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# **For the Eyes Only**

## **The Sensory Politics of Japanese Modernism**

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From left: Kikuchi Kan, Kawabata Yasunari, Kataoka Teppei, Yokomitsu Riichi and Iketani Shinzaburō in 1927  
(Source: Museum of Modern Japanese Literature, collection number: P0001016)



## the debate about new sensationism

kankaku (感覚) : sensation, perception, sense impressions); 新感覚 : new sensation

'[birth control] can be called a movement to expel maternal women and increase the number of women of the prostitute type (*shōgatafu*)'.

'modern people live only with sensations and nerves, the organs of pleasure'. (Kataoka Teppei 'Atarashiki seikatsu to atarashiki bungei', October 1925.)

It was high noon. The crowded express train ran at full speed. The small stations were ignored like stones'. (Yokomitsu Riichi 'Atama narabi ni hara', October 1924)

'The writer's life breathes into the material object: the most direct and realistic power source for this intervention is sensation'. (Kataoka Teppei 'Wakaki dokusha ni uttau', December 1924)

'Film has to rely solely on the mutual understanding that arises between the moving images and the sensation of watching them.' (Kataoka Teppei 'Kurutta ichipejiji ni tsuite', July 1926)





## Yokomitsu Riichi:

‘Sensation is an intuitive explosion of subjectivity that rips off the external aspects of nature to give access to the thing itself’. (Yokomitsu

Riichi ‘Shinkankakuron’, February 1925)

...

‘Chinese cabbages, mangos, candles, beggars’

Suddenly, Sanki became aware that **his body had stopped moving** and was holding on to the edge of a piece of wood. . . . He looked around and **saw his body immersed** up to his neck in the soft surface of the night soil. He tried to raise himself up. . . He fell back in the night soil, his face turned up; closed his eyes and began **to feel his head moving** freely again. **He followed the action of his own head**, wondering how far it would move. Then he realized that his body, as if measuring its own specific gravity, was lying completely submerged in excrement, and grinned.

(Yokomitsu Riichi *Shanghai*, 1927, my emphasis)