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From the Perspective of The Peripheral

Zainichi novelist Yu Miri's *Tokyo Ueno Station* and Japanese manga artist Yoshihiro Tatsumi's dramatic comic *Abandon the Old in Tokyo,* explore and depict the recurring sense of misery and restlessness that wreaked the lives of Japanese men in the lower working-class during the 1960s. Both Tatsumi and Yu portray the dehumanization and loss of self in the face of economic disparity, but their approaches to this issue contrast. Yu utilizes imagery and flashback to narrate Kazu Mori, a homeless ghost that creeps amongst Ueno Park while pondering his haunting past as a hardworking but absent father. And Tatsumi relies on the use of external focalization to capture Kenichi Nakamura, a sanitation worker who lives a mundane and restricted life caring for his mother while trying to survive in an urbanizing society. Ultimately, the protagonists' drive to escape the burden of economic disparity not only inhibits their ability to emotionally connect with their loved ones but also how socio-economic circumstances can affect the lives of those in the periphery living in a metropole.

Through Kazu's reflection of past experiences, Yu displays the impacts of hectic work life as someone of a low class. As Kazu reflects on his past hardship, he acknowledges how he "had no choice but to keep working in Sendai, to pay for Kōichi's tuition and living expenses and to put food on my family's table" (Yu 38). Much like many during this post-war era, scrambling to survive yet barely making ends meet, Kazu carries the weight of a financial burden on his shoulders, given his hopes to create a better life for his family, especially for his children.

Notably, given this flashback that he "had no choice" but to work, Yu conveys how the need to survive in an urbanizing society often comes at the expense of all other aspects of life; specifically for Kazu, his obligations to work cost him his familial relationships. As such, his workaholic nature and absence as a father did not stem from malicious intent or purposeful abandonment, but rather that his circumstances as a victim of poverty entrap him in a cycle of labor. Linking between Kazu and Emperor Akihito, they coincidentally share the same birth year; their sons and Kōichi and the Crown Prince are also born on the same day. Despite this similarity, the two men's lives are distinctly different from one another.[1] For instance, even if a "member of the imperial family [is] due to visit one of the park's museums or galleries," the homeless people who inhabit the park must abandon their tents and personal belongings (9). In other words, while society continues to uphold the emperor and his family in high regard, they leave Kazu and the other homeless people to suffer the fate of the impoverishment that is prevalent during this time. Furthermore, Kazu explains: "I never carried any photos with me, but I was always surrounded by people, places, and times gone by," and that it was "just a constant absence from the present, an anger toward the future" (16). Through the imagery as someone from the periphery living in the core of a metropole, Yu further elicits how the daunting reality of disparity inhibits Kazu from benefitting despite him living in a place of abundance.[2] Despite his exacerbating regret and sorrow that continues to consume him, the bystanders of the busy city continue to overlook his presence; even as a person full of personal experiences and value, he remains in the shadows of his tents as each day passes.

Tatsumi portrays the similar social and psychological impacts of economic hardship. For example, on page 43, the first panel displays a crowd of indistinguishable heads squishing

[1] Professor Shima, 2/9/21, Week 6 Lecture
[2] Professor Shima, 2/9/21, Week 6 Lecture

themselves into a train. Following this is a medium shot of Kenichi in the herd of people and looking up at a sign that advocates the idealism of purchasing a second home. Through the transitions from a third-person to the first-person perspective, we not only see Kenichi's possibly intensifying anxiety as his sweat drops from his face, but we are also able to empathize with his worries. As someone of low economic status living in a cramped apartment and working as a sanitation worker, Kazu can immediately deem the idea of buying a second house as an unattainable goal. Even so, Tatsumi's detailed depiction of Tokyo's landscape: the massive crowd, moving trains, and towering buildings, create a claustrophobic setting. From this, he emphasizes the never-ending activity of Kenichi's surroundings and the physical feeling of isolation that may come even when in a crowd of people. In addition to this, as he walks around town, he passes the cafe his fiancé is waiting at and instead stumbles upon the line of cars that people leave behind and a sign that says "Car disposal strictly prohibited, City Traffic Department" (58). With smooth panel transitions and a third-person perspective of him in the city, Tatsumi concisely exemplifies another moment where Kenichi slowly loses his sense of humanity. Even with the hustle he endures, he has no time for himself, his mother, nor his fiancé; he remains detached as he lives passively. Ultimately, Kenichi's constant distress combined with the pretense of ideal consumerism in Kenichi's surroundings allows Tatsumi to create a space of tension that exposes the private lives of working-class men who try to survive in Japan's thriving urban city.

Comparatively, Yu and Tatsumi brilliantly portray the impact of urbanization on Japanese society and culture during the 1960s. In retrospect, consumerism centered around the imagination of middle-class families who benefitted from being in the metropole and disregarded the effects of social class and socio-economic circumstances. They became accustomed to the

surge of hyper-consumerism culture. However, this culture also left those in the lower-class to endure the long days of labor yet low wages and income, a reality gap which Yu and Tatsumi invoke commentary. While telling the story of 1960s Japan, their pieces share a similar theme of alienation. They provide fluid narratives from the lens of those of the lower working class who did not have a position of inclusion or degree of privilege despite living in the metropole.[3] As Yu depicts how Kenichi's hectic work life inhibits him from maintaining an emotional connection with his family, Tatsumi portrays the similar trend detachment as Kazu's inability to assimilate with consumerism culture causes him to lose his humanity. Despite the differences in familial responsibilities that each protagonist bears, they both eventually lose themselves in the process of trying to follow the hustle of society around them.

Overall, Yu and Tatsumi illuminate the shadowing disadvantages of urbanization that many Japanese authorities and elite citizens attempted to mask during this time. Though consumerism seemingly enforced prosperity and unison of hardworking people to better their nation, it did not accommodate those of the working class. Eventually, many of these people compromised to meet the inclination of labor and assimilate to a materialistic culture. As such, Yu and Tatsumi prose a more objective viewpoint that extends beyond the pretense of Japan's economic expansion and questions the life of postmodern Japan by seeking the unfairness of poverty and the segregation between the upper and lower class.

[3] Professor Shima, 2/9/21, Week 6 Lecture