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# Teshigahara Hiroshi

## Filmmaker of the Japanese Collapsing Identity

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### Abstract

After having been devastated by flames of war, Japan gave birth to the prosperous “miracle” of the post-war period, culminating in 1964’s Olympic. However, beneath this “mask” of miraculous system, lies another face people tried to repress deep down in their unconscious. Rebuilding of the country led to frenetic modernisation driven by Westerner occupant at the cost of old traditions. 1960s follow post-war period which symbolically ended with Japan’s emancipation through signature of the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951. But still American presence remains. Indeed, later events such as Korea’s or Vietnam’s wars will require Japan as a strategic position for American army. Among those is the signature of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan in 1960, which caused violent riots in Tôkyô. So, Japanese people were driven by the anxiety of losing an already upset Japanese identity and the difficulty to adapt themselves to new ways of life.

Many intellectuals and artists were very concerned by this fracture within national identity. Among filmmakers of this time, Teshigahara is one of those who brilliantly illustrated this collapsing of Japanese identity. Not only because of subjects related to identity crisis and anonymity illustrated by conflict between tradition and modernisation but above all because these same subjects still haunt contemporary Japan. So, anxieties related to a mutating identity in the 1960s endure through more recent filmmakers such as Kurosawa Kiyoshi. Such problematic highlights failure of any resolution. In that way, present communication will pay special attention to two of Teshigahara’s movies *The Face of Another* (1966) and *The Man without a Map* (1968) and bring out special patterns such as social mask and evaporation of man like illustrations of atomic and war legacy as well as crisis of modernity resulting from it.

### Keywords

Teshigahara, post-war, Japan, identity, doubling

In his book *Pour un observateur lointain* (“*For a distant observer*”), Noël Burch considers that 1960s’ New Wave of Japanese filmmakers such as Ôshima Nagisa allowed depiction of “individual as subject” to rise within cinema<sup>i</sup>. Expression of individuality as well as fall of the patriarchal, and additionally military, authority are some of the major changes caused by modernization in context of post-war Japan. It results from both disruption of old traditions such as family or work essentially based on community’s mind in favour of modern reforms such as women’s emancipation and equality of rights inciting individualism.

Resulting anxiety from conflict between modernisation and tradition especially drives Teshigahara Hiroshi’s movies. But instead of developing political criticism like some filmmakers as Wakamatsu Kôji did, he explores the identity itself as base of crisis, through characters torn between tradition and modernisation and so, standing in a untenable position. This communication aims to emphasize latent effects resulting from legacy of war and defeat through crisis of identity within 1960s’ Japan but still remaining in contemporary Japan. Latent effects still remaining in contemporary Japan, demonstrating that this inner conflict may still haven’t found stable resolution. This analysis will especially be focused on two movies directed by Teshigahara: *The Face of Another* (1966) and *The Man without a Map* (1968). However, beyond the legacy of war, to fully understand some of their crucial underlines, it will be necessary to consider an interdisciplinary approach related to works on identity and perception like Takeo Doi’s. Indeed, Doi is especially famous for having given a definition to Japanese identity as funded on interdependency through necessary person-to-person relations. And in this continuity, Merleau-Ponty’s works related to perception of the self, the other and the world constitute an inevitable source of analysis in the reception of a mutating modern post-war Japan by individual.

## 1. Tanin no Kao

### a. War’s imprint

To initiate this communication, *The Face of Another* is an excellent start on the crisis of identity related to 1960s’ troubled context. In this film, a man named Okuyama has his face burn because of an industrial accident. Consequently, he is forced to cover his head with bandages. In the same time, this deeply upsets his relationship with his wife (Image 1). His doctor and psychiatrist proposes an atypical offer to him: to affix an experimental artificial mask to replace his disfigured face. One mask for another which would give him the chance to find his social place back (Image 2).

Okuyama concentrates the two major changes related to modernization as consequences of 1945’s defeat, that is loss of masculine power as well as rising of individualism. First one is symbolized through unpleasant position of the burnt face man. Moreover, when Okuyama tries to sexually assault on his wife, he is rejected by her, exposing his loss of any power as well as his masculinity. In a later scene, he also spies her through a keyhole, which underlines the distance between him and her (Image 3). Second one is led through experimental mask which would allow Okuyama to become an entirely different person and to desert his social position and duties.

Moreover, in the continuity of a movie like *Children of Hiroshima* (by Shindô Kaneto, in 1952) exposing a Japan disfigured by war through shots of the famous city’s ruins (Image 4), Teshigahara focuses same intention through the man’s disfigured face. The analogy is indeed especially and symbolized with a secondary character with no apparent connection with the initial story. The character is a female survivor from Nagasaki, both carrying her atomic legacy on her face (Image 5) and working in a mental institution for war veterans.

These war’s reminiscences are not used by chance. At the beginning of his career, Teshigahara used to assist another Japanese filmmaker named Kamei Fumio on the documentary *Still it’s good to live* (1956) focused on *hibakushas*’ testimonies, survivors of the A-Bomb. So, Japan is set both in a rebuilding period and in a great era of new prosperity, like symbolized by 1964’s Olympic Games. This influence inherited from Kamei also leads Teshigahara to put analogy between rebuilding of Japan and rebuilding of the face and identity of individual. Analogy especially emphasized during a scene in which Okuyama watches a construction site through the window of a café (Image 6).

Function of the face in this process of rebuilding lies on a vast identity issue. Indeed, Deleuze mentions three functions of face: “it is individuating (it distinguishes or characterises each person); it is socialising (it manifest a social role); it is relational or communicating (it ensures not only communication between two people, but also, in a single person, the internal agreement between his character and his role)”<sup>ii</sup>. Okuyama’s very first shot showing his face through X-Rays and so, revealing his skeleton (Image 7) depicts a character without any of these identity function. In a time of struggle for preserving Japanese identity after having and still being disfigured by Western reforms, Japan’s face becomes an uncertain and perpetual rewriting shapeless surface. Consequently, Okuyama’s face is the “thing to be written”<sup>iii</sup> like Japan’s.

### b. Role-taking

On one hand, it is interesting to pay attention to the original title itself, *Tanin no kao*. The two main words carry a high symbolical connotation as they were used by Japanese psychoanalyst Doi Takeo to define Japanese interpersonal relationships. *Tanin* is translated by “other”, “stranger”, or “any people outside the inner circle” and so refers to anything stranger or exterior to the inner self. *Kao* is “face”. More significant is that Doi refers this word as latin *persona* which means “mask” and more specifically social mask<sup>iv</sup>.

Okuyama is indeed a theatrical character. Under his new face, he tries to lure the secretary of his boss. Later, in a aim for regaining his masculinity, he plans to seduce his wife through his new identity. Okuyama becomes a forger like “the character of the cinema” itself<sup>v</sup>. His theatricality is emphasized when the mask is affixed on him for the first time. Psychiatrist and his nurse make him try some rugs (Image 8). Then, psychiatrist exhorts him to practice various expressions with his new face such as smiling. By getting used to his mask, Okuyama becomes a complete stranger through psychological changes which are reflected by his physical look. So, for example, choice of clothes is representative of the man who lies, like the psychiatrist notices:

“Here’s the proof that you’re lying. Suit, necktie, shoes. You’ve never worn such loud stuff. Your former face, position, business. No one could guess now. What you wear fits your mask. Your mask chose for you. “It” ordered you to select these things. Do you see? Your mask is really affecting you”

On the other hand, what could be called “therapy of the mask” emphasizes a character playing the role of playing a role. And what the film relates is the play of man as a social being or, to quote Edgar Morin, as a *ready-made* character at the point he can no longer make difference between role and real. Morin says:

“*Role taking and personation* control person-to-person relations. Our personality is a confection, ready-made. We put it on like an item of clothing and we wear our clothing like with a role. We play a role in life, not only for others but also (and above all) for ourselves. The costume (that disguise), the face (that mask), the talk (those conventions), the feeling of our own importance (that comedy), maintain in ordinary life this spectacle offered to self and to others, *that is, imaginary projections-identifications.*”<sup>vi</sup>

While he tries to seduce his wife under the face of another, his strategy seems to work when she follows him to an apartment he rent in downtown and finally accepts to sleep with him. Filled with jealousy and betrayal feelings, Okuyama confronts his wife for having cheating her husband. However, she reveals that she did know all along the man was Okuyama but said nothing because she thought all of this seduction plan was only some kind of a theatrical game. This is the entire difference between points of view of both of them she explicates through the following sentence: “Women don’t hide the fact they use make-up. I can never stand with a mask pretending it’s real”. Okuyama’s mistake was to expose his mask like his real self, his real face and not him as wearing the mask. He disguised himself to claim to be another person while his wife believed he was playing the role of his husband playing the role of another. So, mask is forgery when he asserts to be real but it isn’t when he reveals itself as a mask because as used like a mask.

Japan has an old “presentational” theatrical tradition. Barthes defines it by presenting theatre of puppets called *bunraku*. Originality of this tradition holds on the fact of showing puppets and people who control them. In brief, “presentational” involves to show, in the same frame, fiction but also what is making fiction a fiction, what frames fiction. In this view, puppets expose themselves like objects animated by people and not like objects truly animated on their own. Okuyama’s “metamorphosis” echoes Japan’s modernization and the loss of old traditions in favour of moderns’. Crisis of the mask is representative of the inner crisis between two states of identity that Japan hardly conciliates, even still today.

### **c. Prepersonal body**

Character’s identity collapsing under the influence of a social mask is a characteristic of Japan in which individuals are requested to erase themselves behind their social role within this society. That’s what Maurice Pinguet calls “narcissisme de rôle”<sup>vii</sup>. Lies and theatricality Okuyama uses on his wife are a characteristic of a society of masks such as Japan’s in which people hide and repress their true feelings to follow the way of conformism and uniformity, making them lose any connection with reality. This isolation provokes lack of communication between people, a lack that still endures in contemporary Japan. This annihilation of identity and individuality is symbolized through the last sequence of the movie in which Okuyama and the psychiatrist walking in the streets are submerged by a crowd of faceless people (Image 9). Okuyama says himself that he is “nobody”, “a perfect unknown”. He has become an

anonymous inside a society of interchangeable people. Individual is crushed by community in which identity and faces are interchangeable, just like psychiatrist announced it in a previous conversation (Image 10).

Finally, recovering a face, Okuyama actually loses his true identity to remain in anonymity, becoming nobody and everybody in the same time. Moreover, the experience of the mask as face is connected to organic body. In that way, body as the centre of identity echoes what Merleau-Ponty calls “prepersonal body”, that is “a margin of *almost* impersonal existence” which is “round out our personal existence”. In brief, Merleau-Ponty considers “organism, as a prepersonal cleaving to the general form of the world, as an anonymous and general existence”<sup>viii</sup>. Personal existence reveals an unconscious body. So, in semi-references to Freud, he underlines the presence of an “unconscious” existence that “conscious” one tries to repress but fails to do it. Prepersonal body embodied through mask is this “other me who has already taken part for the world, who is already opened to some of his aspects and synchronized with them”<sup>ix</sup>, this hidden self who acts autonomously and independently of my will. Consequently, if “I” is another, “I” is “nobody”, is the “anonymous”<sup>x</sup>, the informal other than me within the self and the social persona but also to the environmental world.

Experiencing the mask causes revelation of prepersonal body, uncontrollable, nameless and hidden existence which appears, through mask, manifestation of doubling and *doppelgänger*, which converges with the object of Teshigahara’s next movie.

## 2. Moetsukita Chizu

### a. Unnamed man in unnamed city

*The Man without a Map* can be hardly analyzed without a word on *The Face of Another* as well as *The Woman in the Dunes* (1964), which conferred international reputation to Teshigahara by being presented in Cannes Film Festival. This movie follows the gradual vanishing of an unnamed entomologist seeking for new species of insects in some distant and desert regions of Japan. He is invited by some villagers to stay for the night at a woman’s house located in the bottom of a sand pit. But the next day, he discovered that he has been trapped within the pit to assist his host in recuperating sand and so prevent the village to be submerged by desert itself. At the end of the movie, the entomologist has an opportunity to escape but the last shot shows a disappearing act about a man named Niki Jumpei, leaving uncertain if he chose to stay and accept his new life or if he vanished in unknown circumstances.

In this continuity, *The Man without a Map* focuses on an unnamed private detective hired by a woman named Nemuro Haru to investigate the missing of her husband, Hiroshi. Through this film, Teshigahara puts a synthesis of this depiction of the Japanese collapsing identity. So, the missing Nemuro echoes to previous characters of the filmmaker such as the unnamed entomologist, Okuyama but also the detective himself. Teshigahara’s movies share this common subject related to “evaporation of man” (*ningen jôhatsu*) – which provided title of Imamura Shôhei’s movie in 1968 (*jôhatsu* means “evaporation”), coincidentally same year than *The Man without the Map*. The symbolic post-war desert of *The Woman in the Dunes* is replaced by the modern and prosperous city which still remains the new desert where people disappear in anonymity. So, by showing aerial shots over Tôkyô running by cars like ants, first sequence echoes *The Woman in the Dunes’* windswept desert but also *The Face of Another’s* crawling crowd (Images 11 to 14).

### b. Evaporation of Man

Evaporating people are defined by Teshigahara as “ultramodern society’s one of the most mysterious and horrifying phenomena”<sup>xi</sup>, which, again, still endures. In their book *Les Evaporés du Japon* (“*Japan’s Evaporated people*”), Mauger and Remael draws a portrayal of modern Tôkyô very similar to Teshigahara’s, that is as a crawling and tentacular city, “invaded with malls covered by shop signs and men braving alone flowing crowds” and in which “locate oneself is a real challenge because, like evaporated people, streets have no name. Only complex numbers additions can help to identify them. Sectors and sub-sectors don’t usually follow a logical order, so Japanese people lose themselves”<sup>xii</sup>. Disorientation is highlighted through the detective himself, unnamed man inside a city with unnamed streets. Consequently, Tôkyô itself is a reflection of vanishing and anonymous as, like Roland Barthes recalls, it is a city with unnamed streets and where “spaces which compose it in detail are unnamed”<sup>xiii</sup>.

Such assimilation between evaporating anonymous people and anonymous city is symbolized by opening’s credits. Teshigahara exposes some topographic maps drawing surrealistic and abstract human forms – also echoing opening credits of *The Woman of the Dunes*. It is also important to notice the real meaning of the original title. Indeed, *Moetsukita Chizu* means “Burnt Map”. And the first image of the opening credits is a burning map reforming itself from ashes through a rewinding sequence. Once again, Teshigahara draws a visual metaphor of Japanese identity recomposed from ashes of war. But, after having explored depictions of disfigurement, he highlights this new identity as what Roland Barthes calls a “apparently illogical, uselessly complicated, curiously disparate” system<sup>xiv</sup> (Images 15 to 17). Such system is jointly criticised through Nemuro’s excessive amount of diplomas – no less than 9 in fields like

mechanics, driving or electric. Haru tells that her husband considered diplomas as an “anchor” to “settle” within a safe life. An anchor among many like so many potential, doubled and unnamed faces. Diplomas fulfil same role than social mask and constitute as many unreal faces as Okuyama could dress with.

### c. Atomic inner fracture

As initiated in *The Face of another*, doubling is one of the main thematic related to crisis of identity. This crisis through doubling is especially emphasized through multiple shots of mirrors, glasses and reflections which underline sparkling surfaces of future modern “city of glass”. Some examples are particularly noticeable during conversations scenes between the detective and several characters such as Haru, her brother or Nemuro’s colleague (Images 18 to 22). Characters are literally decentred in favour of their reflections, like spectral and sometimes deformed doubles haunting and potentially threatening their personal existence (Image 23).

Furthermore, through reflections, people are emptied from their social and material substance to remain in an illusory existence made of appearing and disappearing like reflections they are. Haru’s brother appears with potential clues before disappearing in a workers’ riot. In that way, failure of the detective’s investigation highlights failure of modern Japan based on excessive logic. Like Jean Epstein says, “invaded by this outrageous and intransigent rationalism, human mind, which, naturally and fully, lives in a complex, rational and irrational, determined and undetermined way, becomes as paralysed and half-devitalised, mechanised, left unproductive in other way than his deductive specialisation. Thus, man is reduced to, more and more, work only as an anonymous cog inside humanity machine which administers universe according perfectly generals and absolutely impersonal principles irrespective of individual originalities”<sup>xv</sup>.

That’s the point of the final dream of the detective. After a struggle in a bar in which he was investigating some time ago, the detective finds his way to Haru’s and collapses in a strange fantasy through which the young woman, in some kind of surrealistic “vampirism” squeezing, subdues him in order to replace her missing husband, that is an imaginary person (Nemuro never appears but through an only picture), an unreal mask she wants real (Image 24). For a moment, film collapses in a negative pattern literally “atomising” the detective but maintaining him in an impossible and untenable position in which he is threatened of vanishing. Following dream echoes like a reminiscence of following consequences resulted of apocalyptic nuclear disaster the following dream acts. City appears like a desolated desert inhabited only by void and hallucinations ending on the vision of desert rising again (Images 25 to 28). Dream highlights the way Teshigahara considers this new everyday life, that is, to quote Lipovetsky, an “era of emptiness”, a social desert “without catastrophe, without tragedy nor vertigo” in which massive desertion is the imprint of the failure of “all the institutions” and “values” of society<sup>xvi</sup>. Consequently, crisis in Teshigahara’s films is a crisis of institutions. Moreover, desertion and emptying of social body echo rising of individualism but also depiction of Japanese man as fallen figure who’ve lost power and authority after 1945’s defeat.

Evaporation of man remains a concerning subject resulted from crisis of identity related to modernisation. A phenomena which still concerns some more contemporary filmmakers. One of the most famous is Kurosawa Kiyoshi. In *Cure* (1997), he illustrates depersonalisation and failure of logic through an amnesiac and unnamed man who uses hypnosis to convert people into murderers (Image 29). And like Teshigahara, Kurosawa emphasizes crisis of institutions as each one of these potential killers embodies specific social role such as education or medical communities. In *Kairo* (2000), he crystallises this crisis through evaporation of the entire Tôkyô population as a result of the lack of boundaries between apathetic living people and ghosts invading reality through screens and Internet (Images 30 and 31).

To conclude, Teshigahara depicts modern Japan as haunted by spectres of modernity, that is a society in which traditional foundations like family or work have been “erased” by post-war Western reforms. Through this transition from tradition to modernisation, Japan hides itself behind the illusory mask of a functional system. People are their own spectres and life is like a dream in which “the perceived world endures only through the reflections, shadows, levels, and horizons between things (which are not things and are not nothing, but on the contrary mark out by themselves the fields of possible variation in the same thing and the same world)”<sup>xvii</sup>.

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<sup>i</sup> Noël Burch, *Pour un observateur lointain : Forme et signification dans le cinéma japonais*, Cahier du Cinéma Editions Gallimard, 1982, p.329

<sup>ii</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 1 – L'Image-mouvement*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, coll. Critique, 1983, p.141

<sup>iii</sup> Roland Barthes, *L'Empire des signes*, Paris, Editions du Seuil, [1970] 2005, p.124

<sup>iv</sup> Takeo Doi, *Le Jeu de l'Indulgence*, Paris, l'Asiathèque, 1988, p.73

<sup>v</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2 – L'Image-temps*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, coll. Critique, 1985, p.173

<sup>vi</sup> Edgar Morin, *Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire, essai d'anthropologie*, Collection « Arguments » réédition, avec une nouvelle préface de l'auteur, [1978] 2013, p.97

<sup>vii</sup> Maurice Pinguet, *La Mort volontaire au Japon*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1984, p.57

<sup>viii</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, « Tel », 1945, p.99

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid*, p.250

<sup>x</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le Visible et l'Invisible*, Saint-Amand, Editions Gallimard, 1964, p.294

<sup>xi</sup> Yamada Koichi, *Lettre de Tokyo : Teshigahara contre Zatôichi*, In *Cahiers du cinéma* n°206, novembre 1968, p.8

<sup>xii</sup> Léna Mauger & Stéphane Remael, *Les Evaporés du Japon. Enquête sur le phénomène des disparitions volontaires*, Paris, Editions des Arènes, 2014, p.37

<sup>xiii</sup> Roland Barthes, *L'Empire des signes*, op. cit., p.51

<sup>xiv</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>xv</sup> Jean Epstein, *Ecrits sur le cinéma Tome 2*, Paris, Seghers, Cinémaclub, 1975, p.258

<sup>xvi</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky, *L'Ere du vide*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1989, p.50

<sup>xvii</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, Paris, Editions Gallimard, coll. NRF, 1960, p.202