for an assistant professor, but suffered real hardships—enduring malnutrition and recurrent suicidal thoughts. At this time she fell victim to the lust of the assistant professor and married him.
> (Wakao and Yamamoto 73)

Wakao actually begins her plot summary not only with the first statements of the accused Ayako during the trial, but with an empathetic understanding of the significance of this part of the testimony that was ignored by the court. In the rest of her summary, she continues to frame it within the contexts that had been screened out first by the prosecution and then, more fatally, by Koda himself.

The actress' version of the plot underscores only the epistemological bifurcation of the film between what it reveals as an address and what is illegible within the ideological limitations of the *genjitsu* of the patriarchal institutions and the indoctrination of the "average man" (gender intentional) of the time. Wakao Ayako's summary, moreover also reveals how much of an agent she was for making this epistemological rupture possible on screen. And although the excessive subject Takigawa Ayako paid with her life for that excess, the depiction of that struggle achieves something that "realistic" persons of the period could not. Finally, this interview and its implications also support two of Saito Ayako's most important formulations on the significance of Wakao Ayako's contribution to the films of Masumura Yasuzo: first, the recognition that the "heroines of Masumura/Wakao films were . . . collaborations . . . [that] emerged from a dynamic tension between the director and the actress, from a quiet 'battle' to borrow Wakao's expression" (Saito 168). This insight covers the "actual site of production" and "historicize[s] a process of production" (168). Saito goes on to include the results of that process—not the actress battling the director during filming, but the performance embedded in and infused throughout the film forever after. "To reconfigure Wakao's body as a critical element determining textual movement is to reconsider the relationship among the spectatorial, performative, and directorial positions . . . . It is in the resistance of the heroine Wakao plays and of Wakao herself as an actor that a site of negotiation resides in which the female spectator's desire is inscribed in the text" (172). It is this "inscription in the text" that allows for a cinematic excessive subject that addresses a spectatorship outside of the restrictions of the world depicted, a spectatorship whose potential community of understanding emerges from that very exclusion.

IV. A New Technology.

The relation of the agents of production to the text produced is one of bifurcation between the represented excessive subject (whose excess may lead to destruction) and the representation which depicts, yet does not support, the social order whose coherence the excessive subject threatens. This bifurcated textual event is subtended by the contradiction between the radical impulses and gestures of films and the studio system within which these impulses are

realized. In Masumura's early work, this contradiction is also configured within the films themselves.

In a public roundtable on *Giants and Toys*, Shirasaka spoke of his and Masumura's deliberate decision to shift the focus of the original novel from industrial espionage to mass communication culture (Masumura et al. 91). This decision significantly shaped the conception of subjectivity in the film. As Michael Raine has observed, the film "recognized that individuality (*kosei*) in mass culture is also a commodity" (152). The capitalist dramas of the novel were set aside or compressed into a singular project to "promote Kyoko, a broken-toothed proletarian girl as a celebrity in order to sell the company's candy. Kyoko is shown to have no particular talents . . . but in Japan's already saturated image culture it is precisely her peculiar ordinariness that is most appealing" (152). Through "carefully placed photo spreads and appearances at fashion shows," the company creates the media's "Kyoko" and then "the empty celebrity is attached to the company's product in newspaper ads and television commercials" (154).

Although the actors who became part of Masumura's stable were significantly more gifted than the hapless Kyoko, their own fame as well as the personae they created were also indebted to the literal and social technology of the cinema. The intersection of the bifurcated filmic text and the underlying contradictions of the cinematic apparatus lead me to revisit one of Masumura's formulations that I cited at the beginning of this essay.

> The notion that "the new film must be filled with new film technique" . . . contains a certain truth. This is because a new technique only is born from a new view of human life. Indeed a new view of human life, a new world view are in themselves new thought. A technique is thought transformed into perception. . . . a true intellect is a two-phase structure—both perceptual and conceptual. (Masumura, "Shinjin Sakka" 59-60)

Both *Aozora Musume* and *A Wife Confesses* open with a moment where the technological and the affective merge to both enact and expose the ideological fixing of the subject. *Aozora Musume* opens with the day that Yuko has graduated from high school and she is posing with two classmates. This is before she discovers the secret of her birth, while she still has a place in a blue-

sky system. And she poses before a still camera with an automatic timer. So the camera is what we see first, and its movement to capture the "reality" of the young girl as a sociomythic subject position operates on its own, ineluctably, it is merely the duty of Yuko to hold that pose (Figure 8a and 8b).



Figure 8a. The camera automatically fixes its subject in place.



Figure 8b. Yuko (center) poses as the fixed subject before receiving the news that would dislodge her.

Ironically, the first shot of *A Wife Confesses* features a motion picture camera from a news reporter in front of the courthouse (Figure 9). While the first still camera was meant to stabilize the position of the good girl, the second camera is in motion, an instrument of surveillance and disapprobation, hunting for the wife who had dared to value her own life and her love over the forces that had crushed her.



Figure 9. The reporter's camera anticipates the film's capturing the image of Wakao Ayako's performance of Takigawa Ayako's life on trial.

The cinematic subject of Masumura Yasuzo is excessive while compromised and as contradictory as it is contradicted. The subject is a composite strategy and the result of variable strategies of representation, discursive conditioning of the narrative, and affective intervention.

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