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Spectator and Spectacle in Japanese Theatre and Film

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Abstract


Introduction

The relationship between the spectator and the artwork (of which he/she is a spectator of) is a tricky one, especially in so strongly a representational medium as film. Film aestheticians have traditionally concentrated on formal structures like shot-reverse-shot, eyelines, screen direction, and various other continuity devices to determine how spectators are affected by the form and style of film. More recently, there has been consideration of how ideological factors like desire and aggression structure spectator response. The bulk of analysis done with film spectatorship accords pride of place to the formal, stylistic, or ideological stimuli of the film, while a reconstituted spectator response functions to lend credence to a proposition about the structure of the film text. Spectatorship often functions as a transcendent legitimation of claims about immanent textual structures, and the contribution of the spectator to the maintenance of the representational process is frequently neglected.

In the dichotomy of film and spectator, films are usually treated as subjects; and spectators, objects, addressees, and/or consumers of filmed representations. This is particularly true in contemporary film studies. With this dichotomy, theorists speak of “spectator positioning” and “instantiation of the spectator within the text.” But these metaphors, while appropriate for the formal operations of film technique, become ludicrous if
taken as literal descriptions. Suppose there were a mode of filmic representation that regularly included images of spectatorship among its representations of the diegesis. We might expect such a practice in dominant Western cinema in representations of, say, a concert or political rally in which there is a definite performance aspect. But what are we to make of a national cinema that not only directly represents images of spectatorship, but stylizes these images in ways that turn them into expressive and decorative compositions independent of a specific performance context?

That type of cinema is standard practice in Japanese film-making, which should have considerable implications for our discussion of film representation and spectatorship. Japanese cinema offers direct representations of spectatorship arranged into pleasing compositions, going far beyond our concept of indirect, external spectator instanciation by formal positioning devices. Specifically, these representations appear in small or large groups of people arranged in a particular configuration usually dictated by the direction and manner of their collective perception. Through the concentrated perception of individuals, the collective is turned into a composition. Spectatorship is transformed into spectacle. I will call these representations “objectified spectatorship,” not only because spectatorship exists and is represented objectively in the film, but also because spectator activity is turned into an object for aesthetic effect.

Objectified spectatorship in Japanese film has a historical antecedent in Japanese traditional theatre. The relation between spectatorship and theatrical representation is an affair completely different from that in the West. The intimacy between audience and performance, the conventionality of representation and audience response, and the lack of organic unity among the various elements of the performance, ignoring the illusionistic mimesis of Western theatre - all these have been noticed and commented on. However, it is necessary to specify
some of the mechanisms of representation in Japanese theatre that contribute to the distinct relation between spectator and representational artwork in Japanese culture. This relation is a much closer one that in the West, involving a constant recognition of aesthetic distance, a conception of representation and form as social convention, and the consequent possibility of “styles of spectatorship” that exist independent of, but in cooperation with, styles of representation. In film, objectified spectatorship may be the aesthetic and historical remainder when cinema is factored into traditional theatrical procedures. The theoretical implications should be evident for a film of representation that is a hybrid between spectator activity and representational forms. A mode of representation that is capable of simultaneously including spectatorship in the representation and turning it into spectacle questions many of our assumptions about the spectator-artwork relationship.

Many writers on theatre have used the distinction between representational and presentational styles of theatre, corresponding to the difference between dominant illusionistic and alternative nonillusionistic theatre representations. Traditional Japanese theatre, including noh, kabuki and the puppet theatre, is classified as presentational, but alternative categories could be devised. Though these are hardly original categories, we might also consider Japanese theatre to be “centrifugal” in its representational force as opposed to the “centripetal” representation of Western theatre in which spectators are transfixed by an epistemologically autonomous realm signified by the concentration of the spectacle in a condensed and spatially separated playing area.

A centrifugal mode of representation is one that depends upon an informed spectator for completion of the spectacle and lacks epistemological differentiation from the spectators’ psychological orientation. The methods of centrifugal representation, then, acknowledge the presence and contribution of spectators as partner in a ritual of theatrical performance: “the
entire force of the performance is directed outward, both from the *hanamichi* and from the stage, so that the focal center of the performance is created in the midst of audience."\[3\]

A description of some of the forms of “representational ritual” is here in order and draws primarily on the techniques and conventions of kabuki. Certain principles inevitably emerge in any discussion of kabuki representational forms that, by Western standards, appear inconsistent: conventionality, intimacy, formality, virtuosity, stylization, immediacy, the connoisseur and the spectacular – all are descriptively applicable to kabuki, but by what specific means do they apply?

**Text and Genre**

In the West, the literary text of a play is the authoritative basis for theatrical practice. In Japan, however, where the repertory theatre is the norm, the text is really a pretext or springboard from which the real object of interest, the production itself, is mounted. Unlike the doll theatre, the concept of fidelity or interpretation based on the text barely exists in kabuki. The *chobo*, or narrative-musical libretto, is treated in the spirit of appropriation: the play (in every sense of the work) is the thing.\[3\] The word changes necessary to highlight the talent of the actor – whether in the acting itself, stagecraft, or sound accompaniment – are made without a second thought. Kabuki is an actor’s theatre, not a rendition of a “canonical” text, and this heightens the immediacy and intimacy of the performance.

On the other hand, immediacy and intimacy are furthered by elements that are strictly codified. Like Japanese films, kabuki plays are rigidly classified by genre: period plays (*jidai-mono*), contemporary domestic plays (*sewa-mono*), and pantomime dance plays (*shosagoto*) are the three main genres well established by the Genroku era.\[4\] Subsequent years brought refinements and differentiations among types of plays within these genres, but
new styles were always located firmly within existing generic boundaries so that audiences would always know in advance the style as well as the story of what they were about to see. Although it might seem capricious to us for a theatrical production to pay little heed to the text of the play, tradition and convention dictated a rigid codification of performance types.

**Character and Characterization**

Here too, traditional Japanese theatre had predictable and codified types. There is no distinction between rounded and stock characters. All characters are types: they typify and signify with no attempt to persuade the audience of their believability as people. Maximization of expressivity, not illusion or naturalism, is the key to approaching the essence of "the gallant warrior," "the loyal retainer," "the virtuous courtesan," or "the villainous deceiver."

But again, characterization, no matter how powerful the expression, relies on a strict codification, by convention, of the means of expression: "the spectator recognizes at the very first glance the blue patterns of the villain, the red of the good hero. . . In puppets and actors alike, class, calling and age are completely represented by the details of the features and hairstyle."v It is easy to see, then, that traditional Japanese theatre seeks representation not through convincing illusion but through intensified expression.

This is an objective accomplished most efficiently if it skirts two canons of Western theatrical representation: narrative unpredictability and organic unity. Kabuki, by contrast, allows disunity in the interest of independently bringing separate elements of performance to full expression, and for this to be appreciated by the spectator there must be a high degree of comprehension of the means of expression, requiring predictable conventions about which the audience knows nearly as much as the performers themselves.\textsuperscript{vi} In this way Japanese
spectatorship can be genuinely participatory in and even symbiotic with this ritualized mode of representation. This kind of representation might give rise to a professional spectator, one with a connoisseur's discrimination and participation in the processes of representation.\textsuperscript{vii}

An example of conventionalized characterization can be seen in kabuki representations of women played by male specialists called \textit{onnagata}, who essentially caricatured femininity, exaggerating the stylized manner and formalized behavior of the ideal Japanese woman to such an extent that well-to-do Japanese would pay \textit{onnagata} to teach them the ways of proper feminine deportment.\textsuperscript{viii}

Roland Barthes writes that

\begin{quote}
The Oriental transvestite does not copy Woman but signifies her: not bogged down in the model, but detached from its signified; Femininity is presented to read, not to see: translation, not transgression…\textsuperscript{x}
\end{quote}

\textbf{Kata}

Translated literally, \textit{kata} means manner, style, or way of doing. In traditional theatrical practice, it means the forms, patterns, or models by which theatrical representation is made. The concept \textit{kata} refers to elements within one of the three levels of form: broad, “generic” performance styles, specific performance techniques, and individual stylistic flourishes. Since the actor is at the center of the kabuki spectacle, \textit{kata} refers mainly to styles and techniques of acting, but many elements of the production that contribute to and are extensions of the actor’s performance are discussed as \textit{kata}.\textsuperscript{x} This includes such elements as costume, makeup, wigs, and various stagecraft techniques which all have individual stylistic patterns that are worked into the play in one way or another. The following discussion centers on the first two levels of form.

As broad performance styles, there are five distinct categories of acting \textit{kata}: wordless pantomime (\textit{danmari}), exaggerated “roughplay” (\textit{aragoto}, a form associated with Edo), gentle
romantic comedy (*wagoto*, associated with Kyoto-Osaka, a puppet style (*maruhon*), and a dance style (*shosagoto*). It is important to remember that as a taxonomy of performance styles, these *kata* have a certain historical and sometimes regional association, but they do not correlate neatly with the various kabuki genres or types of plays.\textsuperscript{xii}

As specific performance techniques, here too *kata* are carefully classified and analyzed. Some of the more spectacular technical *kata* associated most with the bravura *aragoto* style include: the stylized acrobatic combat sequences called *tachiwamari*, in which the death of a combatant is signified by a flying backward somersault; the *roppo*, or “six-way swagger” of warriors seeking to intimidate with their aggressive masculinity and military finery; and the striking *mie*, an emphatic, exaggerated pose punctuated by rolling the head and crossing one eye. One writer has likened the *mie* to a visual exclamation point in the way that it momentarily freezes the action and heightens the expression.\textsuperscript{xii} Needless to say, there are dozens of formal *mie*, *roppo*, and *tachiwamari* devices, and these are only three of the hundreds of specific movement and vocal *kata* that the virtuoso spectator is able to recognize and acknowledge.

Practically every other aspect of the performance has its *kata*. Costume, makeup, and wig do not so much *contribute* to character expression as they *signify* and are constitutive of character itself. The extreme codification of these *kata* is shown by the fact that *The Encyclopedia of Theater* lists twenty-seven types of *kumadori*, or warrior makeup, but adds that there are so many other types that it is impossible to include them all.\textsuperscript{xiii} But if these *kata* signify character, they also contribute to the spectacle of the play, not only by their extravagance, but in spectacular transformational *kata* called *henge* in which characters shed costumes, wigs, and sometimes even makeup right onstage to reveal a new character-signifier underneath. Sometimes these transformations are done for purely visual effect and not to
reveal any new character information. Such transformations are assisted by onstage helpers (of which there are several kinds) who constitute yet another kata in their rigidly defined functions and the manner in which they are performed.

Sound effects and music are separate, complex kata with their own conventions independent of, yet cooperative with each other and with the actor. Regarding the integration into the performance offstage geza music, James Brandon writes,

> It is of great interest to note that when geza music is playing – and this is most of the time – the actor does not match the rhythm of his acting to the rhythm of the music. He does not step in time to narimono drum patterns that are heard when he enters or exits on the hanamichi nor does he time his spoken phrases to fit the shamisen melodies that play in the background during a dialogue scene. Geza is atmospheric music. It sets a mood and the actor goes his own way within that general ambience…. The emotional connotations of a scene, but that during the playing of a scene an actor does not follow the music.

Jacob Raz defines kata as “well-established signifiers metonymically communicated to the audience.” In theatrical representation, this includes the physical organization and stagecraft of the theatre. Many fascinating kata are associated with the revolving stage, forestage, traps, and curtain, but Westerners are most intrigued by the long ramp running out into the audience, the hanamichi. Historically, the hanamichi is a descendant of hashigakari bridge of the noh stage and was extended into the audience to facilitate the continuation of an intimate relation between the performers and large numbers of spectators. Its representational function is a diffusion of the visual effect through a dispersed physical space. Various actions can take place simultaneously on the stage (which is much wider than conventional Western stages) and on the hanamichi, which results in a greater sense of immediacy and involvement with the processes of the representation. This is accomplished by abandoning the “peephole” effect of Western illusionistic staging and exploiting the aesthetic possibilities of visual discontinuity:
[...] the audience does not see the performance as a concentrated whole, for the attention of a member of the audience may shift alternately from an actor five feet away to one fifty feet away. This visual readjustment contributes much to the audience’s sense of the liveliness of the performance, but it also creates a lack of visual continuity; the performance is realized in a succession of bits of the play isolated in space.xviii

Sometimes a “temporary” hanamichi is erected opposite the permanent platform extending from stage rightward and action can occur between the double hanamichi across the heads of the audience. Hostile factions can line up and confront each other from their respective positions separated by the parquet of the theatre.xix Or the two hanamichi can represent banks of a river with actors calling to each other across the “river” of spectators separating them.xx These are among the more striking ways that audiences become involved in the representation. It is through primarily physical means, not through identification with characters or being engrossed in the plot twists, that, writes Earle Ernst,xxi “the required physical adjustment to a new area of interest gives the spectator a lively sense of 'things happening' together with a sense of physical participation in the performance itself.”
Elsewhere, Ernst compares the kabuki experience to that of a three-ring circus:

In the Kabuki there is the same sense of multiple areas of interest and the corresponding physical movement which creates in him the feeling of immediate involvement with the performance.xxii

But how does the audience respond aesthetically to all that excitement?

**Spectator-Spectacle Rapport**

Descriptions of audience response to kabuki performances, especially of Tokugawa audiences, are reminiscent of spectator responses to professional sporting events. There are formal ceremonies of promotion, commemoration or welcome called kojo in which actors directly honor each other and the audience. Formal words of praise by audience members that interrupt the performance, sometimes delivered onstage for lengthy periods, are called homekotoba. More spontaneous cries of encouragement and approval, called kakegoe, can
alter the dynamic of the performance and mark the caller as a kabuki aficionado; on the other side is *akutai*, or words of abuse that are heaped upon a mediocre performer. Whole scenes of certain plays became associated with memorable *akutai* insults and gradually were performed accordingly.xxiii

Audience participation became institutionalized with the formation of *renju*, or audience associations, which would form competitive cheering sections vying with each other for the most attention-getting collective antics, such as singing and rhythmic hand-clapping (*te-uchi renju*). Such groups still dominate at Japanese baseball games. During the late Tokugawa period, the *renju* became so powerful as to insist on being consulted in decision-making concerning details of the performance and even the management of the theatre.xxiv

Performers, in turn, had a great variety of means whereby they responded to the audience. They would make jokes, greet spectators, refer to contemporary events, apologize for poor acting, refer to themselves and other actors by their real names and family reputation, appear frightened (while still in character) of objects in the auditorium, then calm down when the object is identified for what it is, introduce themselves simultaneously as character and actor, etc.xxv That the fine line between performance and party was taken for granted can be seen from contemporary Tokugawa *ukiyo* and scroll representations of kabuki which give no less attention to the audience in front of the stage as to the play itself, sometimes going so far as to indicate specific conversation among spectators.xxvi A 1703 book describes the kabuki ambience as follows. “The people came in pushing and jostling, and eight persons sat knee over knee on a mat. It is very pleasant to see them pressed together like human *sushi*.”xxvi 1/2 In kabuki, then, the idea of inviolate epistemological boundary between diegesis and reality seems out of place.
To sum up, two important points should be stressed about the representational implications of traditional Japanese theatre. First, Japanese theatre does not try to realistically represent an imaginary world; instead, "it reverses the conventional concept of the realistic theatre by presenting techniques of mimesis as its subject matter." Consequently, theatrical representation is interactive, the spectator becoming as much a part of the performance as the actor. Representation becomes a "formal" agreement, a matter of conscious social convention.

Second, this opens the possibility for spectatorship to become an art form, including styles of spectatorship as patterns of reaction to styles of representation: "The Japanese connoisseur has developed his reactions to the level of art... Reaction has been patterned, refined and developed into art, with convention, rhythms, timing and even styles." Spectatorship and spectacle, therefore, are of one piece in Japanese theatrical representation. Jacob Raz sees this as an attribute of Japanese character rather than simply an aesthetic tradition:

[The Japanese] are characterised by the insecurity of individual identity. Therefore, they 'play roles' in life. They need audience in order to fully realise their existence. Consequently, they have always been sensitive to theatricals and have known how to
fully exploit their possibilities, both as performers and as audience.xxx

How this attribute and such aesthetics emerge in film representation is the question to which we now turn.

In looking for aesthetic ancestry for Japanese film style in traditional theatre, different authors come up with different findings. In their book *The Japanese Film*, Joseph Anderson and Donald Richie find little of note save the popularity of *chambara* films that may have been indebted to *aragoto*-style kabuki.xxx Since Anderson’s and Richie's model of cinematic representation is classical cinema with its potential for realism (leavened with a distinct *auteur* style), they are rather skeptical that there could be significant historical legacies or aesthetic commonalities between traditional theatrical forms and Japanese film. Kabuki’s stylization and narrative slightness have little to offer a film in terms of aesthetics based on realism, and as for noh, Anderson and Richie dismiss attempts to find its influences on Japanese film as "nonsense."xxx

But Noel Burch, in his *To the Distant Observer*, finds much material in traditional theatre to fuel his polemic that Japanese film practice deconstructs Western institutional modes of representation. In a sophisticated historical elaboration of theatrical traditional performing arts, Burch insists that traditional/theatrical modes of representation have in common with modernism a concern for the materiality of the signifier manifested in representational techniques that result in the "radical disjunction between signifiers" and "a fragmentation of the representational gesture."xxxii Burch draws on all aspects of Ernst's description of presentational theatre in kabuki and the puppet theatre: the *hanamichi, kakegoe, gidayu bushi* narration and the like. The continuation of such presentational means as the *benshi, oyama*, theatrical makeup, etc, Burch claims, is the foundation on which rests a specifically Japanese mode of filmic representation. The difficulty with this account of theatrical representation is
summed up in the statement that "kabuki's rapport with the audience….exemplifies the Japanese concept of reading incorporated in artistic/social practice." xxxiii Is “reading” a representation really a good way of accounting for characteristic Japanese response to theatrical performances?

Burch thinks that a “reading” of the polysemic, intertextual artwork is one more aspect of the Japanese de-centered, fragmented approach to representation. This is clear in his account of the benshi as provider of a reading that designates a film as a field of signs. xxxiv But is it not that the benshi’s interaction with the film was itself the primary aesthetic delight? Spectator and performance go back-and-forth in a composite representation, not interpretation, of a pre-existent text. In traditional theatrical practice, what Burch calls “reading” is really the incorporation of the spectator into the representation, not of a mode of representation that recognizes the materiality of the signifier.

A subject-object dualism emerges in the formalist Marxist Burch's assumptions about the spectator-artwork relation that is part of his ideological commitments. This is a dualism that doesn’t work for traditional theatrical representation because of the representational features already described; nor does it work in the “community theatre” ancestry of traditional theatre – the Japanese folk culture, communal agricultural rites and rituals, and participatory rural festivals called minzoku geino that Jacob Raz claims is the heart of all traditional theatrical forms. xxxv My claim is that in Japanese film, certain spectator formations (objectified spectatorship) constitute the residual of participatory theatrical representation; a group of classic Ozu and Mizoguchi films from the 1930s and ’40s can be used to demonstrate this claim.
Where do we turn to in order to find objectified spectatorship? Primarily to representations of groups engaged in the performance of some ritual. Ritual, of course, means not just formal rites, but any conventional or routine group situation in which there is a common object of perception. Examples might include meetings of various kinds, family gatherings such as reunions or funerals, audiences at performances, perhaps deranging or sickbed scenes, and certainly large formations like processions or classrooms – all offer opportunities for formal composition based on spectator activity for thematic, expressive, decorative or ideological ends. The fact that we can find this in very different kinds of films, styles, and directors may show the extent to which objectified spectatorship as a vestige of theatrical participatory representation permeates Japanese film representation.

_I Was Born, But…, Passing Fancy_

In these films from the 1930s, Ozu Yasujiro uses objectified spectatorship primarily for comic purposes, but the integration of his spectator formations with the rest of the representation is careful and very subtle. In _I Was Born, But…_(1932), Ozu links the regimentation of school and office by crosscutting on tracking movements that are continued from a shot of the boys marching in the schoolyard to the men yawning at their office, then cutting back to the boys at their calligraphy exercises on an opposite tracking motion.

Visual rhymes are created within and between these shots in the rigid horizontal lines of a boy’s striped shirt, of the climbing bars, and the clapboard school building in the background, which match the linear formation of the marching. The horizontal motif is carried over into the office with a rack of T-sequences and strong horizontal window frames in the background.
Gags abound in the schoolyard and classroom, which involve transgression against the compositional “norms” of objectified spectatorship. One boy gets out of line while marching, sheepishly doing an about-face as the teacher glares at him. This mistake is compounded when he takes off the towel around his neck at the teacher’s prompting, first stuffing it into his mouth, then down his shirt. Due to the careful perspectival angle on the line of boys, the bulging stomach of the boy with the towel blocks furthers the view “down the line” and thus completely ruins the neatness of the formation. The likelihood of a similar gag in Western cinema is not so important as the fact that an expressive composition is created and frustrated out of an arrangement of “modular” participants and that our knowledge of Japanese traditional theatre provides a historical and aesthetic basis for understanding the importance of a mode of representation constituted by participatory spectatorship.

In the classroom, a tracking shot presents an almost abstract configuration of identical heads, hands, and angled sumie brushes of the students poring over their calligraphy exercises. The tracking is arrested by the vertical obstruction of the teacher’s body, and a hand reaches down to encourage the boy nearest the camera. A cut to the teacher’s upper body reveals in the background a disturbance of the composition as a boy starts to get up, but immediately sits down again as the teacher turns and reprimands him, and the composition is restored. Two gags based on the rigidity of this composition include the boy about to hit another, but freezes with his hand in the air and must ask to go to the toilet to get himself off the hook; the other is a more blatant violation of objectified spectatorship in which the teacher catches a boy in a gesture of sublime satisfaction, holding the two halves of the shell of the sparrow’s egg he had just eaten. For this he is expelled from the class.

I Was Born, But…has other examples of objectified spectatorship in the “organic” movement and behavior (especially in the arbitrary gesture of submission) of the boys’
“gang,” the mortifying debut of the father on the home movie screen, the final choreography of gesture and movement in the last scene of reconciliation when the boys break their “hunger strike.” The use of objectified spectatorship contributes to the richness of a film about power and conformity and becomes an important feature of Ozu’s stylistics.

*Passing Fancy* (1932) is notable for objectified spectatorship in the opening scene of the *joruri* performance. The scene has two separate gags, one analytical (à la Ernest Lubitsch) and one integrative. Ozu opens with a tracking shot down the side of the audience, then begins isolating individual characters, parts of bodies, and significant objects such as the purse with a characteristically disorienting cutting style. The obscurity of the continuity here contributes to the gag with the empty purse, because whatever space that comes into view would be the place where the purse will be thrown next. Only when Kihachi sees that there are others slyly inspecting the purse and peeks over the shoulder of the man in front of him are contiguous spaces made more explicit by showing them in a single shot.

The seeds of the second gag are contained in the analytical first by showing one man scratching his calf. When the purse-tossing gag is exhausted, the lice-scratching gag takes over, with individual shots of the barber, then Kihachi, then someone else scratching and shaking themselves, but then the entire audience becomes involve when we see the room in long shot with individuals popping up and down like so many jack-in-the-boxes. Whenever one person pops up, three more jump up to try to get him to sit down, and pandemonium breaks loose in the audience. The punch line comes when the chanter himself begins scratching and hopping, but what is important is the fun in watching an orderly audience spontaneously erupt into lunacy. Spectators literally become a spectacle, and the integrative way that the gag is shot and Kihachi’s scolding Tomio for not being a good spectator reminds us of what the audience should be in the face of its momentary unhinging and decomposition.
Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family, There Was a Father

The first of these is among the stateliest of films in Ozu’s prewar phase; its stateliness has much to do with its arrangements of objectified spectatorship. The opening scene revolves around the arrangements for a formal family portrait. There is something momentous about this scene in light of the father’s imminent death, the repeated looks by other family members at a photograph of the father, and the gradual fragmentation and isolation of the brothers and sisters and their mother.

An interesting aspect of the father’s funeral is that although we see many of the preparations and behind-the-scenes activities, we see little of the funeral itself. The only shot is of Shojiro walking past a line of men to pay his respects at the father’s funeral shrine. Very little substance of the funeral is shown.

What we see instead is a metonymic representation of objectified spectatorship in a low pillow-shot of dozens of dark hats, all with tags on them, occupying the entire confines of the frame like some strange pneumatic landscape. But rather than following this with shots of the similarly arranged funeral congregation, Ozu cuts to a deep focus shot with one of those typically Japanese oblique angles that reveal three rooms with the shoji doors left wide open. A heterogeneous collection of men occupy the spaces: a man in closeup on the left edge of the frame, several men gathered smoking in the middle room with others in the same room facing different directions, and some men in the distant room on the right side facing away from the camera. As if this was not busy and confusing enough, other men were seen constantly passing through the crowded frame from one side or the other. In following the pillow-shot of the hats with this, Ozu is contrasting the orderly arrangement of inanimate objects with the “confused decorum” of the funeral guests’ scrambled mingling.
By contrast, the father’s anniversary memorial service much later in the film exemplifies the decorative possibilities of objectified spectatorship. A series of eight shots whose austere composition and rigorous logic from the indirect and distant to the direct and detailed epitomize the stark beauty of Ozu’s composition and editing such that one is tempted to call it a pillow-sequence (after Burch) were it not such a major part of the diegesis.

An oblique angle shot of the back of the congregation dominated by a massive pillar is followed by another oblique shot of the beating funeral drum, practically all of that is visible in this shot due to the smoke of incense. This is followed by a pair of shots of the Toda family from opposite sides of the orderly row in which they are arranged. A two-shot of a friend of the family and his wife, a pair of one-shots of the daughter and the mother and a closeup of her rosary beads complete the sequence. The structural logic of the sequence in the organization of graphic elements from shot to shot would bear close analytical scrutiny, but the relevant point here is that the sequence is an abbreviated system of formal organization based upon a particular configuration of spectators. The idea that perceptual contemplation is responsible for the decorative configuration is shown in the act of restraining the teen-aged son when he is about to “break formation” to welcome Shojiro back home.

The following scene is one that continues the objectified spectatorship of the memorial service. This is a formal family dinner in which the men and women take their places on opposite wings of an L-shaped table. As Shojiro becomes more blunt in his accusations of his brothers and sisters, they gradually leave, leaving holes in the composition, until only Shojiro and his mother and younger sister are left in the room. Donald Richie gives an interesting thematic account of this sequence in his book Ozu, but does not discuss the representational implications of creating compositions out of spectatorship. For instance, what is the significance of shooting Shojiro’s wing of the table straight on, but shooting the other wing
(where the women sit) from an oblique, perspectival angle and repeating the shot when all the women except the mother and younger sister have left? The composition and editing of this scene would reward close analysis, especially if done in the light of the composition of the characters and the object of their concentration.

A similar scene occurs in *There Was a Father* in the reunion of Chishu Ryu with his former students. Ryu and Sakamoto sit at the head of the group, served by two former students, with the others lined up on the side of the room. Speeches are made and songs are sung, which alter the concentration and hence the configuration of the participants, but one of the most noticeable aspects of the objectified spectatorship is the informal poll taken of how many children the men have. In response to each question, different flurries of hands shoot up, successively changing the design of the alumni gallery. This turns out to be a gag when one man objects that no one asked who had five or more kids.

The choreographic possibilities of objectified spectatorship also are demonstrable in *There Was a Father*. The various graphic parallels drawn between father and son are epitomized in the shot of the two casting in unison while fishing in the river. This shows how objectified spectatorship can work outside the graphic possibilities inherent in a large group and also outside of a common perceptual object. Ryu and his son are not looking at the same thing, but each is lost in his own contemplation of the line and the river, and this is what allows them to stand and move in exact synchronization, similar to the rapt, unselfconscious attention people pay to a performance, oblivious to how one’s own position may contribute to an overall spectator “mosaic.”
Sisters of the Gion, Naniwa Elegy

The former film is here mentioned only for a single shot which demonstrates the potency of multiplied perceptual structures. It makes all the difference to a representation if single or multiple eyelines are shown, both to the object of perception and perceivers themselves.

The scene in which Kimura is being scolded by his boss while the boss’s wife looks on forms a medium closeup triptych of three faces: Kimura on the left, wife in the center and slightly back, and boss on the right haranguing Kimura for his womanizing. Both the boss and the wife glare accusingly at Kimura all the while until the boss, thinking to shame Kimura further, says that when he was young, the women brought him gifts and not the other way around. The wife suddenly turns and glares at her husband, effecting a complete reversal of the perceptual and emotional dynamic of the scene. Now it is the boss who seems to be the target, because he is getting the same glare that this wife was giving Kimura a moment before and of course Kimura is still looking at him. But this is hyperbole, as the boss had only make a flippant and probably false remark to embarrass Kimura. Yet the symmetry between the “two on one” accusatory glances at Kimura and at the boss is not lost on the latter, judging from the boss’s guilty response. Of course this has narrative significance in the light of the boss’s dalliance with Omocha.

The significance of this for objectified spectatorship seems to be that a collective concentration of eyelines has a perceptual force out of all proportion to an addition of singular eyelines taken separately. The problem with this formulation, though, is that eyelines are not quantifiable and that it would be difficult to compare scenes with various types of eyelines due to complicating narrative or thematic factors.
In *Naniwa Elegy*, connections can be made in certain scenes between themes of conventional social roles, traditional performing arts, and Mizoguchi’s style of representation. As in *Story of the Last Chrysanthemums*, there is a disjunction in shooting and cutting style between the *Bunraku* puppet performance and the immediately following sequence in which Mrs. Asai finds her husband with Ayako. Both sequences are approximately the same length (about three minutes), but the puppet sequence is composed of twenty-two shots while the Asai sequence has only five. (This includes the insert of the puppets so the diegetic shots actually number only four.)

In the puppet sequence, most numerous are shots of the audience (including Asai and Ayako), but between the two other kinds of shots - closeups of the puppets and shots of the *joruri* chanter and musicians - the puppet show dominates screen time in the sequence. Moreover, we should expect an average shot length of eight seconds or less, which is exactly right for most of the puppet-only shots (six to ten seconds), except for the three final shots of the sequence, all closeups of the puppets, that last a total of forty seconds. The length of these gets us used to the diegesis (as opposed to the spectacle) of the puppets and forges a stylistic link with the very long takes of the Asai sequence. In other words, Mizoguchi does everything he can in the framing, long takes, and placement of this extended representation of the puppet theater into our viewing of the Asai sequence. The parallel between puppets and people is underlined by means of style.

The Asai sequence is notable not just for its recuperation of the puppet theatre (we have the insert to remind us if we don’t immediately catch on) but in the characters’ awareness of themselves as players. Mrs. Asai is not concerned about her husband’s infidelity, but in how foolish she looks in the position of being cuckolded: “I feel so angry! Being ridiculed by everybody.” She then throws down her purse and falls to the floor in a tantrum, to which her
companion says, “Don’t make a scene.”

The diegesis is here interrupted by the Bunraku insert, followed by Fujino’s objections to being cast by the doctor as Ayako’s legitimate date: “A ridiculous role. The only way out. Must it? What a request.” Fujino thus restores a false propriety to the scene, while Ayako, remaining herself all the while, functions merely as a prop.

When Asai is finally found out, the scene is a far cry from conventional Japanese sickbed situations, and this constitutes the incongruity that so enrages Mrs. Asai: “How dare you make a laughingstock out of me like this? What a shameful scene! I’ve never witnessed anything so disgraceful!” The point in these scenes is that Mizoguchi exposes the hypocritical role-playing of these petit-bourgeois Osaka capitalists and the hurtful consequences when an ordinary girl gets caught up in their duplicity.

Genroku Chushingura (Mizoguchi, 1941-42)

These films are little else besides objectified spectatorship. Throughout the films, the fluid stateliness of the cinematography, the overwhelming scale of the architecture and interior design, as well as the courtly gravity of retainers in royal costumes and configurations for formal audience -- all reinforce each other in what I have elsewhere called the “monumental style” encouraged under the militarist national policy. One could find objectified spectatorship in nearly every scene in these films but I will discuss just two scenes in Part II, as these appear to be especially important.

Robert Cohen has argued compellingly about the cultural basis for ambiguity in Mizoguchi’s point of view constructions, and his observations are relevant to the scene in which Oishi and the loyal retainers offer Kira’s head to the Asano shrine. This is a good
example of what Cohen calls “ritualized observation” both in the representation of the ritual itself and in the “ceremonial” detachment in the way the scene is shot. In his doctoral dissertation, Cohen argues that the distanciation achieved by the long shot, long take, and especially the circular tracking movements in this scene

[...] represents the author’s presence in the texts, and it is, therefore, a mark of excessive coding. It is not, however, without effect. It tends to underline the scene’s extreme formality, and it imposes a sense of intense control onto the fellings of the samurai.

Whereas Cohen attributes the formality of the shooting to an expressive use of technique by an authorial intelligence, I would argue that the formality of the representation issues from the formality of a particular configuration of spectators - participants engaging in a ritual. The formality of the scene is literal; not an expressive “matching” of something to be represented with appropriate devices from an aesthetically neutral storehouse of technique, but a **dictation** of the mode of representation by the structure of a homogenous collective spectatorship. In this way the representation can be seen as interactive with a collective organization of spectatorship based on formal principles of order and decorum. As such, the scene’s formal qualities have an inescapable social significance consistent with the film’s ideological objectives. Representation as an object and representation as an activity engaged in by spectators here make contact.

Another scene in which objectified spectatorship is powerfully invoked is the impromptu performance mounted by the retainers in their last days. Here, as in the head ceremony scene, the camera’s circular tracking motion that surrounds the merry *rambo* dance and haunting flute solo epitomizes the characteristically Japanese enjoyment taken in the union of performance and participation.

But here is an exception to the unified spectatorship. The old messenger for the estate, the only audience member not sentenced to ritual suicide, is overcome by grief at the
contented equanimity surrounding him, and must leave the room to weep, followed by the sound of the flute. The shot of the old man weeping bitterly outside the room to the mournful accompaniment of the flute is held for a long time and is among the most moving in this film of formal ceremoniousness and restraint. This may be an instance of Mizoguchi’s “detached observer” convention, but from which the “detachment” has been removed. The concentration on the old man is also narratively motivated in the next scene when he asks Oishi to accept service from the disguised girl, who turns out to be the forsaken lover of the flutist. But the primary significance of the ronin’s performance is the contrast in styles of spectatorship between that of the ronin and that of the old man, each of which plays off of the other.

*Genroku Chushingura* is the ultimate in objectified spectatorship. The striking choreography of dozens of bowing warriors and the motionless control of noblemen at a formal performance or ceremonial observance are elements that dominate the films. Yet it is important to realize that objectified spectatorship can be found in the humblest *shomin-geki* as readily as in a monumental period spectacle. The prevalence of objectified spectatorship in Japanese cinema makes it all the more important in our thinking about spectatorship and modes of representation, and distinguishes its Japanese manifestations from similar representations in Western cinema. But the primary differentiation from Western spectator representations is the Japanese theatrical tradition of representation as an interactive process between spectator-participant and spectacle-performance. A manifestly conventional practice of representation is also an ideological practice, and we might look at the ideological functions of objectified spectatorship in wartime propaganda films like *Airplane Drone, Army,* and *Star Athlete.*
But if we really want to see vintage kabuki representational practice in Japanese film, we can go to chambara film *Bloody Takadanobaba* (1925), relish the furious slicing and dicing, and call out with the other onlookers, “Matte imashita!” – “That’s what I’ve been waiting for!”

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**Endnotes**


ii Earle Ernst, *The Kabuki Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 104. The hanamichi (flower-road) is an extension of the kabuki stage out into the audience area.

iii Ernst, p. 117.


vii Raz, p. 261.


x James R. Brandon, “Form in Kabuki Acting,” in *Studies in Kabuki* (see note 8), pp. 65-6. My discussion of *kata* draws primarily on this essay.

xi Brandon, p. 66.

xii Brandon, p. 84.

xiii Brandon, p. 109

xiv Brandon, p. 110

xv Brandon, pp. 106-7

xvi Raz, p. 267.

xvii Raz, p. 159.

xviii Ernst, p. 77.

xix Ernst, p. 103.

xx Takaya, p. 95.

xxi Ernst, p. 97.

xxii Ernst, p. 104.

xxiii Raz, p. 186.

xxiv Raz, pp. 191-2.

xxv Raz, pp. 187-89.

xxvi Raz, p. 181.

xxvii 1/2 Shively, p. 15.

xxviii Raz, p. 257 (his emphasis).

xxix Raz, p. 262.

xxx Raz, p. 269.


xxxi Anderson and Richie, p. 327.


xxxxi Burch, p. 70 (his emphasis).

xxxxii Burch, p. 79.

xxxxiii Raz, p. 2.


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