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Material Ecstasy: Cultural alienation and the influence of the nouveau roman in the work of Nakahira Takuma and J.M.G. Le Clézio

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Abstract

This article analyses some of the important early work (ca. late 1960s-early 1970s) of the Japanese photographer Nakahira Takuma (1938-2015) in terms of the themes of materiality and cultural alienation, focusing on Nakahira's links with radical European art and writing of the period. In particular, it explores the relationship with the work of the French writer J.M.G Le Clézio in early writings such as *Le Procès-Verbal* (1963), *L'Extase matérielle* (1967) and *La Guerre* (1970). Le Clézio includes a selection of his own photos as an appendix to *La Guerre* and the article also embraces an analysis of that imagery and its role in relation to the author's association with the *nouveau roman* during this early, experimental phase of his career.

Introduction: materiality and realism in postwar culture

Following an academic formation in European languages, Nakahira Takuma (1938-2015) first became established as a writer and critic before rising to prominence as a photographer during the late 1960s as a member of the *Provoke* group. While known for the distinctive and visually disorienting style promoted by that group, Nakahira subsequently struggled with a range of complex issues that revolved around the role of the subjectivity of the photographer and which related to the ongoing concern within Japanese postwar art with the nature of the relationship between representation and reality. In the case of the Gutai movement this assumed the form of an intense concern with *materiality*, where art became an 'encounter with the substance of matter itself' and was 'part of a larger discourse of the concrete in the postwar era', as with the work of Dubuffet, *art informel*, COBRA, etc.¹ Founded in 1954, the Gutai group dissolved itself in March 1972 in the wake of dissension caused by its involvement in the Expo 70 exhibition staged in Japan, but its influence, as with Mono-ha, or the 'School of Things' (1968 to early 1970s), is clearly retained in Nakahira's concern with the encounter with reality.

For Nakahira and others in Japan, these issues also related to parallel concerns within French postwar art, as with Pierre Restany's *nouveau réalisme* of the early 1960s, as well as with French writing, particularly in the *nouveau roman* of Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marguerite Duras *et al* and that movement's own critique of conventional literary realism.² There are quite specific parallels, for example, between the *nouveau roman's* subversion of the stable authorial position, narrative continuity and the omniscience of the author, and the parallel rejection by the *Provoke* artists of visual stability, clarity and unitary meaning. The concern of the

¹ Alexandra Munroe in Ming Tiampo and Munroe, *Gutai: Splendid Playground* (exh. cat.), Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2013, p.143.

² Alain Robbe-Grillet *For a New Novel*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989 (1963); Valerie Minogue, 'Realism and the *Nouveau Roman*', *Romance Studies*, Vol.1, 1983, pp.77-94.

nouveau roman writer was to present reality – albeit a reality constructed by the author and posed in terms of the ‘new realism’ – in a matter-of-fact, clinically descriptive manner that in some respects echoes the reporting mode of the camera.³ More specifically, Nakahira refers explicitly in his writings to the early work of J.M.G. Le Clézio, whose experimental novels such as *Le Procès-Verbal* and *La Guerre*, are strongly marked by the tenets of the *nouveau roman*, before his work too underwent a major shift under the influence of his contact with primal civilizations. Focusing on Nakahira’s critique of the role of subjectivity in the creation of the artwork, this article traces the development of his ideas about the photograph’s relation with reality and the influence on those ideas of the early writing and photographs of Le Clézio.

The early writing and photographic work of Nakahira

Politically active as a student in the early 1960s, Nakahira closely followed the Cuban revolution, the Paris student protests of May 1968 and the subsequent violent protests in Japan against renewal of the US-Japan ANPO treaty in 1970.⁴ A founder member of the *Provoke* collective in 1968, Nakahira established his reputation as a photographer through the radical ‘*are-bure-boke*’ (grainy, blurry and out-of-focus) stance of the group – not so much a ‘style’ as the realisation of a theoretical programme – but soon after renounced all expression as simply conforming to the demands of a capitalist art market rooted in concepts of expressivity and individual ‘creativity’. I want to consider the reasons for that volte-face, focusing on Nakahira’s ideas as expressed in his own writings – particularly his 1973 collection *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?* – and on the influence upon his work of French literary and theoretical writing of the 1960s-70s. While Nakahira’s text has been posed within Japanese image theory as a link to postmodernism, Philip Charrier has instead emphasised its rootedness in postwar Japanese debates around realism and the influence of the work of Sartre, Le Clézio and others.⁵ I want to shift the emphasis somewhat and to focus more upon questions of subjectivity, materiality and the relation between the image and writing, and to consider how the various theoretical shifts in Nakahira’s thought found – or more often, failed to find – actual visual expression.

Nakahira was heavily involved, together with the critic and thinker Taki Kōji, in the major exhibition *Photography 100 Years* (Tokyo, 1968), which opposed ‘expression’ to ‘record’ (reformulated in 1978 by John Szarkowski as ‘mirrors’ and ‘windows’), where ‘record’ for Nakahira, provided ‘a methodology with which we can confront the world’: ‘Thanks to its impersonal nature, the spirit of “record” must be connected to the spirit of “resistance”’.⁶ It is precisely this politically radical questioning of the role of subjective expression in the creation of the artwork, that

³ In ‘A Future for the Novel’ (1956) Robbe-Grillet also credits the visual image, in both cinema and photography, with the power to ‘help free us from our own conventions’ and to reveal ‘the unaccustomed character of the world that surrounds us’ – *For a New Novel*, pp.20-21.

⁴ See Yasumi Akihito, ‘Introduction: the trajectory of Nakahira Takuma’, in Nakahira, *For a Language to Come*, Tokyo: Osiris, 2010 (1970).

⁵ Philip Charrier, ‘Nakahira Takuma’s *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?* (1973) and the quest for ‘true’ photographic realism in post-war Japan’, *Japan Forum*, (September 2017) at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09555803.2017.1368689> (accessed 20/III/19)

⁶ Nakahira cited in Yasufumi Nakamori, ‘Experiments with the camera’, in Nakamori and Allison Pappas, *For a New World to Come: Experiments in Japanese Art and Photography, 1968-1979* (exh. cat.), Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2016, p.16.

was to become a central concern in Nakahira's writing and practice. The extent of that shift will become apparent if we take as a starting point Nakahira's brooding image of the glare of street lights refracted through a rain-spattered telephone kiosk at night (fig.1) – an image already deeply rooted in a subjective viewpoint and the encounter of self and world through a fragmented vision.

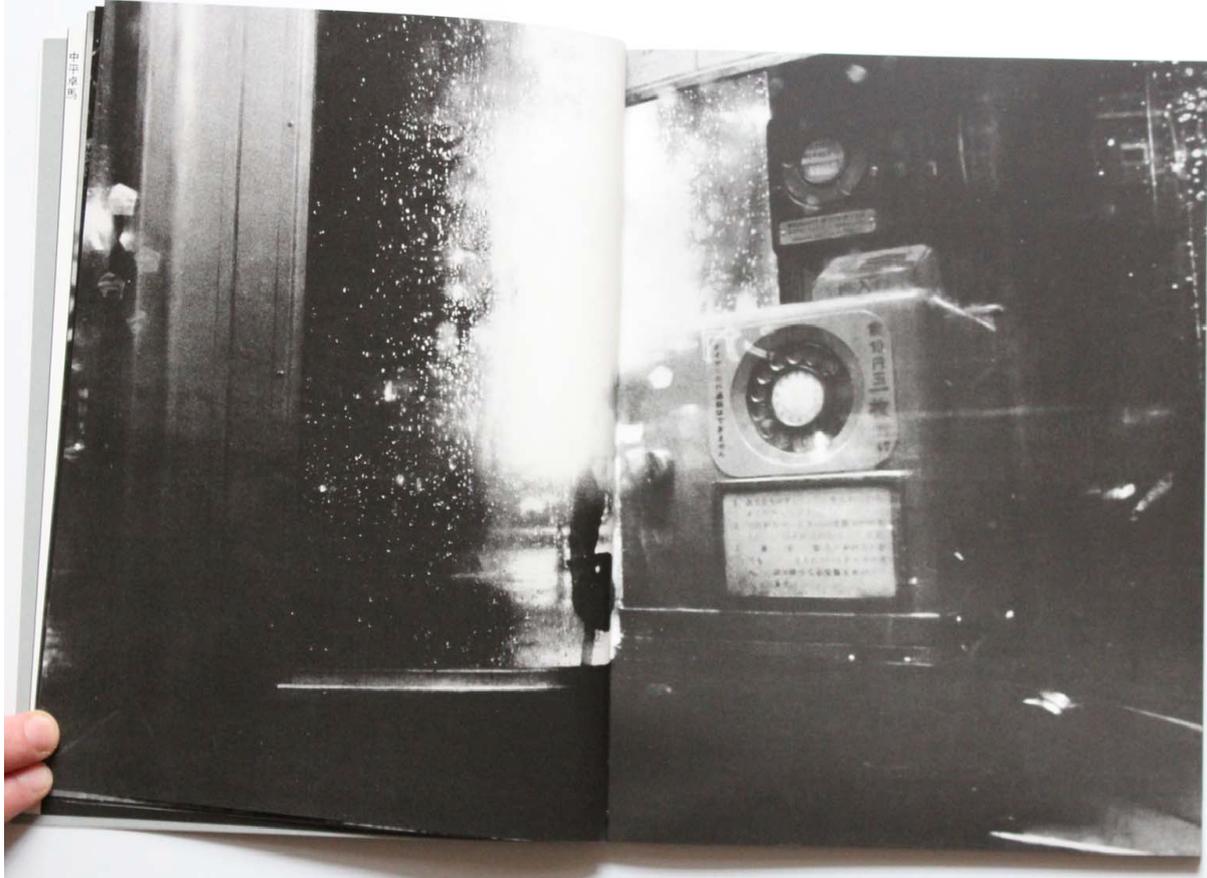


Fig.1 Nakahira Takuma, untitled image from *Provoke 2*, 1968.

J.M.G. Le Clézio is best known as a novelist and travel writer, awarded the Nobel prize in 2008, but whose early experimental work links him to the French *nouveau roman* and the literary innovations of Michel Butor, Georges Perec and others. Charrier argues that Nakahira was attracted to Le Clézio's work as his writings 'closely associate the search for existentialist meaning with the act of looking', and that, as with Sartre, 'the self encounters the world primarily through sight'.⁷ While perhaps true of Sartre (as is apparent in his chapter on 'the gaze' in his 1943 book *Being and Nothingness*) – and also of Robbe-Grillet, who Nakahira also invokes – the writing of Le Clézio is far more *sensorially* embodied, more *visceral*, than this would suggest. It is this focus upon *materiality* that attempts, precisely, to escape such a purely visual regime and that I want to examine in the photographic work of Nakahira. Le Clézio's writing was also admired by other prominent Japanese artists and photographers of the time, including Enokura Kōji, Takamatsu Jiro and Terayama Shūji.⁸ Translated early into Japanese and with most of the covers

⁷ Charrier, op. cit. p.7.

⁸ See Yuri Mitsuda, 'Intersections of art and photography in 1970s Japan', in Nakamori, *For a New World to Come*, pp.33-34.

designed by Takamatsu, Le Clézio's works clearly resonated with those involved in the arts in Japan, suggesting significant shared cultural concerns that I want to consider in more depth.

The transcript and the photograph

Adam Pollo, the protagonist of *Le Procès-Verbal*, Le Clézio's first novel, is a highly disturbed young man unsure whether he's a 'deserter' from the army or has just been released from a psychiatric asylum, and who withdraws to the French coast where he squats in a vacant villa.⁹ Adam spends his time aimlessly, sunbathing and wandering around the town, identifying more with the animal world than with that of human beings. In the zoological gardens, when Adam overhears a couple discussing the character of a chained marmoset, he retorts that 'it's (simply) a marmoset'.¹⁰ As Charrier observes, Nakahira refers to this episode in his *Botanical Dictionary* to argue that the photographer similarly anthropomorphizes the world, 'projecting onto it human attributes that are at odds with "plain reality"' and signalling the 'estrangement' of humanity from world.¹¹ Adam's mental state deteriorates further after his bloody slaughter of a large white rat that he confronts in the villa and as the long summer heat finally ends, becomes increasingly obsessed with his own death. Already the book anticipates themes that Le Clézio would develop further in his subsequent writings: the critique of a society of consumption, a close concern with the texture and materiality of everyday life, the individual at odds with society, and the notion of modern life as a form of continual 'war'.

Adam's quest is posed by Bronwen Martin as a search for identity, where his pursuit of the Self presents as a 'search for the Other' that will involve 'a movement away from the individual ego towards a fusion with the impersonal material forms of life'.¹² Martin sees in this a fundamental conflict between Le Clézio's protagonist and Western urban culture – a conflict that likewise becomes a central issue in some of the more critical Japanese photographic work of the period, as with the politically aware *Provoke* group, and more specifically in that of Nakahira, where we encounter the same rejection of an ideology of individualism. Martin further observes that 'Western rationalist thought is presented as a vehicle of alienation and exclusion' and Le Clézio's attack is, at least in part, upon 'a conceptual language increasingly remote from concrete, lived experience'.¹³ For Martin, the book is 'a violent attack on Western society and on its underlying philosophical assumptions', presenting an alternative in a mixture of pre-Socratic and mystical thought, and in a philosophy of *matter*.¹⁴ Nakahira too shared this suspicion of conceptual language in relation to photography, in part through the influence of Taki, one of the principal theorists of the *Provoke* group, who, as Charrier observes, argued that 'all photography rooted in language is ideologically compromised'.¹⁵ The core contention of *Provoke* was that language had lost its connection with reality, but that photography – though lacking the totality of thought – was nonetheless able to capture that reality 'and to actively

⁹ J.M.G. Le Clézio, *Le Procès-Verbal*, Paris: Gallimard, 1963, p.9.

¹⁰ Le Clézio, *ibid.* p.72.

¹¹ Nakahira cited in Charrier, *op. cit.* pp.5-6.

¹² Bronwen Martin, *Le Clézio. Le Procès-Verbal*, Glasgow Introductory Guides to French Literature 51, Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2004, p.3.

¹³ Martin, *ibid.* p.29.

¹⁴ Martin, *ibid.* p.79.

¹⁵ Charrier, *op. cit.* p.18.

present some materials to language, to thought'.¹⁶ Nakahira gives expression to those ideas in the introduction to his 1971 Paris show, insisting that 'persons who see and pass by will come in contact with reality exposed there, not with my "works"', and refers later to those photos as a 'second reality'.¹⁷ Entering a period of crisis, Nakahira's work increasingly reflects that rejection of subjective affect – as well as of concept – in his often contradictory pursuit of a form of 'pure' photographic realism.

If Adam is a 'deserter', it is surely from any active, conformist role within a society of consumption, and after dumping his motorbike in the sea to suggest his death, lives by squatting, borrowing from his girlfriend Michele and petty shoplifting.¹⁸ Adam is happiest while aimlessly pursuing a dog around town, but when it enters a Prisunic store – emblem of French consumerism satirised in Jean Ferrat's 1967 recording *Prisunic* – is disoriented by the bright lights and loud music, experiencing a sensory overload in the continual announcements and flashing Photomat machine.¹⁹ Nakahira echoes that experience when he writes that: 'Day after day, we allow ourselves to be invaded by an overflow of products, an overflow of information, an overflow of things. Our center has been lost'.²⁰ The bigger problem in all of this, he adds, is 'the dissolution of identity' and hence, the problem of the *expression* of that identity, where for Nakahira, citing the French writer Gaëtan Picon, art as 'expression' – as the expression of some prior lived experience – has been replaced by art as 'creation'.²¹ Citing Robbe-Grillet from his *For a New Novel*, Nakahira pointedly asks:

How could the work of art claim to illustrate a signification known in advance?

The modern novel ... is an exploration, but an exploration which itself creates its own significations as it proceeds.²²

Nakahira's own exploitation of the potential of his camera can be seen to similarly generate its own new and disorienting visualisation of contemporary urban reality as the project proceeds, through *direct engagement* with that reality. And Nakahira further cites the rejection by the *nouveau roman* novelists of the term 'work' in favour of 'text' and the adoption by contemporary artists of the term 'events' – all, he argues, are 'trying to nullify self-contained work'.²³ Rather than expressing 'pre-ordained meanings of the world', these writers are instead attempting 'to specify the structure of the world, of *the thing and self* and *the struggle between thing and self*'.²⁴

We discover a focus in *Le Procès-Verbal* upon the immediacy of such lived experience and a rejection by Le Clézio's protagonist, of analytical thought, the expression of personal emotion and anecdote. One expression of this is the rejection

¹⁶ *Provoke* manifesto, cited in Nakamori, *For a New World to Come*, pp.16-18.

¹⁷ Takuma Nakahira, *Circulation: Date, Place, Events*, Tokyo : Osiris, 2012, n.p. and p.294.

¹⁸ Consumer society was a major topic of investigation at this time, as in Baudrillard's *Système des objets* (1968) and his *La Société de la consommation* (1970).

¹⁹ Ferrat sang of 'flowered aluminium suns' and 'little sales assistants the colour of orange pschitt' – for full lyrics see: <http://www.paroles.cc/chanson,prisunic,20727> (accessed 13 October 2020).

²⁰ Takuma Nakahira, 'Excerpt from *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?*', in Vartanian et al (eds), *Setting Sun: Writings by Japanese Photographers*, New York: Aperture, 2006, p.127.

²¹ Nakahira, *ibid.* p.128.

²² Alain Robbe-Grillet, cited in Nakahira, *ibid.* p.128.

²³ Nakahira, *ibid.* pp.128-9.

²⁴ Nakahira, *ibid.* p.129.

of literary language – of poetry, ‘literary’ writing, etc. – all of which are parodied in the book. It’s perhaps this attempt to grasp the immediacy of the real that finds a response in the photography of the period, as with the subsequent rejection by Nakahira of the *Provoke* approach to photography and instead the attempt to create a direct, expressionless style that more immediately replicates the material world – as in his 1989 photobook *Adieu à X* (fig.2). Martin refers to the shift in Le Clézio to ‘the everyday and the ordinary’ and again we find such a shift of subject matter in Nakahira’s work: from the alienated urban landscape to the clearly delineated suburban realities of organic forms, domestic animals and children.²⁵ And we could add that the ‘procès-verbal’ of Le Clézio’s title, is itself such a factual account or inventory – the *transcription* rather than ‘expression’ of reality.

Becoming mineral

The concept of ‘becoming mineral’ first emerges in *Le Procès-Verbal* and was to be developed further in the subsequent *L’Extase matérielle* of 1967. The idea could perhaps be traced back in French thought to Antonin Artaud’s concept of the ‘body without organs’ – ‘nothing more useless than an organ’ – where the body is stripped of its organs, the source of all pain and suffering, and hence purified.²⁶ This is taken up in turn by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), where it comes to refer to the ‘imageless, organless body, the nonproductive’ and which ‘belongs to the realm of antiproduction’.²⁷ Le Clézio often refers in *Le Procès-Verbal* to the power of the sun, of intense heat, in a kind of ritual of purification of the body. Adam, the embodiment of anti-production, is continually sunbathing and at one point refers to his ‘becoming mineral’ as he lies among the baking pebbles. And he views intense heat as a metaphor for the cleansing of a ‘rotten’ world, whereby ‘all would become white, and hard, and fixed’, such as to create ‘material harmony’.²⁸

²⁵ Martin, op. cit. p.35.

²⁶ Antonin Artaud, ‘To Have Done with the Judgement of God’ (1947), in Artaud, *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, p.571.

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London: Athlone, 1984, pp.8.

²⁸ Le Clézio, *Le Procès-Verbal*, p.166.



Fig.2 Nakahira Takuma, from *Adieu à X* (1989).

Nakahira cites Adam's transformation in explaining his conception of the 'Illustrated Botanical Dictionary', as a means of ridding his photography of all 'poesy' or 'emotionalising of the world', and notes how Adam becomes simply another 'thing' in the world, unburdened of consciousness.²⁹ So we can be certain that Nakahira was familiar with Le Clézio's ideas in the book, adapting them to his own ends. Taking as his model an illustrated primer for children, he asserts that: 'The most important function of the illustrated dictionary is to refer clearly to the object in a straightforward way'.³⁰ The 'method' of such a dictionary, adds Nakahira, 'is mere juxtaposition', where the alphabetical order 'gives no priority to any particular thing', and where the part remains just a part, 'without being infiltrated by the entirety'. And like the catalogue, it avoids all ambiguity, 'simply presenting commodities in a straightforward way'. But Nakahira rejects the possibility of a 'mineral dictionary', judging minerals 'too boastful in their otherworldly rigidity', opting instead for the botanical as an organic compromise between animal and mineral.³¹ Again, *Adieu à X* marks a shift toward such an approach, in its focus upon organic forms, greater visual clarity and its juxtaposing of material objects, people and animals, in the style of the inventory.

Le Clézio's questioning of reason in *Le Procès-Verbal* forms part of a broader interrogation of Enlightenment values, including the critique of the language of power, the rejection of the work ethic and the breakdown of rational categories. One

²⁹ Nakahira, 'Excerpt from *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?*', op. cit. p.130-31.

³⁰ Nakahira, 'ibid. p.129.

³¹ Nakahira, ibid. p.130.

example of the latter is the breakdown of the fundamental distinction between human and animal, where Adam identifies strongly with animals over human beings, imitating the dog and ‘transforming’ himself into the white rat – again, a concept found in Deleuze and Guattari in the notion of ‘becoming animal’, where it serves to question series and structure.³² Martin observes the lack of narrative structure in *Le Procès-Verbal*, where – again a dictionary format – the chapters are simply headed by letters, beginning with ‘A’ but ending abruptly with ‘R’, as though Adam’s life were suddenly cut short by his institutionalisation. A similar questioning of series and structure pervades Nakahira’s 1974 project *Overflow*, where, as we see below, there is a clear rejection of rational order and categorisation in favour of the uncontrolled flow of the work.

As the sultry weather finally breaks, Adam’s state of mind rapidly deteriorates. A drowned corpse is discovered on the beach and is posed by Adam as a kind of ‘strange archangel’, signalling to the living the inevitability of death and leading them down to the depths of the sea.³³ Le Clézio reports this death in the form of a small item in a newspaper layout, juxtaposing this faux documentary style against parodies of poems in various affected literary styles.³⁴ This device is more fully deployed later in the book, when an account of Adam’s incarceration appears amid a three-page newspaper extract. This mode of critical documentary realism finds its visual equivalent in Nakahira’s disavowal of the highly expressive and subjective approach of his *Provoke* period and his advocacy instead of a far more neutral reportorial style, as with *Adieu à X* or the later *Documentary* (2011). But already with *Circulation* we find a profusion of newspaper headlines, magazine covers and teleprinter news feeds reporting the Vietnam war and American politics – a form of remediation of the media ‘spectacle’ posed by Franz Prichard as a ‘feedback loop’ in which Nakahira ‘sought to redirect the everyday flow of mediated realities’.³⁵

Le Clézio’s novel culminates in Adam’s incarceration after his ranting like a prophet before a crowd on the seafront, and his subsequent questioning by a psychiatrist and his students. When the students seem swayed by Adam’s apparent rationality, the psychiatrist intervenes with his own diagnosis of sexual obsession and paranoia – and again such a critique would find an echo in Deleuze’s collaboration with Guattari and the anti-psychiatry movement of the period.³⁶ Writing of his own hospitalisation, Nakahira refers to his ‘hallucinations’ and to ‘the disintegration of this sense of distance’, when ‘material reality would come at me and directly pierce my eyes’, further reaffirming the close correspondence between his own concerns and those explored by Le Clézio.³⁷

³² See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*, London: The Athlone Press, 1988, ch.10 – the chapter in fact opens with the idea of becoming a rat.

³³ Le Clézio, *Le Procès-Verbal*, p.121.

³⁴ The death is attributed to ‘neurasthenia’ – the quintessential expression of the stresses of modern life.

³⁵ Franz K. Prichard, ‘On For a Language to Come, *Circulation* and *Overflow*’, in Yasufumi Nakamori and Allison Pappas, *For a New Language to Come: Experiments in Japanese Art and Photography, 1968-1979* (exh. cat.), The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2015, p.86.

³⁶ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *L’anti-Oedipe*, 1972.

³⁷ Nakahira, ‘Looking at the City, or the Look from the City’, in Nakahira, *For a Language to Come*, Tokyo: Fudoshia, 1970, 2010 (1970), pp.12-13.

Nakahira Takuma's *Circulation: Date, Place, Events* (1971)

Invited to present at the Seventh Paris Biennale in September of 1971, Nakahira arrived with a sense of the utter 'futility' of contemporary art. With no body of work to show, Nakahira took the enormous risk of producing photographs each day during the course of the exhibition, and of printing and exhibiting that work as it was produced, hanging prints before they had even dried and eventually overflowing the allocated space.³⁸ Located in the 'Interventions' section of the exhibition, the work was both performative and site-specific – a performed response to the remit of an international art exhibition that he confronted with a sense of 'hollowness' or 'despair'.³⁹ Nakahira's strategy, as Mitsuda observes, also reflects the prevalent 'On-Sitism' of the Tokyo Biennale *Between Man and Matter* exhibition of the previous year, with an image by Nakahira on the catalogue cover.⁴⁰ There are also certain parallels with Robert Morris's *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1969) – part sculptural installation, part exhibition, part performance – a three week warehouse project that was documented in photographs pinned to the wall at the end of each day.⁴¹ Nakahira's project clearly reflects an awareness of the conceptual art of the period, though he has said that "the 'concept' in conceptual art is really just signifying a relation between the self and an absolute world, rather than with something prosaic like a 'date'" – and that, like the rest of contemporary art, it is detached from reality.⁴²



³⁸ Takuma Nakahira, 'Photography, a Single Day's Actuality', in Nakahira, *Circulation: Date, Place, Events*, Tokyo: Osiris, 2012, p.291.

³⁹ Takuma Nakahira, 'The Exhaustion of Contemporary Art: My participation in the Seventh Paris Biennale', in Nakahira, *Circulation: Date, Place, Events*, p.295.

⁴⁰ Yuri Mitsuda, 'Yūsuke Nakahara', in *For a New World to Come*, p.98.

⁴¹ See *Robert Morris: The Mind/Body Problem* (exh. cat.), Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1994, pp.234-7. I'm grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing to the relevance of Morris's project.

⁴² Nakahira in conversation with Daido Moriyama, August 2 1971, in Daido Moriyama, *Farewell Photography*, Tokyo: Getsuyosha + Bookshop M, 2019 (1972), n.p.

Fig.3 Nakahira Takuma, from *Circulation: Date, Place, Events*, 1971.

The immediate impression created by Nakahira's *Circulation: Date, Place, Events* (fig.3), is of an enormous sense of *disorientation*, where the viewer is confronted by a continual slippage between the direct depiction of the reality of Paris, and the re-photographing of media imagery of the world captured by Nakahira on his travels around the city. Nakahira's artist's statement made clear that this was entirely intentional – 'literally [a] scattering of images ... not montage making any sense'.⁴³ Without time for reflection and editing, the piece became an uncensored flow of snatched images of all that Nakahira encountered that day on the streets of Paris: cars, bicycles, newspaper headlines, shop windows and posters – further complicated by reflexive images of the exhibition itself. We can immediately detect in all of this the impact of Guy Debord's then recent *La Société du Spectacle* of 1967, in which the author identifies the shift to a society in which: 'Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation', and where '[t]he images detached from every aspect of life fuse in a common stream in which the unity of this life can no longer be reestablished'.⁴⁴ And a world in which the subject too becomes incorporated within the spectacle of objects (fig.4), while Nakahira's exhibition too becomes a part of the same flow of representations, spilling out into the exhibition space and becoming reincorporated within the material reality that it represents. Nakahira, writing in a 1972 article, similarly refers to 'the age of illusion' in an era of mass media, where 'the representation of reality seems more real than reality itself' – and hence the deployment of photography as a means of 'record', in order to re-engage with that reality.⁴⁵



⁴³ Nakahira, artist's statement included in location photograph in *Circulation*, n.p.

⁴⁴ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, Exeter: Rebel Press, 1987 (1967), sections 1 and 2 (n.p.).

⁴⁵ Nakahira, 'Would it be possible to deviate from vision as an institution', cited in Nakamori, *For a New World to Come*, p.18.

Fig.4 Nakahira Takuma, from *Circulation: Date, Place, Events*, 1971.

In *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?*, Nakahira observes that the camera 'dominates the world with its one-point perspective' and concludes the 'absolute non-reconciliation between an object (the thing-in-itself) and myself'.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, he asserts, the camera cannot encompass the world 'in its totality' within a single image, which presents only one viewpoint, but instead suggests that by making many images over time, 'it might thus be possible to reveal the structure of the world as compatible with the dualistic opposition between a thing taking over and a thing being taken over – that is, between the world and myself'.⁴⁷ Nakahira's Paris installation represents just such an attempt to invalidate individual perspective, by introducing 'innumerable' viewpoints into his relation with the world. And in a sense, such a fragmentation of the gaze does succeed in loosening the hold of what he characterises as "humanity as operator of the world", while the material reality of the world is correspondingly reasserted.⁴⁸

Nakahira rejects the contemporary model of the artist as producing subjective, expressive work while in conflict with society – as in his earlier *are-bure-boke* style work –, advocating instead the dissolution and dismantling of the individual self. Capitalism had reduced art to the status of the commodity and rested on the maintenance of the individuality of both artworks and their producers, but that 'by actively discarding this form of individual subject-hood ... we can perhaps begin to undermine the foundations of contemporary society'.⁴⁹ Nakahira accordingly took the decision 'to photograph ... nothing but the Paris that I was living and experiencing', aiming at 'capturing my encounters with reality' and eradicating the imposition of any personal meanings upon that reality.⁵⁰ His intention, he wrote, was 'to make myself completely permeated by the world', where the exhibited works were 'simply the *remnants* of that process'.⁵¹ Nonetheless, these grainy, high contrast images clearly retain links with the *Provoke* period aesthetic, further exaggerated by the heavy printing of the project in book format.

⁴⁶ Takuma Nakahira, 'Excerpt from *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?*', in Vartanian (ed), *Setting Sun*, p.125.

⁴⁷ Nakahira, *ibid.* p.126.

⁴⁸ Nakahira, cited in Akihito Yasumi, 'Optical Remnants', in *Circulation: Date, Place, Events*, p.313.

⁴⁹ Nakahira, 'Photography, a Single Day's Actuality', *op. cit.* p.292.

⁵⁰ Nakahira, *ibid.* p.293.

⁵¹ Nakahira, 'The Exhaustion of Contemporary Art', *op. cit.* p.299.

our lives, tearing apart our identities – producing a ‘tense zone of conflict’ that again echoes Le Clézio’s state of permanent warfare.⁵⁴



Fig.6 Nakahira Takuma, from *Circulation: Date, Place, Events*, 1971.

A central aspect of Nakahira’s strategy consists in the return to *matter* that pervades his work, both in its relentless focus upon the material texture of the world – asphalt, rubber, paving, peeling paintwork ... – and in the materiality of the image itself. Nakahira had criticised conceptual artists exhibiting in the previous year’s *Between Man and Matter* exhibition for their neglect of materiality, condemning this as ‘detached from reality’.⁵⁵ Integral to this stance is his insistence on the specificity of *time* and *place* throughout the work, rejecting any appeal to transcendent categories or to ‘universality’ – albeit conceived somewhat paradoxically by Nakahira as ‘a single movement of perpetually overcoming being limited by date and place’, or as Akahito Yasumi glosses, ‘continuously turning towards universality by continuously abandoning universality’.⁵⁶ The photos, Nakahira insisted, were not expressions of some internal world, but were rather ‘signs pointing to reality’⁵⁷, and in this Nakahira’s worldview bears direct comparison with the materiality of Le Clézio’s *L’Extase matérielle* in his assertion that: ‘The beauty of life, the energy of life, aren’t of the mind but of matter’.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Nakahira, ‘The Exhaustion of Contemporary Art’, op. cit. pp.295-6.

⁵⁵ Nakahira cited in Nakamori, *For a New World to Come*, p.21.

⁵⁶ See Akahito Yasumi, ‘Optical Remnants: Paris 1971, Takuma Nakahira’, in Nakahira, *Circulation: Date, Place, Events*, pp.311-12.

⁵⁷ Nakahira, *ibid.* p.301.

⁵⁸ Le Clézio, *L’extase matérielle*, p.47.

The ecstasy of matter

The question of humanity's relationship with matter had become an urgent one within Japanese art in the wake of the Mono-ha movement and exhibitions such as *Between Man and Matter* and Expo '70 staged in Osaka. If we return to Le Clézio's *Le Procès-Verbal*, Adam's quest is characterised by Martin as that of 'fusion with matter and with the primordial forces of life', a pursuit that Adam poses in terms of 'l'extase matérialiste'.⁵⁹ It is, for Le Clézio, to ultimately reach 'the sole fixed point in the universe', attaining a state close to the 'eternal': 'That is to say, a God, having neither to exist, nor to have been created'.⁶⁰ The process of reaching that state, as Martin summarises, begins with 'sensory experience', whereby 'the subject erases itself through a system of multiplication and identification' [...] 'a process of continual self-destruction and creation as Other'.⁶¹ The clearest example of that process, as we saw, is of Adam's becoming 'mineral' and transforming himself into a statue: 'Hard as a diamond, angular, friable'.⁶² And as we have seen in the case of Nakahira, the artist's task is "to reconsider the self as part of the world, an effort to consider the 'otherness of the self'" and hence to transcend the modern opposition of self and world – this by his rejection of the controlling view of the single image and one-point perspective, replaced by "innumerable photographs that have been mediated by time and place".⁶³

In his 1967 *L'Extase matérielle*, a wide-ranging series of reflections rooted in his life as a writer, Le Clézio would return to some of the ideas first encountered in *Le Procès-Verbal*. Translated into Japanese as early as 1970, the book clearly chimes with the contemporary concern within Japanese culture with materiality and the priority accorded the material world over that of ideas. And we should add the importance of 'dialectical materialism', the basis of Marxism and an international *lingua franca* of the radical left of the period – a method directly relevant to Nakahira's own political worldview. In that book Le Clézio asserts that this world is 'not that of appearances', but that: 'It exists' and there is 'nothing other than its substance'.⁶⁴ Martin observes the 'inseparability of the material and metaphysical worlds' for Le Clézio, and that in this he follows Camus, insisting that there is only the material world.⁶⁵ Moreover, the apprehension of matter in Le Clézio's model involves not just sight, but as Martin observes, 'is apprehended through the senses in an experience of synesthesia', where 'vision, for example, involves the whole body'.⁶⁶ Le Clézio can therefore write of 'the gaze of all the senses', a suggestive phrase that we might use to consider Nakahira's photography from a more fully embodied perspective that further conveys his insistence upon the sheer materiality of the world and its apprehension through the senses.⁶⁷

La Guerre: the writer as photographer

⁵⁹ Le Clézio, *Le Procès-Verbal*, p.160.

⁶⁰ Le Clézio, *ibid.* p.160.

⁶¹ Martin, *op. cit.* p.62.

⁶² Le Clézio, *Le Procès-Verbal*, p.60.

⁶³ Nakahira cited in Akahito Yasumi, *op. cit.* p.313.

⁶⁴ Le Clézio, *L'extase matérielle*, Paris : Gallimard, 1967, p.298.

⁶⁵ Martin, *op. cit.* p.49.

⁶⁶ Martin, *ibid.* p.50.

⁶⁷ Le Clézio, *L'extase matérielle*, p.176.

Many of the ideas contained in Le Clézio's critique of the society of consumption in *Le Procès-Verbal* find further expression in his 1970 novel *La Guerre*. There Le Clézio presents contemporary society as existing in a state of permanent warfare, a catastrophic state that he suggests as intrinsic to human society. For Le Clézio the concept of war embraces not simply armed conflict, but rather a more generalised state of violence in which the body is under continual assault or persecution. The novel begins in apocalyptic terms, describing armies on the march, massacres and conflagrations, as cities are destroyed and populations flee. The violence finds its focus in the mind of a female protagonist, a former journalist Bea B., where the status of that violence is continually unclear – at once imaginary, dreamt and real: 'This war of yours is a product of your imagination! Dreams, that explains it'.⁶⁸ And that violence pervades a world of total artificiality:

The earth is a patch of tar, the water is made of cellophane, the air is nylon. ... Somewhere there must be a vast factory, its fiery machines throbbing as they churn out ceaselessly all the products of falsehood: false skies painted blue, fake mountains of duralumin, tinsel stars.⁶⁹

It becomes clear that Le Clézio's real target is the postwar society of consumption and the enormous environmental, social and psychological damage inflicted by the rush to economic expansion of the *Trente Glorieuses* and by the accompanying colonial conflicts in Indochina and Algeria. The intense *materiality* of Le Clézio's text is immediately apparent in his descriptions of the technological assaults incurred in everyday urban existence – a world in which 'solid buildings straddle the earth, bearing down with all their massive weight', bound together by the endless flow of metal along asphalt highways, 'engines screeching harshly'.⁷⁰ And the torrential waves of material objects: 'telegraph poles carrying endless wires, the white towers of skyscrapers, tunnels ..., factory chimneys, antenna-festooned metal turrets, waste land, reservoirs, motorway intersections, railway junctions, traffic lights ...'.⁷¹ Against this Le Clézio juxtaposes the 'temple' to consumption of the shopping centre – 'a kind of refuge' where the war is 'hidden and held at bay' – with its endless rows of counters, mannequins and Helena Rubinstein adverts, 'reeking of perfume'.⁷² Similarly with the airport, characterised as 'extraordinary', 'so pure, so beautiful', a kind of technological sublime, with its sliding doors, electric clocks and Coca-Cola vending machines.⁷³

A similar rhetoric of torrents and conflict pervades some of Nakahira's statements on the subject's conflictual relationship with the modern urban environment:

The contemporary city is like a behemoth that breaks us into pieces. Each of our identities have been shaken to their foundation by the city. Our everyday selves are continuously invaded by a flood of commodities, a flood of information and a flood of material things ...⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Le Clézio, *La Guerre*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1970, p.20.

⁶⁹ Le Clézio, *ibid.* p.31.

⁷⁰ Le Clézio, *ibid.* p.47 and p.37.

⁷¹ Le Clézio, *ibid.* p.47.

⁷² Le Clézio, *ibid.* pp.48-55.

⁷³ Le Clézio, *ibid.* p.179.

⁷⁴ Nakahira cited in Franz K. Prichard, 'An Illustrated Dictionary of Urban Overflows', in Nakahira, *Overflow*, Tokyo: Case Publishing, 2018, n.p.

And he has also written that ‘the city functions as the unseen binds that ceaselessly regulate, oppress and violate us’.⁷⁵

Nakahira conceives of the world as a kind of ‘magnetic field’ of intertwined gazes, ‘woven together by my gaze and the gaze of things’, a model of vision that recalls Jacques Lacan’s conception of the ‘gaze’ in terms of two intersecting triangles, and of which Lacan observes: ‘the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture’ [...] ‘I am *photo-graphed*’.⁷⁶ In such a model, the seeing subject loses its sovereign authority as bearer of the gaze – the gaze, Nakahira observes, is ‘repelled’ by the world, adding that: ‘this could be said to be where the gaze of things starts to be thrown back towards us’.⁷⁷ And he goes on to observe that ‘things will come to repel our focused gaze and emerge in the fullness of wondrous fantasy’, a ‘fantastic quality’ that he detects specifically in the writings of Robbe-Grillet and Le Clézio.⁷⁸ Again then, the *nouveau roman* – and specifically Le Clézio – helps shape Nakahira’s conception of the relation of subject and mind with material reality.

In this struggle between humanity and world, Nakahira argues that ‘technology, which developed so that people could use the world as a tool for themselves, has now reached the point of working against humanity’, adding that ‘the world has begun to rise in revolt against the humanization or instrumentalization of the world by human beings’.⁷⁹ The implication of this for art is that a conception of art as ‘an expression of the artist’s image has to be destroyed’, in order to be replaced by art as a series of infinite “encounters” between artist and world.

Le Clézio includes some twenty of his own black and white photographs at the end of *La Guerre* (figs. 7-9), where they’re arranged in varying sizes, without captions. On one level the photographs are of unremarkable urban scenes: of pedestrians and traffic, a railway station, Monoprix, a supermarket interior and a series of details of vehicles, manhole covers and tarmac surfaces – a wholly artificial landscape devoid of natural forms. The images evidence the façade of everyday normality that, for Le Clézio, serves to conceal the ongoing state of permanent ‘war’ that pervades both the natural environment and civil society. That such apparent ‘normality’ should have culminated in what we now increasingly understand as a state of irreversible environmental destruction, global warming and the onset of a new geological era – the Anthropocene – in which the transformation of the world’s ecosystems is dominated by human activity, points to the prescience of Le Clézio’s thesis.

⁷⁵ Nakahira, *ibid.*, n.p.

⁷⁶ Takuma Nakahira, extract from *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?*, in Doryun Chong *et al* (eds), *From Postwar to Postmodern: Art in Japan 1945-1989. Primary Documents*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2012, p.267; Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin, 1979, p.106.

⁷⁷ Nakahira, cited in Prichard, ‘An Illustrated Dictionary of Urban Overflows’, in *Overflow*, n.p.

⁷⁸ Nakahira, in *From Postwar to Postmodern*, pp.266-67.

⁷⁹ Nakahira, *ibid.*, p.266.



Fig.7 J.M.G. Le Clézio, *La Guerre* (1970).

A layout of three photographs (fig.8) depicts the interior of a supermarket as an ordered, brightly-lit space of chrome, plastics and steel fittings, echoing some of the adulatory descriptions relayed by Bea B in the novel:

I love plastics ... I often go to look at the nylon fabrics ... There are new materials invented by man ... There is the white steel that glitters on automobiles and on railway carriages. [...] In supermarkets I've seen thousands of identical little pasteboard pots containing cream or yoghurt ... [...] There are so many machines everywhere. Electric razors, electric billiard games, mixers, fans, refrigerators, electronic calculating machines. ...⁸⁰

The focus is again on the material texture of everyday life in an era of mass consumption and industrialised food production. And she goes on to celebrate the bodywork of automobiles, hub-caps, tyres and wheels – motifs that are again found in the photographs (fig.9).

⁸⁰ Le Clézio, *La Guerre*, pp.190-91.



Fig.8 J.M.G. Le Clézio, *La Guerre* (1970).

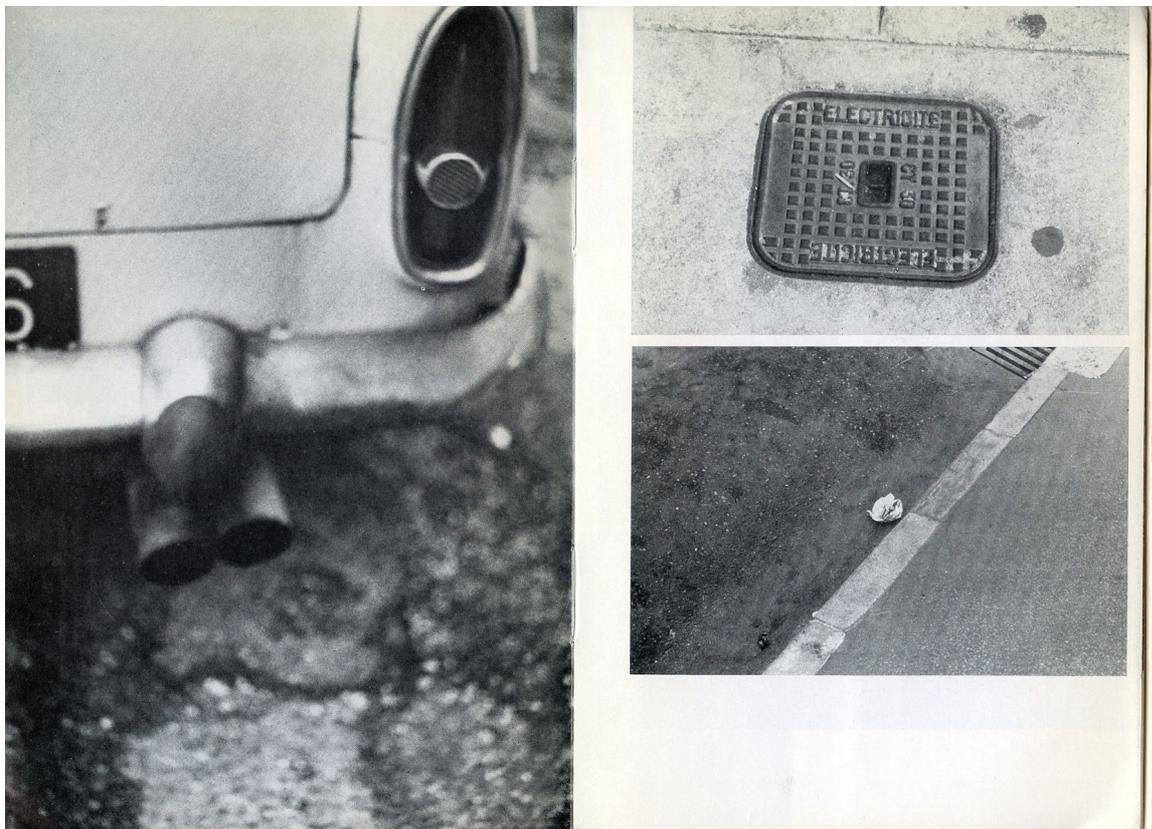


Fig.9 J.M.G. Le Clézio, *La Guerre* (1970).

Whereas Debord, in his *Society of the Spectacle*, proposes the *image* as the central element of the new socio-economic order, for Le Clézio it is the *material texture* of reality that harbours the secret of the transformed relationship between mankind and the natural order. Nakahira in turn combines postwar Japanese culture's concern with materiality – now conceived more in terms of a Marxist model of the commodification of everyday life – with an optical model that endows that material reality with the power of the return gaze.⁸¹ The outcome is that reality becomes endowed with the 'fantastic quality' that he discerns in the *nouveau roman*.

The question of influence here is complex and moves in a number of directions – while Nakahira draws upon the *nouveau roman*, Le Clézio likewise draws on the photographic viewpoint, both in his writing and deployment of photographs. Abe Kōbō's *Hako otoko* (*The Box Man*) appeared in 1973 (the same year as Nakahira's *Botanical Dictionary*) and three years after Le Clézio's *La Guerre* (1970) and similarly incorporates the writer's own photos.⁸² Abe's protagonist is, like Adam, another 'deserter' from society who takes to the streets – a former professional photographer whose box functions not only as a home, but also as a metaphor, both for the *camera obscura* and for the ubiquitous container of consumer society. Atsuko Sakaki clearly demonstrates this incorporation of the photographic viewpoint within Japanese writing, where Abe 'seems to deny the narrativity of photography, renouncing meaning in photographic images'.⁸³ Abe's preferred location is the urban landscape – quite specifically the materiality of existence on the streets as viewed through this mobile 'camera obscura' – and in this Sakaki detects 'characteristics in line with the grammar of street photography'.⁸⁴

'Looking' is a central concern of Abe's book and Sakaki observes that the box in effect looks back with 'its own gaze', adding that the writer 'ambiguates the Cartesian divide between the seer and the seen', thus echoing Nakahira's citation of the Lacanian 'return gaze'.⁸⁵ Abe, himself also a photographer, thus casts doubt on Cartesian vision as the basis of modern 'scientific' documentation, while the photographs included in *The Box Man* – as with Le Clézio's photos – are tangential to the novel and have been characterised by him in terms of a 'montage' or 'poem'.⁸⁶ Photographic seeing therefore both draws on and also feeds back into the novel – a two-way influence that extends to shared subject matter – Nakahira's series *Degree Zero – Yokohama* (1993-2003), for example, contains many photographs of men living on the streets, including with boxes.⁸⁷

Overflow (1974): 'already in the other world'

⁸¹ Marx observes in his model of 'commodity fetishism' that 'the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own' – Marx, *Capital*, Vol.1, London: Penguin Classics, 1990, p.165.

⁸² Abe Kōbō, *Hako otoko* trans. as *The Box Man*, New York: Vintage, 2001 (1973).

⁸³ Atsuko Sakaki, *The Rhetoric of Photography in Modern Japanese Literature*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016, p.13.

⁸⁴ Sakaki, *ibid.* p.14.

⁸⁵ Sakaki, *ibid.*, p.60.

⁸⁶ Abe cited in Sakaki, *ibid.* p.73.

⁸⁷ See Nakahira Takuma, *Degree Zero – Yokohama* (exh. cat.), Yokohama Museum of Art, 2003 –figs.761-820.

Nakahira's urban vision is partially realised in *Overflow* (fig.10), a set of 48 colour photographs shot around Tokyo between 1971-74 and presented as a six metre panel in the 1974 exhibition 'Fifteen Photographers Today' at the Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art. While eschewing the darkroom manipulation of Nakahira's *Provoke* era work, the images are nonetheless still far from the pure realist position advocated in his *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?* and have been characterised by Yasufumi Nakamori in terms of 'a dreamlike non-narrative of a city wanderer, a psychogeographical photographic experiment'.⁸⁸ Prichard observes how the work – as with the conceptual art of the period – required the active participation of the viewer in interpreting and constructing the meaning of what are apparently random fragments of the world.⁸⁹ For Prichard, those fragments echo the method adopted by Nakahira in his *Botanical Dictionary*, where he asserts that "[t]he method of the illustrated dictionary is absolute juxtaposition", and where those elements, Prichard observes, 'did not add up to any signifying whole'.⁹⁰ Nakahira has characterised the city conceived in architectural terms, as an oppressive "dark nebula", as "nothing more than the utterly mixed relations among people, things and space" – "something opaque" that "exceeds my grasp".⁹¹ The meaning of the work, then, is precisely this failure of an urban culture to cohere into any fixed, unitary meaning and the exclusion of any secure, totalising view of the world.



Fig.10 Nakahira Takuma, *Overflow*, 1974.

Nakahira arranged his images in the form of a long, horizontal, staggered grid, such that there is no single pattern of reading and interpreting the work. The individual high contrast images are themselves highly fragmentary and often oblique views of the everyday world, further reinforcing the difficulties of interpretation. They include images of the devastation of the land and sea – open-cast mining, whale-fishing, pollution and an over-arching sense of the inevitable decay of all things: of rotting, rust, peeling paint and a general disorder or entropy of matter. In terms of visual structure, we encounter here a decisive rejection both of the clarity of

⁸⁸ Nakamori, in *For a New World to Come*, p.12.

⁸⁹ Franz K. Prichard, 'An Illustrated Dictionary of Urban Overflows', *Overflow*, n.p.

⁹⁰ Prichard, *ibid.*

⁹¹ Nakahira cited in Prichard, *ibid.*

renaissance perspective and of the habitual visual instantaneity of an age of Debordian 'spectacle'. The dark, entropic aura pervading the work, together with the visual and conceptual frustration experienced in its interpretation, combine to suggest an all-pervasive sense of alienation or of existential angst – the absolute obverse of the seductive world of advertising or the technological utopianism of the period. This is an outlook shared at the time by colleagues such as Daido Moriyama, who in 1972 wrote of his 'awareness that there is not an ounce of beauty in the world and that humanity is a thing of extreme hideousness', and hence of his decision 'to focus on the darkest, coldest regions at the heart of human existence'.⁹²

The shift to colour in this work reflects a more general trend within photography towards the acceptance of colour as an 'art' medium, a shift that would receive institutional sanction in landmark exhibitions such as *William Eggleston's Guide* (MOMA, New York, 1976). But for Nakahira, this also entailed the further development of the principles laid down in his *Botanical Dictionary*, where the use of colour emulsions meant the abandonment of darkroom manipulation, enabling him to finally 'cast off all *trace of the hand*'.⁹³ 'In that sense', he concludes, 'the colour photograph is already in the other world', adding: 'Release the shutter once, and everything comes to an end'.⁹⁴ Nakahira's language of release and otherworldliness, along with the connotations of 'shooting', surely suggest something of his state of mind and anticipate the serious illness that would soon engulf him.



Fig.11 Nakahira Takuma, Untitled image from *Overflow*, 1974 (detail).

Invited in 1970 to write on the theme of 'urban rebellion', Nakahira's thoughts immediately turned to 'night' and 'fires', evoking an urban landscape 'lustrous like

⁹² Daido Moriyama, 'The Decision to Shoot', in Vartanian (ed), *Setting Sun*, p.34.

⁹³ Nakahira, 'Excerpt from *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?*', in Vartanian (ed), *Setting Sun*, p.131.

⁹⁴ Nakahira, *ibid.* p.131.

plastic' – a 'transparent' city that he likens to an 'impregnable fortress', where people run amok in fire and darkness and which is suggested in the shimmering electric cityscape of fig.11.⁹⁵ Nakahira's fantasy of a city 'destroyed by my angry gaze', which he confesses to be a 'crazy delusion', recalls Adam's continual recourse to intense heat in order to recompose a 'rotten' world: 'the simple heat. With it, all would become white and hard and fixed', culminating in 'material harmony'.⁹⁶

With the publication in 1973 of *Why an Illustrated Botanical Dictionary?*, Nakahira burnt much of his previous photographic work – another ritual purging by fire – and was hospitalised for a period due to the impact of prescription drugs and sleeping tablets. Seriously ill again in 1977 with acute alcohol poisoning, he suffered severe memory loss and aphasia, though Nakahira subsequently returned to photography. Writing later of his illness, Nakahira conceived the act of 'seeing' in terms of 'the process of establishing a secured distance between myself and the subject', but with his hospitalisation suffered 'hallucinations' in which. 'immobilized with terror', he lost that sense of distance, unable either to ascertain distances or to determine objects.⁹⁷

Towards a conclusion

If Nakahira is ultimately rather far from the state of 'material ecstasy' advocated by Adam, he nonetheless turns away from an art practice rooted in notions of subjective creativity and expression, embracing instead the materiality of the object and a model of visuality that overturns the sovereign gaze of the viewer. Nakahira's definitive statement of his ideas in his *Botanical Dictionary* is, as Charrier rightly observes, both internally inconsistent and applied only haltingly in his photographic work, and when applied in the later colour work – expressed in the more thorough purging of all subjectivity – results only in 'disconcertingly random and plain' images with a 'point-and-shoot' aesthetic.⁹⁸

Yet this later shift only serves to further underline both the intellectual rigour and political engagement of the earlier work, together with the clear influence of the experimental writing of the *nouveau roman* and in particular the ideas of Le Clézio. The shared awareness by both Nakahira and Le Clézio of a consumer culture already out of kilter in its relations with the natural world, of social alienation and the problematic of the role of subjectivity in the representation of reality, evidence both the prescience and continued relevance of their ideas. And finally, they surely signal the bankruptcy of an economic model no longer sustainable in an age of global warming and pandemics, condensed in Le Clézio's final image of an airliner, hovering high above in a grainy sky.

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⁹⁶ Le Clézio, *Le Procès-Verbal*, p.166.

⁹⁷ Nakahira, 'Looking at the City, or the Look of the City', in Nakahira, *For a Language to Come*, p.12.

⁹⁸ Charrier, op. cit. p.11 and p.20. Again see Nakahira Takuma, *Degree Zero – Yokohama*.

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