

## Modern Vitality: Pure Film and the Cinematic

This chapter examines the paramount role that trick effects played in the solidification of narrative cinema in Japan, particularly as it was defined as separate from theater and popular entertainments in the 1910s and 1920s. In this regard, it builds on Aaron Gerow's significant work on early Japanese cinema, which elaborates on the ways in which cinema emerged in this period as a form distinct from other types of spectacle through the cinema reforms of the 1910s.<sup>50</sup> Yet it reaches different conclusions as a result of its focus on trick effects, in particular spectacles involving the interval. Tricks worldwide tend to be associated with the earliest period of cinema, and this expectation has shaped understanding of how Japanese cinema developed. More specifically, the standard version of Japanese film history is a teleological one mirroring American film history: cinema was reshaped after its earliest years through the importation of continuity editing techniques to create a universal style, and this narrative integration lifted the medium out of its primitive mode to form a classical cinema. Yet trick effects, including substitutions and object animation, dissolves and multiple exposures, are not relics of early Japanese cinema that got swallowed up in the drive for narrative continuity. It is true that by the late 1910s there was a desire among industry reformers to naturalize tricks and special effects through film narratives. Their engagement with film language was far more nuanced than generally assumed, however, and they viewed the attraction of tricks as integral to ideas of a modern, narrative Japanese cinema, in which the technological magic of cinema could be mapped onto the folk magic of native

tales to create a product that bore a local stamp while remaining universally legible. In other words, instead of being linked to primitive, theatrical cinema, as in the United States, the emphasis on the medium that tricks represented became a core way of differentiating cinema from the primitiveness of traditional theater, and in turn of modernizing Japanese cinema.

Due to their association with modern innovation, tricks persisted as visual displays of technological prowess to complement the narrative innovation that grounded classical cinema in Japan. Investigating Japanese cinema of this period through the lens of trick effects thus reveals a fundamental continuity bridging the theatrical, attraction-based cinema of the 1910s with the narrative system of the classical period, thereby recasting questions about how film style developed in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>51</sup> In particular, it challenges the prevailing position that deviations from the classical continuity system in Japanese films of the period represent a surfacing of traditional aesthetic elements from within an adopted Western form, as Burch's claim of presentationalism would have it, to suggest rather that these idiosyncratic features are themselves intimately connected to Japanese modernity; instead of being a residue of a premodern aesthetic legacy, they are artifacts of the modern, displaying the feats of the camera within a narrative form to manifest a uniquely modern configuration. In this way tricks, which were frequently techniques of the interval, became implicated in definitions of a modern cinematic language, the residual effects of which marked Japanese cinema well into the classical period.

The 1910s and early 1920s was a period of contestation within Japanese cinema, as various critics, filmmakers, and intellectuals became invested in renovating existing film production and exhibition practices. Their ideas, writings, and films have come to be referred to as *Jun'eiga geki undō*, or the Pure Film Movement. A loosely-affiliated group, the views of individual Pure Film reformers were not monolithic, but they shared a main goal of creating a sophisticated, tasteful mode of cinema in contrast to the existing popular lowbrow cinema. The author Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and the critic Kaeriyama Norimasa represent two different strains of reform that coalesce on this issue. While Tanizaki became engaged with cinema as a result of his literary background and reputation, by working as a scriptwriter, Kaeriyama became a central figure in the Pure Film Movement because his youthful interest in the medium prompted him to become a critic. He began writing about films in the

popular *Katsudō Shashinkai* (*The Cinematograph*) fan magazine in 1910, and in 1913 he founded the first serious Japanese cinema journal, *Film Record*, later renamed *Kinema Record*; it was through these and other leading film magazines that Pure Film discourse developed and circulated. Although reformers ultimately fell short of their mission to create a refined Japanese film practice, they were nonetheless successful at introducing changes in film style that prefigured classical cinema.

This contribution is typically discussed in terms of narrative: the shift toward building a coherent story world onscreen, in particular through the importation of analytical editing schemes. As both Aaron Gerow and Joanne Bernardi have pointed out, this represented a larger change in conceptions about cinema, as it came to be centered around the film text and associated contexts of production, rather than on exhibition conditions that aligned it with theatrical modes of entertainment.<sup>52</sup> In addition to their interest in film narrative, however, reformers were also instrumental in circulating ideas about how photographic tricks—an umbrella category that included optical effects such as dissolves, fades and single-frame techniques—were implicated in cinematic art. Without doubt the importation of foreign ideas about cinema conditioned this dual impulse toward a transparent, illusory cinematic world and toward a mediated onscreen spectacle. The mode of cinema that reformers advocated took from both Hollywood cinema and European art cinema models to embody the tensions between the pleasures of cinematic narration and the pleasures of the visible apparatus. The influence of foreign writers interested in forging a simultaneously bourgeois and poetic cinema, Vachel Lindsay foremost among them, contextualizes this twin drive, which can be mapped in terms of reformers' interest in elevating the status of the trick: employing visual effects that crystallize the essence of cinematic art through their partnership with the narrative. Additionally the deep connection between cinematic tricks in Japan and the perception of their international valence is reflected in the term itself, as Japanese texts retain the English word "trick" as a loan word to refer to several contiguous and overlapping techniques, in addition to employing more specific terminology borrowed from abroad.<sup>53</sup> These complex global influences are moreover evident in reformers' desire to utilize tricks as modern, cinematic spectacles that could bring new life to traditional stories and other subjects coded as Japanese.

Reformers responded to foreign interest in Japan's exotic tradition by advocating for films that incorporated the fantastical possibilities of

film technology into cinematized versions of native tales. Yoshino Jirō's 1917 film *Monkey II* (*Saiyūki Zokuhen*), based on a Japanese version of a Chinese folk tale about a monkey king with magical powers, is an excellent case in point. Attributing the success of the film in part to its photographic techniques, a critic writing for *Kinema Record* celebrates its skillful tinting, ample use of location shooting, and extensive tricks as follows: "almost all six reels are photographed using tricks and superimpositions...the scenes of Hakkai being blown away by the fan, the she-devils bathing, and the ascension of Kwannon were among the very accomplished scenes."<sup>54</sup> Although there is clearly an appeal to a premodern, supernatural past in this film, this review suggests that the traditional component is noticeably not lodged within the spectacle of the trick effects; rather, these effects are a modern cinematic rendering of a native subject, in which the display of the cinematic apparatus itself becomes an exciting spectacle. This establishes a precedent within Japanese filmmaking practice in which the spectacle of the medium acquires salience against the backdrop of "tradition," a point that is important in part because the major writers on Japanese cinema have assumed otherwise: that these sorts of effects, the elements in Japanese films that emphasize the material qualities of the medium instead of being submerged into the narrative world of the film, themselves reflect something particular about Japanese tradition. Yet what Noël Burch, Donald Richie, and David Bordwell have conceptualized—albeit in slightly different ways<sup>55</sup>—as part and parcel of Japan's enduring tradition can be contextualized within these modernizing discourses; for film reformers, cinematic effects were considered modern rather than traditional, and moreover they were applied deliberately in Japanese films over and apart from the Pure Film Movement's additional interest in analytical editing.

Murata Minoru's 1921 pure film *Souls on the Road* (*Rojō no reikon*) provides a strong example. Richie looks to this film to demonstrate that cinematic effects used in the West for narrative purposes were instead employed for stylistic reasons to conform to a Japanese aesthetic sensibility. He points to the film's use of flashbacks that do less to explain the story than to aestheticize time and space, and to dissolves that exist as decoration instead of marking the passage of time.<sup>56</sup> One sequence, for instance, unfolds as an extended flashback of the prodigal son character, now homeless, losing his role in an orchestra as a violinist. After fainting once due to bad press about his performance, he performs again, only to have the audience members throw their programs at him in disgust.



Fig. 2.1 *Souls on the Road* (Murata Minoru, 1921)

In response, he throws down his violin and exits the stage, after which is a close-up of the discarded instrument (Fig. 2.1). Each of these shots is separated by dissolves, but these dissolves do not indicate a lapse in time, as one might expect according to principles of continuity editing. Instead they work to heighten the mood of the scene and underscore the character's dramatic downfall. In other words the cinematic effect, used here to create atmosphere and enhance a feeling, mediates the world of the film, subverting its illusionary coherence through stylization. Burch refers to instances such as this as an extravagant implementation of Hollywood codes;<sup>57</sup> as Richie puts it, "Through the dissolve, the filmmaker—intentionally or not—insists on the theatricality that remains so much an aim in any Japanese entertainment."<sup>58</sup> Murata's dissolves do indeed exceed a narrative function and appear like an ornamental flourish in the context of the continuity system. However, it is premature for these scholars to assume that such "extravagances" reflect a special Japanese sensibility. By attributing a native aesthetic to these points of perceived difference, this assumption forecloses further analysis of these elements, which become emblems of the premodern surging up and into the modern-Western. The fundamental problem with this is not so much that Japanese elements are thus aligned with premodern tradition—whether as artifacts or citations—while Western ones are seen as modern. On the contrary, the Japanese film industry itself, along with other aspects of Taishō culture, largely saw things in this way. However, it is imprudent to assume that "deviant" stylistic devices were the Japanese, premodern part of this configuration, in which native aesthetic features adorn something Western so as to lend it the appeal of tradition.

For, by analyzing the implementation of tricks—effects of various kinds that retain a discursive function apart from the narrative—within the 1910s and 1920s, it becomes clear that the central way that Japanese tradition was redefined in cinema of the period was in fact by modernizing its local subjects through Western-derived embellishments, decorating native content with modern expressiveness. In this case it is more accurate to claim that the irruptions of the cinematic apparatus within early and classical film narratives are artifacts of the modern. *Souls on the Road* is a clear instance of this, as Murata strove to make a modern film free of traditional aesthetic trappings. The film emphasizes location shooting and naturalistic acting, and many of its techniques, including parallel story construction and editing, close-ups, irises, and fades, reflect the strong influence of recent foreign cinema and continuity principles.<sup>59</sup>

Many of the film's dissolves similarly mark transitions that adhere to this system. While the "embroidery" in *Souls on the Road* could be the unconscious surfacing of native aesthetics, a directorial accident of sorts, it is much more consistent with a display of modern technical expertise, and a sophisticated engagement with cinematic language to create a poetic or emotional valence. When contextualized within the historical moment, the "effects" of cinematic tricks were thought to be fresh and exciting, and decidedly non-Japanese, and thus betray a configuration unique to Japan's modernity.

### INTERNATIONAL MEDIUM, NATIONAL IMAGE

As is common with cinemas worldwide, early Japanese cinema was profoundly inflected by theatrical modes of performance, and it took considerable time for Japanese film to acquire an identity separate from theater and associated entertainments. It was heavily indebted to stage production techniques, most noticeably with its frontal staging backed by painted backdrops, static camera, and one-scene, one-shot formula. Like elsewhere, the theatrical origins of cinema in Japan were varied. For instance, film adopted live *benshi* narration, which was similar to narration in traditional puppet theater and in *kōdan*, a native oral storytelling tradition.<sup>60</sup> Other theatrical conventions included *oyama* or *onnagata*, female impersonators in lieu of actresses, similar to those in kabuki. Films of the period were also typically only one component of a stage show that would incorporate musical and theatrical acts in addition to the motion picture; sometimes films were screened as part of a *rensageki*, or chain drama—a lower-class form of modern *shingeki* theater that resembled *shinpa* melodrama—in which the narrative interspersed actors' live performances on stage with scenes comprised of prerecorded film footage of them. Usually screened alongside or within live theatrical performances in this manner, this "canned theater" was affiliated with other lowbrow entertainments, and with very minimal narrative development its stories were limited to well-known scenes familiar to the young and uneducated. Relying on a combination of *benshi* narration and previous spectator knowledge to flesh out the sketchy images, early film texts were unbounded, drawing extensively from familiar, usually kabuki-derived, traditional tales. For example Yoshino Jirō's 1915 *Goro Masamune* (*Gorō Masamune kōshiden*) took up a popular kabuki story adapted from *kōdan*, and its motionless camera and staging emphasized theater-like frontality (Fig. 2.2).



Fig. 2.2 *Goro Masamune* (Yoshino Jirō, 1915)

As this example suggests, aspects of Japan's "primitive" cinema thrived well into the 1910s, outliving its counterparts in other cinemas around the world; nevertheless, similar to developments elsewhere there was a move away from this theatrical and "open" quality of earlier films, and a push toward creating a unique cinematic language in which to tell a coherent, "closed" story. The turn away from a static, theatrical mode and toward a self-enclosed narrative system demanded a transformation in film style. This predominantly took shape in the form of continuity editing, with Japanese filmmakers following closely the burgeoning classical style in Hollywood, to employ such techniques as varied shot distance and parallel editing. The systematization of analytical editing schemes and the implementation of mobile camerawork worked alongside an increased reliance on scripts and a reduction of the *benshi*'s role to create a self-contained narrative world. Reformers were especially concerned about the institution of the *benshi*, which by its very nature demanded that films rely on extratextual elements and thus prevented integration of the narrative in the same way. In particular they spoke out against the *benshi* as a site of theatrical focus, as a spotlight that was merely supplemented by the film; and they sought to transition



the *benshi* away from providing personal opinions about films to simply describing the narrative to make films legible.<sup>61</sup> In addition to shifting attention away from *benshi* and toward the world of the film, reformers' project of removing the theatrical trappings from films also necessitated the rejection of other artificial conventions associated with traditional entertainments, such as *oyama*, and favored instead an increased realism of set, props, acting, and so forth.

This refitting of Japanese cinema was centered firmly with the Pure Film Movement. From around 1914 to 1923, Pure Film reformers sought to redefine cinema as a respectable art by creating a modern, bourgeois film practice that they could then differentiate from traditional and lower-class forms of spectacle and entertainment. Advocates shared a view that cinema was profoundly connected to the nation and its modernization, and as such it became embedded in political and economic discourse as a product that should serve the nation.<sup>62</sup> In particular, as Bernardi and Gerow have noted, reformers felt that cinema should be central to the project of securing Japan's position and reputation in the world, and that there was a dual strategy for making this possible, namely, the cinematic medium should be mobilized to package Japan for the West and to bring Western technical innovation home.<sup>63</sup> As part of a discourse on national edification, then, modernizing the cinema would elevate its cultural status, and that of its audiences, and this transformation was possible through engagement with the West.

Thus reformers' attempts to remodel film culture in the 1910s and early 1920s in the first place involved introducing into Japanese productions the stylistic and narrative features characteristic of American and European cinemas, so that Japanese films could exhibit a cinematic language equally modern to that displayed in foreign films; and their other most prevalent concern was related to creating a uniquely Japanese cinema that, at least in theory, could be exported. It is significant that the notion of exportability functioned like a shorthand for Japan's position on an international playing field, so that the idea of its possibility was ultimately more significant than the successful practice of exportation. Nevertheless, these two concerns were inextricably intertwined. As one critic put it, if Japanese films had improved narratives and were shot with a higher frame rate then it would be "easy to get audiences abroad."<sup>64</sup> The founder of Shochiku studio, which aligned itself with the Pure Film Movement when it began making films in 1920, articulated a similar point: "we are engaged in artistic business, and so we need to be fully ashamed that our films are inferior to and less artistic than foreign

films.”<sup>65</sup> On the most basic level this is because it was believed that Japanese films would not be exportable unless they abandoned theatricality to possess a special cinematic essence, that is to say technical sophistication and an internationally-legible style. In this context, reformers’ principal stylistic interest was related to continuity editing, with its power to convey complex narrative information and facilitate development of a diegesis in a manner that would be universally self-explanatory. Working in concert with this push for Japanese cinema to adhere to international stylistic norms, however, was anxiety that Japanese films should also bear a local stamp. Reformers, among many others, believed a proper Japanese cinema should reflect the nation’s cultural uniqueness, and it was widely felt that Japanese subjects such as native landscapes and local religion made the most appropriate fodder for the nation’s cinema.

This was in part due to representations of Japan in foreign cinema.<sup>66</sup> There was a surge in American and European films depicting Japanese culture, to which Pure Film advocates had a complex reaction. On one hand they were offended by the stereotypical and inaccurate depictions of Japanese customs and people in these films, and on the other they believed Japanese—and not foreigners—should be the ones to profit from the capitalization of Japanese culture.<sup>67</sup> In other words, taking control of their own cinematic representations was intimately tied not only to disseminating true Japanese spirit abroad but also to using exoticized images for their own gain in foreign markets, cashing in on the international popularity of Japanese cultural and artistic heritage. In this sense, while in some instances effort was made to reclaim the image of Japan against negative depictions, just as importantly reflecting a true Japanese image sometimes simply meant being created by Japanese. Daisuke Miyao has furthermore described Japanese reactions to the films Sessue Hayakawa was making in the United States, suggesting that the participation of a Japanese in these foreign portrayals of Japan also factored into reformers’ desire to take back images of Japanese subject matter as a national project. Thus, in reaction to these international films, there was a push to construct a national cinema; and yet significantly this national film was not viewed as simply a domestic product—in other words that ought to accurately depict Japanese life for domestic audiences—but rather cinema was considered discursively to be a vehicle for disseminating Japanese culture abroad, and for countering foreign depictions of Japan in part by performing Japaneseness themselves.

Thus Japanese cinema’s position in the world was conceived of in terms of economic competition, much like the nation’s global presence

more generally, and indeed the entire Japanese film industry was affected by this preoccupation with international engagement. For example, Taikatsu studio was established in 1920 to focus exclusively on global markets, exhibiting only foreign films in its theaters and endeavoring to make progressive, cinematic films intended solely for international release. And Shochiku's mission statement involved using Western styles and techniques in order to appeal to foreign audiences and expand overseas markets, and in so doing export the Japanese image abroad. A great deal was at stake in this drive to develop an internationally-legible yet uniquely-Japanese cinema, as film production was but one arena where the nation's contested modernity was played out. Although these efforts at exportation were not especially successful, the spirit underlying them is indicative of the extent to which the yardstick for evaluating the quality of Japanese films was established by foreign cinema, as well as how thoroughly reformers' ideas had percolated through not only critical and intellectual circles, but also production contexts. And this is moreover suggestive of the divide present in cinema between popular film and efforts to "improve" filmmaking practices, as the explicit intentions of Shochiku and Taikatsu studios were to incorporate foreign techniques and styles in order to be advanced, up-to-date alternatives to the cheap, popular films being made at Nikkatsu. Shochiku, for instance, used actresses instead of *oyama*, and both studios hired personnel who had worked in Hollywood, including Frank Tokunaga, Thomas Kurihara, Abe Yutaka, and Henry Kotani (who had worked extensively with Thomas Ince and Hayakawa), in order to implement the most advanced ideas and techniques into their films. Thus the interest in representing the nation was clearly considered an alternative practice, in contrast to entertainment films, which were not engaged with matters of uplift and modernization.

With modernity being constructed as Western, it proved difficult for reformers to envision and create a Japan, or a Japanese cinema, that could be at once authentic and modern. They considered the theatrical style of current domestic productions a legacy of the nation's premodern past, a shameful mark of its backwardness. They viewed the prevailing style as an impediment to reflecting cultural sophistication onscreen, and at the same time they were deeply concerned that the cinema should reveal truths about the uniqueness of Japan. And the world stage afforded by international film distribution further complicated this negotiation between resisting Westernization and engaging in cosmopolitanism, as there was great concern regarding foreign

perception of Japan. According to reformers the nation's cinema, implicated in Japanese modernity in this way, bore a burden to appear simultaneously international and national, modern and Japanese.

Thus for reformers there was slippage between universal legibility and modern style, and, on the other side of the coin, ambivalence regarding proper depiction of a unique yet not primitive Japaneseness. They understood that success abroad was necessary to support production of additional pure films, and they knew the category of Japanese exotic had ready-made appeal in foreign markets, such that unearthing unique traditional elements could be an effective means of packaging Japanese culture. Ultimately this strategy meant that the perceived value of Japanese films, and by extension Japanese national identity, was in large part determined by the reception of these films abroad, and hence that the nationalization of Japanese cinema was in many ways a process of Westernization—of underplaying Japanese aspects to create a product that simply had a look of being suitably Japanese.<sup>68</sup> Native folk tales and literature were often singled out as an ideal choice for story content as they would differentiate a Japanese cinematic product that stylistically met international standards. The screenwriter and critic Mori Iwao was one such reformer who advocated the excavation of traditional subjects for the screen, from adapting classical legends for the cinema to incorporating Japanese themes and native locales. He stressed that Japan's culture "abounds with an endless trove of treasures" and emphasized the need to employ these local elements in order to avoid merely imitating foreign cinema, as well as to compete with and counter its portrayals of Japan in international markets.<sup>69</sup>

Yet it was a challenge to isolate an appropriate use of native materials. For instance, despite taking a favorable interest in traditional stories, reformers were very critical of the popular *kyūgeki* genre—historical, costume films comprised principally of scenes adapted from kabuki plays and derived from *kōdan*. The genre's claim to tradition was tainted by its connection to cultural forms reformers deemed unrefined, a position that was deepened as a result of its appeal to children and women. Moreover, such class connotations, combined with a theatrical look that resulted from an almost-wholesale adoption of kabuki conventional form, as well as a fragmentary scene structure that provided little narrative coherence and required *benshi* narration for comprehensibility, rendered them uncinematic and unsuitable for exportation to foreign markets. As a point of contrast, reformers thought if a historical film contained

numerous shots and had a narrative developed sufficiently to make it intelligible to foreigners without reliance on a *benshi*, then it would be ideal.<sup>70</sup> To put it another way, reformers were keenly aware that self-exoticizing in live-action film promised success if executed properly, but in attempting this films walked a tightrope and could easily fall on the side of the premodern.

Dressing Japanese culture in a properly cinematic way promised the ability to mine this reservoir of native lore while successfully circumventing associations with the premodern and, contrary to how scholars tend to narrate this transformation in film style, efforts to do this went beyond importing continuity-editing techniques in an attempt to create an internationally-legible style. One critic, for instance, stressed the necessity of strong acting and sophisticated photographic techniques for creating Japanese films with “vitality such as that in foreign films.”<sup>71</sup> Reformers unanimously felt that Japanese films were boring and slow compared with foreign films, and the inclusion of techniques deemed advanced and exciting, such as panning shots and close-ups, were instrumental to overcoming such technical and artistic deficiencies. Indeed, for the attempt to outfit Japanese culture for export via a reformed cinematic style to take shape, a more intricate engagement with film language was required. For although narrativization was clearly a significant drive for reformers, developing a modern cinematic language encompassed harnessing the new technology in myriad ways to give modern expression to Japanese culture. This had unique and specific consequences for film style, and in particular for how tricks found their place in Japanese cinema of the period; because the filmic medium was thought to be uniquely capable of depicting the fantastic, reformers deemed especially appropriate folk stories that focused on supernatural or magical elements.

Stories associated with magic and the supernatural, including such elements as metamorphoses and the appearance and disappearance of figures, could capitalize on the technological capabilities of the medium, exploiting cinematic tricks to enrich and enliven the stories. The magic of cinema was viewed as a modern counterpart to the supernatural realm, concretizing the impossible and imaginary through techniques like superimpositions and dissolves. By fusing folkloric magic and cinematic technology in these trick shots, the technologic apparatus lent new expression to age-old stories: by increasing the magical feeling associated with the original story, the trick photography in these cinematic folktales imbued these traditional

tales with an exciting, modern quality. One critic pointed to this appeal of uniting native themes with cinematic techniques deemed Western, including tricks, in his analysis of contemporary-subject films used in *rensageki*; he said these films with modern subjects “do not seem wholly Japanese due to their quick changes, including many lively tricks and chases,” leading him to think that “an interesting film in the foreign style” would be born by combining these techniques with a “pure Japanese subject.”<sup>72</sup> In other words, lively techniques such as tricks were marked as foreign and, if applied to a native folk topic, they had the ability to generate a new kind of Japanese film. By mapping the magic and excitement of cinema onto folk magic to enliven the premodern with the modern, tricks became integral to ideas about the cinematic. Thus if stories were originally selected for film narratives so as to complement available film techniques, notions of proper cinematic language developed over time in part to complement these native spectacles.

### TRICKS IN JAPANESE CINEMA

The modern medium of cinema had also been closely associated with the world of the occult elsewhere. When cinema was in its infancy, tricks were used systematically in the United States and Europe to connect its modern technology to the supernatural and spiritual realm. The earliest of these were simple substitution techniques, which exploited the camera’s ability to record moments that, despite being independent, appeared seamlessly integrated when the film was processed: filmmakers stopped shooting, substituted new profilmic objects in place of the former ones, and then restarted the camera.<sup>73</sup> Though first used to make invisible substitutions, this technique came to be most commonly used to create magical changes including sudden appearances and disappearances, and object transformations. Such replacement techniques, alongside adjacent innovations, such as dissolves, reverse motion, matte devices, and multiple exposures, effected a cinematic mode of magic.

These simple substitution effects were also to become the most direct predecessor of early object animation, which employed frame-by-frame photography to create stop-motion tricks. A slightly elaborated substitution technique, frame-by-frame effects generated supernatural displays that were popular in the United States and Europe from around 1904 until 1908, by which time overuse had weakened their appeal, and the infant genre of animation had emerged and begun to have its

monopolistic hold over all things cinematically fantastical.<sup>74</sup> Donald Crafton has suggested moreover that popular awareness of the technique behind the trick, as well as a shift in cinema's cachet—from medium of magic to technology of modern objectivity—signaled the end of the trick film.<sup>75</sup> Technologically-mediated effects such as substitution and stop-motion techniques did not disappear altogether at this time, but rather the spectacle of the trick came to be incorporated within films as special effects—a transition that presumes just such a shift from the realm of magic to that of technology.

What marks the practice and discourse of trick films in Japan as distinct from this lineage is both a temporal delay—with substitution techniques and other tricks not being introduced in domestic filmmaking until well after their reign had ended in Europe and America—and a protracted dominance. Cinematic tricks entered the mainstream with Makino Shōzō, who began incorporating them in his “magical samurai” films in the early 1910s. Initially an owner of a kabuki theater, Makino began to adapt his theater's stage performances for the screen in 1909, and then quickly moved on to the fantastical *kōdan* narratives popular in children's literature of the period; by 1911 he had made hundreds of these films, and well into the mid-1910s his films—most of which were made at Nikkatsu studio—tended to bring to the screen the supernatural feats of ninja, including shapeshifting and appearing, disappearing, and teleporting at will. Although Japanese audiences had by this time been seeing substitution tricks and associated effects in foreign films for more than a decade, the enormous popularity of Makino's films, which also launched the career of Japan's first film star, Onoe Matsunosuke, attests to their successful incorporation into domestic filmmaking practice.

Matsunosuke, once popular in Makino's theater for his supposedly elaborate stage tricks, established his onscreen fame as a sword-wielding hero who triumphed against all odds through trickery and superhuman stunts. Makino is still heralded as the “father” of Japanese cinema, largely for his technological discoveries that transposed these magical stories to the screen. His substitution and stop-motion effects, superimpositions, and multiple exposures refashioned these legends into a modern practice that became one of the period's most successful mass entertainments. In one film, for instance, Makino exposed his film twice, superimposing Matsunosuke's actions over footage of a wave, in order to depict him performing a ninja skill of legend: fighting off his enemies while walking on water.<sup>76</sup> And Yoshino's *Goro Masamune*, which starred Matsunosuke's

main rival, Sawamura Shirōgorō, incorporated trick effects into its climactic scenes, most notably when a strange woman visitor transforms into the monstrous birdlike demon who has recently attacked a princess, prompting the hero Goro to use his sword to defeat her (Fig. 2.3).

Although there are not many extant examples of films in Japan before 1921 to provide visual evidence of the initial development of such trick effects, their trajectory is more apparent in the 1920s. In Makino's 1921 film *The Gallant Jiraiya* (*Gōketsu Jiraiya*), Matsunosuke's character is a purveyor of toad magic. He is depicted smiting a large frog with his magic sword, turning it into a cloud of dust (Fig. 2.4). He can also appear and disappear at will and transform into a giant toad; his nemesis, whose supernatural alter ego is an enormous serpent, is ultimately defeated, vanishing into thin air with a stroke of Matsunosuke's sword (Fig. 2.5). And in Tsukiyama Kōkichi's *Shibukawa Bangoro* (*Shibukawa Bangorō*, 1922), Matsunosuke witnesses a haunted shrine erect itself in the woods, followed by the mysterious appearance of a maiden who then suddenly transforms into a huge spider-person courtesy of substitution splices (Fig. 2.6). They perform elaborate games of hide-and-seek, as the spider is able to appear and disappear at will, and transform in a puff of smoke into a theatrical puppet dangling from a stage wire. Aided by stop-motion effects, the spider spins webs that entrap him, though Matsunosuke eventually manages to slice through the tangle of strands and defeat the spider creature (Fig. 2.7).

As these examples indicate, more noticeable than any delay Japan may have experienced in introducing tricks into its films is how prolonged was their success. Scholars often look to these later Matsunosuke films to get a better sense of what 1910s films might have looked like; indeed, this combination of theatrical staging, static camera, and photographic and editing techniques that cinematize traditional stories appears to have remained relatively unchanged throughout this lengthy period. These features of Japan's early cinema no doubt endured in large part because of economic limitations within the film industry and the attempt to appeal to the tastes of a mass audience. Yet this does not account for the interest Pure Film reformers took in tricks.

Reformers often mention tricks as technical features worthy of praise, for instance, referring to the 1914 Makino-Matsunosuke production *Daimyo Saburomaru* (*Daimyō Saburōmaru*) as energetic and interesting, all the more so as a result of trick photography.<sup>77</sup> This enthusiasm is paradoxical, particularly since reformers more or less unanimously



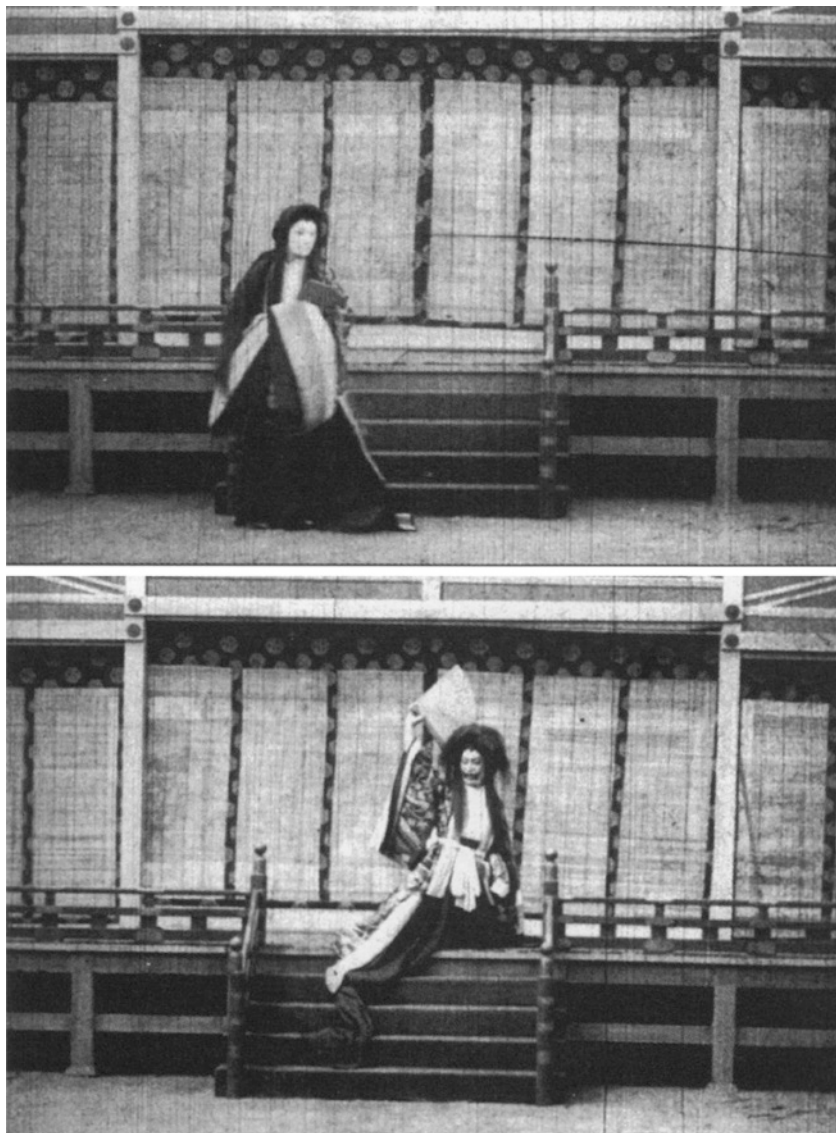


Fig. 2.3 *Goro Masamune* (Yoshino Jirō, 1915)



Fig. 2.4 *The Gallant Jiraiya* (Makino Shōzō, 1921)

detested Makino and Matsunosuke for representing everything backward in Japanese cinema. In addition, to the extent that scholars have thought about the role that tricks played in the Pure Film Movement, they have simply lumped them in with other “primitive” features and presumed them to have been similarly under attack. However, trick effects may have been the single element reformers found appealing about these films. Their writings tend to focus on negative aspects such as cheap props, theatrical acting style, and sequential plot structure, and it is noteworthy that tricks are not a frequent subject of scrutiny. It is likely that scholars’ assumptions have also been conditioned by attitudes that are relevant in the context of American and European cinema, as in those cinemas tricks are often viewed as artifacts of early cinema, features that were consumed with the advance of narrativization. Yet it is important to remember that Japanese cinema did not employ tricks in its earliest years; they rather came to be included in films first by Makino and then by others in the early 1910s. Thus the visual attraction of the trick was predated

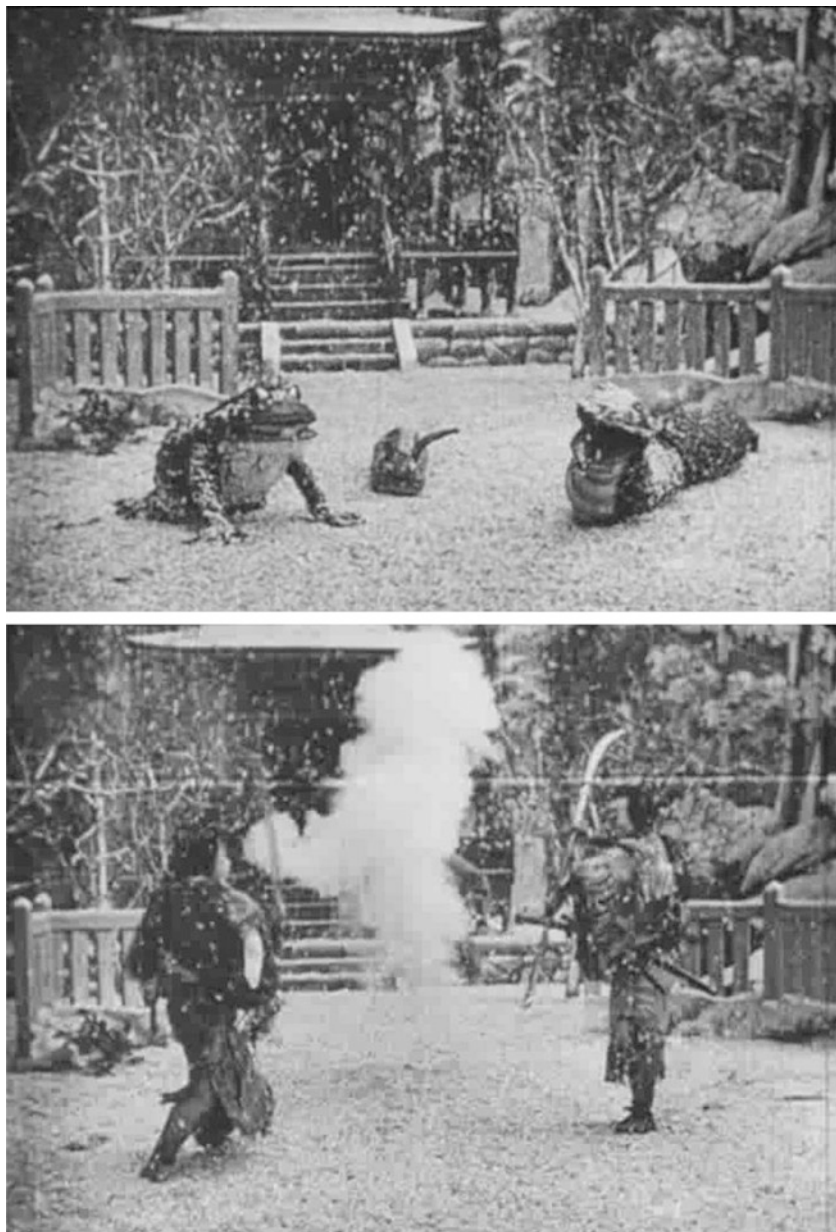


Fig. 2.5 *The Gallant Jiraiya* (Makino Shōzō, 1921)



Fig. 2.6 *Shibukawa Bangoro* (Tsukiyama Kōkichi, 1922)

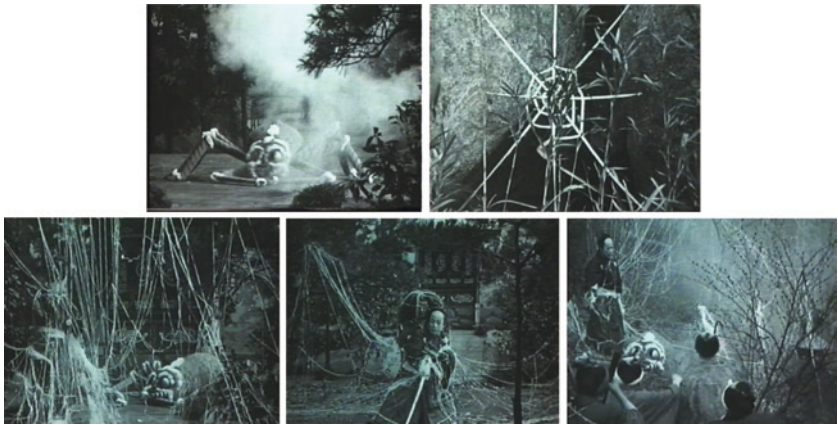


Fig. 2.7 *Shibukawa Bangoro* (Tsukiyama Kōkichi, 1922)

in Japan by a cinema practice focused on theatrical storytelling, and tricks such as the substitution splice were introduced as constitutive ingredients of a more modern, Western, and cinematic film practice.

Outside Japan tricks also experienced a transitioning role in the 1910s, in which the attraction-based structure of early cinema—which often exploited tricks of the camera—experienced an intermediate phase that combined the two modes before attractions came to be more seamlessly folded into a coherent narrative structure in classical Hollywood filmmaking practice.<sup>78</sup> Tom Gunning has signaled Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset's *Zigomar* series (1910–1913) as a particularly apt example of this intermediate, transitional phase, as trick effects created core attractions and yet were placed carefully within a predominant narrative structure. The *Zigomar* films used spectacle to shore up the mystery and excitement of the narrative, delivering delirious visual and kinesthetic shocks and thrilling sensorial displays to reinforce the overall cryptic atmosphere of shadows that makes up the larger narrative universe.<sup>79</sup>

Interestingly, *Zigomar* films were a landmark in Japanese film culture and history. When the first of the series was screened in Japan in 1911 it found enormous popularity and also prompted massive debate, as Aaron Gerow has outlined in detail.<sup>80</sup> As in other parts of the world the success of the series was in large part a result of its straddling of the real and fantastical, pairing the real spaces afforded by location shooting with fantastical trick effects and spectacular dynamism. It prompted numerous versions of the series in domestic film and literature and, in addition to creating a popular craze, the film's thin line between reality and illusion was also responsible for sparking controversy. Authorities, worried that the series would promote criminal activity among youth and otherwise corrupt morals, instituted public discourse on cinema by emphasizing its dangerous influence on society and its association with vulgarity, lower-class tastes, and lack of self-control, which then sowed the seeds for reformers' interest in the bourgeoisification of cinema.<sup>81</sup> Despite *Zigomar* stimulating policies and discourse regarding cinematic reform and edification, it had further impact on reformers. Aaron Gerow has suggested that the film's fascinating mode of visual stimulation, which spurred the Japanese film industry to produce films with similarly enhanced visual excitement, spirited action, and fast editing, was an object of scorn for reformers, who advocated instead for the joys of narrative consistent with an improved, middle-class cinema.<sup>82</sup> However, it would seem the French series in fact played a more complex role for certain reformers, in particular for writer Tanizaki Jun'ichirō.



## ENVISIONING A SYNERGISTIC FILM PRACTICE

Though most famous for his literary contribution, Tanizaki was a central figure in Japan's cinema reform movement, contributing screenplays, assistant directing films at Taikatsu studio, and writing critical essays about the state of Japanese cinema. As Joanne Bernardi and Thomas LaMarre have both pointed out in their wonderful studies on Tanizaki, he was particularly interested in film's ability to depict both realistic and fantastical or supernatural elements: its capacity to stir human powers of perception lent it a dreamlike quality, illusory but heightened.<sup>83</sup> In a 1921 essay Tanizaki in fact cited *Zigomar* as his favorite type of foreign film because it captured this dreamlike essence of cinema—a vivid fantasy—despite the preposterous narrative.<sup>84</sup> *Zigomar* was not the first film to introduce this idea in Japan, nor was Tanizaki the first to write about the medium's unique faculty for depicting the fantastical. As early as 1909 fantasy and magic films had been singled out in intellectual discourse in Japan as the unique province of the cinematic medium; because the camera could depict the fantastic as real, it was specifically suited to show actions and events impossible without the intervention of its technological apparatus.<sup>85</sup> Gerow has suggested that this interest in cinema as a fantastical medium was subsequently taken up by various literary figures including Tanizaki, but his characterization of Pure Film reformers unites them with the position of censors and other officials, who connected the appeal for the masses of films like *Zigomar* to these fantastical qualities and hence considered such qualities to be a problem.<sup>86</sup> It is true that Tanizaki's literary position differentiates him somewhat from other reformers like Kaeriyama Norimasa, the most central figure of the Pure Film Movement, who entered into film production and criticism through fan circles. Nevertheless, it is clear that reformers widely praised techniques that increased visual excitement and mystical poeticism, and did so with enthusiasm similar to that they showed for developments related to the more sober pleasures of narrative. In one article about a foreign trick film, for instance, Kaeriyama states that a film's artistic beauty can be generated through purely visual qualities, just as it can occur through narrative.<sup>87</sup> While reformers, including Tanizaki, did not approve of the lowbrow appeal of films like *Zigomar*, they were undoubtedly interested in the ways films could follow its lead by using optical effects to create a heightened atmosphere, as well as reinforce the effects of more sophisticated narratives.

If Tanizaki was not the first person in Japan to think about cinema's paradoxical proximity to both the realistic and the fantastical, he was nonetheless dedicated to the topic. For him the most intriguing aspect of the medium was that its basis in reality enabled it to portray the fantastical convincingly. In particular, cinema's capacity for close-ups—which demand the elimination of such artificial things as heavy stage makeup and *oyama*, and in turn create an intimacy and naturalness—allowed it to crystallize nature into art and make the fantastic seem real.<sup>88</sup> For Tanizaki this paradoxical aspect of cinema technology operated quite close to the medium's power to infuse the Japanese premodern with a modern essence and Western sensibility. Consistent with other reformers, Tanizaki saw classical Japanese tales, as well as traditional literary forms such as *kōdan* and *kibyōshi* picture books, as an ideal source for film narratives, and this opinion was closely tied to the medium's hold on reality and fantasy.<sup>89</sup> For instance, he claimed that his ideal film might be *The Tale of the Heike* (*Heike monogatari*) with location shooting. He showed a preference for genres and individual stories that had a supernatural component, in particular Izumi Kyōka's stories, which often contained ghosts, demons, and mysterious settings.<sup>90</sup> Although Kyōka was a contemporary writer with a modern sensibility, his style incorporated traditional *rakugo* storytelling features, kabuki dialogue conventions, and themes popular in *noh* theater and folk tales alongside these occult elements.<sup>91</sup> Tanizaki similarly saw cinematic potential in several of Edgar Allan Poe's stories, and his own screenplay *Lust of the White Serpent* (*Jasei no in*) was based on Ueda Akinari's adaptation of a Chinese ghost story.<sup>92</sup> He also mentions that the tales from *Journey to the West* (*Xī Yōu Jī*), a sixteenth-century Chinese story about a magical monkey king, were well suited to the screen. Interestingly, that same year Tenkatsu studio released *Monkey* (*Saiyūki*, Yoshino Jirō, 1917), the first film based on this story; its success led to a sequel that was released in the same year. Both of these achieved critical success in part due to optical effects that brought new life to the magical spirituality of the traditional tales.

The extent to which Tanizaki viewed cinema as uniquely wedding the modern and the traditional, and the realistic and the fantastic, is moreover made clear by the fact that, in addition to his critical essays, his fiction from this period—especially “The Carbuncle with a Human Face” (“Jinmenso”)—figures cinematic technology's merging of scientific, modern objectivity and the fantastical and supernatural aspects of premodern Japan. He also explicitly advocated that films of classic stories

incorporate trick effects, including the famous *Tale of the Bamboo Cutter* (*Taketori monogatari*, aka *Kaguyahime*), about an extraordinarily beautiful princess from the moon who is discovered as a baby inside a magical bamboo culm. This interest is particularly evident in the films based on Tanizaki's own screenplays, with which he also had directorial involvement. While his *Lust of the White Serpent* (*Jasei no in*, Thomas Kurihara, 1921) contains multiple effects, most noteworthy among them dissolves to effect bodily metamorphoses, his *Night of the Doll Festival* (*Hinamatsuri no yoru*, Thomas Kurihara, 1921) reflects his position more explicitly; for this film, Tanizaki and principal director Kurihara used an elaborate system of strings to manipulate a young girl's toys, which move around and converse with one another while she sleeps. Upon the girl's awakening, her doll and two rabbits transform through trick effects into their life-sized counterparts, and they are all transported in her toy car to an imaginary realm in the center of a mountain.<sup>93</sup> As this example indicates, Tanizaki was preoccupied with how cinema's technological prowess could embellish the ambience of a film narrative, how its unique effects might complement the feeling of existing stories and lend them cutting-edge excitement, and synthesizing these strata held the promise for a modern Japanese cinema.

Kaeriyama Norimasa was similarly interested in tricks, which he associated with the modern sophistication of the cinematic apparatus. Like Tanizaki he came to advocate an elevated treatment of the trick, for instance one integrated seamlessly into literary historical dramas rather than brutally illustrating revenge plots. It is through Kaeriyama's contribution that it becomes most evident how tricks acquired such a privileged role for reformers, and how these cinematic effects might have seemed compatible with their thoroughgoing interest in cinematic realism and narrative. Kaeriyama is widely considered the most significant figure of the Pure Film Movement, in part for founding the journal *Kinema Record*, which played a key role in circulating reformers' ideas. He also wrote the first book in Japan that focused on cinematic style and technique, for example discussing location shooting, censuring improper use of intertitles, and advocating continuity editing and a more varied shot repertoire.<sup>94</sup> This text, *The Production and Photography of Motion Picture Drama* (*Katsudō shashingeiki no sōsaku to satsueibō*) was wildly popular, so much so that there were numerous editions between its first printing, in 1917, and 1924. It was composed primarily of Kaeriyama's articles that had been published in *Kinema Record*, as well as summaries and translations of foreign film criticism and technical manuals. This book was the



main source for ideas about film style in Japanese, and through it Kaeriyama introduced Japanese readers to the most significant foreign texts on cinema, including Epes Winthrop Sargent's *The Technique of the Photoplay* (1912), Vachel Lindsay's *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916), and in the 1924 edition, Victor Oscar Freeburg's *The Art of Photoplay Making* (1918).<sup>95</sup> The content of Kaeriyama's text, and its vast circulation, is suggestive of just how extensively foreign ideas about cinema conditioned local views about the medium.

Kaeriyama's principal focus was outlining the elements constitutive of a modern, pure cinema, which for him meant a cinema whose visual and narrative registers worked together in a synergistic fashion. Throughout his career tricks played an important role in creating this harmony; in 1911 for instance he praised Pathé's 1910 tinted trick film *Wonderful Plates* (*Les Assiettes artistiques*),<sup>96</sup> and in his book he dedicated an entire section to trick effects, including detailed descriptions of stop motion, multiple exposure, and slow and reverse motion. Significantly then his position on defining the essence of cinema in no way rejected trick effects as vulgar, lower-class attractions, but rather emphasized them as an integral part of a unique cinematic language. So, while their specific function in popular Japanese cinema of the period—in particular their place in films that were otherwise merely canned theater without coherent narrative—was unsatisfactory, he did not advocate eliminating them from film practice but rather sought to redeploy them in a modern way. More specifically, he argued for films that, in his mind, were amalgamations of tricks to give way to a cinema that crafted a unique interplay between narrative and special effects, welding together visual attraction and narrative suspense. As a young critic he first envisioned this synergy between the dramatic and visual aspects of a film as a mode of cinematic art.<sup>97</sup> And this synergistic film style continued to animate discussions later in the decade, as reformers were particularly interested in the artistic beauty and poeticism it engendered in foreign films. Regarding domestic cinema, they often applauded the photographic innovation of films from the Tenkatsu studio, which regularly made use of "outstanding trick effects."<sup>98</sup> Singling out the impressive frame-by-frame effects in Yoshino Jirō's *Monkey*, Shibata Masaru, the cameraman on the Tenkatsu-produced and Kaeriyama-directed film *Glory of Life* (*Sei no kagayaki*, 1919), has described the excellent techniques, including the skillful trick photography, in many of Tenkatsu's films as bringing salvation to the magical ninja genre.<sup>99</sup> These films were thought to be very "cinematic" in their use of techniques, including acting, staging, and visual effects, with the potential to rival the art of foreign films.<sup>100</sup>

Tenkatsu had acquired a reputation for embracing novel techniques like color and maintaining higher production standards than Nikkatsu, for instance using a higher frame rate; the studio also quickly showed a preference for adapting historical literature rather than kabuki-based stories to the screen. Reformers additionally admired the foreign artistic productions that, according to Komatsu Hiroshi, exerted considerable influence over these films, which attempted to follow the mystical depictions in such films as Ladislav Starewicz's *The Terrible Vengeance* (*Strashnaia Myest*, 1912) and Stellan Rye's *Swedish Cavalry* (*Der Ring des Schwedischen Reiters*, 1913) in their incorporation of trick techniques.<sup>101</sup> Although reformers' interest in the global cachet of such technologies marked a distinct difference from what popular directors like Makino saw in them, in both cases the adaptation of tricks into local film practices underscores Japanese cinema's close connection to international film in the 1910s.<sup>102</sup> These realms of foreign influence and adaptation also demonstrate that the positive valuation of tricks persisted across the divide from "premodern" cinema to a more artistic or highbrow cinema praised by Pure Film reformers—underscoring continuity over discontinuity between Japan's early cinema and the narrative films that gave rise to the nation's classical cinema.

Although reformers desired to naturalize tricks and special effects through film narratives, the attraction of tricks was not rejected in favor of narrativization but was instead viewed by key figures as integral to ideas about modern cinematic narrative. For instance, *Kinema Record* articles reflect great praise for the tricks employed in Tenkatsu's supernatural period films, such as *Jiraiya* (1915), in which a giant toad creature appears and disappears.<sup>103</sup> Similarly *Exterminating the Raccoon Dog* (*Tanuki Taiji*, 1914), which depicted illusions such as walking on air and the sudden appearance of an enormous raccoon-dog creature—a folkloric shapeshifter—who must eventually be slain, was said to "thrill the audience with its filming techniques."<sup>104</sup> These films, with their higher production standards and thorough integration of visual innovations such as tricks, appeared more modern, exciting, and poetic than the simple revenge-plot films Nikkatsu was producing with Matsunosuke. Nevertheless it is clear that the notion of cinematic magic, or cinema as modern magic, did not disappear with the drive for narrative continuity; it was, in fact, instrumental to the conception of a modernized Japanese cinema in this period of change. In this sense we can see how the role of tricks in Japanese cinema marks a clear departure from its development

in teen cinema in Europe and America. Despite trick effects in these other cinemas having an intermediate phase, as with *Zigomar*, the drive for narrative coherence quickly enfolded attractions within a dominant structure. In Japan in contrast, rather than falling to the side in the wake of a narrative drive, tricks were a display of modernity that came to form the core of conceptions about narrative cinema.

The contrast between the development of animation in Japan and in the United States helps to clarify this difference. In Hollywood, as mentioned previously, tricks came to be funneled into the domain of animation—in spirit if not completely in fact—during the early 1900s. Notions of the cinematic were developed in relation to this, in terms of the suppression of artifice in the live-action image. In Japan, in contrast, the cinematic first came to be defined in conjunction with Pure Film efforts. As both Bernardi and Gerow have discussed, the changes that reformers advocated were implicated in a historical shift away from the term *katsudō shashin* (moving pictures) and toward the new term *eiga* (cinema), with the latter emerging specifically in relation to notions of the cinematic.<sup>105</sup> In other words, this concept was defined and took shape through its difference from older, “uncinematic” works. Interestingly, animation, which emerged in Japan just as the Pure Film Movement hit full swing, was actually more easily disposed toward the cinematic than was live-action cinema. As Daisuke Miyao has pointed out, animation did not carry the same risk as live-action film of resembling traditional theater and thus appearing “uncinematic.”<sup>106</sup> Indeed, by its very nature animation sidestepped reigning problems of style connected with acting, *mise-en-scène* and cinematography; and unlike cinema, which was tied historically to mass entertainment forms, animation avoided any perceived kinship with lowbrow, popular entertainments such as kabuki. As a result, animation became aligned with art, artistry, and technique. Domestic animation was influenced heavily by the works of Émile Cohl, and it was considered on a par with foreign films, screened in foreign theaters, and promoted in relation to the most successful foreign films, such as *Zigomar*.<sup>107</sup>

Animation in this sense seemed to embody cinematic purity. Uncontaminated by theatrical modes, it was thus better able to achieve what seemed out of reach, or difficult to achieve, in the nation’s live-action cinema. Miyao has outlined how animation came close to reformers’ goals in part because, by being more international—that is, artistic and modern—it could also feel free to be more Japanese, tapping into

the nation's unique tradition without fear of appearing "backward."<sup>108</sup> Seen in this light it is perhaps unsurprising that reformers praised the use of Japanese subject matter in animated films, which adapted native tales and legends to the screen extensively in the prewar period beginning in the 1910s. Although Tenkatsu briefly hired Shimokawa Ōten to make animated films from 1916–1917, it was Nikkatsu that found more success producing animation in accordance with this model, actually exporting traditional content animation to great acclaim.<sup>109</sup> In short order, by the early 1920s animation became much more closely associated with traditional themes than did other cinematic modes.<sup>110</sup> If animation was paradoxically better suited to meet reformers' goals, as Miyao suggests, it must be noted that, at the time of the Pure Film Movement, animation was not considered distinct from cinema. Thus, in sharp contrast to the United States, where cinema was defined in contrast to animation, here animation represented the epitome of the cinematic. Conceptually then the notion of the cinematic in Japan developed in close connection to aspects of the apparatus—artifice and technique—that tend to be more tightly linked to animation in the Western context.

In this regard, reformers' view of visual innovation as an independent but complementary counterpart to narrative innovation, along with the ways in which this connects to folk tales and export, seems with hindsight to set Japanese cinema apart from international trends (despite advocates' goals to the contrary). Yet their perspective was most probably conditioned by the writings of foreign film critics that were in circulation at the time, especially those sufficiently influential on Kaeriyama to be featured in his book. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the circulation of Vachel Lindsay's ideas in particular was at the root of Kaeriyama's position and, by extension, discussions among reformers more generally. All the editions of Kaeriyama's book referenced Lindsay's *The Art of the Moving Picture*, and the first several printings of it included translations from the work. Lindsay's book includes ideas that are repeated nearly verbatim in some instances within Pure Film writings, particularly those by Tanizaki. In particular, Lindsay expresses eerily similar positions on cinematic tricks as effects that ought to contribute to a fairytale-like fantasy, almost within the same breath as he pronounces the vast potential for retelling ancient Japanese tales on screen. Perhaps more significantly, with respect to both of these topics Lindsay reflects a cinema philosophy of uplift that was mirrored in the views of Pure Film reformers, desiring to elevate the crassness of existing films with a more

poetic cinema—specifically by allowing aspects of cinematic language to retain a discursive function that overlays the demands of the narrative, augmenting it with the spectacle of technological effects. Lindsay repeatedly calls for tricks such as dissolves and substitutions to be welded into narratives so as to fulfill the romantic destiny of cinematic art, he describes substitution tricks and the independent moving of inanimate objects as a crude version of that which is fundamental to the destiny of cinematic art, and he often refers to supernatural stories and Japanese legends and landscapes as rich, inspired film material.<sup>111</sup>

It is instructive to think about how cultural permeability informed this interest in native legends. It was no doubt exciting to Pure Film reformers to find evidence in Lindsay's book of the appeal to foreigners of adaptations of premodern Japanese tales, and moreover suggestions about how they could better profit from this appeal. In addition to enlivening traditional narratives with the poetic spirit of cinematic techniques, Lindsay advocated that such films cultivate a stronger pictorial component. Restating his interest in Japanese tales, he calls for films about samurai code, clan legends, and so forth and insists that, unlike the depiction of Japan in the Thomas Ince-Sessue Hayakawa feature *The Typhoon* (1914), these films should be sure to emphasize the glory of the Japanese landscape.<sup>112</sup> That the bourgeoisification of Japanese cinema involved building on these popular American films to create romanticized and exoticized images of the nation's cultural heritage for a foreign audience is especially interesting given that Ince's own productions had taken advantage of American and European interest in *Japonisme* for a similar end; he had sought to exploit middle-class fascination with the Orient in order to elevate the cultural status of his films, as part of an attempt to refine the institution of cinema in America.<sup>113</sup> So, while the principal direction of influence in the history of cinema may be from Europe and the United States to Japan, the realities of global simultaneity do betray a noticeable multidirectionality.<sup>114</sup>

In addition to this resemblance between the ideas of Pure Film reformers and those of Vachel Lindsay, a similar connection may be drawn to the content of Victor Oscar Freeburg's *The Art of Photoplay Making* and Hugo Münsterberg's *The Film: A Psychological Study*, which were also circulated in Japan through Kaeriyama's text. Freeburg, himself influenced by Lindsay, focuses his text on cinema's poetic beauty and the refinement of aesthetic taste, dedicating considerable attention to the supernatural tricks of the camera. Likewise, Münsterberg—as

well as Austin C. Lescarbourea, whose *Behind the Motion-Picture Screen* (1919) was another text popular during the early 1920s and soon translated into Japanese—repeat similar ideas regarding the importance of tricks for effecting cinema’s magical quality and thus for differentiating cinema from theater.<sup>115</sup> It is clear that these writers conceived of cinematic magic, and the tricks that made it possible, as key to their ideas about the medium’s artistic beauty. Deployed in particular ways, cinematic effects were responsible for elevating the status of film to make it compatible with bourgeois taste, to make a popular but poetic cinema. Interestingly, the ideas of these American writers on film were not actually put into practice in Hollywood cinema, and they in fact manifest a decidedly European, art-cinema sensibility. That their ideas were so influential in Japan suggests how reformers’ understanding of what cinema should be combined the Hollywood drive toward classical narrative style with a poetic interest in cinematic language distinct from the demands of narrative. Reformers’ dependence on these foreign uplift writers, some of whom were deeply involved with Japanese “taste,” thus contextualizes the self-orientalizing that is so evident in films and discourse, as this discursive environment similarly substantiates the notion that the decorative, presentational effects in cinema of the period were modern, sophisticated technical displays. In addition, reformers’ unique engagement with cinematic language points to the dualism between classical and modernist film styles—between American cinema’s interest in narrative and European cinemas’ more avant-garde disposition—that characterizes Japanese cinema into the 1920s and 1930s.

## CONCLUSION

Indeed, Pure Film reformers’ treatment of cinematic tricks had a legacy that extended well into Japanese cinema’s classical period, in which cinematic devices were not wholly in the service of immersion in the story world, and the drive to create a coherent cinematic world worked in tandem with a pull to create effects by displaying the feats of the camera. Interestingly this is not because their desire to create a pure cinema succeeded. Tanizaki for instance claimed that their actual abilities were at the present moment insufficient to create the poetic cinema they desired. He felt dissatisfied with the production of *The Sands of Katsushika* (*Katsushika sunago*, Thomas Kurihara, 1920), for which he wrote the screenplay and had directorial involvement, because it failed to meet his artistic expectations; and Noda Kōgō’s review of *Night of*

*the Doll Festival* suggests that this film too fell short of the goals of cinematic art.<sup>116</sup> It would be fair to say that this failure to meet expectation extended to the movement in general, as the artistic demands of reformers and their desires to elevate the cinema as an art largely went unmet. In part this was because they did not succeed in transforming audience taste, and economic limitations prevented ongoing experimentation.

Despite this, the mundane, practical elements central to reformers' goals—including reducing the textual dominance of the *benshi* and the influence of theatrical modes, using actresses instead of *oyama*, establishing narrative continuity, and so on—were essentially put in place by the mid-1920s. The fate of tricks in Japanese cinema shares in this legacy of Pure Film reformers' efforts, as tricks and dynamic filmmaking increasingly came to be integrated into films. As Joanne Bernardi has indicated, the Pure Film Movement did not simply establish a pull for narrative coherence, but also created a preoccupation lasting nearly a decade with imported technical terms, such as close-ups and fades.<sup>117</sup> In fact, well into the 1920s trick effects including double exposures and overlaps, and other cinematic techniques facilitating transformations and dream and vision sequences were lauded by critics.<sup>118</sup> Thus, even if Japanese cinema did not become the bourgeois, artistic practice that Pure Film reformers desired, their goal of integrating modern techniques into Japanese films in a dynamic way to create a cinema that straddled the demands of storytelling and art was essentially accomplished, as technical embellishments became naturalized within domestic film, characterizing it well into the next decade.

Nowhere was this influence more evident than in the *jidaigeki* period films, which were the new, more cinematic counterparts to the *kyūgeki* films that preceded them. By the mid-1920s, independent studios, especially those making *jidaigeki*—for instance those run by Kataoka Chiezo or Makino Shōzō—encouraged formal experimentation that was very different from the long takes, still framing, and frontality of *kyūgeki*. Instead the films included rapid and discontinuous editing, fast motion, bravura camerawork, dramatic angles and framings, and intertitles with eccentric and pictorial features. *Chambara* swordfighting scenes combined these techniques with dynamic physical action and elaborate stunts, infusing modern energy into traditional stories. Their modern, innovative style generated high-speed, complexly-choreographed kinesthetic displays, in which cinematography and editing worked together to deliver a thrilling sensorial experience.<sup>119</sup> Futagawa Buntarō's 1925 film *Orochi*



Fig. 2.8 *Jirokichi the Rat* (Itō Daisuke, 1931)

provides many excellent instances of this, in particular the climax of the final battle that famously connects numerous jump cuts into an elaborate edited pan. Similarly, *Jirokichi the Rat* (*Oatsurae Jirokichigoshi*), a 1931 film about a chivalrous robber by acclaimed *chambara* director Itō Daisuke, includes extensive moving camerawork and close-ups, exquisite choreography and undercranking, as well as elaborate montage sequences of superimposed nondiegetic drums to build tension leading up to the finale (Fig. 2.8). Such optical effects and embellishments functioned as independent attractions at the same time that they helped to reinforce the overall narrative atmosphere of daring thrills and excitement. By this time most of Japan's period films were heavily influenced by Hollywood Westerns and had replaced stylized kabuki-style fighting (*tachimawari*) with faster, more realistic action, derived largely from the acrobatic energy of Douglas Fairbanks in such films as Fred Niblo's *The Three Musketeers* (1921) and *The Mark of Zorro* (1920);<sup>120</sup> but the quick, cadenced editing, handheld camera, whip pans, and extravagant dolly shots by more experimental directors in these *chambara* films were undoubtedly influenced more by European avant-garde film techniques than by Hollywood Westerns.

This European influence has prompted Aaron Gerow to speculate that there were two historical possibilities for film in the 1920s: a vernacular version of a cinematic avant-garde that thrived on cinematic virtuosity and represented something akin to Burch's alternative to the Hollywood system; and another following closely Hollywood's stable set of stylistic norms, which Bordwell identifies.<sup>121</sup> In fact the legacy of Japan's cinema of tricks suggests that these two possibilities were one and the same, that immersion in a narrative simply was not at odds with displays of technical virtuosity, and that Pure Film reformers' interest in the cinematic apparatus making itself visible in the film image survived, persisting in conjunction with a tendency for film to conceal its artifice. Despite recent headway



in understanding this foundational period in Japanese cinema, scholars have afforded only scant attention to tricks in early Japanese cinema. Yet focusing on trick effects, in particular techniques of the interval, in this earlier period reveals that the prevailing way of thinking about film style in the 1920s and beyond is mistaken: the unique textures that conjure up Japanese otherness for Burch and others were, in context, as Western as analytic editing. Rather than being a surfacing or citation of tradition from within an adopted Western form, tricks and other technical embellishments in fact became integrated in film practice because of their association with the modern, as part of the oscillation between a foregrounding of the medium and a transparent realism that was intended to bolster the mission for Japan to become modernized. The narrative of the Pure Film Movement is transformed in the light of trick effects, and this has important ramifications for how we conceptualize the codification of form in Japan's cinema. For although there was indeed a change in Japanese cinema in the early 1920s that set the stage for its so-called Golden Age of the later 1920s and 1930s, treatment of cinematic tricks points to a need to emphasize stylistic continuity across this transition, in the sense that the exciting implementation of myriad optical effects continued as part of classical cinema. In other words, tricks including dramatic fades and decorative dissolves, like those in *Souls on the Road*, as well as other types of cinematic displays, such as the ostentatious camerawork and rhythmic editing in popular *jidaigeki* films of the 1920s, were central to creating the instances of layering, or shifting between, "representational" and "presentational" modes that characterize films from the classical period.

Daisuke Miyao has commented on the paradox that these *chambara* films appear more modern stylistically than do the *gendai geki* films, which have contemporary settings, from this same period.<sup>122</sup> Although, as Miyao points out, this has an industrial explanation, with independent studios producing more experimental and rebellious films, it bears mention that these films follow a by-now familiar pattern of welding together new, modern style and old, traditional content.<sup>123</sup> If in this context the most formally innovative experiments might naturally overlay the most traditional subjects, it is nonetheless the case that *gendai geki* films were also instrumental in shaping modern film style. Shochiku's Kamata films, which reflect the clearest lineage from the Pure Film Movement, similarly showed a strong western influence and were dynamic and cinematic. As Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano has described, *modanizumu* (modernism)—with its specific connotations of western and modern—was

a popular aesthetic inserted into these films in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>124</sup> This chapter's investigation of cinema in the 1910s and early 1920s interlocks with, and provides a new historical lens for, such recent studies of classical Japanese cinema, which have begun to reconsider film aesthetics in the classical period as part of an effort to historicize films within Japanese modernity. Following a perspective in keeping with vernacular modernism, these studies emphasize the reciprocal relationship between cinema and modern life, though none have dedicated much attention to Japanese cinema's so-called presentational features as such.<sup>125</sup> Japan's earlier use of techniques of the interval and other tricks provides both a conceptual and a historical underpinning to these elements that, as the most direct instantiation of cinema's significance to the sensory-reflexive horizon of life in modern Japan, erupt as attractions in Japan's classical cinema. More generally, the integration of tricks in this earlier period may be said to have established a foundation for aesthetic norms in the nation's cinema: notions of the cinematic that were not only consolidated in classical film style but subsequently reproduced as a dominant cinematic form, in which cinematic narrative is intimately bound up with the display of the cinematic device.

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