

**The Creation of A Myth through the Destruction of Another:
Hosoe Eikoh's Photographs of Mishima Yukio in *Barakei***

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Abstract

The collaboration between Mishima Yukio, a world-renowned Japanese writer, and Hosoe Eikoh, an avant-garde Japanese photographer, resulted in the publication of *Barakei*, or *Ordeal by Roses*, in 1963. Hosoe's photographs of Mishima—superimposed upon images of Western painting—resulted in a stunning visual presentation of portraiture and photographic performance, providing rare visual testimony of Mishima and his representations of an identity situated at the intersection of East and West.

This research undertakes a visual analysis of *Barakei's* "Divers Desecrations", wherein Mishima's naked muscular body is juxtaposed against blurry images of Italian Renaissance paintings. Mishima wrote that "ancient artistic styles, sacred and sensual alike" were available to strip of meaning and to re-inscribe. But in combining images of himself with images of such paintings as Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and Boltraffio's *Madonna and Child*, was Mishima embracing ideologies represented by the Western aesthetic canon or was he actively challenging them by inserting his constructed body into these paintings? That is, was he a syncretist who believed in the synthesis of Western and Eastern aesthetic and cultural values or was he aligning his own sense of identity with external signifiers in order to legitimize his nationalistic and singular views?

Through an analysis of *Barakei*, this research finds that *Barakei* presents Mishima's multi-faceted identity along the modes of both nationalism and syncretism, concluding that *Barakei* is as much a testimony to Mishima's personae as to his complex relationship with the West.

“For beauty is only
the beginning of a terror we can just barely endure,
and what we so admire is its calm
disdaining to destroy us. Every Angel brings terror.”¹

The Collaboration of Two Geniuses

When Hosoe Eikoh was first asked to photograph Mishima Yukio, little did Hosoe realize that he was embarking on a seminal collaboration with Mishima, where Hosoe would have a unique opportunity to curate the visual personae of a literary master. The photographic result, *Barakei*—published in three editions and accompanied by Mishima’s text—was a truly unique combination of portraiture and photographic performance.

Mishima’s literature, including his novels and plays, has long received worldwide recognition. His name carries with it a heavy legacy that touches on extremes ranging from his right-wing militant nationalism, fascination with homoeroticism² and tragic ritual suicide,³ and volumes have been written on his eccentric lifestyle and the ideologies underpinning his life choices.⁴ Despite the existence of this literature, few have focused on the artistic collaboration between Mishima and Hosoe. This research explores the visual testimony and representations of Mishima’s identity in the 1985 edition of *Barakei*, uncovering the possible goals and reception of the collaboration between these two strong personalities.⁵ This research will show that *Barakei* is an important testimony to Mishima’s complex personae, unique for its visual representative format and for the collaboration between photographer and subject.

Hosoe Eikoh Curates the Body

Born in 1933, Hosoe has come to occupy a place at the forefront of 20th century Japanese photography. A 1954 graduate of the Tokyo College of Photography, Hosoe has served in various professional capacities, including as a professor of photography at the Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics and the director of the Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts in Yamanashi prefecture. In July 1959, Hosoe, along with Tomatsu Shōmei and others, founded Vivo, a self-managed agency for the distribution of the group’s work. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Hosoe produced several publications that established his reputation, including *Otoko to Onna* (“Men and Women” in 1961, featuring dancers’ bodies in movement) and *Kamaitachi* (“The Weasel’s Slash” in 1969, featuring Hijikata Tatsumi, a dancer and founder of *butoh*, in a folk-tale-inspired narrative). Hosoe has been recognized for his work, and awarded several accolades, including the New Artist Award of the Japan Photo Critics Association in 1960.

Throughout Hosoe’s *oeuvre*, he has remained preoccupied with the body in its various forms, always focusing his camera’s eye on the body. Unlike Hosoe’s contemporaries—such as

Domon Ken, who photographed World War II survivors—Hosoe’s visual language is mythical, theatrical and “evoke[s] his memories [in a culture otherwise] renowned for its austerity.”⁶ In doing so, Hosoe focused on producing a version of truth through the use of bodies, fiction-staging and stage-managing techniques.⁷

Simultaneously realist yet fantastical, Hosoe transports his viewing audience into a world that is claimed to exist purely because the photographic image remains as evidence. Hosoe’s works have been described as “near mad...extremely high-voltage products of passion and genius.”⁸ Mishima himself has written that the gloominess permeating Hosoe’s art can “be best expressed as a feeling of isolation which refuses to be emancipated.”⁹ Mishima seems to be implying that Hosoe’s subjects have no recourse for survival but to face the world “shameless and without pride.”¹⁰

Hosoe’s work becomes significant for the unique theatricality that pervades his work. Furthermore, he is lauded as a Japanese photographer who has the ability to weave aspects of Western photographic technology with ideas unique and indigenous to Japan, and is described as a “photographic ambassador of sorts, and a figure through whom the currents of Western photography enter Japan, just as he translates the ideas from his unique perspective for his students in workshops in the West.”¹¹ By using photography as his language, and focusing upon the human body as the subject, Hosoe has established a legacy of photographic narrative that provides a testimony to the version of truth he has captured.

Barakei as “Hosoe’s best-known work”¹²

Hosoe first met Mishima in September 1961 to photograph him for his first book of critical essays.¹³ Mishima had been impressed by Hosoe’s photography of Hijikata and had requested that Hosoe photograph him in his home.¹⁴ The collaboration continued through the summer of 1962 and resulted in the publication of *Barakei* in 1963, initially translated as *Killed by Roses* in English.¹⁵ The 1963 edition became the basis for the publication of two other editions, one in 1971 after Mishima’s suicide, renamed *Ordeal by Roses* in English,¹⁶ and one in 1985.¹⁷

The 1985 Edition

While the *Barakei* project as a whole cannot be considered separately from Mishima’s life, the 1985 edition was published 15 years after Mishima’s death. Speculation regarding the uncanny timing of Mishima’s death and the planned publication of the 1970 edition is raised, implying that Mishima may have planned for *Barakei* to be published as an homage to his fascination with death, immortalizing himself as a martyr in reality as well as in print.¹⁸ For the purposes of this paper, and due to issues of access, the author will focus her visual analysis solely on the 1985 edition. In locating the time in which the 1985 edition was published, the author argues that the re-publication of *Barakei* in 1985 should be considered a result of a renewed focus in Mishima’s work and person, and not just a focus on the manner in which Mishima ended his life.¹⁹

Barakei is consciously imbued with theatrical artifice. The 1985 edition of *Barakei*²⁰ is composed of five parts. The first part, Mishima's Prelude, includes a distorted close-up of a hand holding what appears to be a sword, or a lightning bolt.²¹ Part 2, entitled "The Citizen's Daily Round," tells of the madness of the solid, worthy and average citizen.²² Implying that all humans embody an element of madness when they are alone, Part 2 begins with a cryptic quote from Upanishad: "The divinity seen within this eye is the Self."²³ Referencing elements of the divine, the act of viewing, the eye as vehicle, and the self-reflexive self, we come upon the first black and white photograph of Mishima, who stands in front of a series of steps leading up to his home, clad in only a traditional white thong with a rose adorning his chest. His stare is provoking, yet vacant at the same time. Other images in this Part feature Mishima in bondage, with a black thick water hose bound around him.

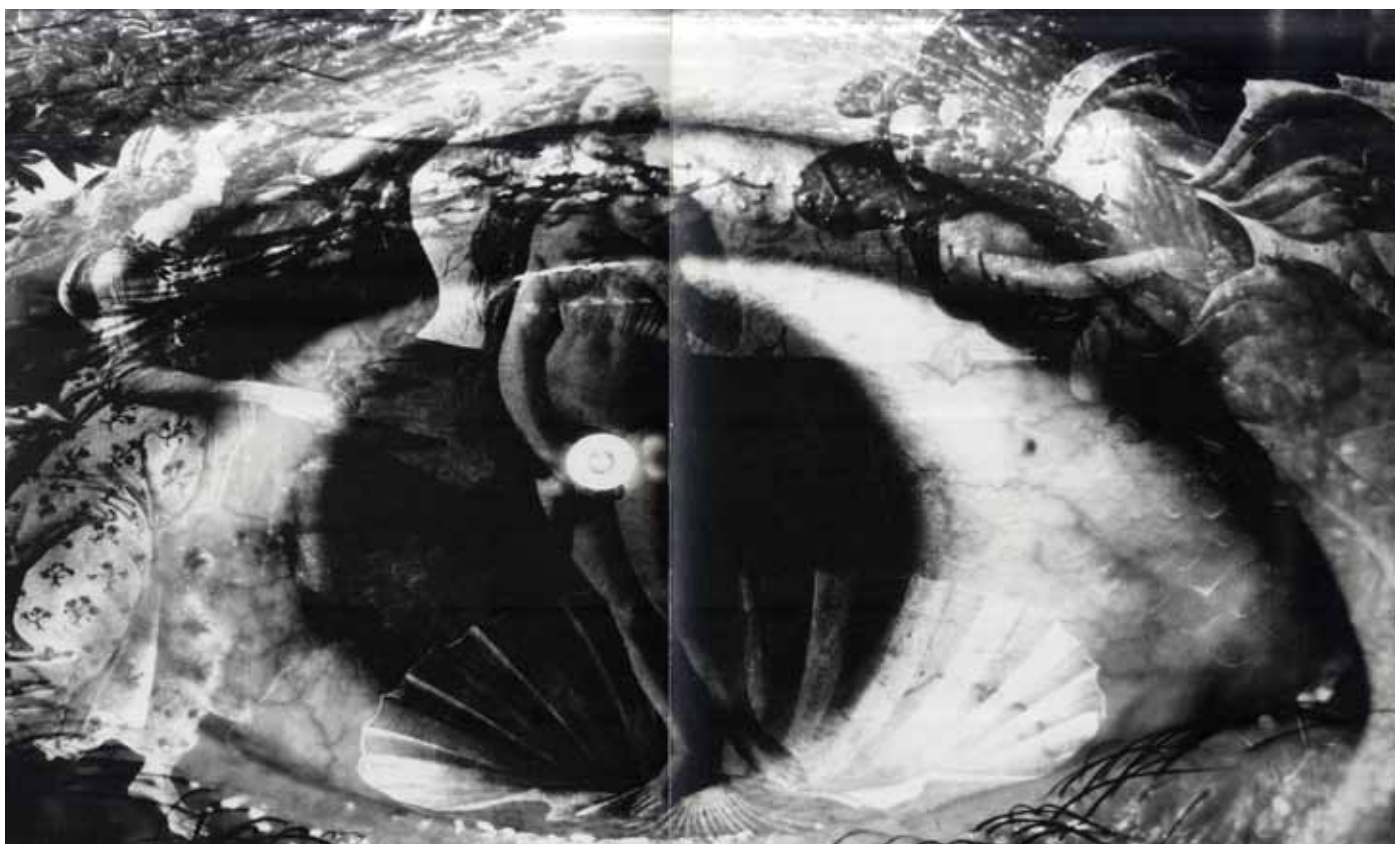
Part 3, entitled "The Laughing Clock or the Idle Witness," finds Mishima becoming a "scoffer and a witness,"²⁴ with Mishima observing that such a witness "laughs scornfully, watches, and does nothing."²⁵ In Part 4, "Divers Desecrations," Mishima is plunged into the midst of ancient, artistic styles, sacred and sensual alike.²⁶ Mishima impudently challenges these images, until he eventually creates in himself the "illusion that his body has become transparent."²⁷ In doing so, he feels that he can transcend time and space, "free to shift from one existence to another, from one life to another, released from all civic responsibilities."²⁸ Such dalliance cannot last forever, as Part 5 brings the "Retribution of the Rose"—Mishima's protracted, eternal torment of execution. In drawing the collection to a close with implied death, Mishima is confronted with "torture and extinction infinitely delayed."²⁹

Mishima's Insertion in the Western Aesthetic Canon

Several of the images in Part 4, "Divers Desecrations", of *Barakei* feature images of Mishima, juxtaposed against iconic images from the Western aesthetic canon. Some of these images feature Mishima's body in its entirety, while others focus on his disembodied parts. Hosoe recalled Mishima showing him Bernard Berenson's *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance*, as well as several other reproductions of Italian Renaissance paintings.³⁰ Each of the *Barakei* images discussed below features an image that has been identified in Berenson's text.

Mishima's Gaze

The first black and white photograph in Part 4 features a close-up of Mishima's eye, with a rendering of Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* in the background.³¹ In gross vividness reminiscent of Georges Bataille's work, this image features details of Mishima's eye: from the wrinkles in his eyelid to his lush, black eyelashes. Centered on the image of Mishima's retina—an unnaturally round, black, shiny marble—blood vessels are even seen floating within the cornea. In the background of the image appears Botticelli's Venus, emanating both from the shell of the painting and the onyx marble of Mishima's eye.

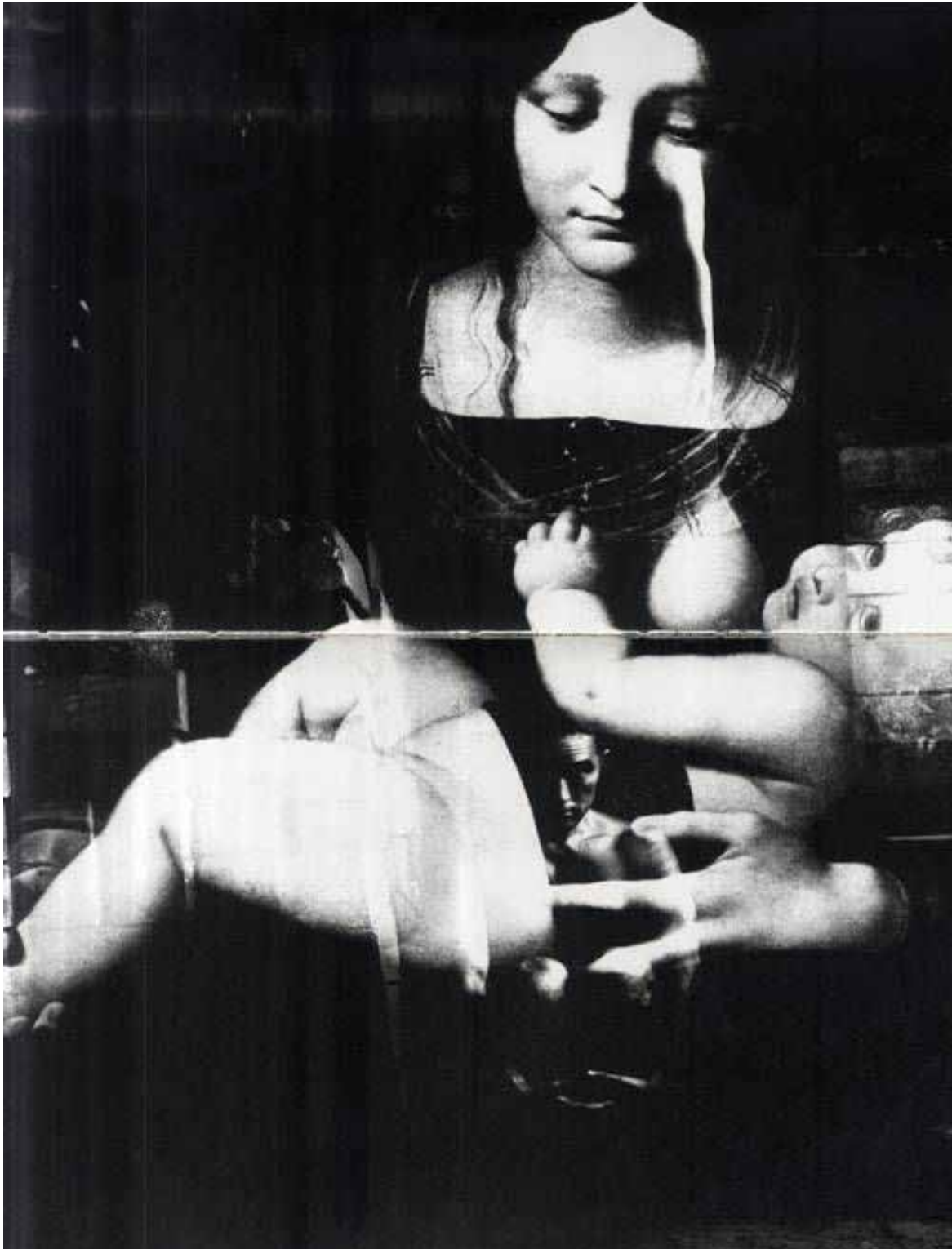


From "Divers Desecrations", *Barakei* (1985). © Eikoh Hosoe

Hosoe notes that for some of the images, he had arranged for the creation of painted backdrops to recreate certain images from the Italian Renaissance,³² and even upon first glance, the reference to Botticelli's painting is evident. However, as the viewer's gaze alternates between the Botticelli background and the details of Mishima's eyeball, she notices that the Botticelli background appears to be a mirror image of the actual Botticelli painting,³³ creating the impression that Hosoe attempted to capture the image of the painted Botticelli as reflected in Mishima's eye. Therefore, it would seem as if Hosoe wanted to capture the gaze that Mishima directed toward his favored works of art. His intense gaze is simultaneously directed outwards toward the birth of Venus and inward, providing a vast and deep void from which Venus emanates.

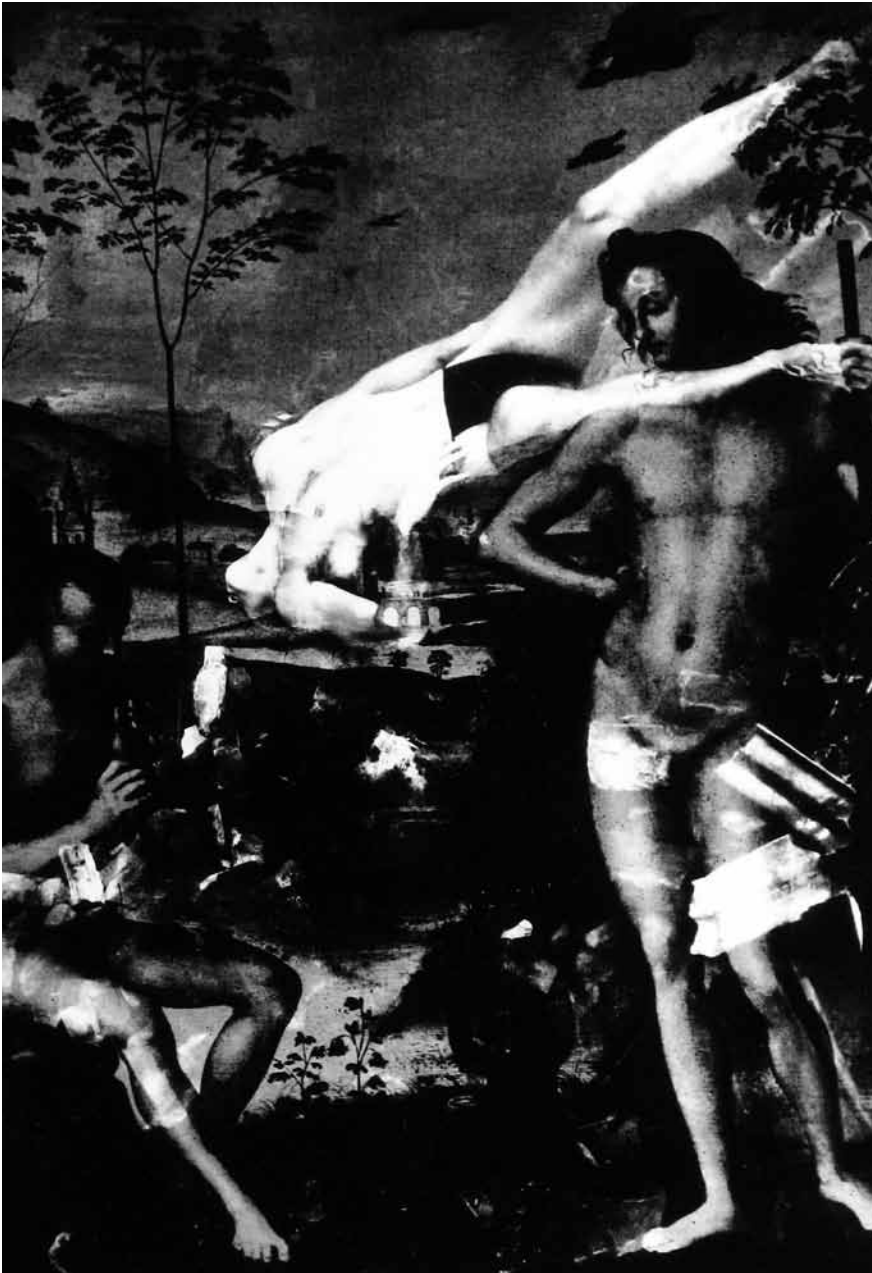
Mishima's Immaculate Conception

The fourth image in Part 4 features a large and clear image of the Virgin Mary cradling the infant Jesus.³⁴ This is Boltraffio's *Madonna and Child*.³⁵ The Virgin's face is filled with motherly compassion, as she directs her gaze to Jesus. Jesus clings to his mother's frock, his left hand reaching out toward the comfort of her partially exposed breast. If one focuses one's gaze merely on the upper half of the image, it would appear to be a representation of the iconic biblical relationship of mother and son.



From “Divers Desecrations”, *Barakei* (1985). © Eikoh Hosoe

However, the viewer immediately notices that a strange line streaks the Virgin’s face, almost as if she is shedding an electrified tear. As the viewer’s gaze continues from familiar iconic territory to the unknown netherworlds of the Virgin’s bodily center, the viewer finds Mishima,



From "Divers Desecrations", Barakei (1985). © Eikoh Hosoe

that Apollo has just played on his lyre. Apollo on the right regally stands, casting a challenging gaze towards Marsyas. Marsyas is often discussed as the embodiment of *hubris*, or pride causing demise.

In this image, Mishima has splashed his loin-clothed torso across the image, physically disrupting the contest between Apollo and Marsyas.³⁷ In comparison to the image of Mary and Jesus, Mishima's body in this image is found in the foreground, his skin tone a pale and jarring white. His body appears to ensnare Apollo's neck, as if Mishima is strangling the young god with his muscular thighs. In this image, Mishima's body is angled in such a manner that one cannot see his face; his distorted body abruptly breaks off at the neck, his body floating through the air,

curled up in the fetal position within Jesus's folds. Mishima is nestled within the center of the Virgin, severing Jesus's body. Additionally, Mishima can be viewed through what appears to be the specter of a ghostly hand, a hand too skeletal and disproportionate to be the hand of the Virgin Mary. As for 'Baby Mishima' himself, he appears as an intense black hole of energy. While his face is covered in shadow, his stare is steady and focused. Surrounded by large patches of white, his toned skin appears dark and lustrous, making him appear a mysterious yet solid presence.

Mishima's Hubris?

The sixth image in Part 4 is Pietro Perugino's *Apollo and Marsyas*.³⁶ In Greek mythology, Marsyas is a satyr that challenged Apollo to a music contest and, having lost the contest, also lost his life. In Perugino's painting, the viewer sees Marsyas on the left with his flute, perhaps attempting to emulate a tune

as if devoid of matter. Perhaps an active challenge to Apollo's dominancy, or an embodiment of Marsyas' *hubris*, Hosoe throws Mishima's body into the world of the picture.

Mishima as Actor and Hosoe as Director

In his Preface to *Barakei*, Mishima admitted that he entrusted himself to the skills of Hosoe's eye and camera.³⁸ Noting that Hosoe's work is "mechanical sorcery," Mishima described Hosoe's camera being used "for purposes utterly opposed to civilization."³⁹ Mishima claimed little or no control as he portrayed himself being transported to a world that was "abnormal, warped, sarcastic, grotesque, savage, and promiscuous...yet there was a clear undercurrent of lyricism murmuring gently through its unseen conduits."⁴⁰ Mishima found this savage, yet gentle world to be in stark contrast to the perceived world that he usually inhabited, a world characterized by the worship of social appearances and morality, which in turn created foul, filthy sewers winding beneath the surface.

In the collaboration, Mishima claimed that his spirit became totally redundant. Subject to Hosoe's artistic explorations, Mishima became just another object to be captured by Hosoe's eye and camera. His body and—by extension—his spirit, was "stripped of [its] various meanings, which [were] flung into a meaningless arrangement where their meaningless reflection of each other eventually restore[d] a certain order to the light and shadow."⁴¹ Therefore, the only requirement for Mishima-as-object was an *a priori* assumption that the body had a meaning of which it could be stripped, as the photographed objects were "consecrated to the uncertain metamorphosis which would surely occur as a result of the ritual situation so assiduously arranged."⁴² Allowing Hosoe to undertake such a process of abstraction, Mishima claimed that Hosoe's exercise achieved "a successful reversion to the kind of primary images already seen in his subconscious world."⁴³

Hosoe remarked that he was attempting to create a "destruction of a myth," and moreover, a "creative process through destruction."⁴⁴ Hosoe allowed the use of tangible objects that Mishima loved or owned in the photographs, as he believed "that the soul of a man resides in his property, and that his spirit is especially evident in the art and the possessions that surround him."⁴⁵ However, he is very specific to note that "the interpretation and expression" of such objects was his alone.⁴⁶

Photography as Testimony or Record

Mishima argued that the task of the photographer is to filter the original essence of the subject of the photograph through the methods of either photographic record or photographic testimony.⁴⁷ While photography-as-record takes the "absolute authenticity of the object photographed as its form and the purification of the meaning as its theme,"⁴⁸ photography-as-testimony allows for the meaning of the object portrayed by the camera to be "filtered off, while other parts are distorted and fitted into a new environment...as for the theme of the work, it lies

solely in the expression of the photographer's subjective judgment."⁴⁹

As a piece of testimony, therefore, photography serves to act as tangible evidence for a supposed truth, with Mishima finding Hosoe's photography-as-testimony to claim: "This is the true [portrayal of the object]...This is a photograph, so it is as you see: there are no lies and no deceptions."⁵⁰ However, this claim to truth is just as constructed as what is the visible end result in the photograph, and while the works are vibrant with a "frail yet intense tremolo of emotion, the emotion of the testimony cannot partake of the slightest objective credibility."⁵¹ What is truthful behind the photograph-as-testimony is the recordation of time that the photographer has spent looking at the object. Moreover, Mishima claimed that no matter how much the subject of the photograph is altered through techniques, the photographed object will always convey original essence to the viewer. Therefore, in the process of creating *Barakei*, Mishima entrusted Hosoe to create a visual testimony of Mishima's personae. Mishima allowed Hosoe to treat his body as an object, alongside the other tangible items indicative of his aesthetic sensibilities, giving Hosoe the opportunity to curate a performative visual representation of Mishima.

Testimony to Mishima's Personae

Mishima specifically claimed that Hosoe's photography was testimony, and not record,⁵² but if this is correct, to what does *Barakei* testify? Hosoe himself noted that *Barakei* was a collection of subjective documentary photographs evolving from his own imagination, and that he "must take whole responsibility" for the result.⁵³ As testimony to an "unrepeatable event," Hosoe wrote that the main theme of *Barakei* is life and death, portrayed through Mishima's flesh and immortal beauty, captured at its peak age of 38.⁵⁴ Mishima was reluctant to acknowledge the aging of his own body; his body "was the battleground where his works were hammered out and his thoughts forged and developed; it was also a high-powered crucible of darkness, emptiness, health, light and death."⁵⁵ In addition to focusing upon Mishima's body, Hosoe also focused on Mishima's possessions, as "things possessed by someone sooner or later come to partake of the owner's spirit."⁵⁶ Considering that Hosoe recalled Mishima showing him Berenson's text on the Italian Renaissance, it may be possible that Mishima specifically appreciated the renewed interest in classical antiquity, albeit of the Western tradition, in the Renaissance period; more generally, however, Mishima may have constructed his idealized understanding of the West by imbuing it with qualities that he perceived to be derived from the Italian Renaissance. Regardless, in Hosoe's photographic project, Hosoe was attempting to create a testimony to the spirit of Mishima, by choosing to focus on his body along with his personal objects.

As mentioned, analyses of Mishima's life often raise the timing at which the second edition of *Barakei* was set to have been released, noting the significance of its planned publication just after Mishima committed suicide in the fall of 1970.⁵⁷ However, without such analyses, the viewer of the 1985 edition of *Barakei* has only the visual images and Mishima's text. In this circumstance, the viewer senses that she is being introduced to a strong-willed character and

is challenged to view Mishima's world. Mishima stands before the viewer, at times staring the viewer down and at times—deep within the world of the photograph—testifying to the viewer about his life and philosophy. Mishima remains captured within the pages of *Barakei*, allowing the viewer a glimpse into a visual representation of Mishima when he was 38 years old.

Did Mishima have Control?

If the above is true, how much control did Mishima have—as the object of Hosoe's photography—in the production of the images in *Barakei*? Mishima claimed that words are often inadequate to traverse the gulf between art and action, and only theatre, “where a false blood runs in the floodlights, can perhaps move and enrich people with much more forceful and profound experiences than anything in real life.”⁵⁸ Believing in the power of theater, Mishima offered himself as the subject matter for Hosoe's camera, and thus *Barakei* might be considered a performance under Hosoe's direction.⁵⁹ Submitting and entrusting himself to Hosoe's almost sadistic authority, Holborn claims that the images of *Barakei* depict Mishima challenging himself with the most severe task of making public his inhabited world.⁶⁰

Mishima believed that theatrical and performative actions—those actions that best approximate life itself—would overcome the flatness and “impotence of words as abstractions.”⁶¹ Allowing Hosoe to curate Mishima and present a visual testimony of him, Mishima permitted Hosoe to uncover his creative epicenter, a “most dangerous, yet vital place.”⁶² This center, while denying Mishima an expressive self, required that Mishima himself be the object of expression. As Hosoe notes, “if it had been someone other than Mishima [occupying that space], such ideas would not have arisen in the first place, and it is unclear whether such ideas arose because it was Mishima.... [R]egardless, in a different way, it had to have been Mishima.”⁶³ The complex and dark world found in *Barakei*, simultaneously fantastically surreal and deeply poignant, is a testimony both to Mishima's spirit and to the creative process between Hosoe and Mishima.⁶⁴

Ur-portraiture

The representations of Mishima in *Barakei* can be considered a form of ur-portraiture, or a prototypical portrait, speaking to a version of Mishima-as-he-was-at-age-38. Photography as ur-portraiture is a theme common to other contemporary artists of photographic portraiture. For example, Morimura Yasumasa is a contemporary Japanese photographer who regularly creates self-portraits of himself in the guise of famous characters and personalities, mostly Western and female.⁶⁵ Recently, he has performed in the guise of Mishima himself, creating a 2006 video work to recreate Mishima's last day in *Seasons of Passion/A Requiem: Mishima*. In his own piece, Morimura delivered an impassioned speech, one based on Mishima's manifesto. In Morimura's work, Morimura acts as the subject of his own work while retaining his directorial role; he clearly plays the part of both the photographer and the photographed in his ur-portraits.⁶⁶

Morimura's work is of course different from *Barakei*, as Morimura performed an identity

separate from his own and retained curatorial control over how he chose to self-fashion himself. Even though Morimura and Hosoe both focus on Mishima as their subject, Morimura is appropriating a historical moment in Mishima's time when Mishima was 45. Morimura recreated this moment based upon secondary sources narrating Mishima's final day and therefore is one layer removed from Mishima-as-he-was-at-age-45. As his work was based on a historical moment that occurred in 1970, Morimura's work can be considered to be more of a historical recreation and reinterpretation, continuing in the lineage of a renewed focus on Mishima's work and person.

On the other hand, Hosoe was directing a version of Mishima-as-he-was-at-age-38. Where he was not removed by time or space from Mishima, Hosoe had the opportunity to imbue his portraiture of Mishima with more creativity as he explored versions of Mishima's identity. His curatorial direction was reflected in the choice of Western icons and paintings and accoutrements used to create the images in *Barakei*. Therefore, *Barakei* can be considered ur-portraiture of Mishima-as-he-was-at-age-38.

Mishima's Spirit Captured

Discourse on photography often raises the dual—and at times, battling—goals of photography, focusing on the photographic judgment as being about either the identification of stereotypes bound by rigid rules⁶⁷ or the “deposit of the real itself.”⁶⁸ In discussing Surrealist photography, Rosalind Krauss argues that the photograph—as a document of “unity as that-which-was-present-at-one-time”⁶⁹—exists to faithfully trace a paradox whereby reality is constituted as a sign. *Barakei* can be viewed as capturing the paradox that is Mishima's spirit from two angles: nihilist nationalism and syncretic hybridism.

Nihilist Nationalism

In *Divers Desecrations*, *Barakei* provides a visual trace of Mishima's ideologies, allowing Mishima, an individual who engaged in same-sex relationships and harbored nationalist tendencies, to lament the perceived experience of emasculation—both at a personal and at a national level.⁷⁰ Having experienced Japan's defeat in World War II and the U.S. Occupation of Japan in the 1950s, Mishima allied his thinking and actions to samurai moralists, *kokutai* scholars, and neo-Confucian revolutionaries of the Tokugawa period.⁷¹ In doing so, he found intellectual traditions for his nationalism, martial values, elevation of Emperor-centered State Shinto-ism, and death-centered ethics and aesthetics. Struggling to fix an emasculated Japan, Mishima conflated nihilism with nationalism; while he believed that Japanese people were so unique that no universal system of thought could be used to enhance Japanese nationalism, he was following in the tradition of using foreign ideologies that appear universal, and therefore, channeled a nihilism advocated by Nietzsche to bolster his own nationalist views. In arguing for an active form of nihilism in his final address to the Self-Defense Forces during the coup d'état that led to his ritual suicide, Mishima extorted the soldiers to rise together and die with

him “for the ‘real Japan, the real Japanese, and the real *bushi* spirit’ that exists nowhere but in the Self-Defense Forces.”⁷² Mishima’s nationalism and nihilism therefore should not be seen in opposition with one another, but rather as a way of using nationalism for nihilist purposes.

In *Barakei*, Mishima appeared in *Übermensch*-like form, making an appeal to renewed masculinity through the display of his muscular body. Simultaneously, a sense of abject rejection of established order and annihilation of the self pervades *Barakei*. Allowing himself to become just another object and entrusting himself to Hosoe’s vision, Mishima’s passivity appears to hide his agency in the expressive act.

Syncretic Hybridism

Mishima’s literary works are often noted for their traditionalism, which in considering his nationalist politics, may appear to be a rejection of Westernized modernism.⁷³ In this rejection, Mishima advocated the return of Japan to a form of society that existed prior to its subjugation to Western influences. However, Mishima also lived in a gaudy Western-style mansion and was open in certain contexts about his homosexual lifestyle—elements of his life through which he “pretended to be Westernized.”⁷⁴ Holborn claimed that the “excesses of [Mishima’s] private environment are a measure of the turmoil of a brilliant man torn between East and West and profoundly disturbed by the mercantile course of his native culture.”⁷⁵ As such, Mishima’s appropriations from an alien and despised culture could be considered his own acts of power and self-aggrandizement.⁷⁶

Ever since World War II, certain theorists lament the loss of an “indigenous Japanese culture based on traditional values.”⁷⁷ However, Japan’s increasing engagement with foreign (and predominantly Western) cultures enhanced Japan’s drive to increase the skills necessary to absorb the West without losing the demarcation between ‘us’ and ‘them.’⁷⁸ In fact, the practice of cultural appropriation has become so well accepted that people in Japan “now hold the view that the capacity for absorption and indigenization of foreign cultures is uniquely Japanese.”⁷⁹

Given the view that Japanese society has moved away from the simple appropriation of Western culture and created its own unique brand of aesthetics,⁸⁰ it is possible to reconceptualize Hosoe’s portraiture of Mishima as a unique syncretic undertaking. Hosoe and Mishima reproduced identifiable Western iconography in *Barakei*, admitting both the strength of the image-as-signifier and the ease with which meaning can be stripped from such image due to replication. In *Divers Desecrations*, Mishima’s insertion into appropriated images from the Western aesthetic canon is both an act of acceptance and an embrace of the represented ideologies (such as Christian religious ideology and martyr myths), with Hosoe merging Mishima’s perceived aesthetic and cultural values with values represented by Western iconography. Not merely seeking to challenge the established representational order, Hosoe portrayed Mishima as a syncretic figure; by choosing to portray Mishima as a complex character who ‘plays’ alongside Western images, Hosoe argued that Mishima is a hybrid of signs. In doing so, Hosoe succeeded

in capturing Mishima in a moment of time, and Mishima, as a subject, provided Hosoe with an opportunity to encode Mishima's body with specific and complex subjectivity that both challenged and embraced the Western thought represented by the icons.

Conclusion

"What became a plus in my life?...What probably became a plus is the great acclaim that [*Barakei*] received in Germany. Apparently, this strange text commanded all of the positive attention at the Frankfurt International Book Exhibition. I served as the model throughout the entire text, not as an author or anything else, but as one object, so the calculation is that I was able to take as a plus only that amount of critical acclaim I received as a pure object...On the other hand, with respect to minuses, there are so many that I cannot even begin to count. That my everyday words and actions are each minuses and that my existence is entirely a minus are facts that I do not need others to tell me. However, what I have learned about life's appeal at age 38 is that the human relationships surrounding me have slightly increased in complexity, and this fascinating aspect stems from the fact I cannot pigeonhole people either as foe or friend."⁸¹

Barakei was a project in the "destruction of myth."⁸² However, in having Mishima perform as object-as-subject, Hosoe ironically created yet another Mishima myth.⁸³ While this visual trove cannot be analyzed separately from Mishima's literary works and the secondary works on Mishima's life, philosophy and politics, Mishima himself noted that the model in *Barakei* did not "need to be him necessarily."⁸⁴ Perhaps this comment was made in connection to Mishima's claim of lack of control in the artistic process; however, *Barakei* very much remains a collaboration between Mishima and Hosoe. Hosoe photographed "the person within Hosoe's concept"⁸⁵—his conception of Mishima. Whether a nationalistic nihilist or syncretic hybridist, *Barakei* uses stunning visual presentation to add yet another layer to Mishima's complexity.

Notes

Yayoi Shionoiri is obtaining her Masters in Modern Art: Critical Studies at Columbia University. She received her J.D. from Cornell University and her A.B. from Harvard University. A version of this article was presented at "East & West: Cross-Cultural Encounters," a symposium held at St. Andrews University in September 2009, and the author would like to thank the participants at the symposium for their comments. The author is indebted to Professors Matthew McKelway and Jonathan Reynolds for their thoughtful insights and to Professor Benjamin Mason Meier for his editorial assistance.

All images have been reproduced with the kind permission of Hosoe Eikoh.

- 1 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Duino Elegies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).
- 2 Although Mishima had a wife and children, Mishima is known to have engaged in same-sex relationships. As far as the author knows, he neither publicly declared himself as gay, nor openly associated himself as having a gay identity. However, he has certainly written about closed homosexuals, for example, in *Confessions of a Mask* in 1949. *Confessions of a Mask* is a semi-autobiographical account of a young homosexual who hides behind a metaphorical mask in order to fit into society.
- 3 On November 25, 1970, Mishima and four members of his Shield Society attempted a coup d'état of the Tokyo headquarters of Japan's Self-Defense Forces. After a planned speech to the soldiers that ended in mocking and jeering, Mishima committed ritual suicide.
- 4 For English language biographies on Mishima, see John Nathan, *Mishima: A Biography* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974) and Henry Scott-Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1974).
- 5 As discussed in greater detail, the author will focus on a visual analysis of the 1985 edition of *Barakei*, and the specific time in which such edition was published, with examinations of earlier editions in subsequent research.
- 6 Mark Holborn in *Eikoh Hosoe* (New York: Aperture, 1999, hereinafter referred to as **Holborn Essay** in the footnotes), 5.
- 7 Fukushima Tatsuo, "On Eikoh Hosoe" in *Eikoh Hosoe, meta* (New York: International Center of Photography, 1991, hereinafter referred to as **meta** in the footnotes), 99.
- 8 Yoshimura Nobuya, "Preface" in *Eikoh Hosoe: Photographs 1960-1980* (Rochester: Dark Sun Press, 1982, hereinafter referred to as **Dark Sun Text** in the footnotes).
- 9 Mishima Yukio, "Preface" to *Embrace* in Dark Sun Text.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Holborn Essay, 10.
- 12 *The History of Japanese Photography*, ed. Anne Tucker Wilkes, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 344.
- 13 Hosoe Eikoh, "Notes on Photographing *Barakei*," in *Setting Sun: Writings By Japanese Photographers*, eds. Akihiro Hatanaka, Yutaka Kanbayashi and Ivan Vartanian, (New York: Aperture, 2005, hereinafter referred as **Hosoe** in the footnotes), 132.
- 14 Hosoe, 133.
- 15 Hosoe, 137. 1,500 copies of the 1963 edition were published, with each signed by Hosoe and Mishima. The 1963 version was awarded an accolade by the Photo Critics Society.
- 16 Hosoe, 140. The publication of the 1971 edition was postponed due to Mishima's untimely death. Certain scholars have discussed the uncanny timing of Mishima's death and the planned publication of the 1971 edition, linking such timing to Mishima's fascination with death. The contents of the 1971 edition were re-edited, and the sections of the book were restructured: "Eye of the Sea," "Sin of the Eye," "Dream of Sin," "Death of Dream," and "Death." Translation of section titles, author's own, based on listings set forth in Mishima Yukio, "*Shinso-ban 'Barakei' in tsuite*" (from the 1971 version of *Barakei*) in *Mishima Yukio Zenshū*, ed. Tanaka Miyoko, et al. (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2000-2006, hereinafter referred to as **Zenshu** in the footnotes), Volume 36, 392-3.
- 17 The author has based her research on the 1985 edition of *Barakei*. The lush 1985 edition, published by Aperture in New York and designed by Awazu Kiyoshi, uses imperial purple and blood red in its

design. Hosoe notes that the 1963 and 1971 versions are different in look; for example, the 1971 version was designed by Yokoo Tadanori, and featured a white cover, a Western layout with horizontal text, and the title stamped in red calligraphy. Unfortunately, the author was unable to procure copies of these extremely rare older editions.

18 Holborn has described Mishima's death to be a gesture of historical implication in perfect accord with the morbid and erotic aesthetic that pervades Mishima's writing.

19 The author does not intend to diminish the significance of the manner in which Mishima chose to end his life or the connections that can be made among his actions, works and certain images in *Barakei*. The author argues, however, that the 'now' in which the 1985 edition of *Barakei* was published should be considered separately from the timing of Mishima's death in 1970, or the time when *Barakei* was first published in 1963.

20 Hosoe Eikoh, *Ba-ra-kei = Ordeal by Roses: Photographs of Yukio Mishima* (New York: Aperture, 1985, hereinafter referred to as **Barakei** in the footnotes). The 1985 version of *Barakei* does not have page numbers.

21 No black and white photographs appear in the first section.

22 Preface to *Barakei*, 5.

23 *Barakei*, Part 2.

24 Preface to *Barakei*, 6.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Hosoe, 134.

31 See Image I. Bernard Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon Press, 1952), Pl. 204. The provenance of the Botticelli painting is listed as the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

32 Hosoe, 137.

33 In the Botticelli painting, Zephyrs, symbols of spiritual passions who blow Venus towards the shore, are seen on the left-hand side of the painting, and Horae, a goddess of the seasons, who hands Venus a flowered cloak, is seen on the right-hand side of the painting.

34 See Image II.

35 Bernard Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon Press, 1952), Pl. 368. The provenance of the Boltraffio Madonna is listed as the National Gallery in London.

36 See Image III. Berenson, Pl. 304. The provenance of the Perugino work is listed as the Louvre in Paris.

37 Mishima apparently fixated on other icons as well, including St. Sebastian, the Christian saint and martyr who is said to have been killed during the persecution of Christians by Diocletian. Mishima may have been entranced by the young St. Sebastian's naked body, tied to a post and shot through with arrows. While not the subject of this paper, an interesting comparison can be made between Mishima emulating St. Sebastian in the third image of Part 5 in the 1985 edition of *Barakei*, and other images of Mishima emulating St. Sebastian. The author is aware of one such photograph taken by Shinoyama Kishin in 1966, where Mishima posed in the guise of St. Sebastian, as painted by Guido Reni (Shinoyama

photograph reproduced in Henry Scott-Stokes).

38 Mishima has noted that he was allowed to “have a pleasant and exceptional experience” and that “above all, he trusts Hosoe’s eye.” Mishima Yukio, “*Barakei Taikenki*”, *Geijutsu Seikatsu*, July 1963 in *Zenshu*, Volume 32, 477.

39 Preface to *Barakei*, 1.

40 Ibid.

41 Preface to *Barakei*, 2.

42 Preface to *Barakei*, 3.

43 Preface to *Barakei*, 3.

44 Hosoe, 134.

45 Hosoe, 137.

46 Hosoe, 134.

47 Preface to *Barakei*, 3-4.

48 Ibid.

49 Preface to *Barakei*, 4.

50 Ibid.

51 Preface to *Barakei*, 5.

52 Interestingly enough, Hosoe claimed that these categories were too narrow. He believed that the medium of photography is capable of infinitely more complicated and subtle forms of expressions. To him, photography can serve as both “a record and a ‘mirror’ or ‘window’ of self-expression.” “Photography and I” in *meta*, 7.

53 *meta*, 25.

54 Ibid.

55 Fukushima Tatsuo, “On Eikoh Hosoe” in *Meta*, 101.

56 *Meta*, 103.

57 Mark Holborn, “Eikoh Hosoe and Yukio Mishima: The Shadow in the Time Machine” in *Art Forum International*, February 1983, 50-7 (hereinafter referred to as **Art Forum** in the footnotes). In such article, Holborn mentions that Mishima’s suicide in 1970 was meticulously staged and rehearsed over the course of the previous decade, 54.

58 Mishima Yukio, quoted in Henry Scott-Stokes, 170.

59 Afterword to *Barakei*.

60 Ibid.

61 *Art Forum*, 55.

62 Afterword to *Barakei*.

63 Hosoe Eikoh, “*Barakei ni tsuite*”, *Camera Geijutsu*, March 1962 in *Zenshu*, Volume 39, 371.

64 Mishima observes in Hosoe’s work the symbiotic existence of “an extreme consciousness of artificial creation and a gentle, easily hurt spirit.” Mishima Yukio, “*Hosoe Eikoh-shi no Ririshizumu – torareta tachiba yori*” in *Mademoiselle*, January 1962 in *Zenshu*, Volume 32, 15.

65 Morimura has fashioned himself as individuals ranging from Velásquez’s Infanta Margarita to Madonna, the pop singer. For a series of essays decoding his own work, see Morimura Yasumasa, *Bijutsu no Kaibōgaku Kōgi* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1996).

66 Other contemporary artists share Morimura’s method. For example, Cindy Sherman takes photographs of herself in variously imagined female characters. Sherman claims that her work is not self-portraiture as she does not create autobiographical works. While Sherman retains control over how she is represented in her work, Chuck Close—known most for his large scale self-portrait paintings—has painted Cindy Sherman looking gender-neutral and without make-up. See Martin Reading, *Close*

- Reading, Chuck Close and the Art of the Self-Portrait* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2005), 285.
- 67 Rosalind Krauss, "A Note on Photography and the Simulacral" in *October* 31 (winter 1984): 61.
- 68 Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism" in *October* 19 (winter 1981): 26.
- 69 Ibid., 23.
- 70 Roy Starrs, *Deadly Dialectics: Sex, Violence and Nihilism in the World of Yukio Mishima* (Folkestone: Japan Library, 1994), 16.
- 71 Starrs, 72.
- 72 *Japan Interpreter* 7, no. 1 (winter 1971), trans. Harris I. Martin, cited in Starrs, 74.
- 73 Karatani Kōjin argues that Japanese writers in the 1930s, such as Tanizaki Jun'ichiro, Kawabata Yasunari and Mishima Yukio were originally Westernized modernists, but turned to traditionalism, not for reasons of nostalgia but because they thought it appeared more avant-garde. Karatani Kōjin: "Japan as Museum: Okakura Tenshin and Ernest Fenollosa" in *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, ed. Alexandra Munroe (New York: Harry N. Abrams), 34.
- 74 Sumie Okada, *Japanese Writers and the West* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 5.
- 75 Afterword to *Barakei*.
- 76 Starrs, 14.
- 77 Mark Sanders, *Reflex Contemporary Japanese Self Portraiture* (London: Trolley Limited), 7.
- 78 Iwabuchi Koichi, *Recentering Globalization—Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press), 58.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Sanders, 7.
- 81 Mishima Yukio, "Shashin-shū 'Barakei' no moderu o tsutomete – purasu/mainasu, '63." *Yomiuri Shinbun*, Night edition, December 28, 1963. Translation, author's own. In *Zenshu*, Volume 32, 630-631.
- 82 Hosoe, 134.
- 83 While Mishima and Hosoe initially began their relationship based upon the artistic exchange that resulted in *Barakei*, their respect for one another was sustained beyond their collaboration. It appears that the photographic artist and literary master remained supportive of each other's work until Mishima's untimely passing.
- 84 Hosoe Eikoh, "Barakei ni tsuite", *Camera Geijutsu*, March 1962 in *Zenshu*, Volume 39, 371.
- 85 Ibid.