

Against the Screen

Poets Rewriting Cinema in 1920s and 1930s Japan

“There were shadows in the cinema” (*shinema ni wa kage ga ita*)—this statement both begins and ends “Cinema” (“Shinema”), a 1929 poem by Iijima Tadashi.¹ These shadows descend from the stage at every film screening, the poem says, in search of empty seats; if a seat already has someone in it, the shadows crouch beside them, giving each spectator an unshakeable sense that they’re watching *with someone*. Eventually, the shadows assemble onstage again, “quietly greet the characters on screen, and withdraw.”

Poetry related to cinema seems to have first emerged in Japan in the 1910s—not long after film’s arrival in 1896—and began to flourish in the 1920s, becoming a regular fixture of poetry journals, film magazines, and newspapers.² Hundreds of poems took on movie theaters, spectatorship, specific films, movie stars, and cinematic techniques and technologies as their main subject. Many poets went beyond this and presented their works not just as poems *about* cinema but as a new kind of hybrid between poetry and cinema, calling them “film-poems” (*eigashi*), “cinemoems” (*shinepoemu*), “poems by camera” (*kamera ni yoru shi*), “poems in scenario” (*poemu in shinario*), or, using Latin letters, the German term *Kinodichtung* or the French term *poésie cinématographique*. Many of these poems—though by no means all—fit into Christophe Wall-Romana’s definition of cinepoetry as “a writing practice whose basic process is homological: it consists of envisioning a specific component or aspect of poetry as if it were a specific component of cinema, or vice versa, but always in writing.”³ Poets also drew inspiration not only from films themselves, but from the full range of cinematic paratexts: shooting scripts, continuity scripts, programs, advertisements, intertitles, subtitles, captioned photographs of stars, live *benshi* narrations, and more.

There is an almost bewilderingly diverse range of these explicitly and implicitly “cinapoetic” works from Japan’s 1920s and 1930s. They span almost every literary movement popular at the time, including Romanticism, naturalism, Dada, Futurism, Surrealism, and proletarian literature. There are poems that take the form of conventional verse, of numbered shot lists that served as film scenarios for imaginary films, of odes to celebrities, of dreamlike prose poems, and of globe-spanning catalogs of objects and scenes, just to name a few. Yet there is a common tension that underlies all of these works, a familiar one at the emergence or transition of any media technology. Poets were quick to recognize the potential of the cinema as a form of expression, and as a site of inspiration to reimagine poetic language, tropes, and structure. At the same time, however, they saw the medium’s inadequacies or even pernicious qualities: the ways technological, societal, and institutional limitations made film fall short of its potential, or made it into something that cut off or fossilized expression and perception. Cinematic poetry was far from a unified form or genre, but what the works under this umbrella had in common was how they aimed not just to remake poetry using cinematic structure and imagery, but to make a *new kind of cinema*, one that used the possibilities of language to go beyond what was afforded by film at the time.

Poetry, here and throughout this volume, was a way of thinking media otherwise. In the case of this chapter, poetry prioritized alternative modes of engagement with the “cinematic” in order to highlight experiences that were difficult to articulate but were nevertheless key to what made cinema what it was, or pointed toward what else it could be. There are other sources, of course, through which we might understand early filmgoing and filmmaking. There are the films themselves, or at least the tiny portion of them from this era that have survived. There are movie programs and leaflets, reviews, critical essays, memoirs, attendance statistics, and promotional materials.⁴ But this chapter will look at what was often literally in the margins: the poems that jostled for room with advertisements on the back pages of film magazines, acted as space fillers in newspapers, and which were dismissed as novelties even in their time (as were, in some cases, the poets who wrote them). Among all cinema-related writing, these poems are unique in their attempts to remake the medium anew, in ways that center the body, the audience, and the aspects of cinema that—like the “shadows” of Iijima’s poem—fluidly move between the film world and “real” world, on and off screen, and within and beyond the space of the movie theater.

It is no coincidence that there was a blossoming of cinapoetic writing around the late 1920s and early 1930s in Japan, a time of enormous transition in cinema. The medium was changing, inarguably, rapidly, and fundamentally, and for one main reason: the emergence of the “talkie” and its subsequent dominance over global filmmaking over the course of the 1930s. The shift from silent films to talkies was profoundly transformative in many ways beyond the addition of prerecorded sound, and not all of those transformations were viewed positively by

those who watched, wrote about, and made movies. As we will see in this chapter, for many, sound film was first and foremost a threat, and it was against this threat that they aimed to use their poems to demonstrate the full potential of a new cinema both on the screen and on the page. The main fear was of homogenization. On the level of a single film, suddenly the experience of viewing would largely be the same every time, unlike “silent” films, which always had live music and sometimes live sound effects, and in Japan usually a *benshi* (live narrator), who was as much or more of a draw than the film itself and a core part of every filmgoing experience.⁵ On a broader level, there were fears that films would become far more similar to one another, with the new requirements of voiced dialogue, certain narrative structures, and so on inevitably placing rigid frameworks on what a movie “should” be like. Those fears were indeed well founded. As Charles O’Brien notes, “By the mid-1930s, the majority of the world’s films, regardless of where they had been made, came to exhibit the same basic convention of film narration and style—the same sort of character-driven plots; linear, cause-and-effect successions of scenes; and continuity editing.”⁶ To most cinapoets, poetry became the radical alternative they were looking for: not just another way to make film, but to make film better.

We can thus also understand cinapoems and cinematic poems as a site of critique of cinema—what might be called poetry *against* the screen. By this I do not only mean poems as imagined films, metaphorically projected against a “screen” in the mind’s eye. I also mean poetry against, *in opposition to*, the screen: the works of poets who saw inadequacies in the capabilities of moving image media of the time, and saw poetry as the solution. Poems about cinema, in Japan as elsewhere, were not straightforwardly an example of a media technology being remediated into the form of a poetic text. They were a site in which poets, film critics, and film critic-poets engaged directly with both the potential and the impossibilities of cinema, not beholden to the state of film technology, the industry, tastes, or practices of the time, or even by visibility itself. Many cinematic poems, while seeming at first to take the form of imagined films, deliberately undermine themselves by being populated with contradictory, abstract, and sometimes unvisualizable “imagery”—they challenge the dominance of opticality precisely through manipulating forms associated with technologies of vision.

For many, of course, experimental writing practices like these were the *only* way to make films, excluded as they were from a highly insular industry—one in which no woman, for example, had yet directed a feature film in Japan, and the burgeoning amateur film scene was largely restricted to the wealthy. To focus on poetry is thus to also center accounts and perspectives often left out of conversations about film theory, cinematic history, and media—in particular, as we will see in this chapter, those of women; of fans; and of those who engaged with film through nonnormative modes of embodiment and sensation. These poets did not only use the cinema—its filmic and written texts, its institutions, its figures—as a rich collection of tropes to draw from in their work. They also used poetry

to rethink what cinema was and could be; what poetry could become in light of the ways of seeing, hearing, and so on afforded by cinematic forms; and how a “poem” could be thought of as an emergence across and between different media and thus could become a site of contestation at a time when those media were being actively remade. Poetry was—and, as we will see throughout this book, continues to be—a site where the edges of media could be redrawn, where the relation between text, media, and the body was made central, and made different.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each representing a different thread or strategy among cinepoets in early twentieth-century Japan. In the first section, “The Haunted Spectator,” I look at four women poets—an experimental film critic, a movie star, a movie fan, and a “modern girl,” respectively—and how they used their work to think about the space of the theater, Western film celebrities, and what might be lost in the transition to the talkie. In the second, “The Unfilmable Script,” I will focus on the genre of the “cinepoem,” an ostensibly hybrid work that was both a poem and a film, and look at poetic compositions—often actively aligned with the avant-garde movements of the time, particularly Surrealism and Futurism—that were not just about cinema but attempted to themselves be a new kind of cinema on the page. Finally, the third section, “The Broken Projector,” looks at an unusual selection of poems that asked what it might mean to go beyond the walls of the theater and cinematize the *world itself*.

THE HAUNTED SPECTATOR

I will begin by focusing on four women writers in the interwar period—Osaki Midori, Hanabusa Yuriko, MIZUHO, and Ōi Sachiko—who used poetry to think through their relationship to cinema. Osaki Midori (1896–1971)—poet, fiction writer, and essayist—was not only perhaps “the first woman to try her hand at film criticism” in Japan, but she was someone who aimed to fundamentally remake film criticism to suit her own poetic preoccupations.⁷ In 1930 she published a series of essays entitled “Eiga mansō”: *eiga* means “film,” and *mansō* is a term she coined that has often been translated as “random jottings” or “wandering thoughts.”⁸ What Osaki aimed to create was a kind of “sensorial criticism,” as Aaron Gerow puts it, a queered *doing* of criticism whose critical purview included the act of criticism itself.⁹ In their focus, her *eiga mansō* are a kind of “minor key thinking,” to use Isabelle Stenger’s term—they were attuned to individual events, screenings, and manifestations but intentionally resisted grand proclamations on cinema as a whole.¹⁰ They centered not what was on screen but what was *around* the screen: the bodies in seats, the haptic experience of the darkened theater, and the way audiences and spaces alike might become “cinematized.” When her eye turned back to the screen itself, she was usually not paying attention to the narrative or the characters or even the cinematography of the films she watched but to the bodies of the actors, the world constructed in the space of the cinema, and the imperfections

of the projection—the more imperfect the better. In doing so, she continuously reminded the reader to think of cinema not as a single, totalized form of media technology but as an open mode of encounter, imagination, and composition; she offers us a model for engagement with media from the edges, one that will be instructive not only in this section but throughout this book. She posited bodies, the medium of film, and even her own writing as ghostly, as a haunting encounter in the space of the screening and on the page. Like the spectators in Iijima's shadow-filled theater, she and the other poets in this section are haunted, not just by what they can see on screen but by what they *cannot*: by the specters of larger-than-life figures called "movie stars" who they cannot touch; by an industry that shut them out in countless ways, large and small, while still wanting their money as moviegoers; and by the fear that the possibilities of cinema were being rapidly closed off around them.

In other words, what Osaki valued in her writing—and what she saw as missing in both film and film criticism at the time—resonates with what cinepoetic works tended to have at their core: a rejection of cinema as a purely visual experience in favor of thinking of it as a fully corporeal encounter between bodies of spectators, actors, and even ghosts, as well as a deliberate turning away from the conventional emphasis on narrative, script, and, eventually, prerecorded sound. Saitō Ayako describes *mansō* as "neither criticism nor reviews, but rather a fascinating record of free-associated images of movie theaters, actors' bodies, hair, and shadows," as well as a valuable historical record of how audiences of the time experienced the shift to talkies.¹¹ Osaki "flaunted her position as spectator," Miriam Silverberg also observed, "and moreover, as eroticized woman spectator."¹² Hitomi Yoshio stresses that the *mansōka*—the one who does *mansō*, which she translates as "the rambling thinker"—is a performed persona of "an amateur spectator of film concerned only with the world unfolded on the screen" and the highly bodily "encounters with the actors on screen," the spectator "so incorporated into the cinematic experience that he becomes part of the film itself."¹³ Osaki called this process "cinematization," or *eigaka*: not only does the spectator become cinematized, Thomas LaMarre argues, but so does the world.¹⁴ The boundaries of the film are not limited to the edges of the screen nor the walls of the theater in Osaki's writings, but they are eroded in a way that the spectator emerges into a world made film-like, the outcome of a *mansō* way of watching film where the eye slips across the screen, into the shadows, and then goes farther still.

Though she was and remains better known as a fiction writer and critic, Osaki "saw herself first as a poet."¹⁵ One of her few extant poems, 1933's "Charlie Chaplin" ("Chāri Chappurin") is a second-person address to the world's most famous film star, one of her two poems under the heading "Poems Dedicated to the Gods" ("Kamigami ni sasaguru shi"). There are enormous numbers of poems about Charlie Chaplin—in Japan and elsewhere—to the extent that Wall-Romana, in his exhaustive exploration of cinema and the French poetic avant-garde, argues that

“it is no overstatement to say that cinepoetry rode to prominence on the Little Tramp’s tattered coattails.”¹⁶ Yet Osaki’s poem is also a concentrated form of *mansō* in its own right:

Your shoulders
are one with the autumn wind
Your cane
is one with the autumn wind
Your fake moustache
is one with the autumn wind
Your bowler hat
And oversized shoes
are one with the autumn wind.
Walking with the wind
Talking with the wind
You were born in the autumn wind
Blown this way and that by the autumn wind
All by your lonesome
A man of the autumn wind who doesn’t say a thing¹⁷

This poem, despite being about the ultimate “silent” film star, is filled with sound—namely, the “autumn wind” (*akikaze*) that blows through nearly every single line. In the long history of Japanese poetics, the autumn wind is the cold wind of loneliness, eating away at the lingering warmth of summer and filling the atmosphere with the melancholy that is the proper emotion of the season. The autumn wind stands not only for solitude, however, but also for an active longing for another: as Haruo Shirane points out, the convention from the Heian period onward is that “*akikaze* also implies unrequited love” due to its incorporation of “the homophone *aki* 飽き, ‘to grow weary,’” pointing to the beloved figure’s “loss of interest” in the poet.¹⁸ Chaplin—reimagined as a “man of the autumn wind” (*akikaze no otoko*)—thus becomes both the ultimate lonesome fellow and the ultimate object of longing, the godlike actor who blows through the cinematic space and ignores the audience’s adoration. His “not saying a thing” (*mono iwanu*) is here not just the norm of a silent film actor before the era of prerecorded sound, but instead becomes a vibrant, deliberate silence, an active not-saying that produces the aching loneliness that Osaki’s narrator revels in. Chaplin’s saying something would perhaps shatter the relationship or cause his descent from “godhood”; Osaki does not *want* to hear what he says, but instead wants to let herself ignore the film, narrative, and even the character he plays in favor of gazing directly at the actor himself.

Adrienne Gibb calls this central aspect of Osaki’s film writing her “poetics of distraction,” which, she argues, “dialectically run aground on the shoals of sound film”: sound film demands a certain kind of attention that would break the spell.¹⁹ Osaki, indeed, was deeply worried about the effect the talkie would have on

cinema. Writing in 1930, she was already nostalgic about silent film, even though it would be several years before Japan's first feature-length sound films and several years more before talkies overtook silent films in Japan; she knew, however, the writing was on the wall (and on the screen, and in the shadows next to the seats). In a portion of one of her *mansō* called "The Suicide of Sound Film," she says that "film used to be just a quiet shadow; it was a quiet world told through rich language, without the need for a raw-smelling voice."²⁰ The word she uses to describe the prerecorded voice that I rendered here literally as "raw-smelling" is *namagusai*, which usually refers to uncooked fish, meat, or blood but also to carnality, lust, corruption, or vulgarity. Sound film threatened to make the experience of filmgoing narrow, single-minded, and overbearing, without any mental space afforded to the wandering fantasies and encounters with the spectral bodies on screen. In this light, her longing for Charlie Chaplin and his silence is not just for the celebrity himself but for the way of cinematic being he represented, one that was about to be blown away by another wind entirely.

Osaki's poem on Charlie Chaplin is part of a subgenre of poetry that had become popular in Japan starting over a decade earlier, in the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s: the *eigashi*, literally meaning "film-poem," frequently appeared in newspapers and film magazines. Despite the generic name, the usage tended to be quite specific, almost always referring to poems about Western film stars, usually from the perspective of the author as fan; at the time, *eiga* was a term that tended to refer to Western films in particular before it came to refer to the medium as a whole. These film-poems give us insight into the more ephemeral aspects of sensation and affect involved in early twentieth-century spectatorship, emphasizing not just films themselves but a broader film culture: globally situated, deeply gendered, and tightly linked to the moment-to-moment fluctuations of celebrity.

One of the most striking examples of this form is 1922's "Sennett Girls—Film-Poem" ("Sennetto no musume-san—eigashi") by Hanabusa Yuriko (1900–1970), the only extant film-poem from prewar Japan by a poet who was herself a film actress.

Dancing! Waves, waves, waves!! Summer, summer, summer!!! With a blue sky, and a silver ocean.

It's your world, so puff out your chests, to the music of the eyes of spring, of spring.

Dance! Beautiful Sennett girls!!!²¹

This short poem was part of an anthology of written works by actresses, Hanabusa being by far one of the most famous among them. Indeed, she is often considered one of the first full-fledged female movie stars in Japan, if not the very first, eventually appearing in almost fifty films over the course of the 1920s.²² Before the 1920s, female roles in Japanese films were played almost exclusively by *oyama*, male actors who specialized in female roles; indeed, the presence of

women on screen was an unmistakable mark of “modern cinema” in Japan long before the shock of prerecorded sound.²³ But Hanabusa was a phenomenon, not just “Japan’s Mary Pickford” but often literally taking on Pickford’s roles. Daisuke Miyao notes how in the 1921 film *Souls on the Road* (*Rojō no reikon*), for example, Hanabusa, as the heroine, “imitates Mary Pickford in hairstyle, costume, and acting style,” which Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano calls a clear example of “the early pure film emphasis on direct imitation of Hollywood.”²⁴

The titular Sennett girls are a reference to the Canadian American comedy director Mack Sennett’s *Bathing Beauties*, a cadre of young women who appeared in his films, promotional events, and photographic campaigns starting in the 1910s. Hanabusa’s poem takes the form of an entreaty, using the imperative forms of verbs and escalating exclamation points to address the bathing beauties directly in the second-person mode favored by most movie star-centered *eigashi*. But while later film-poems were usually *about* the experience of watching a film, this one seems to approach the hybrid form implied by term: it is a written poem, but also a virtual film, gesturing to a space beyond both page and screen. In these short lines, the reader is quickly captured and immersed in a sequence of moments with increasingly heightened affect, exulting in the scenery and the bodies on screen. There is an eroticism here too, manifested in the poem’s repetition of bodies and words, but in a way that differs from other modernist experiments by male poets and artists, in which women’s bodies are continually fragmented and abstracted. Orito Horio’s 1933 cinepoem “Woman and the Ocean” (“Onna to umi”) is an example of this tendency, with a subject matter similar to that of Hanabusa’s poem but far more detached and uneasy, disturbing in its relentless objectification and fragmentation of women’s bodies: “cutting the waves a woman’s arm a woman’s arm a woman’s springtime a woman’s legs.”²⁵ The fact that Hanabusa’s poem was written by a film actress, however, is intimately tied to how it frames the figures on “screen.” Hanabusa not only vicariously experiences the glory and glamour of the Sennett girls, but she does so as someone intimately familiar with seeing her own body enlarged on screen: she actively directs the bathing beauties to strut and dance in much the same way that she would have been directed, creating a film-poem that becomes a fantasized film of her own creation.

Hanabusa Yuriko’s poem, like Osaki’s and most other film-poems by women at this time, centers the encounter of the poet-as-spectator with the celebrity bodies on-screen. They are nuanced explorations of the nature of stardom, fandom, agency, and desire—a stark contrast to the many works *about* women filmgoers by several male poets throughout these decades, which return again and again to the trope of women audience members weeping, enraptured by the scenes before them, or hypnotized by the romances on-screen. We see an early example of this trope in the 1920 poem “Usherette Song” (“Gaido no uta”) by a poet with the

nom de plume Seichō, in which the main object of fantasy is the *gaido*, the female ushers working at the movie theater.

A love scene projected on the screen
 Wings of treachery whispering in the darker-than-dark
 In the impulsive reflected light on the screen
 The floating brilliance of virginity!
 Shine for eternity, the young light that is women's pride, reality is women's sorrow

 When the illusion breaks to no avail and we return to ourselves
 The roar of the crowd approaching an avalanche
 Is that the shape of one of the great beasts that resides in this world?
 Engulfed in shouts penetrating the darkness
 Red lips and slender hands and irresolute struggles
 Sweat and oil running along with worn-off white face powder

 The flash of the arc light leaking from the projection room
 White within the purple, the usherettes' room on the terrace
 The dearness of a room filled with the scent of women within the narrowness and
 the clutter²⁶

The screen (*gamen*) appears repeatedly here, as the poet fantasizes an interpolation of the usherettes within the films, aligning their imagined virginity with the brilliance of the projector's arc light, rendering them near-divine in their break room elevated literally and figuratively above the audience. Repeatedly and fetishistically returning to the usherette's physical attributes, Seichō renders the movie theater as a place that inflames desire, but he turns the focus from the screen to the women waiting in the wings. Nearly two decades later, in 1937, women audience members are viewed with undisguised disgust in the poem "Movie Theater" ("Eigakan") by Horai Ryūji (1909–95). It was not until 1931 that the practice of segregating movie theater seating by gender was ceased in Tokyo, and in Horai's poem we can see his outsized reaction to having to share the space of the screening.²⁷ His misogynist screed in the form of verse decries the "incessant sobbing that can be heard from the women's seats" (*onnaseki ni susurinaku koe ga shikiri ni kikoeru*) and speculates that movies take over women's weak constitutions and leave them with an insatiable need for "men's faces," "storefront windows," and "ornaments and makeup"; he portrays them as leaving the theater suddenly filled with both sexual and consumerist desire.²⁸

But female film fans—even ones who were not critics like Osaki, or themselves film stars like Hanabusa—captured the complexities of their own engagement with the medium, often anonymously or pseudonymously, by publishing poems in the reader submission pages of popular film magazines like *Film World* (*Eiga Sekai*). In its August 1929 issue, for example, a woman writing under the name MIZUHO

(written in capitalized roman letters) starts a long sequence of film-poems with one called “Clive Brook” (“Kuraivu Burukku”), which is about the British actor:

At night on the street the flowers I buy
 Are heliotropes
 An evening dress is silk even in the dark
 Unsmiling eyes stared
 But
 Look—on a moonlit night
 His purple cigar smoke
 How sorrowful that smoke
 Ah—isn't that the scent of heliotropes?
 MY IDOL is
 Heliotrope Harry.

 Clive. Why
 Does he trouble my heart so?
 When dawn breaks
 His melancholy heart
 Is recalled in loneliness.
 And there— heliotropes
 In my bed I think of that gentleman²⁹

MIZUHO's work goes beyond the subtle eroticism of Hanabusa's description of the Sennett girls toward a more explicit expression of passion. She weaves herself into the proto-film noir world of Heliotrope Harry, the gentleman thief protagonist Brook played the year before in the 1928 crime drama *Forgotten Faces* (released in Japan as *Wasurerareta kao*), absorbing its (helio)tropes as she walks down the street: a silk evening dress, moonlight, cigars. The visuals are but one element, with the olfactory force of the heliotrope-scented cigar smoke perfuming the scene, her words evoking nonvisual senses that conventional cinema could not.

Eventually, she shifts from describing the character Harry in roman letters as “MY • IDOL” toward talking about Clive Brook, his actor, directly, as is usually the case in film-poems: “Clive. Why/ Does he trouble my heart so?” (*Kuraivu. Naze/ atashi no kokoro o sawagasu no*). She ruminates over their shared emotional torment while she lies in bed, using the concentrated language of the free verse poem as a site for a potent and complex depiction of fandom and fantasy. There is a play, too, with the multimedia format of the film magazine itself. Right in the middle of the poem floats a photograph of Clive Brook's face with a smoldering expression, looking almost as if it were crudely cut out of another magazine and pasted there, nearly as big as the first two verses combined, his gaze seemingly looking at the beginning of the poem itself. In order to read MIZUHO's poem, one must do as she does and move one's eyes lovingly across Brook's face, over and over. Like in Osaki and Hanabusa's poems about Charlie Chaplin and the Sennett

Bathing Beauties respectively, MIZUHO's work goes far beyond celebrity worship, favoring instead a complex depiction of yearning in which the narrator imbricates herself into the films. In doing so, however, she reveals the inevitable limits of such an act: Chaplin remains silent, the Sennett girls revel in their own dance with one another but not with the spectator, and fantasies of Clive Brook dissipate in the light of day.

Each of the previously discussed poems was, in many ways, not only about their titular movie stars—Chaplin, the Bathing Beauties, and Brook—but was also a fantasy of *directing* films on the space of the page at a time when no woman in Japan had yet directed a feature film. The final poem in this section also falls into this category, but rather than hinging on an encounter with specific Western celebrities within the space of the movie theater, it instead takes on a paradigm-changing technological shift. Within this poem are three imagined films, each of which highlights a different kind of sonic norm at the emergence of the sound film.

This poem, “Three Talkies” (“Tōkī sanpen”), appeared on January 23, 1930, in the newspaper *Yomiuri shimbun*. Written by a poet named Ōi Sachiko (1904–unknown), it was an unusual work, divided into three parts, each with its own subtitle.

SOUND EFFECTS

The harbor's red bricks
Tire of looking at ships
From an alley emerges a house mouse
A black cat with a skinny tail
Even so, the ladies' cheerful overskirts are
Treasury doors.
Gorgeous liquor for unruly hearts
Makes abandoned children.

PART TALKIE

.....
a single moment, a single ray
Oh, how the joy of us youth could shine . . .
.....
.....

100 PERCENT TALKIE

A purple
Purple iris flower
Fell in love a few times.
The manipulations of love,
Gentlemen's gestures of delight.³⁰

This is not a famous poem by any means. It was buried somewhere on the third page of the Thursday morning edition in a recurring section called “Celebrity Poetry Selection” (*meiryū shishō*)—for reasons that will soon become clear—and was eventually reprinted in an anthology of women poets later the same year.

“Three Talkies” was written at an early stage of sound film in Japan, published a year before Japan’s first successful full-sound feature-length film, 1931’s *The Neighbor’s Wife and Mine* (*Madamu to nyōbō*). In Japan as elsewhere, the shift to sound film was not, of course, an immediate switch from “silent film” to films with pre-recorded audio. As Michael Raine notes, it is far from the case that the conversion happened all at once. Certain theaters were wired for Western talkies, some were not, and there was a diverse set of possible filmgoing experiences of recorded sound.³¹ Some films would have fully recorded music and dialogue but live sound effects; some would just have recorded music and sound effects, with the dialogue left to the *benshi*; some would have a partially recorded *benshi* commentary; some would have certain lines of dialogue prerecorded and some remaining silent. In Ōi’s “Sound Effects” (“Saundo efekuto”), “Part Talkie” (“Pāto tōki”), and “100 Percent Talkie” (“Hyaku pāsento tōki”), she captures this diversity by presenting three very different versions of “talkie” films. “Sound Effects” brings to mind the sounds of the harbor, cats, mice, gates, and other types of urban clamor that might have been prerecorded, but it has no quoted dialogue. “Part Talkie” gives us only snatches of an emotional monologue or dialogue, with the majority of the poem taken up by the silence of long ellipses. Finally, the text of “100 Percent Talkie” could pass as a flowery piece of dialogue intoned in a mannered romance. This is *not* a representation of progression or evolution, however, with one type of film overtaking the others; it is something more intriguing, and less easy to sum up.

Despite being the only verse here representing a film without any recorded dialogue, “Sound Effects” is inarguably the most substantial—and wordy—of the three. Here we get the most detailed account of a scene, and not just sonically. The thickness of description is intensely visual, describing a scene in a harbor; like a film camera, the “viewpoint” constantly shifts both in terms of where it’s coming from and what it’s looking at, but it seems to begin with the perspective of the harbor itself, moving from the ships to the alley to a mouse to a cat to women passing by. Compared to the other two parts of the poem, the “lack” of prerecorded dialogue seems to allow for a richer combination of imagined visuality and sonic texture. “Part Talkie” is dramatically different. One could read it as almost a parody—a half-functioning half poem, more dots than words. But the lines that float in the middle of these ellipses are striking, cutting through the silence with musings on youth and radiance. “Part Talkie” in this sense could be read not as evidence of the limitations of this transitional form of halfway-to-sound-cinema, but rather of its affordances: it is in the space of the ellipses that the spectator, like Osaki in front of the flickering screen, can enter, filling in the blanks. The poem “100 Percent Talkie” is even more opaque; while it certainly seems to be a piece of dialogue or narration, it is oblique

and ornate—somewhere between courtship and passion, romance and deception. Recorded sound becomes linked with a focus on the “manipulations of love” (*koi no terentekuda*) and “gestures of delight” (*yorokobu shigusa*). This could be read as echoing the fear of critics like Osaki who saw this kind of manipulation of emotion—artificial, sterile, but effective—as one of the central and potentially most pernicious features of prerecorded sound in film. But there is, at the same time, a kind of luxuriating in the sounds of language more prominent in this section than in the others—the repeated “purple” (*murasaki/murasaki*), the four-character compound for “manipulations” (*te-ren-te-kuda*).³² There is also the pairing of those “gestures” and “manipulations” with the ideas of “love” and “delight.” This “100 Percent Talkie” might be more effective in coaxing certain feelings from the audience, but that coaxing in and of itself becomes a pleasure.

Ōi’s poem serves as a fascinating condensation of the stakes of the multifarious encounters between poetry and film at this time. In the space of a few lines, she captures the particularities, limits, and charms of three forms of “talkie,” rendering the monolithic idea of the “sound film” into something more varied, more uneven, and more meaningful in its specificities. Again, she does not take as a given the move into sound film as a progression or evolution of cinema, nor does she, like many critics at the time, necessarily see it as a degradation.³³ As we see throughout Japan’s twentieth century, poems like hers are not only something that engage with different media forms, but they became a site of critique and reinvention—of disruptive alternative media practice—just when those forms came into being or were about to fossilize. Like Osaki, Hanabusa, and MIZUHO, Ōi foregrounds a kind of haunting in her work, a ghostly quality that centers less what film is and more about what it is *not* or what it cannot be. In her poem, film is something in transition: it is not something transformed from “silent” to “sound” like the flipping of a switch, but instead, like the ellipses in “Part Talkie” so vividly show, an active reconfiguration of the modern sensorium through an uneasy choreography of speaking and not-speaking, hearing and not-hearing, seeing and not-seeing.

As remarkable as “Three Talkies” is, Ōi Sachiko was certainly *not* known for her poetry: it was her appearance, lifestyle, and attitude that shocked the cultural establishment in Tokyo. Ōi represents a type of poet—a type that will see several examples of throughout this book—whose poetic work was one part of a broader experimental project centered around her own body and persona, so it will be instructive to linger for a moment here on precisely who she was and what this persona entailed. This is because Ōi Sachiko was known not only as a poet or a socialite or a socialite-poet but as both the first and the ultimate “modern girl” (*modan gāru*, or *moga* for short), one of the most dominant tropes of this era in Japan. It is commonly noted, in fact, that even the term itself was coined in the mid-1920s by the critic Nii Itaru (1888–1951) specifically to describe Ōi.³⁴ *Modan gāru* eventually came to denote a whole category of young women in Japan who (as journalists and essayists breathlessly reported) rejected societal norms and conventions, sported short haircuts and

outrageous fashions, slept around, spoke their minds, and ostensibly cared more about consumption than politics. In his essay “One Hundred Percent Modern Girl” (“Hyaku pāsento moga”)—published in 1929, a few months before Ōi’s poem—Ōya Sōichi (1900–1970), another cultural critic at the time, dedicated the entire first section to a misogynistic tirade about Ōi, referring to her only under the pseudonym “Madam A” and calling her “the original modern girl in Japan.”³⁵ It is far from a flattering profile, and one that makes no mention of Ōi as a poet or a writer of any kind. He describes her makeup as “terrifyingly elaborate,” and it is not just on her face: her “techniques” (*gikō*) extend so far that it is as if, he says, “she has applied her own unique makeup from the corners of her mind to the edges of her words,” with equally great care applied to “meticulously designing her facial expressions, movements, and even the vibrations of her vocal cords.” She seemingly has extraordinary control over every aspect of her appearance, behavior, and lifestyle, but to Ōya she is not, in the end, an agent at all: to him, Ōi in particular, and the modern girl more generally, is “a mannequin-like being who advertises herself with her own body.” Ōi’s contemporary Kawase Miko described her in much more positive terms than Ōya Sōichi, as “the sensation-causing Modern Girl” with “glass shard-like beauty,” though this too underlines how she was engaged with first and foremost as a spectacle, as a figure who stepped out of nowhere into the society of the time and left its conventions shattered through her appearance alone.³⁶

But before she was the modern girl par excellence, Ōi Sachiko was born Yamazaki Sachiko in June 1904 in a beach villa in what is now Kanagawa Prefecture, near Kamakura and south of Yokohama and Tokyo. While there are few extant details about her upbringing, Ōi’s family was far from conventional. In her immediate family alone was a range of characters that spanned the political spectrum and seemed to unfailingly cause disarray. Ōi’s father, Yamazaki Mitsuaki, was a military man and collaborator with right-wing nationalists like Tōyama Mitsuru.³⁷ Her older sister (or perhaps her mother, according to other sources) was Kogure Reiko, who—far from collaborating with the right wing—was an infamous *left-wing* activist. At seventeen years old, Kogure gained notoriety for her role in the Red Flag Incident (*Aka-hata jiken*) of June 22, 1908, where she was one of a group of socialists who gathered at the Kinki-kan movie theater (which happened to be the site of Tokyo’s first-ever film screening, in 1897) to celebrate the release of one of their fellow activists from prison. She was promptly arrested and became known as one of the “anarchist beauties,” written about in the mass media with a combination of awe and lurid glee.³⁸ Ōi’s younger brother—or perhaps nephew (sources again differ)—was Yamazaki Shindō, an anarchist and member of Japan’s Black Youth League.³⁹ Also at seventeen years old, he was the ringleader of yet another incident in January 1926, in which he and dozens of other anarchist teenagers poured out onto the streets of Tokyo’s swanky neighborhood of Ginza and proceeded to break as many shop windows as they could.⁴⁰ He was also promptly arrested, later writing an account of his time in prison, “The Diary of the Beautiful Boy Behind Bars” (“*Bishōnen gokuchūki*”).⁴¹

As for Ōi Sachiko herself, she was not arrested as Kogure Reiko and Yamazaki Shindō were at the age of seventeen, and she didn't cause chaos in the streets of Tokyo (though that time would come during the shockwaves she later caused as a "modern girl"). She was seventeen, however, when she published her first poem. She was the youngest contributor to the women's literary magazine *Virgin Soil* (*Shojochi*), which was founded in 1922 by Shimazaki Tōson, a literary giant who "may fairly be called the creator of modern Japanese poetry."⁴² After more conventional early poems and stories, notes Nagafuchi Tomoe, Ōi "began to produce works that expressed a modern sensibility," taking on the novel sensations of the contemporary era as the main subject of her literary work as she published in a wide variety of journals.⁴³ Her work was neither widely read nor respected. Gotō Yūkō points out how critics like Ōya dismissed completely any revolutionary quality Ōi might have had and called her simply "bourgeois" and "insane" in her desire for novelty.⁴⁴ The figure of the "modern girl" more generally was dismissed as well, often through their relation to film, with which they were always associated; Barbara Sato notes that in 1929 a female tanka poet, Takayasu Yasuko (1883–1969), described modern girls as "shallow 'bean brains' infatuated with American motion pictures."⁴⁵

But far from the stereotype of the "modern girl" as a socialite totally sheltered from or deliberately oblivious to any politics at all—let alone the radical politics that those around her actively participated in—her poetic work consistently intervened in the politics and aesthetics of her time, centering the defamiliarization of the contemporary media environment and the modes of seeing and hearing engendered within it. Ōi was consistently experimental, not just in her poetry but also in her body, her way of presenting herself, her playing with celebrity, and her lifestyle, all of which were intertwined. This experimentality took a form that was unrecognized or thought of as frivolous, unproductive, or even vulgar, turning her astonishing rewriting of the transition of sound film into just a "celebrity poem" by a famous-for-being-famous socialite, and her complete self-reimagining—of what makeup, fashion, conversation, and even relationships could and should be—as something pathological. She was ostensibly the "100 percent modern girl" who wrote about "100 percent talkies," yet in reality the details of her life and work have been so forgotten that there is barely anything we can say about her with 100 percent certainty. But her "Three Talkies" points toward an alternate retelling of cinema from the edges, even if it might be one that, like the lines of dialogue in "Part Talkie," comes through only in fragments, cutting through a sea of silence.

THE UNFILMABLE SCRIPT

The previous section focused on a handful of poems by women that doubled as a kind of "wandering thought," to use Osaki Midori's term. Understanding their film-poems (*eigashi*) and related works not only as literary novelties of cinematic fandom, but also as a kind of alternative to the dominant theories of film and media of the era, is an important step toward understanding the stakes of a conception

of cinema in which the camera and screen and (eventually) recorded sound play only a small role, if at all. What those poets pointed to instead is a cinema on the page that folded in the gaps and frustrations of cinematic form, technologies, and prescribed modes of spectatorship, highlighting instead cinema's capacity as a springboard of fantasy and novel articulations of visuality and embodiment.

At the same time—beginning in the pages of Surrealist poetry journals at the end of the 1920s—another very different kind of poetry as “cinema on the page” emerged and exploded in popularity. This was known as the “cinépoe,” a term usually rendered in Japanese publications at the time using the French term “cinépoème” in roman letters; in the katakana syllabary as *shinépoe*mu, *shine-poemu*, or *shine-poëmu*; or in kanji using the previously discussed older term *eigashi* (film-poem), often with one of the above terms as a pronunciation gloss. Whatever version of the term was used, the cinépoe in Japan was an expansion of a handful of relatively obscure French literary experiments—which will be discussed shortly—into a full-fledged poetic movement dedicated to the reimagining of cinema, most often associated with poems that took the form of shot lists or unfilmable scripts. This section will explore the emergence of this form not just as an obscure sub-subgenre of poetry that boomed in popularity, but also in its capacity as an example of poetry rethinking media at a time of rapid technological transition, establishing a kind of model that has continued to resonate in the nearly hundred years since. Like the film-poems discussed in the previous section that preceded and continued to flourish alongside them, cinépoes were less about what was projected on the screen, and more about how to position themselves *against* the screen and what it stood for.

“Rugby—cinépoème” (“Ragubi—cinépoème”), a 1929 work by Takenaka Iku (1904–82), was published in *Poetry and Poetics* (*Shi to shiron*), the preeminent Surrealist journal at the time; it had an enormous impact on modern Japanese poetry and remains the best-known example of the cinépoe in Japan. The first few lines follow:

1. Waves and foam coming in along with their beautiful reflections.
2. A sea of caps.
3. *Kick off!* It begins. There are studs on the bottom of shoes.
4. The ball dissolves into water and air. Ellipse. The sadness of savon.
5. “Ah, where the hell did you go?!”
6. Feet. Stocking-wrapped feet are dreaming of factories.
7. Upward-facing chimney burns coal en masse. It's setting up for a magnificent morning.
8. A downward-facing young man. A young man is thinking. A young man with beads of sweat on his forehead. A young man is screaming. Young men. Young men. Young men in the rain of all their passion. Delighted young men. Young men playing in the sun.⁴⁶

Takenaka was born and raised in Kobe, and in 1928, at twenty-four years old, he moved to France. There he met avant-garde figures like the poet and filmmaker Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) and the photographer and filmmaker Man Ray (1890–1976), among others, and he became absorbed in the new art movements centered around Paris, which were characterized by a interplay between the worlds of cinema, literature, and visual art.⁴⁷ He moved to Tokyo three years later but published several works in Japanese poetry journals while he was abroad, including this one. Like a growing number of poems at the time, “Rugby” had the subtitle of “cinépoème.” This was a portmanteau of the French words for cinema and poem, first used by Man Ray to subtitle his 1926 short film “Emak Bakia.” Here, however, it refers to a poem in the form of a film scenario / shooting script of a nonexistent silent film, each line—thirty in total—numbered and representing a different shot or intertitle in an imaginary shot list.

It was an immediate critical success in its time and has remained one of the most discussed works of modern Japanese poetry. In 1930, Nakagawa Yoichi (1897–1994), a prominent experimental novelist, called it “the poetry of tomorrow,” rejecting the narrow focus on the “beauty of spirit” of earlier poetry in favor of “the lucid beauty of matter” and “the pure combination of formats.”⁴⁸ Postwar poet and theorist Ayukawa Nobuo (1920–86) notes that the scenario-form cinépoem had a “highly refreshing impact” on the poetry world of the time, and that “Rugby” was perhaps the most successful of these works. He saw in “Rugby” an effortlessness and lightness to its experimentation that distinguished Takenaka from other avant-garde poets in the interwar period who worked in different modes, and emphasized the clarity and approachability of his cinépoems, which no doubt contributed to the sudden and widespread popularity of the form.⁴⁹ In this way, Takenaka’s cinépoems stand out as perhaps the most emblematic examples of what Hosea Hirata describes as *Shi to shiron*’s central aims: the creation of new kinds of Japanese poetry through formal and methodological experimentation, along with the introduction and incorporation of poetics from abroad.⁵⁰

At the core of “Rugby” is a push and pull with the bodies of young men (*shōnen*) at the center. On the one hand is their mechanization and dehumanization, both in the factory and within the workings of the team: they are described as “weary workers” (*hirō suru rōdōsha*), “tight-packed gears starting to devour each other” (*gacchiri to kuiatte yuku haguruma*), a “bursting flow of released workers” (*watto hanatareta rōdōsha no nagare*), and “young men getting devoured in the machine” (*kikai no naka e kuwarete yuku shōnen*). On the other hand is a more than slightly homoerotic glorification of their bodies in action. The poem’s “camera” lingers on every aspect of them, whether they are “downward-facing,” “standing on tip-toes” “with beads of sweat,” or “in the rain of all their passion,” with further attention drawn to the “teeth of beautiful young men” and “young men only below the waist.” Takenaka himself was one of these “beautiful young men”: not only was he a former rugby player, but he was known for his good looks and even worked as a

model.⁵¹ Indeed, wearing his rugby uniform, he was the subject of Koiso Ryōhei's 1927 painting "His Rest" ("Kare no kyūsoku"), which shows him sitting down, his bare legs wide apart, his feet in thick rugby socks falling half out of his slippers. Like with Hanabusa Yuriko's film-poem on the Sennett Bathing Beauties, the viewpoint of "Rugby" is thus shaped by Takenaka's own embodied experience. It is not purely in the spectatorial mode, with the poet and reader serving as an audience member of the imagined film, but it also steps into the role of the actors/players, the director directing the action, and the cameraperson capturing it, and often all at once.

This type of poem in the form of a numbered shooting script was usually referred to as a "scenario-style" poem. Yet "Rugby," as well as most other cine-poems that took this form, only *seems* to take the form of an actual film scenario or shooting script. In reality it would be extremely difficult to shoot a film that accurately matched it or, more to the point, to easily imagine a film while reading it. While each of the thirty numbered lines ostensibly represents a shot or an intertitle, the images are far from coherent, shifting from the rugby field to the ocean to a factory, with many lines ambiguously encapsulating several scenes at the same time. Where a conventional film scenario's shot-by-shot progression would be as clear as possible—"5) close-up on a hand," "6) long shot of a field," and so on—the imagery of "Rugby" is in a constant process of transformation clearly inspired by *but also exceeding* the potential of avant-garde films at the time. One can of course speculate about "shots" of "Rugby" like the "plume of white steam, becoming a flower," "3 p.m. hearts," and "a moss-like human landscape" being created through clever uses of fades, overlays, cross-cutting, and so on. Nevertheless, we no longer have a straightforward process in which the reader reads a scenario and imagines each shot of the film in order. What we have instead are a sequence of thirty seeds of undetermined cinematic potential, not a subservience to or remediation of the filmic medium, but a conception of the cinematic that is *only* possible through poetic text. What becomes central is not a certain mode of fragmented or montage-form visuality, but rather the entanglement of bodies and perspectives—starting with the audience member, director, actor, and camera, but then expanding to include nonhuman types of embodiment, dreamlike transformations, and impossible points of "view."

"Rugby" remains one of the most famous poetic works of its time, held up as a representative example of prewar Japanese modernist literature and its intimate relationship with novel cultural, technological, and media forms. Yet the cinepoem is largely a footnote in histories of Japanese literature. The whole genre or form is usually depicted in those histories as consisting of few one-off experiments inspired by French works in the late 1920s and early 1930s by some poets associated with the Japanese Surrealist movement, with the assumption that all cinepoetic works used this scenario form. But this is not accurate. Well over

a hundred works explicitly called “cinemoems” (or *ciné-poèmes*, *shinemoemu*, *shine-poemu*, or *shine-poēmu*) were published between 1928 and the early 1940s by a wide range of poets in Japan, some but by no means all of which were in the form of the numbered film scenario. There was also a flourishing of work *about* cinemoems: at least forty critical essays on the cinemoem were published in the 1920s and 1930s. Cinemoems and cinemoetic works were written across the full range of free verse poetic production in Japan, and not just in the modernist avant-garde, including by unknown amateurs and old masters, self-described romantics and New Perceptionists, Dadaists, Futurists, anarchists, lyric poets, and proletarian poets.

A common genre in many magazines starting in the 1910s was *eiga shosetsu* (film stories), short story adaptations of popular films, which were often illustrated with stills from the film itself. Scripts and scenarios of actual films were also regularly published in magazines. All of these functioned, in a way, as virtual films, allowing readers to use the text to let imagined versions of the film play out in their heads. Scenario-form cinemoems, however, were *not* bound to existing films nor to their conventions and thus had more freedom to play with the idea of the imagined film itself. Film offered to these poets not just a new set of tropes and images but something more profound—what James Lastra calls a “spatial, temporal, and sensual restructuring.”⁵²

Wall-Romana traces the course of cinemoems from the nineteenth century to the present in France, where they originated: from Stéphane Mallarmé’s pioneering visual poetry experiments, to some of the first poems explicitly referring to cinema by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1902, to the “first explicit cinemoem” in 1918 (Philippe Soupault’s “Indifference, A Cinematographic Poem”), the coining of the term “ciné-poème” by Man Ray in 1926 with his film “Emak Bakia, ciné-poème,” the poem-scenarios of the same decade by Robert Desnos and Benjamin Fondane, and to the cinemoetic theories of experimental poet-filmmakers like Jean Epstein.⁵³ Kitagawa Fuyuhiko (1900–1990)—avant-garde poet and film critic—drew on his knowledge of many of the above French works as well as the cinemoetry being produced in his own literary and filmic circles in order to provide in 1929 (the same year as “Rugby”) what is perhaps the clearest definition of the term cinemoem as it was used in Japan at the time:

What on earth is a cinemoem? I believe there are two things that can be called cinemoems. One is a thing created from a series of letters [*moji no raretsu ni yoru mono*]. The second is a sequence of projected images / film frames [*eizo (firumu) no renzoku ni yoru mono*]. Within the former category, there are A) poems that borrow the form of the scenario, and B) cinematic poems; within the latter category, there can be A) pure films, B) absolute films, and other such categories. . . . Needless to say, the “thing created from a series of letters” is a literary work, and the “sequence of projected images” is a film. The word *cinemoem* is thus something that names two different genres of art.⁵⁴

While there was a common acknowledgement in Japan in essays like these that cinepoems could be in filmic rather than written form—much like the short avant-garde films by Man Ray that originated the term in the latter half of the 1920s—there does not seem to have been any film created in Japan that was referred to as such in the prewar period, and there was an overall agreement from critics at the time that there were none.⁵⁵ Kitagawa's take on cinepoems as a type of poem that simply "borrow[ed] the form of the scenario" was more in line with the general consensus: that they were a poetic variation on a textual form usually associated with film production. But the writings of many other cinepoets made their larger ambitions clearer: they intended their writings not to be merely *about* cinema but to *be* films themselves. They intended that readers not only imagine a virtual film while reading but also reconceptualize cinema as a practice, stance, or mode of perception that could exist entirely on the page and had no inherent need for camera, projector, or screen.

Perhaps the most important point of origin of Japanese cinepoems was the work of Benjamin Fondane (1898–1944). Fondane was a Jewish Romanian-French poet associated with the Surrealists who declared his poems to be "unfilmable scenarios," and in 1928 he was the first in the world to apply the term "ciné-poème" to written texts, using the phrase coined by Man Ray in his film two years earlier. In his article in the second issue of *Shi to shiron* introducing Benjamin Fondane's poetry collection *Trois scénarii: ciné-poèmes*, the poet and film critic Iijima Tadashi is skeptical, wondering why the potential of the film lens is packed in and closed off by Fondane into compact scenarios, and noting that the end effect is "no different than lyric poetry that emerges from small feelings."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he goes on to create the first example of a cinepoem in Japanese by translating the first twelve numbered lines of Fondane's "Mtasi poi," crystallizing the dominant subgenre of poem-as-numbered film scenario.

One year before this, Kondō Azuma (1904–88) was the first to use the term "cinepoem" in Japanese, in his 1927 essay of that name ("Shine-poemu") in *Kindai fūkei*.⁵⁷ In it he described how he saw the term was generally used (in French), and again he lamented that no films that fit that description were produced locally:

The term "film-poem" seems to be used in two ways—in other words, poems expressed through screenplays, and situations where films themselves are poems. However, I think the latter is the pure meaning. Film-poems in the latter sense do not seem to have been made in Japan yet. If forced to find some, I could probably only come up with two or three sections of *Page of Madness*, and the scenes like those in the Nikkatsu film *Ring of the Sun* that depict the present day. But it seems that they're appearing one after another in other countries. Pure film, absolute film, color music, machine film—these are all certainly attempts of this sort.⁵⁸

As mentioned before, there seems to have been a consensus that no *filmed* cinepoems were created in prewar Japan, though in a 1936 essay, "On Film-Poems"

("Eigashi ni tsuite"), Baba Eitarō had an optimistic take that written cinepoems would have a rejuvenating effect on Japanese film itself: "Poetry always leads other art forms. This is because we are the first to suggest processes of recognition of the newest realities. . . . Excellent cinepoems will help filmmakers with dried-up senses to see film with new eyes."⁵⁹

The first poem written originally in Japanese that was explicitly called a "cin-poem" was Takenaka Iku's "Department Store" ("Hyakkaten"), published in the fourth issue of *Shi to shiron* in 1929, which begins as follows:

1. It's an *ascenseur*, opening and closing. No one is inside of it.
2. There are flowers lying on the floor, there are flowers without petals.
3. Shoes shoes shoes galloping up the stairs. Women's shoes.
4. In the middle, a shoe, its heel having come off.
5. Try holding up a jeweled necklace bending back and forth in the surface of a mirror. The beautiful jewels have a tenacity, like beautiful snakes.
(It's as deep as the sharp light rays looking inside a well.)
6. A nimble calculator sticks out its tongue, sticks out its tongue, sticks out its tongue.
7. White tongue.
8. It's a woman's slender, manicured hand.⁶⁰

The setting of the department store had a special resonance with the Surrealist movement in Japan, in which Takenaka was an active participant. Miryam Sas points out that department store art galleries at the time were a key site for the exhibition of Surrealist art; in other words, far from being an underground phenomenon, activities associated with the Surrealist movement were "squarely within the realm of commercial mass media," with swanky department stores becoming key factors in the institutional recognition of Surrealist aesthetics and artistic practices.⁶¹ Each "shot" within this poem is a vivid depiction of something within the titular store itself but with a decidedly Surrealist bent. As Majella Munro notes, "The sudden transformation and deformation of imagery, specific to the Surrealists' cinematic experiments, were translated by Takenaka into a poetic technique."⁶² Petal-less flowers become women's shoes, a necklace becomes jeweled snakes, and a calculating machine sticks out its paper "tongue": the glittering spectacle of a still-novel form of consumerism runs up against the uneasiness of the products themselves becoming animated.

Takenaka had long had an interest in the work of the Paris-based American artist Man Ray; he saw "L'Étoile de Mer," one of Ray's short filmed cinepoems, shortly after he arrived in Paris.⁶³ In Takenaka's 1929 essay "On Man Ray" ("Man Rei ni tsuite"), he describes Ray's film as a "cin-poem" that is "very pure," "penetrating like music," and which fulfills cinema's potential as the "eighth art"; two stills from the film are included in the article. He also describes meeting Man Ray himself in his apartment, but Ray was decidedly surly and uncommunicative.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, "Department Store"—which Takenaka wrote shortly after this meeting—was

dedicated to Ray and shows clear formal influences from both “L’Étoile de Mer” and the poet Robert Desnos’s film scenario for it (later published in Japanese translation in the January 1930 edition of *Eiga ōrai*), successfully capturing the energy of the interplay between the literary and the cinematic that so characterized the Paris scene. The pop culture critic Ōtsuka Eiji uses “Department Store” as a key example to illustrate this idea of a “cinematic” (*eigateki*) not necessarily bound to cinema. Using this poem as evidence, he goes so far as to argue that the cinematic “had the most vigorous impression not in visual media but in the field of literature.”⁶⁵ Indeed, the novelty of Takenaka’s cinepoem had an immediate impact on the poetry world in Japan at the time, an impact that was captured by Nakano Kaichi: “When Takenaka from his distant lodging house in Paris first published ‘Department Store,’ a prototype of this poetic form, in *Shi to shiron*, it caused a kind of sensation among younger poets in Japan.”⁶⁶

These early works led to a flood of other cinepoems in Japanese poetry and film journals, which were clustered in the late 1920s and early 1930s but continued until the early 1940s. In 1929, for his seminal collection *War (Sensō)*, Kitagawa Fuyuhiko rewrote an earlier version of his poem “How Abundant Is Autumn” (“Aki wa yutakanaru kana”) into a cinepoem, now with numbers at the beginning of each of its twenty-four lines: “1 A city park that smells of osmanthus. / 2 Tree. Tree. / 3 A mantis-like old woman.”⁶⁷ This began a long string of cinepoetic works written by him, and he quickly became the second best known poet to work in this form. William Gardner—one of the few scholars to have written in depth in English about what he calls the “Cine-texts” of Japanese modernism—focuses especially on the poems of Kitagawa Fuyuhiko and the novels of Yokomitsu Riichi, as well as the operative logic of “fragment” and “flow” that characterize much cinepoetic and cinetextual work.⁶⁸ As Gardner notes, Kitagawa was particularly interested in the technique of montage and how it might be rendered in poetry.⁶⁹ This logic can be clearly seen in his many cinepoems set in the Japan-colonized Manchuria in which he was raised. “Autumn—ciné-poème” (“Aki—shine-poemu”), from 1930, is set in the Fushun Coal Mine in Dalian City (“8 No strength left, his neck sinks down into his chest / 9 A pickaxe holding up a dislocated shoulder”).⁷⁰ In his last cinepoem, 1939’s “Memories of Manchuria (Ciné-poème)” (“Manshū no omoide—[ciné-poème]”), the line numbers beginning each “shot” have once again fallen away in favor of a more conventional collage of nostalgic imagery (“street after street / overnight / have been transformed into a skating rink / we jump for joy”).⁷¹ Also based in Manchuria, Miyoshi Hiromitsu wrote parodies of the cinepoetic form itself, including frazzled directors, shoots gone wrong, and shots that are left accidentally unshot: “1 Mr. Director, I’m asking you / 2 Blank / 3 Blank (The sound of the camera seems loud.) / 4 Blank blank blan—.”⁷²

It is no coincidence that many cinepoets, like Kitagawa and Miyoshi, were from settler families in Manchuria. It is impossible, of course, to divorce modernist

artistic and literary production in interwar Japan from Japan's colonialism. The same qualities that made cinempoetry so exciting to poets at the time—the promise of both a new poetic form and a new type of cinema; of a viewpoint that went beyond the limits of the human eye; of the possibilities of juxtaposition, montage, and other techniques of cinematography and editing remediated on the page—made it extraordinarily well suited to be a poetry of imperialism. As with many of the examples just discussed, a large number of cinempoems exulted in the mechanistic perspectives of war and of surveillance: the “eye” of the poems became not just the eye of the camera lens but also the eye of the warplane cockpit or plantation overseer or the crosshairs of a rifle. Kambara Tai (1889–1997), founding figure of Futurism in Japan, called his own cinempoetic works “poems by camera” (*kamera ni yoru shi*), often focusing on the mechanism of the camera itself in precise detail, like in 1929's “A City Corner Will Be Thus Adorned (Study for Poem By Camera)” (“Tokai no ikkaku wa kakute kazararete iku [kamera ni yoru shi no shūsaku]”): “A riveted steel plate rushes past, filling up the screen. / The camera runs parallel to the steel plate, but its movement speed is 4/5ths of the plate.”⁷³ Other Futurist works like Mizumachi Hyakusō's “Cinempoem—Street Beyond Speed” (“Shinepoemu—Sokudo no ue no machi”) from 1932 explored the potential of the form to create ideal imagined works of Futurist cinema, heavily featuring military technology in their core aesthetic language: “Muzzle of a gun aimed at the mirror's vertigo / A street with wavelike unfoldings of velocity / Towards the focal point, star shell ammunitions roar out.”⁷⁴ This can also be seen in the works of Orito Horio (1903–90), who wrote extensively on the potential of the cinempoem and whose 1933 “Him/Me and the Junkers Plane (Cinempoem)” (“Yunkerusu-ki to kare = boku [shinepoemu]”) makes extensive use of dashes and fragmentation to create a scene of an aerial dogfight: “white wings tilted upwards—tilting bow ascending and descending—white incline—tilted black NO. 130 / climbing—climbing—climbing—climbing.”⁷⁵

Tsukihara Tōichirō (1902–89)—the son of a telegraph engineer—takes the wide-ranging cinempoetic view from above to an extreme in 1930's expansive, 114-line-long “Bird's Eye Diagram of Earth” (“Chōkan chikyū-zu”). The poem has the subtitle “cinempoem style” (*shinepoemu-chō*), a term that, just a year after “Rugby,” had already become trendy enough to make this a useful appellation. “What's being typed up by the young typist sitting by a Marunouchi Building window is an order form for Cuban sugar” it begins. “Even though there's a bumper crop in Brazil's coffee plantations / Men are drinking a single cup of coffee for 15 sen / Putting a foot on the gas in a car sent to pick up the chief director / In a Singapore rubber plantation / A native's foot is bitten off by a fierce tiger.”⁷⁶ It offers a vast vision of global networks of trade, politics, and industry with its long lists of moments, objects, and places punctuated by startling events like tiger attacks and shipwrecks. If this “cinempoem style” is meant to evoke a film, it is less a narrative film than it is a documentary film or newsreel, assembling the titular bird's-eye

view of the world through snippets of both everyday and spectacular happenings. Its ostensibly “neutral” stance, however, belies a vision in which colonial exploitation and Indigenous suffering are accepted as natural parts of the contemporary world, reduced to a source of thrilling imagery and entertainment.

While some cinepoets such as Takenaka Iku used the cinepoem as a form to critique the dehumanizing effect of this “objective” camera eye, the vast majority of debates around cinepoems tended not to be about their radical potential—positive or pernicious—but about questions of form. In “On Cinepoems” (“Shine-poemu no koto”), an essay written the year after he published “Rugby,” Takenaka decries how the form has already become a formula. Although he says the fact that they have become so widely written and talked about is a “delightful thing,” he admits that he “can’t stand the poems written so far.” He lambastes them as “half-finished scenarios, split up into lines with numbers just nonchalantly stuck onto them, and then shown off saying—it’s a cinepoem!” and he worries that cinepoets will become a “public laughingstock.”⁷⁷ He goes on to specify that he is speaking of cinepoems on paper and not on film and is criticizing cinepoets who were overly dependent on the concept of the camera. In reality, says Takenaka, when reading a cinepoem on the page the reader is more than primed to chain together cinematic images in their head by means of the experience they have already had viewing several films.⁷⁸ Takenaka Kyūshichi (1907–62) of Osaka (unrelated to Iku), the lead editor of the influential Kansai-area avant-garde journal *Rian* (a katakana rendition of the French word *rien*, “nothing”), was perhaps the most outspoken critic of cinepoems, for different reasons than a jaded Takenaka Iku. In an essay also from 1930—with the no-punches-pulled title “Why Are Cinepoems Meaningless?” (“Shine-poemu wa naze muimi ka?”)—he goes on an amusingly catty tirade against how “poets who have no knowledge or understanding, or are frivolous and stupid, are starting to create works based on the idea of the so-called ‘cinepoem.’”⁷⁹ Takenaka Kyūshichi’s concern seems to be with preserving the novelty and innovation of the filmic medium; while poets of all kinds tried to use poetry to remake film anew, Takenaka sees this as yet another example of film being held back by older art forms instead of being allowed to flourish in its own medium specificity.

That specificity, however, would itself soon change. Sound film emerged globally in the late 1920s, as did the form of the written cinepoem, although talkies took a longer time to take hold in Japan than in just about any other context and did not dominate the film landscape until the end of the 1930s.⁸⁰ But it is no coincidence that the cinepoem peaked in popularity precisely at this time. The numbered film scenario or shooting script was the core textual form of silent film production; with the shift to prerecorded sound came new regimes of scriptwriting.⁸¹ But this gave the scenario-form cinepoems even more power. They became explorations in a phantom future of cinema—another way forward that, even at the time, would obviously not come to pass. It was a path that was more experimental, stranger, and still “silent,” not giving in to the homogenizing force of the talkie. The “*Kick*

off!" at the beginning of Takenaka Iku's "Rugby," in other words, was called out knowing that the match had already been lost, at least in terms of what film would become. Yet there remained for these poets a hope that their own cinematic games had just begun, if not in the theater, then on the page.

THE BROKEN PROJECTOR

In his 1933 essay "The Poetic Construction of the Cinepoem" ("Shinepoemu no shigakuteki kensetsu"), Orito Horio argued that the poetics of cinepoetry might initially draw from filmic images, scenarios, and so on, but, in the end, must become something different: "The idea of the poesy of the cinepoem exists precisely within the linking and fragmentation of images on screen. Nevertheless, in the end, *the cinepoem negates the screen* [*shinepoemu wa sukurin o hitei*] and leaps into an original world."⁸² For many poets, this meant using the filmic medium or the movie theater only as a starting point for asking how the world itself becomes *cinematized*, to use Osaki Midori's term: in the light of a flame, in the play of shadows, in a lightning storm, on a city street covered in flower petals, or on the shores of a remote island. LaMarre notes how, for the writer Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, "the experience of moving pictures became one in which images constantly threatened (or promised) to overflow the limits of the screen, to seep into all aspects of everyday life, and to efface the difference between reality and fantasy."⁸³ Similarly, the poets in this section used poetry to recast the "cinematic" as an experiential mode that exists apart from the apparatus of film. As opposed to the embodied grappling with film as spectatorial fantasy in the first part of this chapter, and the experiments with film scenarios as textual form in the second, this final section turns to a handful of works at the edges of poetic practice at this time. They reflect, however, a larger trend in poetry that sometimes included works called "film-poems" and "cinepoems" but also extended well beyond them: a blossoming of writings in which the cinematic and the poetic were used in concert to reflect upon how the media of modernity generate new ways of knowing and seeing the world.

The "Three Ciné-poèmes" ("Shine-poēmu sanpen") of Kawaji Ryūkō (1888–1959) were some of the first to bear that name in Japanese—they were published in 1929, the same year as "Rugby"—but they have largely been forgotten, perhaps due to their not following the conventional idea that poems with numbered lines are cinepoems, and cinepoems have numbered lines. But in both form and motivation, Kawaji's works differ from the scenario-form cinepoems of the previous section.

STILL LIFE

Left behind on a corner of the table
A single empty bottle
Pleasure already gone
Reflecting the time when corpses transition—

Inspid space. Woman puttering around the kitchen,
 Distorted window frame, clouds in the sky outside.
 Midday clouds of nothing.

SHADOW

Countless feet pass,
 And climb the stairs.
 They disappear.
 The cinema is inside the curtains.
 An usherette even more tedious
 Than a pocket flashlight illuminating a seat.

FIRE

Darkness.
 A struck match
 Lights up each other's faces. Hands. Chests.
 Lips hold a burning cigarette—
 The sound of waves is quiet
 The offshore lighthouse, the ship lights, also quiet . . .
 Flames separate like fireflies
 Lips join together.
 Darkness. A sailor's song by the handrail.⁸⁴

Long before this, Kawaji was a key figure in the development of modern Japanese poetry; his 1910 book *Flowers of the Roadside* (*Robō no hana*) is widely accepted as one of the first—if not *the* first—poetry collections written in colloquial Japanese.⁸⁵ He remained an influential art and literary critic, and in his 1931 essay “Ciné-poèmes (film-poems)” (“Shine-poēmu [eigashi]”), Kawaji notes that film's relationship to literature until that point had been largely centered on adapting the plots of written works. He explores the “cinepoem” as a new and diverse development: to him, any kind of poem (from haiku to scenario-form) might be a cinepoem if it embraces a kind of filmic vision, and he also encouraged the creation of short poetic amateur films with a Pathé Baby camera, one of the few mentions by a poet of the growing amateur film practices of the time.⁸⁶ Above all, however, he defines the cinepoem oppositionally: “the ciné-poème,” whether filmed or written, “runs counter to popular trends in cinema.”⁸⁷

He goes even further than this in his 1933 essay “A Postscript on Ciné-poèmes,” in which he criticizes cinepoems as “meaningless” if they are “just a speedy list of images or impressions” that limit themselves to “anticipating the effects of the camera or the screen” instead of aspiring to be “independent creations.”⁸⁸ The three poems above were one of his few attempts at creating cinepoetry of his own. He self-deprecatingly calls them “extremely shoddy attempts in anticipation of the emergence of an actually good cinepoet,” but they are striking in just how deliberately different they are from many “scenario-form” works.⁸⁹ The title “Still Life” itself, of course, immediately presents a contradiction: a still life is the antithesis

of a moving-image medium like cinema, a winking signal that Kawaji is taking a different approach toward film (and one appropriate for someone who came to be best known as an art critic). The poem is an unsettling domestic scene, with elements that specifically gesture toward the cinematic while *not* explicitly taking place in a film—a bottle “reflecting the time when corpses transition” (*nakigara no utsuriyuku toki o utsusu*, the verb *utsusu* meaning both “reflect” and “project”) and a “distorted window frame” (*mado no yugamu madowaku*). “Shadow,” the second poem, seems to take a cinematic eye and turn it toward a movie theater itself, with images of feet, stairs, curtains, an usherette, and a flashlight. “Fire” is the most abstract: the images are even more fragmentary than those in the poems that precede it, emphasizing the ambiguity of whether what is described is on-screen, in the theater, or both. The focus, again, seems to be on evoking cinematic moments beyond cinematic technologies—the dramatic lighting of matches, the interplay of light and shadow, a handrail of either a theater balcony or a ship, and the sound of waves that ambiguously exist between real, imagined, and sound effect.

Kawaji’s poems are an example of a much larger group of works from this time in which certain types of light produced by artificial or natural phenomena serve to cinematize the landscape—in his case, a struck match, fireflies, and the lights of a ship. But the most common version of this trope was centered around the flashes of lightning in a thunderstorm. To give just one example, the 1924 poem “Lightning Flicks” (literally, “Motion Picture of Lightning,” “*Inazuma no katsudō shashin*”) was written by Matsumoto Junzō (1895–1950) and published in the October 19 issue of *Yorozu chōhō*, a newspaper that had the simultaneous reputation of being a left-wing tabloid and a home for a particularly romantic strain of intellectualism.

Even on a lonely suburban night
flashes of lightning are a Futurist
motion picture

In the bright, pale light
mountains, plains, bamboo groves, telephone poles
a bathhouse chimney
paths through the rice fields
hills, slopes, a man in Western clothes
a woman walking, coquettishly leaning into him
obi, hips, pure white
cheeks
and following after them
a dog, a dog, —stars
everything distinctly
projected
everything strangely
flickering

Even on a lonely suburban night
 flashes of lightning are a Futurist
 motion picture.⁹⁰

This poem depicts a moment of cinematization, to once again use Osaki Midori's term. Osaki focused on the spectators themselves going through that process, but here it is happening to a landscape or, perhaps more accurately, a landscape as seen by the already-cinematized narrator, who has become so imbricated in film's structures of perception that a lightning storm is enough to turn the world around them into a movie. Not only that, but the film is explicitly called an avant-garde "Futurist motion picture" (*miraiha no katsudō shashin*). Although the flicker effect between frames had been minimized since the 1900s by developments in filmic technology, in this poem it returns in full force. It is not something concealed by the shutter in order to allow for smooth projection but is instead made into a natural spectacle: the lightning makes it so that "everything is strangely flickering" (*subete wa kikai ni chirachira suru*). As Charles Musser argues, it was the suppression of the flicker effect that was one of the major conditions for the transition from short-form films about spectacle toward longer-form story films—"reduced flicker," he notes, "certainly facilitates the kinds of pleasures associated with fantasy and fiction."⁹¹ Yet by bringing back this earlier, flicker-filled mode, Matsumoto's poem becomes another example of cinepoetry's pushing against the rapidly crystallizing conventions of narrative film, even well before the talkie. Instead of a trite story, we have a mode of cinematized sensation that envelops the entire visual field.

Matsumoto, born in the rural prefecture of Shimane, later became a socialist politician and was known for his explicitly left-wing works; indeed, in 1923 (a year before this poem was published) he was one of the founders of Japan's first proletarian poetry journal, *Chain* (*Kusari*). Keeping this in mind, a few aspects of the poem come into focus. Those aligned with proletarian literary movements in Japan often made use of avant-garde aesthetics and formal experimentation, but they just as often critiqued such works for being apolitical and out of touch with the common man. Along these lines, "Lightning Flicks" may very well be tongue in cheek, asking what the need for radical Futurist cinema might be when a thunderstorm is enough to remake how we experience the world. And that world was already being rapidly, materially remade. The "suburban night" (*kōgai no yoru*) setting of this poem highlights a space in transition at a time in which suburbs were only beginning to be widely established in the wake of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 (the year before this poem was published) and the resultant need for housing. The suburbs were a site of rejuvenation and potential but also of precarity and painfully felt class differences, as can be seen in any number of *shoshimin eiga* (films focused on the lower middle class), like Ozu Yasujiro's *I Was Born, But . . .*, which became the dominant genre of the next decade of cinema.⁹²

Whatever the intended effect, “Lightning Flicks” is a fantasy of a new regime of cinematized sensation in which the stuff of theater and screen are no longer necessary. Even the drab everyday surroundings of the “lonely suburbs” are something “distinctly projected” within the momentary medium of lightning’s illumination. This creates a sequence of dramatically lit tableaux in each flash instead of still images on a celluloid reel. The literally electrifying excitement of a “Futurist motion picture” has left the realm of the movie theater and has become a way of viewing the landscape, at once romantic and uneasy, “distinctly projected” and “strangely flickering.”

Sagawa Chika (1911–36) took a similarly radically altered vision of the urban and natural world and made it the center of her work throughout her all-too-brief career as a poet. One of the few prominent modernist women poets in interwar Japan, Sagawa published the short poem “Promenade” in 1934 in the third issue of the Kobe-based poetry journal *Cockfight* (*Tōkei*), one of the key publications in the “Kobe modernism” movement in which Takenaka Iku was also a central figure.⁹³

The season changes its gloves
At 3 in the afternoon
The day fades
Petals burying pavement
A black and white screen
Eyes covered by clouds
A day without promises falls into night.⁹⁴

The film-poems, cinemoems, and other film-related poetry explored in this chapter often use the trappings of the cinematic not to center but to challenge the primacy of vision and normative modes of visibility. This can be thought of as the creation of a kind of poetic visibility not *inherently* linked to sight. What might visibility “look like” if it is not tied to an optical regime of the interplay of human vision and machine vision, of organic and inorganic lenses and the production and reception of images? This was precisely the regime associated with the medium of cinema: in Japan, as in the rest of the world, film was seen as the emblematic practice of a new, modern way of seeing, of arranging visual information, and of understanding the world through new logics of montage and mechanism. Sawako Nakayasu highlights the cinematic structure of sensation in Sagawa’s poems as well, how they “operate in a fashion similar to a tableau or montage, placing images one after the other in the reader’s eye.”⁹⁵

“Promenade,” however, contains what seems to be the only explicit reference to cinema in any of Sagawa’s works, with its mention of the “black and white screen” (*shiro to kuro to no sukurin*). Yet as tends to be the case in her poetry and that of most Surrealists, the image is deliberately ambiguous: is the “screen” a movie screen, showing a “black and white” film? Or is the screen the “pavement”

buried in flower petals from the previous line—white petals on black pavement, or perhaps dark petals on white? Could it be that the eyes “covered by clouds” are themselves the screen, perceiving the world around them as “black and white” due to their occlusion? The presence of the cinematic, however, is unmistakable and cannot be disentangled from the three realms of nature, urban space, and the body that constantly intersect in Sagawa’s work. In Matsumoto’s “Lightning Flicks,” flashes of lightning cinematized the landscape into a “Futurist motion picture”; in Sagawa’s “Promenade,” the cinematization happens not through dramatic and intermittent lighting, but through the implied interplay of shadows at a time of transition between seasons and times of day.

Most striking is how these “images” operate for Sagawa: in this poem and in her poetry more generally, the narrator tends to be first and foremost a spectator, though not in a way that can be completely reduced to the optical. “Vision” for her is a full-body experience—often a painful one—in which the eye may or may not play a part, and imagery fluidly moves across multiple sensorial modes. This is not only an aesthetic preference but is linked to the embodied experience of Sagawa herself. A significant aspect of her poetry is its disability poetics (a concept that will be explored in depth in chapter 3). Disability poetry is characterized by Jim Ferris as “foregrounding of the perspective of people with disabilities; [with] an emphasis on embodiment, especially atypical embodiment; and alternative techniques and poetics.”⁹⁶ This becomes especially relevant near the very end of the poem, where, as mentioned, we are told that there are “eyes covered by clouds” (*hitomi wa kumo ni oowarete*); indeed, this is a repeated image in Sagawa’s poetry, with “cloud-covered eyes gaz[ing] at the black specks darting through the air” featured in 1931’s “Blemish on the Grape.”⁹⁷ Sagawa had low vision and also lived with chronic illness since her childhood; seeing bright daylight was often painful for her.⁹⁸

I point this out not to position Sagawa in a way that resembles so many other depictions of blind and low vision people by sighted writers and artists as “mysterious, mournful, and tragic” and as “emblem[s] of loss,” as put by Georgina Kleege.⁹⁹ Rather, I want to center how Sagawa’s poetry can be thought through the poetics of “cloud-covered eyes.” The dominant framings of both poetry and cinema have in common an overwhelming focus on “imagery” as their central building block, whether on screen or in the mind’s eye. Yet throughout Sagawa’s work, we are given different versions of what “seeing” could be: light and shadow have color and texture, weight and pressure. Eyes might be “covered” by clouds, but this does not mean, or only mean, blindness. The “clouds” in Sagawa’s work are simultaneously cumulus and cataract, suspended in the sky and descending toward earth, both massive natural forms and tiny bodily inflections. The whole body becomes a receptacle of feeling, where the senses converge into one and vision becomes touch, taste, scent, sound, and motion. The “cinematic” here is a moment of dramatic transition that resists being reduced to spectacle or even to the image: a

shudder of light and dark, of softness and hardness, decontextualized from the space of the theater but findable in flowers on top of concrete, or even within the “low vision” eye itself.

I wish to conclude with Maruyama Yutaka’s (1915–89) “Grass Cinema—Iki Islands” (“Kusa shinema—Iki”) from 1938, a poem that depicts an experience of film viewership that is strikingly different from most of those touched on to this point, one that is far removed from the grand cinemas of the cities. Set in the small islands of Iki in Nagasaki Prefecture, the poem describes a rural audience outdoors, watching a film brought to them by a government-sent mobile projection unit.

Even the glow of the sunlight is gone
 In the blue darkness of the seaside village
 Here the cinema corps at the end of their journey
 Raise up an empty screen
 And gather the people of the island
 With the sound of a crude saxophone
 But the old projector breaks halfway through
 The torn film rendered useless
 Before the sad-looking cinema corps
 And the abuse-shouting audience
 The sea silently rises up
 The sea of the screen’s surface ripples
 Luminescent fish in the flickering waves
 Ships gathering tiger lily bulbs
 Drifting towards the core of cinema¹⁰⁰

Although the poem was published only a few years after many of the others in this chapter, cinema was in a dramatically different state nearing the end of the 1930s, and it was about to change even more. Here I refer not only to the ascendance of sound film, though the percentage of Japanese films produced that were talkies increased from less than a fifth of all films in 1933 to a full two-thirds in 1938.¹⁰¹ With Japan’s imperial expansion and its shift toward a militarist and totalitarian government over the course of the 1930s, there was an enormous increase in the censorship of all artistic production—including, of course, film and poetry—as well as the introduction of the “Film Law” in 1939, which made the government’s control over film production even tighter. Film became especially important as propaganda, with government-sponsored movie screenings sent to every edge of the rapidly expanding Japanese empire. This is reflected by the term cinema corps (*shinema-tai*), which refers to the mobile projection units that were sent to rural locations for this purpose, which was necessary as, even in 1940, only 10 percent of cities, towns, and villages in Japan had movie theaters.¹⁰²

The title of this poem—“Kusa shinema,” or “Grass Cinema”—is a pun on the most famous Tokyo movie theater district at the time, Asakusa. Highlighting how

far away from the norm of theater screenings this scenario is, the “asa” of Asakusa is lopped off, leaving only *kusa*, “grass,” reflecting the remote seaside village on Iki Island in which the poem is set. The propaganda film—ostensibly meant to awe and placate these remote island audiences, who were still unused to cinema—is “torn” and “rendered useless,” with its projector breaking halfway through the screening. The audience becomes unruly and “abuse shouting,” berating the hapless cinema corps. Yet the cinematic still returns, more powerful and expansive than ever—not despite but *because* of the actual projection ending in abject failure. In the last few lines our attention shifts from the failed screening to the landscape, which has itself become cinematic. The poem combines the water and the “empty screen” (*munashii maku*) into one image, “the sea of the screen’s surface” (*maku no omote no umi*); the “blue darkness” of the village after sunset stands in for the darkness of the theater, and instead of the light of the projector we have the evocation of ship lanterns, “luminescent fish,” and “flickering waves.”

Named explicitly in Maruyama’s poem is something that poets throughout this chapter have attempted to capture: the “core of cinema” (*shinema no kakushin*). For these poets, this was something that not only could exist without a working projector but could be even more forcefully expressed through poetry than through film. For Iijima, the core of cinema is present in the shadows that watch films alongside us and eventually join the world on screen; for Osaki, in Charlie Chaplin’s silence; for Hanabusa, in the freedom of the dancing bodies of the Sen-net girls; for Ōi, in the ellipses between words; for Takenaka, in a shooting script without a camera; for Sagawa, in cloud-covered eyes; and for Maruyama, in the glow of marine life, the movement of the water and the ships upon it, the gathered audience, and the rippling expanse of sea and screen. Through poetry, the medium of cinema could be freed from the crude materiality of celluloid, the projector, the eye, and, eventually, prerecorded sound, and it could be taken far beyond the confines of the theater walls. The core of cinema, to these poets, was its ability to create new forms of thinking, feeling, and embodiment, resulting in their creation of work that aimed to expand upon film’s capacities—not just to capture, but to rewrite imagination and sensation themselves.