

The Cinematic Quality in Machines and Architecture: Focus on Masakazu Nakai's Film Theory and Le Corbusier's "Eyes Which Do Not See"

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Le Corbusier for Nakai Masakazu

When people wanted a new order after the chaos of World War I, Le Corbusier (1887-1965) proposed a new vision for architecture and town planning based on the model of machines. That is to say, machines which had once destroyed the city and massacred people during the war became a model for the new order after the war, though most people at this time couldn't appreciate machines like Le Corbusier. Therefore Le Corbusier wanted people to find beauty and harmony in machines by looking at them with a fresh eye (*des yeux neufs*). That was the reason why he criticized people for their conservatism by calling them "eyes which do not see" (*des yeux qui ne voient pas*) in *Towards a New Architecture* (1922) ⁽¹⁾.

Though it seems that the expression, "eyes which do not see" has no relation with cinema, Masakazu Nakai (1900-1952) quoted it in the context of film theory for two reasons in his early essay, "The Structure of Mechanical Beauty" (1929). One reason was to borrow Le Corbusier's mechanical aesthetics. The other reason was to connect Le Corbusier's idea to cinema by "eyes which do not see". That is to say, Nakai thought that Le Corbusier's "fresh eye", which is the opposite of "eyes which do not see", was the camera lens. Nakai referred two times to Le Corbusier's "eyes which do not see" in that essay:

Le Corbusier's "eyes which do not see", Béla Balázs's "the visible man" and Dziga Vertov's "Kino-Eye", all talked about the development of vision and the evolution of aesthetics. These will be important. Balázs said that the appearance of cinema changed our way of seeing as the typography changed our way of thinking ⁽²⁾.

Le Corbusier's "fresh eye" versus "eyes which do not see", Balázs's "the visible man" and Vertov's "Kino-Eye", talked of the camera's lens as a lifeless eye. Now the vision of the lifeless eye penetrates into the human eye. That was a big event in contemporary art, architecture, painting, and sculpture.

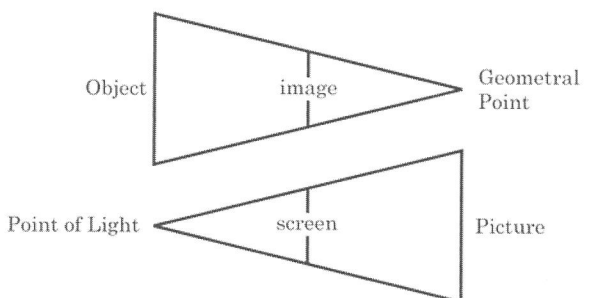


Figure 1

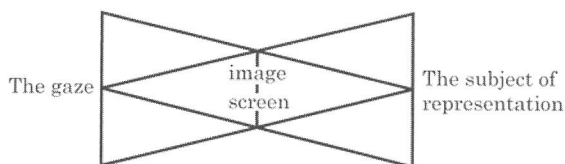


Figure 2

FIGURES: Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire XI, texte établi par Jacques-Alain Miller, Seuil, Paris, 1973, p85 (Figure 1), p97 (Figure 2).*

Art tends to imitate the lens as a transparent pupil, the shutter as a mechanical blink, and the light of a projector as a burning gaze. It means that the individual imitates the collective ⁽³⁾.

In these quotations, Nakai compares Le Corbusier, an architect unconnected with the cinema, with cinema theorist, Balázs, and film maker, Vertov. Can we truly interpret Le Corbusier's "fresh eye" as a cinematic term? The purpose of this paper is to first consider what cinema brings to us according to Nakai's thought, and finally to clarify the cinematic nature in Le Corbusier's architecture.

The Concepts of Space in Nakai's Cinema Theory

After World War II, freedom of speech was guaranteed, and Nakai developed his early thoughts about cinema in several essays. In them Nakai thought that the typical representation medium in each age determined the structures of each subject, and explained that the reconstruction of a subject depended on the change of the mode of visual representation. According to Nakai, there were two big changes until this point in time. The first one was the appearance of perspective painting, and the second was the popularization of cinema that was in progress at that time.

In feudal times, people were bound by social classes from the highest to the lowest rank. However, when perspective paintings situated the viewer at a geometrical point from which to observe, everyone could have their own point of view, and was freed from the vertical hierarchy of feudal space. As a result, everyone became equal and had his or her own subjectivity. Nakai called such space and subject, produced by perspective painting, "Systematic Space" (Taikai-Kukan) and "subjective self" (Shukan).

However, the birth of "subjective self" was the start of its collapse. When everyone became equal, naturally they started to compete, companies were organized, machines were invented, and capitalism began. As a result, individuals were organized into the collective and became cogs in the machine. They no longer stood at a privileged point of viewing, and started to feel alienated. Then, the individualism produced by

perspective painting no longer functioned, and its space was filled with "uneasiness". This is the reason why "a gaze looking back at us" appears in Romanticism. In a sense, this gaze was what the viewer alienated from society had lost: the subject was split into the appropriate self and the actual self as a miserable cog in machine.

Then the cinema appeared from out of all other machines, and it presented a new balance in regard to space and subject. In the space of perspective painting, an artist represents himself by his work of art, and we empathize with him through it. But, in cinema, we can not always empathize with an artist's subjectivity. Instead, there is a collaborative nature in not only the film making process, but also the machines themselves. Therefore seeing a film means accepting the collective nature of cinema. Film and the viewer encounter each other happily as two machines or two collectives in a movie house, instead of in a factory. We thus find ourselves as a positive cog in the machine of cinema, because photography reproduces an object mechanically.

The moving image consists of innumerable photographs. The real object and the object in the photograph identically correspond, because the photograph is a mechanical reproduction of the light which an object emitted. When we see a photograph, we connect the past light to the present, and when we see a series of such photographs in cinematic form, they reproduce a past time and space. As a result the space produced by photography and cinema stimulate our historical sense. Nakai called it "projection space (or functional space)" (Zusiki-Kukan).

Moreover, the various shots are edited together into a montage in cinema. Then the join between these shots forces us to decide the relation between each shot and the significance of these shots. Then the viewer becomes a new critical subject with a historical perspective. Nakai called it "historical subject" (Rekishiteki Shutai-sei), and called the join in the montage "cutting space" (Setsudan-Kukan). In short, when the silver screen replaced the canvas, critics replaced empathy, collectivism replaced individualism, and the split subject became normal.

Lacan's Gaze as Rear Projection

Blow-Up (1959) by Julio Cortázar (1914-1984), a writer who was influenced by Surrealism, is a short story that gives us an example of Nakai's argument about cinema. Michel, who is the hero in this story, took a photograph of a boy and a woman, mismatched in their ages, enlarges it into almost the size of a poster and tacks up the enlargement on a wall. One day, the image of the photograph starts to move like a movie, and he knows that what he imagined when he took the photograph of the couple was much less horrible than the reality. Then he became his camera. This is the reason why Cortázar sometimes refers the hero as 'we' ⁽⁴⁾.

It is not only Nakai and Cortázar who insist that photography and cinema have something to do with uneasiness and change in us. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) uses the concept of "shock effect" based on trauma in Freud's psychoanalysis to explicate that the camera can give us access to an objective vision freed from empathy. On the other hand, based on Jacques Lacan's (1901-1981) psychoanalytical notion of "gaze", Roland Barthes (1915-1980) defined "punctum" as a sting, a speck, a cut and a little hole like an element which rises from the scene, and shoots out like an arrow, and pierces the viewer ⁽⁵⁾.

Nakai also referred to psychoanalysis in *The Introduction of the Aesthetic* (1951), and divided the conscious into three parts: "direct projection" as a reflex action, "upper projection" as conscious and subconscious (or ego and super-ego), and "basic projection" as unconscious (or id). Then to explain "basic projection", Nakai used again the former ideas of "a gaze that looks back at us" and "uneasiness":

Basic projection is my own gaze that I am unaware of, which lies deeper than what I know and think. I can't escape from that gaze, and I feel uneasy. None can fix on it. This image which the gaze projects is a "basic projection" ⁽⁶⁾.

Here, we notice that Nakai thought the gaze was concerned with not only cinema but also the unconscious; the unconscious is similar to cinema. In fact, we can find something in common between Nakai's gaze and Lacan's

gaze. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan said as follows:

In the scopical field, everything is articulated between two terms that act in an antinomic way – on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them. This is how one should understand those words, so strongly stressed, in the Gospel, *They have eyes that they might not see*. That they might not see what (pour ne pas voir)? Precisely, that things are looking at them (les choses les regardent) ⁽⁷⁾.

Furthermore we can find other ideas in common between Lacan and Nakai in *Seminar XI*. There is one figure that shows two triangles (Fig.1) and another figure showing that these triangles overlap (Fig.2). In the two figures, the two triangles widening to the left illustrate the system of perspective painting and the two triangles widening to the right shows the rear projection of cinema. In rear projection, the projector and the viewer face each other from the opposite side of the screen. Lacan uses the point of light in rear projection as a model for the "gaze". In short, these figures show that a psychoanalytical subject is produced from cinema.

To understand the psychoanalytic subject produced by cinema, we can refer to the photograph in the *Rear-Screen Projections* (1980-81) taken by Cindy Sherman (1954-). In these photographs, Sherman stands in front of the screen, where an image is projected from behind it. We can see an uneasy feeling appearing on her face as if she fears someone's gaze. If we regard the gaze that Sherman fears as the light of the projector from behind the screen, we can say that it is her own gaze, according to Nakai and Lacan, because Nakai thought the uneasy gaze is the viewer's own, and Lacan also said that the gaze was a part of the subject that detached itself from him, in the chapter "The Split between the Eye and the Gaze" of *Seminar XI*.

What Sherman wanted to take as her own portrait, might not be her own figure, but the light behind the screen. Just as Sherman faces her own gaze through self-portrait photograph and rear projection, psychoanalysis was invented to save the subject from a crisis in the machine age, and the photography and cinema was born from among the machines, to produce a new subject suitable for the mechanical age.

Conclusion: the Cinematic Nature in Le Corbusier

Based on what we know about Nakai's thought thus far, let us attempt to extend the consideration to Le Corbusier. In Le Corbusier's works such as *La Maison des Hommes* (1942), *Modulor I* (1950), and *Petite Maison* (1954), we find a man with a big eye. Though there are no captions in his original sketches, Alexander Tzonis adds the caption of "eyes that see" in *Le Corbusier: The Poetics of Machine and Metaphor* (2001) ⁽⁸⁾. As the "eyes that see" is in opposition with "eyes which do not see", we may say that "eyes that see" means a "fresh eye" which Nakai regarded as the eye of the camera. Then the man with a big eye is *The Man with Movie Camera*, the title of a 1929 film by Vertov.

The relation between architecture and the inhabitant or visitor corresponds to the relation between cinema and the viewer, or the relation between the photograph, which became a movie, and Michel, who became a lens of a camera, in *Blow-Up*. The function of cinema resembles the function of Le Corbusier's architecture, as a machine to give birth to a man with "New Spirit", the title of Le Corbusier's magazine (*Esprit-Nouveau*, 1920-1925). That is to say, Le Corbusier's architecture gazes at us like a projector. The white wall of the purist architecture might be a silver screen in silent film era.

NOTES

- (1) Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture* (1923), Flammarion, Paris, 1995.
- (2) Nakai Masakazu, 'Kikaibi no Kozo' (1929), in *Nakai Masakazu Zenshu* Vol.3, Bijutsu-Shuppansha, 1964, pp.242-243.
- (3) Ibid., pp.244-245.
- (4) Julio Cortázar, *Blow-Up, and Other Stories*, trans. Paul Blackburn (1967), Pantheon Books, New York, 1985, pp.114-131.
- (5) Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, New York, 1981.
- (6) Nakai Masakazu, *Bigaku-Nyumon* (1951), Asahi-Shinbunsha, 1975, pp.115-116.
- (7) *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alain Sheridan (1978), Norton, 1998, p109.
- (8) Alexander Tzonis, *Le Corbusier: The Poetics of Machine and Metaphor*, Thames and Hudson, 2001, p.22.