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## **The Depiction of Japanese Homosexuality through Masks and Mirrors**

### **An Observational Analysis of *Funeral Parade of Roses***

#### Abstract

Matsumoto Toshio's avant-garde documentary *Funeral Parade of Roses* (*bara no sōretsu*) depicts life in Shinjuku's 1960s underground culture. Using Sakabe Megumi's hermeneutical theory, the film's depiction of sexuality is analysed through its use of literal and figurative mirrors and masks. It is argued that sexuality is highly performative and that the film itself is structured like a play of mirrors, questioning the nature of reality by deferring hypostasis *ad infinitum*.<sup>1</sup>

#### Keywords

Sakabe Megumi, Mirror and Mask, Close Viewing, Avant-Garde Documentary, Gender Performativity

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the logic of the film, I will refer to Eddie as 'she' and Peter, the actor, when 'out of character,' as 'he.' As for Eddie prior to becoming a *gei bōi*, I will use the socially assigned 'he.'



Fig. 1 – 36.16 min

## Introduction

The best homosexuality is in America, like the best everything else, and California, where all national tendencies achieve their most hyperbolic expression, is a living beach of writhing male bodies.

Burgess 1979

There is a propensity among proponents of ‘global queering’ (Altman 1996) to treat Western attitudes towards homosexuality as the gold standard, ranking other communities according to their proximities to these standards. In my discussion of the avant-garde documentary film *Funeral Parade of Roses* by Matsumoto Toshio, I suggest a model that is dominated neither by global nor local attitudes but defines itself by an eclecticism drawing freely on both. I argue that *Funeral Parade of Roses* uses its central hermeneutical elements—the mirror and the mask—to create a fragmented reality in which identities are fluid and constantly displaced. First, I will introduce Sakabe Megumi’s hermeneutical theory of mirrors and masks. Second, I analyze key episodes of the film for their semiotic elements, pointing out the eclectic references it makes. While my description broadly follows the chronology of the film, it is framed by philosopher Sakabe Megumi’s theories, which are referred to where appropriate.

### The Hermeneutics of Mirrors and Masks

Even in a casual viewing of *Funeral Parade of Roses*, one cannot help but notice the prominent place accorded to masks and mirrors within the film. Drawing on Sakabe Megumi's hermeneutics, I will show that these two elements are not merely accidental, but pervade the whole structure of the film. In articulating his particular view on masks, Sakabe expands on an essay written by Watsuji Tetsurō (1937), which examines traditional uses of masks in Japanese and Greek theatre. While Watsuji concludes that the mask ultimately refers to a subject, Sakabe allows no such inference and concludes, rather, that the mask displaces identity without ultimately pointing towards a real face.

Sakabe explains the interaction of mirror and mask, drawing on Nō theatre's *kagami no ma* (鏡の間, mirror room). In the mirror room, the main actor puts on their mask to transform into their character. Sakabe argues that "the structure of the face (面差し, omozashi) is the same as that of the mask (面, omote), in that it sees itself, it sees the other and it sees itself as another" (Sakabe 1989, 44-45). In Sakabe's example of the Nō actor, the actor sits in front of the mirror while putting on their mask, seeing themselves and the mask (i.e., the other), then seeing themselves transformed into the other in the act of putting on the mask. In this way, the mask becomes a new face with the same ontological status as the previous face. No distinction can be made between a supposed 'real' face and the mask; the two categories collapse into each other.

In this way, the mirror and the mask act in unison to displace self-identity. Throughout the film, ambivalent close-ups of landscape-like bodies precede the gendered performances of the very same bodies. This practice puts pressure on the idea of an ontologically prior reality (hypostasis) itself. The mask and the mirror are used to facilitate the emergence of gendered performances and, thereby, establish themselves from the start of the film as the aesthetic principles of its portrayal of sexuality. In the following paragraphs, I show how they appear consistently and create the dreamlike surface (*omote*) of the film itself. Ko (2011) and Raine (2012) already examined the film in terms of Matsumoto's own theory of neo-documentarism, which mixes elements of avant-garde and documentary filmmaking. I, in turn, will focus on various aspects of the depiction of homosexuality through the film's recurring aesthetic elements. In his own theory, Matsumoto also attributes a central role in breaking up dichotomous structures to the mask and the mirror (Inoue & Kerner 2014).

### *Funeral Parade of Roses*

Matsumoto's avant-garde documentary follows Eddie (Ikehata Shinnosuke, a.k.a. Peter), a transgender bar hostess and small-scale drug dealer, through the 1960s Shinjuku underground culture. The film is composed of different episodes, interspersed with documentary-style interviews, and is connected loosely by a storyline referencing the myth of Oedipus. The plot proceeds in two movements. The first proceeds via flashbacks that Eddie experiences, which increasingly reveal her past. It hints at Eddie's troubled family history, in the course of which her father left the family and Eddie killed her own mother and her mother's lover. The second movement is the conflict over the running of Bar Genet and its owner Gonda, which develops between Eddie and Leda, the latter of whom is Gonda's favorite lover prior to Eddie's entrance onto the scene. Leda's suicide allows Eddie to take over the bar and become Gonda's exclusive lover, yet this also leads to Gonda's suicide after he realises that Eddie is his son.

### Close Viewing

#### Performative Sexuality

Firstly, the film's title deserves some attention. *Bara* (rose) in *bara no sōretsu* (薔薇の葬列) was a derogatory term for homosexual men in Japan, implying effeminacy. Hosoe Eikō and Yukio Mishima were, to my knowledge, the first to appropriate the term artistically in their 1963 photo project *Ordeal by Roses* (薔薇刑, *barakei*), the efforts of which *Funeral Parade of Roses* continues. The film opens with a quote from Beaudelaire, "I am the wound and the dagger, the victim and the executioner," as Matsumoto saw 'gay boys' (*gei bōis*) as the wounds of society (cited in Nettleton 2014). I suggest that through the metaphors of the mask and the mirror, *gei bōis* become means for society to see itself and the arbitrariness of its own fundamental reality. Matsumoto achieves this by creating confusion between the mirrored and the real throughout the film and by showing the viewer masks, as convincing as faces that belie what they represent.

The film's first scene shows Eddie and Gonda together in bed, their bodies indistinguishable. Only when Eddie asks for his dress and Gonda shows off his muscles does the gendered performance begin. In answer to Eddie's (perhaps ironic) question, whether Gonda could lift one of the (not-heavy-looking) chairs, Gonda gets down on one knee and starts vigorously to raise

the chair over his head. They embrace and the camera turns, showing us the very same scene in a mirror Eddie was looking into before. Or have we been looking into the mirror and are now seeing the room directly for the first time? It is impossible to say; the reflection of reality is displaced by the reality of reflection.

### Multi-Layered Filmmaking

Throughout the film, Leda, Eddie's rival for Gonda's love, is dressed in a kimono reminiscent of those worn by *kagama*, or male prostitute kabuki actors. Her appearance is the first hint at an older mode of homosexuality from the *gei bōi* culture Eddie represents, while their shared love interest, Gonda, clearly represents the traditional homosexual mode of the older male admirer (*nenja*). As Gonda and Eddie drive away from their hotel room, Eddie appears worried about Leda having seen them. Matsumoto cuts to the rear-view mirror view of Eddie, where he appears colder and almost calculating. The mirror serves as a new perspective that reveals a different facet of the protagonist's personality. At this time, the opening credits start rolling, telling us that Eddie is being played by Peter (ピーター), introducing yet another layer of personhood to the protagonist. In line with Matsumoto's theory of avant-garde documentary, the conflation of diegetic and non-diegetic identity pervades the whole film (Ko 2011).

The most striking instances of this conflation are the strewn-in interviews with the film's actors, the first one of which begins at 9.44 min. The first of these is with Ogasawara Osamu (playing Leda) in full costume in front of an arrangement of cherry blossoms. Asked about her motivation for being a '*gei bōi*', she responds that she likes to be and behave like a woman (*onna*). While not wanting to be a man again, she also does not want to become a 'real woman' (*honto no onna*), i.e., undergo a permanent sex change. Next, an unIntroduced young man is interviewed. He is not cross-dressed, likes being gay (*gei bōi*), and identifies as having been born gay (*umare tsuki*). The interviews complement each other by highlighting the ambivalence of the term '*gei bōi*'. In investigating the question of whether there exists a gay identity in Japan, McLelland (2000, 460) points out that the term *gei bōi* was "used of transvestite male prostitutes", reminiscent of *kagama*. The kimono-wearing Leda corresponds to this description, and it is tempting to read Ogasawara's interview as supporting evidence for this view. The second interviewee, however, appears more closely aligned with Western ideas about homosexual identity. Both interviewees identify as *gei bōis*, yet

their definitions of the term seem contrary to each other. Rather than arbitrating, Matsumoto presents both in a layered fashion, frustrating reductionist approaches.

Another part of this multi-layered approach is Matsumoto's eclectic use of different cultures and narratives, which reflect the origins and trajectories of gay identities that are inexorably interwoven in Matsumoto's version of 1960s Shinjuku. The first time we see Bar Genet is a good example of this. Leda looks into a mirror and the room disappears until only Leda's reflection is visible. Matsumoto superimposes the evil queen's question from the Snow White fairy tale: 'mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?' (*kagami yo kagami kono yo de ichiban utsukushii hito ha dare?*). As Leda looks on, Eddie's reflection appears in the mirror, as if in response to the question. The symbolic function of this mirror episode goes far beyond implying that the ageing Leda (Ogasawara was 25 years old) is not the most beautiful woman 'in the land' anymore. If we recall the story of Snow White, her mother dies in childbirth and her father remarries the evil queen, who tries to get rid of the beautiful Snow White. Unbeknownst to Eddie, Gonda, whom Leda is dating, is Eddie's father, and the scene foreshadows the film's ending. Hence, Matsumoto freely borrows from Western and Japanese traditions, mixing them to create a new, in-between, reality.

### Society and Its Outsiders

When Eddie walks through the city, she is heckled by a group of young men. They stop chasing her when a delivery man spills his noodles all over the street. The scene of the lying bike and noodles makes Eddie recall an image of a woman with a stab wound. Later, we learn she was Eddie's mother, whom Eddie killed. Eddie then collapses against a wall covered in posters of Pierre Paolo Passolini's movie adaptation of the myth of Oedipus (Oedipus Rex 1967). Eddie's collapse attracts another pursuer, whom Eddie evades by stumbling into an exhibition of masks. While Eddie is in the exhibition space, an audio recording elaborates on the metaphysics of masks.

While *Funeral Parade of Roses* predates Sakabe Megumi's philosophical writing on the topic by some 20 years, Matsumoto's use of mirrors and the scene with the mask exhibition seems to flow from the same source. The recording explores mask-wearing as a social performance through a number of dichotomies—some people wear the same mask all their lives, others switch masks frequently; some masks represent features accurately (*sugao no tokuchō wo kyōchō shita kamen*), others do not correspond to the

face; some are easily recognized as masks, others can hardly be distinguished from the real face. The recording goes on to explain that people always wear masks when facing other people and that only these masks are seen: Even when a mask is removed the face is seldom revealed; instead, the recording hints that there might be an infinite regress of masks. These masks are often taken to be persons. Consequently, emotions are also predicated on masks, rather than on persons.



Fig. 2 – 92.12 min

The film presents us with a world where masks structure the interactions of people and may even be indistinguishable from ‘real faces’ (*sugao*, lit. naked or uncovered face). This account diverges from Sakabe’s theory of masks only in so far as Sakabe openly questions the existence of the naked face itself. I want to suggest that Matsumoto, in the exhibit scene, hints at the very same result—if the statements of the audio recording are taken at face value, it seems that people’s faces are almost never encountered, and if they are, there is no way of knowing that they are. This leaves the concept of *sugao* as little more than a comforting illusion: it may well be that people are not hiding behind masks, but simply are nothing but masks.

When Ogasawara is interviewed, the interviewer first comments on how she looks “just like a real girl” (*honto no onna*) [9.40 min], and in this sense too, her style is reminiscent of the male kabuki actors playing female roles, who maintained their social performance of womanhood outside the theatre as well. Yet, Leda consistently surrounds herself with artificial roses in the

Bar and in Gonda's apartment. At her funeral her mourners mention that roses were her favourite flowers, but that they always had to be artificial [87.44 min]. Leda's style recalls a different time, when she would have had a designated place in society. Eddie, on the other hand, wears an obviously artificial mask, with exaggerated eyelashes and an aggressively modern way of dressing, almost as a form of protest. We never see Leda outside of Shinjuku's underground culture, whereas Eddie appears often in social situations in wider society. Eddie's obvious performance of sexuality questions more-muted performances of sexuality in wider society; Eddie's obvious mask questions the subtler masks of society, which are taken for faces. We might think of this affect as a variation on the uncanny valley concept introduced by Mori Masahiro as *bukimi no tani genshō* (不気味の谷現象) in 1970. Originally derived from robotics, the uncanny valley describes a phenomenon when a robot becomes more humanlike (and equally holds for images of human-like beings). While initially, empathetic responses increase with increasing likeness, there comes a point when all empathy drops away, after which point the previous relationship holds again. While normal people's masks are indistinguishable from faces (as opposed to theatrical masks, for example), Eddie's mask clearly looks like a face, yet it introduces an uncanny amount of artificiality into the practice of mask wearing. As such, it is a face that looks like a mask, or, which amounts to the same, a mask that looks like a face and questions society by openly collapsing the ontological distinction between the two.

A sudden cut shows us Tony, an American G.I. on leave, and Eddie drunk-enly walking down a street. As Tony hollers for a cab, a quick shot of seven naked young men seen from the back is inserted [25.41]. They stand in a row, facing a white background, and one of them has a rose clenched between his upper thighs, signaling his homosexuality, for which no other outward sign exists. Despite these young men all looking similar, one of them is clearly marked as an outsider by the rose. Similarly, while the burly black G.I. looks very different from the smaller Eddie, they share an intimate bond of community that bridges gaps of language, nation, and color. The love scene between Tony and Eddie is further introduced by a scene in which a filmmaker called Guevara tells his assistant Ichiyo to thread in a piece of film. The episode seems to suggest that the sex scene that follows is watched by Guevara and Ichiyo.

The scene resembles that of Eddie and Gonda making love in the very beginning of the film; the camera runs along Eddie's body, showing Tony's caresses only peripherally. Turning upwards towards the wall at the head of



the bed, we encounter a mirror reflecting the action. The camera's action also reverses then, traveling along the lovers' bodies, past their feet, coming to rest on the breast-pocket of Tony's shirt. Here we see a stack of photographs, the first of which shows Tony in full uniform with two blindfolded Vietnamese men, who are either dead or have been tortured. The pictures lend some context to an intertitle that appears in the mirror reflection [27.16 min] reading "what a cunning, mysterious artifice" (*nan to iu warugashikoi shinpi na takurami*). The photos point beyond the, so far, jolly-seeming G.I.'s demeanor in Tokyo, hinting at his conduct in the war in Vietnam. Before the mirror reflection, we see a couple in the throes of passion, with Tony's whole body almost eclipsing Eddie's. This one-dimensional image of the gay G.I. enjoying Tokyo's pleasure district is suddenly contrasted by the uniformed man posing with the two Vietnamese men. Tony's real identity cannot be resolved, as we see two masks: the G.I. in uniform and the naked, sensual man. Neither of these is more real than the other; they are both artificial, which becomes particularly clear after the next cut, where we see Eddie writhing in simulated pleasure in the middle of Matsumoto's film-set. Tony is sitting passively on the other side of the bed, watching. Again, Matsumoto breaks the uniform surface of the film with a radical intervention, this time to show how his own subjectivity shapes what appears to be a reality. While the scene shows Eddie, still acting, we are introduced to a third Tony, on set but not in action, and we wonder to what extent this is Tony whom we are still seeing, and to what extent it is Don Madrid, the actor.

### Alternatives to Oedipus

When Matsumoto advances the Oedipal element of the main story line from 34.07 min onwards, we are introduced to Eddie's family. An empty hairdresser's shop hints at his mother's profession. We find Eddie and his mother at the table, her smoking and looking at a photo of a person with a burned-out expression. She mentions that Eddie's father left 12 years ago. Eddie tries to assume his father's place, but she only laughs at him for it. It is here that we recognize the stabbed woman to be Eddie's mother and the burned-out expression as belonging to his father. With the parallel to the myth of Oedipus often being advanced as an interpretative framework for the film, it is hard to ignore its explanatory power. PHILLIPS (2016) argues that this is somewhat misleading, since the parallels tend to overshadow the differences between *Funeral Parade of Roses* and the classical myth. For one,

we might take Matsumoto's remark that *gei bōis* constitute the wounds of society at face value and take the present scene as the depiction of a dysfunctional family. After the father leaves, his son is trying to take his place, not sexually, but as the head of the household. Eddie's family structure in *Funeral Parade of Roses* can be seen as the result of the downfall of the *ie* system, in which the grandparents, their son, his wife, and their children all live together in a house. With modernization, the *ie* system was expanded to the state's structure and the emperor became the head of household of all families (*ie*) (Kumagai 1986). However, the decline of the *ie* system, particularly in modern urban environments, eroded its socio-religious meaning, which Takeda (1973) locates in ancestor worship.

The parallels to Freud's reading of Oedipus and particularly to his idea that the family is a representation of wider society (or vice versa) are striking (Freud 1930). Yet the *ie* system does not bear being broken down in such a way. Rather than being a universal, unfalsifiable, theoretical approach, the *ie* system was a historic reality founded on conceptions entirely independent of Oedipus. It stands to reason that the pertinence of these references is based upon the viewer's own background. Whether the film is best read along the lines of Anti-Oedipus, as Phillips (2016) suggests, or as anti-*ie* is a matter of interpretation. I suggest reading it as an examination of a society renegotiating its own structures.

The shot of the hairdresser's shop places Eddie's family in the urban service sector, far from the rice fields of rural Japan. There are no grandparents, and Eddie's father has left. Eddie establishing himself as the head of the household fails, despite him being the eldest son; his mother's laughter signifies that the tradition of male household dominance is at an end. Unable to be a man, Eddie plays at being a woman, which displeases his mother too. As sexology changed the nature of sexuality and attitudes towards homosexuality, the family too underwent change. Eddie has no male role model; the classical structures are eroded. The members of the Shinjuku underground (*angura*) culture, apart from these traditional structures, constantly renegotiate various aspects of life, from drug-taking to filmmaking.



Fig. 3 – 28.36 min

### Performing Womanhood?

After Eddie talks to her mother, we meet her again, going to a shopping mall with friends. The three of them are garishly dressed, to a point where it is unlikely that they wish to blend in as women at all—many passersby give them bewildered looks behind their backs. Unlike Eddie alone, the group appears unaware of how they are perceived. The scene ends when the three of them brazenly make a trip to the men's room and use the urinals.

As McLelland (2000) points out, the question of gay identity in Japan is by no means a trivial one. In *Funeral Parade of Roses*, the protagonists do not define themselves in terms of gender, not as either men or women. On the one hand, they perform a hypersexual form of femininity to the point of caricature; on the other hand, they have no qualms about using the men's room. As I have been arguing for Leda, the interviews blend character and actor to a point where no clear distinction can be made. The same is true for Eddie, whose actor Peter (Ikehata Shinnosuke) gives an interview [74.45 min] in which he compares himself to Eddie. He points out various similarities, and although he is still in costume for the interview, he never cross-dressed before his part in *Funeral Parade of Roses*. Indeed, he has since appeared in both male and female roles, acting, for example, as the fool in Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985).



Fig. 4 – 51.59 min

At 51.59 min we see Eddie prepare for an outing with a friend. As her friend enters, we see Eddie and the entrance through the large vanity table's mirror. Right behind her head, next to the door, is a poster of a sports car, emphasizing Eddie's masculinity [51.47 min]. While her transformation is under way, Eddie's friend eats a banana in a suggestive fashion, divulging a tale of sexual debauchery in which he successfully 'camouflaged' as a woman. As the camera turns to show both friends, we see the vanity table and the room's more feminine attributes: a small ornamental dress and a poster of a painting of a woman with exposed breasts. Poignantly, there is also a wooden mask hanging in the corner behind the mirror.

### **A Mirror Perpendicular to the Screen**

In another scene, Leda, with her back towards Eddie, addresses Eddie through the mirror, which previously revealed Eddie's superior beauty to Leda. A brief flashback to the room in which Gonda and Eddie spent time together reminds us of what is at stake, before Eddie and Leda draw toy pistols to begin a Wild-West-style duel; Eddie even wears a cowboy hat for the occasion. A comical speech bubble confrontation ends in an ungraceful, sped-up, slapstick fight. In the fight, both try to strip each other of their female attributes. Eddie loses her bra and breast-padding and Leda's kimono knot comes undone. The confrontation ends with Leda hitting Eddie over

the head with a bottle. Tellingly, the loss of consciousness at the end of the fight predicated on unmasking the opponent transports Eddie back to the mask exhibition.

At the exhibition, Eddie is picked up by a friend named Guevara, and they go up Tokyo Tower. In the elevator, they have a conversation about the haziness of reality (*rinkaku ha nanke*) and the original non-existence of things (*hajime kara nakatta deshitara*). Guevara asserts that it is like a mirage (*shinkirō mitai*), while Eddie's question of what he ought to believe in (*dattara nani wo shinjiru no*) is left unanswered. Encountering children atop the tower leads Eddie to believe that she may have been there with their family before, but she does not remember. The encounter triggers a flashback of how she became a *gei bōi*: The young Eddie sits in front of a three-part mirror, and, after an intertitle cursing the day he was born (*waga umareshi hi horobi useyo*), starts applying make-up—being gay is not an identity from birth for Eddie, but rather an act of self-erasure. His mother, finding Eddie kissing the mirror, and unable to deal with or accommodate this behavior, starts feebly slapping him. Naturally, the transformation happens in front of a mirror, reminding us of Nō theatre's *kagami no ma*, where Eddie, the boy, sees a female version of himself and transforms himself into herself. While it is easy to focus on the mother's action as a form of transphobia, Matsumoto's comments on the breakdown of social structure (of which he thought *gei bōis* were a symptom) offer a different interpretation. The film includes depictions of transphobia, yet the problem it addresses is a more general fear of the 'other.' The ascription of transphobia is particularly difficult, as the concept of a *gei bōi* may or may not include cross-dressing or a desire to switch to another sex or gender. Generally, the imposition of trans-identity theory upon the Japanese context is problematic, as sexuality seems to have been less central to historical constructions of identity. This is also evident in Ko's (2011) approach. In relying on Sakabe's thought as an interpretative framework, we can sidestep these issues and make sense of Matsumoto's own claims about the work.

This is further supported when we see Eddie murder his mother and her lover. The second half of the film, after the fight between Eddie and Leda, generally mirrors the first half figuratively, as well as literally. Eddie switches from being predominantly a victim to being a perpetrator. In the murder scene, this change becomes clear, as well as later when she takes over Bar Genet. Her character develops within the film's story arc, rather than in linear time. The opening scene is shown again early on in the second half of the film, this time from Leda's rather than Eddie's perspective; Leda

sees Eddie and Gonda driving away. In the first half of the film, Eddie's distress at seeing Leda is the focus, whereas now Leda's powerlessness is easier to sympathize with. The repetition of the vanity table scene at 76 min is another clear case establishing the middle of the film as a mirroring axis. This time, not the car, but the breasts of the figure in the poster are reflected in the vanity table's mirror. Further, Eddie seems to have become left-handed. The room is literally mirrored.



Fig. 5 – 76.28 min

In Sakabe Megumi's terms, the idea of a true transformation runs counter to the notion of hypostasis. Sakabe draws up the example of the Nō actor's transformation, where the actor ceases to be for the duration of the play (Sakabe 1989). What guarantees the self-identity of things and people are their relationships to all other things and people. While transformation is possible during the play, the actor returns *'to him/herself'*—so to speak—through the relationships they have with the world, holding them in place.

In an interview scene [74.30 min], Peter identifies with his character, Eddie, in many respects, except for the incest. His comment foreshadows that Gonda is Eddie's father, completing the Oedipal formula. The film's minimal portrayal of the Oedipus myth extends no further than killing one parent and sleeping with the other, dispensing with many of the other elements of the story. In Sakabe's terms, Eddie's transformation is radical because she is trying to slip into another role. In this context, cross-dressing is part of her new self. This self is achieved by cultivating a new mask and erasing all old

relationships. In the logic of the film, Eddie's only ties to her previous life are the father she does not remember and the mother she killed. With this meagre grounding in the world, she is free to redefine herself.

Matsumoto's critique of the structural decay of society serves a similar purpose. With the relationships and structures that constitute society worn away, individuals are transformed and a new 'underground' society formed. This new part of society is still negotiating its own rules in contradistinction to old society. From the moment of differentiation, both can maintain their respective identities only by distinction from each other; both societies mirror and, thereby, ground each other.

### The Oracle

Two small puppets are present at the site of Leda's suicide, one with a nail through the throat, the other with a nail in each eye. This refers to *ushi no toki mairi*, a traditional Japanese way to curse someone by nailing dolls to a sacred tree. In this case, the dolls foreshadow the fate of Gonda and Eddie, who will kill himself and blind herself, respectively. The doll ritual replaces the oracle's prediction in the myth of Oedipus—Matsumoto mixes his cultural references and appropriates the story to his context.

Leda's 'prophecy' is fulfilled when Gonda finds a book titled '*Return of [the] Father*' (*chichi kaeru*). After Gonda's suicide and Eddie's blinding of herself, Eddie walks out to the street through dark corridors, in a clear reference to Passolini's '*Oedipus Rex*' [97 min]. As she comes out to the street, a large crowd has already gathered. Eddie then serves as a mirror to society; without seeing herself, she is reflected by society—she became a mirror to society in the sense that society has, through its structure, allowed this tragedy to happen. The camera moves along through the crowd, presenting it as a unified front against that which does not belong: the blinded and blood-soaked Eddie, who still wields the knife, who *is* the knife, but who is also the wound.

### Conclusion

As I have endeavored to show, *Funeral Parade of Roses* does not present a unified surface. Rather, each scene is like a fragment of a mirror that reflects the other scenes, the audience, and Matsumoto Toshio's own subjectivity. Matsumoto's eclecticism makes several interpretations pertinent, which

makes ambivalence itself the work's defining feature. The mirror and the mask as central hermeneutical elements make this palpable, as they are empty signs that take on meaning conferred onto them by the other. Their ultimate referents, however, cannot be identified, and the film thus avoids firm commitments. Matsumoto's way of filming is appropriate to his subject of the highly changeable underground culture of Shinjuku in the 1960s, which has since disappeared. I argued that Matsumoto's use of mirrors and masks foreshadows Sakabe Megumi's iteration of both as central elements to his hermeneutical theory and, consequently, that the dynamic reality of *Funeral Parade of Roses* can be fruitfully analysed in terms of these concepts. Matsumoto achieves a delicate balance of meanings that should not be reduced to any one aspect. For the present paper, my analysis was concerned mainly with different aspects of sexuality; yet an equally fruitful analysis might be given with regards to politics, filmmaking, or underground culture itself.

Taking a closer look at the sexual identities presented in the film, we invariably see them contradicting one another. There is no overarching *gei bōi* identity; rather, they are individuals who all have their own conception of what it means to be gay. In the West, this plurality of lifestyles has been replaced by quite strongly held, normative ideas of what it means to be gay, which tend to overshadow differences among and within communities. In Japan, for better or for worse, the same process has not occurred to the same extent. At the time of filming it may have seemed like a consistent gay identity was in the making, but that is certainly not what Matsumoto depicts. Rather than taking sides, he presents us with a complex and multivalent phenomenon, without reducing it to a stringent, unified notion. Much like the film's own eclecticism, gay identities in Japan draw neither exclusively on local traditions, nor do they merely follow Western ideals. They are a combination of the local and the global, arbitrated by the individual, and, in this regard, resemble Matsumoto's own concerns in aiming to break up the dichotomous through the use of mirrors and masks.





Fig. 6 – 104.22 min

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