CHAPTER TEN

THE MARGINS OF NARRATIVE EMBODIMENT

Banzai, banzai!
Korean Independence banzai!

The Japanese government’s planned repatriation of Koreans, ordered by the Allied Army, had not yet been carried out. Amid the cheers and shouts ringing out after August 15, the Korean Association, which had begun to close down its offices all over the country, issued peremptory demands to the Japanese government to send out evacuation trains. The Koreans who had immigrated to Japan after their farms or homes had been usurped by unscrupulous means numbered three million, and those who had been forcibly brought to Japan as soldiers or forced laborers for the sake of the stupid war numbered more than one million. At the moment of the surrender these people were thrown out of the mines, the army units, the factories, and so on, like old straw shoes; running hither and thither in this foreign land they jostled together trying to reach Shimonoseki, trying to reach Hakata, and there was no way that the one or two trains sent out in response to the Korean Association’s demands could be adequate.

Kim Talsu
“After August 15”

Section I: The Abject and the Sublime

As we saw in Chapter 9, the Japanese body within a strictly Japanese context had rarely been configured in contrastive racial terms before the Occupation; however, the parameters of the normative body had long been configured through contrasts with bodies considered to be outside the parameters of normality in other ways: the imperial body (or other “sublime” bodies) at one end of the scale, and the buraku-dweller body (or other “abject” bodies) at the other.1 In some

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1 On what we now think of as “Japanese soil,” the only real confrontation with a body “racially” different from that of the Japanese was with the Ainu in Hokkaido. Other East Asians, who may have been in the same “racial” category as the Japanese as far as nineteenth-century Anglo-European definitions were concerned—Koreans and Chinese, for example—were considered in Japanese terms to exist on the far side of a line dividing them from the “normal,” human Japanese body.
Occupation-period narratives the parameters marked by these bodies, and the new definitions of these bodies themselves, were put into question.

Space and the Body

Hirabayashi Taiko’s 1946 story “Mô chûgoku hei” (Blind Chinese soldiers) is set on March 9, 1945, the day of the Tokyo fire-bombing.2 (Although the first-person narrator explicitly mentions this fact, it does not figure into the story in any obvious way.) The narrator is making a trip toward Tokyo involving multiple train changes. At a station called Takasaki, where she is waiting with crowds of people to board one of the rare passenger trains, she sees officials making chalk marks on the platform and herding people outside of the chalked lines. When the train finally pulls in, there is one well-kept car that no one is allowed to board. Most of the passengers are so busy cramming their way onto the available cars they do not pay much attention, but the narrator stops to look inside the nearly empty, well-appointed car. She sees a man she identifies as Prince Takamatsu by his distinctive nose (as well as his uniform and the presence of a few attendants): “With the strange, deep emotion that one might experience upon recognizing an existence hitherto believed to be fictitious, I gazed at this beautiful young man. My natural urge was to shout and tell everyone out loud, ‘The Prince is in there. He’s real!’” (42). But she quickly realizes that she had better see to getting herself crammed onto the train if she does not want to wait around for the next one, so she moves away.3

Because she has taken her time about getting on, the narrator cannot find a space to squeeze into in the dilapidated, filthy cars filled with regular passengers. She moves to the very last car of the train, where she sees a group of passengers being led off:

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3 Prince Takamatsu was one of the younger brothers of the Shôwa Emperor; he died in 1987.