

2 x 2: Concatenations, Overflow of Inner Images


In 2000 photographer Issei Suda sneaked into Kamagasaki, one of the largest *doiyagai*, or slum districts of day labourers in Osaka. This series was taken by Suda, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. The images were captured using a half-frame camera allowing one photograph to be composed of two images. These images are low in contrast, dark and heavy, in a different sense from his other well-known works which are nonetheless dark and heavy.

Double image. Suda's photography was once characterised with this expression by critic Masahiro Soh. Soh has mentioned that in Suda's photographs one would find forms that can be paired. Viewing this series, we cannot help but wonder if Suda consciously or unconsciously creates this characteristic whilst capturing the images by using the half-frame camera.

It is widely believed that two multiplied by two equals four. A pair of black leather shoes can be seen on the left hand side of the image, across a black frame, two black phones are found. We see in the photograph, four objects giving off a black lustre to the streets of Kamagasaki. In one image two men walk together. One of the men appears to be lame in his leg, leaning on the other's shoulder. But, comparing the two images next to each other, these men are in different positions. They are replaced, from left to right, from right to left. We wonder, how long Suda followed them. How long until the two men switched their positions, and became four bodies or four objects.

The intervals present between the images reflect a space in time. These gaps convey a sense of Suda's movements allowing the view to enter into his psyche with each split representing a fracture in the captured reality. These voids allow the images to become abstracted, overlapped and multiplied.

Two fountains draw multiple circles on which many sleeping bodies lay. Pumpkins cut into pieces, plastic plant pots and bowls, and round tables folded. A chequered shirt worn underneath a jacket by a man, and chequered laundry bags placed on the street; the man disappearing in the next image transferring the pattern onto two bags. Rika-chan toy-dolls laid on the street replaced by two men standing upright around the tunnel of the



overhead railway. Two by two equals four linking each image to the next, another to the other, creating a sense of infinite connections between each photograph.

A dog sleeping on the street with scattered rubbish. Two dogs, and four hands. One of the pair, with a black and white pattern, remains in the next image. With Suda's poetic gradation of black-and-white imagery, the rubbish becomes stardust, and the body of a dog wandering around the man's sleeping body becomes a geometric figure. Kamagasaki now gives a stellarscape. Yet, the black frames barely control our perception, reminding the viewer that the two images are in different spaces of time. But, the peculiar composition of Suda's photography, its abstraction and disposition, the photographic image and our perception are resistively opened to the infinite cosmos of the image.

A woman of Kamagasaki approaches us. A man walks away. Everyday, mundane objects line up, from here to there, from there to here. Worn-out tools, junk objects—clocks, a portable gas stove, a lace-up boot which has lost its pair, a post-card of Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*—the alignment of every possible objects forms an endless maze. We walk through Kamagasaki in shadow, seeking light, through Suda's eyes and his memories and perception of the real. Where are we walking towards? Perhaps there is no destination; there is no such a thing as this side or the other. There is only wanderlust, shadows and light, and flashes of images, the moment when the shutter is released.

In 2014 we interviewed Issei Suda, fourteen years after these photographs were taken: 'Now I want to express something through images appearing in my mind like a flash of image, which perhaps comes out from my memory, through the juxtaposition of images and its concatenation, yet not as a story.' The fifty photographs of Suda bearing the double image by nature create a continuum of images. The images present such an overflow of inner images of Suda, beyond space and time, as if traveling to Kamagasaki back in 2000.

Ayako Koide

Mechanism, the Machine, Photography

If 'machine' is distinguished from 'mechanical system', the camera can be considered a machine rather than a mechanical system that produces copies.* Without doubt it captures what is there, in front of the camera. However, this is not an immediate, mere reflection of reality. Rather the camera, or photography, 'generates' images. But how is it generated? Where does the image come from?

The photograph is an immanent image, one of the factors which evoke the image is the camera as the machine. Numerous choices both conscious and unconscious are made when creating an image generating not only the captured image but more so capturing the photographer themselves.

It is not merely about the construction of reality or the creation of an internal world inside of the outer world. Rather, the image is embodied in the world, or is incarnated. The photographer genuinely 'sees' the world, and by this seeing act the image hits, in a super-spatiotemporal fashion, the head of the photographer. When this event coincides with the release of the shutter, it generates a photographic work of art in the world. In this way the photographer is a passive spectator of the world, whilst simultaneously being the active, sole generator of the image.

Although it has been ethnographic subjects and emotions of despair and melancholy of mankind that has obsessed Issei Suda, his most recent photographic activity has increasingly concerned—through certain changes in his mind-set—this generation of the image.

Photography is the mechanism of this peculiar process (it is not the structure, nor system, as they produce only the same thing), and the mechanism rests on, in theory, everything in this world, in which photographic activities are held. It is the image produced by the multiplicities such as the choice of the location, to the moment the shutter is released, to the selection of the one photograph. This production of the image reflects the potentiality of the world and at the same the potentiality of the photographer.

* See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari *Anti-Oedipus*

The fetishism of texture within Suda Issei's photography, for instance that of the *kimono* (and its reflection of light), has continuously been apparent. Yet, this feature can be understood as one of the mechanisms of his photography (Suda would call it *nin-jyutsu*, or art of *ninja*). When looking at each photograph containing these motifs, we feel a sudden uplifting sensation by what we might call an awakening breeze. There is something that is ignited, or that penetrates the viewer.

Suda attributes one of his series to his interest and concept of 'admiration'. The photographs in *Rubber* raise a question: to whom is the model in a latex suit perverted? It is primarily the touch of the rubber which gives tightening feelings, but more profoundly it is because the physical restraint evokes a memory, like a bolt of light, that she was hugged by the ex-boyfriend with whom she was completely in love. Suda said that: 'I want my photography to be a device to evoke something like this.' The Kamagasaki of 2014 was photographed under such a mechanism.

Suda photographs bitterness or sorrow reflected upon the surface of objects: the outdated signboards with scratches; the face of people living in *doiyagai*; and decaying architectures. Suda expresses this trait as 'sorrow inscribed in objects'. On one hand the inscriptions are heavily dark and black. On the other hand, lights are showered over these objects as if it attempts to rescue them. It, however, results in emphasizing the shadow. The high-contrast of his photography brings about the sacredness (bizarre and sensational at the same time) and its overwhelming beauty. This nevertheless comes from the photographer's potentiality. It is because the inscription made by light and shadow is discovered by none other than Suda. The face of a model that has a hint of sorrow, even to our naked eyes, cannot be any bitter if it is captured in Suda's photographs. In this way, it should be called an inscription being generated in turn creating another mechanism.

This set of photobooks is composed of two different Kamagasaki series: one taken in 2000, and the other taken in 2014. Furthermore, the latter, for

which this text is written, is divided into two, as it has another gap in temporality. Suda shot Kamagasaki twice in 2014. The first was in June and the second in August.

In the photographs taken in June, another mechanism was involved. To Suda's photographic world in which his inner mechanism operates, an outer mechanism was added. It is a model, which is foreign to his photography. Except for models involving fetishized objects (in reality they are mannequins and nude models), we hardly see any models in his photography. Suda's photography rather captures locals who are embedded in the culture of a place, composes them so well with the landscape, through the unknown, magical process, as if they are actors/actresses in a theatrical play. In this way, things separated from the place are mere strangers, or obstacles for his photography. But in Kamagasaki in June 2014, there was a reason to commit the obstacle.

One day in June 2014, Suda visited Kamagasaki to take photographs, with his 6 x 7 and 6 x 9 cameras. On the first day it was extremely difficult to shoot, as he said. It was because residents of Kamagasaki watched Suda. Alarming views and voices were sent to him from everywhere. Suda then needed to 'escape the eyes' and asked a model to join the shoot during the second day.

When it comes to the discussing the mechanism, there is a distinct difference between the photographs taken in June and those in August. There is no external mechanism in those taken in August. The images were taken on the day of *bon-odori* dance festival for Kamagasaki, when many gather around a temporarily-built stage to dance with the live music. No one would care about a man with a camera during the festival. Suda knew it in June, and was planning to return to the town that day.

The photographs taken in August thus recovered what we might call 'front structure' (a structure that lets the viewers 'face' the photographic images

straightforwardly, or images that 'stand up' or come to the surface) which is one of characteristics of Suda's photography. However, although it was recovered, photographic images out of the front structure are more prevailing in the photographs taken in August. The relations among objects in space and its arrangement became complicated and the photographic image obtains a newer and further 'depth'.

The relatively straightforward front-structure of Suda was destructed by the external mechanism in June. Through the struggles—unable to shoot what he wants, neither to place them at the centre, nor focus—the photographic act necessarily escaped his existing mechanism. Nevertheless, this accident worked to expand the capacity, which is to make a choice again from the infinite selections. In such a way, the escaping line drew a new line of production. This is, in reality, very natural to photography, because it is, as a mechanism, meant to affirm the multiplicity of images of this world.

The space between the surface of photography and the objects captured widened. We cannot help but gaze on the inscription which is now deeper than ever. The sensual, intuitive black of Suda's photography renewed itself into a contemplating black, which now has thicker layers in space. Suda's photography, which has been acclaimed for its picturesque beauty, is now deepening its generating mechanism, letting the imagery accumulate on the photographic surface allows the viewer to go deeper into the interiors of the image.

Ayako Koide

Kamagasaki and I

I first knew of Kamagasaki through Nagisa Oshima's film 'The Sun's Burial'. This film, released in 1960, had a huge impact on me, leaving a vivid image of the town in my mind.

'Such brutal youthfulness, flourishing in the town of sex and violence!' I am sure that the catchphrase appearing on the posters echoed the suppressed energy under the condition of post-ANPO-60, soon after the nationwide protests against the revision of the US-Japan Security Treaty in 1960. Set in the slum of day-labourers in midsummer, this film features places that are familiar to those who only know today's Kamagasaki. I am still amazed with the director Oshima's ability, making a whole piece out of the town, while being 'scared when stepping into the area for the first time' as written in his memoirs.

The characters in the film are not gloomy. They are eager to live with vigour and desire, but they are hopelessly bogged down, like small animals trapped in a bottomless swamp. Each of them has a certain inner strength, but not sufficient to break out from their situation. The film is a story made out of the cries of these people.

At the end of the film the female protagonist runs up to a man, asking: 'Is society truly going to change? Are the tramps out there going to disappear?' It has been fifty years since then. The times have changed, so too society, but as she presumed, the society that has long been awaited has not yet been achieved. Kamagasaki is still needed today.

In 2014, I was asked to take photographs of Kamagasaki and visited the town with little concern for how the town would affect me. My friend living in Osaka advised me to carry only small cameras to avoid drawing attention from the residents. I however ended up picking up two medium format cameras, which definitely attracted attention. Needless to say I have no interest in socio-political issues, never feeling any responsibilities to society. I

was even once called an 'observing' photographer. I am merely a middle-aged stranger. I deserved those sharp glares and alarming jeers that I received from the residents throughout the shoot.

In fact I have visited Kamagasaki several times. Amidst the stench of the town and the glares of the men, what remains in my mind are the popular toy-doll Rika-chan displayed in a shelter built with irregular plywood shapes, and an erotic figure of a woman on a piece of girlie photography clutched in a man's hand. I was even feeling as if I was in a Buddhist cathedral when I was eating with these men in the Airin Community Centre. Still, Kamagasaki was not a subject of my photography. I was just stopping by the area as a detour when I shot the nearby red light district of Tobita, or Shinsekai, the busiest downtown area of Osaka.

This was how I came to rediscover my negatives from 2000, which had remained untouched for fourteen years. It is also an unexpected pleasure to exhibit this series, which even I would not have looked at, if I had not had this invitation. Comparing these photographs taken in 2000 and 2014, I found that Kamagasaki has gradually been changing. Nevertheless, what has been changing the most is the destination of my own eyes. The town appeared differently as the state of my mind has changed.

While there are already many documentary works which are significant in their own right, what is collected in this photobook are mere fragments of the everyday lives of the town and the people living there. If someone discovers something new in this body of work, in these images that a passer-by saw in this town, it would be simply fortunate for me.

Issei Suda
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