

ANIME'S ANCESTRY: KAWABATA'S *THE SCARLET GANG OF ASAKUSA* AND  
OE'S *HELP US TO OUTGROW OUR MADNESS* AS A PRELUDE TO JAPANESE  
ANIMATION

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in English.

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## ABSTRACT

Much research exists on the considerable influence of American and European culture on the newly opened borders of Japan in the 1920's, yet there is very little recognition of French influences beyond the acknowledgement of Surrealism in literary and artistic circles. Evidence exists, however, that French thought made a deep and lasting impression on Japanese culture; an effect that permeated the formation of Japanese philosophy to the modern expression of Japanese animated film, or anime. Currently, evidence does not bear out a premise of direct influence, but unmistakable parallels in philosophical development point to French writer and thinker Georges Bataille, who extended Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism as a literary tool formulated to demand a response from the audience.

Japanese writers Yasunari Kawabata and Kenzaburo Oe used imagery in a similar way as Georges Bataille; they used images derived from their own culture as well as shared surrealist symbols and grotesque imagery. Just as Bataille did, Kawabata and Oe worked out their own personal, societal, and psychological concerns in a sensory-heavy method in order to shock the audience into mental and emotional participation. Specific grotesque or erotic symbolism employed by Bataille, Kawabata, Oe, and anime is not evidence of the connection; instead, it is how each used the shock value of grotesque imagery to create a sensory overload in order to demand audience involvement in a personal and nationwide discussion. The intent of this exploration is not to prove that Japanese anime is founded on French ideology, but instead to clearly and plausibly demonstrate a link between the two, in Kawabata's parallel constructions and Oe's assimilation regarding Bataille, and to show the development and extension of Georges Bataille's philosophy in early and modern Japanese anime.

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CHAPTER 1:  
INTRODUCTION: BATAILLE'S CONCERNS

Much research exists on the considerable influence of American and European culture on the newly opened borders of Japan in the 1920's. Many Japanese writers outwardly claim this impact: Kenzaburo Oe names Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Norman Mailer, among others, as profound influences on his imagination and prose. Yet there is very little recognition of French influences beyond the acknowledgement of Surrealism in literary and artistic circles. Evidence exists, however, that French thought made a deep and lasting impression on Japanese culture; an effect that permeated the formation of Japanese philosophy to the modern expression of Japanese animated film, or anime. Currently, evidence does not bear out a premise of direct influence, but unmistakable parallels in philosophical development point to French writer and thinker Georges Bataille, who extended Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of grotesque realism as a literary tool formulated to demand a response from the audience. Bataille used his version of surrealist imagery as a way to create a sensory experience, one which shocks the reader so deeply that he cannot remain objective and unchanged; he must engage emotionally. Japanese writers Yasunari Kawabata and Kenzaburo Oe used imagery in a similar way; they used images derived from their own culture as well as shared surrealist symbols and grotesque imagery. Just as Bataille did, Kawabata and Oe worked out their own personal, societal, and psychological concerns in a sensory-heavy method in order to shock the audience into mental and emotional participation. While Oe more fully assimilated Bataille's system of shock, Kawabata employed a more detached style, avoiding grotesque imagery except in his use of symbols; his novels parallel Bataille in this regard. Specific grotesque or erotic symbolism employed by Bataille, Kawabata, Oe, and anime is not evidence of the connection; instead, it is how each used the

shock value of grotesque imagery to create a sensory overload in order to demand audience involvement in a personal and nationwide discussion. The intent of this exploration is not to prove that Japanese anime is founded on French ideology, but instead to clearly and plausibly demonstrate a link between the two, in Kawabata's parallel constructions and Oe's assimilation regarding Bataille, and to show the development and extension of Georges Bataille's philosophy in early and modern Japanese anime. The connection between French philosophy, Bataille, Kawabata, Oe, and anime is a tenuous bridge, all are connected by the similar demands each places on audiences: the demand of mental interpretation of graphic violence into metaphors of sensation and meaning instead of mere sensationalism.

Georges Bataille, a French critic and author who wrote his most important works during 1927-1967, was a major influence on 20<sup>th</sup> century French thought. Bataille was originally attracted by Surrealism, but kept his distance from the group after falling out with its founder, André Breton. Although Bataille refused to align himself with Surrealism and its founder, his text demonstrates Breton's idea of "rapprochement," or the juxtaposition of incongruous elements, as expressed by Breton: "It does not seem possible to bring together, voluntarily, what he calls 'two distant realities.' The juxtaposition is made or not made, and that is the long and the short of it...It is, as it were, from the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two terms that a particular light has sprung, *the light of the image*" (Breton 37).

In "Coincidences," the post-novel commentary in *Story of the Eye* (1928) by the author, Bataille explains that the eye ties back to the blind eyes of his syphilitic father, which were particularly wide and blank when Bataille helped his father relieve himself. This, according to Bataille, explained why urine accompanies almost every image of the egg or eye in the story (Bataille, *Story*, 107). Bataille's *Story of the Eye* demonstrates the concept of "rapprochement"



both phonetically and textually. The images of the egg (l'oeuf) and eye (l'oeil) display both alliteration and similarity of spelling in both English and French, while visually, an egg, eye and bull testicle are all remarkably similar in appearance. Bataille's subconscious memories of his father and his presence at a bull fight in which a matador lost an eye all play out in his novel as a juxtaposition of disparate imagery that was involuntary and shone with "the light of the image." The egg, the eye, and testicles are all generative images, as evidenced by Bataille's being "totally taken aback" as he makes the connection that the disparate images in his novel are not the result of studied reflection, but an involuntary, subconscious spark (Bataille, *Story*, 104).

Bataille also remained faithful to Surrealism's basic tenets of "challenging the social and physical limits of man" (Beaujour 157). Indeed, in his extensive life's work he seemed intent on challenging all the possible intellectual limits of man, such as concepts of architecture, the definition of the word "prison," representational imagery, complacency, and totalitarianism. Bataille embraced every chance offered to him to test limitations; he even refused to allow his novels to take a traditional form. Denis Hollier comments: "But to speak *on* something imposes a form on it—because of a specific requirement of this type of discourse, one specific to discourse as such—from that moment on, it becomes an object of knowledge. Form is the temptation of discourse to arrest itself, to fix on itself, to finish itself off by producing and appropriating its own end. Bataille's writing is anti-discursive; it endlessly deforms and disguises itself, endlessly rids itself of form" (24). Bataille challenged the simple formula of a novel, recognizing that following the tacit rules of discourse is an implicit limit in itself.

As Denis Hollier shows, Bataille made a specific, informed choice to discard the novelistic form in order to cast off its limits and deny the written word as an authority simply because of its form. This refusal of form has a powerful impact: "Perhaps Bataille's work gets its

greatest strength in this refusal of the temptation of form. This refusal is the interdiction making it impossible in advance for his works ever to be ‘complete,’ impossible for his books to be only books and impossible for death to shut his words up” (Hollier 24). With this method, Bataille makes it impossible for anyone else to have the last word, and it suggests that he believes that there is no such thing as the arbitrary “last word” that a novel entertains by its form.

Bataille’s subject matter also demanded attention and engendered controversy; he splashed his pages with gory, graphic, and scatological imagery. Although the use of scatology is not a highly respected literary tradition, it is a well-established one that performs a useful literary function. Scatological humor or imagery receives its “low” status from its widespread use in popular literature; often scatological crudeness is used in place of genuine wit. Yet the use of scatology can also function as a vehicle for social satire, since “the tradition [of the use of scatology] encompasses two main uses, satirical and non-satirical” (Lee 3). Non-satirical humor, on the other hand, uses excrement *as* the joke. We are simply invited to laugh in derision at a victim of scatological ridicule.

However, Bataille was more than a mere monger of vulgarity; his work ensured a response of revulsion that ultimately demanded intellectual interaction. Jae Num Lee’s study of scatology as a literary device suggests that literary intent separates the low use of scatology from the effective use of it. Bataille takes the literary merit of scatological imagery even further by utilizing its shock value. He uses scatology to heighten and to create contrast to an extreme point; this strategy evokes a stronger emotional response from the reader and thus the impact is that much stronger. Bataille writes that “it is already clear...that obscenity is not a term containing a negative value judgment. Rather it is what is *deemed* to be obscene. Note that

instead of overcoming this by advocating that all should be permitted, it is the obscenity that is important in its own right, and this is because what is forbidden is precisely what is more relevant” (Hegarty 106). Bataille seems to be suggesting that what the scatological metaphor or image is directing attention to is far more relevant than the literary device itself; therefore, scatology works as an excellent vehicle for satirical commentary. The more shocking the imagery, the more it lingers in the mind. Bataille also specifically used synaesthesia to create a sensory-heavy experience for the reader to force him to engage. Synaesthesia is “the blending of different sensory experiences through metaphoric language” (McNary 2). Sound can be described in terms of colors, sight images to odors, etc. In his 1928 *Story of the Eye*, for example, a jet of urine is described as “a gunshot seen as light” (Bataille 39). Synaesthesia allows Bataille to combine such different sensory experiences in a sort of literary bombardment to demand the reader’s attention.

Bataille appreciated one additional function of scatology: its ability to lower the control of the intellect. As Denis Hollier observes, “Scatology, in fact, has no other aim than to lower the seat of thought a few degrees, to make it, in every case, lose its head or, what comes down to the same thing, make the head lose thought. Return of the brute, back to headless animality” (105). The response of laughter or attention to scatological images reveals the primal truth of man; he is unshakably attracted to the dark hedonism of his biology. No amount of social veneer will conceal this reality.

Bataille reveled in this deposition of civilization, but it estranged him from the thinkers of the day, since his “scatological inscriptions are...not to the taste of the surrealist: they do not like the shit from which, in fact, it is not certain that the avenging weapon of the idea will manage to extricate us” (Hollier 104). Denis Hollier suggests that Surrealists, in other words, avoided the

idea of loss of control and of the acknowledgement of the limits of man's knowledge and culture of enlightenment; Bataille reveled in his relinquishment of it, and went out of his way to transgress the communal rule of civilization to shun discussion of the primal and its abandonment of control:

Such key words as 'sovereignty,' 'evil,' 'transgression,' 'excess,' and 'consummation,' with their connotation of barbaric ritual, bespeak Bataille's refusal of "civilization": for him, literature belongs outside the law; it challenges order. Through writing, modern man attempts a return to the primitive darkness of violence and eroticism. Literature must seek the antipodes of reason and culture, or sink into nothingness. As a writer, and a critic, Bataille himself tried to be an outlaw: his underground, pornographic novels constitute an aggression against taste, morality, and the regular uses of language. (Beaujour 149)

Bataille recognized that a work of art "clashes with, if not the letter, the spirit of the prohibitions indispensable to safeguarding this world" (Beaujour 162). For Bataille, safeguarding prohibitions kept humanity fenced away from any real grapple with life. He did not aim to evoke a dry, intellectual analysis by his work; he wished to provoke the visceral, knowing that this type of impression awakens what lies unnoticed in the unexplored recesses of the mind, and may lead to an honest, emotional and lasting interaction. Bataille elevated his personal interest in his own emotional struggles to that of a psychological truth. One of his main concerns was with alienation, but he does not focus on alienation as a personal difficulty alone: "Bataille considers that all alienation is self-alienation, and that the root causes lie deep in the human psyche. In Bataille's view it was not only individuals who were alienated, it was also the society itself that was alienated from itself." The only answer, according to Bataille, was "that the overcoming of alienation can only be achieved by engaging with new possibilities of heterogeneity" (as opposed

to homogeneity) and “if one’s own alienation was to be transformed then this would require a simultaneous transformation of society” (Richardson 91). Bataille transforms his emotional struggles into a universal truth, applicable to the human psyche in general.

## CHAPTER 2: JAPAN AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

The first successful encroachments on Japan's well-known policy of isolation were made in 1853 by Admiral Matthew C. Perry, who demanded that Japan open its doors to commerce and trade. He sparked a major crisis within Japan by forcing the Bakufu to sign unequal agreements that allowed foreigners trade privileges. "Bakufu" is the term for a military system of government carried out under the authority of a hereditary military dictator, otherwise known as a shogun. In 1868, an alliance of powerful lords restored control to the emperor in the Meiji Restoration. Bataille began writing in France during a period of cultural shifting in Japan, a time of divergence from the former tradition of isolation. This shift is represented through the terms *kindai* and *gendai*. *Kindai* refers to "the period between the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and the end of World War II in 1945, and it points to the breakup of the feudalistic Tokugawa regime and subsequent Westernization of Japan. *Gendai* is used to indicate the so-called contemporary period of Japanese culture since the war" (Washburn 3).

Despite the shift towards modernity, it became clear that Japan's then current internal structure threatened to consign Japan to the sidelines of world influence, both economically and culturally, and this hazard gave rise to a conviction that, in order to protect Japan, the traditions of the immediate past must give way to a new cultural identity. This shift was represented by the dismantling of Japan's feudalistic structure, one in which peasants could not own land, warriors could not choose any other profession, and a conglomerate of disjointed local lords ruled specific domains under the sway of the emperor, eliminating the former system of social classes "to make all subjects of the emperor equal before the law." The warrior class, accustomed to government stipends, was stripped of their privileges and their position became obsolete (Duus 104-105). The

old feudalistic regime gave way to a nationalist government that transformed Japan from an isolated island into a contentious world power.

The subsequent steps toward interaction with the outside world did indeed result in new forms of self-expression and self-identity. However, these new forms and the subsequent similarities in cultural expression and ideology should not be ascribed to any particular culture alone; these avenues of growth are common “to the process of cultural transformation” (Washburn 8-9). Dennis Washburn goes on to state that “the usage of *kindai* and *gendai* ...to point to specific moments of extreme dislocation and discontinuity clearly indicates that *modern* is understood to be an intrinsic characteristic of Japanese cultural identity as it diverged from...the traditional culture of the Tokugawa period. At the same time, both Japanese words indicate that the modern is defined by the process of Westernization, which involved the adoption of a set of social or ethical values extrinsic to the native culture” (3). Therefore, while Japan underwent a cultural transformation within itself along lines that are common to this phenomenon and should not be explained simply by cultural exchange, the lines of influence between the West and Japan are clear. The United States is commonly credited as the major influence, but it was not the only Western country that functioned as a catalyst for change in Japan.

Ample evidence exists that French philosophy, specifically that of Bataille's, was similar to Japanese artistic theories. Japanese writers have a way of incorporating instead of adopting foreign philosophies; they tend to adapt ideas to their own culture instead of the reverse (Washburn 5). As Gwenn Peterson writes, “Japanese writers have produced poems ‘in imitation of Cocteau’ and novels supposedly in the manner of Flaubert or Wilde or ‘the result of reading Thomas Mann.’ Yet the results often strike Westerners as intensely Japanese. Sympathetic

vibration to congenial aspects of foreign culture can be found in all the modern writers, including ...symbol, theme and attitude” (3). Japanese writers are able to create work that does not merely imitate foreign ideas, but incorporates and, in some important ways, alters them.

Several European artistic movements influenced Japanese writers, including Dadaism in the 1910s and Surrealism in the early 1920s after World War I. However, these influences gave rise to internal dissension, criticism, and even outspoken anger against those who imitated Europe and the West. But despite such dissension, some Japanese writers changed avenues of expression by including French idioms, playfulness, and artistic terminology common to modern French writers into their own work. During this period, Japan underwent a vast nation-wide socio-economic upheaval, but the importance of the influx of new ideologies should not be underrated. As Miryam Sas cautions, “I would hope that Surrealists will be considered an important example among the many ruptures and reconfigurations that took place in Japan during the time. They can be seen both as a ‘symptom’ of larger cultural phenomena and, more crucially, as a paradigmatic moment that can help to reconfigure our understanding of these cultural changes and this period as a whole” (3). In other words, one cannot ignore the new philosophical ideas that contributed to Japan’s rise to economic power, specifically Surrealism.

Surrealism made a deep impression on Japanese writers’ striving for modernity, with its emphasis on the “non-sequitur” and unexpected juxtapositions within the framework of a revolutionary movement. Surrealism’s distinctive characteristics also included a mixture of the psychological, abstract, and visual, with an emphasis on an acceptance of the other, or the unconscious. Japanese writers not only absorbed these approaches but also added to them, layering on new interpretations: “As a movement that challenges and breaks apart, explicitly and at its initiating moment, clear and bounded conceptions of language, poetry, and the



transmissibility of meaning, Japanese Surrealism (as well as Dada) reframes the relation between content and consciousness and is thus a particularly strong and revealing case of cultural interaction.

The Japanese writer's subject matter also underwent a transformation: prewar literature in Japan depicted a broad range of sexuality in the modern period (Mostow 50). New topics of self-identity, psychological exploration, and the connection of physical sensation to intellectual response surfaced in literature. Japanese writers, finally joined the ranks of modern writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by fashioning a modern mindset that was concurrently imbued with Japanese traditions.

CHAPTER 3:  
KAWABATA: MODERNISM AND PARALLELS

Japanese writers tended to adapt foreign ideology through similar symbols that, filtered through Japanese minds, took on a particular cultural stamp. Despite this screening method of appropriation, Bataille's concerns are clearly paralleled in Yasunari Kawabata's 1930 novel *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, as well as in Kawabata's short stories. In addition to French thought and European modernity Japanese writers created an amalgam of American, European, and Japanese sources that became uniquely their own. The style Kawabata used in *The Scarlet Gang* was never replicated in any other of his novels; but in it, he included various modern sensory stimuli. As a result, the French influences in this novel are striking. Prior to the publication of *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, Kawabata had joined the *shinkankakuha*, or "New Sensationalists"<sup>1</sup>, a group of writers heavily influenced by the French philosophies of Cubism and Swedish Dadaism.

Yasunari Kawabata began his career in the early 1920's, a period concurrent with Bataille's writing career, as well as with the New Sensationalist School of writers. This group advocated a "literature that emphasized the phenomenology of human sensation of perception. Rather than an artificially produced coherence of both dialogue and narrative structure, this group experimented with a style that more closely replicated the inchoate, fragmentary, free associative nature of human speech, thought and experience" (Mostow 143). Kawabata's novel, his first extended work, stands as one of two novels that represent the literary legacy of the New Sensationalists (Lippit, *Topographies*, 119). The New Sensationalists officially disbanded in

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<sup>1</sup> Yokomitsu Riichi, Jūichiya Gisaburō, Kataoka Teppei, et al.

1929. However, they regrouped around a new leader and remained an influence until 1983; thus remaining as a force in Japanese thought as an extension of French philosophy in Japanese artistic theory.

This new group did not simply “ape” French philosophers. As Helen Sword writes, “The new Sensationalists were trying to theorize the new textual form that was touched off by French works...where numerous metaphors were freely used as a form of style” (85). They stated that “New Sensationalism was not the problem of how one sensed or felt the object – it created a different world through new uses of metaphors and fragmented sentiments” (Sword 86-87). Both the modern and the French influences can be seen in Kawabata’s *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*.

Perhaps the strongest argument for reading *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* as a modern novel is the evidence that the text enacts “the modernist novel’s dissolution into the various forms of mass culture,” and that this “fragmentation of the novel form underscores Kawabata’s depiction of modern culture itself as a grotesque hybrid, in which collage and montage are revealed to be the very principles of its formation. In this sense, *Asakusa Kurenaidan* provides a commentary on the shifting ground of the cultural identity of the age, a stage for transformations in appearance, gender, and cultural borders that symbolize the early Showa period” (Lippit, *Japanese Modernism*, 254-255).

This disassembling of the conventions of the novel form support Mikhail Bakhtin’s argument regarding the history of the novel:

If the novel developed according to the cannibalization of surrounding forms of writing (among them the diary and epistolary forms), modernism presents this process of internalization and assimilation in reverse: the disintegration of the novel into heterogeneous fragments of other

genres. *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, by contrast, breaks down the distinction between pure and 'mass literature,' dissolving the novel into multiple, 'impure' forms of writing. (Lippit, *Topographies*, 120)

In other words, in *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, Kawabata mimics the form of modernism by assimilating, in one heterogeneous form a mixture of “pure” and “impure” writing techniques. Kawabata creates this “impure” form of writing as exemplified by the sheer inability on the part of the reader to place his novel into a clear genre and by the difficulty of identifying a narrator, linear timeline, plot, or fixed area of Asakusa. The narrator is unlike any conventional narrator because the reader discovers three distinct narrative styles. Kawabata also incorporates shifts in person. Although we mainly look at Asakusa through the eyes of a “flaneur,” a narrator/character who saunters about Asakusa, we are able to see things that he would not be able to see, such as the private scene on the boat in which Yumiko confronts Akagi, the man she blames for driving her sister into madness (Kawabata 74-76).

*The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*'s modernist aspects include, among others, the disruption of linear structure. Kawabata follows differing perspectives only to abandon them abruptly. The French style of journalism is shown in the serialization of the novel; Kawabata writes for a bit, stops, and then starts again. Seiji Lippit notes that “Kawabata's work, however, takes [the] temporal aspect of the novel to its absolute limits, to the point where the distinction between novelistic time and that of everyday life can no longer be strictly maintained” (*Japanese Modernism* 214).

Kawabata also manages to convey the new tempo of contemporary culture by incorporating speed into his text, for example, by condensing a two hundred year history of prostitution in Japan in the following:

There were girls serving tea in teahouses starting two hundred years ago. Next came the girls at the toothpick rooms. Arrow girls at the archery stands. It is already Meiji. Proprietresses of sake bars. Then newspaper room girls. *Go* parlor girls. Mugitoro shop girls. Shooting gallery girls. The girls of the bars under the Twelve Stories. It is already Taisho. The “Taisho Geisha.” The big earthquake. Along with the Twelve Story Tower, all sorts of girls disappear. (Kawabata 154)

Kawabata conveys the quickening pace of the city in this condensed account of history, and, as Seiji Lippit comments, “reflects the reduction of history into the immediacy of the present” (Lippit, *Japanese Modernism*, 206-207). Along with tempo, Kawabata depicts a new “urban topography... marked by fragmentation and flux, as well as by the circulation of human bodies as commodities” (Lippit, *Topographies*, 119). Kawabata’s main narrator jumps from place to place without a smooth segue between each area of the city. Kawabata also does not appear to have much emotional involvement with the characters. There is a distance that partly comes from the narrator’s position as a “flaneur.” The result of this detachment is an inability for the reader to connect to or understand the actions of any character. This lack of depth in the novel, its “superficiality”, is not necessarily a negative characteristic, as this approach offers a greater appreciation of the panoramic view of the setting and the time period.

The Japanese, while relaxing their strict social structure, still held on to class awareness and racial prejudice. Asakusa was a pleasure district outside the city, a district that attracted many foreigners. Such foreign influence is seen in the desirability of the Russian ballet dancers.

Color does make an erotic difference, but while many Russians visited Japan and engaged in prostitution, there would never be any question of marriage between the two. The narrator, while enjoying the privileged position as a “taster” of unusual happenings on the streets, speaks slightly of the bums he sees. Kawabata abandons the storyline in the second half of the novel, but he still pays attention to the commercial culture of both entertainment and consumerism. He includes simple line drawings to the side, and thus connects his words to an image. Many pages feature contemporary playbills and revues, thus emphasizing Asakusa as the center of an entertainment culture. Seiji Lippit comments that even though the Marxist critics decried proletarian popular culture, Kawabata boldly included characteristics of mass culture, such as “montage and collage and the temporal and referential structure of journalism...perhaps never before had the writer so self-consciously manipulated the form, and so extensively incorporated the very structure of mass media into the work as Kawabata did with *Asakusa Kurenaidan*” (*Japanese Modernism* 207-208).

Kawabata reflects French novels in this acceptance of sexuality and lack of worry about shocking people, and in doing so Kawabata writes a novel of social revolution: that of a society becoming more permissive. Most tellingly, he includes a description of the prostitutes plying their trade, but does not condemn them nor discuss their actions as “sinful”. Kawabata’s quick and occasionally confusing shifts between characters, the way that conversations leave more unsaid than said, force the reader to put the pieces together, the sudden trailing off, unfinished chapters that abruptly shift to a new location, the retelling of old legends juxtaposed with present day events, all contribute to the atmosphere of the city. In this novel, Asakusa is a text, and Kawabata uses the city as a metaphor for what was happening in Japan—the mix of the old and

the new, the forging of a new Japanese modernism. It may even be argued that the novel is a study of the psychological exploration of Asakusa itself.

The New Sensationalists almost certainly influenced Kawabata's *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*. Its journalistic aspects, rapidly changing storylines and perspective, and the panoramic view combined with shifts into deep psychological probing all come from French critics and novelists, but Kawabata makes his work Japanese with his themes of isolation and his depiction of Western influence on the Japanese. However, he also makes use of Bataille's system of shock, as can be seen in the manner in which a young girl attempts to poison the man who led her sister astray.

Bataille's common themes of gore, scatology, grotesque, and disturbing imagery are not echoed in *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*. Kawabata is less an assimilator of Bataille than he is a writer whose work parallels Bataille's techniques. Bataille presents shocking or disturbing happenings in a matter-of-fact recording of events. For example, in *Story of the Eye*, the narrator casually describes a shared fantasy of arousal with Simone, his lover, and Marcelle, an innocent and mildly unhinged girl: "[Simone] would urinate freely...on Marcelle's back...Furthermore, Marcelle herself could fully inundate me if she liked, for while I held her up her thighs would be gripping my neck. And she could also stick my cock in her mouth, and what not" (Bataille 44). There is a casualness about this erotic fantasy; the characters seem totally unaware that their dynamic is amiss.

Kawabata makes use of this tactic almost at the very beginning of *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, citing the poor rickshaw man who sells his wife's body when things get tough (5). He also mentions a beggars-only bar in which "They put a naked girl on the table and get drunk

while spinning her round and round” (45). Each shocking event is treated with a blasé attitude: “It’s not so surprising that the little girl who rode the holy horse in the May Sanja Shrine festival already now in June has to sell her body to support her family” (128). Even the rather sad debauching of the innocent country girl, Oharu, is treated as a run of the mill event, one which gives neither participants nor observers any cause for alarm. Oharu is lured to Tokyo by a man who sold his “rights” to her to another man unbeknownst to the inexperienced girl. Oharu is then lured to an “auntie’s house” at night and wakes up naked and unable to leave. She ends up charming the second man, Terasaka, who then uses her for his own ends as a shooting gallery girl (166-180). Each event is touched on, treated as normal, and each thread, disturbing in its own way, is not allowed an ending, just as Bataille does not allow an ending in *Story of the Eye*. As Bataille used shocking imagery to convey his personal and societal concerns and a greater psychological truth, so Kawabata uses shocking scenes to convey his apprehensions regarding the growth of a consumerist culture, and galvanizes the reader into a debate: are these changes worth the price Japanese society pays?

Later in life, although largely abandoning the experimental prose present in *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, Kawabata employed another common Bataille tactic: the use of a grotesque symbol as a metaphor. In 1963, Kawabata wrote a short story titled “One Arm.” (Coincidentally, there is a Tennessee Williams story of the same name.) Katsuhiko Takeda summarizes the work: “The protagonist of Kawabata’s ‘One Arm’ is an unmarried man in his early thirties. One late spring night he borrows a certain young girl’s right arm and goes back to his home with it. The protagonist had had other love affairs, but he had been unable to obtain satisfaction either physically or spiritually.... He... replaces his own arm with hers. This act of replacement symbolizes a meaningful spiritual and physical union...A man and a woman can become one



body by God's will, and this union becomes the source of a new life. Both his and her souls, both his and her bodies will be preserved in a new life that succeeds theirs... The attainment of an ideal human relationship is the theme of this story" (124-25). In this bizarre exchange of limbs, Kawabata uses the arm as a grotesque symbol of the spiritual and physical union, expressing the universal truth of the human need of such a union.

Bataille also employed grotesque symbols. In *Story of the Eye* (1928), Simone has a morbid fascination with eggs, especially wishing them to be placed in the bidet so that she may relieve herself on them after contemplating them in a sort of enraptured trance. For her they represent "eyes", a symbol that repeats itself in the "cut-out" eyeball of a priest, the bull tearing out the eye of a matador, and the raw balls of a bull that Simone requests (they look very much like both eggs and eyeballs). Bataille, in "Part Two: Coincidences," realizes that the images come from significant events in his life. He "attempts to create a transcendent experience by using...unexpected sense-language descriptors as a tool to disrupt the subjectivity of the readers" (McNary 3). In other words, Bataille is using these symbols and grotesque imagery to override the reader's perspective and bring them into an encounter that transcends the possible.

Kawabata wrote using the tenets of the French inspired school of New Sensationalists in only one novel before abandoning the experimental style. His later writing shows much more subdued forms of the principles of the New Sensationalists, such as "detachment and distancing, randomness, a succession of images, and a *flaneur*-like slumming" (Sword 215) and limited glimpses of Bataille's philosophy. Joshua Mostow writes that "though Kawabata soon abandoned the 'experimental' prose style of the New Sensationalists, throughout his life he maintained a more generally modernist, conservative and elitist view of literature as necessarily aesthetically pleasing and accessible only to the reader sensitive enough to appreciate 'purity'

and beauty” (143). It is clear, however, that Kawabata was one of the first to exhibit a Japanese parallel of Bataille’s philosophy synthesized in a new and uniquely Japanese artistic theory.

Kawabata does not recycle Bataille’s symbolism in his experiment in modernity that is *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*. The similarity that I have traced between Bataille and Kawabata consists of a comparable philosophy and a use of similar techniques. Therefore, establishing a connection is not a matter of written proof or of the literal replication of symbols; the connection exists in the intangible transmission of goal and philosophy. Tracing a similarity of ideas can be done; however, in such an approach it would be impossible to pin down irrefutable evidence of Bataille’s influence on Kawabata for this reason: Kawabata did not “regurgitate” Bataille. Instead, Kawabata paralleled Bataille’s philosophy in his own work and adapted his symbols through his own cultural filter. Objective evidence is difficult to procure and can even be counterproductive; symbolic ideas, when viewed with an objective eye, often lose the subjective intent of the symbol. It is difficult to trace the influences of modernity as separate from Bataille’s philosophy, yet clear parallels of Bataille’s imagery and literary techniques are present in Kawabata’s modern work. Kawabata’s embrace of French philosophy is evident in his work with the New Sensationalists in Japan during the time in which Bataille wrote his radical works.

However, Kawabata’s parallel use of Bataille’s system of shock falls short of actual assimilation of Bataille. Nevertheless, Kawabata is one of the leaders in integrating French and Japanese artistic theories into a new strain of thought by his interweaving of traditional and modernist elements. But it is in Kenzaburo Oe that the system of shock emerges most openly and fully and gives evidence of true assimilation. Oe, by more fully embracing the Western

philosophical shift and Bataille's system of shock, shows the further extension of the "Modernist" movement begun by Kawabata.

CHAPTER 4:  
OE: POSTMODERNISM AND ASSIMILATION

Kenzaburō Oe was born 1935 in Ose, Japan. He lost his father in 1944, during WWII, when he was nine years old. In 1945, Japan's emperor capitulated after the American bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The experience of hearing the emperor as a broken, weak man made an indelible impression on Oe, as well as many other young boys who had been taught to regard the emperor as no less than a living God. Oe also had his first encounter with American soldiers when they visited his village toward the end of the war. Instead of committing atrocities, as Oe had been taught to expect, the soldiers tossed candy while the children scrambled to pick it all up. It was a moment of relief and shame that profoundly affected Oe (Oe, *Teach Us*, xiii-xiv). Oe experienced another life-changing event with the birth of his mentally handicapped son, Hikari. The experiences of fathers and mentally handicapped sons is a frequently recurring theme in his writing.

Oe studied French literature at Tokyo University under Professor Watanabe, a scholar of French literature and thought. His first short story was published in 1957. In the 1950's, Japanese intellectual thought centered on Sartrean existentialism, and this emphasis is clearly identifiable in Oe's early stories. It is interesting to note that Oe's thesis was on imagery in Jean-Paul Sartre's fiction, and in 1960 he visited his hero Sartre in France, thus making clear his ties to French thought and imagery (Claremont 4). Claremont also notes that Oe paid tribute to the Russian Mikhail Bakhtin in his Nobel Prize speech (172). Oe spoke of his debt to Bakhtin, saying: "I learned concretely from his translation of Rabelais what Mikhail Bakhtin formulated as 'the image system of grotesque realism or the culture of popular laughter': the importance of material and physical principles; the correspondence between the cosmic, social, and physical

elements; the overlapping of death and a passion for rebirth; and the laughter that subverts established hierarchical relationships” (Oe, *Japan*, 124-125). Oe specifically cited Bakhtin’s theory as enabling him to make such cultural connections (Oe, *Japan*, 32-33).

Oe’s early life sowed the seeds of many of his recurring themes: “the village as an imaginary topography, expanding in its significance to encompass the nation and mankind’s place in the cosmos; the vast forest, ever renewing itself; the power of mythology intertwined with historical folklore; uncertainty and betrayal as inevitable conditions of life; and the Emperor, no longer divine but still at the head of a centralist socio-political system dominating Japan” (Claremont 4). Oe was deeply concerned with the socio-political effect of the war and Westernization on the psyche of the Japanese.

Oe’s fascination with the village and folklore is similar to Bataille’s fascination with primality and with what, in man, is specifically human (Beaujour 161). Oe is also a modernist writer, focusing on the male subject and his individuality as well as his part in a larger collective. In fact, as noted by Mostow, “The tension between the desires of the individual and the duty toward a collective is at the heart of many of Oe’s novels” (Mostow 198). The prevailing attitude in the 1950’s and 60’s also contributed to Oe’s modernist tendencies, as Japanese society experienced rapid economic growth and an unsurprising resistance to a continued alliance with the United States. During this time, there developed “a humanist, but often somewhat existentialist, stream of fiction in the work of male writers such as Oe Kenzaburō, Abe Kobo, and Shimao Toshio. Their protagonists frequently struggle to negotiate the demands of individual conscience or desire versus duty toward a collectivity, within a context of increasing internationalization, industrialization, and urban anonymity” (Mostow 32). Oe also had several American heroes, including Mark Twain and William Faulkner, both of whom had a significant

influence on his writing. Faulkner, for example, has a literal influence on Oe: “Faulkner’s ‘is’ in Oe’s self-awareness or his recurrent first –person narrator, ‘I’. Oe metaphorically translates Faulkner’s ‘is’ into various characters” (Kimura v.). However, both Surrealism and French artistic theory were the major and lasting philosophical influences on Oe’s body of work; and he has continuously demonstrated the tenets of French philosophy and exhibited influences from Bataille’s symbolism and his literary strategy.

Oe published *Teach Us to Outgrow our Madness* in 1969 as a collection of four stories and in it he demonstrated Bataille’s influence through his use of sexual imagery, violence, scatology, marginality, archaic man, and the technique of grotesque realism that Bataille developed into his literary trademark of shock value. Violence and sexuality often go hand in hand in both Bataille’s and Oe’s work. But Bataille’s concept of violence is not limited to acts of aggression; he makes distinctions that are also evident in Oe’s work. As Zeynep Direk contends, one must first understand this distinction between “immanent violence” and “transcendent violence” in order to understand Bataille’s use of the term. Violence within the framework of animality places man as the higher being, superior to all other animal species. Therefore, immanent violence, or the return to animality, would be seen as a regression, and inherently negative. For Bataille, however, Zeynep Direk contends that “it seems that being in touch with our own animality may be an important way to experience immanence and a powerful resource for a critique of Western civilization” (29). Immanent violence “eliminates the differences, dissolves the individuals, and returns them to indistinction” (Direk 47). It is a return to the “natural condition,” and for Bataille, this return lacked the negative connotations that such a setting aside of the trappings of civilization almost automatically assumed by the general population. Bataille states that “intimacy is violence”; consequently he connects immanent

violence with an intimate interconnection with “the ground of our existence in which we are always already interconnected with other living beings” (Direk 30). In direct contrast is the term “transcendent violence,” which is “not a return to animality, nor is it a ‘sovereign experience’ in Bataille's sense. It gives rise to the regimes of servitude in which the subject loses itself in the power relations that belong to restricted regimes of consumption and serves to establish the hierarchical differences among individual human beings” (Direk 30). In other words, transcendent violence emphasizes the individual distinctions of people, such as class, and sets them apart from one another. With this distinction, Bataille elevates his emotional interest in violence to a psychological truth.

For Bataille, the subjectivity of immanent violence brings about a desirable intimacy born of the return to the collective, devoid of the artificial distinctions set up by transcendent violence (Direk 47). Bataille valued this “regression” to the natural state because he believed that subjectivity “as the immanent unity of the world and life can never become the object of knowledge, although it can be ‘experienced’” (Direk 31). This experience implies a loss of awareness of distinct and individual beings, a transcendence of the natural environment, and an ability to view objects from the outside, to view them in an objective manner. Bataille evidently wished to create a sensory experience that returned the reader to a state of subjective collective unconscious, or a more natural, archaic state. He used the immanent violence of graphic and sexual imagery in order to accomplish such a return to primality.

Sexuality and violence come together in Oe's “Prize Stock,” with the juxtaposition of Eros and Thanatos (“sex” and “death” in Freud's terms) and polymorphous sexuality in the naked romp at the town spring (*Teach Us* 151-153). The setting is an Eden-like village outside the realm of society, in a primitive forest. The narrator is a young boy nicknamed “Frog”, who

lives with his father and younger brother. One day, as they speak with their friend Harelip, they hear a plane overhead. Soon they learn that an African American soldier has been captured. He is immediately called a “catch,” like a trapped animal would be, and he is found a hole to live in. The soldier is equated with an animal. The young children of the village are delighted with his “humanness,” his ability to communicate with gestures and mechanical skill. “‘He’s like a person!’ Harelip said to me softly.” They even equate him to a gentle “domestic animal” (*Teach Us* 146). However, the soldier’s stench finally becomes so bad that the children take him to the communal spring where they bathe. They look on his limbs and genitalia with frank admiration. In the midst of this innocent, almost primitive, scene intrude elements of violence, such as Harelip slapping the girl’s bottoms as they fondle his “rosy penis,” and the black soldier’s sexual play with the goat (*Teach Us* 151-153).

However, the atmosphere of love and trust abruptly ends in tragedy. In order to kill, one must reduce, and the soldier is reduced to an animal until, ultimately, he is killed when he resists being moved despite the friendliness that has sprouted up between the soldier and both young and old members of the village. As the villagers attempt to move the soldier to the nearby city, Frog’s hand is badly hurt when the black soldier uses him as a shield. Even though Frog’s hand is in the way, Frog’s father strikes, smashing the boy’s hand and killing the soldier (*Teach Us* 160-161). Both the villagers and the soldier are dehumanized; the soldier by his animalistic treatment of the villagers, and the villagers both by their vicious treatment of one of their own, and by their vicious treatment of the soldier, a person they had treated as one of their own. “Prize Stock” investigates the dehumanization required of the human psyche in order to kill his enemy.

Oe also embraces Bataille’s use of “transcendent violence” (Direk 30). Distinction between “us” and the “other” and the difficulties such awareness entails is evident in “Prize



Stock” in the disturbingly racial depiction of the African American soldier. This collision of such divided humans, deeply aware of the gulf between them, results in tragedy. Not only does the African-American lose his life, but also Frog’s (as well as the other children’s) relationship with the “adults,” as Frog calls them, is permanently tainted. The members of the village were brought together in a collective unit with the arrival of the soldier, but his death jarred them apart again. As Joshua Mostow writes, “Oe reveals the harsh, brutal truth of any set of human relations that is based on differential power” (200-201). Transcendent violence, involving the awareness of distinctions between individuals, allows Oe to reveal the inherent flaws of making a distinction between self and the “other.”

Oe also makes extensive use of Bataille’s system of shock value with scatology and graphic imagery. He includes many examples of public urination, such as the African American soldier relieving himself in the middle of the street in front of many villagers when he is first captured (Oe, *Teach Us*, 124) as well as the young male narrator, Frog, peeing in front of his younger brother. Oe describes the act: “My urine jumped a great distance...it rebounded and warmly wet the tops of my feet and my goose pimped thighs. My brother, his head pressed against my side like a baby animal, observed intently” (*Teach Us* 133). In Oe’s *Teach us to Outgrow our Madness*, the narrator, again a young boy, is urinated on by his obese goggle-wearing father who has collapsed heavily to the ground: “Then his large pitch-black penis sprang from the long-since buttonless fly of his ‘people’s’ overalls, and he energetically urinated. The boy remained on his knees...and the smelly urine wet his naked side and right buttock” (74).

Bataille uses excrement and scatology as a way to challenge complacency and the delusion of civilization that man clings to, striving to ignore his natural, primal nature. He is led to express the eruption “of excremental force, the excessive violation of modesty, the violent

excretion of the sexual object coinciding with a powerful or tortured ejaculation, vomiting, defecation” in contrast to the “corresponding limitation, a narrow enslavement of everything that is opposed to this eruption” because “it is only in these concrete conditions that sad social necessity, human dignity, fatherland and family, as well as poetic sentiments, appear without a mask and without any play of light and shadow” (Bataille, *Literature and Evil*, 92-93). Bataille, as he makes clear, is not interested in allowing man to hide behind the illusion of civilization.

As does Bataille, Oe also uses scatology; in his case, he uses it to draw the reader’s attention to the link between the “generating force and to fertility... The living body returns to the earth its excrement, which fertilizes the earth as does the body of the dead” (Wilson 4). In Oe’s *A Dark Night’s Passing*, as Michiko Wilson contends, “Shiga Naoya did not have to make Tokito Kensaku take the herbal medicine. He could have come up with another solution: let Kansaku continue his bout with the diarrhea. For example, let us say Kansaku runs around [on the mountain] with diarrhea. He shits all over the place. . . . Through this, a dynamic regeneration takes place. Rather than letting him merge into nature, and dissolving the confrontation between him and nature, Shiga could have regenerated Tokito Kensaku as a character who actively interacts with nature. Had he concluded *A Dark Night’s passing* with the [alternate] ending, would not Japanese literature have changed a little?” (4). Oe chose instead to create the vivid image of excrement and nature, and to highlight how man is at odds with even this most natural function of life, elevating his concern to reach the psychological truth behind the balance of man and nature.

Oe also embraced Bataille’s use of graphic imagery. Oe’s best known image of suicide might be one by Bataille himself; in *The Silent Cry*, Oe described a hanged man “who had painted his face red and thrust a cucumber into his anus. Bizarre though this image is, it is

haunting in its expression of anguish and despair” (Claremont 9). In *The Story of the Eye*, Bataille depicts a similarly haunting image: “In Simone’s hairy vagina, I saw the wan blue eye of Marcelle, gazing at me through tears of urine. Streaks of come in the steaming hair helped give that dreamy vision a disastrous sadness. I held the thighs open while Simone was convulsed by the urinary spasm, and the burning urine streamed out from under the eye down to the thighs below” (96). Both these images involve a bizarre sexuality that enhances the emotional anguish of the subjects. Oe’s expressed the sadness of the hanged man, and Bataille the sadness of the narrator. But both Oe and Bataille used scatological and graphic imagery to express emotion in an indelibly striking manner, and the influence of the Frenchman upon the Japanese author is unmistakable.

Oe is known as a master of symbolism for his technique of layering metaphorical meaning in his text. He does have identifiable Sartrean symbolism in his work, but also he uses uniquely Japanese symbols. The titular story of the collection *Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness* demonstrates his use of Japanese symbols. One of Oe’s recurring themes is an outlandishly fat man as the father of a slender young boy, often the narrator. The fat man symbolizes Japan’s historical baggage, carried about because it is impossible to be rid of it.

During the 1960’s, Japan tucked into the shadow of the US, began to slowly reestablish itself as an economic power again, careful to stay within the confines of the 1947 “Peace Constitution.” Japanese internal sentiment supported the limited international role; Japanese civilians preferred to keep a low international profile after the horrific events of World War II. China and Korea, near neighbors, were suspicious of Japanese movements to gain a security role, viewing Japanese growth as a threat. There was also resentment towards Japanese strength

(McDougall 16). The challenge of communication and the complicated relationship between the fat man and the slender boy parallels that between Japan and the rest of Asia.

By the 1970's, Sartrean symbolism and influence was fading in Oe's work, perhaps because its focus on the individual provided too narrow a scope for Oe (Claremont 10). Oe's interest in archaic mythology, the cycle of death and rebirth centered on the marginal world of a village, and his preoccupation with the father-son diathesis with the birth of his son all required a more expansive vehicle. While Sartrean symbolism and thought receded in Oe's writing, his use of scatology, marginalization, shock value, and other trademarks of Bataille's writing did not. These specific techniques are not the best indication of Bataille's thought, however; it is the specific way Oe used them: he utilized graphic imagery, sexuality and violence, marginalization and shock value as a way to work out his own issues, both social and personal, and to reach a deeper psychological truth just as Bataille did.

When Oe began to write, it was fresh on the heels of a society centered on a fallen emperor. An entire generation "had been left without a sense of purpose, having lost a target for rebellion as Japan began racing along the road of high economic growth, leaving them with only a sense of empty futility. Oe in his writing had anticipated the tenor of the times" (Hirano).

As Janeira Martins observes:

The new generation find in Oe's novels a mirror of their own attitudes and beliefs, the attitudes of systematic challenge and scorn for the hypocrisy of the world governed by cynical old men, the prestige of violence, and the glorious indifference before the injustices of the human condition. Oe, like Kobo Abe, is attracted primarily to the problems created by life in the great cities and the despair of modern man in finding himself and others empty of humanity, unrooted from society, never truly getting to know another human being, and unable to go beyond

superficial, meaningless contacts. (219)

Oe promotes his personal experience with loss of belief in the emperor into an exploration of the emotional effects on the Japanese psyche as a whole. This concern over living an emotionally superficial life is also Bataille's concern as explained in his concept of transcendent and immanent violence: he wanted to destroy the artificial veneer of human interaction and provoke a visceral, lasting, and emotional response.

For Oe, a generation lost a father figure when the image of the emperor as an all-knowing God-like character ended with the outcome of WWII. Oe frequently refers to the response of his youth to the question "What would you do if the emperor commanded you to die?" The response: "I would die, Sir, I would cut my belly open and die" (Oe, *Teach Us*, xiii). The loss of this kind of awe of the Emperor affected Oe almost as much as the loss of a father would have. It should be noted that Oe's father died when Oe was nine years old.

Bataille also had issues with his father. Bataille had a difficult childhood with his paralytic, blind father who suffered from syphilis. In his own words, he writes, "When I was born, my father was suffering from general paralysis, and he was already blind when he conceived me; not long after my birth, his sinister disease confined him to an armchair. However, the very contrary of most male babies, who are in love with their mothers, I was in love with my father" (Bataille, 106). After a traumatic incident caused by his father's delusional attack on his caregivers, Bataille's love turned to hate. Bataille and his mother abandoned the ill man in Paris as the Germans approached Reims, and Bataille's father died shortly thereafter (Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, ix). Further complicating the relationship, "Bataille confesses that his love for his father is intrinsically linked with the terror of having being abused by him...Bataille writes: 'I am perhaps three years old, naked legs on my father's knees and my sex

bloody as the sun” (Dragon 39). Dragon goes on to point out the “omnipresence of a father that reiterated the entire Oedipal scenario” in *Story of the Eye* (38). Both Oe and Bataille conflate the father presence with negative authoritarianism in their novels.

In the epilogue to *Story of the Eye*, Bataille recalls an innocent childhood memory of vacationing with “several perfectly chaste girls” with his mother as a chaperone. As they climbed the old ruins of a medieval castle, Bataille’s elder brother popped out of a cave, scaring everyone badly. He had just finished writing the sheet episode in the story, and he was taken aback that an apparently nonsexual episode in his life was unconsciously transformed into an “intensely sexual moment” (McNary 2). Bataille worked out much of his memories and personal struggles through his use of graphic imagery.

Oe also worked out personal battles by using graphic imagery in his writing, a tactic that was cathartic. The birth of his brain-damaged son caused him much emotional anguish. His decision to keep the boy instead of sending him to an institution was unpopular in his neighborhood, and that added to his difficulties. For Oe, Hikari was more than his son, he represented a macrocosm of Oe’s vision: “I live in this cosmos-world-society as a human being. This child of mine deeply and sharply influences the structure of my flesh and spirit. Therefore, when I write about trees and whales, these words, which embody symbolic meanings, constantly reflect the shadow of the child’s existence. Conversely, I write about the idiot infant. The words that describe him, however, do not portray the retarded child who exists in my own family. My words . . . like a surrealist painting that places the sky and an ocean in the orifices of a human body, are the very image of this cosmos-world-society which I glimpse through the flesh and spirit of the idiot child” (Wilson 7). Oe, like Bataille, used shock value to heighten the effect of

graphic imagery while depicting deep emotional pain. Oe has said of his writing about Hikari, "I made no attempt to add in anything that we did not actually experience" (Hirano). Even though each story did not play out Oe's particular experience; nonetheless, they contained the emotional truth of the matter. Oe also wrote about his other personal struggles. In 1997, Oe was deeply saddened when his brother-in-law and boyhood friend Yoshiharu Ikeuchi committed suicide. He explored the reason behind Yoshiharu's suicide in the novel *Changeling* (Hirano).

Oe, in terms of both themes and techniques, merges Bataille's philosophy both with traditional Japanese philosophy and with his own personal philosophy, in which he takes Kawabata's course and then moves a step further. Ultimately, Kawabata, in spite of his experimental prose, asserted traditionalism as the primary filter of Japanese culture. However, Oe is, as Charles Fu says, "highly skeptical of traditionalist claims as being little more than an apparition, a collective fantasy generated to a large extent by a nationalist/nativist sociopolitical agenda" (Fu ix-x). This skepticism is what allows him to step away from the traditionalist perspective and be more open to the radical imagery of Bataille.

Oe is a deliberate writer. Clearly he is well versed in the use of imagery, but where he differs from Kawabata is in his approach. Instead of simply adopting French surrealism and existentialism, Oe makes his mark in his use of scatology, grotesque realism, violence and sexuality, and shock value to create a lingering, sensory-rich and objectivity-stripping reader experience to express his concern over Japan's nationalistic direction and his own personal battles. Oe may not discuss all the same issues as Bataille, but he has appropriated Bataille's methods as a Japanese writer, using a similar vehicle in order to present his concerns to the

public, thus creating a new artistic theory with an amalgamation of European, Western and Japanese thought.



CHAPTER 5:  
THE STATUS OF IMAGE IN TEXT AND FILM

Surrealism as a movement and Bataille's adaptations of surrealism are distinctly different. Surrealism "officially" emerged in France in 1924 with Andre Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism*. Two years later, Eugène Atget published in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, a collection of photographs of Paris which were enthusiastically received by the Surrealists. The movement had, almost at its inception, an "impulse to uncover latent Surrealist affinities in popular imagery" ("Heilbrunn Timeline"). Surrealism as a literary movement is thus linked to both written and visual imagery. Photography became an important art form for the Surrealist movement with the works of Man Ray and Maurice Tabard. Techniques such as double exposure, montage, and solarization "dramatically evoked the union of dream and reality" and performed trademark Surrealist reversals that portrayed the repulsive subject as bizarre yet compelling ("Heilbrunn Timeline"). The theory behind this alteration of photos affected art as well; artists created paintings that looked like photos, yet they were "photos" of things that could never exist. Surrealism photography and art had the same kind of humor inherent in Surrealist literature: a grim playfulness that bred dark laughter. It was the kind of laughter that doubtless owed part of its existence to World War I, a war which had ended only a few years prior in 1918.

Surrealism, as an artistic theory clearly lent itself to visual and written portrayal, but does grotesque realism and Bataille's philosophy of shock value translate visually from the written word? Clearly symbolism, as used by the Surrealists, is affected by the conversion of French culture into that of the Japanese. For example, Bataille adapted Surrealist imagery to suit his own concerns, such as the egg, eye, and testicles in *Story of the Eye*; Kawabata adapted the

Surrealist's interest in the human form and metaphor when he wrote a short story in which a woman's limb represented a spiritual union. These comparisons are largely speculative, and these two examples are not evidence of Surrealist symbolism and its transmission into Japanese culture. Similarly, one might ask, how can such different mediums of text and animation be compared with any validity? As Jean-Luc Nancy notes, "The difference between text and image is flagrant. The text presents significations, the image presents forms" (63).

Despite the "blatant distinction," however, a continuous relationship between text and image exists: "Each one shows something: the same thing and yet a different thing. By showing, each one shows itself, and therefore also shows the other one across from it and facing it. It therefore also shows itself to it: image shows itself to text, which shows itself to image" (Nancy 63). Both text and image present something placed before our eyes; the difference is that text is presented to the eyes of the mind, and image is presented to the eyes of the body. Spoken text calls up the image of the lips pronouncing words, the expression of the face; the voice draws the eye. In this way, image and text are "arrow and target for each other," and "the image thus gives presence to the text, if with this word *text* you understand the interlinking, the meshing and weaving together of a sense. Sense consists only in being woven or knit together. Text is textile; it is the material of sense. But sense as such has no material, no fibers or consistency, no grain or thickness" (Nancy 64-65).

Both text and image weave together a sense, even though they may do so using different methods. There is no text without image, in this sense, because text in the form of written symbols creates words that are symbols of images. Text symbolizes an image, just as the letters themselves, arranged into words, form their own visual image; there is also the mental image as

well as nuanced meaning. For example, the word “goat” takes up visual space as grouped letters, signifies a living, breathing goat, and, further, a goat can symbolize evil or stubbornness.

In this way, image can also be treated as a text because it can be interpreted as a text can. A changing facial expression conveys a nuanced meaning that must be “read” and interpreted, much like a passage in a story. An image can be conveyed through text: “the girl’s shoulders slumped and her mouth curled into a frown,” and the same content can be conveyed by the moving animation of a girl with slumping shoulders and a disheartened expression. Both ways of presentation are “read” to express the subject’s unhappiness. As a result, the relationship among text, sense, image, and symbol translates to cinema and theater as well, according to Nancy, even though “the nature of the images or their mode of delivery is not the same” because “in their relation to the text, the theater proposes an entire body, a body that is physical and present, moving on a stage, whereas the cinema presents a body that is cut up and framed—even if it is shown in its entirety. This frame is linked to the text, even if it is not subordinated to it, or else it becomes a sort of text, an articulation. The theater embodies the text above all, whereas the cinema textualizes the body, making it signifying” (Nancy 65).

Written text was a part of early cinema as well. The cinema was initially silent--text was inserted between the film frames. The words were seen twice: once as text and once as image reflected in the facial expressions and poses of the actors. However, the texts on the panels formed images as well: “It was not merely the text as the meaning of the words. It was, in the successive stream of images, a kind of image, which offered a passing insight into the element of sense: into consciousness” (Nancy 65). The panels of text “delivered sense as an image” (Nancy 65). Significantly, Jean-Luc Nancy contends that in the modes that lack an indicated text, “the

text comes from the image itself. It comes out of it and returns to it, without setting down any words. This is the case with painting, photography, installation, sculpture and architecture, and, sometimes, video, performance, music, and dance” (71). An image can symbolize, not itself, but a meaning, just as the text can create an image as a symbol. Text, image, and film, and animation: all can produce a visual image of meaning that can be read and interpreted, and can, therefore, be discussed equivalently despite the difference in medium.

Japan is a land open to textual interpretation, perhaps having evolved a more visual culture, according to Roland Barthes. Barthes notes:

Now it happens that in this country (Japan) the empire of signifiers is so immense, so in excess of speech, that the exchange of signs remains of a fascinating richness, mobility, and subtlety...In Japan, the body exists, acts, shows itself, and gives itself, without hysteria, without narcissism, but according to a pure— though subtly discontinuous – erotic project. It is not the voice which communicates...but the whole body (eyes, smile, hair, gestures, clothing) which sustains with you a sort of babble that the perfect domination of the codes strips of all regressive, infantile character. To make a date (by gestures, drawings on paper, proper names) may take an hour, but during that hour, for a message which would be abolished in an instant if it were to be spoken (simultaneously quite essential and quite insignificant), it is the other's entire body which has been known, savored, received, and which has displayed (to no real purpose) its own narrative, its own text. (9-10)

Japan's culture of communication through body language particularly lends itself to being read as a text. Japanese culture affords a continuous exchange of textual and visual interpretation that allows Bataille's literary philosophy to be visually converted into Japanese anime.

CHAPTER 6:  
EXTENUATION IN ANIME

Bataille's philosophy, as transmuted through Kawabata and Oe, had a slow and gradual influence on anime. Japanese movie producers began studying the techniques of animation soon after American and European animation was first screened in Japan (Clements 169). Japanese animation, or anime, emerged in 1917, seven years before the appearance of Surrealism in 1924; four years later, Bataille published *Story of the Eye*. In Japan, one of the first animation shorts was titled *Namakura Gatana* (1917) or *The Dull Sword*, by Jun'ichi Kouchi. Only thirty seconds remain of this ninety second work. It features a samurai who has been cheated by a merchant who sold him a dull sword. The samurai comes up behind the merchant to complain and the merchant, still facing forward, kicks him. The luckless samurai tumbles head over heels through the air (Clements 170).

At this early stage, anime was largely derivative, used both folklore and myth as subjects, and relied on common sight gags for effect. In 1929, *Kobu Tori* (*The Stolen Lump*), directed by Yukikiyo Ueno, arrived in theaters in Tokyo. The animation was naturally much improved, but it followed the existing trend of animation by illustrating a Japanese folktale. The mid-1930s did see a change in anime; unfortunately, the change was largely derivative of the old "Disney style" of character animation, with rounded facial features and simplistic sight gags. In *Chinkoroheibei and the Treasure Box* (1936), by Noburo Ofuji, Chinkoroheibei slumbers under a tree as a spider hanging above him rises and falls with each breath (Clements 513). Anime only developed as a distinctive style combining both theme and visual content in the late 1930s.

Bataille's, Kawabata's, and Oe's novels all display the social and personal concerns of their time period synthesized into psychological truth. Anime began a visual shift from simple folkloric retellings to this social mirroring in 1942 with Mitsuyo Seo's *Momotaro's Sea Eagle*. This anime functions as a propaganda war film, featuring a young boy with Japanese features rousing his army of appealing monkey-like soldiers to attack "Demon Island" and destroy the "Red Demon's" air force. A sailor on one of the ships, surprised by the air attack, is difficult to see because of how impossibly white his skin is (Clements 716). This anime mirrors the 1941 Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, illustrating the Japanese government's agenda. WWII ended with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and the subsequent horror of such devastation.

Anime reflected this feeling of horror as well: a 1947 anime by Kenzo Masaoka titled *Suteneko Tora-Chan* depicts a stray cat being adopted by a cat family (Clements 192). The anime was likely created to address the pressing need for families to take in the children orphaned by the atomic bomb. In the 1960s, Osamu Tezuka continued anime's thematic shift by focusing more on imaginative tales that conveyed his personal beliefs. In 1969, Kenzaburo Oe published *Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness*; however, despite its literary acclaim, anime did not display much of a response to his work. Instead, animes from the 1970s to the 1980s are a mix of "mecha" (giant robots), space adventures, and heartwarming children's tales (Clements 716). Anime was developing as its own medium, and its history parallels that of other forms of artistic expression such as the novel: it began with a focus on society as a whole before delving into the individual and the individual psyche. As anime developed as a medium, so too did its subject material. Anime became more and more of a sophisticated inquiry into human psychology; a

shift from derivative entertainment animes for, instead, films revealing French influence on Japanese philosophy can be seen in the early 80s.

The 1980s in Japan were marked by electronic advances and expansion of knowledge-intensive industries. Japan's economy was strong, and its industries began focusing on the advancement of foreign inventions, taking in and improving what had already been made. Japan began to import more than export as private companies increased equipment budgets.

Technological research was now carried out for economic growth rather than for militaristic armaments. The Japanese economy shifted from agriculture and mining to electronics and computers, giving rise to an-information based economy powered by sophisticated computers (Kingston 2-3). Just as Kawabata's *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* reflected Japan's growing consumerist culture, and Oe's *Teach Us to Outgrow our Madness* mirrored Japan's social concern with human isolation in the midst of industrialization, animes at this time echoed the growing preoccupation with the age of technology and the fear of what man's arrogance, coupled with an unlimited scientific potential, can wreak on humanity, especially coupled with man's greed for conquest.

In 1988, director Katsuhiro Otomo made *Akira* from the manga of the same name. The film is set in the year 2019, centering on Tetsuo Shima, a teenage member of a biker gang who has psychic powers. The leader of his gang, Shotaro Kaneda was once his friend, but turns against him after Tetsuo is taken by scientists who want to study his psychic gifts. They hope to learn how to manipulate his abilities, and as an extension control the mysterious powers of another boy, Akira, also with psychic abilities. Akira was responsible for decimating Tokyo with his unpredictable psychic capability. Akira was subsequently captured and what remained of his body was locked in a temperature-controlled vault (*Akira*). An antigovernment group discovers

that the government is also working on developing psychic abilities in children (Bolton 162). In this anime, Japan's government is unchecked by ethical concerns. It is only concerned with scientific advancement, power, and knowledge. As can be seen with this anime, Katsuhiro Otomo poses a potent query in response to the rapid rise of technological development in Japan; he explores what the potential consequences of such development may be on not only a personal level but a universal level of psychological investigation.

In *Akira*, the consequences of unrestrained scientific advancements are dire. Tetsuo breaks free from the scientists' control. But without their medication, his body rapidly degenerates along with the mechanized arm he himself regenerated after his own arm was disintegrated by a laser. The arm begins to act erratically, sending out wires and electronic circuitry that moves as if the arm is organic. As Kaneda attempts to kill his friend, Tetsuo spirals out of control and his psychic powers produce a major body change: Tetsuo loses control of his body and erupts into a vast, pulsating being that looks like a giant infant, an infant made a mish-mash of organic and metal parts. The bulk (Tetsuo) soon loses any discernible shape and begins absorbing minds and bodies into itself while begging Kaneda for help, screaming "My body won't listen!" Tetsuo absorbs his girlfriend into his organs: she is squeezed tighter and tighter until, in a bubbling explosion of blood, she, too, is absorbed.

Tetsuo ultimately self-destructs and in doing so vaporizes Tokyo (*Akira*). In *Akira*, Director Katsuhiro created an anime that made ample use of both violence and graphic imagery that cannot fail to elicit an emotional response to the question of what happens when unchecked technological growth subject only to the human appetite for control and power is produced. A viewer can see that Kawabata's and Oe's use of shock value to heighten the effect of graphic



imagery are plainly echoed in *Akira*'s vivid depiction of the risks of unrestrained scientific advancement.

Another anime, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1997), explored the growing concern with the consequences of unlimited science coupled with man's insatiable quest for power. Christopher Bolton writes, "Science may free humanity from the tight grip of established social power, yet it is chiefly depicted in the anime as oppressive and reactionary" (164). *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, a TV anime series directed by Hideaki Anno, incorporated a Japanese appropriation of Bataille to an unprecedented level. The setting of the series is a post-apocalyptic world, and an Evangelion is a giant robot that only 14-year-olds can synchronize with and pilot. Tokyo is a city that can be retracted underground, and is also one of the few remaining human settlements after a meteor hit the earth and wiped out 95% of the world's population. Massive beings known as Angels regularly attack Tokyo. Shinji Ikari, the main character, and several other teenagers must battle them to save the earth.

One of the recurring themes of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is the fear of the effects of man's abuse of technology, the same fear that fueled *Akira*. Director Hideaki Anno explores the possibility that uncontrolled technological advances may result in the self-destruction of humanity. In *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, man precipitates the tragedy that leads to a massive loss of life on earth. The Angels that attack the earth differ in appearance, but all are a composite of the organic and the mechanical, just as the Evangelions are. In Episode 5, Anno reveals that Angels are composed of a type of matter characterized by both particulate and wave form properties, like solidified light. Although they are composed of different matter, the arrangement and coordinates of the pattern fall within 99.89% as a match of a human being, thus making it clear that these enemies are not that different from humans. Thus the Evangelions are essentially

Angels, and the Angels are essentially human, a similarity pointing to humanity's arrogance at having created and called down the Angels upon them, to their own ruination. Man must become a monster in order to defeat the monsters. The price paid for victory is dehumanization in the form of 14-year-old soldiers. The government, formed of three supercomputers known as the Magi, continually pushes together the boundaries that exist between man and machine, further twisting the psyches of all who come in contact with their organization. As Sharalyn Orbaugh comments, "Futurism is grounded in the complete renewal of human sensibility brought about by the great discoveries of science. Those people who today make use of the telegraph, the telephone, the phonograph... do not yet realize that these various means of communication, transportation and information have a decisive influence on their psyches" ("Frankenstein" 85). Animes like *Akira* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* explore and test this psychological influence by using graphic imagery to emphasize and elicit an emotional response. One does not have to look very far to see the influence of Bataille on the evolving nature of Japanese anime images.

*Neon Genesis Evangelion* voices a protest against mechanized war and the wide distance humans put between themselves and their primal state of self, emotion, and communal connectedness, a sort of mourning song for modernity, paralleling Kawabata's concern with the impact of consumerism on Japanese society and Oe's anxiety concerning the effects of industrialization on the individual. Bataille used shock value to force the reader into a critical engagement. Kawabata and Oe, while they do not have the same concerns as Bataille, also use shock to create emotional involvement. Anime shocks the viewer into emotional participation in the conflict as well by using graphic imagery, violence, and sexuality. In Episode One, an Angel grabs Shinji's robot's arm, twists, and breaks it. Shinji, because he is connected to the robot, screams in vivid anguish. The Angel then punches through the Evangelion's braincase, causing

two jets of blood to spurt violently. In Episode two, Shinji wakes up to see a decapitated Evangelion head. Abruptly the flesh begins to move, and nightmarishly produces a bright green eye that stares straight back, causing Shinji to black out from fear. In Episode 24, Shinji and Kaoru, a charming young boy with blue hair become very close. Kaoru eventually reveals that he is an Angel, and Shinji is forced cut off his head to save the world. Kaoru's decapitation is graphically and grotesquely portrayed (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*). A viewer can see the similarity in the use of violence to receive "salvation".

*Metropolis* is a 2001 anime that shares the same name as Fritz Lang's 1927 science fiction film, and has many of the same themes, although director Shigeyuki Hayashi insists Lang's film did not influence his work. In the anime *Metropolis*, based on the manga by Osamu Tezuka in 1949, the director creates a hauntingly graphic scene as weapons blaze around the cyborg Tima, showing "A demonic and mechanical Tima erupting through the skin of the radiant, angelic Tima. Machinery invades her body, exposing her inner mechanisms, leaving only patches of her angelic appearance" (Lamarre, *The First Time*, 180). The anime uses graphic imagery to raise the question of what happens to the human soul when integrated with a machine and, like Bataille and Oe, compel an emotional response to the presented apprehensions.

Just as Bataille and Oe did, anime employs sexuality for its shock value. However, many animes also use sexual imagery merely to titillate. This is a common gimmick in anime known as "fan service." *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is no exception, but the series also uses sexuality as a vehicle for commentary as well, by coupling it with violence that mimics Georges Bataille and Kenzaburo Oe. This series has the "ordinary" violence of tanks, bombs, guns, but it also includes sexual deviancy. Sexuality is used to heighten the emotional impact of a contrasting scene. In a dream state, for example, Mitsuko sees Shinji watching her having sex with Kaji, her old

boyfriend and new lover. Her response is “No, please. Don’t let Shinji see this. I don’t want him to see me like this.” A kissing couple at the theater highlights Shinji’s utter loneliness and desolation (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*).

Bataille, Kawabata, and Oe all use graphic imagery to shock the reader. Each of the three also uses the contrasting element of “studied carelessness” when describing shocking imagery. This technique correspondingly heightens the emotional impact of the grotesque imagery. These casual receptions of shocking scenes are duplicated in anime by allowing obscene events to pass by without an expression of outrage by the characters. For example, Shinji is forced to harm his classmate when his father overrides the Evangelion’s system; this experience is dismissed as insignificant by his father. These teenagers are exposed to an exceptional amount of graphic violence, yet traumatic events such as mental breakdowns are glossed over by the adults with a casualness and indifference which calls to mind Oe’s adult-child relationships in “Prize Stock.” Frog’s hand is smashed and the soldier murdered, yet no adult, not even Clerk, who discusses the event with him, attempts to explore the emotional impact of adult betrayal and the loss of a friend. Director Hideaki Anno highlights the concerns of the age with human arrogance, science and nature, emotional alienation, and deep-seated betrayal, as well as a foray into how much trauma the mind can handle, and, just like Bataille and Oe, he wields graphic violence and sexuality as a tool to override the viewer’s perspective and initiate an interactive and emotional encounter.

Bataille had an interest in alienation and the marginal, shown by his desire to break down civilized order and embrace man’s primal nature. Kawabata and Oe filter this concern through the medium of Japanese society. In Kawabata it emerges in his narrator; by making him a flaneur, he is outside on the edges of the city, uninvolved in its daily machinery. Oe presented his

concern with the marginal by focusing on the alienation of unassimilated individuals in his depictions of isolated, unconnected individuals.

Anime reflects the Japanese concern with marginality as well. Miyazaki's main character in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* is another marginal character, as a female and a pacifist in a world of warriors one can see why she is marginalized. Both *Akira* and *Neon Genesis Evangelion* focus on young, isolated boys: Tetsuo is isolated by his rare psychic powers and Shinji by his ability to pilot the Evangelion as well as his emotional stiltedness. *Metropolis* focuses on a marginal character, Tima, who is a cyborg in a society that despises and fears robots. As Sharalyn Orbaugh notes, "These final stages of intercorporation—when machine and human interpenetrate so fully that they merge—has been viewed with terror by writers of fiction as well as technological pioneers and tech theorists" (Orbaugh 104).

Part of Kawabata's expression of the marginal was his panoramic view of the city of Asakusa as the narrator shifts from scene to scene with limited character involvement. Anime lends itself to this panoramic view by putting the audience in the position of Kawabata's flaneur, mimicking the succession of images Kawabata employed in *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*. The viewer briefly dips into a character's psychological experience, only to move on to other characters and scenes. Another of Bataille's main themes is his challenge of hierarchy. Oe also challenges hierarchy, using his novels to protest the nationalistic Japanese society centered on the Emperor as a god. Anime challenges hierarchy as well. In *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the world is falling apart and the established order is failing, highlighting the necessity for Shinji as the subversive, disruptive element.

In *Story of the Eye*, Bataille worked out his personal emotions to express an overall psychological truth, such as his difficult relationship with his father; the personal impact of his father can simultaneously be universalized. In a somewhat similar way Oe worked out the emotional impact of losing a father figure [the Emperor] in *Teach us to Outgrow our Madness*. Both authors used the shock value of grotesque imagery to express their personal and emotional concerns. In the 1980s, Hayao Miyazaki's films marked a gradual shift into shock value as a vehicle for personal concerns; it was also during this period that anime gained worldwide popularity. Japan's new emphasis on a society centered on technology sparked concerns about the balance of science and nature, and man's role in maintaining an ecological balance between the two. In Miyazaki's 1984 anime, *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, the setting is a post-apocalyptic world in which humans have destroyed the earth through war to such a degree that poisonous plants make breathing impossible around the vast forests known as the Toxic Jungle; human settlements are few and far between. This anime reveals Miyazaki's powerful concern with the balance of man and nature; as Dani Cavallaro says, "Miyazaki's preoccupation with environmental issues [is] a crucial aspect of both his political perspective and his cinematic signature" (130).

Miyazaki makes use of the value of shock in order to convey these personal concerns to his audience, just as Bataille and Oe did. In *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, Miyazaki highlighted the grotesque in that which threatens the natural world, strengthening the emotional impact of his concern with shock value. For example, a bioweapon that the Telmekians attempt to unleash on the Toxic Jungle is a massive organic being that is pulled out of his suspended sleep before he is ready. As a result, his body slowly melts, lava-like, as he crawls painfully slowly towards the Toxic Jungle. His labored progress is punctuated by the cracking of his bones

as they break off his weakened skeleton (*Nausicaä*). Miyazaki heightens the grotesque for shock value in *Princess Mononoke* as well, by emphasizing the massive amount of enmity the boars and wolves have towards the humans. The residents of Iron Town have been shooting the massive animals. When their hides are punctured, the boars who do not die immediately become walking corpses with blank eyes and mouths of dripping blood. Thick, writhing gray masses appear on their hides; if their hatred is not soothed, they become revolting monstrosities with writhing, nightmarish tentacles (*Princess Mononoke*).

Miyazaki is deeply concerned with the balance of man and nature, and man's refusal to honor that balance. In *Princess Mononoke*, *Nausicaä*, and other films, he is not only exploring his personal anxieties but elevating them to a universal exploration of the effects of the imbalance between man and nature on the human psyche. Although Miyazaki does not make use of sexuality to enhance the emotional impact of his animes, as Bataille and Oe do, the shock value of grotesque imagery allows him a vehicle to convey his fears and apprehensions. It would be difficult to watch his richly varied depiction of the natural tapestry, witness its wholesale destruction, and come away unaffected by the repercussions of man's actions on nature.

1999 and 2001 also heralded animes that show evidence of Bataille's philosophy as adapted by Yasunari Kawabata and Kenzaburo Oe. Livia Monnet describes the animated work of Ayako Tabata, nicknamed Tabaimo, titled *Japanese Kitchen* (1999), in which "We behold an ordinary Japanese kitchen, where a housewife seems busily engaged in dinner preparations. The lateral screens show plunging views of a crowded residential area where the woman's apartment is located. A series of bizarre incidents seem to occur in succession in the woman's kitchen, as well as outside. Thus the radio weather forecast announces a 'rain of senior high and junior high school students.' Several teenagers will indeed be seen on the lateral screens plunging to their

death in suicidal ‘rain showers’” (Monnet 191). Bizarre as it this scene is, the next sequence of scenes are even more surrealistic: “A terse comment is splashed across the screen: ‘*Papa wa risutora*’ (Papa—i.e., the woman's husband—has been fired). The housewife opens the refrigerator, and reaches for her tiny husband, who continues to perform meaningless clerical tasks at his desk. This satirical depiction of the effects of a seemingly endless economic recession cuts to a scene of decapitation: the hapless husband is beheaded on the chopping board by his indifferent wife” (Monnet 192). This minimalist approach combines the surrealistic element of creating anachronistic images that, though realistic, could not really exist. Monnet comments that the anime “shorts” shed light on the “insidious dangers inherent in state-sponsored, inward looking neo-nationalism,” and “call attention to the serious consequences of the economic slump Japan has experienced since the 1990s: rising unemployment; eruption of violent crimes and social instability; the psychological crisis besetting large sections of the population, in particular the unemployed” (Monnet 194). Again, Tabaimo makes use of anime to explore the psychological, universal impact of modernization on the human psyche, much as Bataille, Kawabata, Oe, and Osamu Tezuka and Hayao Miyazaki did.

However, Tabaimo’s grotesque social satire abruptly shifts to an appalling scatological sight that very much prompts comparisons to Bataille: a schoolgirl squats in the middle of a road, pulls down her underwear, and excretes Japan’s national flag, sacred in Japan (Monnet 194). Tabaimo offers a pessimistic and disturbing view of Japan’s society, a vision that demands outrage, anger, but understanding as well—she forces a strong emotional response, refusing to allow viewers to disengage. Tabaimo purposely “manipulates familiar images to de-familiarize them by placing them in sometimes shocking contexts to provoke her audience into thinking more deeply about societal issues” (“On the Dark Side”). Tabaimo is much more like Bataille



than Oe in her use of scatology, since Oe uses scatology to draw attention to the natural cycle of death and rebirth. Tabaimo uses it as Bataille does: a social satire meant to shock the reader. Just as Bataille suggests that what a scatological metaphor or image is directing attention to is far more relevant than the literary device itself, so Tabaimo uses it to comment on Japanese society and point to the dystopian societal issues that her scatological imagery satirizes. While she adopts Bataille's methods, she picks her own themes—themes that reflect Japanese concerns. Therefore, Tabaimo represents the modern Japanese regeneration of Bataille's philosophies, as filtered through Kawabata and Oe.

## CHAPTER 7:

### CONCLUSION: PARALLEL SYMBOLISM AND ASSIMILATED PHILOSOPHY

The use of Bataille's themes and Kawabata's Japanese paralleling of them is evident from the 1980s on. Kawabata's themes of isolation, sweeping panorama with sudden perspective shifts, and fleeting intimacy with characters shows up clearly, as does Bataille's use of shocking and graphic imagery and preoccupation with man and machines (as seen in the anime *Metropolis* 1949 and 2001), use of graphic imagery and extreme contrast (As shown in *Akira*, 1988) and inner exploration and representational imagery (as presented in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, 1995). The connection between French ideology, Bataille, Kawabata, Oe, and then anime is a tenuous bridge, all connected by the similar demands each places on audiences: the demand of mental interpretation of graphic violence into metaphors of sensation and meaning to express personal and societal issues, as well as psychological truth, instead of mere sensationalism.

While showing decidedly less of Bataille's and French influence than Oe's later work, Kawabata's novel, *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa*, parallels Bataille's philosophy, creating a Japanese internalization of French thought and the subsequent development of anime with his use of graphic imagery to shock readers into emotional interaction with his personal and societal concerns, such as the collective impact of consumerism, his experimentation with Surrealism's human sensation of perception, modernistic experimentation, and the incorporation of Bataille's casual statements of shocking imagery and use of grotesque symbols as metaphors. Kawabata also paralleled Bataille's disassembling of the novel form with his creation of the panoramic view and succession of images that disrupt the linear perspective of a novel. Kawabata created his own uniquely Japanese perspective on Bataille's use of the novel as a psychological experiment by developing a psychological study, not of the self, but of the city of Asakusa.

Kawabata is a forerunner to writer Kenzaburo Oe, a writer who fully embraced the use of shocking and graphic imagery in his work, specifically *Teach Us to Outgrow Our Madness*. Between Kawabata's novel, written in 1930, and Oe's, written in 1969, anime's development parallels Japanese internalization of French thought. The synthesized version of Bataille, Kawabata, and Oe's philosophies emerges fully in anime during the 1980's to the present. Kawabata's *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* is more than a brief flirtation with French style and Bataille's philosophies; the novel is the link between the assimilation of French thought into Japanese consciousness and the subsequent development of anime. Japanese animation owes its present form to Bataille's philosophies, Kawabata's unique Japanese parallel of French philosophy, and Oe's assimilation of Bataille, thus making *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa* and *Teach Us to Outgrow our Madness* as the prelude to modern anime.

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