

Power Made Visible: Photography and Postwar Japan's Elusive Reality

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Despite the impact of the Allied occupation (1945–52), Japanese photography in the immediate postwar period was neither “art” nor “documentary” by American definitions. Instead, as the vigorous 1953 debate over “realism” shows, photographers such as Domon Ken and critics such as Tanaka Masao and Watanabe Kosho insisted that photography—at least real photography—was a political practice. It was political not because its aesthetic accomplishments bolstered national prestige in the arts nor because it provided visual evidence for public policies by documenting social conditions. A real photograph, whether of a beauty, a beggar, or a bourgeois, attempted to make manifest a reality often invisible to the naked eye: the reality of power and how power ought to work after Japan's defeat. These photographic practices show us that postwar conditions were so unsettled that the very nature of social reality—what it was, how one should see it, what one could hope for—was still undefined. By participating in the ideological effort to “constitute reality,” photography in Japan sought to establish political, social, and aesthetic norms that were taken for granted elsewhere.

“WARRIOR IN WHITE” is an arresting image (*Hakui no yūshi*, figure 1). The two crude prostheses and the walking stick create a tripod, mimicking photographic equipment and implicitly challenging us to think about photographic practices and interpretation. By today's criteria and also by the standards of 1950s America, this picture can be categorized as either documentary or art. If we start asking questions about the body poised above those false limbs, about the trauma that severed those thighs, about this *yūshi*'s experiences after the war, we may not get answers from the photograph itself, but we are treating it as testimony about a particular person's life and about Japanese society before, during, and after the Allied occupation (1945–52).

But this is not the only way to see it. Nakamura Rikko's (1912–95) artful idiom is also recognizably modernist. In this view, the former warrior is not an individual or even an icon but a column of white supported by a delicate black base and an angled black line. The faint grid pattern of the sidewalk sets off



Figure 1. Nakamura Rikko, *Hakui no yūshi* (Warrior in White), 1954.

the elaborate gray shadow; the textured band of broken soil intersects with smoother grays of cloth and concrete. Examined from this perspective, the photograph raises questions about the graphic power of simplicity. This aesthetic question addresses not a three-dimensional lost world captured by the camera more than half a century ago but the two-dimensional paper world in front of us. In other words, depending on how you look at it, “Warrior in White” can

participate in either of two discourses, with two sets of questions and two sets of institutional practices.¹

This ambidextrous quality is not inherent in the image itself but in how we have come to look at photographs from this period. Nakamura's "Warrior" and most Japanese photographs from the immediate postwar years have been treated as documentary or as art or as both, and slotted into familiar mid-twentieth-century American paradigms. And why shouldn't they be? The medium of the camera, so universal in its mechanics, was the object of intense international exchange after the war as well as before. Photographers carrying a social conscience or aspiring to artistic expression (and often they were the same person) crossed the Pacific regularly. The Allied occupation, primarily an American show, encouraged practices and institutions fundamental to both understandings of photography. Convergence between Japanese and American photography would not be surprising.

As we survey Japanese institutions and practices, there are indeed marked similarities. Popular magazines, the primary support for documentary work, were abundant in both countries; galleries and art museums sustained aspirations to cultural prestige. Although the postwar attempt in Japan at a general-interest photography magazine modeled on *Life* failed, pictures of the nation's painful recovery filled periodicals.² By 1949, despite shortages of paper and ink, at least seventeen magazines devoted specifically to photography glided through the hands of occupation censors, usually spot-checked only after publication.³ Many of these publications featured American developments. For instance, *Camera* ran a regular column called *Amerika Camera Nyuzu* as well as stories on notable photographers working in the documentary mode such as Carl Mydans, Margaret Bourke-White, and Horace Bristol. Along with documentary

¹The Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography exhibited Nakamura Rikko's *Hakui no yūshi* in part I of its four-part *Shōwa shashin no 1945–1989* in 2007. See the catalogue for this exhibition, *Shōwa no fūkei* (2007, 23).

²Photographer Natori Yonosuke founded *Shukan Sun News*, a photographically illustrated weekly magazine modeled on *Life*, in November 1947 (see Putzar 1987, 8).

³The Prange Collection at the University of Maryland houses a portion of the documents related to the occupation censorship of Japanese publications from 1945 to September 1949, when censorship ended. Because no systematic and comprehensive effort to create an archive was made during the occupation and some unknowable percentage of these materials was lost, it is not possible to make unqualified statements about the methods and extent of the censors' work. However, the censorship of photography magazines appears to have been very slight indeed.

The photography magazines in the Prange collection include *Amachua Shashin Sōsho* (Amateur Photography Series), *Asahi Camera*, *Camera*, *Fotogurafi*, *Foto Purei* (Photo Play), *Kamera Taimuzu* (Camera Times), *Kamera Tsūshin* (Camera News), *Kamera Puresu* (Camera Press), *Photo Art* (the 1949 successor to *Shashin Satsuei Sōsho*), *Sankei Camera*, *Shashin Kagaku*, *Shashin Saron*, *Shashin Sokuryō* (Photography Survey), *Shashin Techō* (Photography Notebook), *Shashin Tenbō*, *Shashin to Gijutsu* (Photography and Its Techniques), and *Tokushū Camera*. The circulation of these magazines varied from 2,500 to about 35,000 per month. Other photography magazines from the era included *Camera Geijutsu*, *Camera Mainichi*, *Foto Taimuzu*, *Nippon Camera*, and *Sankei Camera*.

work, Japanese periodicals also alerted their readers to developments in art photography. *Asahi Camera*, for example, ran a story on postwar American art photography in November 1949.⁴ More significantly, the occupation painstakingly created a more accessible infrastructure for the arts, including photographic art, and supported joint curatorial ventures. As early as the spring of 1946, a few small private galleries opened amid the ruins of bombed-out Tokyo. By 1953, the year after the occupation officially ended, the gleaming new National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, presented its first photography exhibition, *Gendai shashin ten: Nihon to Amerika* (Contemporary Photography: Japan and America), with the foreign images selected by Edward Steichen (1879–1973), celebrated director of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.⁵

Given these powerful American paradigms, photography in postwar Japan might have seemed destined to serve as documentary in popular magazines and poised to achieve the status of fine art with a place in museums.⁶ But it did not.⁷ Indeed, despite all the seeming convergences of equipment, people, publications, and institutions, Japanese photography and American photography performed radically different roles in their respective societies. My argument is that however these photographs may look to us today, however easily we may draw parallels between mid-twentieth-century Japanese and American images, in order to understand what photography meant during this period in Japan, we need to jettison received categories, defamiliarize the pictures, and, most especially, recover the discursive practices that gave them significance.

⁴See Kimura Ihei, Kanamaru Shigene, and Ina Nobuo (1949, 108). They discuss Yousuf Karsh and Wee Gee in relation to Picasso.

⁵The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, a public museum under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, opened in 1952, the final year of the Allied occupation of Japan. There are National Museums of Modern Art in other major Japanese cities as well. By contrast, the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York is a private institution that opened in 1929. In 1937, MOMA led the way in art photography, presenting Beaumont Newhall's epoch-making history of photography exhibition, *Photography, 1839–1937*, followed in 1938 by Lincoln Kirstein's *American Photographs*, an exhibition of the work of Walker Evans. In 1940, MOMA was the first art museum in the world to establish a department of photography.

⁶The Allied occupation of Japan, almost entirely an American operation, emphasized the necessity of art to democracy by creating new museums, transforming old imperial museums into national museums, and mounting a survey of all the art in the country so that it could be available for public viewing. The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, and museums elsewhere were the result of this effort. The occupation as a whole was not specifically concerned with photography as an art form, although many people serving in the U.S. military, such as Edward Steichen, were. For more on occupation initiatives in relation to art, see Thomas W. Burkman (1988) and Mark Sandler (1997).

⁷I have written about photography's tenuous position in Japanese museums in the essays "History and Anti-History: Photography Exhibitions and Japan's National Identity" (2000) and "Raw Photographs and Cooked History: Photography's Ambiguous Place in Tokyo's Museum of Modern Art" (1996).

Let me be precise about the question I am pursuing. I am not primarily interested in treating these Japanese images as “evidence” in the sense that art historian John Tagg uses the term. For Tagg, the question is what a photograph means to us today. In this search, he insists, contra Roland Barthes, that the meaning of a photograph cannot rely on some “pre-photographic reality” but instead emerges through current social and semiotic processes, of which the photograph is an element. As he puts it, “It is to the reality not of the past, but of present meanings and of changing discursive systems that we must therefore turn our attention” (1988, 2). Tagg’s focus is on what photographs mean to us now, what evidence they provide today, and he rightly asks us to consider the history of what constitutes evidence. The question that I raise is different. Although we can, and perhaps should, ask what poignant images such as Nakamura’s might mean to us today, my focus here is on the question of what these photographs meant in Japan then.

Recovering past ways of seeing is even more difficult than Tagg’s project of investigating the history of contemporary evidentiary standards because we cannot hope—indeed, it would be fraudulent to pretend—to see these pictures, in a direct and unmediated way, as they were seen half a century ago in a war-devastated country. Even in the present, seeing precisely as another sees is impossible. We will never know exactly how light strikes the eyes of the person standing beside us, exactly how the colors we look at together are refracted by the lenses of his or her pupils. If this is so now, how can we hope to know how people more than fifty years ago not only saw but also felt and thought about an image, even if we have that same image before us? What we can hope to do, by creating a dialectic between the brute presence of a photograph and its circulation through publication and commentary in the late 1940s and 1950s, is to attune ourselves to the particularities of postwar Japanese discursive practices. The distinctiveness of the Japanese enterprise emerges when we look at the place of photographs in that society, read what photographers and critics were saying about those efforts, and reexamine the images, noting the disparity between what was said about them then and how they may look to us now.

By these means, this essay explores not only photography’s position in postwar society but also what that position tells us about Japan after the war. As I will demonstrate, conditions were so unsettled, there was so little agreement about the fundamental nature of power and the proper values of society, that photographers embraced as their primary mission the goal of establishing reality, a fugitive reality lost in the war-torn landscape. They hoped by ardent looking to constitute the very ground on which their visual practices would have meaning in society. With this at stake, the category of “art” held little allure, and documentary work, with its necessary reliance on established social consensus and relations of power, was not strictly possible.⁸

⁸John Tagg emphasizes the ways in which documentary photography was beholden to state structures and established relations of power. According to Tagg, even socially conscious efforts such as

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After the war, Japanese photographers and critics claimed for their medium the status of neither art nor documentary. Instead, the word on the streets, in darkrooms, and in photo magazines was “realism,” expressed interchangeably as *riarizumu* or *rearizumu* (Japanese forms of the English word) or *genjitsu*.⁹ Photographers and critics wrote of wanting the *riaru* (real) and *riaritii* (reality), of finding what was actually there. Indeed, the era from 1945 to 1955 has been dubbed Japanese photography’s “age of realism.” As with most attempts to label an era, we must take this appellation with a grain of salt. Similar photographic styles depicting similar subjects emerged well before the surrender, so the defeat of 1945 neither ruptured old photographic trends nor created entirely new ones.¹⁰ Continuities in personnel matched continuities of style and subject matter. Wartime cameramen, including realism’s leading advocate, photographer Domon Ken (1909–90), moved smoothly into the postwar era.¹¹ Although “realism” was the dominant idiom of the age, it was hardly hegemonic. Photography magazines from 1945 to 1955 displayed everything from snapshots of babies to deliberately stylized studio work. Even Domon Ken dabbled in work that he never claimed was “real,” such as his erotic series *Nikutai ni kansuru hasshō* (Eight Chapters on the Flesh) from 1950. Nevertheless, the decade between 1945 and 1955 was distinctive in its concentration on an idea of realism and, within this decade, 1953 stands at the apex. Looking back over that year in

Farm Security Administration photography in the 1930s, although they opened up new sites for cultural practice, also “worked to effect an imaginary identification of viewer and image, reader and representation, which would suppress difference and seal them into the paternalistic relations of domination and subordination on which documentary’s truth effects depended” (1988, 12).

⁹My first thought was that these different terms might suggest analytical distinctions, but they seem to be used interchangeably.

¹⁰Not surprisingly, debates rage over the degree of change in postwar Japanese photography. A sample of the range of opinion can be found in Anne Wilkes Tucker et al. (2003). In that volume, Takeba Joe argues that “[p]ostwar photography would develop with documentary realism at its core, but this would not represent a continuation of the prewar explorations” (157). Kaneko Ryūichi argues for greater continuity, claiming that “the photojournalism epitomized by *Front* [the wartime propaganda magazine] ... sowed the seeds of the postwar photo-realism movement” (193).

¹¹No artists or photographers were prosecuted on war crimes charges. Domon Ken was a prolific photographer and writer. Examples of his images can be found in the thirteen-volume *Domon Ken zenshu* (1983–85) and in some of his writings in the two-volume *Shinu Koto to Iru Koto* (1974), but neither compendium pretends to be comprehensive. The critical literature in Japanese on Domon is also vast. Overviews include Abe Hiroyuki (1997) and Tsuzuki Masaaki (2004). Little has been written on Domon in English, but see Edward Putzar (1994).

The reader will note that the Japanese photography world was almost entirely male—hence terms like *cameraman*, a term often used in Japanese for *shashinka* (photographer). A few intrepid Japanese women photographers, notably Tokiwa Toyoko (born 1930), worked during this period, but they were even rarer than Western women with cameras. Iizawa Kōtarō includes Tokiwa, the only woman, in his book on twenty-five outstanding photographers, *Shashin to kotoba* (2003).

a December essay, Domon would declare, "It is not an exaggeration to call 1953 the victory year for *rearizumu*" (1953d, 174).¹² But as Domon and others well knew, it was no simpler to claim to be "real" than to claim to be "art" or "documentary." Insisting, as Domon did, that "if it is not realistic, it is not photography" (quoted in Putzar 1987, 9), clarified nothing and necessarily entailed vigorous debate.

One of the first questions is where the polemic on *riarizumu* emerged. Camera magazines, rather than books, newspapers, or museum catalogues, became the primary venue in which the realists attacked one another, largely unmolested by any antirealist detractors. Although the 1953 debate coincided with the Tokyo Museum of Modern Art's first photography exhibit, *Gendai shashin ten: Nihon to Amerika*, running from August 29 to October 4, 1953, these writers by and large made no attempt to engage the proposition that photography should be treated as art. No reference was made to American curator Edward Steichen's pronouncement that "[p]hotography practised by the artist becomes a vehicle for new and penetrating emotional expression of reality and a dynamic process for giving form to ideas" (1953, 3). Nor was there any intense discussion of the phenomenon of placing in the museum images that in other contexts might be read as documentary, such as Dorothea Lange's migrant mother, Yoshida Yoshio's work "Placard" of a street demonstration, or Suzuki Naoji's image of repatriates returning to Japan from Anatahan Island. In fact, Domon Ken ignored the presence of six of his own images on the museum's walls.¹³ It was not as artists that Japanese realists sought to present themselves, and it was not in art books or museum catalogues that they sought to define themselves. Instead, realism's physical presence in the public sphere was manifest in the accessible venues of hobby magazines and the occasional group show.¹⁴

Of course, knowing where "realism" appeared does not tell us what "realism" was. To clarify the concept, I will follow a debate that played out between April and December 1953 in the pages of one influential monthly

¹²The cover of the magazine presents the title both in *katakana*, traditionally transcribed as *Kamera*, and in Romanization, *Camera*. I have chosen to refer to the magazine as *Camera* to recognize this cosmopolitan gesture on the part of its publishers who were, in fact, keenly interested in developments in photography outside Japan.

¹³The photographs by Domon Ken in the *Gendai shashin ten: Nihon to Amerika* exhibition were "Takahama Kyoshi" (poet); "Kokei Kobayashi" (artist); "Phoenix surmounting the Phoenix Hall, Byōdō-in Temple"; "Kisshoten, Joruriji Temple"; "Woman in Ponto Street, Kyoto"; and "Shibaraku."

¹⁴Domon Ken would not have his first one-man show until the spring of 1955 (see *Photo Art* 1955). Photography books, expensive and durable objects, were a less important form of presentation in the 1940s and 1950s than they were later. Martin Parr and Gerry Badger speak of Japanese photo-books in the 1960s and 1970s as "marking a highpoint in the history of the photobook, another of those brief periods, like Russia in the 1930s, when photographic book publishing was at the forefront of a cultural renaissance that touched all the arts" (2004, 267).

called *Camera*. Reestablished after the war in January 1946, *Camera* was hardly the only magazine to concern itself with the status of photography. Indeed, the debate over realism had many iterations in other magazines, including *Asahi Camera*, *Nippon Camera*, *Shashin Saron*, and *Photo Art*.¹⁵ However, the particular 1953 thread in *Camera* has the advantage of showcasing sophisticated contending views and a direct dialogue between practitioners and critics (in this case, between photographer Domon Ken and critics Tanaka Masao and Watanabe Kosho). Not only that, but these articles also give us some sense of the exchange between professional cameramen and hobbyists, an exchange marked by exhortations to pursue “reality.” With a circulation between 15,000 and 35,000, *Camera* boasted an avid readership of dedicated camera buffs who eagerly participated in monthly photography contests beginning in January 1950, sending their images to be judged and commented on by Domon and his fellow photographer Kimura Ihei (1901–74). Thus, defining “realism” in the pages of *Camera* was not just a theoretical exercise for professionals and critics but also shaped how weekend photographers chose their subjects and approaches in their defeated, but recovering, country. “Realism,” whatever else it might have been, was a social practice during these years.

The opening gambit in this debate was the surprising and, to some, alarming rejection of *riarizumu* by Domon Ken, the movement’s acknowledged leader. In his role as judge for *Camera*’s monthly amateur photography contest, Domon Ken was frequently irascible and gnostic. His April 1953 column revealed him in precisely this mood as he scolded his readers for the uninspired quality of that month’s submissions.¹⁶ Every month, 1,000 to 1,500 entries ranging widely in style and subject matter deluged *Camera*’s offices. Out of this group, Domon and Kimura choose twenty-three to twenty-five winners for publication and comment, carefully selecting images not only on the basis of technical accomplishment but also to represent a range of themes from portraits and pets to still lifes and landscapes.¹⁷ Domon’s April 1953 outburst took to task not all amateurs, only those who took photographs of vagrants, the people made homeless by wartime bombing and dislocation.¹⁸ Photographs of these destitute people, what had

¹⁵This magazine, like *Camera*, has a Romanized title as well as a *katakana* title that might be rendered *Foto A-to*, and here, too, I have chosen to use the Romanized title. In 1956, with the demise of *Camera*, Domon Ken moved to *Photo Art* and served as judge in their monthly amateur photography contests.

¹⁶Even Domon Ken’s October 1949 announcement that he would serve as a judge for amateur contests beginning in January 1950 sounds disgruntled as he asserts that photographers are not taken seriously enough.

¹⁷Domon explains the process of selection in “Futatabi shōhei no shashin in tsuite: Gamen no amasa to rearitii” (1953b).

¹⁸John W. Dower writes that in the sixty-six major cities that were bombed during the war, around 30 percent of the population was homeless: “In Tokyo, the largest metropolis, 65 percent of all

come to be known as “beggar photography” (*kojiki shashin*), constituted the core of *riarizumu*, and Domon's own work, and that of fellow contest judge, Kimura Ihei, had inspired thousands to venture forth to capture the desolation of Japan's postwar street life.

But in April 1953, Domon expressed nothing but exasperation with his amateur followers. Tired of looking at what he called imitative, uninspired snapshots on the same bleak theme, Domon urged his readers to use “their realistic eyes” (*riarisutikku na me*) to “take some beauty photos (*bijin shashin*) for once” (quoted in Tanaka 1953, 75), by which he meant pictures of pretty girls (figure 2). The wholesome beauties who smiled sweetly from so many magazines were hardly gritty sirens of the demi-monde, but, Domon appeared to suggest, they could be as real as any bum.

TANAKA MASAO AND THE REALITY OF RADICALISM

Domon's outburst, directed at the very realism he himself seemed to represent, alarmed the well-established photography critic Tanaka Masao (1912–87).¹⁹ In the very next issue of *Camera* (May 1953), Tanaka launched a sober and intelligent defense of “beggar photography” as the only way to grasp reality.²⁰ Tanaka begins this essay by claiming that images of street children, prostitutes, and beggars had become a ubiquitous theme or *mochiifu* for occupation-era photographers, both amateur and professional.²¹ And, as Tanaka notes, a common saying had it that “if you take beggars, you have realism” (1953, 73)²²—a saying very much in line with the widespread notion that documentary photographs provide access to social reality and that social reality is generally an unjust and doleful affair.²³ Tanaka, however, ardently denies the validity of this common view. Just taking a picture of a beggar, he argues, is not enough to give you “the real.”

How, then, does Tanaka define “real” photography? He expounds his “theory of beggar photography” by distinguishing unreal beggar images from real ones. As examples of illegitimate treatments of streetwalkers and panhandlers, Tanaka points to the work of Hayashi Tadahiko and Akiyama Shōtarō. He complains that although their subjects were appropriately down and out, the

residences were destroyed. In Osaka and Nagoya, the country's second and third largest cities, the figures were 57 and 89 percent” (1999, 45–47).

¹⁹Tanaka, the older brother of photographer Hamaya Hiroshi, had a long and distinguished career, helping to found the Japan Photo Critics Club in 1955 and serving as director of the *Nihon shashin kyōkai* (Photographic Society of Japan) and editor-in-chief of *Nihon Camera*.

²⁰As Tanaka says, the origin of the phrase *kojiki shashin* is unknown and did not refer to an established genre like “landscape photography” or “avant-garde photography.” Nevertheless, it was widely used.

²¹The widely used word *mochiifu*—originally from the English term “motif”—refers to subject matter, theme, or topic in general.

²²The phrase is *kojiki o utsuseba riarizumu*.

²³This equation of reality with dour social problems would serve as the *raison d'être* of the *Nihon Bearizumu Shashin Shūdan* (Japanese Realist Photographers Association), founded in 1963.

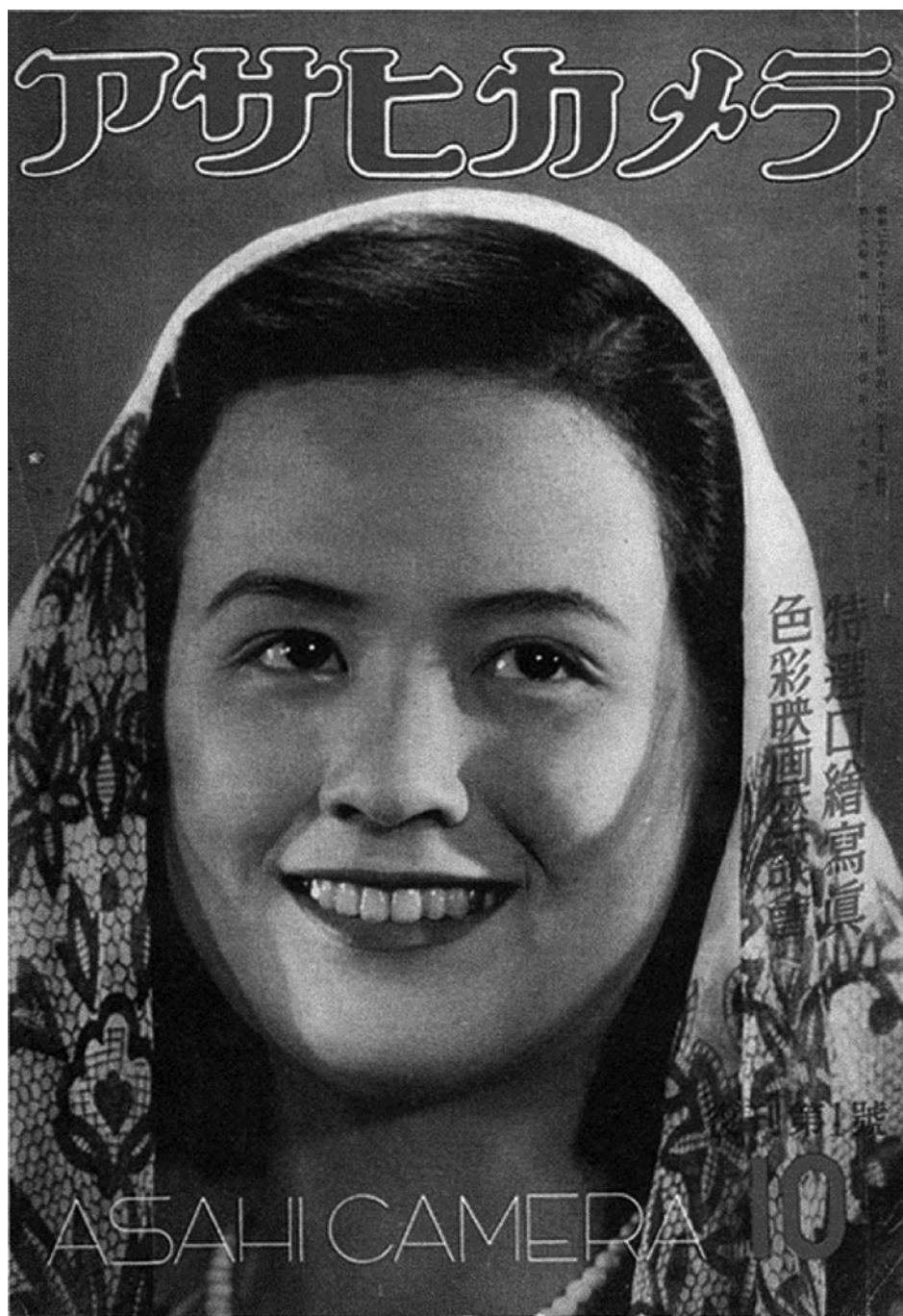


Figure 2. Kimura Ihei, cover photograph of Sumi Rieko, *Asahi Camera*, October 1949.

photographers romanticized conditions. For bracing views of reality, Tanaka turns to two series on Tokyo created in 1949–50: *Shin Tokyo Arubamu* (New Tokyo Album) by Kimura Ihei and *Machi* (City) by Domon Ken.²⁴ Initially, Tanaka tells us, these great street photographers operated out of mundane curiosity (*fūzokuteki kyōmi*). Rather crudely, they presented the misery of the ragged alley dwellers of Shinjuku and the shoeshine boys in Ginza without any general theory of “the real.”²⁵ However, as Kimura and Domon concentrated on down-and-out street people over time, they began to recognize “that the depiction of actual living human beings is only possible when human beings are captured in connection with other human beings and with society” (Tanaka 1953, 74). In other words, only gradually did Kimura and Domon achieve the social awareness that Tanaka thinks crucial to photographic realism. Only then could they make real photographs and instruct amateur photographers to do likewise through *Camera*'s monthly contests. True reality involves not just a particular subject but a particular subjectivity.

Tanaka's concern for social awareness sounds as though he were advocating a type of “beggar photography” similar to American documentary work made under the auspices of the Farm Security Administration or the Photo League: hard-hitting views of down-and-out life that cry out for social action. But it looks different. The images he praises in the series by Domon and Kimura present little poverty and illustrate no imperative for social remedy. Only one of these sixteen images, Kimura's *Shinbashi* (*Shin Tokyo Arubamu* no. 6), shows a ragged vagrant.²⁶ Many of the others do not attest to hard times at all, including ones Tanaka chose to illustrate his essay, such as Domon's full-faced young woman behind a statute of a *tanuki* or raccoon dog (figure 3).²⁷ This strange disparity between Tanaka's words and his illustrations demonstrates that Japanese “realism” was a complex category, less legible than American documentary.

²⁴Kimura Ihei's *Shin Tokyo Arubamu* has ten images in all, with the first two appearing together as no. 1. The series was published intermittently between July 1949 and May 1950 in *Camera*. Domon Ken's *Machi* has six images and appeared intermittently between October 1949 and July 1950, also in *Camera*. Sometimes the magazine paired Kimura and Domon; sometimes their work was displayed alone.

²⁵The Ministry of Health and Welfare reported in 1948 that there were 123,510 orphaned and homeless children. Dower writes, “many of these children lived in railroad stations, under trestles and railway overpasses, in abandoned ruins. They survived by their wits” (1999, 63). Shinjuku and Ginza are sections of Tokyo.

²⁶Kimura Ihei, *Shinbashi*, from *Shin Tokyo Arubamu* (no. 6), published in the December 1949 issue of *Camera*, shows a homeless man in dirty clothes looking at a public sign.

²⁷Along with Kimura's *Shinbashi* and Domon's *Hato no machi*, Tanaka illustrates his essay with three other photographs: Kimura Ihei, *Asakusa Kōen* (Asakusa Park), *Shin Tokyo Arubamu* no. 1, 1949, of well-dressed people sitting in a sunny park listening to a speech; Kimura Ihei, *Aoba dōri nite* (Ginza) (Aoba Avenue, Ginza), *Shin Tokyo Arubamu* no. 3, 1949, of a middle-class woman contemplating a purchase; and, Domon Ken, *Katsugiyu no ko* (Child with Bundle), *Machi* no. 6, 1950, of a girl sleeping on a bundle in the train.



Figure 3. Domon Ken, *Hato no machi* (Pigeon Town), *Machi* no. 3, *Camera*, December 1949.

How are we to understand this tension between Tanaka's stated position and his exemplary photographs? When we step back from Tanaka's text, we see that he postulates two realities. One reality is mechanical, imitative, and superficial; the other, what he calls "true reality" (*shin no genjitsu*), is realized only when the camera's mechanics join with the photographer's consciousness of larger social forces. As Tanaka puts it,

Even though the camera may focus on the actual figure of a beggar without any falsification, this is not adequate for the depiction of true reality. In such a photograph, a mere mechanical realism (*kikaiteki riarizumu*) exists between the camera and the beggar. Only when the photographer's thoughts and views of society are reflected in the framed representation (*gamen keishou*) brought about by the mechanics of the camera does true reality emerge. (1953, 75)

With effort, the photographer's consciousness will come to encompass not just poverty but also the vivid truth of class conflict from the workers' point of view. According to Tanaka, Domon's 1952 "May Day" series demonstrates precisely this union of subject matter and critical interpretation, but he does not show us these images.

Tanaka's idea of two realities will not startle those familiar with mid-twentieth-century epistemological debates. Indeed, it is almost as though Tanaka were echoing Georg Lukács's insistence that "the recognition of a fact or tendency as actually existing by no means implies that it must be accepted *as a reality constituting a norm for our own actions*. . . . There is always a reality more real and therefore more important than *isolated* facts and tendencies—namely, *the reality of the total process*, the totality of social development." Arguably, the very disciplines of history and the other social sciences were devised to transcend the particularity of isolated facts and the fragility of individual lives in order to focus on this second-order reality—called the "reality of the total process" by Lukács and "true reality" by Tanaka—as the only object worth knowing.²⁸ Tanaka espouses camera-work that mines the visible world for these hidden structures.

In this quest, Tanaka was at a disadvantage because photography's relationship with an abstraction like the "total process" seems tenuous, whereas concrete specificity is generally regarded as its forte. The camera's power lies in providing the anecdote to the perfectly captured instance, what Barthes will call "a certain but fugitive testimony," rather than a theoretical analysis that permits comprehensive knowledge.²⁹ A single photograph is but a specific instance, whereas "the total process" must incorporate all instances. When photography has

²⁸Michael Geyer deftly argues that the durability of individual lives, especially Holocaust biographies, challenges the very reasons for history: "For History was meant to transcend the unsteady and fragile life of individuals, the mere *Menschenalter*, in the continuity of such collectivities as the state, the nation, the people, or the religion, the *Zeitalter*. However, in the twentieth century, states, nations, and people ruptured, were killed, and disappeared, time and experience proved discontinuous, but lives continued inasmuch as people survived, often by sheer chance, and inasmuch as they succeeded in creating bonds of belonging, among which the care of the dead appears as one of the most essential tasks" (2005, 354).

²⁹Roland Barthes ruminates on the relationship between history and photography as follows: "A paradox: the same century invented History and Photography. But History is a memory fabricated according to positive formulas, a pure intellectual discourse which abolishes mythic Time; and the Photograph is a certain but fugitive testimony" (1981, 93).

served social theory, it has generally been through collections of images. By creating large archives, photographers such as Francis Galton, August Sanders, Lewis Hines, and the American Farm Security Administration photographers transformed photographs into tools of social analysis analogous to the surveys, statistics, and theories about human “types,” social structure, and historical development that undergird the social sciences’ search for reality.³⁰

What is novel about Tanaka’s position is that he understood photography as capable of expressing the “reality of the total process,” not through multiple negatives or multiple images, as did the photographers mentioned earlier, but in a single shot. For him, time is a multiplicity of processes that can be captured in a still. A true image presents us not just with the glistening orb of a unique moment but also conveys the sum of all the forces that shaped that moment. The photographer performs this trick of squeezing time, of compressing not just seconds but days, years, and even centuries into a single image, by inserting his own critical understanding. As such, a *real* image does not casually record the momentary and contingent reality before the lens; instead, it renders a larger, enduring, and capacious reality, along with the proper understanding of that reality, all within a single two-dimensional print. If we take Tanaka at his word, each real photographic image is a crowded space, a freeze-dried concentration of visual facts, historical momentum, and intellectual interpretation encompassing the entire world and its antecedents. Reality is the dialectically achieved consciousness of universal economic, social, and political processes expressed on light-sensitive paper.

Why, in 1953, is Tanaka saying all this? Why does he need to defend “beggar photography”? The reason, he tells us, is that realism may be losing its advocates. Critics, even Domon Ken, dismiss it as a ridiculous, imitative fad where amateurs armed with cameras chase vagrants and prostitutes down alleys, producing images of poor quality. Tanaka admits the truth of these charges, but he insists that “the correct course for those photographers who seek to attain true realism is to start with beggar photography and move on to higher spheres. Mimicry of beautiful photography is meaningless, but mimicry of beggar photography possesses a larger significance” (1953, 75). Photographs of beggars, though not necessarily real in and of themselves, can be the starting point for

³⁰Perhaps the most famous typologist among photographers was Francis Galton (1822–1911) who created, among other projects, composite photographs of such social categories of people as “murderers” or “violent robbers” by combining multiple negatives printed over one another to create a single “representative” face. A typologist who nonetheless preserved the individuality of his subjects was German photographer August Sander (1876–1964), whose “Man in the Twentieth Century” project surveyed German social roles from high to low. Another example of photography in the service of sociological understanding is the work of Lewis Hine (1874–1940), whose pictures of children working in mines and factories galvanized American progressives to create new labor laws. Later, with U.S. government sponsorship, Dorothea Lange (1895–1965), Walker Evans (1903–75), and other photographers working for the Farm Security Administration surveyed the destitution caused by the Depression and the Dust Bowl, creating a vast compendium of photographs to bolster the administration’s views.

the dialectical process that ends in achieving “true reality”—a reality that, as we have seen, may have no beggars visible in it.

WATANABE KOSHO AND THE REALITY OF THE BOURGEOIS FUTURE

Not all Tanaka's readers were convinced. Watanabe Kosho (1914–93), also a photography critic, refuted Tanaka in the July 1953 issue of *Camera*, directly attacking Tanaka's idea that consciousness of true reality emerges from the dialectical practice of “beggar photography.”³¹ Watanabe insists instead that consciousness *precedes* the taking of pictures. As he puts it, “Shooting a subject merely because he or she is a beggar, without any self-awareness or consciousness, never leads to philosophical development. Consciousness of reality and a productive self-awareness must precede the work itself” (1953, 112). Watanabe, examining the “grandiose portraits of shoe shiners who polish shoes with their heads bent down and beggars who stand about with empty expressions,” finds “no social meaning or significance in them” (112).³² Indeed, Watanabe insists that beggar photography is unreal, and even surreal, because it combines the photographers' improper prurience with improper subjects, those people marginal to Japan's central concerns.³³ Bucking documentary photography's conventional focus on injustice and suffering, from Horino Masao's 1932 *Kojiki* to Domon Ken's street urchins, Watanabe insists that beggar photography, for all its pain, is not real because it does not represent the real experience of most people.

Watanabe's critique is not based on a sanguine view of Japan's postwar circumstances. Like Tanaka, he, too, disdains as meaningless the pursuit of superficial brightness amid the hardship of economic recovery, but he insists equally on the meaninglessness of superficial darkness. And for Watanabe, beggars represent precisely that. Watanabe's disgust with beggars is shrill; he calls them idle, sick, abnormal, animal-like, primitive, and lacking the will for self-improvement,

³¹Watanabe Kosho contributed frequently to *Camera*. He would become a member of the *Nihon Shashin Hihyōka Kyōkai* (Japan Photography Critics Association), started in 1957, as an outgrowth of *Nihon Shashin Hihyōka Kurabu* (Japan Photography Critics Club) that had been founded in 1955 (see Tucker et al. 2003, 326). He was not related, as far as I know, to the photographer Watanabe Yoshio, nor to fellow critic Watanabe Tsutomu, who would join the debate with his own essay, “Kojiki shashin (kuso riarizumu) no tsugi ni kuru mono” (1953).

³²Although Watanabe does not mention Domon Ken's portraits of shoeshine boys in Ginza, it seems likely that this comment is an indirect attack on Domon's work. See, e.g., Domon's photo *Ginza no shūshain bōi* (Shoeshine Boy in Ginza), 1951–52, in *Kindai shashin no umi no oya: Kimura Ihei to Domon Ken* (2004, 22).

³³Watanabe compares Tanaka's insistence that beggars represent “true reality” to surrealist Jean Cocteau's view, in reference to a painting by Giorgio de Chirico, that “nothing can be more realistic than to paint an imaginary object located in an imaginary room—a ship outlined with bubbles, a locomotive coming through the door and a forest on the floor” (1953, 113). For Watanabe, both claims to reality are equally incomprehensible.

a diatribe that undermines his banal comment, “all that exists is reality” (1953, 112–13).³⁴ Quite obviously, for Watanabe, some realities are more real than others, and the beggars, as he puts it, should “disappear entirely.”³⁵ Watanabe is also suspicious of photographers when their cameras caress despair, the way they seem to relish the exoticism of homelessness and prostitution.³⁶ Their sick curiosity devolves into easy sentimentality, heightened emotion, and misrepresentation of social problems. Just as beggars are ill and idle, so, too, are the photographers, indulging in their weird “masturbatory” fantasies.

The reality that counts for Watanabe, it soon becomes evident, is the reality of middle-class values, the experience most common in society, the sociological mean. In the immediate postwar world, this reality is neither comfortable nor pretty nor without pain, but it embodies diligence and fortitude. Despite the hardships, what is common to most people—and therefore real—is the hope for a better future, a future brought about by fortitude and social responsibility. The camera ought to dwell on dreams shared by the vast majority of humanity, even in terrible circumstances. As examples, Watanabe directs his readers’ attention to the “numerous lives that are far more seriously despondent than those of beggars,” describing a merchant who kills himself and his family after being “unable to pay a small amount of tax despite having worked diligently” and a female student who jumps onto a railroad track because of a thousand yen debt. Portraits of the impoverished, Watanabe argues, should convey the lesson of self-discipline—and, from the anecdotes he provides, the grim lesson that self-destruction is better than mendicancy. In short, Watanabe directs our attention to future prospects and to the politics of amelioration for the working majority; the rest can be damned.

Watanabe’s idea of “real” photography is not the work of Domon Ken or Kimura Ihei but of Bert Hardy, whose pictures of a Glasgow slum called Gorbals first appeared in the crusading British publication *Picture Post* in 1948, before *Camera* picked up the series in October 1949 (figure 4).³⁷ Hardy’s photographs roused Britain’s conscience, Watanabe insists, because, instead of showing misery alone, they depict heart-warming, cheerful “scenes of love” (*ai no jōkei*). This description would have surprised readers of *Picture Post*. Even Watanabe himself realizes

³⁴Watanabe’s lack of sympathy for beggars was not unusual in postwar Japan. Dower points out that “Japan was a harsh, inhospitable place for anyone who did not fall into a ‘proper’ social category. There existed no strong tradition of responsibility toward strangers, or of unrequited philanthropy, or of tolerance or even genuine sympathy (as opposed to occasional sentimentality) toward those who suffered misfortune” (1999, 61).

³⁵Fellow critic Watanabe Tsutomu voices similar disgust with this subject matter in a satirical piece called “Kojiki shashin (kuso riarizumu) no tsugi ni kuru mono” (1953).

³⁶On the ethics of viewing pain see, e.g., Susan Sontag (2003) and Mark Reinhardt, Holly Edwards, and Erina Duganne (2006).

³⁷See Shimazaki Kiyohiko (1949). For background on Bert Hardy, see Stuart Hall (1972) and Robert Kee (1989).

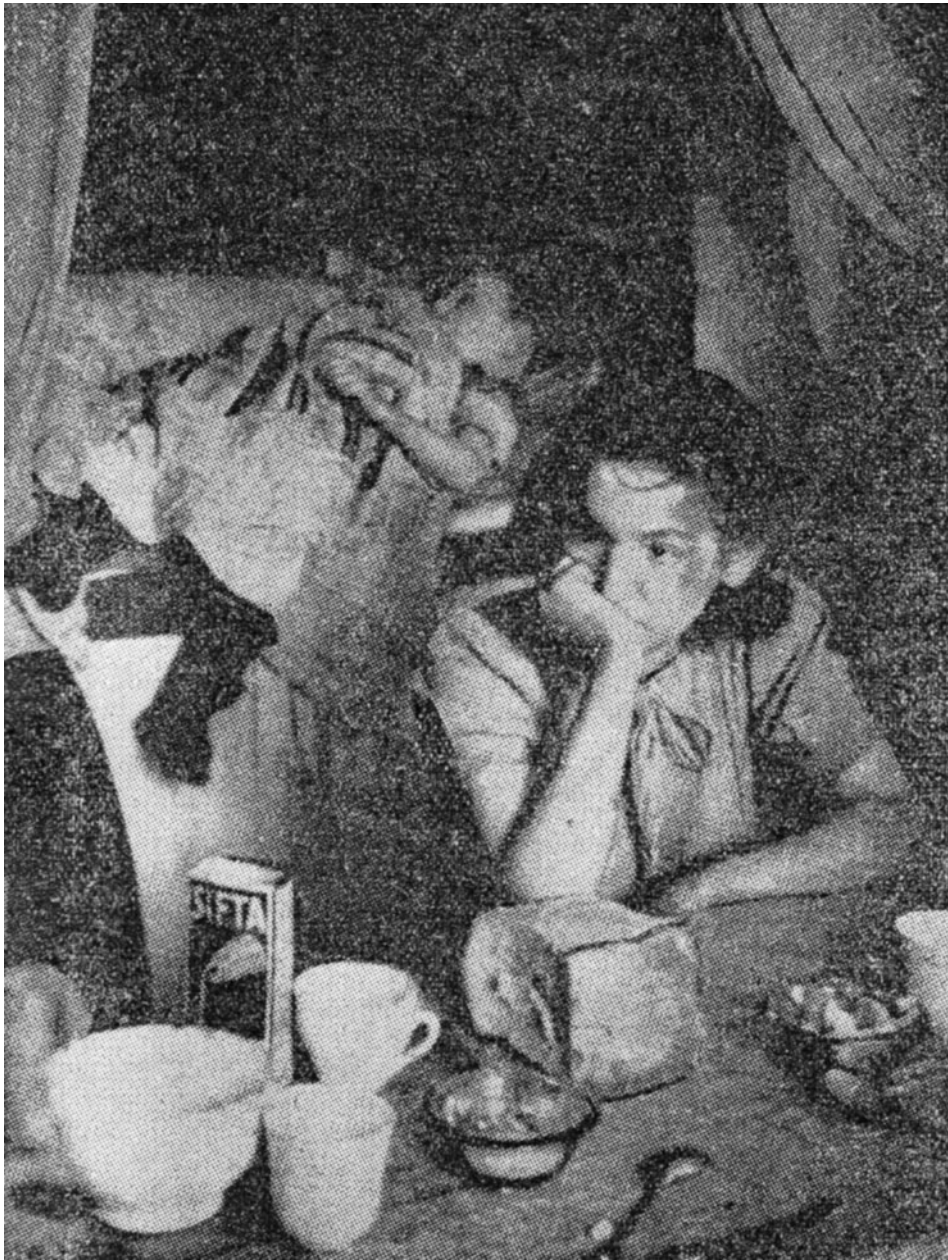


Figure 4. Bert Hardy's Gorbals image, *Camera*, July 1953.

that the image he uses, one that was also published earlier in *Camera*, suggests that "young girls, who tend to be dreamy, cannot avoid a harsh sense of depression and despair in Gorbals" (1953, 113, caption). But Watanabe insists that the essential message of Hardy's photographs is upbeat: tired mothers feed their babies; poor children play happily in bleak surroundings; old people enjoy a game of cards in dismal gaslight (1953,

113). Showing perseverance and cheer spurred public sympathy and initiated political action in Britain, Watanabe tells us, whereas Japanese “beggar photography” just turns people away.

For Watanabe, real photographs capture the “darkness right next to us” (*mijika na kurasa*)—as Hardy’s surely do—but always point to a future when diligence and fortitude win out—an optimistic forecast less evident to me in the images themselves. As with Tanaka, a discrepancy exists between what Watanabe says and what he shows. Nevertheless, the differences in their positions are also clear. For Watanabe, reality is not a Marxist-inflected dialectic focused on the poor but the reality of the social mean; for Watanabe, a real photograph is not an analysis of time past but a beacon of time future.

DOMON KEN AND EMOTIONAL REALITY

During the rest of 1953, Domon also took pains to refine a definition of realism. Having sparked this particular argument between Tanaka and Watanabe, he was by no means willing to cede the field to critics, although he did not condescend to engage either man’s position directly.³⁸ The month after Tanaka’s appeal for more beggar photography, Domon published a curiously anguished essay in *Camera* about an image that he does not show of an alms-seeking veteran (1953a, 157–58). This image, made by an amateur whose name Domon claims not to remember from some place he cannot recall, won no prize in *Camera*’s monthly contest. Nevertheless, Domon declares, the image haunts him. He describes the photograph as being of a maimed former soldier in the white clothes of a supplicant. The soldier stands in a blizzard with no umbrella, hat, or overcoat, patiently holding a donation box. Domon declares that “today, if a photographer turns away from these war victims while holding a camera, a mechanism that facilitates the most realistic of records, I would call him an anti-humanistic betrayer of the Japanese race” (1953a, 157). Why then wasn’t this picture among the winners? Its subject matter was captured with clarity and “yet it was rejected from the competition” (158). In the June essay, Domon is incapable of answering his own question.

The August issue of *Camera*, following Watanabe’s contribution, shows that Domon is still obsessed with the wounded veteran, unable to get the image out of his mind or, by now, the minds of his readers, some of whom asked pointed questions when he lectured in Hakata. Domon finally reproduces the image and asks, “What exactly ... were the fatal drawbacks of the photograph of the wounded soldier?” (figure 5). His startling answer is that there was a “*lack of reality* (*rearitii*

³⁸During the rest of 1953, Domon discussed realism in four essays: “Fotojenikku to iu koto—aru shohei no shashin ni tsuite” (1953a), “Futatabi shōhei no shashin ni tsuite: Gamen no amasa to rearitii” (1953b), “Rearizumu shashin to saron pikuchua” (1953c), and “Rearizumu wa shizenshugi de wa nai” 1953d. The last-named essay is reprinted in Domon Ken (1974, 236–43).



Figure 5. Ogawa Kojiro, *Shōisha* (Maimed), reproduced in *Camera*, August 1953.

no ketsujo)” (1953b, 158; emphasis added). The image, by Domon’s own account, provides copious details about this soldier’s condition (including the unmentioned missing leg) as only the camera can, and yet, for Domon, the picture lacks some crucial element. What reality, then, is he after? It soon becomes evident that, for Domon, reality entails emotional truth. He writes, “Quiet and persistent snow may seem charming to someone under a *kotatsu*, sipping warmed sake; yet, for a wounded soldier standing in an open square, it is only a natural disaster that saddens him. He feels like crying, wishing it would stop soon, but the sky darkens and snow continues to fall. In order to capture that misery ... and convey it to the audience,” the amateur photographer (whose

name turns out to be Ogawa Kojiro) should have manipulated the world more thoroughly. Domon insists that without “thorough manipulation of the visible world” (1953b, 159), even the camera, that most realistic of mechanisms, will fail.

Reality, in Domon’s account, is emotion expressed through artifice. Because emotional states are not readily apparent, the photographer must strive to expose the subliminal. He does this through composition, conveying different emotions by manipulating the relationship of the main object in the photograph to the expanse around it. In this particular instance, Domon argues that Ogawa should either have enlarged his frame to include the snowy sky and “the roads where traces of cars and pedestrians had been erased by the snow,” or, alternatively, he should have cropped the image, creating a close-up framing the top half of the man with his frozen, messy hair. Enlarging the space and turning the image into a landscape, the reader may infer, would have underscored the veteran’s loneliness. Closing the distance would have transformed the photograph into a portrait, placing us within the orbit of veteran’s pain. Although Domon does not put it in these terms, in order to achieve reality, the subject before the lens must be forced within a recognizable pictorial convention—into a genre such as landscape or portraiture—so that we can then interpret it in the appropriate emotional terms. For Domon, aesthetic conventions are essential to the production of reality.

To underscore his argument linking emotion and spatial composition, Domon presents three hand-drawn diagrams of chairs. His use of these drawings should cause us to pause. Until now, Domon has celebrated the camera alone as the “mechanism that facilitates the most realistic of records” (1953a, 157). He has even dismissed drawings and paintings as involving “subjective re-composition or fantastical themes” (1953c, 185). In making this distinction between photographs and drawings, he sounds like philosopher Stanley Cavell arguing that the camera *transcribes* an object or person onto film and paper, giving us the uncanny experience of really seeing “things that are not in actuality before us” because “in the taking of a photograph, the object has played a causal role altogether different from its role in the making of a painting” (1985, 3–4). More than a mere metaphorical likeness, as in a drawing or painting, a photograph gives us reality itself (even vanished realities) rather than representations.³⁹ But Domon is drawn to representation rather than to transcription. The lure of “subjective re-composition” is strong. Although he may at times insist on the camera’s special relationship to reality, in fact, he wants to use this technology to produce the same effects possible through other visual media. Indeed, I would argue that his embrace of intuitive

³⁹Some, like philosopher Kendall Walton, have gone even further, arguing that photographs *are* real, that they “are *transparent*. We see the world *through* them” (1984, 251). Walton is following closely in the footsteps of French film critic André Bazin, who declares, “The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it” (1980, 241). For more on the debate over whether a photograph *is* real or instead represents the real, see Tagg (1988). The sense of what counts as an objective image of reality has changed radically over time, as demonstrated by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison (1992).

emotion and aesthetic artifice suggests that, contrary to Cavell, Domon really makes few claims for the nature of the medium: His interest is in how the camera is used, not the ontological status the image produces.

In these drawings, each schematic representation of a chair provides a formal explanation of "the relationship between blank space and reality" (figure 6). The

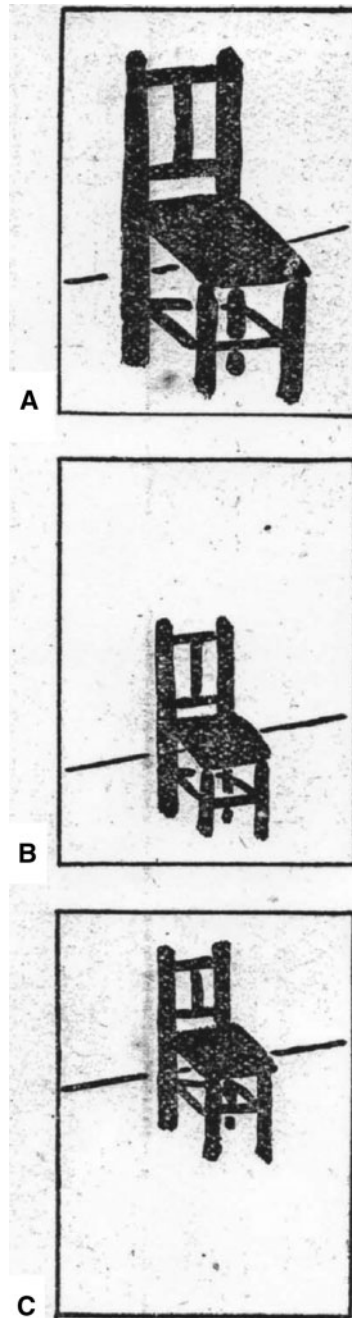


Figure 6. Domon Ken, diagrams of chairs, *Camera*, August 1953.

first illustration, figure A, represents a purely descriptive approach to an object—as in “an advertisement for a newly designed chair or a formal record of a Louis Dynasty chair.” Here, the even space framing the chair mutes emotion for the sake of calm assessment in much the same way that the even space around Ogawa’s maimed veteran suggests detachment. Figure B conveys a different sensation. By enlarging the space above the chair, this angle underscores the fact that nobody is sitting there, implying, says Domon, feelings, perhaps bereavement, about the chair’s owner. Figure C, in which one sees the space in front of the chair “suggests that the person who was sitting on the chair just went away or that someone is coming to sit there. Paradoxically it emphasizes the fact that the chair is in an empty room” (1953a, 157). Including the empty space in front of the chair invites anticipation. In other words, as the relationship between object and the space around it shifts, the reality of the situation shifts.

Domon emphasizes the need to train the photographer’s eye “to be able to capture the reality of a subject within a rectangular space” (1953b, 157). Like the American photographer Edward Weston before him, Domon argues that photographers must first learn how to look—to “see photographically”—before taking a picture.⁴⁰ Darkroom manipulation and special effects must be avoided so that the creative process relies on the precision and intensity of the photographer’s gaze, on what Domon elsewhere calls “a direct connection between subject and camera” so that the image is an “absolute snapshot, absolutely unstaged (*zettai sunappu, zettai hienshutsu*).”⁴¹ However, unlike Weston, for whom this previsualization elevates the photographer to the status of an artist capable of high modernist abstractions, Domon voices no desire for artistic status. Domon promotes decisive framing in order to appeal “directly to the eyes, not the minds, of the viewers” (158) and, ultimately, to their hearts and sentiments. The photographer should excavate hidden emotion through spatial arrangement.

Time as well as space figures in Domon’s conception of “the real.” Unlike Tanaka and Watanabe, who argue that a still image should refer to historical forces or future prospects, Domon thinks of a real image as entirely engaged in the present. While it may be imperative to see “the eternal within the moment” (1953c, 185),⁴² realism for Domon is about the “concrete problems

⁴⁰Edward Weston insists “the photographer’s most important and likewise most difficult task is not learning to manage his camera, or to develop, or to print. It is learning to see photographically—that is, learning to see his subject matter in terms of the capacities of his tools, so that he can instantaneously translate the elements and values in a scene before him into the photograph he wants to make” (1943, 3200–3206).

⁴¹This phrase had come to epitomize realism. Domon introduced it a couple of years earlier and would repeat it often in 1953 (see, e.g., Domon 1953c, 185; and 1953d, 175).

⁴²The concept of the eternal contained within the present was articulated in other arenas as well. During the war, *Kokutai no hongi* (fundamentals of the national polity) linked imperial authority to the “eternal now” as distinct from history and tradition.

of today and today alone" (175).⁴³ For Ogawa's photograph of the begging veteran to be real, it does not have to gesture back to the war or forward to this man's bleak prospects. Reality is the immediate emotional truth, as understood by the cameraman, of a single instant conveyed through mastery of conventional, formal techniques. Reality is not on the surface, absorbed through a casual glance, but it is of the moment, garnered in a single, penetrating shaft of compassion.

Before we become too enamored of Domon's instantaneous sympathy, it is essential to observe that although Domon does not speak in the overtly sociological and political language of Tanaka and Watanabe, he, too, is deeply interested in the relations of power. His emotional reality is, I would argue, decidedly paternalistic and nationalistic. Domon's politics are best described as a form of right-wing populism, in contrast to Tanaka's left-wing sympathies and Watanabe's bourgeois values. As I have suggested, this populism is not without compassion, but it is a compassion directed at people whose own capacity for agency and anger has been stripped from them, making them merely pitiable objects before the camera and before a nation whose kindness they patiently long for. In Domon's prescribed practices, hierarchical power is embraced, not contested, in order to beg for benevolence toward the unfortunate. In fact, it is possible to interpret Domon's own portraits of veterans as conveying precisely this sort of imposed, formal emotionalism, far removed from his purported goal of the "absolute snapshot, absolutely unstaged" (figure 7). This veteran has not been permitted the liberty of presenting himself; he is represented and rigidly configured by Domon's practices.

Let me explain more fully what I mean by Domon's right-wing populism. If we consider Domon's dismissal of Ogawa's begging veteran, we see that so imperative is his need for affective truth that he licenses the photographer to impose not only the aesthetic form necessary for any competent photograph but also emotional interpretation. Domon has no way of knowing the veteran's emotional state (he himself has never seen the man), and yet he declares that the maimed veteran in the blizzard "feels like crying" and insists that Ogawa ought to have conveyed the man's supposed teariness to make the scene "real." Apparently, he never considers that the maimed soldier might project not simply neediness but also anger at Japanese society's callousness in war and peace. As historian John W. Dower has shown, veterans returning with physical or mental wounds were commonly shunned, and "many maimed veterans, having nowhere to turn, defied taboos and flaunted their disabilities—more accurately their pain and hardship—by donning distinctive white clothing and begging in public" (1999, 61). In short, this veteran might be a rebel, an active agent

⁴³Domon argues that photography is only about the present, a view at odds with the elegiac discourse on photographs as *memento mori*, metonymic shards of the past, that erupt into the present, bringing with them the scent of the charnel house. The theme of photography's connection with death is sounded (e.g. Barthes in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* 1981).



Figure 7. Domon Ken, *Shōi Gunjin, Ueno* (Wounded Veteran), 1951.

portraying Japan's disgrace, not just a pitiable object in need of sympathy. And yet Domon never suggests that Ogawa should have investigated the man's actual motives when he strove to photograph reality.

For Domon, the camera is *not* a tool to discover reality, a reality that might be counterintuitive, confusing, or even alienating for photographer. Instead, reality emerges through "thorough manipulation of the visible world" and thorough interpretive imposition. The dialectic between photographer and poverty crucial to Tanaka and the excavation of sociological truth dear to Watanabe are not part of Domon's domineering sentimental practice. Whereas both Tanaka and Watanabe speak in universal terms, Domon, to achieve the emotional reality that he values, focuses on the Japanese race or *Nihon minzoku* and advises Japanese photographers exclusively. Indeed, his December 1953 essay announces, rather cryptically, that if Japanese photographers battle to solve the problems facing them, they will be able to raise the flag of Japanese realism (*Nihon no rearizumu*) on the world stage. This declaration of a particular national reality ends with the martial exhortation: "We now hope for bravery from all the amateurs of Japan" (1953c, 176).⁴⁴ Framed by the cameraman and, ultimately, by the state, Japanese reality, by the lights of Domon Ken, is emotionally demanding but politically conservative.⁴⁵

PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM IN 1953

Given all the ink spilled in Japanese camera magazines, did "realism" have a core meaning? Can we distill the quality sought by these photographers and critics? Certainly, as we have seen, the pages of *Camera* reveal passionate disputes and strange tensions between images and text. And yet, despite these differences, all three writers dismiss the notion that "if you take beggars, you have realism" (Tanaka 1953, 73). In other words, they all agree that reality is not manifest on the surface of life; it is not necessarily visible to the untutored eye nor can it be captured by casually opening a camera's shutter. What you see, according to Tanaka, Watanabe, and Domon, may *not* be what is actually there. What you see is "naturalism" (*shizenshugi*), says Domon, and "rearizumu is not naturalism" (1953c).

In 1953, then, reality is a riddle: something present but not always visible. The insistence on reality's fugitive quality exposes a society in flux, riven with doubt, wary of deception. Even among photographers, the sense of sight

⁴⁴Domon's politics during the war were highly jingoistic, and, even after the war, martial terms attached themselves to him. Ito Ippei (1995) calls him the "General of Realism."

⁴⁵Given that Domon advocates not dialectical engagement but sympathetic domination, Tanaka's praise for Domon's photographs (such as the 1950 *Machi* series) as embodying socialist analysis is yet another illustration of the difficulty of interpreting the meaning of images, even for contemporaries.

cannot be fully trusted. In these disputes, the uncertainty about what is real is so great that neither its content—beauties, beggars, or the bourgeoisie—nor the formal constraints most appropriate for its presentation can be taken for granted. In short, there is instability both about what should be known and how to know it. This elusive reality reveals postwar Japan as a society in epistemological and existential turmoil, as well economic, political, and social distress. Japanese photography was not a pursuit stabilized, as in the United States, by artistic norms and institutions like museums. Nor was it supported by the socio-political structures and values that permitted American documentary work to reveal forms of injustice widely recognized as such. Instead, Japanese photography was participating in establishing fundamental norms. Photography was part of the postwar process of trying to develop some consensus about what was, in fact, actually there and also about what should be there.

This elusive quality presents a practical paradox: If the photographer's goal was reality and yet reality was not readily visible, how could the camera capture it? Such a layered conception of the world, so strikingly different from the "superflat" Japan identified by Murakami Takashi (2000) today, required extraordinarily skilled excavators to tunnel through the superficial detritus of sensory distraction (see also Darling 2001). For this reason, Tanaka, Watanabe, and Domon elevated the photographer's creative capacities. All three men saw a photographic print as real only insofar as the photographer's subjective insight, understanding, and craft combined with the objective, mechanistic operations of the camera. Without *both* subjectivity and objectivity, no photographic reality would surface. The mechanism guaranteed nothing. To put this another way, Tanaka, Watanabe, and Domon all agreed that the main cause of "unreal" photography was not technical failure or unorthodox manipulation but inadequate interpretative verve.

If reality were invisible and required skilled interpretation, the tension that we have observed between the commentaries and their accompanying images makes sense. Tanaka speaks of beggars while looking at plumb girls behind *tanuki*; Watanabe speaks of bourgeois virtues while showing us Glaswegian slums; Domon speaks of spontaneous snapshots while creating formal compositions. Dismissing these discrepancies as mere blindness would be a mistake because they provide a key to unraveling the conundrum of the real. These men were skilled at looking and looking closely, and what we must realize is that they were attempting to see beyond the surface of the print.

But we still have not defined reality. What was the true quarry of these photographers and critics? What was real and present, even though it might not reflect light onto film? Although none of these writers used the term, I believe the answer was power itself. As all three make clear in their different ways, the goal of photographic *rearizumu* was the substratum structures of human interaction, the play of power that determined the shape of civic space, the distribution of pain and of wealth, the relative weight of past,

present, and future. *Rearitii* consisted of the invisible sinews orchestrating social interactions; photographic *rearizumu* framed these invisible forces on paper. Like power, *rearizumu*, as Domon argues, "is a practical exercise (*jissen-teki kadai*)" (1953d, 174), a subject worked through in action, not a thing or a word. If properly and fearlessly pursued, the activity of *rearizumu* culminates in a black-and-white rectangle in which "the real" is made manifest. Because of reality's elusive nature in postwar Japan, a photographer could not point to it with his camera; instead, his job was to constitute reality through the practice of his craft.

To return to my opening argument, Japanese photography, unlike American photography during this period, aspired to be neither art nor documentary. In 1960, when Tokyo's Museum of Modern Art held its second photography exhibition seven years after the joint American-Japanese venture, all pretense that photographs deserved careful connoisseurship was merrily disregarded: The selection committee chose images published that year in magazines, displayed them in the same size used for magazine publication, and then did not bother to add them to the museum's permanent art collection. Photography remained in a separate sphere (Masuda 1995, 10).⁴⁶ Nor did photographers embrace documentary in the sense that their American contemporary Beaumont Newhall defined it as "a desire to communicate, to tell about people, to record without intrusion, to inform honestly, accurately, and above all, convincingly. Subject is paramount" (1864, 197). The subjects of beauties, beggars, and the bourgeoisie might suggest a desire "to tell about people," but these "motifs" were only penultimate steps on the way to revealing power's subsurface operations. Because Tanaka, Watanabe, and Domon all wished to get to this real quality beneath, they valued "intrusion" and labored in their essays to create the context in which their intrusions would be understood. In Newhall's America under the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, images of impoverished people illustrated the failure of a widely embraced civic bargain; they demanded social recognition of injustice and government action.⁴⁷ After the occupation in Japan, the status of impoverished veterans and even pretty girls, how society should respond to them, what the war had meant, and what the new civic bargain might be were still undetermined. Unlike American documentary photographers, who could rely on accepted norms to give their images context and meaning, Japanese realists, because they worked in conditions of extreme dislocation, simultaneously had to create the picture and the context in which the picture should be

⁴⁶Not until 1979 did a committee of some sixty photographers headed by Watanabe Yoshio call for the establishment of art photography museums in Japan.

⁴⁷Tagg is deeply skeptical of documentary work. He sees photographers, even those with compassionate intentions and progressive politics during the 1930s, as functioning as agents of the state in scrutinizing and integrating citizens under a governmental regime of "dependence and consent" (1988, 9).

understood.⁴⁸ Their photographs could not rely on social practices outside their borders to frame their meaning. Far from having stabilized Japan in its own image, the American occupation left Japan in a condition in which the very contours of reality were still up for grabs.

Although coherent in its quest to reveal power, Japanese realism was not ideologically coherent. Tanaka's socialism with its insistence on the historical determinants of poverty, Watanabe's liberal democratic pragmatism with its emphasis on individual responsibility, and Domon's sentimental nationalism with its elevation of emotional connection presented three starkly different realities and three starkly different avenues for political action. These incommensurate realities represent choices that Japanese faced in the wake of the American occupation. That Domon's vision of "the real" gained dominance, and that he ultimately became, as critic Izawa Kōtarō would call him, "Japan's most popular photographer" (1998, 4), demonstrates that sentimental nationalism would trump social or liberal democracy as visual truth as well as political solution. But in 1953, that resolution to the political crisis had yet to be finalized. In 1953, during "the victory year for *rearizumu*," Japanese photography had political weight not because it bolstered claims to an elevated national culture (as did the aesthetic triumphs of art photography in America) nor because of the information and impetus it might provide on a policy issue like eliminating poverty (as did documentary work). Instead, postwar Japanese *rearizumu* had political weight because it attempted to frame an invisible truth. Penetrating through *bijin*, beggars, or the bourgeoisie, real photography sought to make power visible.

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⁴⁸Recent explorations of American documentary photography's political role include Lili Corbus Bezner (1999) and Robert Harriman and John Louis Lucaites (2007).

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