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Against Purity:
Theatricality and Otsuji Kiyoji's APN Photographs (1953-54)

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Art History

by

Daniel Pease Abbe

2016

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Against Purity:
Theatricality and Otsuji Kiyoji's APN Photographs (1953-54)

by

Daniel Pease Abbe
Master of Arts in Art History
University of California, Los Angeles, 2016
Professor George Thomas Baker, Chair

This essay examines a series of photographs that were published between 1953 and 1954 in the Japanese illustrated weekly news magazine *Asahi Graph*. These photographs were taken by Ōtsuji Kiyoji, a photographer whose diverse production remains underexplored both inside and outside of Japan. The photographs were all collaborations with other artists, in which an artist would make a sculptural construction and Ōtsuji would then photograph it. The essay considers the series—known as APN, after the column of the magazine in which it ran—in light of its theatrical qualities. Through an analysis of shadows in the work, and an exploration of the tactile qualities of these photographs, the theatricality of the APN photographs is shown to trouble “pure” models of photography and vision.

The thesis of Daniel Pease Abbe is approved.

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2016

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Introduction: Theatrical Anomalies

Just as this bell, which is too loud for a doorbell, rings out toward heaven, the gestures of Kafka's figures are too powerful for our accustomed surroundings and break out into wider areas.¹

Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death"

When readers of the weekly magazine *Asahigurafu* (*Asahi Graph*) paged through the February 2, 1953 issue, they would have seen about a hundred photographs. This was hardly unusual: *Asahi Graph* was the Japanese equivalent of *Life*, a pictorial magazine with one of the widest circulations in the country.² In this issue, photographs illustrated typical articles: a lead story on the new Japanese Air Force, a report from an American stringer on life in Hong Kong, and a human interest piece on an outdoor swimming competition held in freezing conditions. Towards the back of the issue was a section called APN, something of an op-ed page collecting word games, satirical musings on current events, and questions posed to people on the street. Here, readers would have encountered a photograph dramatically different from all others in the magazine: this image had nothing to illustrate, no story to tell (Fig. 1). Strangely, it was one of the only photographs in the magazine with a credit line. Stranger still, two people were credited. The caption read: "Production: Kitadai Shōzō; Photography: Ōtsuji Kiyoji."³

¹ Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 121.

² For more information on *Asahi Graph*, including rough circulation data, see Hirofumi Utsumi, "Nuclear Images and National Self-Portraits: Japanese Illustrated Magazine *Asahi Graph*, 1945-1965," *Annual Review of the Institute for Advanced Social Research*, no. 5 (2011): 1–29; Asahi Shinbun Hyakunenshi Henshū Inkai, ed., *Asahi Shinbunsha Shi*, vol. 3, 4 vols. (Tōkyō: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1995); Asahi Shinbun-sha, *Asahi shimbun shuppan kyoku shi* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun Shuppan Kyoku, 1969); Ryo Kuwahara, "Saihakken! Sengo gurafu jaanarizumu," *d/Sign*, December 2007.

³ *Asahi Graph*, February 2, 1953, 22. Unless noted, all translations are mine. Following the convention of East Asian Studies scholars, Japanese personal names are rendered family name first, given name second, unless the person resides outside of Japan.

In the foreground of this image stands a three-legged, UFO-like object on top of which a disk has been balanced. Behind it is a wooden structure, seemingly the skeleton of a wall, on which three squares bearing the letters A, P, and N have been pasted. To the left and right of this structure stand two dark angular forms. All of the objects are bathed in a raking light that is projected from beyond of the right side of the frame. The light source is hidden, as if in the wings. A low camera angle places the viewer's line of sight close to the light ground, raising the UFO-like object up before all, and leading the gaze to confront the dark backdrop. Together with the evenly lateral distribution of objects throughout the visual field, and the spotlight that calls further attention to the backdrop itself, the arrangement and lighting of elements within this scene point to the kind of space that this photograph works to create. It is, in short, that of a theater. In what follows, I consider this photograph, and the broader series from which it is drawn, in light of its theatrical qualities—qualities that, I will argue, trouble “pure” models of photography and vision. If these photographs leave behind restrictive categories in order to “break out into wider areas,” like Kafka's gestures, then my task here is to track the directions in which they point.

This photograph is one of a series of 55 that was published almost continuously in issues of *Asahi Graph* between January 8, 1953, and February 3, 1954.⁴ The series does not have a formal title; because the photographs were produced for the APN section of *Asahi Graph*, I will refer to them as “the APN photographs.”⁵ Ōtsuji Kiyoji photographed all but five of the images,

⁴ During this span, the only issue that did not include an APN section was the July 29, 1953 issue, a special feature on the Korean War. The APN section itself continued until May 26, 1954.

⁵ “APN” is an acronym of “Asahi Picture News,” the magazine's official English title at that time. Following convention, I render the magazine's title in English as *Asahi Graph*. The APN photographs have been written about very sparingly in English, when they have usually been taken up as a project incidental to Experimental Workshop. In 2012, Kunsthalle Bern held an exhibition of the APN photographs, and published a small catalog, *APN Research*,

Kitadai Shōzō was responsible for the rest. Each photograph showed a sculptural object (or group of objects) created by an artist; following the language used in exhibition catalogs that reproduce the APN photographs, I will refer to these objects in front of the camera as “constructions.”⁶ In total, seven different artists produced constructions for the APN photographs. They were, in order of appearance: Kitadai Shōzō (artist), Saitō Yoshishige (sculptor), Yamaguchi Katsuhiko (artist), Komai Tetsurō (printmaker), Teshigahara Sōfū (flower arranger), Hasegawa Saburō (painter), and Hamada Hamao (designer).⁷ Given the diverse participants in the project and the complex forms that they produced, it would be difficult to locate any unifying aesthetic of the APN photographs. However, some qualities hold true for all of the photographs: they were produced in a studio, the photographs show nothing other than inanimate (though not necessarily immobile) objects, and each photograph contains the characters A, P, and N. This final quality was a requirement from the magazine, such that the photograph could carry out its function as the header image of the APN section.

But who were these artists? Kitadai, the producer of the stage-like construction in Figure 1, was a founding member of the intermedia art group *Jikken Kōbō* (Experimental Workshop). The connection between the APN photographs and Experimental Workshop goes beyond

with extremely brief essays in English. In both English and Japanese, the photography historian Obinata Kinichi has been the primary source of scholarship on the series. My thanks to Professor Obinata for his kind assistance with this project. See Kunsthalle Bern, *APN Research*, ed. Melanie Mermod and Kinichi Obinata (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 2012); Kinichi Obinata, “The Experimental Workshop and the Technologies of Audiovisual Reproduction,” in *Experimental Workshop: Japan 1951-1958*, ed. Jasia Reichardt (London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 2009); Tokyo Publishing House, ed., *Jikken kobo to APN* (Tokyo: Fuji Xerox, 2007); Kinichi Obinata, “From Images/To Images: Exploring the Early Achievements of the Experimental Workshop,” in *Jikken kōbō ten: Sengo geijutsu wo kiri hiraku*, ed. Hideki Sugino and Tomoko Matsubara, trans. Stan Anderson (Yomiuri shimbun-sha, 2013), 324–27.

⁶ This term also provides a useful resonance with Soviet constructivism, a movement well-known to a number of the artists involved in the project, most notably Yoshishige Saitō. For more on the connection between Saitō and constructivism, see Saki Nagato, “Saitō Yoshishige to roshia koseishugi ni tsuite,” *Kajima bijutsu zaidan nenpo* 21 (2004): 422–34.

⁷ The last three members joined the project midway through 1953, when Saitō and Komai were forced out by the editors of the magazine.

Kitadai—Yamaguchi, Komai and the photographer Ōtsuji were also members, while the older figure Saitō was something of an advisor to the group.⁸ In this essay, I will focus primarily on work produced by these artists, though I will also address the constructions of Teshigahara, who was the founder of the Sōgestu-kai school of *ikebana* (flower arrangement).⁹ Experimental Workshop was founded in 1951, and has often been described as an attempt to create something of a Bauhaus in Japan. While the group did not function as a school, it was an interdisciplinary collective. Indeed, the group’s primary public displays were not exhibitions of visual art (much less of photography in particular) but rather performances of music, ballet and theater, in which the artists of the group made stage sets and costumes. The majority of the group’s members, in fact, were associated with the performing arts, including one dedicated lighting designer.¹⁰

Given that four members of Experimental Workshop worked on the APN photographs, this series has been understood as a *de facto* project of the group. This is justifiable in my view, not just because of shared personnel, but also because of a shared attitude to artistic production. Experimental Workshop scholar Miwako Tezuka writes that the group’s “eclectic method” entailed “a cross-disciplinary approach, examination of new materials, and the theatrical presentation as a format allowing the artists to construct, however temporarily, a sense of

⁸ Although Ōtsuji was previously known to Kitadai, he joined Experimental Workshop as a direct result of his participation in the APN photographs.

⁹ The Sōgestu Art Center, the school’s building, became an important hub of modernist performances in the postwar period. It hosted an event in 1962 with John Cage—though the so-called “Cage shock” that this event produced is an exaggeration.

¹⁰ Among the group’s fourteen members there were five musical composers, a piano player, a lighting designer, an engineer and a poet-critic. The members of the group were: Akiyama Kuniharu (poet), Fukushima Hideko (visual artist), Fukushima Kazuo (composer), Imai Naoji (lighting designer), Kitadai Shōzō (visual artist), Komai Tetsurō (printmaker), Ōtsuji Kiyoji (photographer), Sato Keijiro (composer), Sonoda Takahiro (piano player), Suzuki Hiroyoshi (composer), Takemitsu Tōru (composer), Yamaguchi Katsuhiko (visual artist), Yamazaki Hideo (engineer) and Yuasa Joji (composer).

community among the audiences through the sharing of a specific time and space.”¹¹ Some of Tezuka’s categories map neatly onto the APN photographs. To begin with, they were indeed interdisciplinary, given that each photograph proposed an encounter between sculpture and photography. An April 1953 construction by the sculptor Saitō Yoshishige (Fig. 2) exemplifies this encounter. Some of the other constructions were closer to collages that had been assembled in front of the lens, but this photograph shows only a single object against a black background. APN photographs also used unconventional materials: a caption for Kitadai’s image in Figure 1 lists “piano wire” and “planks of green and red celluloid” as materials used, while an earlier construction by Saitō (Fig. 3) included “wool stuffing of a baseball base.”¹² (All 55 images were credited, but these explanatory captions, valuable for their information about materials used, only ran with the first eight photographs.) But what of Tezuka’s final term, the commitment to “theatrical presentation”? In what way could photographs be “theatrical”? I have already suggested that an iconography of the theater is present in Kitadai’s photograph, but surely this is not a sufficient reason for calling the photograph itself “theatrical.” In order to define this term, I need to introduce the context in which these photographs appeared.

The publication of the APN photographs in 1953, in *Asahi Graph*, can only be called anomalous. *Asahi Graph* was not only the leading pictorial news magazine of its day; from its initial publication in 1923, it had also been “the pioneer of graphic magazines and established the

¹¹ Miwako Tezuka, “Jikken Kōbō and Takiguchi Shūzō: The New Deal Collectivism of 1950s Japan,” *Positions* 21, no. 2 (March 20, 2013): 372, doi:10.1215/10679847-2018283. This article offers detailed explanation of a 1955 performance titled *The Experimental Ballet Theater*. Among other events, Experimental Workshop organized performances of music by Copeland, Satie, Schoenberg; avant-garde ballet by Matsuo Akemi; and an adaptation of the play *Pierrot Lunaire* into the traditional Japanese theater. For more information about Experimental Workshop’s activity, see Miwako Tezuka, “Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop): Avant-Garde Experiments in Japanese Art of the 1950s” (Ph.D., Columbia University, 2005).

¹² *Asahi Graph*, February 2, 1953, 22; *Asahi Graph*, February 18, 1953, 22.

foundations of modern graphic journalism in Japan.”¹³ Naturally, it valued “the photograph’s ability to provide a historical record and documentation,” and the majority of the photographs it published in 1953 carried out these tasks.¹⁴ But 1953 was a significant year in the artistic and photographic worlds in Japan—worlds that, then as now, were rather separate. In art, this year marked a time in which “realism,” “record” and “documentary” were crucial terms: painters and printmakers set out to the countryside to document strikes and the conditions of dam building.¹⁵ Within photography, the most vocal champion was the photographer Domon Ken—and 1953 marked the year in which the volume of his realist discourse “reached its peak.”¹⁶ Domon was a former photojournalist who had worked extensively during the prewar period under the tutelage of Natori Yōnosuke, who is widely credited with introducing techniques of modern photojournalism into Japan.¹⁷ But for Domon, “realism” was not the basis of photography’s

¹³ Ryūichi Kaneko, “Realism and Propaganda: The Photographer’s Eye Trained on Society,” in *The History of Japanese Photography*, ed. Anne Tucker, Kōtarō Izawa, and Naoyuki Kinoshita (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2003), 187.

Asahi Graph was published from 1923 – 2000. In the post-war era, the magazine was re-launched under the slogan “satire, aphorism, irony, parody, and humor.” Quoted and translated by Utsumi, “Nuclear Images and National Self-Portraits,” 4. The editor behind this re-launch was Izawa Tadasu, who approached Kitadai directly in order to commission the project that became the APN photographs. Izawa had a significant connection to theater himself: under a pseudonym, he was a renowned playwright and comic, whose 1952 adaptation of the French play *Le Cuvier* into the traditional Japanese *kyōgen* theater (a genre of comedy performed between acts of a *nō* play, had been a success. See Julie Iezzi and Jonah Salz, “Susugigawa (The Washing River): An Instant Classic,” *Asian Theatre Journal* 24, no. 1 (2007): 87–104, doi:10.1353/atj.2007.0013; Jonah Salz, “Contesting Authority through Comic Disruption: Mixed Marriages as Metaphor in Postwar Kyogen Experiments,” in *Inexorable Modernity: Japan’s Grappling with Modernity in the Arts*, ed. Hiroshi Nara (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 129–49.

¹⁴ Kaneko, “Realism and Propaganda: The Photographer’s Eye Trained on Society,” 187.

¹⁵ For more information on the importance of “document” to the arts in 1950s Japan, see Koji Toba, *1950 nendai: “Kiroku” no jidai* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 2010). In 1996, the Meguro Museum of Art (Tokyo) held an exhibition that reflected on the situation of art in Japan in 1953. See *Shedding Light on Art in Japan: 1953* Committee, ed., *Shedding Light on Art in Japan: 1953* (Tokyo: Meguro Museum of Art : Tama Art University, 1996).

¹⁶ Yoshiaki Kai, “Sunappu: A Genre of Japanese Photography, 1930-1980” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2012), 102.

¹⁷ Together with critic Ina Nobuo, Natori translated the term “reportage photo” into Japanese as *hōdō shashin*. Natori had worked as a photographer in Germany until 1933, when he was unable to return to Berlin and remained in Japan. Natori established his own company, *Nippon Kōbō* (Japan Workshop) which played a significant role in Japan’s wartime propaganda effort; Domon was one of its staff photographers. The masterwork of Japan Workshop is *Nippon* (Japan), a 72-page accordion-style foldout publication that approximates the scale and grandeur of the

journalistic value. Instead, he used the term to establish photography's position as a unique and autonomous art.

Domon positioned his use of the term *riarizumu shashin* (literally “realist photography”) within a tradition that was just as strong in Japan as in America and Europe: that is, the discourse of photography as an art separated from all others.¹⁸ In 1932, critic Ina Nobuo published a highly influential essay, “*Shashin ni kaere*” (Return to Photography), in which he struck an uncompromising tone in this regard: “Sever relations with ‘art photography.’ Destroy all concepts of ‘art.’ Smash the idol and leave! Then recognize photography’s own ‘mechanicality’ with alacrity!”¹⁹ Ina took up “mechanicality” as the concept around which photography should distinguish itself from the other arts, especially painting. He also introduced the term *rearu foto* (“real photo”), as a name to suggest the underlying principle of truly photographic photography.²⁰ This essay laid the groundwork for Domon’s later claims.

Domon’s realist discourse did not take photography’s mechanical quality as the basis for its specificity. Instead, he defined photography negatively, against a theatrical technique: “Only realist photography, which takes as its basic method the absolutely unstaged absolute snapshot, is capable of facing up to societal reality itself.”²¹ Domon’s idea of the “absolutely unstaged

photomural in the size of a book. Domon himself was involved in the production of a nationalist photomural for the 1940 World’s Fair held in New York. For an excellent analysis of this photomural, see Sae Yamamoto, “The Influence of Photo-Reportage on Photo-Mural ‘Nippon Sangyo’ at the New York World’s Fair, 1940,” *Bulletin of Japanese Society for Science of Design* 56, no. 2 (July 2009): 63–72.

¹⁸ The prime example of this in the West is the 1932 manifesto of Group f/64, which proclaims: “Group f/64 limits its members and invitational names to those workers who are striving to define photography as an art form by simple and direct presentation through purely photographic methods. The Group will show no work at any time that does not conform to its standards of pure photography. Pure photography is defined as possessing no qualities of technique, composition or idea, derivative of any other art form.” Cited in Therese Thau Heyman et al., eds., *Seeing Straight: The f.64 Revolution in Photography* (Oakland, Calif: Oakland Museum, 1992), 21.

¹⁹ Nobuo Ina, “Shashin Ni Kaere,” in *Shashin Ni Kaere*, Nikon Saron Bukkusu 32 (Tokyo: Nikon Nikkōru Kurabu, 2005), 24.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

²¹ Ken Domon, “Riarizumu shashin to saron pikucha,” in *Shashin sappō* (Tokyo: Davide-sha, 1976), 39.

absolute snapshot” became something of a catchphrase during the 1950s, and it took hold among amateur photographers in Japan.²² He was just as committed as Ina to staking out an exclusive position for photography, and was unsparing in his condemnation of anything that might threaten this position:

When photography imitates painting, or is made to stage models in a play, shouldn't we reflect upon this as a total abandonment of principles, a suicidal act? The way of using the camera mechanism properly is precisely when a photographer faces up decently to societal reality not as a painter, not as a poet, not as a novelist, not as an actor, but using the absolutely unstaged absolute snapshot as a body blow. I believe that the only true way for a photographer to add anything to this society as an artist lies in this method of production.²³

Domon's photographic purism is thus grounded in the separation of photography from other media, which leads him to reject staging techniques.

Produced at the same time as Domon's articles, The APN photographs embody a challenge to this thought. In this first place, actual stages are a recurring motif of the series: for example, Kitadai's construction from December 23 (Fig. 4) shows what looks like a soundstage, complete with microphones and a sound baffle. This “baffle” is actually a light reflector used in studio photography—another interdisciplinary connection. But aside from the appearance of stages in the photographs, they have also quite clearly been “staged.” None of the photographs look anything like a scene that might be encountered in Domon's “societal reality,” and the positioning of lighting and objects before the camera could not be called natural. In Yamaguchi's

²² For an account of Domon's realism in 1953, see Julia Adeney Thomas, “Power Made Visible: Photography and Postwar Japan's Elusive Reality,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 02 (May 2008): 365–94, doi:10.1017/S0021911808000648. Yoshiaki Kai refers to another possible source of Domon's anti-staging rhetoric, a 1937 publication by photographer Watanabe Yoshio titled *Sunappu shashin no neraikata utsushikata* (How to Aim at and Shoot *Sunappu* Photography). Referring to photographs produced with even the “agreement or consciousness” of the subject, to use Kai's phrasing, Watanabe has the following advice: “However, the author does not want to recommend this prepared nature, but would like to emphasize that this will not be necessarily a condition that results in a great work. Rather, only when one dives into an unprepared and real nature, find and extract beauty from the dynamic movement of the subject, does it become an expression that fully demonstrates the objective depiction of photography.” Cited and translated in Kai, “Sunappu: A Genre of Japanese Photography, 1930-1980,” 37.

²³ Domon, “Riarizumu shashin to saron pikucha,” 39.

March 18 construction (Fig. 5), the black shadow cast by a white disk falls neatly within another circle, an effect that is clearly the result of a deliberate choice of lighting and angle.

If the APN photographs do, in fact, challenge the purist discourse of Domon, in what terms does this challenge manifest itself? Here I would like to return to Tezuka's final term of Experimental Workshop's methodology, the group's interest in "theatrical presentation." Certainly, photography lacks some of the qualities of theater, in that it is not a performance with a duration; if it were, it would be cinema, or video. However, I want to suggest that photography can produce an effect of theater. The question of what this effect consists of, and whether it is to be valued positively or negatively, turns on the definition of the word "theatricality." I contend that the APN photographs are, indeed, theatrical, and in order to establish this claim I will address some of the ways in which theatricality has been considered.

In framing my inquiry into the APN photographs around theatricality, I am aware that I have drawn myself into a discussion of a term linked with the art historian Michael Fried. Fried has not only maintained a long-running polemic against theatricality, but has also assimilated photography to this polemic in his most recent book.²⁴ What follows is not simply an attempt to argue against Fried, or indeed any other of the scores of antitheatrical writers from which one could choose.²⁵ In taking up the relationship between photography and theatricality, my intent is to show how this concept can be understood generatively, to open up the possibilities of the

²⁴ Michael Fried, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2008).

²⁵ For a catalog of antitheatrical thinking, see Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

medium. To my understanding, theatricality offers photography a way to exceed itself—not just to “resist” the hermetic segmentation proposed by Domon but to liquidate those borders.²⁶

When Fried’s negative characterizations of theatricality are read positively, they can be surprisingly helpful in stoking these thoughts. The “purity” that Fried seeks is not found in the specificity of media, but rather in the experience of the viewer, or, to use his term, “the beholder.” In his 1967 essay “Art and Objecthood,” the foundation of his antitheatrical claims to date, Fried calls minimalist sculpture “literalist”; for him, this work “is theatrical because, to begin with, it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work. [...] The experience of literalist art is of an object in a *situation*—one that, virtually by definition, *includes the beholder*.”²⁷ Fried recoils in horror from this situation, because it also includes “the beholder’s *body*,” to the detriment of vision.²⁸ Theater appears here as an interruption or intrusion into the otherwise pure experience of beholding. On the one hand, this characterization seems to me quite useful, insofar as it entails the liquidation of a border between art and beholder, and it even seems well suited to describe the APN photographs, in

²⁶ While “staged photography” has been addressed within photographic discourse, the theater has not been taken up directly. Or, when it has been taken up as a term of inquiry, it has largely been in relation to human “actors,” in which the photograph’s function is to record a performance. A catalog essay for an exhibition titled “Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre,” makes as much clear: “All of the photographic images that form the core of this book, and are featured in the exhibition, are of people posing or performing in some way for the camera, either as actors in a staged scene, or as recognizable stereotypes, or simply as persons other than themselves.” Lori Pauli, “Setting the Scene,” in *Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre*, ed. Lori Pauli (London ; New York : Ottawa, Ont: Merrell ; In Association with the National Gallery of Canada, 2006), 13–79. Roland Barthes also considers photography’s relation to theater in terms of people—“Photography is a kind of primitive theatre, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead.” Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 32. In the 1970s, the photography critic A.D. Coleman coined the term “directorial mode” to describe certain staged photography of the 1970s, but this term again makes the camera a tool for recording. In discussing the work of Lucas Samaras and others, Coleman writes that camera is “a dramatic device, in front of which their fantasies and obsessions are acted out.” A.D. Coleman, “The Directorial Mode: Notes Towards a Definition,” in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1981), 490.

²⁷ Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 153.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

light of the tactile qualities of the magazine in which they were published—a subject to which I will return later in this essay. Fried’s negative utility, though, only goes so far. He claims: “*What lies between the arts is theater,*” and while this definition seems entirely welcome, granting theater an interdisciplinary quality, it also reduces it to an empty term that lies, as if inert, between media.²⁹

I think it is productive to consider theatricality in light of the work of literary theorist and dramaturg Samuel Weber. Weber develops a conception of theatricality that has already thought beyond Fried’s position, to arrive at a formulation of the theatrical that articulates its possibilities:

Insofar as one proceeds from a presumption of self-identity and self-presence, all departures from their putative self-enclosure—and theater entails just such a departure—are to be vigilantly controlled, if not condemned. Theater marks the spot where the spot reveals itself to be an ineradicable macula, a stigma or stain that cannot be cleansed or otherwise rendered transparent, diaphanous. This irreducible opacity defines the quality of theater as medium. When an event or series of events *takes place* without reducing the place 'taken' to a purely neutral site, then that place reveals itself to be a 'stage,' and those events become theatrical happenings.³⁰

Theater’s productive quality, in other words, is its ability to open up supposedly stable, unified categories. Insofar as Weber characterizes theater as a threat to “self-enclosure,” it threatens precisely the *borders* of categories, and thus comes also to threaten autonomy or purity.

Significantly, this threat is articulated through its “irreducible opacity,” that is, the resistance of the theater to being “rendered transparent.” Opacity and transparency are measurable only under light, where they can be determined by the presence or absence of a shadow. For Weber, theater is indeed a medium of shadows, and this passage comes from a set of reflections on the cave in Plato’s *Republic*. This cave is a theater, though certainly one that

²⁹ Ibid., 164. Italics in original.

³⁰ Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, 1st ed (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 6–7. To the best of my knowledge, Weber has not addressed Michael Fried’s antitheatrical project in any of his writings.

meets with the condemnation of its author. In Weber's reading of Plato, the ascent to the outside world leads to truth: "No shadows or obscurities, no echoes, projections, or simulacra: only light as it is and things as they are."³¹ "Light as it is and things as they are": the phrase sounds like nothing if not a perfect slogan for purist photography. But the APN photographs mark a "departure" from this model. They do not bring the viewer outside, even once: their world is subterranean, shadowy, as in the projected shadows in Komai's January 28 construction (Fig X).

In this essay, I understand "theatricality" to mean the "irreducible opacity" that sullies a supposedly "purely neutral" site. Theatricality, in this reading, is a blockage. In my first section, I will examine the status of shadows—those archly theatrical elements, for Plato—in the APN photographs, in order to trace how the presentation of their various appearances or dissolutions threaten the purity of the medium. In my second section, I will turn to the material qualities of the photographs to show how, in their physical publication in *Asahi Graph*, they work against a purely optical mode of vision to make themselves available to a mode of looking that is, instead, tactile. Well beyond the iconographical representations of the theater, the APN photographs come to embody theatricality through these two qualities.

Shadow Play

In a 1952 letter to the art critic Takiguchi Shūzō, Ōtsuji Kiyoji wrote: "I want to take photographs, but they have only a weak presence, they are powerless."³² The photographer of APN has himself had something of a "weak presence" within the history of Japanese photography as it has been understood thus far. This is perhaps due to the fact that the majority

³¹ Ibid., 8.

³² Kiyoji Ōtsuji, "Takiguchi Shūzō ate shishin shitagaki," in *Ōtsuji Kiyoji: Photographs as Collaborations*, ed. Kinichi Obinata and Yuri Mitsuda (Tokyo: Film Art, 2007).

of his work was produced in collaboration with, or on commission from, other people. The letter that he wrote to Takiguchi Shūzō, an art critic of great renown and something of a godfather figure to Experimental Workshop, came after a two-person exhibition that Takiguchi had arranged at Takemiya Gallery, Tokyo, in August 1952.³³ Ōtsuji's letter expressed doubt about the success of the show, but this doubt extended to the qualities of photography itself: "Let us say that a certain object in a certain form captures one's attention. It can then be photographed to some degree of satisfaction. However, it's weak. Once it becomes a photograph and is thrown back into reality, its presence grows weaker [*kage ga usuku naru*] at once."³⁴ It seems that Ōtsuji took these doubts quite seriously—he would not hold another solo or two-person exhibition for 35 years. What is curious about Ōtsuji's language, though, is that when he refers to the idea of a "weak presence" [*kage ga usui*], his turn of phrase in Japanese literally means "weak shadow." In this section, I will examine some of the ways that the APN photographs themselves make shadows become "weak," in order to draw out the theatrical qualities of the series.

Without exception, the APN photographs were produced in the indoor space of the studio. The series plays out, as it were, in the dark, or at the very least in isolation from Platonic sunlight. It should not come as a surprise that shadows are important motifs within this darkened

³³ Takiguchi (1903 – 1979), a surrealist poet and critic who held a long correspondence with André Breton, was a crucial figure for Ōtsuji. Ōtsuji had taken up an interest in photography as a child, but he did not think of becoming an artist until he encountered the writings. Ōtsuji recounted that one of the most important moments in his development as a photographer came when he encountered a stack of back issues of the magazine *Photo Times* at a local bookstore. Writing about this encounter during the 1980s, Ōtsuji relates that, at that time, he had taught himself about photography exclusively through photography magazines, and that his interest in photography was largely about "mechanisms and techniques." However, he refers to the encounter with *Foto Taimusu (Photo Times)*, which came when he was in middle school, as "a turning point," "the event that drew my interest in photographic work." *Photo Times* was known as one of the most progressive photography magazines in Japan at the time, which was active in introducing foreign photographers, often of an avant-garde bent: among the names on the list that Ōtsuji gives to the reader are Man Ray, Hans Bellmer and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. For more on Ōtsuji's encounter with *Photo Times*, see Kiyoji Ōtsuji, "'Foto Taimusu' to no deai," in *Shashin nōto* (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 1989), 159–64.

³⁴ Ōtsuji, "Takiguchi Shūzō ate shishin shitagaki," 34.

space. However, they cannot be taken for granted; as I will show, the APN photographs render shadows “weak”—both in the sense of becoming transparent and in losing a connection with the object that casts them. Shadows become translucent, or ambiguous—when they do not disappear altogether. The obvious manipulation of shadows in the APN photographs is one way in which they take on a theatrical character: it is not so much in the shadows themselves, but the way that they are presented to the viewer, that threatens the purity of photographic representation. While the shadows in the APN photographs behave unusually, the way that they are staged pits the photographs against Domon’s “realism.” A comparison made later in this study with Domon’s own photographs helps to bring out these qualities.

The APN photograph published on March 18, with a construction by Yamaguchi Katsuhiro (Fig. 5), is disorienting—it is cropped in such a way that there is no way to judge scale, or the direction that the camera is facing. This photograph in particular seems to revel in the play of shadows. The planar surface here is riven by shadows of all kinds—though it may not appear this way at first. A hole has been cut out of a board, and the spoke-like wires cast their shadows on the surface below. A white triangle casts a thin shadow onto a striated surface. These striations are themselves shadows cast by the ridges of corrugated cardboard. Many of the relationships between shadows and objects are quite clear here; two white disks at the end of thin wires cast circular shadows onto the surfaces below. But there is one complication: towards the bottom of the photograph, a black triangle makes an incursion into the frame. Is it, too, a shadow? If so, of what?

The triangle certainly looks like a shadow, but the object that casts it is not visible. In this sense, it is an example of what Denis Hollier has called “orphan shadows,” that is, “shadows detached from their indexical origins, shadows cut off from their cause, shadows thrown by an

invisible object, shadows of objects repressed outside the frame.”³⁵ The term “indexical” comes from the writings of the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, who distinguishes the index—a sign caused directly by a physical phenomenon—from the icon—a sign that is not dependent on any actually existing thing.³⁶ An indexical representation is thus a shadow caused by the object that casts it, or the traces that light leaves on photosensitive material. The indexical shadow is the one cast by a hatpin *onto* the canvas of a painting, but not the one that appears *in* a photograph.³⁷ In Hollier’s account, a shadow that is represented photographically loses its indexical qualities to become fixed as an icon. However, Hollier treats orphan shadows as a phenomenon of painting, not photography.

A more complex example of an orphan shadow can be found in the January 28 photograph, with a construction by the printmaker Komai (Fig. 6).³⁸ The lower part of the frame is cut off by a dark mass, which gives the photograph the unmistakable impression of a stage. To the left side of the frame stands a sculptural figure made of at least six different pieces of material. A dark arm-like form extends from the bottom of the figure, describing a 90 degree curve upwards into space. The figure extends vertically to occupy about two-thirds of the frame’s height; its upper half is a thin piece of material that terminates in a disk. A single white circle in the place of what would be an eye lends the figure a vaguely anthropomorphic quality.

³⁵ Denis Hollier, “Surrealist Precipitates: Shadows Don’t Cast Shadows,” trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 69 (July 1, 1994): 119, doi:10.2307/778991.

³⁶ Peirce writes: “An *Index* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object.” See Charles Sanders Peirce, “A Syllabus of Certain Topics of Logic,” in *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings. Vol. 2*, ed. The Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 291–92.

³⁷ Hollier uses the examples of Joan Miró’s *Spanish Dancer* (1928) and Man Ray’s *Integration of Shadows* (1919).

³⁸ Curiously, this is the only photograph that does not have APN written on it. I can only speculate as to whether or not this was done intentionally; however, the fact that Komai was later asked to leave the project might be worth bringing up in this regard.

The figure is lit up, making it stand out against its dark background. At the far right of the photograph is a bright spot of light in the center of which lies a shadow that seems to mimic the shape of the figure at the left. This shadow, too, extends vertically and terminates in a disk. Yet closer examination reveals some complications. The arm-like form is not represented in the shadow, and although it might simply be positioned at a 180 degree angle to the spotlight, there are enough incongruities between the figure at left and the shadow at right to raise doubts about the relationship between the two.

The shadow itself has a tantalizingly close, but ultimately frustrating relationship to the object that appears to cause it—it is not possible to determine beyond a doubt what is causing the shadow. The near-resemblance of the shadow with the structure—and the *other* shadows cast onto the background—produce a dissonance in the image. This photograph appears to trouble indexicality by representing shadows that are not caused by anything in the frame. What is the effect of this disturbance? Or is it actually a disturbance at all? Perhaps it would be more accurate to call it a contrivance—that is, a device used to produce artificiality. The manipulation of shadows here is treated as just that: the photograph has been staged almost as a parody of Plato’s cave, with shadows cast upon a wall. The photograph creates the space of a stage and puts on a shadow play.

A photograph published on January 21, with a construction by Yamaguchi, shows an even more blatant contrivance (Fig. 7). The photograph shows two objects: a top (with “APN” written on it) and a construction made up of various pieces of thin wood, a kind of structure that seems to float in mid-air. The top casts a shadow directly onto the background, but the structure casts no shadow at all. The gradation of shadow on the left side of the top makes it clear that this shadow is a real one, indexically welded to the object. But the architectural form has been denied

a shadow, even though the two objects appear to sit at the same distance from the camera. Yet this is clearly a contrivance—here, the caption even spells out that the “industrial object was hung from the ceiling by a thread.”³⁹ The lack of a shadow is due to a clever arrangement of lighting, objects and background—that is, a careful staging. The simultaneous presence and absence of shadow corresponds to nothing like the natural lighting conditions germane to purist photography.

The lack of shadow is a contrivance, but it makes no effort to pass itself off as anything *but* contrivance. This sort of staged technique would have been anathema to Domon, but in a peculiar way it acquires a realist valence—if realism is aligned less with the representation of “reality” and more with a self-referential acknowledgement of the conditions in which the work is produced. This a realism that would be, to borrow a term from Hollier, “performative.” Hollier develops this concept out of his study of the surrealist autobiographical novel, which positions itself against the realist novels of Proust and Dostoevsky. This concept is indexical, not literary. Or, it is literary only insofar as it takes “literature” as a *starting point*: “It begins with the indexation of the tale.”⁴⁰ The mode of this realism is to continually make clear to the audience the terms through which the work is being produced: in contrast to Proust, who already has “the final revelation” and merely has to find the right way to transmit it to the reader, Breton “wants, on the contrary, to profit from the fact that the revelation has not yet occurred in order to throw himself into writing.”⁴¹ The writer and reader share their lack of knowing the “revelation.” Perhaps this explains the abundance of photographic materials in the APN photographs: the light reflector that doubles as a sound baffle (Fig. 4), a studio light itself in one of Komai’s

³⁹ *Asahi Graph*, January 21, 1953, 22.

⁴⁰ Hollier, “Surrealist Precipitates,” 126.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

constructions (Fig. 8), and the many appearances of celluloid and glass throughout the project. The recurring motif of the disk at the end of a pole, too, looks like an ideal darkroom tool, for dodging a photograph. These light-producing and light-inhibiting devices perform the investment of the photographs in making absolutely clear their own constructed nature. While Domon thinks he has found “the only true way for a photographer to add anything to this society as an artist” with the “absolutely unstaged absolute snapshot,” the “absolutely staged” APN photographs offer a different kind of realism through their total disclosure of their stagedness.

In 1952, Domon Ken made a series of photographs under conditions very similar to those of the APN photographs: in a studio, of “constructions,” and on commission. The difference between these photographs and the APN photographs is worthy of consideration. Domon took these photographs for publication in the book *Ikebana*, by Teshigahara Sōfū, who was the founder of the avant-garde *ikebana* (flower arrangement) school Sōgestu-kai—and also a participant in the second half of the APN photographs. Although *Ikebana* was published in Tokyo by Sōgestu-kai, it contained only English text; it was clearly intended as a primer on Teshigahara’s work for Western audiences. A laudatory essay of substantial length was followed by 24 of Teshigahara’s *ikebana* compositions, each of which included a color photograph by Domon.

Domon’s photographs of Teshigahara’s *ikebana* evince a rather tortured relationship to shadows: at every turn, it appears that he has attempted to suppress their appearance. When Teshigahara’s work itself is lithe enough, Domon is able to accomplish this entirely: the composition “The Weed Which Turns to a Star” (Fig. 9) sits against its background as if it were floating in space, against an abstract field of color. The light is distributed evenly across the

surface of the vase and the orchids, without the faintest hint of a shadow. When Teshigahara's compositions are more volumetric, shadows cannot be erased quite as efficiently: the thick stone vase used for "The White Camellia" (Fig. 10) casts the faintest of shadows onto the ground, and a swoop of the camellia's branch cannot help but cast its shadow onto the upper corner of the vase. But the background remains pristine, untouched by shadow, almost indistinguishable from the table. These photographs are all brilliantly lit, as if the goal was to bring them out of the dark studio and into the Platonic space of light and truth. Domon has tried to light the shadows out of existence, but he is not quite successful—for the most part, they still hang on.

Ōtsuji's approach to lighting Teshigahara's constructions in the APN project was less tortured: there is either a full shadow—or none at all. Teshigahara's first construction for APN was a simple rendering of the three letters in an almost brutalist fashion (Fig. 11). Ōtsuji photographed them in a similarly rough light, allowing them to cast a shadow directly into the foreground of the image. Although no other collaboration between Teshigahara and Ōtsuji featured such strong shadows, the other images simply removed shadows from the equation altogether, posing Teshigahara's constructions against a stark background (Fig. 12). The "tortured" quality of Domon's photographs as I have described them lies in the sense that Domon not only wants to suppress shadows—he also wants to suppress their suppression.

One final APN photograph, with a construction by Kitadai, draws out further complications with the treatment of shadows (Fig. 13). The camera is positioned above the scene, which plays out on a flat, white plane. A light cast from the left passes through a stencil of the "APN" letters such that the light literally writes these letters, in positive, against the shadowy ground cast by the solid part of the stencil. The contrast between shadow and non-shadow is clear, but the last two elements of the composition disturb this distinction. These two elements

very much resemble the two rhomboidal forms that appeared in Figure 1, which were identified as “green and red celluloid.” The top form is made up of perhaps five pieces of celluloid, arranged into a small, volumetric cluster. They, too, cast a shadow, but it is not as opaque as the one cast by the stencil just above it; the material is somewhat translucent, rendering the shadow “weak.” Another cluster of celluloid appears lower in the frame, but it is much more complex than the first one—the material is arranged at haphazard angles, and it consists of longer and more numerous pieces, such that it finally becomes impossible to distinguish between celluloid and shadow. The camera registers both in the same way; the boundary is made unclear. Like the missing shadow of Figure 7, the perfect indexical rendering of the shadow that passes through the stencil is positioned next to the ambiguous shadow of the celluloid constructions.

I have narrated the shadows in the APN photographs in order to bring out the effects that they produce. Whether shadows are orphaned, removed altogether or confused with the object that casts them, the photographs perform this “weakening” that Domon sought to hide in his own work. Insofar as these effects draw attention to themselves—and the juxtaposition of perfectly indexical shadows with indexically “weak” shadows is difficult to ignore—they become an “opacity” standing in the way of a purely (or “absolutely”) photographic photography. Yet this opaque quality, as I have described it, is somewhat abstract: I have argued that the APN photographs stand in the way of an idea. In the next section, I will consider the photographs as physical objects, in order to explore how their materiality works against models of purity.

Touching, Not Looking

It might be easy to overlook the publication of the APN photographs in *Asahi Graph*, especially given that these photographs have, in recent years, found a new life as art objects. In

2007, silver gelatin prints of the APN photographs were made from the still-existing 1953 negatives. These prints were matted and packaged into two portfolios, one containing Yamaguchi's contributions and the other Kitadai's. The portfolios were produced in an edition of seven, and they have since entered the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, Tate Modern and the Getty Research Institute. While the modern prints are larger in size and greater in resolution than their counterparts that ran in *Asahi Graph*, this afterlife of the APN photographs severs them from the context of the magazine—if this entry into high-profile museum collections is indeed an afterlife, it is a thoroughly disembodied one, in which the photographs come to stand in for Experimental Workshop in purely aesthetic terms.

Here, I set out to recuperate something of the photographs' bodily connection to their audience. For the fact of their publication in *Asahi Graph* means that they came into contact with their audience through literal contact—through touching at the same time as seeing. In this section, I will consider the tactile qualities of these photographs as they appeared in *Asahi Graph* in two ways. First, I will consider the way that the photographs themselves call out to the viewer's sense of touch, and how these textures were then mediated by the paper of the magazine. Then, I will turn to the concept of "tactile vision," which opens up the possibilities of a relational value for the photographs. In working against optical models of vision, the photographs as they were published in *Asahi Graph* obtain a theatrical quality.

Tactility poses a threat to optically pure vision, and this quality gives it the possibility of becoming theatrical. In her book *Touching Photographs*, Margaret Olin suggests that vision and touch might be mutually exclusive: "Touching is blind. There is a tension between looking and touching; the two activities seem to alternate like a blinking eye, as though we cannot do both at

the same time.”⁴² There is a connection between touch and blindness: expressions like “groping about” or “feeling one’s way” imply a lack of vision; when the eye is closed, the two lids are touching. It is curious, then, that Olin develops the seemingly contradictory concept of “tactile looking”: “The significance of tactile looking, mistaken or not, is that it is more act than reading; it produces more than it understands. In contrast, readings aimed at understanding rely on a visual conception of looking.”⁴³ In this essay, I will use the term “optical” instead of “visual,” which strikes me as somewhat tautological in this context. Olin’s “tactile looking,” though, functions as a metaphor that expands the range of possible interactions between photographs and audiences. She directs attention away from the purely optical to open up the possibilities offered by the tactile.

The photograph of a construction by the sculptor Yoshishige Saitō published on February 18, 1953 (Fig. 3) is a particularly tactile photograph. The photograph shows three volumetric forms that appear to have been speared by a complex network of wires, such that they are suspended in midair, directly in front of the viewer. A beam of light gleams off of one of the wires. A placard towards the bottom spells out the three letters: A, P, N. The uppermost form is not only caught in the web of wiring, but also has a hole bored through its center. The hole is visible to the viewer because of the unusual lighting conditions: the objects have been lit from behind or from the side, such that their camera-facing surfaces are completely obscured from view, while the full outline of their surfaces—including the interior of the hole—are fully illuminated. Still, the outlines of these objects are anything but uniform: they do not describe solid borders. On the contrary, the outlines are studded, or interrupted, or simply ruptured by the

⁴² Margaret Olin, *Touching Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3.

rough texture of these objects. A few fibrous hairs are even visible towards the top of the uppermost object, and indeed another hair can be seen within the hole. In bringing out the texture of these objects, the photograph calls out to the viewer's sense of touch.

When the photograph appears in the magazine—when it becomes paper—the textural qualities of the photograph are doubled. This paper itself is not a neutral medium; it remediates the image. The front sides of the three forms in Figure 3 are unilluminated, but when the photograph runs in *Asahi Graph*, the texture of the paper itself shows through these objects, as if the textured surface of the illuminated silhouettes had been carried through. The combination of the texture of the paper and the imperfect printing makes it seem, if only for a moment, that the fibers of the magazine's pages had represented the texture of the object itself. This effect is heightened further in Saitō's March 11 construction, which seems to show a skull of some sort (this photograph does not have a caption listing the materials used) emerging from a hole cut into a wooden board (Fig. 14). The construction is illuminated from above and to the right, such that the light catches the wood grain—another textural effect. But here, the weave of the paper does not so much intersect with, as overlay, this grain, lending the photograph an almost uncanny material quality—something that could perhaps be called “presence.”

The soft texture of the magazine's paper invites the touch: it is meant to be handled, folded, unfolded, left on a bench or in a train car, held casually or flipped through in “waiting rooms of banks, dentist offices,” where the magazine was often found.⁴⁴ This places them outside of a disembodied mode of looking, *necessarily* bringing them into a relationship with their beholder that is not purely optical—before their reproduction in catalogs and portfolios, it was impossible to see these photographs without also handling paper.

⁴⁴ Kuwahara, “Saihakken! Sengo gurafu jaanarizumu.”

The physical situation of the modern prints of the APN photograph makes clear they have been co-opted by a regime of optical looking. These photographs are not meant to be touched; they sit in a rigid matte that ensures that the surface of the prints will remain untouched by human hands—ungloved ones, at least. The matte allows each photograph to be handled, but not hand held. In the modern print, the smooth surfaces of the geometric cluster of shadows and material are rendered clearly (Fig. 15). In Olin’s terms, the APN photographs can now be mobilized for a reading “aimed at understanding,” and in the hands, as it were, of a MoMA curator they duly become “a critical visual representation of the style” of Experimental Workshop.⁴⁵ As I suggested earlier, the APN photographs are considered with good reason to be one of Experimental Workshop’s projects, but to reduce them to a stylistic exercise is to strip away the group’s commitment to “the theatrical presentation as a format allowing the artists to construct, however temporarily, a sense of community.”

Part of my interest in Olin’s idea of “tactile looking” lies in the fact that she opens the photograph up to a broader range of possibilities: in Olin’s conception, photography becomes “a relational art, its meaning determined not only by what it looks like but also by the relationship we are invited to have with it.”⁴⁶ What kind of relationships might the photographs in the magazine have created? Looking through the material of the magazine itself will shed light on the nature of the particular relationship that the APN photographs established, or made available.

Remaining with the Kitadai photograph under discussion (Figs. 13 and 15), I will examine some of the content of the March 4, 1953 issue in which it was published. While the lead article deals with an explosion at a gunpowder factory in a suburb of Tokyo, the second

⁴⁵ Eva Respini, “APN Portfolios and Jikken Kobo,” *Museum of Modern Art*, accessed March 16, 2016, http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/87-apn-portfolios-and-jikken-kobo.

⁴⁶ Olin, *Touching Photographs*, 3.

article in the magazine deals with media. This story, titled “A Voice from Muntinglupa and a Waiting Family,” covers the efforts of a Japanese priest in the Philippines who took voice recordings from 72 Japanese prisoners held on charges of war crimes and brought them back to Japan for broadcast on NHK, the national radio station. The story focuses on the Asano family, whose son Toshio sits on death row. A photograph shows them in front of their radio as they listen to Toshio’s voice for the first time in 10 years; the antenna of the radio is visible in the foreground of the image, and the family has placed their hands close to each other. The photograph ostensibly shows the moment of simultaneous transmission and reception. This was not the only discussion of media in the issue.

In the APN section, there is a regular feature in which people on the street answer a question posed by a public figure. In this issue, a researcher of Greek culture asks whether it wouldn’t be good for the spirit if, for a stretch of 10 or 20 days each year, radio broadcasting and newspaper publication were halted, thus allowing people to exchange ideas directly with each other.⁴⁷ This proposal is roundly criticized by the respondents, who all protest in various ways that it would be impossible to go on for even a few days without the news. However, the response of a 23-year-old woman named Naitō is striking: she points out that if radio broadcasts were halted, she would miss out on listening not just to the news, but to music.

Naitō’s response, it seems to me, models the relationality that the APN photographs propose. To be sure, Naitō is not describing a direct, transparent form of communication, of the kind that the researcher of Greek thinks would be good for the spirit. However, her attitude to the radio could be called tactile: it does not stop at the limit of understanding. The possibility of

⁴⁷ “Saisho Yoron Chosa,” *Asahi Graph*, March 4, 1953.

finding music—or other sounds—within the news acts out something like the possibility of engaging with photographs as material. They hold out, the possibility of forming a community.

When the APN photographs are divorced from their publication in *Asahi Graph*, as in their appearance in the MoMA collection, they lose nothing of their ability to engage a beholder in an optical mode. On the contrary, the resolution and quality of the modern print provides what would certainly be considered a more transparent experience of looking—and it is precisely this transparency that is valued. In their elevation to the space of the museum, the photographs are sublated: they leave their material, tactile form to enter into an idealized optical zone. But the APN photographs are not just optical phenomena: the tactile relationship they offer to their audience opens them up to other modes of reception. This openness is reflected in the magazine itself, in the way that the grain of the paper shows through the white ground of the image. The APN photograph becomes a receptive space into which other materials can be introduced—in the same way that a radio allows for the transmission of news *and* music.

This mode of theatricality does not correspond to a “performance” of any sort. The ostentatious way that the photographs disrupt shadows—and indeed the very staging of the shadows themselves—are perhaps not difficult to understand with respect to theatricality. But the tactile qualities of a photograph are less obviously theatrical. Fried associates theatricality with an experience that includes “the beholder’s *body*.” This is certainly the case with the APN photographs when they are published in *Asahi Graph*, where there is not so much a beholder as a *holder*. Tezuka writes that Experimental Workshop’s experiences of community exist only “temporarily”; perhaps this interval corresponds to the momentary blindness produced when the photograph is touched.

Conclusion: Another “Japanese Photography”

In this essay, I argued that the use of shadows in this project works against the purity of a “realist,” “absolutely unstaged” photography as theorized by Domon. Then I showed that the material qualities of *Asahi Graph* make the APN photographs available to “tactile looking,” a concept that places the series against the optical mode of looking for which it has been harnessed in recent years. In thinking about theatricality and photography, I have focused on somewhat abstract qualities of the series, when I could have tried to locate theatricality in the collaboration between the various members, or in the staging of the objects. It seems to me that these qualities are tied too closely to the literal theater, and I have tried to avoid suggesting tautologically that the APN photographs are theatrical because they resemble theater. Instead, I found it more productive to think of “theatricality” as an effect that can be located in more abstract territory.

As I conclude this essay, I would like to suggest a way in which the theatrical interventions of the series against photographic and optical purity might lead to a productive rethinking of the series’ broader context within the history of Japanese photography. Part of the difficulty of writing about the APN photographs is the elusiveness of its primary photographer, Ōtsuji Kiyoji. It might seem strange that I have hardly mentioned Ōtsuji thus far, though disappearance is symptomatic of the way that he has been treated within scholarship. Ōtsuji has received almost no attention outside of Japan, and a somewhat limited reception even within Japan. One reason for the muted tone of Ōtsuji’s reception is surely the fact that his work itself is quite diffuse; this is a photographer who did not hold a solo exhibition until the age of 64, and published no photobooks during his career. The majority of his work exists in places like art magazines, illustrated books of calligraphy materials, scientific textbooks and exhibition catalogs. Still, despite all this, it would be difficult to understate his importance to the

development of contemporary photography in Japan. With his connection to Takiguchi Shūzō, Ōtsuji functions as a link between the prewar and postwar contexts, and he has been highly influential as a writer and teacher—among his pupils is the noted contemporary photographer Hatakeyama Naoya. I have been interested in Ōtsuji for a number of years, not because I saw a powerful exhibition of his work, but rather because I repeatedly found that he was, as it were, floating in the background of contemporary Japanese photography. Ōtsuji is in the air, not on the wall.

As such, he is a difficult figure to assimilate to the prevailing view of Japanese photography in the West, which has been dominated by two tropes: the photobook, and *Provoke*, a small group of radical photographers who broke with photographic conventions in pursuit of an aesthetic that was deliberately blurry, grainy and out-of-focus. Moriyama Daidō is the most widely recognized photographer to emerge from this group. In his book *Japanese Photobooks of the 1960s and '70s*, Ivan Vartanian has neatly combined both of these tropes into a single, domineering statement: “I feel safe in saying that the best way to view Japanese photography, and in particular photography from the 1960s and ‘70s, is in the form of the photobook, a statement with which Daido Moriyama concurs.”⁴⁸ Is it a coincidence that Domon Ken aligns quite well with these two tropes? Domon, after all, published a number of important photobooks—one of which, *Chikuhō no kodomo* (*Children of Chikuhō*) is included in Vartanian’s volume. He was also a key link in the chain of photographic development that led up to *Provoke*. To be sure, the politically and aesthetically radical *Provoke* photographers positioned themselves in opposition to Domon. But for all the violence of Moriyama’s imagery (Fig. 16) it

⁴⁸ Ivan Vartanian, “The Japanese Photobook: Toward an Immediate Media,” in *Japanese Photobooks of the 1960s and '70s*, by Ryūichi Kaneko and Ivan Vartanian, ed. Lesley A. Martin and Kyōko Wada, 1st ed (New York: Aperture, 2009), 11.

never questioned the boundaries of photography itself. In other words, even if *Provoke* photography understood itself as a radical alternative to realist photography, it obliterated this first term only to hold on to the second.

Does Ōtsuji represent a “theatrical” challenge to the *Provoke*-centered history, complicating it by obscuring its otherwise transparent teleology? What would the history of Japanese photography look like if it took Ōtsuji, rather than Domon, as the central figure of the 1950s? It would have to take into account all of Ōtsuji’s relationships with people *outside* of photography: Experimental Workshop members, of course, and a much wider range of other actors around the Japanese art world. “Photography,” in short, would not look like photography anymore, but something more like the light reflector in Kitadai’s soundstage construction: photography deconstructed, repurposed, attuned to other frequencies.

Figure 1

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Kitadai Shōzō, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published February 4, 1953

Figure 2

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Saitō Yoshishige, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published April 15, 1953

Figure 3

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Saitō Yoshishige, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published
February 18, 1953

Figure 4

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Kitadai Shōzō, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published December 23, 1953

Figure 5

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published
March 8, 1953

Figure 6

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Komai Tetsurō, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published April 15,
1953

Figure 7

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published
January 21, 1953

Figure 8

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Komai Tetsurō, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published April 29,
1953

Figure 9

[image redacted]

Teshigahara Sōfū, “The Weed Which Turns to a Star,” published in *Ikebana*, 1952 (Photograph:
Domon Ken)

Figure 10

[image redacted]

Teshigahara Sōfū, “The White Camellia,” published in *Ikebana*, 1952 (Photograph: Domon Ken)

Figure 11

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Teshigahara Sōfū, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published July 1,
1953

Figure 12

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Teshigahara Sōfū, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published August 12, 1953

Figure 13

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Kitadai Shōzō, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published March 4,
1953

Figure 14

[image redacted]

APN photograph (Construction: Saitō Yoshishige, Photograph: Ōtsuji Kiyoji) published March 11, 1953

Figure 15

[image redacted]

Image from the portfolio *APN* (pub. Tokyo Publishing House, 2007)

Figure 16

[image redacted]

Moriyama Daido, from *Karuido (Hunter)*, 1972

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