

that she'd have to take the blouse to the cleaner's after just one wear was another thing that irritated her.

They didn't drink like fishes as they had back in the days when they'd knocked back margaritas and whiskies, and instead everyone went home at an intermediary stage of drunkenness, poised between drinking properly and not drinking at all, and she forgot about the photocopy Setchan had given her, so that it was not until a while later that she actually read it.

from: MIEKO KANAI, *MILD VERTIGO* (1997; TRANS. POLLY BARTON, 2023)

WARPING AND ETHICS

So moderate and comfortable in its design is the Setagaya Art Museum – the creation of the same architect responsible for the Fukiage Imperial Palace – that it more closely resembles a hotel built with the intimate feel of a second home such as those found before the Second World War in the resort towns of Hakone or Karuizawa than it does any art museum, and if, hypothetically speaking, a single woman of thirty-one or thirty-two who worked in the advertising department of a company responsible for the distribution of Western films, or a twenty-six-year-old woman who worked a desk job at a trading conglomerate (who had not entered the company on the career track) and was engaged to be married to a colleague currently working for the Côte d'Ivoire or Amman branch of the same company ended up having an affair with someone whom I don't have the space here to imagine and consider how she might have met, then, that being the case, the museum is exactly the kind of place that a novelist would conceive of them being invited along on a date to by the copyeditor of a weekly magazine, aged somewhere between thirty-seven and forty-five, or the director (or

else producer) of a culture programme on TV who hadn't been involved in the recent staged documentary scandal but was nevertheless unable to think about the issue as one entirely unrelated to him, as a location where they could enjoy a cultural experience together.

With its verdigris roof and pale brown tiles, its monastery-like cloisters and simple wooden construction, the building casts tasteful contemporary Japanese bourgeois conservatism in an appealing light, and truly does have something about it that spurs the imagination, causing one to dream up those kinds of hackneyed scenarios, whereby the copyeditor, or the director, finding out that the title of the Nobuyoshi Araki and Kineo Kuwabara exhibition was *LOVE YOU TOKYO!*, and that it was at the Setagaya Art Museum – which was just *such a nice spot* – decided to invite his lover along. The woman working in the advertising department of the company distributing Western films had, while studying abroad in Paris, visited the *Japon des avant-gardes* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou with an American journalist, and hence knew of Kuwabara's photography – the American journalist, whom she'd met at the *cinémathèque*, had been a Japanophile, and had said to her that Kuwabara's photographs had a way of capturing the world that was far more dynamic than that of Ozu, and which reminded him of Mikio Naruse, that the two showcased the beauty of the Japanese people in an analogous way, but she had not seen a single one of Naruse's films – and she had also, of course, heard of Araki. The office lady at the trading company had never heard of Kineo Kuwabara, but the photographer who went by the moniker ARAKI was famous (she'd seen him once on a late-night TV show), and she knew that his photographs were, to borrow the phrase of a girl in the same year as her at college, 'dirty

photos', but according to the director, whose second daughter had just entered kindergarten, they weren't just 'dirty photos', but enough of a big deal that they would someday have to feature his photographs, including his nudes, on the *Sunday Art Museum* programme that screened on the national TV channel where he worked and invite Kōtarō Iizawa or some other big-name art critic along as a guest, and even if you ascribed the way that Kōtarō Iizawa had talked about Araki's photographs in terms of the Melancholic, that paradigmatic concept of the nineteenth-century psyche, to Iizawa being a photography critic and therefore uneducated, you couldn't overlook the fact that people like Gen'ichirō Takahashi, Taeko Tomioka and Yūko Tanaka admitted that, unlike the stereotypically beautiful nudes by Kishin Shinoyama, which everybody felt that they'd seen somewhere before, but which lacked any kind of contemporary sense of relevance or provocation, Araki's nudes revealed a certain truth about the times in which we are living, or at least, that was what the director had explained when they were sitting in the Shiseido Parlour in Laforet Harajuku, and the fact that he clearly inhabited a totally different world from her fiancé who worked in a trading firm (an airmail letter had arrived from him yesterday saying that the humidity in the Côte d'Ivoire made it feel 'like a steam bath') made him attractive to her, but when he spoke, the top left-hand corner of his mouth would jerk upwards, and his jaw would jut out to the left at the same time, which was another reason why she didn't want to go with him to a hotel.

As suggested by its whimsical-sounding title, *LOVE YOU TOKYO!*, it's Asia's sordid international metropolis, shape-shifting dynamically as it is ravaged and consumed, that forms the subject of the exhibition – a city

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that is perhaps well suited to have its name written not in kanji, as is standard, but rather in the katakana script used for foreign words, as in the Japanese title to the exhibition – which presents the work of two photographers born and bred in the city (in the same Taito Ward, in fact, though different parts of it) a generation apart, like father and child, taken over the half-century between 1930 and 1993 and arranged to give visitors a sense of navigating their way through a tangled maze of narrow alleyways.

The two young, unmarried women didn't know the hit song 'Love You Tokyo' that had been sung by Akira Kurosawa and Los Primos, but the copyeditor and the TV-channel director knew it, and in fact, when men of the former's age would sing their karaoke renditions of songs such as 'Karajishi Botan' and Yuzo Kayama's 'Itsumademo', brimming with emotion, the copyeditor, who was born in 1947, would frequently counter with 'Love You Tokyo', or else Linda Yamamoto's 'Komacchauna', and enjoyed pulling the wool over the eyes of the young women who happened to be around by pretending that this Akira Kurosawa was *that* Akira Kurosawa, but he hadn't been born in Tokyo (neither, in fact, had the director), and as for the two women, the advertising lady was a second-generation Tokyoite, her father and his siblings the first to have been born in the capital, while the woman in the trading conglomerate's great-great-grandfather had been a member of the southern Satsuma clan, born a low-ranking samurai and serving with the clan's forces, and since her grandfather's generation, her family had been bureaucrats for the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, living in Tokyo's Suginami Ward.

With its verdigris roof and its tiles in the something-or-other style, the Setagaya Art Museum has a more or less identical design concept to the Imperial Palace,

and when you think about that in reference to modern Europe, where art museums such as Florence's Uffizi, the Louvre after the French Revolution and the Hermitage after the Russian Revolution were a part of the history of Enlightenment philosophy, in the sense that they served as spaces where the collections of the imperial or royal families and the aristocracy were made available to the public, then it's as if the Setagaya Art Museum serves as the antithesis of that, it's assimilated with the residential spaces of the Emperor, do you see what I mean, in present-day Heisei-era Japan the public space of the art museum follows the example of the Imperial Palace, the director said, simply parroting the lines that an art critic he'd been at university with (whose uncle was an historian specializing in the Annales school) had written in a magazine article, at which the woman with the desk job nodded as if struck by this observation, and said, it sort of feels like how the old Nara Hotel or the Hakone Fujiya Hotel would look if they were renovated.

Is this exhibition, in fact, an appropriate match for its ironic title *LOVE YOU TOKYO!* and the journalistic ring that it carries? Considering the words alone, it seems immediately obvious that the title's intended implication is that the warping of the photographers' feelings towards the super-metropolis of Tokyo imbues them with a criticality that allows them to function as love, and as we have in all likelihood understood Nobuyoshi Araki's photographic oeuvre as manifesting a criticality that stems from such warped feelings as directed towards numerous contemporary 'issues' such as photography, the city, culture, sexual mores and death, the fact of the exhibition being given this title, *LOVE YOU TOKYO!*, with the somewhat outdated flippant note it strikes, didn't make us feel remotely uneasy, and it is indeed possible to

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understand the notable lack of 'I' within the phrase as simultaneously indicating the subsumption of the subject within the amorphous city of TOKYO, and as a linguistic simplification aligned with Nobuyoshi Araki signing his work ARAKI, to wit, a warped kind of critical coinage. We do get slightly sick of the fact that, standing in front of ARAKI's photos, we end up bringing to mind terms of infantile psychology like 'warped'.

That said, after taking a turn around the artificial alleyways erected in the gallery space that lead us through an entire half-century, visitors to the exhibition find that, at each of the turning points in those artificial alleys, it's the Kuwabara photographs that all eyes are drawn to, each of which, in exposing the limits of an Arakiesque criticality as they appeal by virtue of being real photographs, far transcend any of Araki's actual photos. Why might such a thing be happening? You could of course put it down simply to the difference in talent between the two and be done with it – and it should be hastily noted that the phrase 'difference in talent' is being used here to indicate not a discrepancy in the presence or absence of talent, but rather to refer to an essential difference in the nature of the talent – but even by doing so, it's impossible to gloss over the cruelty of the way that the Arakiesque criticality in Nobuyoshi Araki's photographs is surpassed so overwhelmingly by the abundant joy found in the desirous gaze of Kineo Kuwabara's photographs.

Of course, the very nature of photography means something different to Kuwabara than it does to Araki, who is of Kuwabara's son's generation, and it also stands to reason that the material significance of Kuwabara's photos of the dancing girls in Asakusa is different to that of Araki's photographs of sex workers, and when we go to compare the complex-yet-simple surprise, sadness,

humour and compassion-filled affection we find in the photograph Kuwabara took of the four primary-school boys lost in thought in the back seat of a bus in the 1970s with one of Araki's photographs of children, taken with a lens that deliberately produces a grainy finish, and displaying a criticality towards contemporary society that derives from the sheer fact of their being photographs and therefore being so easily comprehensible as to verge on a form of defencelessness, we probably need to consider the era in which these two photographs are taken and perhaps reflect that the criticality of the photographer resides precisely in capturing his own era, and looking at the picture of Araki taken by Eiichirō Sakata that appears in the thick exhibition catalogue for *LOVE YOU TOKYO!*, on what would be the back cover if you were to pick up the book and read from right to left, and at his expression, which, leaving aside the round sunglasses and white moustache, is a mixture of diligence, kindness and shyness, the viewer starts to doubt their own eyes, to wonder if this is really the same Araki as the one who appears among the 'dirty photos' (to borrow the phrase used by the novelist Anna Ogino) that ARAKI took with the self-timer function, where he himself wears the same eerie, frozen expression of nervousness and distrust towards the photographer as his own subjects do, and to wonder also if the criticality found in Araki's photographs is actually more concerned with the identities of those people living out their lives within the contemporary city, highlighting the lies that at first glance appear as realities, and although we knew it all along, we end up reconfirming for ourselves that despite Araki's possession of the talents and diligence needed by someone who works as both journalist and critic, his work is really quite dull.

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The camera, apparatus of the desirous gaze, is made up of a shutter released upon a scene which one feels certain can never be fully contained within a 35-millimetre frame by a finger that is determined to live in the present moment, full as that moment is of affection, curiosity and regret towards all those people living through the world's uncontainable time and space. The determination, the hesitation, the joy and fear of the moment when the finger releases the shutter are not about any critical consistency of a journalistic nature, but rather *the ethics of the person holding the camera*, who, with the rapid movement of a finger, must make an instantaneous decision with that desirous gaze. Indeed, this dynamic ethics of photography is what makes possible the momentary interlocking of the finger on the shutter and the desirous gaze, an interlocking to which Kuwabara's photography – right up until his most recent work, *Afternoon Smiles* (1992) – owes its ability to move the viewer. The finer details of the fragile beauty and its sensuous glimmer that reside within the ethicality of such a photographer can very often be lost from the originals in the process of mass-producing them, similar to watching a film on videotape.

The field of photography, which evolved into a medium through the emergence of the distinction between *amateurs* and *experts*, that was in turn made possible by advances in development and printing technology and which then went on to give rise to *professional* and *fine-art photographers*, has thus accomplished in a flash the transition from commemorative albums for bourgeois families to grand symbol of printed media within popular consumerist society, and yet perhaps finds itself simultaneously fated, when within the nineteenth-century-style public exhibition space, to attest endlessly to the quality – i.e. the artistry – of its prints *as* prints.

Hmmmmmm, the woman working at the trading conglomerate said to the director. I dunno, but they seem kind of flat? Or tacky, or something? It's just a bunch of naked women, they're not really even very smutty, you see loads of photos like this in the weekly magazines, and on TV too, right? The director was at a loss for how to reply, mentioning pubic hair and Gen'ichirō Takahashi's name and the contemporary criticality of Araki again, and the single young woman working in the advertising department of the company distributing Western films understood Kineo Kuwabara's photos far better now than when she'd seen them in Paris and felt moved by them, felt now, this guy is a true photographer, while Araki, who'd lived in and amid a Tokyo experiencing the schizophrenic flattening that accompanies modernization and has captured the symptoms of that disorder, is a diligent journalist, he's capturing in imagistic form the schizophrenic contemporary age where a girl from the sex industry and your wife's face as she dies appear the same to you, it's that pernicious brand of modernism known as realism, she said in the French restaurant that jutted out from the left wing of the Setagaya Art Museum with its pared-back interior design that reflected the taste of the Imperial Family, and the copyeditor thought, as he remembered the photograph that showed a Shinjuku skyscraper at a diagonal angle, that the main theme of Araki's photography was quite possibly that of papering over the castration complex with sheer bravado.

Araki's photographs do not threaten our images of Tokyo, or of sex, and especially not of death. Because they are earnestly presented to us in the belief that they will challenge and complicate such images, his photographs deliver a comfortable shock, before stopping

short and beginning to become flat. Through the value schema of contemporary criticism that construes the flattening of every kind of value as the unique feature of the contemporary age, Nobuyoshi Araki flattens himself into ARAKI. When Araki, whose photographs are surely taken as ironic depictions of the age, as described by Daniel J. Boorstin's *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, which holds that the photographs that a tourist takes on their travels are flattened into the 'experience' of the backpacking tour, is unable to transcend the ambiguity of the image, which is after all not so simple to achieve – what these photographs tell us is that neither TOKYO nor Tokyo can be fully accommodated within the photographic image, and neither can middle-aged women, girls in the sex industry, faces at the moment of death, or sex – it is Kineo Kuwabara's photographs that place a bet with the ethics of the finger and the gaze on that apparatus known as the camera, turn to face the present time of the viewer, and speak for the power in the presence of those people living through this moment in time, this moment in space, which can only exist in this photograph. *We will not become flattened, even if we are captured on film.*

The title given to Kuwabara's most recent photo exhibition, *Afternoon Smiles* (1992), refers to the smiles of reconfirming, in the ethics of the finger and the gaze, a world – be that of Tokyo or TOKYO – that is not flattened by being accommodated within the frame, which flows over with the dynamism of time and life, and truly continues to expand. By sharing Kuwabara's smiles, we can find the conviction to live in this world.