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Introduction: The Theory Complex

Aaron Gerow

The canonical histories of film theory have overwhelmingly centered on Europe and America. Anthologies such as Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy's *Film Theory and Criticism* (Oxford, 2004), or historical guides such as Dudley Andrew's *Major Film Theories and Concepts in Film Theory* (both University of Cambridge Press) or Robert Stam and Tony Miller's *A Companion to Film Theory* (Blackwell, 2004) have devoted the vast majority of their pages to European or North American theorists. Peripheral locations such as Japan, which has had a vibrant and prolific culture of film theory and criticism for over a century, are virtually ignored. The problem is neither merely one of representation, where the term "film theory" has come to signify a select group of theorists and ideas emerging from a powerful section of the globe; where some theorists, or their scholarly commentators, assume the right to speak for all of film theory. It is also one of definition, in which the very concept of what constitutes "film theory" has been shaped by this selection. Thus, even when Western cinema scholars are open to non-Western film thinking, those concepts are rarely admitted into the arena of film theory because they do not seem "theoretical" or address the central questions of theory.

In the case of Noel Burch's 1978 book, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema*, the absence of non-Western theory might, on the one hand, be seen as founding a positive critique of the West. Claiming that "the very notion of theory is alien to Japan; it is considered a property of Europe and the West" is one way Burch constructs Japanese culture as resistant to, and thus a critique of, Western logocentrism and its cinematic equivalent, the classical Hollywood cinema.¹ Yet on the other hand, this assertion not only enables Burch to narrate Japanese cinema as based on age-old, unquestioned—and thus untheorized and conceptually uncontested—traditions, it allows him, the European theorist, to establish a monopoly over the practice of theorizing

Japanese cinema and understanding its world-historical import. This is analogous to Edward Said's European Orientalist, "for whom such knowledge of Oriental society as he has is possible only for the European, with a European's self-awareness of society as a collection of rules and practices."² Just as Burch needs his version of Japanese cinema to accomplish a critique of the "Institutional Mode of Production" (e.g., classical Hollywood cinema), by presenting a cinema that is radical, popular, and rooted in age-old tradition, so a non-theoretical Japan becomes necessary to establish his theoretical endeavor by providing a poststructuralist textuality that is other and without self-consciousness, one that authenticates and renders natural the deconstructionist project because it performs an unthinking acceptance of that, without being tainted by logocentrism. This provides contemporary theory with naturalized authenticity while simultaneously giving the Western theorist the honor of bearing the consciousness of that significance—one the Japanese other cannot assume. With this attitude, the Western eye transforms Japanese theorists into local informants (Iwamoto Kenji is the one who serves that function in Burch's book) who at best aid the foreign theorist not with theorization, but with filling in content and context, and who are forgotten in the end.

This is not simply a Euro-American phenomenon, however. Curiously, the absence of non-Western film theory, or even Japanese film theory, is also evident in Japan. One can open one of the many books introducing film theory in Japanese, such as Iwasaki Akira's *Theory of Film* (Eiga no riron, 1956), Okada Susumu's *An Introduction to Film Theory* (Eiga riron nyūmon, 1966), or even Iwamoto Kenji and Hatano Tetsurō's *Anthology of Film Theory* (Eiga riron shūsei, 1982), and find very few Japanese names.³ This is not because there is a dearth of profound thinkers about cinema in Japan, a list that includes such illuminati as Imamura Taihei (1911–86), Nakai Masakazu (1900–52), Tosaka Jun (1900–1945), Gonda Yasunosuke (1887–51), Sugiyama Heiichi (b. 1914), Nagae Michitarō (1905–84), Haneda Kiyoteru (1909–74), Matsumoto Toshio (b. 1932), Yoshida Kijū (b. 1933), Matsuda Masao (b. 1933), Asanuma Keiji (b. 1930), and Hasumi Shigehiko (b. 1936). But as Satō Tadao (b. 1930), the author of *A History of Japanese Film Theory* (Nihon eiga rironshi, 1977), the only book on the history of film theory in Japan, laments,

Japan also has seen the publication of numerous books relating to film theory, but most of them are either translations of or introductions to foreign theory. There are some tomes of film theory penned by Japanese themselves, but for some reason, these works are not examined by later generations of theorists and, therefore, have not been inherited and built upon. New theorists always just want to wait for the birth of some new foreign theory and begin their theoretical work by introducing that theory.⁴

Whatever film theory has sprouted in Japan has seemingly been repeatedly nipped in the bud, refused the opportunity to grow, adapt, morph, and create a continuous history.

This may constitute a form of intellectual self-colonization, one that, as I have argued elsewhere, is established in the 1910s around the time of the Pure Film Movement, an effort by first film critics and then filmmakers to render Japanese film more “cinematic.”⁵ Confronted with authorities defining cinema in general as a social problem, reformers projected and deflected those problems onto Japanese film and used their form of film study to correct it, locating its problems in its deviation from the true cinematic path. In this case, critics placed themselves above and beyond Japan’s cinema. Their standard for study, however, was frequently the foreign gaze, as critics from the 1910s posited exporting Japanese films not only as an economic or national goal, but also a means of changing the domestic cinema, since whether a film could be understood by foreign audiences became the measure of whether a film was a film. Film study—or film theory—became a process in which intellectual reformers assumed the Western gaze (usually imagined as Americans and Western Europeans) in order to define not only cinema in Japan, but also their elevated position in that socio-political structure—this even though such exports would only become a reality in the 1950s. A manifestation of this transcendent but solitary vision was the format subsequent introductions to film theory would take, in which the only Japanese theorist who appeared in the text was the author, who established himself as equal to foreign theory by commenting upon it, yet distinct from and superior to other Japanese theorists by effectively effacing them. By the 1920s, a particular set of relations was established between the terms “cinema,” “theory,” and “Japan”—wherein each of these concepts is defined in relation to the others—such that an often unspoken term, the “West,” instituted not only the hierarchy of its cinema and its theory over Japan, one enforced on the ground by an elite class of cinema intellectuals, but also a certain impossibility in which cinema and theory are inimical to Japanese film if not Japanese cinema culture.⁶

Japanese films remained a constant object of criticism until well into the postwar era, as critics still favored both the cinema and the theory coming from abroad and complained of Japanese film being slow, melodramatic, or too theatrical. Domestic theory experienced a complex, if not tortured history. Again, there was no shortage of impressive thinkers, but the question was whether what they were doing was film theory. The word itself, “*eiga riron*,” was common currency from the 1920s: Sasaki Norio, for example, a prominent editor of film journals and translator of many theoretical works, essentially paraphrased Béla Balázs’s manifesto for film theory in a 1927 article in *Eiga hyōron* (Film Criticism).⁷ Satō Tadao, however, doubts whether all of this was really film theory. In the introduction to his book on film theory (which is translated here in this issue of the *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*), he declares:

To the extent possible, I wish to examine only those written works concerning film theory. In Japan, unfortunately, very few individuals can be called film theorists.

Imamura Taihei is about the only person who has consistently worked as a film theorist, writing several theoretical books on film.⁸

Satō's definition is too strict: if we were to follow it, most of the great names in classical film theory, from Sergei Eisenstein to Siegfried Kracauer, from Hugo Münsterberg to Rudolf Arnheim—all of whom had pursuits other than film theory—would not be called film theorists. But Satō is not alone in feeling that the history of Japanese film theory is absent of film theorists.⁹ Not only do historians seem to forget Japanese film theory, the theory that is remembered is not even considered theory.

This may partially be a problem of the object “theory” and its definition. Dudley Andrew states that the goal of film theory “is to formulate a schematic notion of the capacity of film,” an aim that is different from that of film criticism, for instance, which is “an appreciation of the value of individual works of cinema, not a comprehension of the cinematic capability.”¹⁰ Yet this comprehension, he says, exceeds the practical; while one could say that all filmmakers engage in film theory, in that they continually test what cinema can do for them, their goal is not one in which “knowledge of an experience begins to substitute for the experience itself” and thus where knowing about film becomes more important than knowing how to use it.¹¹ Satō appears to be forwarding a different definition. While relying on certain institutional variables (such as publishing and professional divisions of labor) to delineate and thereby deny the existence of film theory as an intellectual discipline in Japan, he offers a more expansive definition when trying to identify where theory then may exist.

It is hard to believe that such an artistic tradition of Japanese film could be sustained without theoretical inquiry. Even if there is the transmission of technical skill, it does not develop through simple intuition or practices alone. Then where do we find Japanese film theory? Perhaps the succinct words passed in casual conversation from a director's mouth to the ear of an assistant director, or another member of the crew, have been of the greatest consequence to film theory.¹²

Satō is proffering what he considers a “Japanese” conception of film theory that, in contrast to Andrew's definition, is centered on the practical.

My concern is not to adjudicate these definitions, but rather to first spotlight the compulsion in Japan to fret over the existence of film theory in Japan—what one could call a “theory complex”—to both forget theory and remember it in a different form, to insist Japan has no film theory but still “to formulate a schematic notion of the capacity of film.” It is this problem that haunts, and in many ways shapes, not only how the history of Japanese film theory is narrated, but also how such theories were pursued.

This problem, for instance, renders it difficult for a historian of Japanese film theory to justify its study through simply asserting that Japan possesses a splendid history

of film theorization equal to or surpassing that of the West. That may be true, and the hope is that the sampling of the history of Japanese film theory offered in this issue will convince the reader of its intellectual breadth and depth. The danger is that tactic not only repeats in the realm of intellectual thought the modernization thesis of Japan catching up to standards established in the West, but also poses an impossibility in which Japanese film theory is celebrated when film theory itself (in Europe and America) has been defined in part through its difference from a non-theoretical non-West other. It is this potential impossibility that, I contend, the theory complex is aware of, or perhaps even derives from. The complex also problematizes any effort to root Japanese film theory in a long-standing traditional aesthetics. Not only does that strategy threaten to descend into an ahistorical (self-) orientalism, it obfuscates how Japanese thinking on cinema often grapples with theory's "Westernness" and modernity—and thus how the struggle of theory is itself distinctly modern. The problem of Japanese film theory in some ways resembles the aporia of a Japan attempting to become modern even though modernity was defined in the West through the non-West as its pre-modern other. As the literature scholar Dennis Washburn puts it, "Many Japanese recognized the predicament of their self-identity—that they could never be wholly modern in the Western sense nor wholly Japanese in the traditional sense—the process of Westernization marginalized Japanese culture and created [an] extreme self-consciousness and sense of belatedness."¹³ Yet we should note that the supposed Westernness of film theory in Japan—as well as the modernity of the medium—was less a given, simply imposed from abroad or inherent in the object, than an aspect constructed historically, well after cinema's entry into Japan, for very specific reasons, many of which were local and concerned issues of class, modernity, and nation, such as the rise of the urban masses, divisions between city and country, the development of the family state, and Japanese imperial intentions, as well as issues involving the form of cinema, ranging from the use of *benshi* (the narrators for silent movies) to the dominance of exhibition over production in the industry. The theory complex was as much a historically contingent problem as a symptom of non-Western modernity.

This also cautions the researcher against exclusively focusing on what seems familiar in Japanese film theory. It is tempting to justify the study of Japanese film thought by seeing in it versions of one's own cinema theory, for instance, finding Gonda Yasunosuke's *Principles and Applications of the Moving Pictures* to be an early form of British cultural studies, or celebrating Sugiyama Heiichi for expounding André Bazin's critique of montage years before Bazin did.¹⁴ Finding what one recognizes in it, however, renders Japanese film theory important only to the degree that it becomes one's reflection, in the West or in the present, confirming one's existence. What does not reflect what is familiar is forgotten and what does is refracted to confirm our likeness, making Japanese thought work for us, not for itself. In other words, this overlooks the potential alterity of Japanese film theory itself, elements of otherness that are irreducible to existing concepts

in the Euro-American canon. It is important to consider this otherness not simply for the sake of preserving difference against the forces of homogenization, but also because it was anxiety over such alterity that shaped how the history of Japanese film thought has been narrated inside Japan and abroad. Whoever reads Japanese film theory must consider how it can be other, in terms of space or time, in part because theory is other to it as well (again not because Japanese cannot handle abstract thought, but because that is how cinema and theory were historically constructed).

That does not mean that the reader cannot engage in a dialogue with these various theories. They can force one to think to the degree that they are “other.” As Ryan Cook and Nakamura Hideyuki deftly show us in this issue of the *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, the ideas of the contemporary thinker and film critic Hasumi Shigehiko intersect with trends in both French and Japanese thought to challenge us not only with different perspectives on directors like Ozu Yasujirō or on cinema as a whole, but also with a “theory” that questions theory itself. Kitada Akihiro, also in this issue, convincingly argues that Nakai Masakazu, an aesthetician, cultural activist, and librarian, offers a conception of mediation that contemporary Japanese media studies lacks. And one can even argue that the New Wave film director Yoshida Kijū’s efforts to rethink the other in cinema through the concept of self-negation mark a train of thought that has remained alive in the films and thought of younger directors like Aoyama Shinji.¹⁵ The dialogue that theory can promote is less about transcending time than it is about emphasizing it, as analyses by Irie Yoshirō and Pat Noonan here in this volume illustrate in underlining the historicity of Imamura Taihei and Yoshida and what that history says about the cinema and ideas of that day and of ours. This issue of the *Review* has sought to embody these kinds of dialogue by presenting translations of original writings by such thinkers as Gonda, Imamura, Nakai, and Yoshida alongside more recent critical engagements with their ideas. Those engagements, I believe, succeed to the degree they refuse to just “use” or find “confirmation” in these thinkers, but struggle with their ideas in a process that promotes self-questioning.

It is appropriate for a dialogue with Japanese film theory to engage in self-interrogation because, I would contend, much of that theory itself, especially under the contradictions of the theory complex, is significantly self-conscious, if not self-critical. An approach to the history of Japanese film theory, then, beyond respecting its alterity and remaining self-conscious of one’s own perspectives, should consider at least partially how it performs theory at the same time that it is critical of the possibilities of theory itself. Japanese thinkers such as Gonda, Nagae, Yoshida, or Hasumi often engage, consciously or unconsciously, in meta-level questions of what “film theory” means in their particular historical context, exhibiting a sort of “double consciousness” (similar to Du Bois’s sense) in which they “do” theory at the same time they are conscious of what it might mean to “perform” theory (which often includes consciousness of a sort of foreign gaze or standard). They can engage in high-level thinking about cinema, but

critique it as theory or refuse to call it theory; or they can perform under the banner of theory but do operations that deviate from the canonical form. Such interrogations of theory often go hand-in-hand with questioning terms such as “cinema” and “Japan,” querying the relationship of film to the nation, Japan to the world, intellectuals to their object of study, the educated classes to the masses, the word to the image, and film and its study to academia. Film theory can thus constitute a form of cultural or political strategy in the historical field, and so a history of that practice must interrogate its own assumptions about “film theory,” “Japan,” and “cinema.”

I believe examples from that history prove the existence of such strains of thought, even if, as Satō complains, that thread may not enjoy a self-conscious continuity. On the one hand, one can see some examples of literature, such as that of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (whose never-filmed screenplay “Asakusa Park” is translated here) or of Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, engaging through literary prose in a different kind of thinking about the capabilities of cinema, often exploring the moving picture’s uncanny ability to enunciate different but believable worlds.¹⁶ On the other, in the writings of Gonda Yasunosuke, one can see theorists themselves questioning the project of theory by reformulating it through the everyday world of the masses. Gonda, for instance, critiques academia and plays with his scholarly language in order to return theory to the everyday, just as he felt cinema was doing by returning art to the quotidian.¹⁷ Imamura Taihei’s theorizations of documentary and animation did not simply serve to justify these minor genres, but saw in them a new form of thinking itself, one in which the masses literally “thought” about the world through both cinema and the mundane objects film emphasizes. In the 1930s and 1940s, Nagae Michitarō’s plain, logical, yet richly suggestive language also aimed to return theory to the present, everyday realm of experience, while still arguing the continued need for theory to work in time to bridge contradictions and productively engage in the “commute” (*kayou*) between the expanding, specific details of cinematic technology and the totality of the film experience.¹⁸ And Nakai, whom Kitada argues is contesting meaning itself, went so far as to argue that limits in the enunciative structure of cinema allowed the masses to write their own history through the cinema.

If theory became the bulwark for Japanese Communist Party theorists like Iwasaki Akira before the war, a tool for both radical political critique and orthodoxy, those on the non-communist left after the war explored forms of theory that were not traditionally “theory.” Satō, for instance, foregrounds the informal words spoken on the set, without systematization or self-consciousness, as part of his endeavor to conceive of an influential Japanese film theory that eludes both the forgetfulness of intellectuals and the hierarchies of globalized knowledge—and thus the Western definitions of theory. This move can be linked to Satō’s background in the scholarly group *Shisō no kagaku*’s (The Science of Thought) attempt to discover the thought embodied in popular culture, and to Tsurumi Shunsuke’s assertion of the “right to be mistaken” in considering cinema.¹⁹ In another example, to a New Left film thinker such as Matsuda Masao, “The problem comes

down to whether or not, when making the non-literate consciousness (*mojinaki ishiki*) of the lower classes the object of academic thought, one can maintain, in one's academic subjectivity, an 'introspection' that can correspond with the object, one that cannot be called anything other than non-literate consciousness."²⁰ The question, in other words, was how to theorize without abandoning non-theoretical thought, and thus to keep theory in the everyday world. By the time of Hasumi, this political critique of theory became a poststructuralist one when he stated that, "Words should, before anything else, not take the existence of cinema as a given, but must be released toward the path where cinema might exist, and at the moment they manage to illuminate to a certain degree the shell of that point, they must be prepared for their own death."²¹ Theory then understands cinema the most at the instant when it ceases to be theory.

I believe there are other manifestations of these complex contradictions in Japanese film theory, where thinkers pursue a theoretical project at the same time they question theory. In some periods, one can see a questioning of the theory=West equation in how, for instance, Japanese thinkers advanced substantially developed critiques of montage in the 1930s before many of their European counterparts did, or in how a questioning of textuality and a focus on the power of reception has been a constant strain in Japanese cinematic thought. In some cases, the duality is evident in the contradictions or fissures in the thinking itself. The somewhat irreconcilable bifurcation that Irie Yoshirō, for instance, sees in Imamura Taihei's straddling of the formative and realist trajectories of film theory (in Dudley Andrew's sense of the terms), is, I think, one example of that. From another perspective, one can also see the intellectualization of much Japanese film criticism, which included Kitagawa Fuyuhiko advancing the notion of prose film (*sanbun eiga*) or Matsuda Masao discussing "landscape theory" (*fūkeiron*), complicating the usual division between theory and criticism.²² One could go so far as to speculate that film criticism offered some Japanese thinkers an imperfect alternative to the constraints of theory because it was a practice less defined by theory and thus freer of its monopolization by the so-called West. Talking about individual films, it did not assert as much command of the universal "capacity" of film, which Europe or America always seemed to claim. Weaving between the particular and the general thus became a way to both elude the usual pretensions of "general" knowledge on the part of Western theorists or academics as well as question definitions of theory. This tendency has been particularly evident today in Hasumi's students, such as Aoyama Shinji or Umemoto Yōichi.

Yet if film criticism in some cases may have been a different kind of theorizing, or an implicit questioning of definitions of theorizing, it was achieved, in the case of impressionist criticism, which dominated much of the history of Japanese film criticism, at the cost of refusing to theorize itself. The critique of theory in theory has always borne the danger of refusing to intellectually challenge, critique, or otherwise methodically analyze cinematic phenomena, including processes of meaning production, reception, and their socio-political conditions. The film scholar Abé Mark Nornes has complained

of how Japanese postwar documentary theory, often debating the problem of how subjectivity (*shutaiseiron*) related to reality, never rigorously theorized the subject through established methodologies and thus ended up with views of the film and filmmaker that were splintered and ultimately apolitical.²³ I have also argued elsewhere that devaluations of theory like those by Satō were part and parcel of the postwar construction of Japanese cinema as an ideological concept, where Japanese cinema became Japanese to the extent that it was not theorized.²⁴ Satō's problem is that, while attempting to reverse the negative view that a Japanese cinema without theory is somehow lacking, he does not undermine the divorce of Japan and theory effected by dominant paradigms, but rather revives it in a populist nationalism. The recent decline of film criticism as an institution in Japan and the persistent resistance film studies has experienced as a discipline within Japanese academia may indicate not only how much cinema has represented a challenge to dominant constructions of national and culture, but, in turn, how serious thinking about film is viewed as anathema to the political, cultural, and national economy.

Satō himself, as with many other thinkers during the history of cinema in Japan, has felt the critical need for theory; the problem he and others have faced, however, has been not just what to say about film, but what theory is and how to do it. Pursuing theory could mean reinforcing the dominant paradigm linking “Japan,” “film,” and “theory” under the aegis of Europe and America, or it could mean critiquing that very structure via the cinema. Abstaining from theory could function as a strategic protest against the intellectual or linguistic domination of the free-floating cinematic signifier, or it could reinforce the national inscription of cinema—and its business practices—as unspoken and naturally Japanese. The definitions of “theory” are in flux, subject to multiple appropriations. If the content and goals of film theory are objects of contestation, so the concept of film theory itself is a site of struggle. Film theory in Japan, then, was (and is) as much a practice of articulation and creation—and thus of politics and ethics—as a realm of aesthetic or philosophical description. This is the complexity of the theory complex.

This issue of the *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* reflects both the theory complex and the complexity of doing theory or its history. There are figures such as Gonda and Hasumi who directly question theory, in part through their styles of writing, as they consider the larger implications of cinema on knowledge. Nakai and Imamura may appear to fit more easily into the canon of film theory—Satō again considers Imamura Japan's only true film theorist—but their thought both exhibits the tensions created when operating either between political positions (Imamura) or between aesthetics and practice, as well as takes advantage of such cracks to promote the new forms of perception enabled by cinematic mediation. Satō's introduction to his history of Japanese theory of course questions the existence of its object, and perhaps Yoshida's work—which he himself refuses to call theory—exemplifies Satō's conception of practical knowledge, but it does so in a way that complicates that critic's vision of a plebian, non-intellectual culture. Certainly there are many other thinkers this issue could have considered, but

it is a reflection of the difficulty of considering Japanese film theory that few have become the subject of a scholarly analysis, which was one condition for selection in this collection. Many of the thinkers mentioned but not translated here—and others, such as Itagaki Takaho (1894–1966), Inagaki Taruho (1900–1977), Ozaki Midori (1896–1971), Yajima Midori (b. 1932), Tsumura Hideo (1907–85), Uryū Tadao (1915–83), Hasegawa Nyozeikan (1875–1969), Ōkuma Nobuyuki (1893–1977), Shimizu Hikaru (1903–61), Ōtsuki Kenji (1891–1977), Terada Torahiko (1878–1935), Mitsuura Tsutomu (1911–89) and more—are worth introducing, but await further research.

Why write about Japanese film theory, especially if the object itself is so difficult to define? There is no doubt value in encountering the intellectually stimulating approaches to cinema by thinkers whose ideas, for reasons often external to them, have been forgotten or suppressed. We can certainly also say that knowing the theoretical context of films—some of which was shaped by film directors themselves, since it was not unusual for Japanese directors to write about cinema—can help in understanding the intertexts of film production and reception. The intellectual struggle with film in Japan can also serve as a test case for understanding the contradictions of modernity in Japan, especially in the realm of ideas. And there is the value in questioning the narrow canon of film theory and rendering in richer colors both its history and the range of questions and answers that have been posed.

This is a crucial moment for such a history. At a time when some scholars in Japan are endeavoring to institutionalize the discipline of film studies in Japan, recounting a history of film theory can contribute to defining the field, but, I would argue, in a complex fashion, given how the disciplinization (in the multiple meanings of that term) of film thought was itself a self-conscious object of debate throughout this history, as some used theory precisely to object to academic thought. Such a study of Japanese film theory also informs current debates over the discipline in America and Europe as well. There is now, in fact, a move in film studies to write these other histories of film theory, as the film scholar David Rodowick, for one, has declared “I believe we need a more precise conceptual picture of how film became associated with theory in the early twentieth century, and how ideas of theory vary in different historical periods and national contexts.”²⁵ There is already a small, but significant move in recent years to reconsider some of the issues and figures from Japanese film theory, including work by Abé Mark Nornes, Iwamoto Kenji, Eric Cazdyn, Yuriko Furuhashi, Mark Driscoll, as well as my own research.²⁶

Rodowick’s declaration, we should note, is contained in a now well-known piece that calls for clarifying the project of theory through reconsidering film philosophy. As Rodowick argues there and elsewhere, the shift toward the digital has revived the question of “What is cinema?” (or “What was cinema?”), which in turn has generated a “metacritical attitude” in which film studies has increasingly examined both itself and its theory.²⁷ I wonder then whether we cannot now say that many European and

American film scholars are, somewhat like their counterparts in Japan, suffering from their own theory complex, their own worries about theory. Perhaps they can learn from the example of Japan, especially given how both the presence of Japanese cinema and the absence of Japanese theory (according to figures like Burch) has been one aspect of how film studies as a discipline has been historically constructed. In this case, the history of Japanese film theory should not serve as the mirror through which these scholars can better perceive their project. Rather, I see much of Japanese film theory, from Gonda on, working to return the rather insular field of film theory—especially that of foreign theory—to the realm of the everyday, one that is more global and which naturally must include Japan and other cultures heretofore excluded from the theoretical canon. Japan's fraught history of film theory can help the project of film theory become more aware of the complexities of living theory (*riron ni ikiru*) within modernity and the global and local struggles over cinema that involves.

As a final note, I want to underline that the complexities of the theory complex have also made this a rather difficult issue to produce. This is not just because this special issue on Japanese film theory starts, both in this introduction and in Satō's piece—if not elsewhere in the issue itself—by complicating the simple assumption of the existence of such a category. On a more practical level, the complexities and politics of theory in Japan did not make it easy to produce, as we did not always get the cooperation we hoped for from theorists and scholars. I thus must give my greatest thanks to those who did help make this issue, the first effort in the English language to both translate and critically engage with a variety of Japanese cinematic thinkers, a reality. The result is a somewhat varied mix, covering periods such as the 1910s, the 1930s, the 1940s, the 1960s and the 1970s, and ranging from the first monograph in Japan dedicated to conceptualizing the cinema (Gonda's 1914 text) to newly penned analyses (Cook and Noonan), from discussions of film theorists seen from the vantage point of other disciplines (Kitada's media studies analysis of Nakai) to an expert analysis of a single film (Ozu's *Late Spring*) via a detour through the ideas of Hasumi (Nakamura's text, originally delivered as a lecture at the Kinema Club VII conference at Yale).

The most complex task, however, has been translation, in part because it is so central. Theory in Japan has often revolved around translation, and not simply because Gonda and Nakai use German words or Imamura montage theory. It has boldly engaged in the difficult endeavor of translating film into theory, theory into film, or even theory into the everyday. It is such efforts to subtly rework the words of theory that have made translating these texts so complicated. Slight errors in translation can result in the whole text going astray, its argument losing life. Some of the earlier attempts to introduce Japanese film theory in English have suffered from the tendency to project their agendas onto the original texts, refusing to listen to their complex voices. The translations in this issue may not always succeed in capturing the full chorus of these texts (likely one more

jazzy than symphonic, if we borrow Imamura's distinction), but the translators—Joanne Bernardi, Michael Baskett, Alex Zahlten, Kendall Heitzman, Phil Kaffen, Pat Noonan, and Kyoko Selden—have done a splendid job of listening, of engaging in dialogue with these texts, rethinking their own words as they translated those of others. I salute them and the editors of the *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* for their excellent work. I hope it can serve as an example of the process, the ethics, if not also the effects of a serious engagement with Japanese film thinking, and thus an argument for further encounters.

Notes

1. Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in the Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 13.
2. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 197.
3. Iwasaki Akira, *Eiga no riron* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1956); Okada Susumi, *Eiga riron nyūmon* (Tokyo: Hakuyōsha, 1966); Iwamoto Kenji, Hatano Tetsurō, eds., *Eiga riron shūsei* (Tokyo: Firumu Ōtoshā, 1982). Of the eighteen classic examples of film theory introduced in *Eiga riron shūsei*, only two—by Imamura Taihei and Asanuma Keiji—are by Japanese thinkers.
4. Satō Tadao, *Nihon eiga rironshi* (Tokyo: Hyōronsha, 1977), 321.
5. See Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
6. For more on this, see my “Nihon/eiga/riron,” in *Nihon eiga wa ikite iru*, eds. Kurosawa Kiyoshi, et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010), 159-99.
7. Sasaki Norio, “Eiga no rironteki kenkyū no jūyōsei,” *Eiga hyōron* 3.3 (September 1927): 170-77.
8. Satō, *Nihon eiga rironshi*, 7. See the English translation, page 14 of this issue.
9. For instance, during interviews with me during the summer of 2010, both Yoshida Kijū and Asanuma Keiji expressed doubts over whether film theory was produced in Japan.
10. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 5.
11. *Ibid.*, 3.
12. Satō, *Nihon eiga rironshi*, 9. See the English translation, page 15 of this issue.
13. Dennis C. Washburn, *The Dilemma of the Modern in Japanese Fiction* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 4.
14. See, for instance, Sugiyama Heiichi, “Eiga kōseiron,” in *Eiga bunkaron*, ed. Nakatsuka Michisuke (Kyoto: Daiichi Geibunsha, 1941).
15. For more on Aoyama's conception of cinema and the other, see my “Aoyama Shinji,” in *Fifty Contemporary Film Directors*, ed. Yvonne Tasker (London: Routledge, 2010): 27-37.
16. For more on such literary thinking about cinema, see my “Celluloid Masks: The Cinematic Image and the Image of Japan,” *Iris* 16 (Spring 1993): 23-36, or “The Self Seen as Other: Akutagawa and Film,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 23.3 (1995): 197-203, or Tom LaMarre's *Shadows on the Screen: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō on Cinema and “Oriental” Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2005).
17. Gonda Yasunosuke, *Katsudō shashin no genri oyobi ōyō* (Tokyo: Uchida Rokakuho, 1914).
18. Nagae Michitarō, *Eiga, hyōgen, keisei* (Kyoto: Kyōiku Tosho, 1942).
19. Tsurumi Shunsuke, *Gokaisuru kenri* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1959). Shisō no Kagaku was the group of scholars and intellectuals who published the journal *Shisō no kagaku* (The Science of Thought) from 1946 to 1996. While encompassing a wide variety of ideas and methods, it was particularly known for actively engaging with the “thought” of popular or mass culture.
20. Matsuda quotes his own article in the 5 October 1968 *Tosho shinbun* in *Bara to mumeisha* (Tokyo: Haga Shoten, 1970), 277.
21. Hasumi Shigehiko, *Eiga no shin-*

wagaku (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1996), 51.

22.

See Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, *Sanbun eigaron* (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 1940) and Matsuda Masao, *Fūkei no shimetsu* (Tokyo: Tabata Shoten, 1971).

23.

Abé Mark Nornes, "The Postwar Documentary Trace," *positions* 10.1 (2002): 50. In response to Nornes, I still believe it is important to ask how much the lack of theorization he sees is less an omission than itself a theory or politics of theory.

24.

Aaron Gerow, "A Retrospective on Japanese Retrospectives," *Un-*

dercurrent 6 (2010). http://www.fipresci.org/undercurrent/issue_0609/gerow_retro.htm

25.

David Rodowick, "An Elegy for Theory," *October* 122 (Fall 2007): 94. The Permanent Seminar on the History of Film Theories is promoting such research by advocating the plural conception of film theory.

26.

See, for instance, Abé Mark Nornes, "The Postwar Documentary Trace" in Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era through Hiroshima* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Iwamoto Kenji, *Sairento kara tōkai e: Nihon eiga keiseiki no hito to bunka* (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2007);

Eric Cazdyn, *The Flash of Capital: Film and Geopolitics in Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Yuriko Furuhashi, "Returning to Actuality: *Fūkeiron* and the Landscape Film," *Screen* 48.3 (Autumn 2007): 345-62; Mark Driscoll, "From Kino-Eye to Anime-eye/ai: The Filmed and the Animated in Imamura Taihei's Media Theory," *Japan Forum* 14.2 (September 2002): 269-96.

27.

Rodowick, "An Elegy for Theory," 93. See also his "Dr. Strange Media, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Film Theory," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 394-97.