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Through the Eyes of Ancient Egyptians: Franz Boas and Tanizaki Junichirô on Modern Japan

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I. PLACING JAPAN IN *THE MIND OF PRIMITIVE MAN*

What are we to do with the modernity of a nation whose distinguishing feature lies in its aptitude to assimilate modernity itself? It is along the lines of such speculation that Japan is noted in both editions of Franz Boas's landmark study of American anthropology, *The Mind of Primitive Man*. Originally published in 1911, *The Mind of Primitive Man* provides less an overview of fieldwork on "primitive" societies than a general theory in which the very concept of primitiveness is overturned. Lest his intent be misunderstood, in the revised edition, published over twenty years later, Boas went so far as to declare in his preface, "There is no fundamental difference in the ways of thinking of primitive and civilized man" (v), a strange point to make in a book that purportedly sets out to expound on such differences. As it turns out, any essential contrast drawn between primitive and civilized society is reducible to a matter of perception, that is, how "the mind of modern man" regards its society above all others. Boas argues that modern civilization *appears* more advanced only to the extent that the patterns inherent in its evolution are measured in terms of their *rate* of development. To the extent that this rapidity validates a nation's modernity,

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its civility may turn out to be a matter of speed. In anthropological terms, any crucial distinction, whether made between primitive and civilized society, colored or white people, or the “West” and “East,” can hardly be made without referring to this standard of time. In both editions, Boas immediately underscores this distinction: “What, then, is the difference between the civilization of the Old World and that of the New World? It is essentially a difference in time. The one reached a certain stage three thousand or four thousand years sooner than the other” (8). It is the arbitrariness of this standard Boas addresses in a reference he makes to modern Japan, one which only appears later in the revised edition of *The Mind of Primitive Man*, published in 1938:

If the achievements of a people were a measure of their aptitude, this method of estimating innate ability would hold good not only for *our time* but would be applicable under all conditions. The Egyptians of 2000 or 3000 B.C. might have applied the argument in their judgment of the people of northwestern Europe who lived in the Stone Age, had no architecture and a very primitive agriculture. They were “backward people” like many so-called primitive people of our time. These were our ancestors, and the judgment of the ancient Egyptians would now have to be reversed. Precisely in the same way must the customary *estimate* of the Japanese of one hundred years ago be *reversed* on account of their adoption of the economic, industrial and scientific methods of the western world. (10; emphasis added)

While in the original edition of *The Mind of Primitive Man* Boas already anticipates the sense that the standards of expediency by which “the western world” defines itself may be undermined by the emergence of Japan as a modern state, most emphatically in his reference to the Russo-Japanese War, Japan at the turn of the century only concerns him to the extent that its rising geopolitical status may demythologize racialist theories of “western” superiority. The modernity of Japan turns out to be not a matter of physiological traits as aptitude for technology, discernible in its efficiency to *conduct* warfare. Insofar as they provide an occasion to reverse the standard by which modernity and civility have been claimed, the terms of such conduct must by necessity be defined as *retaliatory*:

After we have thus found that the alleged specific differences between civilized and primitive man, so far as they are inferred from complex

psychic responses, can be reduced to the same fundamental psychological forms, we have the right to decline as unprofitable a discussion of the hereditary mental traits of various branches of the white race. . . . An apparently excellent discussion of external influences upon the character of a people has been given by A. Wernich in his description of the character of the Japanese. He finds some of their peculiarities caused by the lack of vigor of the muscular and alimentary systems, which in their turn are due to improper nutrition; while he recognizes as hereditary other physiological traits which influence the mind. And still, how weak appear his conclusions, after the energy and endurance exhibited by the Japanese in their modern development and in their conflict with Russia! (116–17)

Boas, of course, is hardly unique in evaluating Japan's modernity according to its aptitude to assimilate technology. What is striking, however, is how this estimate shifts in the revised edition in which the modernity of an Asian nation has been reassessed. Boas replaces his reference to the Russo-Japanese War with a broader account of the nation whose modernity, in its assimilation of institutional forms from "western civilization" and the *standards* of such institutions, now rivals that of "western civilization" to such an extent that Wernich's analysis of the Japanese race in terms of its physiognomic deficiencies must be called into question: "And still, how weak appear his conclusions, in view of the modern economic, political and scientific development of Japan which has adopted to the fullest extent all the best and worst traits of western civilization" (139).

What I wish to address in this article is not so much the anthropological issues involved in providing such "snapshots" of recently modernized cultures, but the peculiar impatience Boas exhibits in his evaluation of Japan's modernity as being *complete* by the late 1930s. While Japan's rapid assimilation provides him with the example that dispels the notion that modernity is inherently a province of "western civilization," the imperative with which this modernity must be under constant watch to be reevaluated presents a further problem: How do we grasp modernity when it occurs beyond those geographical boundaries hitherto assigned to it? If we are to understand the process of how modernity gets assimilated beyond "the western world," then its trajectory must be realigned along the directions of development emerging elsewhere. Boas's revisions on Japan, however, reveal the difficulty involved in assessing such adjustments. Whether, as he argues in the 1911 edition, its military performance at the beginning of the

twentieth century provides the exception to the rule, or the same nation's assimilation is considered complete almost thirty years later, it is only in accordance with the standard of the "western world" that the terms of Japan's success *in having caught up* become apparent. While the legitimacy of standards based on "western" superiority may be called into question, such claims may end up glossing over the difficulty involved in coming up with a universal standard for modernity. Worse yet, in practice they may end up dissolving the need to abide by any standard at all.¹ It could be said that *The Mind of Primitive Man* anticipates in certain ways the advent of cultural relativism, yet its author would hardly have welcomed the prospect of doing away entirely with the premise that certain values *must* be universal. While taking note of the inherent positivism that underlies Boas's work, in "Anthropology as Kulturkampf: Science and Politics in the Career of Franz Boas," George W. Stocking Jr. underscores the difficulty involved in validating universal categories in anthropological terms. If, in postulating the categorical imperative of "culture," Boas succeeds in recognizing the significance of "marginal" societies based on alternative value systems, this recognition of other systems is fed back into the reinforcement of systemic values on which the *modernity* of civilization is based:

Certain values deeply embedded in his own enculturative experience—scientific knowledge, human fellowship, and individual freedom—had in fact been cumulatively realized in human history, not merely in a generalized sense, but in the specific form of "modern" civilization, which Boas' language often made clear was "our own." Boas was far from satisfied with that civilization, and his alienation was ultimately expressed in his contribution to the modern pluralistic concept "culture," which was founded on the legitimacy of alternative value systems. But anthropology, for Boas, did not lead to a "general relativistic attitude." Quite the contrary, not only were there general values that were cumulatively realized in the history of human civilization, there were also general values that were variously realized in different human cultures—"fundamental truths" that, notwithstanding their form in "particular societies," were "common to mankind." Boas *did not himself undertake the systematic comparison that might have revealed these values empirically*, however, and his occasional specific references to them suggest that they, too, were rooted in his own enculturative experience. Thus the common moral ideas he saw underlying the varied ethical behavior of mankind turn

out to be respect for “life, well-being, and property” within the range of the recognized social group. (45–46; emphasis added)

We can see then how Boas seeks to evaluate Japan’s modernity according to a compressed trajectory of time that fluctuates between terms of success and failure defined by the categorical imperatives of “life, well-being, and property” and how, in the event of war, these Lockean terms end up being converted into the currency of casualties, appropriation of resources, and territorial expansion. While, as in the case of the Russo-Japanese War, a recently modernized nation may suddenly measure up to the geopolitical standards of “western civilization,” such progress also runs the risk of being invalidated no less precariously several decades later with its defeat in World War II. As exemplified in his revisions, the geopolitical status of Japan ends up presenting a conundrum for Boas insofar as its modernity must be evaluated retroactively, but with the utmost urgency, and hence be revised. The vigilance with which one’s interpretations must be monitored, rewritten, and sorted out ends up informing Boas’s critical endeavor itself. Hardly a matter of scholarly accuracy, disregarding the task of constant revision would threaten the enterprise of human sciences. In the preface to the revised edition of *The Mind of Primitive Man*, Boas makes clear how science itself is subject to the vicissitudes of critical inquiry:

Since 1911, when the first edition of *The Mind of Primitive Man* was published much work has been done in all the branches of science that have to be considered in the problem with which the book deals. The study of heredity has made important strides and has helped to clear up the concept of race. The influence of environment upon bodily form and behavior has been the subject of many investigations and the mental attitudes of “primitive” man have been studied from new points of view. For this reason a large part of the book had to be *rewritten and rearranged*.

As we have seen, part of this rearrangement includes understanding Japan’s modernity. But if the estimation of non-Western nations in the midst of modernizing is reversed through hindsight, then it may be said that such reevaluation occurs at an unexpected, if not alarming, rate. The kind of backwardness once associated with a nation like “the Japan of one hundred years ago” must be constantly reevaluated and revised. The abruptness with which such revisions are made is all the more apparent when Boas resorts

to suspending the linearity of modern history in order to articulate the recent emergence of Japan as a global power, asking his readers instead to associate its development with the time-travel scenario of assuming the perspective of ancient Egyptians and imagining how “we” (Europeans) must have appeared in their eyes: “. . . the judgment of the ancient Egyptians would now have to be *reversed*. Precisely in the same way must the *customary* estimate of the Japanese of one hundred years ago be *reversed* on account of their adoption of the economic, industrial and scientific methods of the western world” (emphasis added). By what standards then can modernity be measured other than those that do not have to be reversed? The argument for the “legitimacy of alternative value systems” leads to the more complicated issue of how, instead of the notion of legitimacy itself, the actual contours of such systems can be grasped in practice, one that Boas himself admits in his note on Japan that he is hardly prepared to resolve: “The claim that achievement and aptitude go hand in hand is not convincing. It must be subjected to an exhaustive analysis” (10).

II. “IN PRAISE OF SHADOWS” AND ETHNIC SIMULATIONS

While by no means exhaustive nor analytical, Tanizaki Junichirô’s essay “In Praise of Shadows” [*Inei Raisan*] provides a provocative vantage point from which the experience of modernity is explored according to a standard that need not be reversed. If Japan’s aptitude to modernize serves in *The Mind of Primitive Man* as a prime example to show how little technological progress has to do with racial heredity, then “In Praise of Shadows” seems to expound on the ineptitude with which such modernization pervaded everyday life in the 1930s. While, as Boas argues throughout *The Mind of Primitive Man*, modernity may transpire regardless of one’s ethnicity, Tanizaki insists that modernity, at least in the case of Japan, threatens to extinguish ethnic integrity. Published in *Keizai Ôrai* magazine between 1933 and 1934, Tanizaki’s essay on the nature of Japanese culture seems at first glance to follow the same logic of racialist theories flourishing in Europe and the United States during the early twentieth century, ones that Boas takes pains to critique throughout the revised edition of *The Mind of Primitive Man*. It would not be difficult to read the essay in terms of racialist tropes, whereby modernization presents a menacing threat to one’s ethnic integrity. But the polemics of “In Praise of Shadows” are unique insofar as its author, while repudiating the terms of progress by which modernity is gauged, articulates a different set of standards, one that, instead of adhering

to the pseudoscience of racialism, as we shall see, revolves around the notion of taste. The kind of breakdown of ethnicity portended throughout this essay has little to do with racist theories that conjure the biological threat against the integrity of a social body defined in terms of racial inheritance. Instead of presenting the reader with the pseudoscientific ideas of a social body under the biological threat of racial integration, the sense of threat evoked throughout “In Praise of Shadows” revolves around the deterioration of the *body* itself, not in terms of science, but as *a matter of taste*. As he himself admits near the beginning of the essay, when he writes “I know nothing of science” (16), Tanizaki sidesteps the debate on race simply by refraining from any discussion of science with regard to ethnicity. This disinclination toward coupling ethnicity with science is in marked contrast with early twentieth-century American fiction in which the science behind human endeavors cannot help but be addressed. In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), for example, Tom Buchanan can only claim the integrity of his “civilization” in the name of science: “The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged. It’s all *scientific stuff*; it’s been proved” (18; emphasis added).

In sharp contrast, if “In Praise of Shadows” has anything to say about race, it has nothing to prove about it. The criteria the essay presents with regard to ethnicity adhere little to those terms of science that Boas demands in the analysis of culture, nor do they adhere to the imperative of addressing race in “scientific” terms, as Tom Buchanan does in *The Great Gatsby*.² The *theoretical* validity in defining culture, whether postulated along the lines of race or technological assimilation, is utterly inconsequential to the terms of taste that Tanizaki stakes out for claiming one’s ethnic integrity. My purpose in this article is to examine how “In Praise of Shadows” situates Japan’s modernity in terms of taste and how its polemics anticipate a kind of terror of tastelessness.

Before addressing the nature of taste itself, Tanizaki begins his essay by mapping out the purity of one’s ethnicity in spatial terms, asking his readers to imagine constructing a house in “pure Japanese style.” From the outset, defining culture has less to do with tracing its genealogy as grasping its present style in spatial terms. By analogizing the problem of cultural integrity as an architectural matter, Tanizaki attempts to situate a space of autonomy beyond the reach of modern temporality. Insofar as this space of stylistic “purity” can only be attained when situated outside the normative of time prescribed by foreign technology, Tanizaki evaluates its nature as a matter of *simulation*. Throughout “In Praise of Shadows,” Tanizaki insists

he has no wish to repudiate the convenience attained through Japan's assimilation of foreign technology. Foreign technology, marked by its superior functionality, he says, pervades everyday life in modern Japan so overwhelmingly that he dismisses any sincere attempt to attain a "pure" Japanese-style autonomy as being no more realistic than the life of an aesthete or tea master (*chajin*).³ Unmediated authenticity is hardly an option, according to the polemics of "In Praise of Shadows," and Tanizaki values ethnicity only to the extent that it can be simulated. Such simulations, instead of rejecting foreign technology, permit its presence only to the extent that it can be concealed:

For the solitary man with refined taste (*chajin*) it is another matter, he can ignore the blessings of scientific civilization and retreat to [a thatched hut in] some forsaken corner of the countryside; but a man who has a family and lives in the city cannot turn his back on the necessities of modern life—heating, electric lights, sanitary facilities—merely for the sake of doing things the Japanese way. Even installing a phone could be a nightmare for the purist who must deliberate over whether to hide it behind the staircase or at the end of the hallway where it will least offend the eye. On top of this, he must deliberate over how the electrical wires can be buried underneath his garden, how light switches can be hidden in the closet or cupboard, and how the electric cords need to be tucked behind the folding screens. It may be only after toiling over these measures that he realizes how extreme they are, and how he had resorted to them out of sheer anxiety. The resulting structure then would hardly provide the model of tranquility. (7–8; trans. mine)

If this kind of "authenticity" can only be approximated at the cost of concealing the artifice involved in its simulation, then attaining the purity of a Japanese-style house in modern times ends up encompassing a twofold process whereby every gesture made to signal its authenticity must also be accompanied by an equal effort to conceal any trace that might betray the same gesture's inauthenticity. In this sense, authenticity becomes a matter of performance. But if the grace evoked by the effortlessness of a performance signifies its authenticity, then this simulation of Japanese space falls apart under the strain of effort it requires to *appear* effortless. Indeed, on completion of Tanizaki's ideal house, any commendation for its "naturalness" of style could only be issued from visitors who are most

oblivious to those technological efforts made to render the space habitable in the practical terms of modern times. The ideal visitor, ironically enough, would turn out to be the foreigner who, in seeking the “model of tranquility,” would deemphasize those traits that might undermine its authenticity. Conversely, the inauthentic nature of this simulacra would be most apparent to its creator who, in seeking to emulate authenticity, ends up increasingly aware of the fiction involved in its construction and must do everything to conceal its traces. Each gesture contributing to the simulation, rather than revealing the purity of intent behind it, ends up yielding to the prerogatives of another intent, one in which the attempt to construct a “pure Japanese” space cannot help but underscore the bad faith demanded in its construction, which can only lead to a state of neurosis. Any satisfaction found in concealing the “impure” presence of foreign objects must induce a kind of counterhysteria for having succumbed to the imperative of having to conceal them in the first place, as if authenticity were derived only through screening out those elements that taint it: “It may be only after toiling over these measures that he realizes how extreme they are, and how he had resorted to them out of sheer anxiety. The resulting structure then would hardly provide the model of tranquility.” The state of anxiety Tanizaki projects here, of course, is induced none other than by the pressure of having to compete with the prevalence of modern technology for the sole purpose of concealing its presence. The attempt to conceal any traces of new technology only shows how the time standard of “western civilization,” instead of being repudiated, must course through the simulation all the more in having to be concealed in its application. Yet, strangely enough, the author himself seems hardly surprised by this discouraging conclusion. If anything, Tanizaki seems to have anticipated the shortcomings of this scenario in order to bring up another kind of simulation, one that may not require constructing any space at all. Simplified, the terms of this experience revolve this time, not around space, but the body itself.

III. IN AND OUT OF THE REALM OF TASTE

To discuss ethnicity in a way is to invoke the desire for such identity, and, in this sense, the attempt to define one’s ethnicity may be accompanied by the vague suspicion that it is missing or, more succinctly, not entirely there. If the inherent qualities of one’s culture cannot be provided through the spatial forms of architecture, how tangible can they be? By limiting the discussion of one’s ethnicity to the province of bodily experience, Tanizaki

measures the terms of modernity according to the faculty of taste.

Perhaps the most curious aspect in Tanizaki's discussion of the Japanese confection, *yôkan*, is how little its actual quality matters. Refinement, instead of indicating an ability to evaluate an object of taste according to its constitutive elements, revolves around one's capacity to experience it in a multisensory context. Tasting *yôkan*, less a matter of determining the superiority of one particular kind or brand of *yôkan* over another, signals the occasion to expand one's faculty of taste: "Once it's in your mouth, you feel as if the entire darkness of the room has been crystallized into this cool smooth delicacy, its sweetness melting away at the tip of your tongue so much so that *yôkan*, *even when it is in fact bland*, seems to evoke a mysterious deep flavor" (29; trans. mine, emphasis added). Any deficiency in actual palliative taste is easily compensated by the willingness with which one can load it through a kind of "cross-pollination" of the senses. Such an experience can only be described in synesthetic terms in which one's sense of taste, sight, sound, smell, and touch end up spilling over into each other's realms. The act of swallowing initiates a chain of synesthesia in which the visual-spatial spectrum of the "darkness of the room" is miniaturized into palliative dimensions and relayed back into one's mouth. Absent from this notion of taste is any inclination to treat the experience as an aggregate of discrete evaluations ascribed to each sense. If the concept of taste entails that one abide by a certain set of categorical standards held against the specificity of an object, it is the absence of such standards that seems to distinguish the experience of refinement upheld throughout "In Praise of Shadows." The nebula of synesthesia ends up being both transcendental and native precisely to the extent that it overwhelms the senses, its other-worldly, spiritual dimensions measured according to the plethora of *associations* to be channeled through one's faculty of taste:

Whenever I have a bowl of soup, the faint sound from the lacquered wood bowl tickles my inner ear like a distant chirp, and as I contemplate how it will taste, I always fall into a meditative trance. It must be similar to the experience of a tea master (*chajin*) who, on hearing the sound of his kettle, loses himself in contemplating the winds of the legendary pines of Onoe. It is said that Japanese food is meant to be looked at rather than eaten, but rather than provide a display, the wordless musical interplay of the candlelit flicker and luminous glow of lacquer ware simply induces the occasion to meditate. Natsume Sôseki praises the color of *yôkan* in *Pillow of Grass*, and, come to

think of it, there is something meditative about that color. The half-transparent jade-like skin, as if absorbing the natural light to its core, is suffused with a faint dreamlike glow; the depth and complexity of such shades could never be found in delicacies from the West. Look at how utterly silly and superficial the whole notion of cream is by comparison. (28; trans. mine)

If the reverie of being unequivocally “Japanese” is crystallized in the synesthetic experience of consuming such delicacies, the coherence of such states largely depends, as his reference to Sôseki’s sense of taste pointedly suggests, on a *discursive* tradition. It is hardly surprising then that the sense of harmony in this state of reverie should collapse with the mere mention of the foreign signifier “cream” (“*kureemu*”). Rather than contrast *yôkan* with another European dessert, Tanizaki brings up the quintessential ingredient in European and American desserts, “cream.”⁴ The awkwardness of the analogy only underscores how “cream” merely disorients the senses to the point where the very idea of analogizing cultural practices is ridiculed. The significance of a foreign dessert, like the rationale for importing foreign technology, is purely a matter of its content, as in, “cream.” Its substance may be consumed, but what form or shape it should assume as a dessert is a matter of utter indifference. What becomes apparent instead is how the discursivity of taste remains untranslatable.

Conversely, insofar as the synesthetic pleasure largely depends on one’s cultivated *ability* to extract it from the delicacy, even the substantive taste of mediocre *yôkan*, “even when it is in fact bland,” cannot take away from the pleasure of eating it. Such pleasures cannot be derived from consuming “cream,” not because it is lacking in taste, but because any depth behind the “western” experience would end up being claimed not in the mystery it evokes but in its actual substance. The repugnance Tanizaki feels towards “cream” has less to do with its actual taste as it does with its overwhelming power of signification. In merely being mentioned, the signifier “*kureemu*” manages to intrude on the pleasure of consuming *yôkan*, overturning the discursive flow of one’s reverie in “all things Japanese.”⁵ The lingering bad aftertaste of such foreign signifiers serves as a reminder for Tanizaki, who in turn reminds his readers, that the rapidity with which Japan modernizes may threaten to extinguish not so much taste itself as *the discursivity involved in refining such taste*. Tanizaki calls attention not so much to the novelty of appliances as to the way their usage invokes the appearance of newer forms of discourse that threaten to extinguish those forms of taste

that have been cultivated until now. While, as Boas stipulates, a nation's modernity may be measured according to the institutional standards it assimilates from "western civilization," Tanizaki seems more interested in exploring how this assimilation threatens to straighten out the discursive *bent* of one's native faculty of taste. The good things in life may proliferate as a result of importing technology, but their use may obliterate the discursive terrain on which one's ethnicity can be mapped out. It goes without saying that the desire to extrapolate the ethnic dimensions of a nation is often, if not always, equal to the degree of success or failure attributed to its modernity, but what I am interested in is how the polemics of "In Praise of Shadows" ends up subverting the standards of such success in terms of taste. If, as Tanizaki claims, the assimilation of "western civilization" is accomplished to the detriment of one's refinement of taste, then the acquisition may come at the stiff price of having to be paid twice, first, with the waning of the discursive faculty cultivated before modernization, and then later with the elimination of *the imperative to have any taste at all*.

IV. BOAS ON BREACHES OF ETIQUETTE

The polymorphic sensuality Tanizaki attributes to the experience of eating *yōkan* bears a remarkable resemblance to what Boas defines as "emotional associations" in *The Mind of Primitive Man*. Boas introduces the term in order to underscore how the emotional *affect* involved in social customs, far from being personal and subjective, ends up taking on a universal significance. It is this emotional register, with all its power to bind one's activities into a purposeful yet transcendental unity, that baffles the modern observer:

A trait of primitive life that early attracted the attention of investigators is the occurrence of close associations between mental activities that appear to us as entirely disparate. In primitive life, religion and science; music, poetry and dance; myth and history; fashion and ethics—appear inextricably interwoven. We may express this general observation also by saying that primitive man views every action not only as adapted to its main object, every thought related to its main end, as we should perceive them, but that he associates them with other ideas, often of a religious or at least of a symbolic nature. Thus he gives them a higher significance than they deserve. Every taboo is an example of such associations of apparently trifling actions with ideas that are so sacred

that a deviation from the customary mode of performance creates the strongest emotions of abhorrence. The interpretation of ornaments as charms, the symbolism of decorative art, are other examples of association of aspects of behavior that, on the whole, are foreign to our mode of thought. (226)

As nonsensical as the elaborate network of associations made between the variety of practices, occurrences, and interpretations practiced in primitive society may appear to the modern eye, Boas is careful to note how this strangeness is a matter of modal differences. He quickly points out how analogous modes of behavior prevail, in fact, in modern society: “In order to make clear the point of view from which these phenomena seem to fall into an orderly array, we will investigate whether all vestiges of similar forms of thought have disappeared from our civilization” (226–27). It turns out that modern society is hardly exempt from the “irrational” hold emotional associations have on its citizens. Far from being extinguished, the register of emotional associations initially attributed to “primitive life” prevails in the everyday life of modern citizens.

But the remarkable aspect of emotions in civilized society, particularly when they are unpleasant, turns out not to be their occurrence but the difficulty with which they can be rationally explicated. The modern equivalent of the primitive “emotions of abhorrence” is to be found in the way etiquette is breached in civilized society. It is precisely to the extent that there is little, if any, scientific basis to justify a code of conduct that its infraction provokes reactions that can only be rendered in emotional terms: “Most important for the purpose of our investigation is the observation that all of us who live in the same society react to certain stimuli in the same way without being able to express the reason for our actions. A good example of what I refer to are breaches of social etiquette. A mode of behavior that does not conform to the customary manners, but differs from them in a striking way, creates on the whole, unpleasant emotions (227).”

Before we proceed to examine such breaches, it is well worth noting how most of them are related to the consumption of food, that is, how we are *accustomed* to consuming food. In both “In Praise of Shadows” and *The Mind of Primitive Man*, the criteria of taste provide a contrast to the standards of objectivity that support science. The terms of taste in a culture are operative only to the extent that they demand an emotional investment, one that its members can hardly explicate on rational grounds. Instead of providing a normative standard for taste, both texts convincingly emphasize

the difficulty involved in divesting the emotional terms of this investment, as if the universality of culture were reducible to one's *distaste* when being subjected to the standards of other cultures. That both authors repeatedly cite such instances instead of those of pleasure seems to suggest that the only way to define one's taste would be to explore the terms of its repulsion.

Boas emphasizes the resilience with which social customs are upheld in modern society to the point where, on their being transgressed, one's most immediate and deep-seated emotions are unleashed with no room for rational analysis. One's response to an offensive act is not to be rational but to simply assert the correctness of one's own etiquette on grounds that turn out to be no less arbitrary than the ritual conduct of "primitive" tribes. The degree of rationalization that ensues in explaining one's repugnance is only equal to the emotional value invested in it in the first place. More important, the value of such resilience only surfaces the moment the etiquette is stripped of its worth in the form of an infraction: "A close introspective analysis shows these reasons to be only attempts to interpret our feelings of displeasure; that our opposition to a change is not by any means dictated by conscious reasoning, but primarily by the emotional effect of the new idea which creates dissonance with the habitual" (232). If breaches of etiquette threaten to rupture the naturalness with which conduct is formalized, the immediate impulse is to rationalize such forms without much conscious speculation. It is precisely to the extent that one's reaction to a breach of conduct is "irrational" that the futility of explicating it beyond the immediacy of emotions it provokes becomes apparent. Processing reactions of disgust through rational inquiry offers little relief insofar as such emotions are, "by nature," irrational. The immediacy of such displeasure reveals how standards of taste are measured according to an emotional register, regardless of whether they prevail in modern civilization or "primitive" society:

It will be readily recognized that most of our table manners are purely traditional, and cannot be given any adequate explanation. To smack one's lips is considered bad style, and may excite feelings of disgust; while among some Indian tribes it would be considered bad taste not to smack one's lips when invited to dinner, because it would suggest that the guest does not enjoy his meal. Both for the Indian and for ourselves the constant performance of these actions which constitute good table manners make it practically impossible to act otherwise. An attempt to act differently would not only be difficult on account of the lack of adjustment of muscular motions, but also on account of the strong

emotional resistance we should have to overcome. The emotional displeasure is also released when we see others act contrary to custom. To eat with people having table manners different from our own excites feelings of displeasure which may rise to such an intensity as to cause qualms. (229)

V. DISASSOCIATION OF THE SENSES

In the sense that it intrudes on the observer's sense of propriety, the crude, uncalled for appearance of the "cream" that threatens to dissolve the synesthetic reverie of eating a Japanese delicacy in "In Praise of Shadows" may serve as another example of the kind of emotional association Boas examines in the breach of social etiquette. Yet Tanizaki's polemics on the nature of taste and Boas's analysis of etiquette diverge in important ways. First, the sense of intrusion brought on by foreign objects in "In Praise of Shadows," instead of being gauged specifically in "emotionally loaded" instances, seems overwhelmingly symbolic, with no point of reference. Instead of being distasteful in a particular way, foreign things embody the entire process of assimilation so much so that the particularity of the offensive nature of an object such as "cream" is all but lost. If the concrete sound and gesture of "smacking one's lips" disgusts the modern civilized person in Boas's analysis, then it is the nebulousness of "cream" as a mere signifier that seems to threaten the particular integrity of Tanizaki's reverie of tasting *yōkan*. Furthermore, while the "smack" signals the instantaneity with which an etiquette is breached, the amorphousness of "cream" also may, in indicating the pervasiveness of assimilating the "West," represent the stickiness of such intrusions as they coagulate beyond the fleeting and nearly unconscious instantaneity of outrage elicited, as Boas notes, by the infraction of an etiquette: "The antagonism against it is a reflex action accompanied by emotions not due to conscious speculation" (233). Last, whereas one's adherence to the various forms of conduct in the examples Boas provides results in a cohesion that is essentially social, the dynamic flow of tasteful experience Tanizaki seeks is strictly bound within the individual's body ensconced in an asocial environment. The cohesiveness guaranteed by refinement in the world of "In Praise of Shadows" takes place beyond the realm of everyday society. The plentitude offered through taste, instead of being confirmed through social interaction, is mapped onto the visceral realm of one's body and the amalgamative experience it conjures through its five senses. In this sense, Tanizaki's sense of refinement has

little to gain in adhering to those social bonds offered in the name of etiquette. The kind of propriety underscored by Boas is largely a matter of indifference in “In Praise of Shadows” insofar as the refinement of taste is contingent on one’s *withdrawal* from those realms of societal cohesion offered through the exchange of politesse. Whether public morality suffers as a result of the importation of foreign norms is of little concern to Tanizaki, compared to the damage it might inflict on the sense of autonomy gained through one’s taste.

All of these factors contribute to the most important point that differentiates the polemics of “In Praise of Shadows” from the dynamics involved in societal infractions: the repugnance elicited in assimilating “western civilization,” instead of calling forth the specificity and network of emotions that tacitly sustain an etiquette, invokes an *absence* of associations, and Tanizaki’s contempt for “cream” may be said to revolve around this lack. The frustration centers not so much on the specificity of a gesture or object as the sense that the associative field within which the emotional register of one’s taste resonates in all its complexity has been cleared out in the name of assimilating the technology of science:

I end up being preoccupied with the thought that if only there had been a scientific civilization unique to the East, one that was distinct from the West, we would have been in a much different social predicament. For example, had we any claim to our own distinct physics or chemistry, then the different technologies and industries emerging from them might have also developed into a variety of unique forms, and everyday appliances, medicine, as well as crafts might all have been in keeping with our ethnicity. In fact, our perception of the very foundations of physics or chemistry might have differed entirely from those conceived by the West. The nature and quality attributed to various phenomena such as light, electricity, or atoms might have been explored in a manner entirely at odds with how they are currently taught to us. (15–16; trans. mine)

Nothing short of an alternate history of science could provide the depth and variety of associations that are available in the modern society of “western civilization,” where science flourishes as the foundation of its culture. In the same way that the builder, in the attempt to simulate an authentic Japanese house, must be excluded from experiencing its authenticity, the modernity of Japan, while succeeding in its assimilation of

foreign technology, also ends up foundering in disengaging itself from the flow of acculturative associations emerging from a civilization based on science.

More important for Tanizaki, however, is how this drive to simply *apply* science, while eliding any gaps between its practice and theory, may unmoor the associative principles on which one's ethnic integrity and faculty of taste have been based until now. Any attempt to incorporate the standards of Europe or the United States would result, not only in disabling the bodily synesthesia invested in one's refinement, but constricting the discursive space hitherto reserved for embellishing one's refined taste, in essence "whiting" it out. Even the transparent medium of discourse, paper, is subject to this neutralization of the senses:

It has been said that paper was invented by the Chinese. For us, Western paper *only serves a practical purpose*, but the grain of Chinese and Japanese paper evokes a warmth that soothes the mind. While they may share the same color, they differ in terms of their *whiteness*. Whereas the *skin* of Western paper tends to *repel* light, the light on the skin of Japanese and Chinese paper is absorbed and enveloped with the calmness of the first snow falling on the ground. Soft and pliant as a leaf, soothing to the touch, our paper hardly makes a sound when folded or wrapped. It is no wonder that shiny, glittering objects make us uncomfortable. (19–20; trans. mine, emphasis added)

Strictly limited to its use value, "Western paper" evokes little in the realm of taste. It negates any attempt to experience the polymorphous sensuality of taste no less than it "tends to repel" light itself. In sharp contrast to this constriction in refinement, the abundance of associations accompanying the touch of Eastern paper provides Tanizaki with the opportunity to project an Other of the East (*Tōyō*) whose discursive and bodily traits (paper as "skin") are intertwined and grafted onto one's nativity in terms of "nature," one that transcends the techno-artificial dimensions encompassed by the West. One's refinement, at first defined as Japanese, is now shared by Japan and China to the point where the collective that Tanizaki refers to as "us" at the end of the passage now exceeds the boundaries of one's nationality. The ease with which this aestheticization is linked to China may provide us with a glimpse of the geopolitical undercurrent at work against the association Boas makes between science and "western civilization." As already mentioned, the sense of repugnance Tanizaki evinces has little to do with the particularity

of offense provoked by an infraction. The outrage brought on by a breach can be defused immediately to the extent that it ends up reinforcing the propriety of one's conduct. But the sense of intrusion addressed throughout "In Praise of Shadows" proves to be too overwhelming to be dissolved in any form whatsoever. The outrage here lasts, and Tanizaki gauges his resentment according to an economy that perseveres, parsed out by suspicions that if the loss in capacity to make such native associations is the price to pay for assimilation, there is little prospect of any return. The most quotidian realms, such as speech, in being curtailed to the exigencies of foreign technology, will end up incurring losses as irretrievable as they are gradual, escaping notice as long as this economy prevails:

Even with regard to speech, we speak more quietly, with fewer words, and, most important, we value the "space" between phrases; but that kind of space, of course, is destroyed the moment it has been recorded by a machine. And so we end up modifying our art, distorting it so it will fulfill the requirements of a machine. Of course, because this machine has been developed by Westerners, it works in tandem with their art. The fact that we lose so much in so many ways must give us pause. (19; trans. mine)

Instead of presenting a threat against a particular style or form of taste prior to modernization, the specter of modernity simply portends the dissolution of one's faculty of taste. As if to preempt such loss, Tanizaki projects his native refinement as a collective trait to be shared between China and Japan by grafting the faculty of taste onto the body politic of an East Asian alliance, one that, unsurprisingly, historically coincides with the dimensions of territorial expansion claimed by Japan in the name of "the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." While it might be compelling to analyze the political aesthetics of complicity involved in the writing and publication of "In Praise of Shadows," I am interested here in how Tanizaki measures the deterioration of taste with one's ethnicity by coupling them together *against* the success Boas attributes to Japan in its assimilation of "western civilization." Contrary to Boas's assessment of Japan's complete assimilation of "all the best and worst traits of western civilization," Tanizaki underscores how, in the midst of such profuse application, those associative traits that are part and parcel of "western civilization" may prove not to be so adoptable in practice.

Ironically enough, this disjunction becomes apparent, not in the realm of

incorporating specific etiquettes from abroad, but in the process of *cultivating* science. Tanizaki's desire to project an ethnicity based on taste that encompasses East Asia is equal to the sense that the rapid success with which technology or institutions from Europe and the United States have been emulated is gained only through a collective neglect in imbibing those associations inherent in the practice of science. The associative nature of "western civilization," in Tanizaki's eyes, far from being emotional, turns out to be unrelentingly scientific. If science were valued strictly in terms of its application, assimilating it would hardly be problematic. The problem, which Tanizaki intuits but hardly analyzes, is that science constitutes a culture in and of itself, one whose associative nature prevails with as much force as does the practice of etiquette in civilized societies or of rituals among primitive peoples. Boas is quick to distinguish the culture of science from a culture based on the mores of etiquette or taboos, insofar as the nature of its associations is constantly subject to speculation and revision. Such prerogatives not only inform the methodology of scientific research but, more important, constitute the basic elements of civilized society: "Thus an important change from primitive culture to civilization seems to consist in the gradual elimination of what might be called the emotional, socially determined associations of sense-impressions and of activities, for which intellectual associations are gradually substituted" (252). It would be in the best interests of such a society then to have its participants *not* be entirely committed to those associations that, while supported "traditionally," are nonetheless proven to be false. As Boas himself makes clear, the analysis of human behavior requires a certain lack of commitment or "agnosticism" toward those standards that cannot withstand the rigors of scientific inquiry. In this sense, the human sciences, whether examining etiquettes or taboos, must break down the immediacy of experience that traditional practices are meant to ensure and, subsequently, inform us of their systemic significance, one that is as unknown as it is unconscious. While the human species is analyzed according to the variety of cultures it assumes, this diversity can only be viewed comprehensively from a vantage point of scientific observation. The certainty of such analysis is always held at bay, yet proposed as in all likelihood true. Always regarded as tentative, these conclusions, unlike norms of tradition, may be questioned, modified, or in certain cases even rejected. Boas empathically warns against the mistaken impulse to embrace science as if it constituted a tradition. In such cases, science turns into a culture no less susceptible to error than the superstitions of primitive society. The "cure" advocated by science against such

susceptibility is not to be immune to those questions cast on its discoveries but to welcome them:

In scientific inquiries we should always be clear in our own minds of the fact that we always embody a number of hypotheses and theories in our explanations, and that we do *not* carry the analysis of any given phenomenon to completion. If we were to do so, progress would hardly be possible, because every phenomenon would require an endless amount of time for thorough treatment. We are only too apt, however, to forget entirely the general, and for most of us purely *traditional, theoretical basis which is the foundation* of our reasoning, and to assume that the result of our reasoning is absolute truth. In this we commit the same error that is being committed, and has always been committed, by all the less educated, including members of primitive tribes. They are more easily satisfied than we are at the present time; but they also assume as true the traditional element which enters into their explanations, and therefore accept as absolute truth the conclusions based on it. *It is evident that the fewer the number of traditional elements that enter into our reasoning, and the clearer we endeavor to be in regard to the hypothetical part of our reasoning, the more logical will be our conclusions.* There is an undoubted tendency in the advance of civilization to eliminate traditional elements, and to gain a clearer and clearer insight into the hypothetical basis of our reasoning. It is therefore not surprising, that, in the history of civilization, reasoning becomes more and more logical, not because each individual carries out his thought in a more logical manner, but *because the traditional material which is handed down to each individual has been thought out and worked out more thoroughly and more carefully.* While in primitive civilization the traditional material is doubted and examined by only a very few individuals, the number of thinkers who try to free themselves from the fetters of tradition increases as civilization advances. (222–23; emphasis added)

With its power to question and filter out any bias tradition promotes on irrational grounds, the positivistic spirit Boas invests in science would have been undoubtedly dismissed Tanizaki, not so much because of its intrusiveness, but precisely the reverse—the spirit of such inquiry can only skirt around the premise of refined experiences, which by definition escape scientific observation.

Tanizaki's skepticism about this scientific prerogative, of course, is hardly unique to the literary polemics of early modern Japan. We find, for example, similar misgivings held in the name of refinement depicted in Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way*. In observing Doctor Cottard's gracelessness, Madame Verdurin remarks, "He's a *man of science*, out of touch with the practical side of life, he has no idea of the value of things and relies on what we tell him" (209; emphasis added). As far as she is concerned, the doctor's medical knowledge only takes away from his capacity to engage in polite conversation. As the narrator notes, "[s]ince he completely lacked the critical faculty which he thought he exercised on everything, that refinement of politeness which consists in declaring to a person to whom you are doing a favor, without however expecting to be believed, that you are in fact indebted to him, was a waste of effort with the doctor, who took everything literally" (208). Refined speech, far from providing a transparent mode of communication, operates on an economic basis whereby one's net worth is constantly reassessed according to the various rates at which utterances are exchanged. The modest statement, while *proposing* to deflate its speaker's worth, in fact signals the occasion by which exponential gains are made out of the listener's tacit approval. One's worth, instead of being stated, is *derived* through the social currency of politesse. If refinement "consists in declaring to a person to whom you are doing a favor, without however expecting to be believed, that you are in fact indebted to him," the things one says hold up insofar as they do *not* have to measure up to the facts. Nothing could be more inappropriate in such cases than to treat such exchanges, as Doctor Cottard does, either at face value or as a complete farce. He proves himself to be inept at navigating his way through the most elementary form of politesse, reinforcing the sense that in the eyes of a "man of science" the *way* etiquettes are exchanged might just as well be as incomprehensible as it would be in the mind of Boas's primitive man.

At the same time, if the procurement of refinement remains precious to Verdurin's little "circle," it is constantly tinged with an irony that anticipates its demise, one that paves the way to the opening sentence of the subsequent volume *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, whereby the terms of refinement have been reversed by the turn of the century in Paris: ". . . my father replied that although a guest as eminent as Cottard, a scientific man of some *renown*, would always be an *asset* at one's dinner table, the Marquis de Norpois would be bound to see Swann, with his showing off and his name-dropping, as nothing but a *vulgar* swank, 'a rank outsider,' as he would put it" (3; emphasis added). If the relentlessness with which the

passing of time ruins the standards of social standing and etiquette depicted in Proust's novel, it also indicates its authenticity, gained only at the cost of divesting those values imbued in nineteenth-century etiquette of their authority. In this sense, both Boas and Proust, in their early twentieth-century writings, treat taste as if it is beyond restoration. Etiquettes and matters of taste are always in a constant state of transition, and those of the past can no longer be experienced in their *proper* terms. This kind of resolve and consolation in tracing the extinction of such terms is almost entirely absent in the nature of refinement explored throughout "In Praise of Shadows."

We may return here to the question of what constitutes the modernity of a nation whose distinguishing feature lies in its aptitude to assimilate modernity itself. While modernity may provide the gauge by which the progress of a nation is monitored, one has to wonder what constitutes the exact nature of the nation itself. While it is the exact nature of "society" that is constantly probed throughout *In Search of Lost Time*, one in which the nationhood of France requires only a passing thought, the polemics of "In Praise of Shadows" cannot help but revolve around the threat that science presents in extinguishing it in *ethnic* terms. If Proust's characters cannot help but be drawn to those interactions within society that define their sense of taste, the refinement of "In Praise of Shadows" works inversely. As mentioned earlier, the refined experiences Tanizaki advocates depend on one's willingness to withdraw from the realm of etiquettes exchanged for the sake of maintaining societal cohesion. Any form of social interaction based on proper conduct only gets in the way of the transcendence Tanizaki seeks out of one's bodily taste. Tanizaki cannot do without the pleasure of isolated refinement any more than Proust's protagonists can divest themselves of the socioeconomy of etiquettes. Indeed, in terms of Tanizaki's polemics, the Proustian narrative might even be considered scientific insofar as the exteriority of conduct it depicts is rendered palpable only to the degree that the critical analysis of such conduct remains both distant and exact. It is almost as if the critical vantage point, offered first by the narrator at the beginning of the novel, is gradually handed over through its meticulous precision to the reader. If Proust's novel allows readers to gain a perspective from which its space can be viewed precisely because it is beyond the realm of their lived experiences, then we can see how this kind of exteriority overlaps with the anthropological aims Boas advocates throughout *The Mind of Primitive Man*. Like the past depicted in *In Search of Lost Time*, any glimpse into the "world of primitive man" is made available only to the

extent that its observers cannot inhabit it. The perspective on such spaces can only be gained by making them uninhabitable. According to the polemics of “In Praise of Shadows,” then, science is only an extension of this kind of exteriority whereby the impenetrability of taste and all that it embodies must be eliminated for the sake of a discourse based on observation and analysis. Whether an etiquette or scientific protocol is being observed hardly matters insofar as the propriety of their exchange is justified by the observable exteriority of one’s conduct. Any vantage point afforded by science only comes at the cost of giving up one’s capacity to experience an interiority cultivated through taste.

It is important, however, to recognize how Tanizaki’s polemics on ethnicity depend on a sequential leap no less drastic than the one Boas makes in asking us to see “primitive” Europe through the eyes of ancient Egyptians in order to reevaluate the currency of Japan’s modernity. When Tanizaki associates ethnicity with taste, one cannot help but ask, Since when did the faculty of taste shed its role of ranking social groups circumscribed within a national polity and assume the dimensions of ethnicity instead? Given how class and regional distinctions are meticulously described in Tanizaki’s fiction, most notably in *The Makioka Sisters*, their absence in “In Praise of Shadows” is all the more conspicuous, yet also telling. While the stakes of refinement in *The Makioka Sisters* are depicted as provincial and realistic, those pursued throughout “In Praise of Shadows” are driven by the need to define refinement as a transcendental ideal. The most provocative aspect of this ideal, however, is how it seems to have emerged as a result of being aborted with the same fluidity that Tanizaki introduces, yet abandons, the notion of constructing a house in “pure Japanese style” at the beginning of the essay. In fact, the terms of such transcendence almost seem to hinge on the idea of its dissolution, as if its contours can only emerge with the threat of its extinction. Any terms based on the nature of taste and ethnicity then could only be claimed in retrospect, in anticipation of their demise. If, as in the case of Boas’s revised commentary on Japan, the success by which a nation modernizes demands a kind of reversal in time so much so that previous assumptions and associations must undergo “corrections,” then the measure of criticism inveighed against such success depends on a leap forward in the prediction of a disastrous future. Insofar as the discursive capacity for taste embodies one’s *transcendental nativity*, Tanizaki anticipates how such loss would necessarily give way to a crisis over ethnicity, one that in its extremity could eventually lead to a crisis of spiritual proportions.

VI. ANTICIPATING THE TERROR OF TASTELESSNESS

If the polemics on taste and science in “In Praise of Shadows” seem quaint in the context of contemporary Japan, it would be well worth reminding ourselves how they have continued to resonate into its postwar period, most disturbingly perhaps at the end of the twentieth century. By then, the disjunction between taste and science that Tanizaki addressed in the 1930s is hardly a literary affair, nor is there any room to imagine or simulate any space in keeping with the “pure” style of Japanese architecture or art of tea. Instead, I would argue the sense of threat portended in “In Praise of Shadows” gets played out in the realm of everyday life in the form of *terror of tastelessness*. To the extent that Tanizaki’s polemics anticipate a decline in the faculty of taste, the trajectory of such loss may parallel a national agenda to assimilate science as *utterly* technical. Confined to its application, those associative realms, that is, the culture of science claimed to encompass everyday life in “western civilization,” may prove to be unnecessary. At the same time, one’s faculty of taste, at least the kind that Tanizaki insists on preserving, may no longer be deemed necessary either. In a society increasingly based on the accumulation of technological capital, any role the faculty of taste can play in allocating the significance of one’s body may have no other option but to evaporate. While the scope of this article is limited to the origins of this disintegration, the outrage laden throughout “In Praise of Shadows,” along with the desire to simulate ethnicity through discourses through bodily interventions, far from being extinguished, ends up amalgamating into an apocalyptic vision of terror, one that can only be articulated first by tracing its origins. While the proportions of this vision are far from anything Tanizaki would have imagined in his fiction and essays, its apocalyptic terms are hardly out of alignment with those anticipated throughout “In Praise of Shadows.” For now, a mere quotation will have to suffice. In his memoir, *Aum and I* [*Ômu to watashi*], Ikuo Hayashi, traces the origins of his commitment to the Aum Shinrikyô sect and how it culminated in his role as one of the key assailants in the Tokyo subway sarin attack incident. These origins, instead of stemming from the teachings of the sect or its leaders, turn out to be rooted in his disillusionment as a doctor practicing “Western medicine,” one that is finally ameliorated through the discovery of a “native science,” a practice that uncannily resembles the alternative science projected as an ideal throughout “In Praise of Shadows” (if only there had been a scientific civilization unique to the East”). In a nation whose technological prowess

seems unsurpassable, what Tanizaki writes off as a flight of his imagination ends up being explored with the utmost sincerity and executed in its most extreme form. Unencumbered by the kind of debt of assimilation of Western science that haunts Tanizaki's essay, in the eyes of Hayashi, this alternative science promises a freer flow of associations as dynamic as the synesthesia of refinement advocated throughout "In Praise of Shadows":

At the time [1987], Hirakawa published a book by Ishida Hidemi called *Kinagareru shintai* [The body flowing with qi]. Filled with references to studies on the *Zhuangzi*, Taoism, Xian Dao meditation, the book offered an overview of a "science of the body" (*shintaikan*) as it was understood traditionally in the East. It emphasized the concept of the energy flow—how energy entered, circulated, and exited the body. It was in sharp contrast to the static nature of Western medicine, which evolved out of practicing the "cadaverous" methodology of dissection. The ideas in this book overlapped with Indian concepts of kundalini and chakra, and it made me realize that Eastern medicine revolved around a medical system as well, but one that was more flexible in its concept of the body as based on the flow of "qi." (69; trans. mine)

The difference between Tanizaki's conjectures and Hayashi's account, while by no means superficial, as Boas would say, requires exhaustive analysis, but for now it may be worth pointing out how, according to Hayashi's account, the appeal of this alternative science resides, not in the particularity of experience it offers, but in the abstraction of the signifier "flow" itself. If "cream," in all its heaviness, disrupts Tanizaki's reverie of refinement, then the chain of associations based on the signifier "qi" constitutes a flow in itself that is entirely ethereal. And if the word "cream" for Tanizaki represents the racial "whiteness" inherent in assimilation, then the preponderance of signifiers of ethereality based around "qi" and "flow" (*ryūnyū*, *ryūshutsu*, *nagare*, *ryūdō*) convey or, perhaps more cryptically, enshroud ethnicity in terms of imperceptibility and tastelessness. Such terms are inscribed in the very form of terror expressed through its means of destruction: an invisible gas whose sole purpose is the obliteration of the senses.

NOTES

¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald's "Echoes of the Jazz Age" (1931) and "My Lost City" (1932) offer controversial ruminations on the dissolution of standards in taste. While an analysis of these essays is beyond the scope of this article, I plan on incorporating them into my work in progress on what I have termed the "terror of tastelessness."

² Exasperated by the tenacious popularity of racialist theories that purport to be "scientific," Boas explicitly states his conclusion at the beginning of the revised edition of *The Mind of Primitive Man*: "A close connection between race and personality has never been established. The concept of racial type as commonly used even in scientific literature is misleading and requires a logical as well as a biological redefinition. While it would seem that a great number of American students of biology, psychology and anthropology concur with these views, popular prejudice, based on earlier scientific and popular tradition, has certainly not diminished, for race prejudice is still an important factor in our life" (v-vi).

³ While *chajin* can mean a tea master as well as an aesthete, and Tanizaki interchanges the two meanings throughout this essay, I have translated the word accordingly, but it is worth noting how the way Tanizaki overlaps its meanings provides further illustration of how the polymorphous nature of taste is embedded discursively in his *style* of writing.

⁴ In Harper and Seidensticker's translation of "In Praise of Shadows" *kureemu* is mistranslated as "cream-filled chocolates" (20) By referring to another delicacy the analogy may be smoother than it is in the original text, but it ends up undermining the simplicity with which Tanizaki attempts to convey *kureemu* as being merely heavy and white and nothing more in substance.

⁵ In a similar way, at the beginning of *Naomi* [*Chijin no ai*] the narrator readily admits that he was enthralled less by the titular character in person as by the way her *name* appears in English: "I found it remarkable how her name spelled in English was 'Naomi' and how this made her seem utterly western. That's how it all started" (6; trans. mine).

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