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Author (full names) IRENA EMEVA HAYTER
Title of thesis Words Fall Apart: The Politics of Form in
1930s Japanese Fiction
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This thesis presents an analysis of Japanese modernist texts from the 1930s, with an emphasis on the writings of Takami Jun (1907-1965), Ishikawa Jun (1899-1987) and Dazai Osamu (1909-1948). Rather than discuss these experiments within the problematic of influence and see them as secondary gestures imitating the techniques of Gide or Joyce, I attempt to show that Japanese modernist fiction is deeply implicated in its cultural, political and technological moment. I begin with a mapping of the historical and discursive forces behind the so-called cultural revival (*bungei fukkō*) and the revolt against the epistemic regime of Westernized modernity: its soulless positivism, its logic of instrumentality which objectified nature and the historical teleologies which inevitably relegated Japan to a secondary place. I examine the works of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai in this context, against close-ups of specific material and discursive developments. The transgressions and dislocations of linear narrative in Takami Jun's novel *Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot* (*Kokyū wasureu beki*, 1936) are read as radical deconstructions of the deeply ideological discourse of *tenkō* (the official term for the political conversion of leftists) as a regeneration of the self, as the return to a natural organic Japaneseness. The narrative of Ishikawa Jun's *Fugen* (*Fugen*, 1936) is structured by dualistic tropes which can be seen as configurations of mediation and unity; I explore the meaning of these narrative strategies against the collapse of political mediation in the mid-1930s and the swell of fascist longings for oneness with the emperor. The marked reflexivity of the stories in Dazai Osamu's first published collection *The Final Years* (*Bannen*, 1936) is discussed in the context of the profound anxieties generated by the accelerated logic of cultural reproduction and the technologically altered texture of experience. I argue that in their shared emphasis on discursive mediation and the materiality of language, the texts of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai become figures of resistance to a nativism which strove for immediate authenticity and abandoned representation for the metaphysics of timeless Japaneseness.

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**Words Fall Apart: The Politics of Form in 1930s
Japanese Fiction**

Irena Eneva Hayter

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

May 2008

Abstract

This thesis presents an analysis of Japanese modernist texts from the 1930s, with an emphasis on the writings of Takami Jun (1907-1965), Ishikawa Jun (1899-1987) and Dazai Osamu (1909-1948). Rather than discuss these experiments within the problematic of influence and see them as secondary gestures imitating the techniques of Gide or Joyce, I attempt to show that Japanese modernist fiction is deeply implicated in its cultural, political and technological moment. I begin with a mapping of the historical and discursive forces behind the so-called cultural revival (*bungei fukkō*) and the revolt against the epistemic regime of Westernized modernity: its soulless positivism, its logic of instrumentality which objectified nature and the historical teleologies which inevitably relegated Japan to a secondary place. I examine the works of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai in this context, against close-ups of specific material and discursive developments. The transgressions and dislocations of linear narrative in Takami Jun's novel *Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot* (*Kokyū wasureu beki*, 1936) are read as radical deconstructions of the deeply ideological discourse of *tenkō* (the official term for the political conversion of leftists) as a regeneration of the self, as the return to a natural organic Japaneseness. The narrative of Ishikawa Jun's *Fugen* (*Fugen*, 1936) is structured by dualistic tropes which can be seen as configurations of mediation and unity; I explore the meaning of these narrative strategies against the collapse of political mediation in the mid-1930s and the swell of fascist longings for oneness with the emperor. The marked reflexivity of the stories in Dazai Osamu's first published collection *The Final Years* (*Bannen*, 1936) is discussed in the context of the profound anxieties generated by the accelerated logic of cultural reproduction and the technologically altered texture of experience. I argue that in their shared emphasis on discursive mediation and the materiality of language, the texts of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai become figures of resistance to a nativism which strove for immediate authenticity and abandoned representation for the metaphysics of timeless Japaneseness.

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Introduction

Henceforth, any resurrection of the Greek World is a more or less conscious hypostasy of aesthetics into metaphysics – a violence done to everything that lies outside the sphere of art, and a desire to destroy it; an attempt to forget that art is only one sphere among many, and that the very disintegration and inadequacy of the world is the precondition for the existence of art and its becoming conscious.

Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*

This study focuses on Japanese modernist fiction from the 1930s, with an emphasis on the works of Takami Jun (1907-1965), Ishikawa Jun (1899-1987) and Dazai Osamu (1909-1948). It argues that modernist texts were deeply marked by the intensities of their political, cultural and technological moment. As an approach this can seem hopelessly *démodé*: it can imply a rigid deterministic relationship between the material and the discursive and an instrumental view of language which takes us back to the worst Stalinist misreadings of Marxism. Post-structuralism and deconstruction have not only asserted the autonomy of the textual, but have also challenged the supposedly obvious premise that a material reality does indeed exist behind language; for post-structuralism, everything is discursive and there is nothing outside the text. My attempt here will be to argue against this solipsistic pan-textualism and to gesture towards a more dynamic politics of reading. It is not my intention to reduce modernism to a superstructural reflection of some universal economic base, but to analyse literature as a cultural practice operating in conjunction with other networks of signification. The aim would also be to open the realm of the discursive and push to the foreground certain intersections between historical forces and textual practices. These convergences are not necessarily found in the thematic concerns and the referential content of the texts. More often than not the relationship between text and history is *symptomatic*, similar to the psychoanalytic dynamic of displacement, containment and repression. This is a historicist study, but one which is more indebted to Macherey, Althusser and Jameson, rather than Foucault.

These theorists form a lineage which broke away from the vulgar Marxism of reflection theory and its posited simple homologies between means of production, social classes and artistic forms. Their overall framework is psychoanalytic in so far as they all acknowledge a historical or ideological unconscious behind the text: for Macherey, 'the speech of the book comes from a certain silence, a matter which it endows with form, a ground on which it traces a figure'.¹ The Althusserian breakthrough, as summed up by Etienne Balibar, consists in his departure from the classical Marxist conceptualization of ideology as false consciousness. For Althusser, 'ideology is *not consciousness* (not even 'social' and 'collective', not even 'false' consciousness); it is, rather, *unconsciousness* (of which the forms of consciousness are only one aspect and a consequence)'.² Althusser's notion of ideology as unconsciousness sustained by certain material and discursive practices and the method of 'symptomatic reading' he ascribed to Marx ('it divulges the undivulged event in the text it reads, and in the same movement relates it to a different text, present as necessary absence in the first'), continue to be the potent interpretive tools of that exciting and diverse field we have come to call cultural studies.³ But it is Jameson's work from the seventies that still remains the most formidable theoretical synthesis of narrative, ideology and history. While I am ambivalent towards Jameson's assertion that 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles', I agree with him that the political is the absolute horizon of interpretation, that the reading act should be 'restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of ... history'.⁴ Narrative form, Jameson taught us, 'must be read as an unstable and provisory solution to an aesthetic dilemma which is itself the manifestation of a social and historical contradiction'.⁵

¹ Pierre Macherey, *Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall, London: Routledge, 1978, p.85.

² Etienne Balibar, 'The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser' in E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (eds), *The Althusserian Legacy*, London: Verso, 1993, p.7, emphasis in original.

³ Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, London: Verso, 1979, p. 67, quoted in John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, Harlow: Pearson, 2006, p. 57.

⁴ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979, p.20.

⁵ Fredric Jameson *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, p.94.

My study aims not only to recover a broader field of discourse, but also to map the intersections between the discursive and the historical. I devote a full chapter to the historical forces whose convergence precipitated the 1930s crisis of representation. In the subsequent chapters, close readings of the texts are set against specific material and discursive developments. The historical constellation of the 1930s looms large in the thesis; it is not treated as a static and inert background to the literary works. For some purists, such a study walks the boundary between textual analysis and cultural history, but I believe that such an approach is valid. Apart from the Marxist-psychoanalytic framework outlined above, my bringing together of the formal and the historical draws on the principle of montage, that master trope of modernism. In montage, signification is made in the forced juncture of two elements; the operation of juxtaposition is *itself* meaningful and the constructed whole is, in Eisenstein's words, '*not fixed or ready-made, but arises – is born*'.⁶

Such an attempt at a political reading of form would imply working against the grain – modernism can be, amongst other things, the moment of aesthetic transcendence *par excellence*, of a sanctified sphere of culture removed from the historical world. But the disavowal of the political is itself a profoundly political position, and that is why the purified and autotelic modernist text should be forced to confront the material conditions of its production. This need to restore historical particularity is imperative in the case of peripheral modernisms which have long been dismissed as secondary gestures, as inferior imitations of Western originals. There is a bewildering profusion of concepts of modernism; the adoption of a particular definition has become an act of taking sides in an ongoing political and cultural debate. This study eschews the Eurocentric, and especially Anglo-Saxon, views of modernism as esoteric aesthetics and sides with what can be termed a purely *technical* conception. In T. J. Clark's words,

modernism is a name ... for a pattern of artistic practice in which modernity's very means of representation – the structure of symbolic production and reproduction within it – are put to the test of exemplification in a particular medium...Modernism was a form of

⁶ Sergei Eisenstein, 'Word and Image', in *The Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda, San Diego: Harvest/Harcourt Brace & Company, 1975, p.31, emphasis in original.

testing – of modernity and its modes. The modes were put to the test by being materialized, by being reduced to a set of actual, technical manoeuvres ... by being forced and denatured in the process, in order to see how much of [them] survived the extremes of dispersal and emptying, flattening and abstraction, estrangement and deskilling.⁷

Throughout the thesis, modernism is also employed in Miriam Hansen's broader historical meaning of 'a whole range of cultural and artistic practices that register, respond to, and reflect upon processes of modernization and the experience of modernity, including a paradigmatic transformation of the conditions under which art is produced, transmitted and consumed'.⁸

My reason to designate as modernist the writings of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai is because rhetorically, they participate in a denaturing of realist conceptions of language, representation and subjectivity. I am aware that in Japanese cultural studies modernism is often identified with the 1920s, with experiments in both literature and the visual arts and the vibrant mass culture of consumption and display. I focus the first chapter on the historical and discursive developments bridging the 1920s and the 1930s in an attempt to flesh out a certain dynamic of continuity that goes against the grain of the established orthodoxies of cultural history. More often than not the eras of Taisho (1912-1926) and Showa (1925-1989) are troped in contrasting figures; a complete fissure is posited between the 1920s and 1930s. The 1920s are often described as the time of 'Taisho democracy', modernism, and the spectral modernity of the city as a space of desire.⁹ The first decade of Showa, on the contrary, is dark and militarist; culture is totally hegemonized by a fascist state. Ienaga Saburô represents a powerful tendency among Japanese leftist historians to collapse together the 1930s with the years of the Pacific War:

⁷ T.J. Clark, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', *New Left Review* 2 (Mar-April 2000), p. 91.

⁸ Miriam Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism', *Modernism/Modernity* 6:2 (1999), p.60.

⁹ Katô Shûichi and Andrew Gordon have questioned the commonly accepted narrative of Taisho democracy: see Kato Shûichi, 'Taisho Democracy as the Pre-Stage for Japanese Militarism', in H. D. Harootunian and Bernard Silberman (eds), *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taisho Democracy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, pp. 217-37; and Andrew Gordon, *Labour and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*, Berkeley: California University Press, 1991, pp. 5-10.

The term ['Pacific War'] covers the period from the Manchurian incident in 1931 to the unconditional surrender in 1945 and encompasses the whole series of Japan's military clashes with other countries. In my view, these events are inseparable, all part of the same war ... from the perspective of world history the decade and a half of fighting in Asia was indisputably a phase of the Second World War...¹⁰

Metaphors like 'the dark valley' (*kurai tanima*), a common expression for the war years, are often projected back on to the early 1930s, implying a barren time for culture.¹¹ But narrating the 1930s as the barren years of a fractured modernism fails to account for the extraordinary fecundity of literature, philosophy and cultural criticism and the flourishing of popular culture and vernacular modernism in the years before 1938. Works firmly enshrined in the canon of modern Japanese literature such as *Yoakemae* (Before the Dawn, 1929-1935) by Shimazaki Tôson (1872-1943), *An'ya kôro* (A Dark Night's Passing, 1921-1937) by Shiga Naoya (1883-1971) and the first part of *Yukiguni* (Snow Country, 1935) by Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972) as well as the more radical experiments of Hori Tatsuo (1904-1953), Itô Sei (1905-1969) and the writers discussed in depth in this study, Takami Jun, Ishikawa Jun and Dazai Osamu, were all published in the mid-1930s. Some of the seminal texts of Japan's representative philosophers and theorists of culture, Kobayashi Hideo (1905-1983), Kuki Shûzô (1888-1941), Watsuji Tetsurô (1889-1960) and Tosaka Jun (1900-1945), among others, also appeared during that decade.

Another enduring trope in literary and cultural histories of pre-war Japan has been the dichotomization of Marxism and modernism. The cultural historian Minami Hiroshi exemplifies this stance in his assertion that during the 1930s, modernism was attacked on both sides – by Marxism and fascism – and declined under their pressure.¹² The famous phrase of the critic Hirano Ken, *sanpa teiritsu*, or 'three-way opposition' – between the three conflicting camps of Marxism, modernism and 'old' realism – as defining the discursive parameters of early Showa, is rehearsed in a number of literary

¹⁰ Ienaga Saburô, *Japan's Last War: World War II and the Japanese, 1931-1945*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979, p.xiii.

¹¹ Thomas Haven's study of the war years is called *Valley of Darkness: the Japanese People and World War Two* (New York: Norton, 1978); an influential article by Donald Keene is titled *The Barren Years: Japanese War Literature* (*Monumenta Nipponica* 33:1 (1978), pp. 67-112).

¹² Minami Hiroshi, *Shôwa bunka: 1925-1945*, Tokyo: Keisô shobô, 1987, p.iii.

histories.¹³ One of the central arguments of this thesis is that in terms of literary representation, *both* Marxism and modernism enact a break from naturalism and Taishoesque aesthetics, from transparent language and the idea of an organic, unmediated interiority associated with it. My first chapter explores the confluences between Marxism and modernism on the level of language and subjectivity. The *Shinkankakuha*, or neo-sensationist school, Japan's exemplary modernist movement during the 1920s, and the writings of its central figure, Yokomitsu Riichi (1898-1947), are often figured in terms of ruptures and discontinuities: from early engagements with the exteriority of a fluid urban reality to the retreat into the interiorized topography of 'spiritism' (*seishinshugi*) in Yokomitsu's later work *Ryôshû* (Travel Melancholy, 1937-1946). I will, instead, chart some continuities in Yokomitsu's work. I will also attempt to show that modernism did not wane with the decline of neo-sensationism: the consciousness of language as semi-autonomous, poised between referentiality and opaqueness, and of subjectivity as relational and constructed rather than immanent, new sensationism's most radical departures from Taisho epistemologies, can also be found in the explorations of the nature of representation and the problem of the narrating subject in the works of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai from the 1930s.

The larger discursive moment in which I situate the work of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai is the so-called cultural revival (*bungei fukkô*) from the mid-1930s as a rejection of the Meiji project and the epistemological regime it established. Although the registers and figures of this revolt vary between schools and thinkers, there emerges a shared distrust of instrumental reason, subject-object dialectics and the rationality of ends. These discourses were marked by the strategic resurgences of the aesthetic and the protofascist epistemologies of empathy and affect. I use the term fascism fully aware of its contentious history and the debates surrounding its application to the Japanese case.¹⁴ The crisis of representation of 1930s Japan was marked by a loss of faith in

¹³ Hirano Ken, *Shôwa bungakushi*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1965, p.7.

¹⁴ Andrew Gordon engages polemically the standard arguments against the description of late 1930s and 1940s Japan as fascist. Most of these can be attributed to an underlying Eurocentrism (privileging a list of features based either Italy or Germany, or both) or a nominalism which would ultimately deny any connections between separate national histories. Gordon finds an 'impressive realm of shared historical experience' and similarities in the ideology and programme of the fascist

capitalism and parliamentary rule, by a collapse of mediation and the rise of fascist longings for oneness with the emperor. Like its European incarnations, fascism in Japan was a response to this crisis and an attempt to resolve it in the ideological domain, without, however, changing the fundamental economic structures of capitalism.¹⁵ For Slavoj Žižek the reflex uniting all fascisms is 'capitalism without capitalism': fascism imagines a capitalism liberated from its excesses, from inherent class antagonisms; where alienation and fragmentation will be replaced by organic community.¹⁶ Fascism always disavows its ideological nature; as Peter Osborne has written, it 'problematizes "the political" while it presents itself as its truth'. For Osborne, fascism is no mere political form, but 'a manifestation of the deep-rooted historical or even metaphysical, tendencies or possibilities of the age'.¹⁷ Psychoanalytic conceptions of fascism offer insights into the libidinal workings of fascist ideology, a dimension lacking in economic approaches or the analyses of political science. Ideas of fascism from above, or Maruyama Masao's 'all-pervasive psychological coercion', do not explain the uncanny rise of popular fascist desires for unity with the emperor during the so-called campaign for the clarification of the national polity (*kokutai meicho undō*) from 1936, when the government was blamed for not being forceful enough in stamping out the theory of the emperor as an organ of the state.¹⁸ The sophisticated analysis of Deleuze and Guattari – which draws on Wilhelm Reich's classical theorization of fascism as repressed desire externalized in hypernationalism – is valuable because of their emphasis on the libidinal energies mobilized by fascism; on the 'micropolitics of perception, affectation, conversation'. For

orders in Germany, Italy and Japan (Gordon, *Labour and Imperial Democracy*, pp.334-338). Leslie Pincus also contends that even if 'the fascist credentials of the political regime may be in doubt, the cultural landscape of interwar Japan bears an unmistakable resemblance to its European fascist counterparts'. (Lesley Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shūzo and the Rise of National Aesthetics*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996, p.216).

¹⁵ '...fascism is a politics implicit in modern capitalism, involving mass mobilization for nationalist and counter-revolutionary aims, militarized activism and a drive for an elitist, authoritarian and repressive state apparatus, articulated through a nebulous vitalist philosophy of nature and the will...it is a form of reactionary modernism: responding to the alienation and exploitation of modern society but unwilling to lay down any serious challenge to the structure of private property central to capitalism, fascism can only set its compass by the light of reaction, a mythic past to be recaptured within the radically altered conditions of modernity. This politics of reaction constitutes the ideological basis of a revolution from the right in which war, nature and the nation become central terms. (Mark Neocleous, *Fascism*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997. pp. xi-xii).

¹⁶ Andrew Herscher, 'Everything Provokes Fascism: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek', *Assemblage* 33 (1997), p.60.

¹⁷ Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde*, London: Verso, 1995, p.160.

¹⁸ Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Japanese Politics*, London: Oxford University Press, 1969, p.9.

them, fascism is 'inseparable from the proliferation of molecular focuses of interaction which skip from point to point before beginning to resonate together'.¹⁹ In my reading of Ishikawa Jun's *Fugen* (Fugen, 1936), I attempt to trace the workings of fascism as ideology; as a 'reproduction of desires and *discourse*', in the words of Alice Kaplan: I am interested in the way language, in the discourse of the radical right and during the clarification campaign, was used to bind nationalist affect; in the way the rhetorical micropolitics of the rescripts emphasized the unity of emperor and people.²⁰

Chapter one begins with a mapping of the historical forces which during the interwar years in Japan undermined traditional reference and established structures of symbolic production. Some purely material transformations – the intensification of totalizing tendencies within capitalism, the rise of finance capital and a heightened logic of abstraction – affected aesthetic practices of representation. I trace the break from the naive humanism of Taisho and the idea of linguistic transparency associated with it, in new sensationism and proletarian literature. But the politics of this aesthetic revolution remains fundamentally ambiguous; some of its figures resonate with the fascist organicism of the cultural revival and its rejection of the epistemic regime of (westernized) modernity: its soulless positivism, the logic of instrumentality which objectified nature and the historical teleologies which inevitably relegated Japan to a secondary place. The cultural revival forms the master context against which I read Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai. The big question of this thesis is to understand how 1930s modernism related to the nativist voices which sought to transcend the crisis of modernity through the metaphysics of timeless Japaneseness. If these fictions emphasize discursive mediation and the materiality of language, how did they confront the anti-rationalist epistemologies which abandoned representation, striving instead for immediate authenticity?

The second chapter considers Takami Jun's *Kokyū wasureu beki* (*Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgotten*, 1936, hereafter referred to as *Auld Acquaintance*) against the

¹⁹ Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, London: Athlone Press, 1988, p.213, 214.

²⁰ Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 20, emphasis in original.

profoundly ideological discourse of *tenkô* (the ideological conversion of leftists) as a regeneration of the self, as the return to a natural organic Japaneseness. The protean narrator of *Auld Acquaintance* crosses narrative and ontological levels; he directly comments on the discontinuities and elisions in the characters, effectively depriving them of subjectivity. I argue that the aporias of *tenkô* affected profoundly issues of narrative, subjectivity and psychic temporality. With its materialist conceptions of self and society, Marxism was a potent figure for modernity; the ideological reversal of *tenkô* meant the rejection of a westernized present for a return to an organic community untouched by alienation. The hyperretrospectivity of *Auld Acquaintance*, the characters' almost perverse obsession with the past and their paradoxical inability to narrate the past coherently becomes a radical inversion of the *tenkô* narrative of rebirth, of inauthentic pasts and authentic presents. Takami's work articulates a perpetually fractured subjectivity which resists the seductive immersion into the communal body. On the level of language, the verbose narrator and the heavy meandering sentences of *Auld Acquaintance* create a dense textuality which implies that texts might not have an ultimate referent, that all origins might be constructed, fictionalized, lost in writing; an anti-foundationalist position which goes against the organicism of the cultural revival.

The third chapter focuses on Ishikawa Jun's *Fugen*, a work which engages polemically with the conventions of the *shishôsetsu*, the so-called 'I-novel', and its claims for immediacy and authenticity. Because of this self-conscious focus on the materiality of writing, some critics have placed *Fugen* in the Gidean paradigm of a *roman pur* insisting on pure artifice and seeking to purge the novel of anything remotely referential. I argue that the critical construction of Ishikawa Jun as a modernist preoccupied with formal purity effectively erases historical particularity and brackets off the politico-ideological contexts surrounding his work. My reading is an attempt to demonstrate how in *Fugen* the formal stages the historical; to grasp the rhetorical politics of the text. As an exemplary modernist work, *Fugen* relies on deeper dualistic structures drawn from archetype and myth. I argue that on a purely structural level these oppositions are used to explore configurations of mediation and organic unity: I trace the meanings of this strategy in the

context of the collapse of political mediation in the 1930s and the fascist visions of mythical oneness of emperor and people articulated in the discourse of the radical right. My analysis also probes *Fugen's* deep fascination with bodies and corporeal materiality: I see the close-ups of graphic physicality which verges on the abject, as *symptomatic* of the proximity and technologically enhanced visibility of the emperor's body in the 1930s, of the reactionary identification of the emperor with the maternal and its mobilization of the pre-individuated imaginary of fascism. I argue that Ishikawa's valorization of language as radical alienation in the symbolic critiques attempts to transcend the modern through the maternalized epistemologies of presence and resists a fascist libidinal economy of prediscursive affect.

The last chapter is organized around the stories from *Bannen* (The Final Years, 1936), Dazai's first published collection. In my analysis of 'Dōke no hana' (The Flower of Buffoonery) and 'Sarumen kanja' (The Youth with the Monkey Face) I focus on the devices which disrupt the rhetoric of the *shishōsetsu* and emphasize the fictional, bringing forward the scene of writing and the material existence of language. I also attempt to challenge the distinctions made between these more complex works and a folkloric tale such as 'Gyofukuki' (Metamorphosis) or the seemingly unproblematically autobiographical 'Omoide' (Memories): the latter texts also employ techniques which problematize the (supposedly unmediated) textualization of experience and transgress genre conventions. I read the narrative strategies of these works as *symptoms* of the epistemological anxieties brought on by the intensified logic of cultural reproduction in the late 1920s and 1930s. The traditional literary establishment, the *bundan*, was transformed irrevocably by the advent of mass publishing, the commodification of the literary work and its entry into a homogenized terrain of circulation. Technological advances in photographic and printing techniques also brought about unprecedented density and ubiquity of images. Dazai's early works are highly sensitive to their own status as commodities and to the technologization of experience; their modernist narrative grammar *embodies* the duplicity of the photograph, its claim to capture reality directly, without mediation, while at the same time remaining a representation of itself. But in these texts the exposure of literary

artifice is paradoxically joined by figures of intimacy between narrator and reader, of visions of communion beyond the treachery of language. My analysis attempts to grasp this contradictory dynamic, to uncover the ideological meanings of Dazai's reconstruction of the immediacy of a concrete storytelling situation in the context of the 1930s.

Obsessively troped as a return – to Taisho, to Meiji, to the eternal time of a purified Japanese tradition – the cultural revival represents a complete retreat from the political. As an ideological manoeuvre, the repression of the political is not only the focus around which the culturalist discourse of the 1930s gathers itself; in a certain sense it is the primal scene, the originary moment of modern Japanese literature. Its founding text, Tsubouchi Shōyō's *Shōsetsu shinzui* (The Essence of the Novel, 1888-9), argued for the autonomy of literature and its complete separation from the realms of the ethical and the mundane, with the intention to break away from didacticism and the long East Asian tradition of political writing. *The Essence of the Novel* was written when the People's Rights movement was already on the decline under government pressure and factionalism. Tsubouchi's essay established itself as the origin of the modern in Japanese literature through what Atsuko Ueda has called the de-politicization of the *shōsetsu* (prose narrative), the rejection of *jidai*, or the historical, and the valorization of interiority (posited in universal terms oblivious to ethnic, social and cultural heterogeneities) as the proper realm of modern fiction.²¹ Karatani Kōjin has also located the emergence of 'interiority' in modern Japanese literature in a symptomatic repression of the political: 'To speak in Freudian terms, the libido which was once directed toward the People's Rights movement and the writing of political novels lost its object and was redirected inward, at which point 'landscape' and 'the inner life' emerged.'²² The High Treason incident of 1910 – in which several hundred anarchists and socialists were interrogated by the police, twenty six charged with plotting to assassinate the emperor and most of them sentenced to death – also affected literary and critical discourse of the time: Hasumi Shigehiko attributes the complete abandonment of the present and the tautological discussions of vague concepts

²¹ Atsuko Ueda, *Meiji Literary Historiography: The Production of 'Modern Japanese Literature'*, PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1999, pp. 178-192.

²² Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, p.39.

such as *sekai* (world), *jinrui* (humanity), *jinkaku* (personality) to the suppression of radical politics and the government's bluntly stated intention not to tolerate any heterodoxy.²³ The ultimate task of this study is not to place Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai in the rather simplified divisions of complicity and resistance, but to attempt to see how these seemingly garrulous and narcissistic texts enact the repressed politics of their historical moment.

²³ Hasumi Shigehiko, "'Taishôteki' gensetsu to hihyô", in Karatani Kôjin (ed.), *Kindai Nihon no hihyô: Meiji Taishô hen*, Tokyo: Fukutake shoten, 1992, pp.140-141.

Intersections

Once upon a time – at the dawn of capitalism and middle-class society – there emerged something called the sign which seemed to entertain unproblematic relations with its referent. This initial heyday of the sign – the moment of literal or referential language or of the unproblematic claims of so-called scientific discourse – came into being because of the corrosive dissolution of older forms of magical language by a force which I will call that of reification, a force whose logic is one of ruthless separation and disjunction, of specialisation and rationalisation, of a Taylorising division of labour in all realms. Unfortunately that force – which brought traditional reference into being – continued unremittingly, being the very logic of capital itself. Thus the first moment of decoding or of realism cannot long endure; by a dialectical reversal it then itself in turn becomes the object of the corrosive force of reification, which enters the realm of language to disjoin the sign from the referent. Such a disjunction does not completely abolish the referent, or the objective world, or reality, which still continues to entertain a feeble existence on the horizon like a shrunken star or red dwarf. But its great distance from the sun now allows the latter to enter into a moment of autonomy, of a relatively free-floating Utopian existence, as over against its former objects. This autonomy of culture, this semi-autonomy of language, is the moment of modernism, of a realm of the aesthetic which redoubles the world without being altogether of it, thereby winning a certain negative or critical power, but also a certain otherworldly futility.

Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

Koharu biyori, or Indian summer, a lull before the storm, might be a much more appropriate figure for the mid-1930s than metaphors of the dark valley.¹ Japan was indeed hit hard by the world depression of 1929-1930, especially the countryside, yet it managed to recover more quickly than the rest of the industrialized world – around 1935-1936 it enjoyed a period of real prosperity. It is true that even before the recession, the beginning of Showa was plagued by instability, financial crises and a wave of bank bankruptcies: in 1927, the bankruptcy of Suzuki Shôten, a big Kobe trading company,

¹ Karatani Kôjin uses the term for the years 1925-1935 in 'Kindai Nihon no hihiyô: Shôwa zenki 2', in *Kindai Nihon no hihiyô I: Shôwa hen jô*, Tokyo: Kodansha bungei bunko, 1997, pp. 146-191.

triggered a financial panic: the Bank of Taiwan, Suzuki shōten's creditor, closed temporarily and thirty banks went bankrupt.² The deterioration of economic conditions and the financial instability culminated in the world depression. Japan's GDP dropped by 18% between 1929 and 1931 and unemployment soared.³ The countryside was in a constant slump after 1925; bumper crops, falling rice prices and the collapse of demand for silk in America because of the invention of synthetics exacerbated the problems in other industries. Japan did bounce back, however, faster than Britain and the United States. The economy showed signs of recovery in 1931 under the measures of the finance minister Takahashi Korekiyo (1854-1936) and in 1932 Japan completely overcame the effects of the depression through a devaluation of the yen, a powerful campaign for government-sponsored exports and a further monopolization of industry as new conglomerates (*zaibatsu*) in the heavy and chemical industries were formed. There was a widely shared awareness that the disruptive, deterritorialising energies of laissez-faire capitalism had to be controlled, which led to the formation of increasingly corporatist economic structures. *Zaibatsu* were protected by the Law for the Control of Important Industries passed in 1931 which reinforced their powers of control.⁴ The recovery through exports strengthened the perception that the possibilities of economic liberalism had been exhausted and that government controls and an expansion abroad were vital for a healthy economy. John Dower points out that throughout the thirties, when most of the world was still struggling to recover from the depression, Japan's annual growth averaged 5% of GNP (the United States, by contrast, was still attempting to go back to the levels of 1929 in the later 1930s). Growth was particularly robust in new industries such as metals, chemicals, and engineering. The index for consumption goods rose from 100 to 154 between 1930 and 1937, while that for investment goods rose from 100 to 264 in the same period.⁵ According to Minami Hiroshi, the years 1934-1936 were the time when the nation enjoyed the highest living standards before the war: the ratio between wages and costs of living was good; even blue collar workers saw their income

² Nakamura Takafusa, 'Depression, Recovery and War, 1920-1945', in Peter Duus (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Japan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.457.

³ James McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 2002, p.405.

⁴ Nakamura, 'Depression', pp.460-461.

⁵ John Dower, 'The Useful War', *Daedalus* 119:3 (1990), p.53.

rise and there was a consumer boom of electrical appliances.⁶ The middle classes were closest to the modern life imagined by the media during the 1920s.

This was, however, the Indian summer of the big cities – rural distress formed a stark contrast. The 1920s and the early 1930s turned into one long chronic recession in the countryside, because of the volatile domestic conditions and the worldwide surplus of agricultural commodities. The worst year was 1934 – according to contemporary records, 6,500 girls from the Tōhoku region were sold into urban brothels and 17,000 went to work in spinning mills and factories.⁷ Tenant disputes increased drastically, as if to emphasize the Marxist dictum of uneven development and the disjointed temporalities Japan was living during the interwar years.

Urbanization increased dramatically: while in 1920 18.1% of the overall population lived in the cities, in 1930 the figure was 24.1%. In other words, five million people moved to the cities in the ten year period between 1920 and 1930 and urban population grew by 53.3%.⁸ Until 1937-38 the 'modern life' of the cities continued to flourish. Material culture was still modern and westernized and everyday life did not change significantly after the Manchurian Incident of 1931, the date which some historians take as the beginning of Japan's slide into militarism and the fifteen-year war. A vibrant city life revolved around leisure, cafés, sport and dancing. The number of cafés and bars continued to rise each year and peaked in 1934 at 37 000; the number of people going to dance halls, cinemas and racing tracks continued to increase.⁹ While in 1925 Japan had 813 cinemas and 155 million spectators, in 1935 they had expanded to 1,586 cinemas and 202 million admissions.¹⁰ In the mid-1930s Marxist books were still in circulation and Marxism remained influential in academic and artistic circles: the heated debate on Japanese capitalism was still going on.¹¹ 'Modern life' did change after the start of the war against

⁶ Minami, *Shōwa Bunka*, p. 72.

⁷ Elise K. Tipton, *Modern Japan: A Social and Political History*, London: Routledge, 2002, p.112.

⁸ Minami, *Shōwa bunka*, p.19.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁰ Joseph L. Anderson, 'Second and Third Thoughts about the Japanese Film', in Joseph L. Anderson and Donald Richie (eds), *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 455-456.

¹¹ The debate on Japanese capitalism (*nihon shihonshugi ronsō*) involved two schools of Marxist historians, the *kōzaha* and the *rōnōha*. It centred on the nature of the Meiji restoration, which was

China. In 1938, the government initiated a movement for spiritual mobilization: it placed restrictions on everyday life, introduced patriotic Shinto rituals and imposed economies. These measures were not really effective, but they did leave their mark on the spaces of the modern: there were military marches on the streets; the police were hunting the entertainment areas for students violating regulations and patriotic activists stood on the corners of the Ginza preaching against permed hair. For the cultural historian Miriam Silverberg, the modern moment is between 1923 and 1938, 'not an apolitical prelude or interlude, but an intense expression of cultural phenomena with profound political implications'. Aspects of the culture of 'erotic-grotesque-nonsense' lived on well into the Pacific War, because the subjects of the emperor 'did not want to let go of the modern'.¹²

The vernacular modernism of the interwar years, the expansion of popular culture and the newly found consumption, were premised on a transformation of capitalism that would also redraw the discursive parameters of the 1930s. In the early years of Showa the share of the service sector in the structure of Tokyo's economy rose to above 50%.¹³ Previously private aspects of life and leisure were commercialized; commodification penetrated new areas of both private life and social practice. There was a marked shift from production to consumption, marketing and display.¹⁴ This consumer society *avant la lettre* was sustained by a service economy, which, not unlike the immensely more complex service economies of our age, was quite removed from the realities of

crucial for grasping the current state of Japanese capitalism and the left's course of action. The *kōza* school's position, aligned with the official Comintern interpretation, insisted that Meiji was an incomplete bourgeois revolution, and that the emperor system, together with the landlords, were feudal remnants that caused the structural deformations of Japanese capitalism: its state-sponsored nature, uneven development and propensity for traumatic crises. According to the *kōzaha* the struggle should be directed towards the achievement of a full bourgeois order, which would be a prelude to a socialist revolution. The *rōnō* faction, on the hand, argued that Meiji was a bourgeois revolution which swept away feudalism and that the proper strategy for the left was a socialist revolution. Both schools employed a rigorously materialist approach which challenged forcefully the claims of the imperial interpretation of history (*kōkoku shikan*) and had a profound impact on contemporary understandings of history and the nature of historical knowledge. For an in-depth analysis of the debate, see Germaine Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

¹² Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p.5.

¹³ Yamamoto Yoshiaki and Oda Mitsuo, 'Taidan: enpon no hikari to kage', *Bungaku* 4:2 (2003), p. 24.

¹⁴ According to Gregory Golley, in late Taisho, 'the visual advertisement had begun to dominate modern life and print culture with unprecedented ideological and perceptual force. Proliferating with particular intensity after the earthquake of 1923, advertisements of mass consumer goods (especially cosmetics and pharmaceuticals) increased by six times in Japan between 1912 and 1926.' (Gregory Golley, *Voices in the Machine: Technology and Japanese Literary Modernism*, PhD Dissertation, UCLA, 2000, p.298)

production. This deterritorialization of production from consumption further intensified processes of destabilization and loss of social reference. The totalizing tendencies of monopoly capital generated vast opaque structures of production, and distribution, in Hirano Ken's phrase, 'demonic fetishes' (*demonisshuna busshin*) alienated from human life, from immediate existential experience.¹⁵ What was radically new in the historical conjuncture of the late 1920s and 1930s, as Eric Cazdyn has argued, was this transformation of Japan's capitalist system in coordination with its colonial project – and its implications for the cultural practices of representation. Cazdyn locates the moment of mutation of classical into monopoly capitalism in the late 1920s: the new Bank Law of 1928 encouraged the development of a credit system and promoted the radical consolidation of industry and banking within the structures of the *zaibatsu*.¹⁶ With finance capital, the focus shifts from commodities as such to money *itself*: money is no longer a stable anchor of value, but the quintessential free-floating signifier, a lubricant for financial transactions. It no longer functions to attain concrete commodities, but to generate more money. Finance capital for Deleuze and Guattari represents the ultimate dematerialization of money; there remain only flows of financing, axiomatics of abstract quantities:

Inversely, bank credit effects a demonetization or dematerialization of money, and is based on the circulation of drafts instead of the circulation of money. This credit money traverses a particular circuit where it assumes, then loses, its value as an instrument of exchange and where the conditions of flux imply conditions of reflux, giving the infinite debt its capitalist form.¹⁷

The recovery from the recession was indeed due to exports and Japan's interests in China, Manchuria and Korea served to manage the structural needs of Japanese capitalism. The integration of financial and industrial capital enabled the export of money throughout Asia. That meant that a vital part of the economic structure was situated outside Japan, again removed from immediate existential reality. What the world recession and the deterritorialization of finance capital laid bare was the arbitrariness of representation in general, which as Karatani Kôjin has stressed, is inherent in the

¹⁵ Hirano, *Shôwa bungakushi*, p.10.

¹⁶ Eric Cazdyn, 'A Short History of Visuality in Modern Japan: Crisis, Money, Perception', *Japan Forum* 11:1 (1999), pp. 95-105.

¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p.229.

exchange principle. Money was not only a store of value, but an abstraction moving relentlessly in a vicious cycle, compelled by its own self-increasing drive, beyond the will of its owner.¹⁸ The moment of modernism, as Jameson states in the epigraph to this chapter, is this moment of arbitrariness of representation, of the weakened link between sign and referent and the relative autonomy of language.

The tensions between global capitalism and the nineteenth-century model of the nation-state are articulated in Yokomitsu Riichi's novel *Shanghai* (Shanghai, 1928-1932) as a conflict between national subjectivities (and bodies) and the deterritorialising energies of financial capital striving to break free from any fixed identity. His protagonist Sanki works for the Shanghai branch of a Japanese bank and views himself and the other foreigners in Shanghai as extensions of their national economies. As Komori Yôichi has shown, it is this *belonging* to the native country that constructs the national bodies of Sanki and the other characters; the only group to whom this identification is refused are the white Russian émigrés, forever severed from the national territory: the prostitute Olga remains only 'flesh'.¹⁹ The people who transcend this identification are the foreign exchange brokers who run from bank to bank and make their money from the differences between the prices of the stocks and the currencies of different countries.

Nakano Shigeharu's (1902-1979) poem 'Kawase sôba' (The Rate of Exchange, 1936) is another work dramatizing the ideological tension between the sheer arbitrariness of money, its status as pure difference, and the efforts to impart some original and irreducibly Japanese value on to the yen.

The Rate of Exchange

If Japan is
That different from all the countries of the world
Even if Nihonjin
Is read as NIPPONJIN The sound sounds good
If we are that different from all the foreigners in the world
Tell me how you tell yourself apart

¹⁸ Karatani Kôjin, 'Josetsu: Rui Bonaparuto no buryumêru 18 nichi', in *Teihon Karatani Kôjinshû*, vol.5, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2004, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹ Komori Yôichi, *Yuragi to shite no nihon bungaku*, Tokyo: Nihon hōsō shuppan kyōkai, 1998, pp. 146-147.

If one yen is not two marks
And it happens that is not a half a mark
If on the whole the yen is not a mark and not a pound or a ruble or any of
these things
What is this darn thing called one yen

I know The professors taught me
Said some long ago know-nothing barbarians uncivilized folks
Used some sort of clamshells for their cash
And now even the professors
Don't know even how many yen's a shell.

On the front the *chrysanthemum's 16 petals*
On the back *rippling waves and cherry blossom flowers*
This is then my own 10 sen
And thrown into the bargain a hole like they didn't use to have

And by the way why do the mails
If all foreigners are unrefined
Putting on the front of their coins kings and presidents and sickles and hammers
Arrive at these far destinations
Why do 'cheap and quality Japanese goods'
Have their way into foreign markets?

Soon all sorts of geniuses
Trying to make theory from all this
Will be suffering for sure
But that is fruitless effort
They've got to learn the exchange rate
And I for one Even if you don't know
I know the international clamshell exchange²⁰

Here we have an ostensibly naïve lyrical subject hiding behind deceptive simple-mindedness in order to question the ideological meanings of some 'natural' assumptions. The equation of the global circulation of abstract currencies with a primitive clamshell exchange is profoundly ironic; we are made aware that what is meant is exactly the opposite: the stubborn reassuring materiality of the clamshells cannot be farther away from the complex, almost irrational movements of modern capital. 'Cheap and quality Japanese goods' sell well abroad; Japan is fully integrated into a global capitalist market. It is these economic realities of capitalism that nativist discourses sought to repress in their emphasis on 'culture' and the Japanese spirit. The logic of the international exchange rate, however, remains opaque and indifferent to the sublime meanings of the Japanese currency.

²⁰ I am using Miriam Silverberg's translation of the poem in *Changing Song: The Marxist Manifestos of Nakano Shigeharu*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, pp.204-5. The italics indicate phrases deleted by the censors when the poem was originally published in the April 1936 issue of the journal *Chûô kôron*.

The 1920s and 1930s – not only in Japan, but in the industrialized world in general, and especially in the metropolises living the new texture of modernity – were indeed a time of a fundamental shift, of an intensification of the logic of certain economic and social processes which dialectically meant a mutation of the capitalist system. The strong oligopolistic tendencies in the Japanese economy went hand in hand with a restructuring and rationalization of industries along Fordist-Taylorist lines. The corrosive forces of capitalist disjunction, which Jameson refers to in the epigraph to this chapter, intensified further the processes of social abstraction and reification. During the two decades the Japanese were negotiating the contradictory complexities of atomization *and* totalization, of homogenization *and* vast unevenness. The social and cognitive effects of this contradictory logic, the loss of previously stable matrixes of reference, affected practices of aesthetic representation. The disintegration of the discursive landscape of Taisho and the break with all 'things Taishoesque' which the Showa avant-garde enacted, cannot be disengaged from these material trends.

The Showa Avant-Garde

Reality rather than sentiment, relationality rather than personality, masks rather than naked faces.

Isoda Kôichi, 'The Paradoxes of Japanese Modernity'

Culturalism (*bunkashugi*) was the organising centre of the discursive terrain of Taisho. This term was used first in a 1919 lecture by the economist and philosopher Sôda Kiichirô (1881-1927) titled 'The Logic of Culturalism' (*Bunkashugi no ronri*)²¹. *Bunka* was established as a translation of the German *Kultur* and retained all the powerful ideological connotations of the original term. In the German neo-idealist philosophical tradition culture was posited as divorced from pragmatic concerns, transcending politics and the realm of the mundane. The intellectuals, those who belonged to the domain of culture, regarded themselves as an aristocracy of the spirit in an increasingly coarse and homogenous modern society. Taisho culturalism was based on the idea of a universal culture, which, according to Sôda, included 'Plato, Goethe, Kant, Newton, Rembrandt,

²¹ Arakawa Ikuo, '1930 nendai to chishikijin no mondai', *Shisô* 624 (1976), p.6.

Beethoven, Basho, and Murasaki Shikibu.²² This phrase exemplifies the peculiar inflections of Taisho universality, its ahistorical character and its erasure of national and ethnic boundaries and power tensions. It is based on a very modernist strategy of decontextualising and reappropriating not only the past, but also the historically and culturally different. Taisho cosmopolitanism was not only oblivious of geopolitical power relations and the realities of empire; it is as if it was *structurally dependent* on them to come into being, as if colonialism was its obscene underside. As Karatani Kôjin writes, 'although the discursive space of the Taisho period is thus established at the point where Koreans are incorporated into the Japanese empire, it exists as if this event never occurred'.²³ This suppression of difference has also been stressed by Hasumi Shigehiko in his discussion of Taisho critical discourse. Hasumi points to the proliferation of almost totemic words like *jinkaku* (personality), *sekai* (world), *jinrui* (humanity), which circulated as exemplary empty signifiers without properly defined referents.²⁴ Taisho defines itself as the antithesis of Meiji utilitarianism and its idea of *bunmei*, civilization. In Harootunian's analysis, 'this emphasis on spirit privileged both the subject and goal of self-formation through the practice of humanistic disciplines and the cultivation of absolute value'.²⁵ Cultural discourse was premised on an epistemology of surface and depth, of outer skin and interior emotion, of material and spiritual, of a sanctified private interiority. What is striking about Taisho culturalism and its cult of self-cultivation is a stance we might call *textualism*, however clumsy this term might sound: its elevation of the written text (most often that of literature) into a supreme and sublime truth. The written text possessed an almost absolute authority over lived experience, an attitude expressed eloquently in Akutagawa's famous remark that life is not worth a single line of Baudelaire. Komori Yôichi sees in this a dynamic of sublimation, of a politically disenchanting generation after the High Treason Incident finding in texts a simulacrum for life.²⁶

²² Quoted in *Ibid.* p.6.

²³ Karatani Kôjin, 'The Discursive Space of Modern Japan', *Boundary 2* 18:3 (1991), p. 205. Japan annexed Korea in 1910.

²⁴ Hasumi, "'Taishôteki" gensetsu', pp. 140-141.

²⁵ H. D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture and Community in Interwar Japan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 54.

²⁶ Komori Yôichi, 'Chishikijin' no ronri to rinri', in Komori Yôichi, Tôgô Katsumi and Ishihara Chiaki (eds), *Kôza Shôwa bungakushi*, vol.1: *Toshi to kigô: Shôwa shonendai no bungaku*, Tokyo: Yûseidô, 1988, p.16.

The epistemology of the *shishōsetsu*, the exemplary genre of Taisho, was shaped by these ideas of a socially unmediated, 'natural' subjectivity. One of the most potent and at the same time most contested terms in modern Japanese literature, *shishōsetsu* has been the subject of heated debates ever since its emergence, and of numerous later studies in Japanese. A protean genre whose very existence and identity have been challenged by recent critical interventions, it is loosely described as a prose narrative predominantly in the third person that claims to represent faithfully the experiences of the author. The *shishōsetsu* strives for immediate authenticity, ostensibly eschewing fiction and the manipulation of narrative material. Edward Fowler's study has questioned this myth of sincerity and has shown that the purported immediacy of the *shishōsetsu* is the effect of literary artifice. Tomi Suzuki, on the other hand, argues that the existence of the genre was made possible by the gradual naturalization of a mode of reading that collapsed differences between author, narrator and protagonist. In other words, *shishōsetsu* as a genre category was invented *post factum* by critical discourse, and projected retroactively on to very heterogenous texts.²⁷

The Japanese literary avant-garde did not contest bourgeois sensibilities and staid academicism, like its European counterpart, but the culturalism of Taisho and the naïve humanism of expressed in the words of the politician Shimada Saburō (1852-1923) that man, and not matter (*mono*), is the fundamental principle governing the contemporary world.²⁸ As Fujita Shōzō wrote, the cult of personality, *jinkakushugi*, was a philosophy extremely convenient for the imperial state: it implied that the Japanese people did not need abstract universal rights, but should be treated as concrete personalities with human emotions (*ninjō*).²⁹ The ideological meanings of the *shishōsetsu* can be found in this *privatization* of experience and the channelling of all intellectual energies subversive to the coarse utilitarianism of Meiji into a purely individual, psychological project of salvation. Developmental narrative in this sense was implicated in a foreclosure of

²⁷ See Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, and Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

²⁸ Quoted in Fujita Shōzō, 'Shōwa 8-nen o chūshin to suru tenkō no jōkyō', in Tsurumi Shunsuke and Shisō no kagaku kenkyūkai (eds), *Tenkō: kyōdō kenkyū*, vol.1, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1959, p.38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.39.

political agency.³⁰ The genre was premised on a presentist aesthetics of expression which implied the existence of a modern self (*kindai jiga*) that could be expressed in a *genbun itchi* language. *Genbun itchi* was indeed regarded as an almost unmediated, transparent vessel for the expression of interiority.³¹

New sensationism and proletarian literature represented a revolt against the Taishoesque master trope of a sanctified interiority. In the texts of both modernists and Marxists we find almost violent assaults on self-contained subjectivity. Interiorities are emptied out and there is a new preoccupation with surfaces: the corporeal surface of the body, the skin of machines, the superficial stimuli of urban life. Japanese literary history, however, insistently narrates the beginning of Showa as a long-standing conflict between new sensationism and the proletarian literary movement. If we look into the theoretical essays of both Marxists and modernists, we can find ample ground for establishing such a dichotomy. For new sensationism, proletarian literature was indeed its defining other. But the tension between the two should not be elevated into brittle binaries like 'literature of revolution' and 'revolution of literature'; 'self-consciousness' and 'social consciousness'. In one of his key texts on formalism, 'Bungei jihyō' (Review of Current Literature), Yokomitsu Riichi criticizes the Marxist preoccupation with content and defines new sensationism as the only writing capable of grasping the newly emerged importance of form. And yet, in this same review he praises a story by the proletarian writer Hirabayashi Taiko (1905-1972) for its innovative formal techniques.³² A telling proof of the political charge of the

³⁰ Tomiko Yoda, 'First-Person Narration and Citizen-Subject: The Modernity of Ogai's "The Dancing Girl"', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65:2 (2006), p.294.

³¹ The *genbun itchi* movement (literally 'unification of the spoken and written language') is a defining moment for modern Japanese fiction. Rather than unifying the various written styles and spoken dialects, *genbun itchi* was in fact the *invention* of a supposedly neutral style (in fact biased towards male speech), based on the dialect of the Yamanote area in Tokyo and heavily influenced by translations of Western literature. *Genbun itchi* language is associated with Japanese naturalism and later the *shishōsetsu*, and with their claims for immediacy, transparency and 'naked description' (*rokotsu naru byōsha*), as Tayama Katai (1871-1930) famously defined it; that is, description stripped of the rhetorical and stylistic conventions of classical Japanese. Nanette Twine's book *Language and the Modern State: The Reform of Written Japanese* (London: Routledge, 1991) is an exhaustive study of the linguistic and political aspects of the movement. Recent debates have also been influenced by Karatani Kōjin's interventions, which can be summed up in his provocative assertion that 'the self and interiority which the novelistic "I" was supposed to express did not exist *a priori*, but were constituted through the mediation of a material form, through the establishment of *genbun itchi* (Karatani, *Origins*, p.77).

³² Yokomitsu Riichi, 'Bungei jihyō', in *Teihon Yokomitsu Riichi zenshū*, vol.13, Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1982, p.150. (hereafter abbreviated to TYRZ). The review was originally published in the magazine *Bungei shunjū* in November 1928.

artistic avant-garde was the suspicion with which the authorities treated the constructivist journal *Mavo*, although it did not have any explicitly political content. The boundaries of schools and movements were in fact markedly fluid: Kataoka Teppei (1894-1944), one of the founding members of the new sensationist school, Murayama Tomoyoshi (1901-1977), editor of *Mavo*, and later Takami Jun (who started out as a Dadaist) and Takeda Rintarô (1904-1946) are some of the figures who migrated from the artistic avant-garde to the more politically committed proletarian culture movement. As Miriam Silverberg has pointed out, Nakano Shigeharu and other leading Marxist figures published their attacks on capitalism in the capitalist press; their Marxist voices contested non-Marxist views in the same cultural space.³³

When viewed in terms of their treatment of language and representation and grasped as a field of practice divorced from schools, genealogies and dichotomies, divisions between Marxist and modernist avant-gardes become untenable. Both are symptomatic articulations of a certain rupture in the discursive and social conditions of the late 1920s and both represent a revolt against realist representation and the rhetoric of interiority. A radically different consciousness of language – as still conveying meaning, but at the same time being opaque and material, rather than transparent and instrumental – emerges, and the emphasis shifts from referential reality to this newly found semi-autonomy of representation.

Faultlines of Showa: Language, Montage, Perception

The perceptual in this sense is a historically new experience, which has no equivalent in older kinds of social life.

Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*

The following passages are taken from the representative works of new sensationism and proletarian literature: *Kani kôsen* (The Factory Ship, 1929) by Kobayashi Takiji (1903-1933), and Yokomitsu Riichi's *Shanghai*:

³³ Silverberg, *Changing Song*, p. 227.

A thin uncomfortable drizzle began to fall off Ramoi. The fishermen and the factory hands tried to warm themselves by sticking their hands, *raw and red as crab claws*, inside their jackets, or by cupping them over their mouths and blowing ... As they entered the Sôya Strait, *the ship started shaking as if it had hiccups* ... Then the waves would slide past the portholes, *flowing like a panorama and the ship would shudder like a convulsive child*.³⁴ (my emphasis)

A neighbourhood of crumbling brick. In its narrow streets, a crowd of Chinese dressed in long-sleeved black robes *swayed and stagnated like seaweed at the bottom of the ocean*. Beggars crouched on the gravel road. In the shop window above their heads hung the egg-sacks of fish and the bodies of gutted carp, dripping with blood. Next door, mangos and bananas from a fruit stall overflowed in piles onto the pavement. Next to the fruit stall was a pig-butcher. Innumerable pigs with their hides removed, hanging by their hooves, *formed a flesh-coloured cave*, a kind of gloomy hollow. From the recesses of this *wall of tightly packed pig, the white face of a wall clock shone like an eye*.³⁵ (my emphasis)

What strikes the reader of *The Factory Ship* is the work's almost obsessive preoccupation with physicality and the conscious rejection of the rhetoric of interiority: there are only occasional slippages into what 'the men' thought. In the passage above, the men's frozen hands are starting to resemble the claws of the crabs they have been cleaning and putting into cans. This is not only a powerful image of alienated and dehumanised labour; it also signals a disconcerting collapse of hierarchical orders: man as subject and the natural universe, be it animate or inorganic, as object. This conspicuous resistance to the language of humanism, and the epistemological problems caused by the erosion of the traditional dichotomies between subject and object, is one of the central concerns of avant-garde writing in the late 1920s, elaborated with the usual intellectual denseness – and sometimes obscurity – in Yokomitsu Riichi's essays. The ship hiccups and shudders, its inert materiality suddenly animated and humanized in a figurative strategy very similar again to Yokomitsu's famous passage about the train ignoring the small stations on its way as if they were stones.³⁶ It is also a strategy based on exaggeration and *literalization*:

³⁴ Kobayashi Takiji, *The Factory Ship and The Absentee Landlord*, trans. Frank Motofuji, Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1973, pp.11-12, my emphasis (translation modified). The original can be found in Hirano Ken (ed.), *Kobayashi Takiji Tokunaga Sunao shû*, vol.36 of *Nihon bungaku zenshû*, Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1961, p.29.

³⁵ This passage is translated in Golley, *Voices in the Machine*, p.57, my emphasis (translation modified). The original can be found in TYRZ, vol.3, p.7.

³⁶ The passage is the beginning of the story 'Atama narabi ni hara' (Heads and Bellies), originally published in the first issue of *Bungei jidai* in 1924. 'Mahiru de aru. Tokubetsu tokkyû ressha wa man'in no mama zensokuryoku de kakete ita. Ensen no shôeki wa ishi no yôni mokusatsu sareta'. (It was high noon. The crowded express train ran at full speed. The small stations by the tracks were ignored like stones.) (TYRZ, vol.1, p. 396). Kataoka Tepei used the last sentence as

the animation of the inorganic and the depiction of nature as blind automatism go against certain naively idealistic conceptions about the human and the natural; these compelling images can be seen indeed to *embody* the classic Marxist notions of society and history as materialistic totalities.

In the passage from *Shanghai*, the bizarre juxtaposition and the pure spatial proximity of flesh and cold lifeless matter signals a similar confluence of the organic and the artificial. The sheer numbers of pigs recall the mechanized and efficient environment of a modern slaughterhouse – it might be this technologised slaughter that has reduced them to the inertness of the cave, in a striking image of continuity between geology and flesh. The clock is like an eye: in a reversal of perspective, a mass-produced mechanical object is suddenly endowed with life.³⁷ The most complex and problematic image, however, is that of the crowd of Chinese men 'swaying like seaweed'. With the exception of Fang Qiu-Lan, charismatic beauty and Communist agitator, the work almost obsessively depicts the Chinese as a crowd stripped of individuality and agency. It is an image which reveals the ideological tensions at the heart of modernism and its assault on self-contained subjectivity – and the profound ambiguity of Yokomitsu's engagement with colonialism and difference. The reduction of the movements of the crowd to the rhythmic pulsations of nature somehow cannot but seem like a deliberate gesture aimed at objectifying the mass of Chinese men, as if to tame symbolically the uncanny crowd.

Another formal strategy shared by Marxists and modernists is the fragmentation and loss of narrativity, the adoption of montage instead of narrative causality.

The trains stopped. The cars stopped. The bicycles, the trucks, the
sidecars rushing recklessly, stopped one after another.

the example of the revolutionary stylistics of new sensationism and it is often quoted in works on the movement.

³⁷ Ishii Chikara finds a similar ontological reversal articulated through syntactic structure in a story by Yokomitsu titled 'Bureina machi' (A Rude Town, 1924): 'I stepped out from under the tree. The morning sun deluged me, aiming for my breast,' (*Watashi wa ki no shita kara ippo deta. Asahi wa watashi no mune o megakete sattô shita*). In Ishii's analysis, the reversal of the subject deviates from the conventions of written Japanese according to which only animate beings can be the subject of a sentence. Ishii points out that if we take only the second sentence, its figure is simply personification; but its placement after the first makes it clear that *watashi* and *asahi* are juxtaposed – and this structure has the effect of depriving *watashi* of humanity and producing a disconcerting effect of alienation and discomfort in the reader. (Ishii Chikara, 'Gengo ni okeru shinkankaku', in Komori *et al.*, *Kôza Shôwa bungakushi*, vol.1, pp.190-191.)

– What?
– What, what has happened?
The yellow November sun was roughly picking out of the bad dust intensely simple faces from the crowd.
The human wave, like a swarm of tadpoles in a puddle, shoved against each and swayed.
– An august passing (*gotsûka*) – the procession of the Imperial Regent! A whisper from the front rows spread in an instant to the rear. The cars stopped their roar; people took their hats off.³⁸

A set of cranes suspended at rest over the mud bared the rusted teeth of their gears. Stacks of lumber. A crumbling stone fence. A mountain of greens spilled from a cargo hold. White fungus grew like skin on a small boat split open on the side. (...) Moonlight tumbled down everywhere, lustreless as though bred in the dust.³⁹

Both passages are composed of seemingly random juxtapositions of images, clipped staccato sentences and parallel syntactic structures. The organization of the sentences is rhythmic and visual, rather than causal. The structure is more that of paratactic accumulation than syntactic subordination; there is a loosening of the linear narrative connection. Ishii Chikara finds similar techniques in 'Kami' (Hair, 1925), a story by Kawabata Yasunari, and isolates the reversals of causal relationships and narrative chronology and the fragmentation (both spatial and visual) of meaning, as the exemplary stylistic techniques of new sensationism.⁴⁰

In 'Shinkankakuron' (Essay on the New Sensation, 1925), the essay which sets out most clearly the principles of new sensationist aesthetics, Yokomitsu Riichi states that new sensationism incorporates all the avant-garde artistic movements of the time: futurism, cubism, expressionism, Dadaism, constructivism. He also discusses some of the stylistic and narrative techniques of new sensationist writing: a twisted, made-to-look-strange perspective on the theme; 'jumps' (*hiyaku*) (one is tempted to say jump cuts!) between lines and fragments of text; complications of the progressive linear movement of plot; rejection of unified time and space.⁴¹

³⁸ Tokunaga Sunao, *Taiyô no nai machi*, in Hirano, *Kobayashi Takiji*, p.211.

³⁹ Yokomitsu Riichi, *Shanghai*, trans. Dennis Washburn, Ann Arbor: Centre for Japanese Studies, University of Michigan, 2001, p.62.

⁴⁰ Ishii, 'Gengo', pp.187-188.

⁴¹ Yokomitsu Riichi, 'Shinkankakuron' in *TYRZ*, vol.13, pp.79-80.

The temporal and perspectival multiplicity and the destruction of received narrative form are very close to the aesthetics of montage which, in different registers, was affecting all the avant-garde movements of the time. Montage can be seen as the central trope of the dizzying modernism of the interwar years, visible not only in aesthetic movements, but in the regimes of knowledge and everyday life.⁴² Drawing on Bakhtin's thesis that at the dawn of modernity all rigidly defined classical genres were subjected to 'novellization as a process of linguistic familiarization and the creation of certain semantic open-endedness', to an opening up to the present and the vernacular, Peter Osborne suggests that with modernism, all existing genres of communication, including the novel, are subject to *cinematization*: the logic of montage becomes a dominant trope. For Osborne this process is at one with commodification and the reduction of the present towards simultaneity and instantaneity, producing a dehistoricization of life within which events are consumed as images, independently of each other and without narrative connection.⁴³ Narrative is the epistemological form of historicism *par excellence* and the weakening of narrative connections is indeed symptomatic of a crisis of historical experience and historical knowledge. This cinematization of genres can also be seen as the effect of the newly found domination of the visual: the sense of sight, as Susan Buck-Morss has written, is privileged in the phantasmagoric sensorium of modernity.⁴⁴ Jonathan Crary locates the origins of this process at the beginning of the nineteenth century, but it could be argued that the interwar years, awash as they were with photographs, pictorial advertisements, films and other visual experiences, brought about a further intensification of the logic of the visual, a transformation which will be explored in more detail in chapter four of this thesis.⁴⁵ It was then that visual experience attained an unprecedented mobility and exchangeability and was severed from its founding sign. As Guy Debord has remarked,

...it is inevitable that [the spectacle] should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch; the most abstract of

⁴² For a ground-breaking study of Japanese mass culture and everyday life during the interwar years, as montage, see Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*.

⁴³ Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, p.197.

⁴⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered', *October* 62 (1992), p. 24.

⁴⁵ See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1992, pp.1-24.

the senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society's generalised abstraction.⁴⁶

The loss of touch as a conceptual component of vision, according to Crary, meant the unloosening of the eye from the network of referentiality incarnated in facility, and the autonomization of vision. The emergence of montage aesthetics should not be separated from the intensified logic of this loss of reference, of what Crary has called 'spectacular consumption'.⁴⁷ It was simultaneously appropriated and critiqued by the various modernisms, including the neo-sensationists and the Marxists in Japan during the late 1920s.

Perhaps the most radical rupture from the discursive space of Taisho staged by modernists and Marxists can be seen on the level of language. To borrow Karatani Kōjin's beautifully simple formulation, if Taisho culturalism was premised on the paradigm 'literature as self-consciousness', the aesthetics of the 1920s avant-garde can be summed up as 'literature as language'.⁴⁸ What is important in this rupture is a new consciousness of language as something existing *outside* and *before* the subject, with its own material reality; rather than language as a transparent medium expressing an organic, self-evident interiority. Apart from the complications of narrative technique and style, this break effects a certain epistemological instability in the discursive space of the late 1920s and 1930s: as Gregory Golley writes, notions of linguistic opacity 'necessarily undermine traditional ideas of subjectivity and interior human experience'.⁴⁹ The same radical linguistic self-consciousness is visible in the mid-1930s work of the three writers explored in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, Takami Jun, Ishikawa Jun and Dazai Osamu. Although different from the staccato montage aesthetics of new sensationism, the often discussed garrulousness and verbosity which their works share means exactly an excess of language and an evacuation of content which go hand in hand with violent disruptions of the subjectivity of narrator and characters. Although forcefully argued first and foremost by Yokomitsu Riichi, the foregrounding of the exteriority of language again

⁴⁶ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, New York: Zone Books, 1995, p.17, quoted in *Ibid.* p.19.

⁴⁷ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p.19.

⁴⁸ Karatani Kōjin, *Kindai Nihon no hihyō I*, p.149.

⁴⁹ Golley, *Voices in the Machine*, p.190.

transcends schools and movements. And this consciousness of linguistic semi-autonomy, as Jameson reminds us in the epigraph of this chapter, cannot be disengaged from advanced capitalism and the forces of disjunction and abstraction unleashed by it.

Yokomitsu's views on language can be found in the essays from the so-called debate on literary formalism (*keishikishugi bungaku ronsō*).⁵⁰ In 'Review of Current Literature', the essay mentioned above, he asserts that 'form is nothing else but a sequence of written characters endowed with rhythm and meaning'.⁵¹ For Yokomitsu there is no content possible without this sequence of written characters. He opposes vehemently Kurahara Korehito's stance about form arising spontaneously from content. Yokomitsu goes on to stress the primacy of objective reality and the importance of a materialist understanding of this reality. For him, form is *material*, it is part of this reality and therefore takes precedence over content, which is subjective and idealist. In another essay from 1928 titled 'Moji ni tsuite: keishiki to mekanizumu ni tsuite' (On Script: On Form and Mechanism), Yokomitsu states that the written character is a material object (*moji wa buttai de aru*). Written characters have their own meanings, they are not only empty transparent vessels for content. Using our perception and intellect, we feel the energy called content. Yokomitsu defines content as the energy (*enerugii*) which emerges between the reader and the form of the written character, and the illusion (*gensō*) which the reader derives from the written character.⁵² The literary work of art is independent of both writer and reader and is first made of form.

Yokomitsu makes a bold rhetorical gesture towards a stance which can be defined as the *dematerialization* of content, a fundamental of modernist aesthetics that is symptomatic of the workings of universal historical forces and processes of abstraction. This dematerialization of content and Yokomitsu's insistence on language as solid and opaque

⁵⁰ The debate started with Yokomitsu Riichi's intervention into discussions of the massification of art (*geijutsu no taishūka*) on the pages of proletarian literary journals and the attempts of critics like Kurahara Korehito to argue the primacy of content and by extension, the fundamental importance of the ideological function of literature, or what Japanese Marxists called its 'political value' (*seijiteki kachi*). In this Kurahara followed the official line of Stalinist literary theory. Yokomitsu, in turn, accused Kurahara of idealism; of not being a good Marxist because he privileged the subjective (content) over the objective (form). For an illuminating discussion of Yokomitsu's essays on formalism see Golley, *Voices in the Machine*, pp. 172-183. The key texts from the formalist debate can be found in Hirano Ken (ed.), *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsōshi*, vol.1, Tokyo: Miraisha, 1956, pp. 363-404.

⁵¹ TYRZ v.13, p. 141.

⁵² Yokomitsu Riichi, 'Moji ni tsuite: keishiki to mekanizumu ni tsuite', TYRZ vol.13, pp.114-115.

have been interpreted by critics such as Komori Yôichi and Suga Hidemi as the complete disjunction between sign and referent, as pure textuality liberated from the confines of reference.⁵³ In such critical readings Yokomitsu has been recuperated as a poststructuralist *avant la lettre*. He was indeed familiar with Saussure – he refers to his work in an essay from 1928; Saussure's *Course de Linguistique Générale* was translated in Japanese and published in 1928.⁵⁴ In 'Review of Current Literature', Yokomitsu gives a very Saussurean example of how form dramatically alters content by substituting the character *yama* with *hayashi* in a person's name. In his essays on formalism, however, Yokomitsu often talks about qualitative changes and leaps, of quantity dialectically changing into quality: he might be a Saussurean, but he is definitely not a (post)structuralist; dialectics is important for him. The neo-sensationist view of language does not posit the complete separation of sign and referent: in Yokomitsu's writings the existence of language is poised on an intermediate ground, between complete referentiality and pure signification. In Golley's analysis, the printed character for Yokomitsu is *both* a sign and a referent; 'an opaque object that obeys the laws of physics, but an object which curiously retains referential powers, capable of capturing, through its own "movement", the material movement of the outside world'.⁵⁵

It was the emphasis on perception that gave the *shinkankakuha* movement its name and it is translated sometimes as 'new perceptionism'. But this emphasis on perception meant that all other elements of experience - cognition, understanding, knowledge – were pushed to the background. Perception becomes isolated and privileged; in Yokomitsu's *Shanghai*, for example, the subject is closer to an apparatus registering discrete stimuli without aiming for a completeness of experience. This autonomization of perception is one of the hallmarks of the experience of modernity: in his seminal essay on the work of art in the time of technical reproducibility Benjamin focuses on the crisis of perception caused by an alienation of the senses that makes it possible for mankind to view its own

⁵³ See Komori Yôichi, 'Ekurichûru no jikû', in *Kôzô to shite no katari*, Tokyo: Shinyôsha, 1988, pp. 455-506 and Suga Hidemi, 'Kaku Kikai', in *Tantei no kuritikki: Shôwa bungaku no rinkai*, Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1988, pp. 70-93.

⁵⁴ Komori, 'Ekurichûru no jikû', p. 470.

⁵⁵ Golley, *Voices in the Machine*, pp. 184-185.

destruction with enjoyment.⁵⁶ According to Miriam Hansen, Benjamin saw this reorganisation of the economy of the senses as 'the decisive battleground for the meaning and fate of modernity'.⁵⁷ Jameson, on the other hand, traces modernity's relentless logic of flux and internal decomposition in the field of perception:

the deperceptualization of the sciences – the break with such perceptual pseudosciences as alchemy, for example, the Cartesian disjunction between primary and secondary senses, and the geometrization of science more generally, which substitutes ideal quantities for physically perceivable objects of study – is accompanied by a release of perceptual energies... This unused surplus capacity of sense perception can only reorganise itself into a new and semi-autonomous activity, one which produces its own specific objects, new objects that are themselves the result of a process of abstraction and reification, such that older concrete unities are now sundered into measurable dimensions of one side, say, and pure colour (or the experience of purely abstract colour), on the other.⁵⁸

Like the rest of the industrialised world, during the 1920s Japan experienced a technologization of life and the emergence of a spectral reality saturated with sensory stimuli. What is profoundly ambiguous about Japanese modernism's embrace of perception, is the presence of mystical and metaphysical undertones. Kawabata Yasunari – the other focal figure in the new sensationist movement – saw the meaning of its aesthetics in perception without intellectualization: 'writing "sweet" with your tongue, not after taking the sensation to your head and then writing "sweet" with your head.' For Kawabata, the difference between the old 'objective' or naturalist writing and 'expressionist' or new-sensationist writing is the confluence of the subjective and objective: 'I am the lily and the lily is me'.⁵⁹

Self and other become one ... all things of heaven and earth lose their boundaries to merge into one spirit and form one unified world. On the other hand, when the subjective flows into all things, then this means that all things are endowed with spirit, or in other words, these are the ideas of multi-dimensional pan-spiritism (*tagenteki ban'yûreikonsetsu*). Here lies a new path to salvation. This is the old Eastern subjectivism (*shukanshugi*), or the oneness of the subjective and the objective.

⁵⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, London: Pimlico, 1999, pp. 211-244.

⁵⁷ Hansen, 'The Mass Production of the Senses', p. 60.

⁵⁸ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 229.

⁵⁹ Kawabata Yasunari, 'Shinshin sakka no shinkeikô kaisetsu', in *Kawabata Yasunari zenshû*, vol. 30, Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1982, p. 177.

There is a type of depiction (in Yokomitsu Riichi's works – my note) which humanizes things. It is based on sensing intuitively all things (*banbutsu o chokkan shite*) and endowing them with life. The subjective view of the writer should disperse on to numerous things; it should enter all objects and make them flicker.⁶⁰

Similarly, in 'Essay on the New Sensation' Yokomitsu asserts that new sensationism is a shift away from objective content towards a more subjective form: 'Sensation is an *intuitive* explosion of subjectivity which rips off the external aspects of nature to give direct access to the thing itself'.⁶¹ (my emphasis).

Kawabata's epistemology is one of *sensory* cognition and it is striking how strong an element of intuition it contains. He identifies the new fusion of subject and object with an eastern 'subjectivism'. This association of the urban, avant-garde origins of new sensationist aesthetics with a timeless eastern mysticism prefigures the nuances of cultural uniqueness in the later writings of both Yokomitsu and Kawabata. Behind Yokomitsu's yearning for a subjective intuitive contact with the thing itself, for ripping away of the external aspects of nature, is a hunger for an immediate encounter with the real. The desire for immediacy, the anti-rational epistemology of intuition, is present in Yokomitsu and Kawabata during their neo-sensationist period well before their supposed turn towards 'spiritualism'. Both will eventually attempt to transcend the formal and epistemological aporias of modernism through the aesthetization of the nation. To posit a complete break between Yokomitsu's new sensationist writing and his later *Travel Melancholy*, between the celebration of urban reality and his retreat into a sanctified tradition, is to ignore the tropes of intuition and immediacy in his earlier writings. *Travel Melancholy*, with its evocation of the national spirit and its belief in *kotodama*, the mythical identity between words and things, reveals the profound ideological ambivalence of the new sensationist project. In her discussion of the discursive space of the cultural revival Yumiko Iida stresses the structural breakdown of cognition and an increased epistemological opacity that no longer marks a boundary between subject and object.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.178-178.

⁶¹ Translated in Dennis Keene, *Yokomitsu Riichi: Modernist*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 79. For the Japanese original see TYRZ, vo.13, p.76.

⁶² Yumiko Iida, 'Review of *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* by Harry Harootian', *Historical Materialism* 13:1 (2005), p. 230.

Both historical intensities and the inflections of modernist aesthetics change during the 1930s, but it is not difficult to discern here the effects of neo-sensationist epistemologies. The aesthetics of Yokomitsu and Kawabata – the autonomization of perception, the dissolution of the traditionally dichotomised categories of subject and object and the emphasis on intuitive knowledge – finds its natural continuity in the discursive motifs of the cultural revival. The epistemological flux of the 1930s lead to a breakdown of representation and a quest for authenticity prefigured in the neo-sensationist pursuit of immediacy through sensation, of perception without intellectualization. But the celebration of the semi-autonomy of the senses, of newly found perceptual intensities is, paradoxically, a symptom of the *alienation* of the senses under the technological regime of advanced capitalism. As Susan Buck-Morss explains in her sophisticated reading of Walter Benjamin's artwork essay, for Benjamin this condition of sensory alienation lies at the core of the aesthetization of politics which fascism does not create but merely manages.⁶³ The new sensationist rejection of subject-object distinctions does not only depart from the earlier aesthetics of Naturalism, but is symptomatic of a collapse of the distinction between art and non-art, a collapse characteristic of both the artistic avant-garde and fascism. While during Taisho, art and non-art were distinctly separated, the Showa avant-garde challenged the aesthetics of the autonomous work of art. For Russell Berman, the same trope is employed by fascism: there is a continuity between the demontage of autonomy aesthetics by the avant-garde and the fascist aesthetization of the political.⁶⁴

Chronologically, the journal *Bungei jidai* (Literary Age) around which the new sensationists gathered lasted only until 1927, but the impact of the movement was far broader, and greater. Yokomitsu Riichi, Kawabata Yasunari, Kataoka Teppei and others attempted to articulate in their theoretical essays what some contemporary proletarian works and even some *shishōsetsu* figured only *symptomatically*, through form, on the level of language and narrative structure. Early Showa literature did stage a certain break with realist aesthetics and the modes of knowledge of Taisho; a break that transcends

⁶³ Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics', p.4.

⁶⁴ Russell Berman, 'Foreword: The Wandering Z', in Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, pp. xi-xxiii.

divisions between schools and literary factions. The dynamic of the neo-sensationist revolution, however, remains fundamentally contradictory and ambiguous; the faultlines of its aesthetic and epistemological tensions run through Yokomitsu and Kawabata's 'scientific' aesthetics of exteriority and their later embrace of the anti-rational epistemologies of intuition which marked their retreat into the interiority of the nation. The Showa modernist avant-garde rejected the Western totalities of humanism and realism only to substitute for them pure, immanent Japaneseness untouched by modernity and its mediations.

In his literary memoir titled *Shōwa bungaku seisuishi* (The Rise and Fall of Showa Literature, 1952), Takami Jun describes the excitement of the literary youth when *Bungei jidai* appeared:

Our eyes were shining when we bought the inaugural issue of *Bungei jidai*. The bookshop, I think, was Ikubundō, in front of the university. It cost fourteen *sen*. I opened it straight after I left the bookshop, and began to read while still walking. Here was the literature we, the young generation, had been passionately seeking, the literature we were hungry for.

Orthodox literary histories do not regard Takami as a modernist writer. Takami himself, however, admits that although in his high school years he was a member of a socialist circle, he was ardently supporting *Bungei jidai*, and not *Bungei sensen* (Literary Front), the proletarian journal that should have been his ideological choice.⁶⁵ He recalls that his young self found the radical originality of the Shinkankakuha style much more compelling.⁶⁶ Takami also describes the younger generation's awe of Yokomitsu, his powerful charisma, and the influence he wielded not only on his contemporaries, but on later writers as well. For Takami, Yokomitsu liberated Japanese literature from realism and forced it into the twentieth century.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Takami Jun, *Shōwa bungaku seisuishi*, Tokyo: Kadokawa bunko 1967, pp.24,26.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*p.103.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*p.117.

The End of the Leftist Avant-Garde

To fully understand the meaning of the gestures performed by Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai in their work from the mid-1930s, an account of the proletarian literature movement and Marxism in Japan is indispensable. At the time, leftist literature commanded an enormous influence, greater than that of the new sensationists, although a certain element of faddishness and of a commercial boom staged by a capitalist mass media is undeniable. All three writers were exposed to Marxism and the proletarian culture movement. Takami Jun was explicitly associated with it: while a student at Tokyo University he edited leftist art magazines and later became a member of the Japan Proletarian Writers' League (*Nihon puroretaria sakka dōmei*). Takami was also involved in activities aimed at raising the political consciousness of the workers; his early stories were in the vein of proletarian writing. Dazai's contact with radical Marxist politics was more of a youthful infatuation: he participated in a leftist circle while at high school and his works from that time share the thematic concerns of proletarian literature. With Ishikawa Jun, we have more of an intellectual position: his early essays betray a sympathy for socialist ideas and a certain contempt for bourgeois notions of culture and private property.⁶⁸

In the early 1920s, the leftist cultural movement was represented by the journal *Tane maku hito* (The Sower), a platform for the vibrant and politically diverse voices of anarchists, nihilists, Marxists, Christian socialists and syndicalists. Later in the decade, however, the tensions between the Marxists, who advocated a centralized organisation integrated with the international communist movement, and the anarcho-syndicalists, who insisted on direct action and favoured more autonomous structures, lead to a number of traumatic splits and dogmatic purges. After the murder of the charismatic Ōsugi Sakae in 1923, the anarcho-syndicalists were purged from the movement. In 1926, young Marxist radicals such as Nakano Shigeharu, Kubokawa Tsurujirō (1903-1974), Hayashi Fusao (1903-1975) and Kamei Katsuichirō (1907-1966) in effect ousted the non-Marxists from

⁶⁸ Ando Hiroshi, *Jiishiki no Shōwa bungaku: genshō to shite no watakushi*, Tokyo: Shibundo, 1994, p.174

the Japan Proletarian Literature Federation (*Nihon puroretaria bungei renmei*).⁶⁹ The term 'proletarian', which in the beginning used to signify a broad front of anti-capitalist politics, gradually came to possess exclusively Marxist connotations.⁷⁰ An article by the influential critic Aono Suekichi (1890-1961) had a profound impact on the gradual bolshevization of the movement and its domination by views which saw the arts as purely instrumental in the bigger political struggle. Aono published 'Shizen seichō to mokuteki ishiki' (Natural Growth and Consciousness of Purpose) in 1926. It presents an evolutionary, almost teleological narrative of the movement. Aono takes great care to emphasize the differences between 'proletarian literature' and 'the proletarian literary movement': the proletariat grows naturally and so does its will for self-expression. The proletarian literary movement, on the other hand, is the result of this natural growth (*shizen seichō*), directed by what Aono calls 'consciousness of purpose' (*mokuteki ishiki*): both concepts, according to Hirano Ken, were borrowed and adapted from Lenin's writings on art.⁷¹ In other words, the proletarian literary movement should be conscious of the purpose of the proletarian struggle: it should be clearly shaped by a class consciousness, because only then it will become class art. The movement should implant this purposefulness onto proletarian literature which should be part of the total struggle of the proletariat.⁷²

Aono's article articulated a drive towards a total politicization of art. A number of theoretical debates about how exactly this should be done rocked the proletarian movement in the next couple of years. Critics like Kurahara Korehito and Miyamoto Kenji (1908-2007) argued for a radical and direct politicization of art. Kurahara's stance was more or less a wholesale application of Soviet literary theory. In post-revolutionary Russia the iconoclastic avant-gardist charge of futurism and constructivism in the arts and the newly emerged critical formalism were gradually stifled by Stalinism. The Soviet avant-garde believed that changing ossified bourgeois art forms will change both the world and the consciousness of the new individual, but Stalinist doctrines about a directly political literature and socialist realism asserted the primacy of content. The daring formal

⁶⁹ Iwamoto Yoshio, 'Aspects of the Proletarian Literature Movement in Japan' in Harootunian and Silberman, *Japan in Crisis*, p.162.

⁷⁰ Hirano, *Shōwa bungakushi*, p. 29.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p.28.

⁷² Aono Suekichi, 'Shizen seichō to mokuteki ishiki', in *Nihon puroretaria bungaku hyōronshū*, vol.3, Tokyo: Shin Nihon shuppansha, 1990, pp. 260-263.

experiments of some of the Japanese proletarian works discussed earlier in this chapter would also be discouraged because of theoretical demands for proletarian realism and overtly political messages. Kurahara Korehito's article 'Puroretaria riarizumu e no michi' (The Road to Proletarian Realism) from 1928 can be seen as symbolic of this shift. Kurahara does provide a perceptive critique of both classical realism and naturalism: while the perspective of classical realism remains individualist, naturalism is objective in its depictions and materialistic in its underlying philosophy, but it reduces human existence to biological drives and heredity.⁷³ Also, while writers like Émile Zola (1840-1902) and Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946) depict the lives of workers, their emphasis is always on philanthropy, not class struggle. A proletarian writer, Kurahara argues, should not reduce social problems to 'human nature'. This social perspective is vital, as it rejects ahistorical, private suffering, but the most important thing is to possess a class perspective. Kurahara asserts that the proletarian writer should see the world through the eyes of the proletarian avant-garde – the communist party – because this is the only correct viewpoint. Art should not be a product of the privatized view of the writer but should be permeated with the subjectivity of the proletariat: this is the only way literature will be useful to its struggle.

The cultural critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke (1892-1931) was one of the sceptical voices in these debates: his article 'Seijiteki kachi to geijutsuteki kachi' (Political value and Artistic Value) from 1929 put forward a dissenting view. Although politically very much on the left – he was the focal figure of *Tane maku hito* – Hirabayashi remained ambivalent towards the vulgar ideologization of art. He argued that while activists look for a political value in a work of art – its function as propaganda, direct or indirect; its potential for consciousness-raising and for achieving a political purpose – literary critics base their judgment on purely artistic criteria. Hirabayashi prefers to keep the dichotomy between these two sets of criteria and rejects attempts on the part of Marxist critics to transcend this duality with a crude pseudo-dialectical gesture in order to establish something called 'social value' (*shakaiteki kachi*). Hirabayashi's analysis remains anchored in a Marxist, historicist

⁷³ Kurahara Korehito, 'Puroretaria riarizumu e no michi', in Muramatsu Takeshi (ed.), *Shōwa hihyō taikei*, vol.1, Tokyo: Banchō shobō, 1968, pp. 65-71.

framework: for him art is not a mystical and timeless realm, but an ideological system shaped by social conditions; he does assert, however, that art does not have a direct bearing on the political struggle.⁷⁴

The theoretical debates and the entire proletarian culture movement, however, were dominated by critics like Kurahara Korehito and Miyamoto Kenji. In 1930 Kurahara published an influential article titled 'Nappu geijutsuka no atarashii ninmu' (The New Mission of NAPPF Artists). (NAPPF, pronounced *nappu* in Japanese, was the Esperanto acronym of the All Japan Proletarian Arts Federation (*Zen Nihon musansha geijutsu renmei*), the umbrella organization created in 1928). Kurahara criticizes proletarian literature for its lack of a distinctly 'communist' perspective different from the social-democratic one. He again reiterates that writers should see through the eyes of the communist avant-garde and should work towards expanding the political and ideological influence of the party. Fiction, according to Kurahara, would publicize the activities of the party in a much livelier manner than theoretical discussions or journalistic reports.⁷⁵

In 1930, NAPPF even published a list of themes and subjects which proletarian writers had to concentrate on: the struggle of the workers and farmers, mass strikes, the true nature of bourgeois politics and others.⁷⁶ The structure of the movement was also becoming rigidly centralized and restrictions were imposed on publishing in the 'bourgeois press': Takami Jun, for example, was reprimanded for putting his work in the coterie magazine he created together with some fellow young writers, *Nichireki* (The Sun Calendar) – proletarian writers were expected to publish in the official journal of NAPPF, *Senki* (Battle Flag). An essay by Miyamoto Kenji with the telling title 'Seiji to geijutsu: seiji no yūsei no mondai' (Politics and Art: The Problem of the Priority of Politics) published in 1933, demands that writers should have a deep understanding of current political tasks because this political perspective will help them grasp the fundamental truths of society. Miyamoto reiterates that only a writer aligned with the communist party can understand

⁷⁴ Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, 'Seijiteki kachi to geijututeki kachi', in Muramatsu, *Shōwa hihyō*, vol.1, pp. 85-92.

⁷⁵ Kurahara Korehito, 'Nappu geijutsuka no atarashii ninmu', in *Kurahara Korehito hyōronshū*, vol.2, Tokyo: Shin Nihon shuppansha, 1980, p. 62-63.

⁷⁶ Kurihara Yukio, *Puroretaria bungaku to sono jidai*, Tokyo: Impakuto shuppan, 2004, p.113

the contradictions and complexities of contemporary reality. He takes positively Stalin's claim that literature should give a tangible, vivid form to the tasks of Marxism and make them easy to understand for the masses. Class-conscious art, according to Miyamoto, is one of the forms of the class struggle.⁷⁷

This radical and forceful bolshevization of the movement placed absurd restrictions on the subject matter and techniques of leftist art. All left-leaning artists were required to act like communist activists and *de facto* abandon art in favour of propagandist and organizational activities in factories and villages. Kurihara Yukio has pointed out that the drive towards reorganization came from Kurahara applying literally the strategies of the red labour unions to the culture movement: in August 1930, Kurahara attended the fifth meeting of the Profintern (the international organisation of the communist labour union movement) in Moscow as an interpreter to the Japanese delegation, but he did not go to the second meeting of the international revolutionary writers held in Kharkov in December 1930.⁷⁸ The strategies advocated by Kurahara and the leadership of NAPF could indeed be suitable for the labour unions, but the dogmatism and the gradual erosion of creative freedom were bound to have adverse effects on the proletarian culture movement. Dissenting voices were soon to be heard: Hayashi Fusao was the first to rebel against this total subjugation of art to doctrinaire communist politics in a series of articles published in 1932. In the same year the authorities took firm measures to suppress the movement: leading figures of the Writers' League were imprisoned, among them Kurahara Korehito, Nakano Shigeharu, Murayama Tomoyoshi and Miyamoto Kenji; others were arrested and detained a number of times.⁷⁹ The death of Kobayashi Takiji at the hands of the police on 21 February 1933 was a profound shock for all writers, whether they defined themselves as leftists or not. Internal conflicts, sectarianism, and police repressions made the Writers' League dissolve itself in February 1934, symbolically marking the end of proletarian literature.

⁷⁷ Miyamoto Kenji, 'Seiji to geijutsu: seiji no yûsei no mondai', in Hirano, *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsôshi*, vol.2, pp. 147-156.

⁷⁸ Kurihara, *Puroretaria bungaku*, p.110.

⁷⁹ G.T. Shea, *Leftwing Literature in Japan*, Tokyo: Hôsei University Press, 1964, p.356.

What such a sketch of the development of the movement and its collapse fails to account for is the enormous authority Marxism wielded in intellectual and academic circles and its profound mark on the discursive space of the twenties and early thirties. As Peter Duus writes, Marxist theory offered 'a positive philosophical alternative to the ahistoricity and passivity of the prevailing academic philosophy of *kyōyōshugi*, or self-cultivation'.⁸⁰ Especially in the interpretation of Fukumoto Kazuo (1894-1983), whose writings took the intelligentsia by storm in the mid-1920s, the Marxist concept of dialectical materialism explained the human, the economic, and the political as *totalities*. Fukumotoism brought to the leftist movement Marxist rigour and a hitherto unknown theoretical sophistication. Fujita Shōzō has written that the aim of Fukumotoism was the formation of a *homo theoreticus* shaped entirely by abstract written texts.⁸¹ While it must be said that this textualism is typically Taishoesque, in other aspects Fukumotoism enacted a certain rupture with the dominant discursive regimes of Taisho. Fujita views the elevation of the abstractions of Marxist theory and the spirit of rational inquiry into the social as powerful challenges to the undifferentiated emotional unities on which the modern Japanese emperor state was founded: the profoundly ideological claims that there is no antagonism between the state and the natural world, between community and the individual, between public loyalties and private emotions.⁸² For literature and all cultural discourse, as we have seen, Marxism represented a profound break with the solipsism of a privatized interiority. In that sense, Marxism introduced the absolute otherness of social forces which existed *beyond* individual consciousness: a sophisticated critic like Kobayashi Hideo pointed that out as early as 1935, in his seminal *Watakushi shōsetsuron* (Essay on the I-novel):

And so it happened that the first solid resistance to the fictionalization of the writer's mundane life came with the introduction of Marxist writing. What was being imported was no longer a literary style, but a social ideology. It is quite clear that modern Japanese fiction encountered something genuinely new when it imported this new ideology, as a structure indissolubly absolute and universal, that affected both the literary world at large and the styles of individual writers...When an ideology is imbued by a universal aspect, resisting every distinct

⁸⁰ Peter Duus, 'Socialism, Liberalism and Marxism: 1901-1931' in *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 6, p.710.

⁸¹ Fujita, 'Shōwa 8-nen', p.35.

⁸² *Ibid.* p.36.

interpretation put forward by individual writers, we encounter 'socialised thought' in its primary form.⁸³

Yokomitsu Riichi, supposedly the arch anti-Marxist, mentions Fukumoto's influence and the shock dialectical materialism produced in writers; how it pushed to the forefront of intellectual debate the problem of consciousness and matter.⁸⁴ The politicization of literature which Marxism demanded was a revolt against the Taishoesque autonomy of the work of art, against that transcendental value of literature vis-à-vis ethical and political concerns, as postulated in Tsubouchi Shôyô's 'The Essence of the Novel'. Proletarian literature and cultural critique were a dominating presence in the cultural production of the twenties and early thirties; even in terms of sheer volume, it has been estimated that almost half the articles published in leading 'bourgeois' magazines and journals were written by intellectuals belonging to the movement and 'based on unmistakably Marxist assumptions about the functions and role of literature.'⁸⁵ According to Jay Rubin, the journals of the proletarian movement, *Senki* and *Bungei sensen*, had a combined circulation of around 50,000 in 1929-30. Proletarian works accounted for 29 percent of the fiction published in the influential journals *Kaizô* and *Chûô kôron* in 1929-30 and 44 percent in 1930-1931.⁸⁶

Like new sensationism, the leftist avant-garde meant a radical departure from the aesthetics of the *shishôsetsu*. Both emphasised an absolute exteriority which was the basis of their radical critique of existing epistemologies: language, for the new sensationists, and the political, for proletarian writers. Like Yokomitsu and Kawabata, Marxist writing would develop twisted parallax trajectories: from the formal experimentation of the early years to the rejection of any preoccupation with form and the total domination of Kurahara's 'proletarian realism'. The fetishization of abstract knowledge and the will to theoretical purity did not only contribute to the excessive

⁸³ Paul Anderer (ed.), *Literature of the Lost Home: Kobayashi Hideo - Literary Criticism 1924-1939*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p.78.

⁸⁴ Kikuchi Kan et al., 'Bungei fukkô zadankai', in Muramatsu, *Shôwa hihyô taikêi*, vol.1, pp. 474-475, originally published in *Bungei shunjû*, February 1933.

⁸⁵ Donald Keene, 'Japanese Literature and Politics in the 1930s', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 2:2 (1976), p. 226.

⁸⁶ Jay Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984. p. 247.

factionalism and the subsequent collapse of the movement, they also condemned Japanese Marxists to a total isolation from sensuous reality and the bonds of society. As Fujita Shōzō again has argued, the ideological reversals (*tenkō*) of Marxists renouncing their beliefs cannot be explained only with coercion by the authorities; Japanese Marxism's abandonment of the present for the abstractions of theory is also an important factor: 'Tenkō usually occurred as an interior (*naimenjō no*) transformation linked to external incidents which dragged *homo theoreticus (rironjin)* from the transcendental level of his confrontation with Japanese society, down to the real world'.⁸⁷ The bonds of commonality and the epistemologies of empathy which Fukumotoism broke with reasserted themselves with full force during the cultural revival. *Tenkō* writing, which narrates the experiences of those Marxists, more or less conforms to the rhetorical grammar of the *shishōsetsu*, in what Michael Bourdaghs has called 'a particularly ironic return of the repressed'.⁸⁸

The Cultural Revival

As mentioned earlier, the cultural revival (*bungei fukkō*) is situated in the years between 1933 and 1937 and sometimes figured as a lull before the storm, an Indian summer. This was indeed a time of relative economic prosperity, early consumer bliss and a thriving modern life in the cafés, cinemas and dance halls of the cities. Critics often attribute the introduction of the phrase *bungei fukkō* to Hayashi Fusao – and he is truly the paradigmatic figure of this time: former member of the *Shinjin-kai* (Society of New Men), the radical student circle at Tokyo University, member of the Writers' League and its umbrella organization, the Japanese Proletarian Culture Federation (*Nihon Proletaria Bunka Renmei*), arrested and thrown in prison as a communist collaborator, and later emerging as a pivotal figure in the Japanese romantic school. Hayashi published the essay 'Sakka no tame ni' (For the Writer) in three instalments in the *Tokyo Asahi* in May 1932, together with two accompanying essays: 'Bungaku no tame ni' (For Literature), published in July 1932 in *Kaizō* and 'Sakka to shite' (As a Writer), which appeared in the

⁸⁷ Fujita, 'Shōwa 8-nen', p.44.

⁸⁸ Michael Bourdaghs, *The Dawn That Never Comes: Shimazaki Tōson and Japanese Nationalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 169.

September 1932 issue of *Shinchô*. *Sakka no tame ni* marks the beginnings of Hayashi's rebellion against the rigid centralization of the proletarian culture movement and the reduction of art to purely instrumental propaganda value. The essay contains all the thematic concerns and the rhetorical tropes of the cultural revival and can be regarded as its founding text. Hayashi's critique of contemporary mechanized society, of the fragmentation of knowledge and the loss of the totality of experience would become some of the major motifs of culturalist discourse, powerfully present in the notorious symposium on overcoming modernity. The essay argues against the dogmatism of proletarian literature, and, on the other hand, against the commodification of literature by large-scale print capitalism. Hayashi blames this commodification on the extreme commercialization of cultural production and consumption. The levelling and homogenization which result from these processes drag the writer down to the low and vulgar. Hayashi sees the writer as someone able to penetrate 'like a ray of light' into those mystical recesses of reality which are inaccessible to scientific, political or journalistic discourse.⁸⁹ This mystical intuition comes from 'the completion of the inner world of the writer': 'The writer must complete within himself a new world. This perfected inner world radiates a light whose violent pulsations touch the heart of the reader, and draw him forcefully into the world of the writer.'⁹⁰ The light metaphors ('like a ray of light', 'radiating a light') lend to the text almost mystical intonations. Again, in an uncanny repetition of Taisho, exteriority is abolished and absorbed in the inner world of the writer; the sociohistorical is erased in favour of the subjective realm of artistic creation. The liberation of literature from politics, its autonomy from the material and its elevation into a master trope which transcends the sordid confines of a soulless society, would become the ideological foci of the discourse of cultural revival.⁹¹

While Hayashi's rhetoric remains intensely abstract, an essay by Tokunaga Sunao titled 'Sôzaku hôhôtei no shintenkan' (New Directions in the Method of Artistic Creation, 1933)

⁸⁹ Hayashi Fusao, 'Sakka no tame ni', in Muramatsu, *Shôwa hihyô taikai*, vol.1, p. 200.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

⁹¹ What is curious – and what adds an ambiguous dimension to the essay – is the contrast between Hayashi's analogy of the sports record, and the lofty language in the rest of the essay: together with sex and speed, sport is the epitome of the superficial, base and commercialized modernism Hayashi despises.

criticizes directly the rigid, overpoliticized schemata endorsed by NAPF. Tokunaga argues that this domination of politics has led to lifeless works which are nothing more than mechanical applications of theory. According to Tokunaga, content is not everything in a literary work: art is a special type of superstructure, and if there is no form, art itself disappears. When an ideological position is forced on to writers by party and union administrators, art is reduced to a propaganda leaflet – and the result is that the writer finds himself completely estranged from the masses, a violation of one of the most important tenets of Marxist literary practice.⁹²

It is ironic that the calls for a cultural revival and liberation of literature from politics ultimately ended up reconstituting Taishoesque discursive regimes and the very epistemologies proletarian literature resisted when it burst onto the scene in the mid-1920s. Hayashi and Tokunaga were two prominent voices from the proletarian camp who articulated the internal tensions and contradictions in it. 1932, however, also saw the emergence of a powerful rhetoric about the crisis of *junbungaku*, 'pure' or 'high' literature' in general.⁹³ In 1932 there was a special issue of the journal *Shinchō* titled *Junbungaku wa doko e iku ka* (Where is Pure Literature Going?). High literature was overwhelmingly perceived as being threatened by the rise of popular fiction. Proletarian literature had been in demand and sold extremely well; after its demise the vacuum left in the magazines and newspapers was flooded by popular novels, *tsūzoku shōsetsu*. The formation of the *Bungakukai* (Literary World) group and the publication of the eponymous journal was an event sensationalized by the media as the formerly opposing factions of 'proletarian' and 'bourgeois' writers (*puro* and *buru* in contemporary journalistic parlance) came together: the founding members of the journal included figures like Kobayashi Hideo, Hayashi Fusao, Takeda Rintarō and Yasunari Kawabata. This dissolution of the tensions between Marxist, modernists, and 'old realists', and the drive to rescue culture

⁹² Tokunaga Sunao, 'Sōsaku hōhōjō no shintenkan', in Muramatsu, *Shōwa hihyō taikei*, vol.1, pp. 226-235.

⁹³ *Junbungaku* (pure or high literature) emerged as a discursive creation in the 1920s, when it was often associated with the *shishōsetsu* and its confessionalism and immediacy. Sometimes the term is used as interchangeable with *shishōsetsu*. It was the spectre of mass culture that precipitated a discourse attempting to define pure literature through the exclusion of the popular and the commercial and through the identification with the 'quintessentially Japanese' genre of the *shishōsetsu*. (see Seiji Lippit, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism*, New York: Columbia University Press, p.120)

from both Marxism and commodification would remain the two important discursive topoi of the cultural revival. They are emphasized in Hayashi Fusao's postscript to the inaugural edition of *Bungakukai* in October 1933. Hayashi's rhetorical attack is directed at the vulgar economic views of Marxist historians who explain all developments with money and desire.⁹⁴ Hayashi bluntly compares such intellectuals to monkeys – because a man who has lost his conscience and idealism becomes a monkey. He attacks the cynical journalists for whom the very proliferation of literary journals is a symptom of the decline of literature. On the contrary, Hayashi argues, what we are witnessing is an explosion of the will to literature. Vulgar journalism is aligned with print capitalism: they have nothing to do with proper literature. Making money is the job of the merchants; the writer always has to walk the difficult path of exploration and creation.⁹⁵

Literature again emerges as mystical and transcendental, separate from the socio-political realm. Hayashi's rhetoric is similar to the tone of the previous essay, although here he attacks directly both Marxist historical materialism and capitalism. His harsh language betrays anxieties about homogenization and the rise of mass culture. Despite the repudiations of 'vulgar journalism' and 'print capitalism', the call for a cultural revival was celebrated by the commercial media: the popular magazine *Bungei shunjū* organised a roundtable discussion (*zadankai*) on the cultural revival, in which all prominent figures took part.⁹⁶ The publishing industry also reacted quickly: in April 1934 Kaizōsha published *Bungei fukko sōsho* (Cultural Revival Series). It consisted of twenty-four works, each by a different writer. Modernists like Yokomitsu and Kawabata and philosophers like Miki Kiyoshi were also included. The editorial choices belie the broad, all-enveloping character of the cultural revival as a phenomenon affecting the very discursive parameters of Japanese society. Critics, especially Marxists, are sceptical about its impact on literature. Kubokawa Tsurujirō's response remains one of the enduring Marxist critical assessments of the phenomenon, often quoted in later writing. Kubokawa wrote as early as 1934 that

⁹⁴ Perhaps because of censorship Hayashi does not explicitly identify these intellectuals as Marxists, but that is clear: the Marxist school of historians was the one that insisted on the primacy of the economic. The views of Marxist historians were still influential in the early thirties and the debate on Japanese capitalism was still going on.

⁹⁵ Hayashi Fusao, 'Bungakukai sōkangō rokugō zakki', in Muramatsu, *Shōwa hihyō taikei*, vol.1, p. 465.

⁹⁶ Kikuchi *et al.*, 'Bungei fukkō', pp. 468-491.

the very same context which contributed to the decline of proletarian literature, later brought about the cultural renaissance.⁹⁷ This is a critical perspective which sees the cultural revival as aligned with the forces of official ideology and the mass arrests and repressions of leftists. Honda Shûgô, on the other hand, emphasizes the contradictory duality of this call for purified art: for him, its main ideological parameters are an unprecedented *commodification* of literature together with a *mythologization* of literature. The Akutagawa and Naoki prizes, devoted to 'pure' and 'popular' literature respectively, were created in 1935, and are both, according to Honda, products of the cultural economy of the time. According to Honda, it was big commercial print media that brought about the boom in Marxist writings in the late 1920s and early thirties, and then channelled frustrated aspirations for social change into the cultural revival.⁹⁸ While for Marxist critics in the lineage of Kubokawa Tsurujirô proletarian literature is the repressed other of *bungei fukkô*, in a traditional dichotomy, the position of Sasaki Kiichi is more interesting and complex. Sasaki brings into the analysis the so-called 'phenomenon of massification' (*taishûka genshō*). The experience of mass alienation, homogenization, and atomization of the early 1930s caused a search for a radical romanticism that would overcome them. While until 1933 the orthodox *bundan* was preoccupied with proletarian literature as its main antagonist, after its demise the realities of massification loomed even starker. The mythologization of tradition – in the guise of imperial ideology, for example – and the thematic returns to premodern agrarian realities in *tenkō* writing are, according to Sasaki, the reactions of the middle classes to these processes.⁹⁹

Yokomitsu Riichi's 'Essay on the Pure Novel'

Yokomitsu's 'Junsui shōsetsuron' (Essay on the Pure Novel, 1935) is a powerful articulation of the anxieties of massification and the possibilities of the cultural revival. At that time Yokomitsu's position in the *bundan* was schizophrenically split – on one hand, he was revered as '*junbungaku no kamisama*', or the god of pure literature; at the same

⁹⁷ Satō Shizuo, *Shōwa bungaku no hikari to kage*, Tokyo: Ôtsuki shoten, 1989.p.131.

⁹⁸ See Honda Shûgô, 'Bungei fukkôki to tenkō bungaku', *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kansho* 23:1 (1958), pp. 60-78.

⁹⁹ See Sasaki Kiichi, 'Bungei fukkôki no mondai', *Bungaku* 16:4 (1958), pp. 7-15.

time he was publishing short stories in women's fashion magazines.¹⁰⁰ His call for a *junsui shōsetsu*, or a pure novel, that will bridge the divide between pure literature and popular fiction, should be seen in this context.¹⁰¹ Such a call resonated very much with the mood of the time: the writer and critic Hirotsu Kazuo (1891-1968), for example, also urged pure literature to adapt to a mass readership and to recapture the newspaper space devoted to serialized fiction, which at the time was entirely dominated by popular novels.¹⁰²

In 'Essay on the Pure Novel', Yokomitsu criticizes pure literature (most probably using the term as a synonym for the *shishōsetsu*) for its naïve, presentist conception of the everyday and for the claustrophobic domination of one interiority, that of the protagonist. He stresses the need for a narrative structure which would allow for the autonomous presentation of the consciousness of a number of characters. For Yokomitsu, the essence of the pure novel is not mimetic realism, but 'the creation of possible worlds' (*kanō no sekai no sōzō*), a stance which is in striking opposition to the *shishōsetsu* ideology of sincerity and lack of artifice.¹⁰³ At times both the architectonics of the argument and the terminology Yokomitsu employs can be confusing. He writes about *gūzen* (chance, accident) in modern life and uses the same term for the plot devices of popular novels – whose vibrant narrativity, according to him, is needed to revitalise the stagnant high literature. If *gūzen* can be taken to mean the contingency of alienated modern existence, where the self is no longer the obvious source of agency and meaning, how can the same word be used for the flamboyant plots and the melodramatic coincidences of popular fiction? In a roundtable discussion on the essay, Yokomitsu explains that what we have in popular novels is *gūzensei* without *hitsuzensei*, chance without necessity, which

¹⁰⁰ Sone Hiroyoshi, 'Senzen senchō no bungaku: Shōwa 8-nen kara haisen made' in Isoda Kōichi (ed.), *Shōwa bungaku zenshū bekkān*, Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 1991, p. 344.

¹⁰¹ Despite the fact that at the time the Japanese literary world was experiencing something of an André Gide boom and the purely terminological links between Gide's *roman pur* and *junsui shōsetsu* are obvious, both Yokomitsu himself and critics later have denied any conceptual connection between the two. See, for example, Toyoshima Yoshio *et al.*, 'Zadankai: "Junsui shōsetsu" o kataru', *Sakuhin* 6 (1935), p.4 and Nakamura Kazue, 'Yokomitsu Riichi "Junsui shōsetsuron" no uchi naru tasha', in Fujii Sadakazu *et al.* (eds), Yokomitsu Riichi, *Nihon bungaku kenkyū shiryō shūsei*, vol.38, Tokyo: Wakakusa shobō, 1999, p.188

¹⁰² Hirotsu Kazuo, 'Bungei zakkan', quoted in Hirano, *Shōwa bungakushi*, p.195.

¹⁰³ Yokomitsu Riichi, 'Junsui shōsetsuron', in Hirano, *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsōshi*, vol.3, p.74.

for him does not have any reality.¹⁰⁴ One possible interpretation would see the loss of reference and the radical contingency of life under advanced capitalism as so shockingly new, opaque, and unrepresentable, that the only way to grasp and narrativize them would be through the exaggerated coincidences of popular fiction.

The focal concept of the essay – and the central requirement for the pure novel – is again the ambiguous ‘fourth person’ grammatical position (*yoninshō*). In Yokomitsu enigmatic definition, the fourth person seems to denote radical reflexivity: the self looking at the self (*jibun o miru jibun*).¹⁰⁵ Yokomitsu makes it clear that this is something different from a transcendental omniscient narrator. In one of the most sophisticated contemporary responses to the essay, the critic Nakamura Mitsuo suggests that the fourth person is a figure for the complexities of self-consciousness. Writers are losing interest in external reality and are more and more preoccupied with self-consciousness; self-consciousness is the new reality, the new image of man.¹⁰⁶ Gregory Golley finds the fourth person in *Shanghai*, a work which Yokomitsu began to serialize seven years before he wrote the essay. Golley reads the fourth person as a metaphor of the split between body and consciousness; as the disembodiment experienced by a consciousness observing the body from a distance.¹⁰⁷ This disjunction between body and consciousness is indeed the condition of modernity; as in Rimbaud’s famous ‘*je suis un autre*’, the self does not coincide with its boundaries anymore. In the article mentioned above, Sasaki Kiichi identifies the expansion of the reading public which brought about processes of massification and a perception of homogenization of experience, as the historical configuration which *Junsui shōsetsuron* attempts to come to terms with.¹⁰⁸ For Nakamura Kazue, the fourth person is an attempt to overcome alienation and a symptom of a profound disenchantment with modernity: what should have been progress – the formation of the *kindai jiga*, or modern self – ended in disconnectedness from others.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Toyoshima *et al.*, ‘Zadankai: “Junsui shōsetsu”’, p.16.

¹⁰⁵ Yokomitsu, ‘Junsui shōsetsuron’, p.76.

¹⁰⁶ Nakamura Mitsuo, “Junsui shōsetsuron” ni tsuite”, in Hirano, *Gendai nihon bungaku ronsōshi*, vol.3, p. 92.

¹⁰⁷ Golley, *Voices in the Machine*, pp.139-141.

¹⁰⁸ Sasaki Kiichi, ‘Bungei fukkōki no mondai’, p.12.

¹⁰⁹ Nakamura Kazue, ‘Yokomitsu Riichi’, p.184.

I will argue that the fourth person can be seen as a device with which Yokomitsu explores the narrating subject and its ontological and epistemological status. Even in the most radical new sensationist writing this subject of enunciation had remained self-evident. Despite the montage stylistics of *Shanghai* and its disjointed sentences, we never doubt the existence of a coherent and consistent subjectivity behind the text. The problematic of the narrating subject rises to the surface later, in Yokomitsu's groundbreaking story 'Kikai' (The Machine, 1930). The story revolves around the highly charged relationships between two workers in a small metal plate workshop and their master. 'The Machine' employs an unreliable narrator of whose version of the story we remain somewhat suspicious. Moreover, this narrator gradually drifts away from the autonomous subject he is supposed to be and becomes the obedient function of controlling structures and forces impenetrable to everyday consciousness: 'I no longer understand myself. I only feel the sharp menace of an approaching machine, aimed at me. Someone must judge me. How can I know what I have done?'¹¹⁰ This narrating subject is no longer a coherent source of meaning, but more of an allegoric exploration of a self increasingly penetrated by technology (*literally* eaten away by acid), opaque and alienated from itself. Critics have traditionally seen the visually dense, meandering sentences of 'The Machine' as a departure from the staccato style of *Shanghai* – and as the symbolic end of Yokomitsu's new sensationist period.¹¹¹ Yokomitsu's works after 1930 are often narrativized as a shift from an obsession with exteriority (*gaimen*) to a more politically reactionary retreat into (national) interiority (*naimen*).¹¹² Seiji Lippit, for example, also views 'The Machine' as 'a shift from the representation of extreme interiority (the concern with the dynamic movement of sensory phenomena) to that of radical interiority (the representation of psychological experience)'.¹¹³

There are, however, some striking continuities between this story and Yokomitsu's earlier new sensationist writing: the traditionally dichotomised categories of organic and

¹¹⁰ Yokomitsu Riichi, 'Machine', trans. Edward Seidensticker, in Ivan Morris (ed.), *Modern Japanese Stories*, Tokyo: Tuttle, 1962, p.244.

¹¹¹ Itô Sei's view can be regarded as representative. See Hirano, *Shōwa bungakushi*, p.87.

¹¹² The dichotomy of exteriority and interiority as a critical device for narrating Yokomitsu's work can be traced back to Kawabata (see, for example, Kawabata Yasunari, 'Kaisetsu' in Yokomitsu Riichi, *Nichirin, Haru wa basha ni notte*, Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1981, p.283).

¹¹³ Lippit, *Topographies*, p.209.

inorganic bleeding into each other, the emptying out of subjectivity, the radical reformulations of identity. As Itô Sei has observed, in 'The Machine' identity is conceived as relational and differential.¹¹⁴ The illusion about the continuity of identity – on which the epistemology of the *shishôsetsu* and Japanese naturalism earlier was founded – is violently shattered. These radical dislocations of autonomous subjectivity are again symptomatic of the forces of technology and capitalist rationalization which threaten to disjoin sign and referent. Thus, Suga Hidemi sees in the visual thickness of the script of 'The Machine' the sudden emergence of discourse for discourse's sake, as an end in itself: unlike proletarian literature and the *shishôsetsu*, here discourse is not subordinated to content, but strives to break free.¹¹⁵

The search for a narrating subject who would be somehow different from the naively self-evident *shishôsetsu*-esque *watashi* and who will articulate symbolically the crisis of representation is the major concern of cultural discourse during the 1930s and presents a significant departure from the preoccupations of new sensationism and 1920s modernism in general. This problematic looms large with Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai; there is even some striking synchronicity – 'Essay on the Pure Novel' was published in April 1935, Ishikawa Jun's story 'Kajin' (The Beauty) and Dazai's 'The Flower of Buffoonery' in May 1935, while Takami Jun began serializing *Auld Acquaintance* in February 1935. For Suga Hidemi as well, the problem of the subject of representation, which runs through Yokomitsu's essay and Kobayashi Hideo's 'Essay on the I-novel', is the underlying problem of the cultural revival.¹¹⁶ This resonates with Neil Larsen's thesis that 'modernism, as an ideology dominated by but not specific to the realm of aesthetics, is the inversion ("the inverted consciousness") of a historically objective "crisis in representation" affecting the construction of what are initially social and political identities'.¹¹⁷ Thus, the very real crisis of subjectivity and historical agency in 1930s Japan is displaced onto the problem of

¹¹⁴ Yoshimoto Takaaki, *Gengo ni totte bi to wa nanika* Tokyo: Kadokawa bunko, 1990, p. 303.

¹¹⁵ Suga, *Tantei no kuritikku*, p. 82.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹¹⁷ Neil Larsen, *Modernism and Hegemony*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990 p. xxiv.

the narrating subject in literature - one aspect of what Karatani Kôjin, after Tosaka Jun, calls the pan-literary (*bungakushugi*) of the cultural revival.¹¹⁸

Nakamura Kazue takes this problematization of the writing subject in 'Essay on the Pure Novel' as an attempt to articulate the crisis of subjectivity and the disintegration of the modern self (*kindai jiga*). For Nakamura, Yokomitsu's fourth person is 'the other within the self' (*uchi naru tasha*).¹¹⁹ This questioning of the modern self, however, takes on an ambiguous inflection: although Yokomitsu's essay is rooted in the contemporary and theorizes the contingency of modern existence, there is some atavistic yearning for the prelapsarian wholeness of both individual and *socium* - no matter that Yokomitsu does not slip into explicitly premodern themes and tropes. The essay does construct continuities: popular novels, with their vibrant narrativity, come from *monogatari*, while the lineage of *junbungaku* has the classical genres of *nikki* and *zuihitsu* as its origins.¹²⁰ This narrative of origins completely erases the traumatic encounter with the otherness of the West in which modern Japanese literature was constituted - and replaces it with identity in a subtle ideological manoeuvre. The internalization of the other implied in '*uchi naru tasha*' can also be read as the incorporation and neutralization of radical otherness: this erasure of difference is one of the paradigmatic epistemological strategies of culturalist discourse. At the end of the essay, Yokomitsu's radical questioning of subjectivity gestures towards *minzoku*, the race, as the sanctified topos which will transcend the crisis of subjectivity, restore the bonds of commonality and heal the ideological fissures of modernism.¹²¹ In an essay published two months after 'Essay on the Pure Novel', 'Sakka no himitsu' (The Secrets of the Writer) the initial conceptual ambiguity of the fourth person gives way to a determinedly ethical articulation. Yokomitsu states that the establishment of a fourth person is not only for writers, i.e. it is not only a narrative device. The fourth person is fundamentally necessary for 'the pursuit of morals' (*dôtoku no tsuikyû*) and 'the beginnings of intelligence' (*richi no kaishi*).¹²² Here we find an atavistic desire for a

¹¹⁸ Karatani, *Kindai Nihon no hihyô I*, p.147.

¹¹⁹ Nakamura Kazue, 'Yokomitsu Riichi', p.185.

¹²⁰ Yokomitsu, 'Junsui shôsetsuron', p.74. The construction of linkages with a native tradition going back to figures like Kamo no Chômei (1155-1216) and Basho (1644-1694) is a persistent motif in the discourse on the *shishôsetsu*. See Lippit, *Topographies*, pp. 26-27.

¹²¹ Yokomitsu, 'Junsui shôsetsuron', pp.78, 79.

¹²² Yokomitsu Riichi, 'Sakka no himitsu', *TYRZ*, vol.13, p. 248.

premodern ethics of commonality that has escaped modern nihilism and the aporias of self-consciousness, a desire which will find its full articulation in *Travel Melancholy*. It is indeed tempting to hail Yokomitsu as a postcolonialist *avant la lettre*, as Nakamura Kazue does, but his presumed revolt against the West employs the essentialist dichotomy of European intellect and Japanese feeling, a major rhetorical device in culturalist writing: Hagiwara Sakutarō's essay 'Nihon e no kaiki' (The Return to Japan, 1937) also revolves around these tropes. Kevin Doak's reading of the pure novel essay is more open to the complexities of its historical moment: Yokomitsu's call for a fusion of the pure and the popular is for Doak symptomatic of a manoeuvre aimed at the erasure of ideological differences and the unification of all Japanese intellectuals around a single hegemonic position.¹²³ Yokomitsu indeed claims that the pure novel has to emerge from Japan: cultural uniqueness will overcome the contradictions of capitalist modernity.

The essay is inscribed with the fundamental tensions of the 1930s: between pure literature and mass culture, between individual subjectivity and a complex reality, between the homogenizing impulses of advanced capitalism and the attempts to recover cultural difference. It is not the closure and the solutions sketched by Yokomitsu, but indeed his problematization of the narrating subject that has meaning for the narrative transgressions enacted by Takami, Ishikawa, and Dazai. In a certain sense, Takami's *Auld Acquaintance* is a fulfilment of Yokomitsu's vision, a decentred universe of radically isolated interiorized characters. If, as Suga Hidemi claims, narrative discourse – in 'The Machine' and as theorised by Yokomitsu in 'Essay on the Pure Novel' – struggles for a certain autonomy, then we can trace definite continuities between them and the works of the three writers which this thesis focuses on: with Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai we have again *narration* itself pushed to the foreground, made visible. Their strategies, however, are at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum: they write the crisis of subjectivity *without* attempting to transcend it and expose the hidden mechanics of narrative representation *without* abandoning it altogether.

¹²³ Doak, Kevin, *Dreams of Difference: The Japan Romantic School and the Crisis of Modernity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994, p.112.

Returns and Repetitions

The two essays by Hayashi Fusao discussed earlier in this chapter captured the dominant mood of the cultural revival; 'liberation of literature from politics' became one of the stock phrases of its discourse. The belief that literature can be autonomous and transcendental, free from ideology, is, of course, profoundly ideological; the essence of the cultural revival lies in this misrecognition. Hirano Ken's interpretation of the discursive dynamics of this peculiar time, the reigning critical orthodoxy in Japanese literary history, is also founded on this belief in the liberation of literature from the constraints of Stalinist ideology. Hirano sees the possibilities of the cultural renaissance in the dissolution of the old oppositions between Marxists, modernists and 'old realists': for him the journal *Bungakukai* is the Japanese variant of the French *front populaire*, the intellectuals uniting against increasingly totalitarian politics and the threatened freedom of speech. Karatani Kôjin has criticized this overly optimistic assessment, with its implicit desire to uncover in the Japanese context currents of resistance similar to those in Europe under the Nazis.¹²⁴ Karatani draws on the devastating critique of the Marxist philosopher Tosaka Jun, who as early as 1935 pointed to the excessively *literary* character of the cultural revival: for Tosaka, even if it is possible to talk about a united popular front, it is confined *within* literature; it does not represent a wider political intervention into the present. This pan-literality of the cultural revival comes from Taisho culturalism and remains an ideologically ambiguous phenomenon.¹²⁵ The proliferation of impressionistic literary essays (*bungeidan*) speaks negatively of the absence of any proper critique. What is published under the guise of philosophy, according to Tosaka, is just literary criticism pretending to be philosophy. This pan-literality is different from aestheticism (*tanbishugi*) or the belief in the supremacy of art (*geijutsu shijôshugi*). The supremacy of art implies a conscious separation between art and the everyday. Contemporary Japanese pan-literality, on the contrary, elevates everyday life and fuses it (*itchi saseru*) with literature.¹²⁶ Everyday reality becomes simply a pretext for literature. Tosaka calls this

¹²⁴ Hirano's interpretation and Karatani's critique can be found in Karatani, *Kindai Nihon no hiho 1: Shôwa hen*, p. 147.

¹²⁵ Tosaka Jun, 'Handôki ni okeru bungaku to tetsugaku', in *Nihon ideorogijiron*, Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1977, pp. 266-79.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p.273.

pan-literary liberalism (*bungakushugiteki jiyûshugi*), probably because he sees it as a compensatory discourse for the lack of any true political liberalism. 'Pan-literary liberalism for the petit-bourgeois intelligentsia, fascism for the lower classes,' is his troublingly negative conclusion.¹²⁷

Literature, in other words, becomes again – in an uncanny repetition of Taisho – a compensatory utopian space for the diminished possibilities of political practice. Culture is sanctified; its material conditions of production are erased. Ironically, this mythologization of culture comes at a time when capitalism and its technologies of reproduction have irrevocably sundered it from tradition. The return of Taisho was almost literal: many established Meiji and Taisho writers, silent during the years dominated by proletarian literature and modernism, not only returned to the literary scene, but also published seminal works: Shimazaki Tôson, who had been serializing *Before the Dawn* since 1929, completed it in 1935; Shiga, probably the quintessential Taisho figure, published the last part of *A Dark Night's Passing* in 1937. 'Shunkinshô' (Portrait of Shunkin, 1933) was hailed by the critics as a sign of Tanizaki's return to form. Nagai Kafû serialized *Hikage no hana* (Flowers in the Shade) in 1934 and *Bokutô kitan* (A Strange Tale from the East of the River) appeared in April 1937. This return of the old masters included also philosophers: 1935 saw the publication of Nishida Kitarô's *Tetsugaku ronbun shûsei* (An Anthology of Philosophical Writings) and Watsuji Tetsurô's *Fudo* (Climate and Culture). Philosophical discourse during the revival had a markedly existentialist slant: the calls for a 'humanization' of Marxism and philosophy in general were symptomatic of the return of vague, abstract Taisho humanism and the erasure of any exteriority, be it Marxism, Asia or language.¹²⁸ The return of the *shishôsetsu* in the guise of *tenkô* confessional writing meant that language was also 'liberated' from the modernist tension between referentiality and opaqueness and again subordinated to 'expression' and 'self-consciousness'. The culturalist aversion to coldly analytic, positivistic knowledge and the emphasis on intuition is an uncanny repetition of figures and tropes which Hasumi Shigehiko has identified as quintessentially Taishoesque. The 'humanization' of

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.277.

¹²⁸ Karatani, *Kindai Nihon no hiyô I*, p.149.

philosophy resonates with Kagawa Toyohiko's (1888-1960) Taisho critique of the Marxist dictum about the forces of production determining forms of culture and its elimination of the human: Kagawa insisted that man is the foundation of all culture.¹²⁹ The new sensationist fusion of subject and object can also be traced back to the Taishoesque resistance to the clear differentiation between them: as Hasumi has argued, even Nishida's philosophy, despite its intellectual sophistication, banishes difference and insists on identity and tautology. The only discovery of difference during Taisho is Yanagi Sôetsu's 'Chôsen no tomo ni okuru sho' (Letter to a Korean Friend, 1920) – compared to it Watsuji's *Koji junrei* (Pilgrimages to Old Temples, 1918) is an unanalytical, emotional eulogy to Japanese beauty.¹³⁰ If the retreat from politics after the Great Treason incident in 1911 meant a turn towards abstract slogans, we can certainly discern a similar obsession with abstract rhetoric after the suppression of Marxism in 1932-3: *jiishiki* or self-consciousness, Yokomitsu's central term in the essay on the pure novel, is one of these vague tropes. Even the excessively textual character of Taishoesque self-cultivation, pointed out by Komori Yôichi prefigures the textualism, or pan-literalism, in Tosaka's terms, of the mid-1930s.

Repetition and return emerged as the master tropes of the cultural revival. Repetition is symptomatic of that longing for meaning, for enduring structures which will counter what Benjamin – and later Benedict Anderson – call the empty, homogenous time of modernity. The essay 'The Return to Japan' by the poet Hagiwara Sakutarô (1886-1942) is steeped in this metaphors of return. The essay uses the figures of Urashima Tarô, of wandering, of the exotic allure of the West as a dragon's castle beyond the sea. Japan's modernization and homelessness are thus described in spatial terms; the time from the Meiji restoration until the mid-1930s is transposed onto space and figured as a journey to the West and back. (As we will see later, this spatiality and the flattening of time are among the major discursive strategies of the cultural revival.) Hagiwara sets up heavily loaded oppositions: Chinese abstract language and Western intelligence against Japanese aestheticism. Early in Japan's history, the internalization of Chinese conceptual

¹²⁹ Hasumi, "'Taishôteki' gensetsu to hihyô", p.134.

¹³⁰ Ibid.p.143.

thought produced the concrete, sensuous art and the masculine lyrical poetry of the Nara period (710-794). The aporia of modernity as well, according to Hagiwara, will be transcended through aesthetics: technology and Western thought will be used for aesthetic purposes: 'Once again, we should be resolved to recover the lost youth of Japan through Western intelligence ... and build a new Japanese culture in the world (*sekaiteki ni atarashii nihon bunka*)'.¹³¹ The analogy between the Western origins of Japanese modernity and the importation of Chinese thought in the sixth century works to construct a cyclical, timeless pattern, an ahistorical characteristic of Japanese culture. The Urashima Tarô metaphor and the military imagery towards the end ('Will someone write a poem for the advancing bugle to match the winning song of the military?') jar oddly with the lyrical language in the rest of the essay.¹³² The military rhetoric is a bit ominous and disconcerting: the essay was published in December 1937, when Japan's military adventures on the continent were already turning into a full-scale war with China.

The discourse of return, however, was anything but monolithic. For more complex thinkers, authentic return was not possible; the past became simply a repository of traditionalist tropes divorced from historical contexts and ready for modernist rearticulation. Tanizaki is probably the most representative of such a strategy. 'Portrait of Shunkin' was hailed by critics as Tanizaki's return to classical Japanese *topoi* and 'pure literature', after the lurid, obsessive explorations of the surfaces of modern life in *Chijin no ai* (A Fool's Love, 1924), and works like *Sannin hōshi* (Three Priests, 1929), which have the stylistic and narrative grammar of popular novels. While at first sight 'Portrait of Shunkin' might appear as an eulogy to a rarefied Japanese aesthetic tradition, its deeper structures remain ambivalent – and even subversive – to the organicist logic of the cultural revival, in which the newly reasserted autonomy of art from politics became aligned with ideas of ethnic and cultural uniqueness. Golley's sophisticated reading of the work locates an equalizing modernist logic at the heart of the text, 'a form of consciousness which abstracts the contents of memory and tradition, in order to magnify their hidden contradictions, to impose upon them the disorder of hierarchical inversions

¹³¹ Hagiwara Sakutarō, 'Nihon e no kaiki', in Muramatsu, *Shōwa hihyō*, vol. 2, p.163.

¹³² *Ibid.* p.164.

and unexpected juxtapositions, dissolving – but also, in the end, reconstructing in ironic configurations – the ideological basis of an originary ethnic identity'.¹³³ There is a mechanism of signification at work in the text which uncovers in a sanctified aesthetic tradition intonations of bizarre sado-masochistic deviance and pollution associated with the outcasts, similarly to the undercurrents of scatology and impurity in Tanizaki's apologia to the quintessentially Japanese aesthetic of shadows, 'In'ei reisan' (In Praise of Shadows, 1933).

Troubled Knowledge

These returns of Taishoesque literature and philosophy were accompanied by an emphasis on those discursive currents in Taisho which rejected the rationalist and utilitarian regime of Meiji, embracing instead intuitive knowledge and an almost mystical expansion of interiority. Revivalist philosophy and cultural critique represent a wholesale attack on the modernizing project of Meiji, its conscious undoing. Enlightenment values were seen to cover relations of power and domination; modernization was revealed to be a profoundly ideological extension of Western hegemony. This rejection of the Meiji project finds a compelling articulation in Yasuda Yojūrō's essay 'Bunmei kaika no ronri no shūen ni tsuite' (On the End of the Logic of Civilization and Enlightenment, 1937). Yasuda takes the contemporary malaise of literature as symptomatic of the decline of thought in general. Literature, he claims, is locked into an endless futile pursuit of the rational (*gōri*) and cannot break free from the mould of intelligence (*chisei*).¹³⁴ For Yasuda, Marxist literature and Marxism in general are the last stages of what he calls 'the logic of civilization and enlightenment' (*bunmei kaika no ronri*). It is the logic of intelligence, but also of simulation and mimicry, of the opportunistic and fragmentary translation of Western thought. The bureaucratism of Meiji is the adaptation of specialised, uncreative (*hisōzōteki*) technological knowledge to Japanese realities. Yasuda firmly rejects any pretence of universalism in imported Western thought; for him it is simply the knowledge regime of a particular historical conjuncture, that of the moment when the West has

¹³³ Golley, *Voices in the Machine*, p. 449.

¹³⁴ Yasuda Yojūrō, 'Bunmei kaika no ronri no shūen ni tsuite', in *Yasuda Yojūrō zenshū* vol.7, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1986, p. 11.

completed the partition of the non-Western world. He sees the rationalist model as dominant, inscribed even within projects which vehemently oppose it, such as the restorationism of the early Meiji years and the official Japanism of the 1930s. For Yasuda, the contemporary exceeds the epistemological boundaries of this regime: on the continent, the Japanese masses have brought into being a new imperial reality, which demands a fundamentally different logic.¹³⁵

The inflections and the figures of the culturalist revolt varied between thinkers and schools, and a brief sketch could only trivialize the complexity and the intellectual sophistication of these powerful critiques of modernity.¹³⁶ What I am aiming for is a structural and rhetorical analysis of the cultural revival; an outline of those broad discursive unities constituting the master-context in which I read the texts of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai. As already encountered in Hagiwara Sakutarō's essay, 'The Return to Japan', culturalism effaced historical time in favour of repetitions and immutable essences, or in Watsuji Tetsurō's concept, *jūsōsei*, stratigraphic layering. It is tempting to read this emergence of space as a conscious gesture of resistance to Marxism and its privileging of the materiality and historicity of being. In her illuminating study of Kuki Shūzō, Leslie Pincus writes that Kuki projected Edo aesthetics and the erotic practices of *iki* as a locus of resistance to modernity: *iki* represented a logic emptied of instrumentality, replacing purposeful love with disinterested free play.¹³⁷ Kuki's strategy for her is based on a transformation of 'the artifactual remainders of a specific historical site into signifiers of a disembodied and "dislocated" metaphysical space'.¹³⁸ Watsuji's explorations of traditional Japanese ethics share a similar spatial epistemology; a conscious attempt to *produce* place at a historical moment when the forces of capitalist and technological rationalization were deterritorialising space and commodifying time. Watsuji's alternative

¹³⁵ Ibid.p.16. Yasuda's essay was published in June 1937, but it uncannily prefigures the surge of popular support for the so-called Chinese incident (*Shina jihen*) – or Marco Polo bridge Incident in July 1937, which marked the transformation of hostilities between China and Japan into an all-out war.

¹³⁶ For an overview, see Tetsuo Najita and H. D. Harootunian, 'Japanese Revolt against the West: Political and Cultural Criticism in the Twentieth Century' in Duus, *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 6, pp. 711-774; about separate schools and individual thinkers see Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*; Doak, *Dreams of Difference*; Karatani, *Kindai Nihon no hiho I*; Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997; Pincus, *Authenticating Culture*.

¹³⁷ Pincus, *Authenticating Culture*, p. 219.

¹³⁸ Ibid.p.219.

to positivism and the tyranny of subject-object dichotomies is intersubjectivity or relationality (*aidagara*) and a view of human existence as bounded by nature. His was a philosophy which reinforced the Heideggerian Being-in-the-world with a notion of the spatiality of being as absolutely determining human consciousness and the ways of life of nations. (Similarly, the Kyoto school philosophers, disciples of Nishida, saw history not only as temporal and chronological, but as spatial and relational. Historical change, they maintained, could not be comprehended without reference to spatial categories such as geography, climate, race, nation and culture.)¹³⁹ In Watsuji's ethics the self was within the embrace of nature: a Taishoesque motif which the culturalism of the 1930s used to construct a pure and irreducibly Japanese *collective* subject unbounded by historicity and untainted by modernization.

In the revivalist critiques of modernity, the world of thought is divided between two mutually irreconcilable ways of thinking: logical reasoning, which was branded traditionally Western, and the local epistemologies of empathy and intuition. For Yanagita Kunio, understanding the common folk (*jōmin*) meant not interpretation, but the exercise of empathizing with their experience.¹⁴⁰ Yanagita's ethnography and Orikuchi Shinobu's theories of the origins of poetry in ritual were also conscious attempts to challenge the monolithic historical vision of Meiji. Meiji knowledge was constituted in a violent repression: older understandings of the past were fractured and abstracted in order to be joined again in the teleological narrative of the nation. It was exactly these forms of centralized knowledge which Yanagita and Orikuchi were trying to undo in their emphasis on the local, the particular and the marginal, on fragments unmobilized by the relentless homogenization of the nation-state.

The intellectual revolt against the historical teleologies and the instrumental reason of Meiji finds its most compelling articulation in the symposium on overcoming modernity, despite the fact that it took place in September 1942, almost a year after the beginning of

¹³⁹ Naoki Sakai, 'Modernity and Its Critique: The Problem of Universalism and Particularism', in Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian (eds), *Postmodernism and Japan*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1989, p. 106.

¹⁴⁰ Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, p.323.

the Pacific War. The unravelling of historical temporality and the resurgence of anti-rationalist knowledge, together with the crisis of language and meaning, left a profound mark on the cultural production of the 1930s. I will argue that the dislocations of narrative in the texts of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai, the breakdown in representation and subjectivity, should be read in this context. My reason to include here close-ups of some interventions from the symposium is because *rhetorically* they intersect with the writings of Yokomitsu and Kawabata discussed earlier; the rarefied aesthetic discourses of figures like Kobayashi Hideo, Kamei Katsuichirō and Kawakami Tetsutarō also have a disturbing resonance with the radical right's visions of presence and immediacy which will be discussed further in this study. Thirteen prominent intellectuals took part in the symposium; most of them had produced important and in a sense representative work during the years of the cultural revival. The debate did not present a unified vision of the modern and of the task of transcending it; the voices varied from the openly anti-western and pro-war Japanist rhetoric of Hayashi Fusao and Kamei Katsuichirō, to Nakamura Mitsuo's sceptical explorations of the condition of modernity.¹⁴¹

The commodification and emptying out of language as a symptom of the loss of the wholeness of experience emerges as a major theme in the texts of Nishitani Keiji and Kamei Katsuichirō. Nishitani focuses on the relentless movement of modern knowledge towards autonomization and the differentiation of practices into sharply separate domains. These processes brought about a loss of totality and are to be blamed for the proliferation of fractured, incomplete representations. The crucial thing about the importation of Western culture in Japan was, according to Nishitani, the fact that all fields of culture were imported disparately, without any relation between them. This was so because Western culture itself was already fragmented, compartmentalized into specialized fields. It had already lost wholeness and relationality; it lacked a centre. The foundation of knowledge, which made possible a unified worldview, was already disintegrating. Nishitani also emphasized the scientization of the humanities, their penetration by

¹⁴¹ For detailed analyses on the symposium, see Takeuchi Yoshimi's classic *Kindai no chōkoku*, (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1983); Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, pp.34-94; Yumiko Iida, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan : Nationalism as Aesthetics*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 25-66; Karatani Kōjin, 'Overcoming Modernity' in Richard Calichman (ed.), *Contemporary Japanese Thought*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, pp.101-18.

positivism and the principles of instrumental knowledge: his example is psychology, which looks at the phenomena of consciousness purely functionally, and relates psychic experience to physiology.¹⁴²

A similar critical position was taken by Kamei Katsuichirō during the roundtable discussion. Kamei insisted that one of the fundamental flaws of Japan's post-Meiji civilization was the loss of human wholeness (*zenjinsei*). Various fields of culture became fragmented to the extreme; knowledge became professionalized, leading to the emergence of academic pedants totally alienated from an ignorant public. In order to succeed in their field, scholars and scientists became mere functionaries of knowledge, specialists who lost sight of the universal.¹⁴³ In the essay he submitted to the symposium, Kamei focuses at length on the fall of language, cheapened both by the slogans of the left and the clichés of journalism. This crisis of language was symptomatic of a profound malaise of the spirit. A renewal of spirit is necessary after the defeat of communism in Japan, Kamei claimed, making clear the connection between the failure of radical politics and the rise of culturalism during the 1930. Modernity and the utilitarian civilization of Meiji had violated the depths of the Japanese spirit: civilization (*bunmei*) is opposed to spirit (*seishin*).¹⁴⁴ Modernity, according to Kamei, is the worst enemy, because the Japanese have internalized it. The specialized language of current affairs and ideas is some kind of pernicious, alien *argot*. Words have become divorced from perceptual and human truth – before they had poetry and beauty and were organically linked to human experience. While the characters written with a brush are rooted in sensuous experience, the printed word is completely alienated – even characters written by pen have lost their mystical connotations. Gesturing towards a non-analytical hermeneutic of identification and tautology, Kamei insists that the classics should not be analysed: their infinite feeling (*omoi*) should just be conveyed beautifully to others.¹⁴⁵ He blames the massification and homogenization of culture for this violation of the original beauty and sublimity of words. An instrumental view of language is one of the most vulgar of Western imports,

¹⁴² Nishitani Kenji, 'Kindai no chōkoku shiron', in Kawakami Tetsutarō and Takeuchi Yoshimi (eds), *Kindai no chokoku*, Kyoto: Fuzanbō, 1979, pp.18-37.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-235.

¹⁴⁴ Kamei Katsuichirō, 'Gendai seishin ni kansuru oboegaki' in *Ibid.*, pp. 4-17.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.8

completely alien to the Japanese tradition. For Kamei, the only language which penetrates straight to the heart of the people is poetry – and the language of the imperial rescripts.¹⁴⁶

If journalistic clichés rob the poetry of language, mediatization destroys the aura of sublime, authentic experience. A heroic deed on the battlefield is immediately converted into radio broadcasts, newsreels, feature films and other forms of popular culture. For Kamei this decline of sensibility is related to the rise of film and photography. While the older arts, such as literature, painting and sculpture, have their particular limits, film and photography do not know their limits – man might end up being overcome by machine.¹⁴⁷ At the end of the essay Kamei asserts that the war will be the cure of the spiritual malaise of modern civilization: 'Peace is more dreadful than war... Better the war of kings rather than the peace of slaves!'¹⁴⁸ Throughout his text, Kamei uses the word *yosooi* (pretence, simulacrum) for Japan's modernity – and it is certainly this mimicry, the idea of Japanese modernity as a secondary gesture, that emerges as one of the recurrent motifs of the symposium. Kamei is not, however, fully aligned with official discourse: he criticizes Japanese state propaganda which remains within the paradigm of rationalism, of superficial modern alienated knowledge. What Kamei envisages is an authentic, radical return; he does not express any doubts about its possibility, no irony can be detected. In the discussion, Kamei also insists that the Japanese have lost communion with their gods, *kami*, because of the destructive influence of modern thought and the penetration of science. What is necessary is to retrieve religious faith itself, not academic commentaries and interpretations of that faith. There is no other way to overcome modernity, Kamei claims, apart from belief in the *kami*.¹⁴⁹

On his part Kawakami Tetsutarô stresses the opposition between Japanese blood (*chi*), which should drive the intellectual activities of the Japanese, and Western intellectualism (*chisei*), which has been structuring modern Japanese thought. Firmly confident in the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p.9.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p.12.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁴⁹ Kawakami and Takeuchi, *Kindai no chōkoku*, pp. 200-201.

superiority of blood over intellect, Kawakami even hints that the European predecessor of the Japanese symposium failed because it accepted the separation of flesh and knowledge.¹⁵⁰ The opposition between Japanese blood and cold Western rationality is indeed one of the most potent metaphors of the *zadankai*. Knowledge should not be cerebral and intellectualized: as Kobayashi Hideo also stressed, ideas or literature should not be thought in the head, but felt in the flesh.¹⁵¹ Kobayashi rejects conceptual scrutiny in favour of intuitive aestheticism vis-à-vis works of art and literature. For him, as for Kamei, who located in the classics an irreducible essence of feeling inaccessible to analytical reason, works of art and aesthetic practices from the past had escaped the mediations of society and history. In the roundtable discussion, Kobayashi talks about aesthetic epiphanies outside linear time, immune from history. For him the history of modern Japanese literature is a history of misreading of western literature; the failures of positivistic approaches are becoming clear in the present. Kobayashi's example is Dostoyevsky: he attacks the sociohistorical analyses of the Russian writer's work, arguing that Dostoyevsky was not concerned with contemporary Russian society: on the contrary, he was trying to *overcome* the contemporary: he discovered the Russian people (*kokumin*) and the Russian God.¹⁵² Kobayashi obliquely quotes Marx – without acknowledging it – in stating that Western modernity is a tragedy; Japan's, a hasty imitation of that, can only be a farce. Studying the social or historical conditions in which a particular work of art was produced means only studying the dregs, the empty shells left after an author has transcended his age. This method, according to Kobayashi, cannot reveal to us the spirit of the writer. Modern conceptualizations of history place too heavy an emphasis on change, and historical knowledge has become nothing but a theorization of change. What we need instead, Kobayashi asserts, is a theory of timelessness, of unchanging patterns, of the eternal.¹⁵³ We need *feeling* for the greatness of art, not interpretation: the works of art from the Kamakura era (1185-1333) are in front of our

¹⁵⁰ Ironically, the Japanese symposium was modelled after a series of discussions on the future of culture organised by the League of Nation's Committee on Arts and Letters, held in different countries in Europe and South America between 1932 and 1938 and chaired by Paul Valéry. Some of its early proceedings were published in two volumes, *The Future of the European Spirit* and *The Formation of the Modern Man*, which were translated into Japanese in 1936 and 1937.

¹⁵¹ Kawakami and Takeuchi, *Kindai no chōkoku*, p. 246.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 218.

¹⁵³ Kawakami and Takeuchi, *Kindai no chokoku*, pp.219-20. .

eyes; theirs is an independent, self-sufficient beauty which transcends our criticism and interpretation, and the same is true to the sensibility and the customs and ways of life in the Kamakura era.¹⁵⁴ The traces of the ancients are the norm (*kihantekina mono*) for the modern artist; when the artist confronts his material, time stands still and history becomes the eternity of the classics.¹⁵⁵

For Kobayashi Hideo and Kamei Katsuichirô, affective identification and not conceptual analysis was the proper stance towards the aesthetic masterpieces of the past. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the desire to transcend subject-object dichotomies and the foregrounding of perception at the expense of other cognitive processes was also one of the distinguishing features of early Showa modernism. The fundamentally ambiguous ideological contours of new sensationism mean that there are more continuities between the abject spaces of Yokomitsu's *Shanghai* and the rarefied landscapes of cultural uniqueness constructed by 1930s discourse. The loss of clearly marked boundaries between subject and object signified a profound shift in knowledge production and was directly related to the alternative epistemologies of empathy. Empathetic identification meant a rejection of representation *qua* discursive mediation. There was an unhealable fracture between being and meaning (representation in language). Words had fallen apart, commodified by advertising and journalistic clichés and cheapened by the slogans of both left and right. As Kevin Doak has suggested, in the case of the Japanese romantics, distrust of representation lead to an emphasis on myth, poetry and the sublime, forms which promised greater totalization.¹⁵⁶ The epiphanies of Kobayashi and Kamei transcend historical time and flux of modernity; their interventions posit the aesthetic as the privileged idiom of the nation. This domination of the aesthetic – what Karatani Kôjin formulates as the elevation of the beautiful and the affective (*nasake*) against the rational (*chi*) and the ethical (*zen*) – in many ways defines the cultural revival.¹⁵⁷ The suspicion towards the oppressive totalities of the Enlightenment lead, ironically, to the construction of alternative aesthetic totalities.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.223.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.231.

¹⁵⁶ Doak, *Dreams of Difference*, p. xxxv.

¹⁵⁷ Karatani, *Kindai Nihon no hihyô* I, p.166.

In his study of the emergence of the aesthetic in the Western philosophical tradition, Terry Eagleton emphasises its compensatory position *outside* Enlightenment reason: 'art appears to speak of the human and the concrete, offering a respite from the alienating rigours of more specialised discourses and a common world among the explosion of the division of knowledges'.¹⁵⁸ *Aisthicos*, as Susan Buck-Morss reminds us, is the ancient Greek word for that which is perceptive by feeling; which belongs to the sensory world. The original field of aesthetics was not art, but reality: it meant a form of cognition achieved through taste, touch, hearing, seeing, smell, the whole corporeal sensorium.¹⁵⁹ With the dawn of modernity and its relentless logic of abstraction, the aesthetic became gradually confined to the domain of art, with an emphasis on that most abstract of the senses, vision. It did, however, retain its particularity, its origins in the corporeal. As such, the aesthetic can represent the *excess of modernity*, that which cannot be articulated within the discourses of reason. The aesthetic remains inherently ambivalent, like the uncanny, that conduit to the obscene and horrific underside of modernity.¹⁶⁰ The abject spaces of Yokomitsu's *Shanghai* – the putrid alleys, the boats full of excrement – and the rarefied landscapes of cultural difference in his *Travel Melancholy*, paradoxically belong to the same logic of *excess*, of that which must be excluded in for modernity to constitute itself. The domination of the aesthetic in 1930s cultural discourse is understandable: its origins in the particular and the corporeal, its ability to absorb excess, make it a very potent site for anti-modern, anti-rationalist revolt. The search for a new form of *sensory* cognition, for non-alienated knowledge, runs through the new sensationist obsession with perception to the debates on overcoming modernity. In 1930s Japan the resurgences of the aesthetic in the public sphere could help tame political energies and displace social antagonisms. Most of the culturalists, including romantics such as Yasuda and Kamei, were not aligned with official Japanism and often opposed its simplifications and the crass propaganda techniques. Figures such as Yasuda would claim to be absolutely

¹⁵⁸ Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics', p.6.

¹⁶⁰ In his analysis of the uncanny in Freud and Lacan (both of whom avoid explicitly historicizing this potent and at the same time ambiguous psychoanalytic trope), Mladen Dolar locates its origins in the particular historical rupture brought about by the Enlightenment. According to Dolar, 'there is a specific dimension of the uncanny that emerges with modernity', and its irruption parallels the rise of scientific rationality and the Kantian establishment of transcendental subjectivity. (Mladen Dolar, "'I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding Night": Lacan and the Uncanny', *October*, 58 (1991), p.7, emphasis in original)

unconcerned with politics, and their obsession with the aesthetic would seem to support these claims. But there is nothing more ideological than the claim to be outside ideology. Alan Tansman has uncovered in the fundamentally apolitical writings of Kawabata, Shiga and Yasuda what he calls 'moments of repose' which transcend the linear movement of time and in which a perceptual apparatus shattered by modernity can become whole again.¹⁶¹ In Kawabata's *Snow Country*, aesthetic experience is again presented as transcending reason and seducing one away from intellectual analysis. In all three writers, according to Tansman, moments of aesthetic wholeness are tinged with violence.¹⁶² No matter how fundamentally apolitical these epiphanies might be, they resonate disturbingly with the 1940s imaging of death on the battlefield as an aesthetic experience: the erasure of the self and its dissolution in the ultimate community of death, or *ichioku gyokusai*, 'the total suicide of the one hundred million', as the ubiquitous slogan from the last days of war had it.

By no means an exhaustive discussion, this chapter was an attempt to bring to the foreground the major material trends and the discursive currents in which I situate the texts of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai. As stated in the beginning, my aim has been to map some intersections between the discursive and the material, history and text, and to stress those crucial unities which go against the grain of orthodox literary histories. On the level of language and representation, the old opposition between early Showa Marxism and the modernism of the new sensationists becomes untenable: their texts constitute a certain rupture from Taishoesque epistemologies of surface and depth, expression and interiority. There emerges a new consciousness of language as *material*, but at the same time capable of conveying meaning. This newly found semi-autonomy of representation, together with the logic of montage and the loosening of narrative unity would affect cultural practices and regimes of knowledge. I should stress again that this disintegration of the discursive landscape of Taisho should not be disengaged from the workings of advanced capitalism. If, as Baudrillard has argued, 'the logic of the commodity and of political economy is at the heart of the sign, in the abstract equation of

¹⁶¹ Alan Tansman, 'Images of Repose and Violence in Three Japanese Writers', *Journal of Japanese Studies* 1 (2002), p.110.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p.109.

signifier and signified', then the linguistic materiality of modernism and the questioning of the traditional humanist subject are not unrelated to the cognitive and psychic effects of these processes.¹⁶³ The only way to go beyond the futility which Jameson, in the epigraph to this chapter, ascribes to the opaque modernist text, is to force it confront the material conditions of its formation.

In Japan, the dynamic of the Showa aesthetic revolution would remain fundamentally contradictory and ambiguous, inscribed with the ideological faultlines of both modernism and literary Marxism. The new sensationist rejection of traditional subject-object dichotomies, their emphasis on intuition, immediacy and sensory knowledge would become the central tropes of the more reactionarily inflected discourses of the cultural revival. The new sensationist – and later culturalist – critique of oppressive Enlightenment reason would give way to the affirmation of Japan as an absolute irreducible essence. With Marxism, the early radical experimentation and the new emphasis on subjectivity as constructed in a network of economic and social relations, would be replaced by 'proletarian realism', and later, by a return to the aesthetics of the *shishōsetsu* and its naïve humanism.

Although it would be difficult to trace direct influences (however problematic this term might be), Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai – and the other young writers who came of age in the charged decade of the 1930s – were deeply affected by the new sensationist revolution. The works discussed in the subsequent chapters of this thesis share a common modernist stance in their explorations of subjectivity, language and representation; in their critical engagements with the rhetorical grammar of the *shishōsetsu*. Their formal strategies are strikingly close to the ones offered by Yokomitsu as examples of new sensationist writing: dislocations of temporality and distortions of linear narrativity; an emphasis on the materiality of language achieved through an excess of narration and the loss of narrative content proper. These formal continuities do not only demonstrate the importance of the rupture of early Showa, but also embody the contradictory ideological impulses at the heart of the new sensationist project. In the texts

¹⁶³ Jean Baudrillard, 'For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign', in Mark Poster (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p.81.

of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai, these strategies become figures of resistance: to the culturalist erasure of representation in favour of the metaphysics of timeless Japaneseness; to the atavistic re-emergence of *kotodama*, the plenitude of an original language before the ravages of alienation, as exemplified by Yokomitsu and Yasuda Yojûrô. The violent disruptions of identity enacted on both thematic and formal level in these texts should also be seen against the background of the return of the organic self of the *shishôsetsu*, and the profound crisis of subjectivity brought about by the *tenkô* conversions. The cultural revival brought indeed a mythologization of literature – but what we have in the works of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai is instead literature as *convention*: truth is exposed as an effect of literary artifice, and the sheer production of sentences without any fixed point of reference is pitted against romantic ideas of literature as the auratic creation of the national spirit.

Takami Jun and the Politics of Representation

Feeling, imagination, the priority of local affections and unarguable allegiances, a subliminally nurturing cultural tradition: these things, from Burke and Coleridge to Yeats and T.S. Eliot, are effectively confiscated by political reaction. The political left is then doubly disabled: if it seeks to evolve its own discourse of place, body, inheritance, sensuous need, it will find itself miming the cultural forms of its opponents; if it does not do so it will appear bereft of a body, marooned with a purely rationalist politics that has cut loose from the intimate affective depths of the poetic.

Terry Eagleton, 'Nationalism: Irony and Commitment'

Takami Jun's *Auld Acquaintance* strikes the reader as a verbose, shapeless, at times irritatingly digressive work. Its main characters are old friends from higher school whose lives get intertwined again years later, after they have all drifted away from the passionate Marxist politics of their youth.¹ The focus which binds the disparate strands of the narrative together in the last two chapters of the novel is the suicide of another school friend, Sawamura Minoru. Death is a classic narrative topos: as Benjamin tells us, 'a man's real life – and this is the stuff stories are made of – first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death'.² In *Auld Acquaintance*, death does indeed provide some sort of symbolic closure and intelligibility as Sawamura is the only character whose life is told as a straightforward coherent narrative: the fierce thirst with which he swallowed Marxist theory at school; his participation in the radical student organization at Tokyo Imperial University, the Society of New Men (*Shinjinkai*); his involvement in the labour movement as an agitator, which lead to his arrest and imprisonment; the declaration of *tenkô* and the subsequent release; his return to normal middle-class life

¹ The so-called higher school (*kôtô gakkô*) was a unique feature of the Japanese education system before the war. University education actually took place in two completely different institutions, the higher school and the university. While university education was professional, utilitarian and unemotional, the three-year higher school had a liberal curriculum which emphasized individual fulfilment and encouraged self-expression. It was, as Henry Smith writes, an environment in which student radicalism flourished. (Henry Smith, *Japan's First Student Radicals*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972, p. 8.

² Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov' in *Illuminations*, p. 93.

and then the shock of his suicide. The proper story of Sawamura's life, however, only serves to emphasize negatively the fragmented, elliptical manner in which the lives of the other characters of *Auld Acquaintance* are presented. The text does not dwell on their years at university and is silent about the traumatic moment of *tenkô*, the event which has ruptured their lives. This refusal to construct an intelligible narrative of the lives of the characters is accompanied by all kinds of distortions of linear temporality. There are even some reflexive close-ups of the discontinuities in the supposedly organic selves of the characters; at times the readers find themselves suspended between accepting them as 'real' and their exposure as simply the fictional constructs of a capricious narrator.

Auld Acquaintance does come across as a text which openly flaunts the conventions of literary realism and it can be baffling why it has been persistently treated as a *tenkô* novel, or even as a *shishôsetsu*. *Tenkô* literature remains a vague and protean term: Honda Shûgô defines it broadly, focusing on its thematic preoccupation either with the problem of ideological reversal in general, or with the *tenkô* experience of a particular writer.³ Very diverse texts can be grouped together on the basis of the biographical author's experience of *tenkô*. Murayama Tomoyoshi's *Byakuya* (White Nights, 1934), *Rai* (Leprosy, 1934) by Shimaki Kensaku (1903-1945), *Ame no ashita* (A Rainy Tomorrow, 1934) and *Mura no ie* (The House in the Village, 1935), both by Nakano Shigeharu, are often cited as the best examples of *tenkô* writing. They all narrate the writer's own experience in thinly disguised autobiographical form and remain within the rhetorical structures of the *shishôsetsu*. The flood of such *tenkô* confessional novels after the suppression of the Marxist movement stunned the literary establishment and prompted Nakamura Mitsuo to hurl some angry questions in an essay published in 1935: 'Was it not you, the proletarian writers, who most boldly crushed, or attempted to crush, this tradition of the *shishôsetsu*? Did you, gentlemen, abandon your literary theory together with your so-called political position?'⁴

³ Honda Shûgô, *Tenkô bungakuron*, Tokyo: Miraisha, 1972, p.187.

⁴ Nakamura Mitsuo, 'Tenkô sakkaron', in Muramatsu, *Shôwa hihyô talkei*, vol.1, p.315.

Takami Jun did write a *tenkô* declaration when he was arrested and thrown into prison in 1932. He was threatened by a police agent boasting that he had tortured Kobayashi Takiji.⁵ Days after his release, his wife left him for a rich older man. Takami described the experiences in a *shishôsetsu*-like story titled *Kanjô* (Feelings, 1933). The scandal of this personal history partly explains why the little critical writing on *Auld Acquaintance* has obsessively attempted to uncover beneath its chaotic, meandering narrative the simple structures of autobiographical fiction. Umemoto Masayuki, for example, claims that in each character it is possible to see a different side of Takami the author; for him *Auld Acquaintance* is 'a private confession', its meaning found in the earnestness and depth of the disclosure.⁶ Takami's masochism (*jigyaku*), which supposedly led him to depict less likeable sides of his personality in the characters, is another recurrent motif. In one of the earliest critical essays on Takami, Hirano Ken persistently references the work with biographical details and calls it 'literature of self-blasphemy and self-regeneration'.⁷ Isogai Hideo is also preoccupied with the question of which characters, and to what extent, Takami projects himself onto. Everything about the work is attributed to Takami's peculiar upbringing: Takami grew up poor in the rich Yamanote area of Tokyo, the illegitimate son of Sakamoto Sannosuke, governor of Fukui and *kanshi* poet (who was actually Nagai Kafû's uncle, which makes Takami and Kafû cousins). Isogai even goes so far as to accuse Takami of exaggerating his private issues into the aporias of the intelligentsia in general, of universalizing his pathetic problems. The intrusive narration points for Isogai towards the premodern tradition of *gesaku*, but there is again a purely psychological explanation for it: the shock of *tenkô* and the elopement of his wife. It is hinted that this traumatic experience prevented Takami from achieving a proper realist novel.⁸ These are readings which exemplify the interpretive paradigm within which *tenkô* literature has been approached: the text is reduced to a secondary gesture, to a simple and reliable document of the writer's *tenkô* experience. In the case of *Auld Acquaintance*, such readings either marginalize the idiosyncratic formal structures of the work, or like Isogai, find extratextual, biographical explanations for them.

⁵ Ishimitsu Shigeru, *Takami Jun: hito to sakuhin*, Tokyo: Shimizu shoin, 1969, p.57.

⁶ Umemoto Masayuki, *Takami Jun kenkyû*, Tokyo: Izumi shoin, 2002, p. 14.

⁷ Hirano Ken, 'Kaisetsu' in Takami Jun, *Kokyû wasureubeki*, vol.1 of *Takami Jun sôsho*, Tokyo: Rokkô shuppansha, 1949, p. 341.

⁸ Isogai Hideo, 'Kokyû wasureubeki', *Nihon kindai bungaku* 4 (1966), pp. 38-50.

In his seminal *Tenkô bungakuron* ('An Essay on *Tenkô* Literature', 1957), Honda Shûgô notes that *Auld Acquaintance* deviates from the confessional mode of the *shishôsetsu*. But Honda remains critical because for him the work shows too much interest in *fûzoku* (customs and mores); in city life and its spaces of desire: bars, cafés, department stores; in the hedonistic fashions and attitudes of an intelligentsia robbed of political expression. In the symbolic economy of pre-war Japanese fiction, a preoccupation with customs and mores meant an affinity with popular writing rather than 'pure' literature. Honda even expresses doubts about whether Takami, with his sharpened sensibility for the pleasures of city life, could at all become a proletarian writer. The implication again is that *Auld Acquaintance* is not confessional and not realistic enough. Nevertheless, for Honda the work remains 'one of the high peaks of *tenkô* literature', its form symbolically enacting 'the collapse of the foundations of a certain world-view', a collapse that led to 'an explosion of self-consciousness' (*ninshiki no happô yabure*).⁹ Other critics who have touched on the form of the work consider the verbose style and the intrusive narration to be the inevitable (*yamu o enai*) expression of the spirit of that desperate time.¹⁰ Such readings still assume a direct, almost deterministic connection between a reality shattered in pieces and fragmented textual form; realist narrative remains the norm which the work was striving for but somehow failed to achieve: again the cultural paradigm of the *shishôsetsu* in which form remains secondary, subordinated to thematic concerns.

The only critical position which brings to the foreground the formal inventions of the novel and acknowledges them as conscious gestures of resistance to realist representation is that of the writer and critic Nakamura Shin'ichirô (1918-1997). For him *Auld Acquaintance* is 'more or less the first realization of the twentieth-century novel in Japan'. The twentieth-century novel, according to Nakamura, is the novel after Dostoyevsky which reaches its pinnacle with Joyce and Proust. These three writers radically changed the nineteenth-century realist novel of Balzac and Dickens: they destroyed the illusion of the organic unity of character. The unity of a novelistic character, his or her 'depth', the continuity of

⁹ Honda, *Tenkô bungakuron*, p. 209.

¹⁰ Takeda Rintarô, '*Kokyû wasureubeki kaisetsu*', in *Takami Jun zenshû bekkann*, Tokyo: Keisô shobô, 1977, p. 132.

identity, were exposed as nothing but the conventions of an outdated literary mode.¹¹ Nakamura gives us some clues about this striking gap between the established view of *Auld Acquaintance* and his own reading of it. Even Kobayashi Hideo's view of the genre of the novel, as sophisticated and formidably erudite a critic as he was, was weighted towards the *shishōsetsu*; his stance exemplified a romantic attitude which saw behind the text the soul of the writer. Kobayashi, according to Nakamura, did not think that the problem of form belongs to the domain of literature proper.¹² While other critics have generally attempted to place Takami in a native genealogy, criticizing him, like Isogai, for regressing back to the premodern idiom of *gesaku* or pointing to writers like Uno Kōji (1881-1961) and Satomi Ton (1888-1983) as predecessors of the verbose narrator in *Auld Acquaintance*, Nakamura argues that behind *Auld Acquaintance* one should see Thackeray: the presence of a narrator who openly manipulates the characters like marionettes, as a conscious challenge to the modern novel's illusion of interiorised selves and transparent narration, and even the theme of vanity – leftist vanity, in Takami's case.¹³ It should be stressed that Nakamura Shin'ichirō's understanding of the novel is not bound by native tradition; his frame of reference is formed by European and Anglo-American literature. While standard literary histories place Tayama Katai's confessional 'Futon' (The Quilt, 1907) at the origins of Japanese naturalism, Nakamura gives as early examples of the 'proper' novel (*honkaku shōsetsu*, a term used to differentiate it from *shishōsetsu*) authors and works which are marginal in the established canon of modern Japanese literature: *Kuroshio* (Black Tide, 1903), Tokutomi Roka's (1868-1927) attempt at a wide political and social panorama; *Seishun* (Youth, 1893-94), a work by Oguri Fuyō (1875-1926) exploring the dilemmas of the young intelligentsia in the third decade of Meiji, written in the manner of Turgenev; *Aiyoru tamashii* (Gathering Spirits, 1921-24), an autobiographical novel by Ikuta Shungetsu (1892-1930), poet, critic and translator strongly drawn to the nihilism of Nietzsche and later, to anarchist politics: these are for Nakamura much more important than Katai's 'Futon'.¹⁴ Nakamura also points out that while at the First Higher School Takami was infatuated with Dada and founded a Dadaist

¹¹ Nakamura Shin'ichirō, *Sengo bungaku no kaisō*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō 1983, pp. 20-21.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹³ Nakamura Shin'ichirō, Tamura Ryūichi and Isoda Kōichi, 'Zadankai Shōwa bungaku: Takami Jun', *Gunzō*, September 1975, p. 279.

¹⁴ Nakamura, *Sengo bungaku*, p.17.

coterie journal called *Kaiten jidai* (Revolving Age). He was one of the few left-leaning writers who did not dismiss avant-garde art – Dadaism, constructivism, new sensationism – as bourgeois decadence.¹⁵

Like Nakamura Shin'ichirō, we can find purely biographical evidence that Takami was a writer interested in literary experimentation and modernist technique. In an early article written while he was involved in the proletarian literature movement, Takami argues that the inherited bourgeois art forms cannot contain the voice of the proletariat, and that it is therefore necessary to crush these forms. Takami's view that art as an establishment and the refined culture accumulated by the bourgeoisie should be destroyed is precisely that of the avant-garde. He emphasizes that the proletarian movement and the literary avant-garde together, side by side, should forcefully reject bourgeois art; he theorizes avant-garde art as a stage in the growth of the proletariat's will to self-expression.¹⁶ Marxism and modernism are not conceived as an implacable opposition; rather, this is a call for an Oedipal revolt, an intoxicating delight in the anarchic destruction of established values, artistic or political. Later essays – the seminal 'Byōsha no ushiro ni nete irarenai' (One Cannot Just Lie Back Behind Description, 1936), 'Riaritii to riarizumu' (Reality and Realism, 1946) 'Bungaku to genjitsu' (Literature and Reality, 1947), among others – present a view of realism as inseparable from the positivistic epistemologies dominating the nineteenth century and not entirely adequate a mode for the loss of common sensibilities and the shattered faith in objective reality which mark the contemporary condition. Objectivity can no longer be taken for granted. The emphasis should not be on observing and faithfully recording an exterior reality, but on constructing an alternative reality intrinsic to the work, with its own *raison d'être* (Takami's example is cubism). In the modernist texts of Wolfe and Joyce subjective narration and the expansion of psychic interiority have replaced the objective certainties of third-person narration in the classic realist novel.¹⁷

¹⁵ Nakamura, Tamura and Isoda, 'Zadankai', p. 273.

¹⁶ Takami Jun, 'Wagakuni ni okeru sentan geijutsu undō ni kansuru ichikōsatsu', *Takami Jun zenshū*, vol. 13, pp. 36-46. The essay originally appeared in 1928, in *Daigaku saha* (Academic Left Wing), a coterie magazine published by students at Tokyo Imperial University.

¹⁷ Takami Jun, 'Byōsha no ushiro ni nete irarenai', *Takami Jun zenshū* vol. 13, pp. 137-9; 'Riaritii to riarizumu' in *ibid.*, pp. 461-8; 'Bungaku to genjitsu' in *ibid.*, pp. 389-99.

It is indeed possible to trace in Takami's essays a heightened awareness of the aesthetics of modernism. We can also point out the fact that similarly to Nakamura Shin'ichirō, Takami's view of fiction is not bound by a native genealogy; his frame of reference for both realism and modernism is the Anglo-American tradition (he was a graduate of the English department of Tokyo University). We can probably unearth in his letters and essays purely biographical evidence to support the assertion that the verbose style and the fragmented narrative of *Auld Acquaintance* are conscious aesthetic strategies, not expressions of an anguished authorial persona or failed attempts at proper realism. To rely on this organic, self-evident unity between the biographical author and his writing, however, is to remain within the hermeneutics of the *shishōsetsu* and its *heimlich* certainties. The aim of this study is to push to the foreground other, less obvious and less naturalized convergences between the text and its larger discursive and material contexts. The unravelling of temporality and the deconstruction of narrative authority performed by *Auld Acquaintance* betrays a concern with broader issues of representation and subjectivity. The formal structures of the work, I argue, are symptomatic of the historical aporias of the 1930s, and in order to grasp their meanings, we need to situate Takami's text in a field of discourse: the crisis of subjectivity brought on by *tenkō* and the profoundly reactionary politics of representation embraced by a resurgent romanticism.

Narrative Transgressions, Temporal Perversions

An outline of the plot of *Auld Acquaintance* is probably due, although any attempt to construct a coherent narrative will do violence to this digressive and hyperretrospective text. Ozeki Kenji is a graduate of Tokyo University working in a shabby company publishing English dictionaries and bemoaning the mediocrity of his life: his cheap dark house; the obsession with daily economies which structures the daily lives of his mother and his wife. While receiving treatment for alopecia at a hospital, Ozeki runs into Shinohara, a friend from higher school. Confident, arrogant, popular with women, Shinohara is everything Ozeki is not. Shinohara takes Ozeki to the Ginza bar where Akiko, his current love interest, works. In the following weeks Ozeki meets two other old

classmates, Tomonari and Matsushita, and the novel then devotes three whole chapters to their time in higher school. All four got involved with a group studying leftist thought, although Tomonari did not like the radical denunciation of art as the enemy of Marxism and together with Shinohara left the group to start a Dadaist literary journal. Following new directives about 'thought guidance' from the Ministry of Education, school authorities ordered the social studies group to disband. At the last meeting of the group Matsushita, in a fit of blind rage, threw out the school official supervising the gathering. Tomonari gave a passionate speech and as a sign of protest submitted an empty sheet at the year end exams. When they meet years later, there is an air of gloomy decadence around them; it seeps out even from the exuberant dandyism of Shinohara. Matsushita, also a Tokyo University graduate, but working as an insurance salesman, invites Ozeki to go out drinking with him, with the hope of persuading him to buy insurance. Shinohara's feelings towards Akiko cool down and she reluctantly accepts Ozeki's attentions. The news of Sawamura's suicide brings a wry recognition of how hollow life is for them all. The narrative closes with a memorial gathering for Sawamura, the characters singing 'Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot' in honour of their dead friend.

Yokomitsu Riichi's general critique of the *shishōsetsu* in his 'Essay on the Pure Novel' included an attack on the claustrophobic expansion of one interiority, that of the narrator-protagonist, a deformation of perspective which can make the other characters appear flattened and one-dimensional. Yokomitsu emphasizes the need for a decentred narrative perspective which would present a number of characters as autonomous subjectivities. In some ways, the narrative universe of *Auld Acquaintance* with its radically isolated interiorities is a fulfilment of Yokomitsu's vision. All of the main characters – Ozeki, Shinohara, Matsushita, Akiko – are endowed with a complex interiority and psychological depth. This effect is achieved through narrative modalities which emphasize agency and autonomy. We have transcendental, omniscient narration; we also have focalized narration, in Genette's terms, which adopts the perspective of a character. This focalization is varied, not confined to a single point of view. Sometimes the beginning of a new chapter is accompanied by a shift in focalization: the first three chapters are centred on Ozeki, while chapter four is narrated predominantly through Shinohara's perspective.

There are also changes in focalization *within* chapters, as well as intense situations in which abrupt shifts of perspective occur – like the first date of Shinohara and Akiko:

This woman has fallen for me, he thought, and wiped his forehead with a perfumed handkerchief. She doesn't want to be regarded a bad girl. He took a cigarette out of his pocket and patted it slowly with his thumbnail. This man has fallen for me, Akiko muttered to herself, hidden in the trees, and felt like sticking her tongue out at him. He is jealous of my ex-husband, that's why he said such distasteful things...how funny (49).¹⁸

Shinohara and Akiko are trying to see through each other, to reach behind appearances and grasp the other person's feelings. Such sharp, tense juxtapositions and reversals of perspective have the effect of emphasizing not only the psychological interiority of the characters, but also their isolation and opaqueness, the disjointed universe of the work. Other modalities which construct a character's subjectivity are passages structured like interior monologue, as well as the many 'flashbacks', retrospections which function to confirm the continuity of the self across past and present. Such narrative strategies have the effect of suppressing the presence and signs of the narrator, creating the illusion that these subjectivities present themselves to the reader directly, without mediation.

There are also recurrent moments, however, when a narrator does appear, a verbose and flamboyant one. He refers to himself as *hissha*, the author; he comments on the narrative, directly addresses the characters and interferes with them; sets out on long digressions which constantly threaten to unravel the main narrative into sheer incoherence. This is the narrator addressing the timid, submissive Ozeki, who has been ordered to clean up after the drunken Shinohara:

Why didn't you refuse, Ozeki? A forceful 'No!' would have probably cooled the reckless arrogance of your roommate. My heart aches at the sight of your wretched figure; I almost cannot bear writing about you. At that moment, as if nature has begun singing its tune about the strong preying on the weak, a piercing cold wind blows against the glass in the corridor and bites into your skin through the cracks in the window (64).

¹⁸ All page numbers in the text refer to *Takami Jun zenshū* vol.1. All translations are mine. This translation follows as closely as possible the diacritics of the original.

It is as if the convention of the transcendental, disembodied narrator is deconstructed by being used *too literally*, in an almost grotesquely exaggerated way. It is profoundly disconcerting, this gleeful freedom with which the narrator transgresses narrative levels: he can comment on the story and the characters from a removed, abstract meta-position and then he can suddenly play with the pretence that the time of the narration and the time of diegesis overlap. This constructs the illusion that the narrator is positioned at the same ontological level as the characters:

Come to think of it, what a ridiculous detour did our story take! *While the narrator was rambling on*, our hero Ozeki Kenji finished his haircut and returned to his dull home (15, my emphasis).

The reader might harbour feelings of disbelief, because the present Akiko, namely the image of her which the reader has painted in his imagination after reading the beginning of the chapter, and Akiko as she appeared in the retrospections following, are quite different. This, however, is not a lapse on the part of the narrator. I did intend to describe this change in her in a composed, assured manner, but *while I had abandoned these two* [Shinohara and Akiko], they got ready to go out and would leave the apartment any moment now. I don't really mind them going out, but *there was a conversation between them which should not be missed* (51-52, my emphasis).

In the second passage, the narrator casually collapses narratological levels: the beginning sees him take a transcendental position vis-à-vis Akiko, commenting on the discontinuities in her character. This is the classical formalist gesture of 'laying bare the device': although the narrator attempts to find an explanation for this discontinuity, the effect of the passage is to draw attention to the fact that Akiko is simply a fictional character. Further, however, we are again given the impression that the narrator is *inside* the diegesis, at the same narratological level as his characters. The exposure of artifice is performed in an even more straightforward manner in the following passage about Ozeki:

If we are to say it again, he thought he was 'beyond hope'. But these days, a feeling that there might be hope – something like strength or joy, an aspiration or a dream – in any case, a lightness began fluttering inside him. If I was used to popular fiction, I would say it was his longing for Akiko. There was this as well – but the reason was different (80).

While real people are amorphous and complex, the creation of a fictional character always entails a simplification of personality. These passages are essentially reflexive close-ups of the process of constructing a character: the operations of selection and combination involved, the magnifying of certain elements and the marginalization of others. The ontological volatility of the characters, their construction as autonomous interiorized subjectivities and their exposure as fictional constructs, is the fundamental tension which runs through the work. The fluid positionality of the narrator – from a disembodied omniscient narration which suppresses the enunciating subject to a highly personalized, verbose figure – collapses narrative hierarchies and creates a certain epistemological indeterminacy. This is an ironic reflexive narrator pointing to his own mask; the exaggeration and the literalization of his powers paradoxically create an effect of disintegration of narrative authority, its exposure as sheer artifice.

The discontinuities and elisions in the supposedly organic selves of the characters are also emphasized by radical distortions of linear temporality and plot chronology. The following diagrams are an attempt to map roughly the temporal structure of chapters one, four, and nine. Diagrammatic presentation always means simplification; the temporality of the work is much more complex as temporal shifts are often accompanied by changes in other narrative modalities; shifts in perspective or secondary temporal movements often occur *within* temporal segments. There is also the distinction between subjective and objective retrospections, as Genette reminds us in his seminal study of narrative anachronies; where possible I have tried to mark this distinction in the diagrams.¹⁹ Rather than a detailed presentation of the complex temporal structure of the work, the purpose of these diagrams is to show how it deviates from conventional linear narrative. The sequence A→B→C→D→E signifies normal chronological succession.

Chapter One

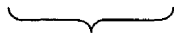
D: Ozeki in the barber shop excusing himself with his nervous exhaustion (*shinkei suijaku*)
→ **B (unidentified past moment):** retrospection about the colleague who told him about

¹⁹ Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*, trans. Jane Lewin, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980, p. 39.

nervous exhaustion → **C: the following morning after B**: Ozeki sees in the morning paper an advertisement for a medicine for nervous exhaustion → **C: same day** Ozeki has lunch with the same colleague → **A: eight years before at higher school**: retrospection about the day Ozeki shared a table with Shinohara in the school canteen → **the narration goes back to D**: 'While the narrator was rambling on, our hero Ozeki Kenji finished his haircut and returned to his dull home.'

Temporal structure of the chapter:

D → B → C → A → D

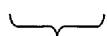

Ozeki's retrospection

Chapter Four

D: Shinohara and Akiko are in Akiko's apartment → **A (two months before D)**: Shinohara and Akiko meet for the first time → **B (several days later than A)**: Their first date → **return to D**: Shinohara and Akiko in Akiko's apartment → **C (several days earlier than D)** Shinohara takes Ozeki to the bar where Akiko works.

Temporal structure of the chapter:

D → A → B → D → C


Shinohara's retrospection

Chapter Nine

C: Ozeki receives a letter telling of Sawamura's suicide and uses it as a pretext to go out (actually heading for Akiko's apartment) → **C**: the narrative 'cuts' to Shinohara, who at this same time is waiting for Fumie at Shimbashi station → **B: Shinohara's morning**: his thoughts when opening a letter and finding about Sawamura's death → **E: some time after Sawamura's funeral**: a memorial piece about Sawamura, written by one Makino and 'quoted' by the narrator → **again C**: Shinohara meets the woman who lives in the apartment next to his → **A: retrospective digressions** about this woman and her scandalous way of life, the quarrel with her husband and Shinohara's intervention → **back to C**: Shinohara waiting for Fumie → **D**: Shinohara's date with Fumie.

Synchronicity: the other characters and their plots at this moment: Akiko and Ozeki, Tomonari and Akadako, Matsushita's wife.

Temporal structure of the chapter.

C (Ozeki) → C (Shinohara) → B → E → C → A (Shinohara's retrospection) → C → D
(synchronicity)

What is evident even from these simple diagrammatic presentations is the absence of any will towards a linear chronological narrative. Instead, what comes to the surface is the work's hyperretrospectivity, the characters' almost perverse fixation on the past. Ozeki is the character most nostalgically immersed in the past; he articulates directly the plenitude of the past and the barrenness of the present:

Daydreams are pleasant only when you have hopes. But what dreams and hopes were there for him now? A dull job and a tedious family life. What does he live for? What is the point of this life? Only school was a happy time. He had dreams back then (12).

Subjective retrospections take a significant part of the text in chapters one, four and nine, while in chapters five and six the narrative is focused almost exclusively on the characters' time at higher school. The past somehow emerges as more authentic than the present. The subjective retrospective digressions are often triggered by the resemblance of a certain present situation to a past one, the associative principle typical of modernist psychological narrative: Ozeki and his 'nervous exhaustion' in chapter one, the sight of Akiko playfully sticking out her tongue at Shinohara in chapter four. In these two chapters, the retrospections are actually longer, even in terms of pages, than the 'main narrative'; the feelings of the characters are analyzed in more minute detail in the past experience. A dialectic of originals and imitations can be discerned here: the past experience is always the authentic one, the present one is a pathetic imitation of the fullness and intensity of an original experience: the tedium and mediocrity of Ozeki's *petit bourgeois* existence and the feeling of having lived life to the full at higher school; Shinohara and Akiko in the present of the narrative, when feelings have cooled, and the aching intensity of the first day they spent together. In chapter nine, the narration becomes even more fragmented

and unreliable: Sawamura is introduced only obliquely, the reason of his death remains opaque – only Shinohara constructs his own dirty (*kitanai*) interpretation. What we learn about Sawamura actually comes from the memorial eulogy (*tsuitôbun*) of one Makino who appears for the first time as well. The effects of temporal synchronicity and the multiplicity of perspectives emphasize the unbalanced narration; the truth becomes even more removed and impenetrable.

If the past is so important for the characters of *Auld Acquaintance*, then what are we to make of the narrator's interventions into their subjective retrospections? Here is how the narrator interferes in Ozeki's daydreaming about the past:

I would like to draw the attention of the reader to Ozeki's lustfulness: the reader might have caught a glimpse of it earlier in the dinner scene. Despite his indecisiveness, Ozeki has sharp and keen amorous instincts. His lust will play a very active part further on in this narrative (22).

Although, as we have seen, a large part of chapter four consists of Shinohara's recollection of the beginning of his relationship with Akiko, at some point the narrator interferes to state: 'It is unclear where the idea came from, but some days after, the faces of Shinohara and Akiko were seen in the corner of a train bound for Sakuragichô' and, a few pages later, 'That night the two were seen at the Odeon cinema' (45,49). At times it seems as if the narrator interrupts, or dismisses, their reminiscences, refusing them the right to represent their own past: 'Instead of recording here the exchange of recollections that took place, I would like to sketch briefly the history of their friendship. What do you think?' (55).

Retrospection is based on the self-evident presence of an interiorized subjectivity: 'me' in the present is the same 'me' from the past, and it is only me who can recall that experience. The presence of memories in Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* was used as the ultimate test of being human. If identity can be described as continuity of the self in time, as the possibility to construct a coherent narrative of the self in which past and present are organically linked, then the transgressions of the narrator and the fragmented temporal structure of the work have the effect of *depriving the characters of subjectivity* in

a gesture which seems almost violent. This unravelling of subjectivity, together with the reflexive strategies which expose the characters as fictional constructs, is probably what Nakamura Shin'ichirô had in mind when he stated that *Auld Acquaintance* is the first example of the twentieth-century novel in Japan because it destroys the supposedly organic unity of character.²⁰ The discontinuities in the characters and the fundamental ruptures in psychic temporality, the refusal to construct a linear narrative – these strategies enact symbolically the disintegration of the Taishoesque personality, of the naïve conception of immanent interiority which re-emerges with *tenkô* literature. In *Auld Acquaintance* the self is nothing but an effect of literary artifice, a rhetorical construction, the whim of a capricious narrator.

Tenkô and the Crisis of Subjectivity

The fragmentation of the self performed by the formal structures of *Auld Acquaintance* can be seen as transfigurations of capitalism's intensified logic of abstraction which in the 1920s and 30s was undermining traditional reference and established subject positions. Other historical and political intensities, such as the ideological transformations of *tenkô*, were also affecting cultural practices of representation. My discussion of the knowledge regimes and epistemologies of the cultural revival in chapter one mentioned *tenkô* only in passing, but in fact it is one of the master tropes of the cultural revival, of the whole decade of the 1930s. *Tenkô* profoundly affected issues of narrative, subjectivity and representation in general – and the formal inventions of *Auld Acquaintance* can be understood only in the context of this troubling crisis of representation and the discourses around it.

In its most direct and concrete meaning *tenkô* signifies a written denunciation of radical Marxist beliefs, often done under coercion, as a condition for release from prison or police custody. The literal translation is 'change in direction' and as Fujita Shôzô has shown, it originated *within* the discourse of Japanese Marxism, and specifically from Fukumoto Kazuo's conceptualization of the dialectical relationship between the individual and the

²⁰ Nakamura, *Sengo bungaku*, p.21.

historical totality. Fukumoto designated with the term *tenka* the objective dialectical change brought about by the universal laws of history. *Tenkô*, or change of direction, referred to the individual's accommodation of the laws of dialectical materialism.²¹ This conception of the individual in history was used by Fukumoto to critique earlier Japanese Marxism and specifically the ideological eclecticism of Yamakawa Hitoshi (1880-1958) and his emphasis on syndicalism and economic struggle. Fukumoto called for a true change of direction (*makoto no hôkô tenkan*) and a departure from the old paradigm. *Tenkô* for Fukumoto was a change of direction conceived purely subjectively; it implied acting upon the situation with a consciousness of purpose. It was the unity of two acts: an exterior action which has an impact on the outside world, and interior reflection.²² Thus conceived, the Marxist *tenkô* had connotations of spontaneity and agency; it also implied a reshaping of the self (*jiko henkaku*) (Karatani), an all-over reconstruction of the self (*zenshin o kôchiku shinaosu*) (Fujita), and it might have been because of these nuances that the term was adopted by the authorities to mean a renunciation of Marxist commitment.²³ In the discourse of the state, *tenkô* described the process in which 'people confused by preposterous alien thoughts...performed self-criticism and embraced again the national ideas (*kokumin shisô*) recognized by the system'.²⁴ The first and most spectacular *tenkô* was that of Sano Manabu (1892-1953) and Nabeyama Sadachika (1901-1979), senior figures in the leadership of the Communist party. In a sensational declaration published in June 1933, Sano and Nabeyama repudiated communism as the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia's will to power. They denounced the bureaucratized Comintern, an instrument for advancing the interests of Soviet Russia, but their most forceful criticism was reserved for Marxist doctrine in general. Sano and Nabeyama insisted that the concept of class (which according to Marxism transcends national boundaries) and the idea of the revolution as the ultimate form of class conflict were ill-suited to Japan, where 'the firmness of national unity is a prime characteristic of

²¹ Fujita, 'Shôwa 8-nen', p.34.

²² Ibid., p.34

²³ Ibid., p. 36; Karatani, *Kindai Nihon no hihyô: Shôwa hen*, p. 17.

²⁴ Fujita, 'Shôwa 8-nen', p. 34. Fujita partially quotes the words of Hara Yoshimichi (1867-1944), then Minister of Justice, regarding the mass arrests of Communist party members and sympathizers in 1928.

society'.²⁵ Japan, they asserted, could progress towards socialism in a manner which is uniquely hers and which could be extremely orderly. They defended the emperor system, whose abolition the Comintern theses for Japan had pronounced to be the main task of Japanese communists: 'The social sentiments that place the imperial household in the centre of national unity lie deep in the hearts of the working masses'. They also defended the war against China's 'Nationalist clique', which, they argued, in world historical terms would liberate the Asian people from the clutches of Western capitalism.²⁶

Here we can see emerging what would become the main figures of *tenkô*. In the broader meaning *tenkô* is an ideological reversal, a cultural change of direction, not just the renunciation of Marxism. Marxism, because of its materialist conceptions of society and history, came to be seen as a metonymy for Western modernity. *Tenkô* was a return to a natural, sensuous, spontaneous Japaneseness; for Fujita Shôzô, as discussed briefly in chapter one, this meant the return of the *homo theoreticus* of Japanese Marxism to an undifferentiated (*zuru zuru bettari*) affective community. According to Fujita, the explosion of print capitalism and rising standards of education after the first world war produced *en masse* an intelligentsia shaped entirely by the internalization of Western written texts. These were anti-communal subjects, or rather an imagined community constructed by Western literature and humanist philosophy, by abstract texts divorced from Japanese reality. It is this textualism, the obsession with theory that makes the generation of Fukumoto and the Society of New Men so different from earlier radicals like Ôsugi Sakae. For the Fukumotoists, Western theory was the orthodoxy and Japanese society was simply the object onto which it should be applied. The superiority of Western theory over the knowledges of a non-western society was not questioned. Fujita stresses that because of Fukumotoism's obsession with theory, its isolation from a concrete reality and the excessive factionalism of the party, the libidinal energies banished from leftist politics were absorbed by fascism, the tenant farmer movement being a prime example.²⁷

Fascism, as we know, promises a sensuousness that will overcome the fragmentation of

²⁵ Sano Manabu and Nabeyama Sadachika, 'A Letter to Our Fellow Defendants' in Wm. Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck and Arthur E. Tiedelman (eds.), *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol.2, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, p.943.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 944.

²⁷ Fujita, 'Shôwa 8-nen', pp. 35-44.

modern life and restore the unity of experience. It is in this broader meaning of abandoning modernity and the West in order to immerse oneself in a commonality untouched by alienation, that *tenkô* becomes indeed the master trope of 1930s culturalism; structurally, *tenkô* resonates with the anti-modern epistemologies articulated in more intellectualized discourses.

The opposition of the abstractly theoretical and the sensuous, of Marxism and the *kokutai*, were the most potent figures of *tenkô* discourse. 'It was the Japanese *kokutai* that opened the path of *tenkô* for me,' wrote Hayashi Fusao in the pamphlet *Tenkô ni tsuite* (On Tenkô, 1941):

I managed to free myself completely from the constraints of abstract theory. I have never been much of a theorist. With tears in my eyes, I will share my life with the life of the Yamato people; with tears in my eyes I will lend my strength to the advance of the nation.²⁸

The duality of the abstract and the sensuous is clearly laid out; the repetition of 'tears in my eyes' and the parallel structures emphasize affect and commonality. For Hayashi, Marxism is just an ideology, an -ism which originated in the class-divided society of nineteenth-century Europe, and therefore alien to Japan; it does not stir the blood of young people and cannot be a supporting pillar for their soul. What supports the spirit of the nation should be something inside the nation.²⁹ The naturalness of *tenkô* is another recurrent motif. The writer Iwakura Seiji (1903-2000) wrote in the preface of Hayashi's pamphlet that *tenkô* should be something happening spontaneously (*onozukara*); it should be emerging forth (*wakideru*) from a feeling of loyalty to the land of the ancestors. For Kamei Katsuchirô, who also contributed quotes to the pamphlet, the completion of *tenkô* was going to bring critical reflection and new vigour to the world of ideas. Asano Akira (1901-1990), a founding member of the Japan romantic school, wrote in his contribution that *tenkô* demanded a ritual purification, a turning away from the private and advancing towards the social (*kô*), in other words, dissolving oneself into the

²⁸ Hayashi Fusao, 'Tenkô ni tsuite', in *Hayashi Fusao chosakushû*, vol. 3, Tokyo: Tsubasa Shoin, 1969, p.384.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 382.

community.³⁰ The narrative of *tenkô* as regeneration of the self was highly charged emotionally, as seen even in these brief statements. Figures like *fukkatsu* (resurrection), *fukki* (return), *saisei* (rebirth) abound in this discourse.

If we follow Fujita's argument that Japanese Marxism posited a subjectivity shaped by abstract written texts, then it is possible to argue that the collapse of Marxism, a master narrative *par excellence*, would expose with full force the crisis of the modern self, fundamentally split and alienated from itself. The discourse of *tenkô* as self-renewal envisaged a self reshaped as an imperial subject; a transcendence of the crisis by the immersion of the self in the incomparable *kokutai* – premodern, anti-rationalist, anti-Western. Fujita Shôzô quotes the writing of the social activist Kobayashi Morito (1902-1984), which represents a critique of the past from the world of affect:

The mountains give birth to dreams. How pleasant it must be to walk in these mountains!...The mountains give birth to beauty. The sublimely beautiful form of the mountains inspires aesthetic feeling in Ono (Kobayashi)[sic.]. In that way, the mountains become spiritualized (*seishinka sareru*).³¹

The yearning for a mystical identification with nature exemplifies the anti-modern charge of *tenkô*. *Tenkô* is a proto-fascist return to nature, blood and soil; another trope for the resurgence of the aesthetic which reasserts itself against cold reason and the ravages of industrial modernity. A similar motif of rebirth is present in some representative literary works, most notably Shimaki Kensaku's *Seikatsu no tankyû* (Quest for life, 1937), where the hero goes back to the countryside, to his native place, and looks back at his devotion to abstract ideas. It is this return to the truth of the soil that has led some critics to detect crypto-fascism in Shimaki.³² The discourse of self-regeneration was profoundly ideological and used skilfully by the authorities: according to Richard Mitchell, 'Procurator Hirata Susumu summed up this view: "No thought criminal was hopeless...Since they were all Japanese, sooner or later they would all come around to realising their ideas

³⁰ Honda, *Tenkô bungakuron*, p. 212-3.

³¹ Quoted in Fujita, 'Shôwa 8-nen', p. 49.

³² Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 857.

were wrong." ...Daily indoctrination would reform even hardened thought criminals, whose Japaneseness was bound to surface sooner or later.³³

This celebratory discourse of rebirth in fact represses a rupture of psychic temporality and a breakdown of identity. *Tenkô* presupposes a subject who has renounced his past infatuation with abstract thought in order to submerge herself in the sensuous community of the nation. Such a subject constructs retroactively an inauthentic past in order to embrace her authentic present. This retroactive construction is strikingly similar to the psychic mechanism which psychoanalysis calls secondary revision. According to Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, 'The elimination of the dream's apparent absurdity and incoherence, the filling in of gaps, the partial or total reorganization of its elements by means of selection and addition, the attempt to make it into something like a daydream (*Tagtraum*) – these, essentially, are what Freud called secondary revision, or at times "considerations of intelligibility" (*Rücksicht auf Verständlichkeit*).'³⁴ In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud extended this psychic mechanism to some 'systems of thought':

There is an intellectual fashion in us which demands unity, connection and intelligibility from any material, whether of perception or thought, that comes within its grasp; and if, as a result of special circumstances, it is unable to establish a true connection it does not hesitate to fabricate a false one...In all these cases it can be shown that a rearrangement of psychic material has been made with a fresh aim in view; and the rearrangement may often have to be a drastic one if the outcome is to be made to appear intelligible from the point of view of the system.³⁵

Secondary revision shows that causation can work backwards as well as forwards, that certain events can gain significance by retroaction, working in reverse to create meanings that did not previously exist. *Tenkô* then not only complicates psychic temporality as the basis of identity, the continuity and coherence of the self in time; it also problematizes narrative causality. Through this secondary construction of one's past as inauthentic, *tenkô* elides a crisis of representation. The discourse of *tenkô* as a rebirth of the self is an

³³ Richard Mitchell, *Thought Control in Prewar Japan*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, pp. 127, 170.

³⁴ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, London: Karnac Books, 2004, p. 412.

³⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.412.

attempt to overcome this crisis with a return to the pre-modern: the countryside, the communal body, the family. In *tenkô* narratives, the family is not a castrating patriarchy, but a matriarchal community bound by empathy, outside the alienation of the symbolic. The breakdown of subjectivity is to be overcome by a renunciation of subjectivity, by a return to a mother-bound plenitude. Honda Shûgô notes that in some of the most representative works of *tenkô* literature, such as Nakano Shigeharu's *The House in the Village*, Murayama Tomoyoshi's *White Nights*, or Shimaki's novels and stories, the psychological process of arriving at the decision to commit *tenkô* or the moment of *tenkô*, of writing the required declaration, is never described in detail. *Tenkô* emerges as something unrepresentable, an aporia beyond words. The explosion of confessional narratives after writers were released from prison, the object of Nakamura Mitsuo's wry criticism, should be considered as the desire to narrate and therefore tame the implacable contradictions generated by the *tenkô* experience. The fear of insanity, a recurrent motif in the authors mentioned above, also points to a crisis of meaning, to an anxiety that the symbolic order might be disintegrating. The countryside is a metonymy of the premodern, but also for the mother-bound presymbolic.

In Takami's *Auld Acquaintance*, Ozeki has an experience of words suddenly losing their meaning, of disintegrating written characters. He cancels his subscription to the high-brow intellectual journal *Kaizô* and switches to a magazine with popular fiction. Even the rigid font of *Kaizô* seems to him difficult to understand. The enthusiasm with which he was swallowing each issue of the journal is long gone, but even when he forces himself to read it, he cannot grasp the meaning of the sentences and gives up (10). Significantly, for Ozeki and the other characters of *Auld Acquaintance*, the moment of *tenkô* remains vague, mentioned in the text only obliquely. It is true that compared to Sawamura, who was active in the labour movement, they remained only leftist fans (*sayoku fan*). And yet, for them as well *tenkô* has ruptured the supposed continuity of experience. After gradually abandoning their youthful idealism, they sink into the tedium of suburban married life, or in drinking and shallow affairs. If identity is indeed the continuity of the self in time, the possibility to construct a coherent narrative of the self in which past and present are organically linked, then the volatile narration of *Auld Acquaintance* and the personification

of an intrusive narrator have the effect of depriving the characters of this organic identity. The unhealable rupture between a mediocre present and an authentic past is an *inversion* of the *tenkô* narrative of self-regeneration. For the characters of *Auld Acquaintance*, the past is where the authentic, full-blooded life is. The unbearable mediocrity of their present openly resists the celebratory constructions of *tenkô* as a second life, the overcoming of the breakdown of subjectivity through a dissolution of the self into the community. Even purely spatially, Takami's narrative remains within the city, locus of modernity, desire and westernized education; there is no salvation through a return to the countryside. This is again a strategy of inversion exposing the ideological charge of the opposition between an urban modernity and the proto-fascist ode to the soil.

The hyperretrospectivity of *Auld Acquaintance's* narrative and the fluid positionality of its narrator, his intrusions and manipulations of the characters, should be seen as symbolic enactments of the crisis of representation brought about by *tenkô* and the state's aggressive will to control the constructions of subjectivity. *Tenkô* can be narrated only symptomatically, through the formal complications of Takami's work, and not through *shishôsetsu*-esque naturalism. To write a confessional novel about the experience, as most *tenkô* writing does, is an ideological gesture which suppresses the contradictions of *tenkô* with its constructions of a straightforward narrative and its naïve belief in the validity of an autobiographical mode of self-representation. In this sense *Auld Acquaintance* exposes not only the hidden artifice of the *shishôsetsu* but also the historicity of the genre and its limits, its inadequacy in an age in which faith in an autonomous organic self has been violently shattered. *Auld Acquaintance* deprives the characters of subjectivity and refuses closure; coherence and ending are allowed only to Sawamura, the character who has escaped the barrenness of living. The other characters are incapable of ordering their lives, of constructing narratives of their past. The collapse of Marxism as the master narrative which was providing subjectivization means that their lives will remain fractured and disjointed; a secondary revision is refused to them. This literary, textual deconstruction of subjectivity reflects negatively the textual construction of identity, the excessive internalization of theory characteristic of Japanese Marxism. The interference of the narrator produces ontological and epistemological uncertainty and unsettles

novelistic hierarchies; the shifts of point of view and the temporal distortions generate effects of fragmentation, of a jostling plurality of themes and narrative lines. Subjectivity remains fractured, but not renounced; *Auld Acquaintance* refuses the salvation of *tenkô* through the return to the premodern and the dissolution of the self into the aesthetic totality of imperial Japan. *Tenkô* is present only obliquely in the thematics of *Auld Acquaintance*, but we can argue that *structurally* it is the master strategy of the text. Takami's text performs certain inversions which expose the profoundly ideological character of the discourse of radical *tenkô* figures like Hayashi Fusao and Kamei Katsuichirô. It critiques the whole premise behind *tenkô* literature in general; its attempts to construct a coherent story and narrate an organic self. In *Auld Acquaintance*, the traumatic rupture of identity, the aporetic unrepresentability of the whole experience, are not suppressed, but exposed, brought to the foreground.

While often conceptualized as a specifically Japanese response to the historical aporias and the ideological complexities of the interwar years, *tenkô* should not be disengaged from the workings of those universal material forces discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. During these decades, the disjunctive dynamics of capitalist rationalization and the establishment of various technological regimes radically undermined traditional humanist conceptions of autonomous subjectivity. While remaining distinctly Japanese, *tenkô* is symptomatic of the universal contradictory dynamic of an accelerated modernity; the aggressive will of the state to shape subjectivity, to transform 'thought criminals' into imperial subjects and the attempts to transcend the crisis of the modern self through a return to a presymbolic oceanic feeling, can be found, in different guises, in the gathering fascisms in Europe and America. It is in this meaning of *tenkô* as a symptom of the will to overcome modernity, that Takami's text is close to Yokomitsu Riichi. If in 'The Machine' the erosion of subjectivity is performed through an unreliable narrator whose consciousness is increasingly penetrated by technology, in *Auld Acquaintance* the characters are deprived of autonomy by a narrator who manipulates them at will. Suga Hidemi remarks that the perspective of 'the self is looking at the self' becomes possible

only with *tenkô*.³⁶ 'The self looking at the self' is, of course, Yokomitsu's definition of his ambiguous 'fourth person' in 'An Essay On the Pure Novel'. Yokomitsu was never involved in the leftist movement, although, as we saw in chapter one, there are some purely intellectual intersections between Marxist materialism and the new sensationist assault on Taishoesque conceptions of self and language. Yokomitsu, with his heightened sensitivity to the aporias of the present, saw that *tenkô* has exposed a reflexive, divided subject which demanded a radically different epistemology from that of the *shishôsetsu*. However, unlike Yokomitsu, who gestures towards cultural nationalism as a way out of the deadlock, Takami's *Auld Acquaintance* articulates a perpetually fractured subjectivity which resists the seductive immersion into the *kokutai*.

Fascism and Popular Fiction: The Friendly Literary Society

But the disconcerting collapse of narrative hierarchies and ontological levels in *Auld Acquaintance* can also be seen as a symbolic enactment of the collapse of the separation between culture and the state and the beginnings of a fascist aesthetization of the public sphere. The state strengthened censorship mechanisms and the agencies enforcing them. In 1934, the Committee on Film Control (*Eiga tôsei iinkai*) was created and film censorship moved away from crude suppression to encourage the production of wholesome, uplifting films that could exploit the medium's potential for indoctrination.³⁷ Apart from pre-publication censorship and the seizing of already published material, routine practices since the Meiji period, the army introduced 'friendly meetings' with the editors of journals like *Kaizô* and *Chûô kôron* (The Central Review) to encourage self-censorship and the promotion of positive content. The *Bungei konwakai*, or Friendly Literary Society, created in 1934, was also regarded as a means of promoting writing favourable to the state. A key figure behind the society was Naoki Sanjûgo (1891-1934), a charismatic writer who embodied the energies of popular fiction when it burst upon the scene after the 1923 earthquake. Naoki wrote *katakiuchimono*, samurai stories of revenge, and was also involved in film production. In 1930-31 Naoki serialized *Nangoku Taiheiki* (Chronicle of the Great Peace of the South) in two major newspapers, the *Osaka*

³⁶ Suga, *Tantei no kuritikki*, p. 18.

³⁷ Jay Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals*, p.250.

Mainichi and the *Tokyo Nichinichi*, a work which won him both popularity and critical acclaim. On 8 January 1932, Naoki published a provocative fascist manifesto (*fashizumu sengen*) in the *Yomiuri* newspaper: he proclaimed himself a fascist and declared war on the political left.³⁸ A month later, on 5 February 1932, the first meeting of the *Itsukakai* (Society of the Fifth) took place. It was a gathering of popular writers (Naoki Sanjūgo, Kume Masao (1891-1952), Mikami Otokichi (1891-1944), Shirai Kyōji (1899-1980) and Satō Hachirō (1903-1973)) and dynamic young officers from the Army General Staff, some of them members of the ultranationalist *Sakurakai*, or Cherry Blossom Society. An article in the *Yomiuri* from 4 February reported the discussions between popular writers and the army and their intention to create a league of literary fascists (*bungakuteki fassho renmei*). The article used phrases such as 'the importance of the current situation becoming heavy with apprehension day by day', 'the swelling patriotic vigour of the whole nation', 'the call of love for the land of the ancestors which demands a swift reversal of the ideological tide.' According to the *Yomiuri*, the writers called for the creation and strengthening of fascist literature.³⁹ During the meeting, the literary members were shown documentary footage of the Manchurian incident, accompanied by a detailed explanation from the officers; at dinner there were discussions of military strategy and the highly technologized nature of modern warfare. Later, in November 1932, the writers were invited to observe military exercises.

The Society of the Fifth did not last as the members from the army apparently did not have the time to attend meetings. But importantly, it was the precursor of the Friendly Literary Society, which also owed its existence to Naoki's ambition. The other focal person and sponsor of the society was Matsumoto Gaku (1886-1974), then Chief of the Police Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior, one of main censorship agencies. Matsumoto was one of the creators of the Committee on Film Control; he drafted the legislation using as a model the film policies of fascist Italy. Matsumoto was somewhat of an eccentric involved in an array of flamboyant patriotic cultural activities: he headed the Centre for the

³⁸ Enomoto Takashi, 'Bunka no taishūka mondai to kokkashugiteki henkō 1: "Itsukakai" no seiritsu o chūshin ni', *Shakai kagaku tōkyū*, 14: 3 (March 1969), p. 30.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

Study of National Spiritual Culture (*Kokumin seishin bunka kenkyûjo*) and in his prolific writings espoused a return to the union of politics and ritual which characterized the ancient Japanese state. In an article in the *Yomiuri* from 25 January 1934, Matsumoto expressed the view that while the patriotic drive towards elevation of the Japanese spirit had become visible in the other arts, literature was lagging behind. This had been the reason behind Matsumoto's meeting with the powerful editor of *Bungei shunjû*, Kikuchi Kan (1888-1948) and a group of popular writers which included Naoki, Mikami, Shirai, Yamamoto Yûzô (1887-1974) and Yoshikawa Eiji (1892-1962), in mid-January 1934. Matsumoto emphasized the need to advance the status of literary men and proposed the creation of a literary academy.⁴⁰ The rather sensational tone of the article caused an immediate reaction and on 27 January 1934, the philosopher Miki Kiyoshi contributed to the same newspaper a piece titled *Teikoku bungeiin no keikaku hihan* (A Critique of the Plan for an Imperial Literary Academy). Miki expressed his misgivings about the fact that Matsumoto, the person directly responsible for thought control, was the driving force behind the idea for a literary academy. For him this was a sign of the state's intention to control literature – the proof was the enthusiastic support provided by rightist popular writers. Naoki responded in the same newspaper, explaining that although Matsumoto's vision was indeed 'the unification of thought under the state' and 'the promotion of national policy through literature', the movement was not bound to this and had other, larger aims as well: to reform the censorship system and foster a more harmonious relationship between literature and the bureaucracy; to put in place administrative policies promoting literature; and to provide state recognition for writers through the establishment of literary awards and the creation of a literary academy. The Friendly Literary Society, he stated, will work for moral education through literature and will encourage nationalist (*kokuminshugiteki*) writing not because such are the demands of the bureaucracy, but because of the spontaneous patriotic will of the participating writers.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Enomoto Takashi, 'Bungei konwakai', p.227.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 227-8.

The reaction of Miki Kiyoshi, probably representative of the attitude of leftist and liberal intellectuals, was understandable in the increasingly claustrophobic atmosphere at the time: the collapse of the proletarian literature movement and the dissolution of the Proletarian Writers League in 1934; the suppression of any intellectual heterodoxy as evident in the persecution of a respected professor of law at Kyoto University in the so-called Takigawa incident. In March 1934, the notorious Peace Preservation Law, whose 1927 revision had already made death the maximum punishment for crimes against the *kokutai* and private property, was again revised, expanding the powers of the police. The League for Academic and Artistic Freedom (*Gakugei jiyū dōmei*) was created in September 1933, with the veteran naturalist writer Tokuda Shūsei (1871-1943) as its president. Miki Kiyoshi, together with other prominent intellectuals, sent a letter of protest to Hitler after the notorious burning of decadent and degenerate books by the Nazis in May 1933.

In such a context, a literary organization led by someone like Matsumoto Gaku was naturally viewed as the state's will to control literature and cultural discourse in general. The first issue of *Bungei konwakai*, the eponymous journal of the society, published in January 1936, listed the following writers and critics as members: Kamitsukasa Shōken (1874-1947), Kishida Kunio (1890-1954), Toyoshima Yoshio (1899-1955), Mikami Otokichi, Chikamatsu Shūkō (1876-1944), Satomi Ton, Masamune Hakuchō (1879-1962), Kawabata Yasunari, Kikuchi Kan, Nakamura Murao (1886-1949), Shirai Kyōji, Murō Saisei (1889-1962), Hasegawa Shin (1884-1963), Yoshikawa Eiji, Shimazaki Tōson, Katō Takeo (1888-1956), Yokomitsu Riichi, Tokuda Shūsei, Hirotsu Kazuo (1891-1968), Uno Kōji, Yamamoto Yūzō, and Satō Haruo (1892-1964). Among the events organized by the society was a memorial service for deceased writers (the name of Kobayashi Takiji was conspicuously absent), a visit to Shōsōin, the Imperial Repository at Tōdaiji temple in Nara, for Shūsei, Hirotsu, Masamune Hakuchō and Uno Kōji, and a viewing of military exercises attended by Minami, Kikuchi Kan, Shirai, Yoshikawa and Satō Haruo.⁴² The society also advertised its intentions to provide medical and financial assistance to writers but the lack of transparency about the sources of its funds prompted criticism in the

⁴² Ibid., pp. 232-233.

media. Eventually it was revealed that the money did not come from the state or from Matsumoto himself, but from substantial private donations from the Mitsui and Mitsubishi *zaibatsu*.

The editorial of the first issue of the *Bungei konwakai* journal stated that 'the Friendly Literary society is neither an ideological organization, nor a social club. It is a body which aims to advance the culture of the Japanese empire through the literary arts with loyalty and enthusiasm.'⁴³ There was the pretence of ideological neutrality, of the society being open to any writer regardless of ideas or tendencies – but there was not a single leftist among the writers invited to join, nor were people associated with powerful factions in the *bundan*. The first literary award of the society should have gone to Shimaki Kensaku had the results of the balloting been followed properly. Matsumoto Gaku, however, objected that Shimaki's writing did not conform to *kokutai* ideas and the prize was given to Murô Saisei instead.⁴⁴ The so-called Shimaki problem caused a storm of criticism in the media by both outsiders and members of the society and lead to the furore around Sato Haruo's angry resignation (he did join again later).

The Friendly Literary Society should be seen in the highly charged political context of the time, the gradual gathering of fascisms and the erosion of the public sphere, but it also should not be disengaged from the changing economy of cultural practices in the late 1920s and 1930s. Popular literature had emerged on the scene in an atmosphere of anxious hunger for the printed word after the physical destruction of books in the 1923 earthquake. There was also a convergence of more intangible social and technological developments: not only the growth of primary education and the spread of literacy, but also the development of networks of distribution which ensured nationwide dissemination of cultural products. Ikeda Chôsuke, an editor at Hakubunkan, is sometimes credited with the introduction of the term *taishû bungaku* (mass or popular literature), while other scholars attribute it to Shirai Kyôji, although Shirai himself has not confirmed it. *Taishû* seems to be one of the totemic signifiers in the cultural discourse of the late 1920s, its

⁴³ 'Bungei konwakai sôkan no ji' in Muramatsu, *Shôwa hihyô taikei*, vol.2, p. 378.

⁴⁴ Enomoto 'Bungei konwakai', p.234.

meanings and connotations changing according to the context and the political inflections of its usage. The term did articulate a new social imaginary – the emergence of the masses. The burgeoning mass culture industry used it to conceptualise the diverse consumers of their products and champions of *taishū bungaku* such as Shirai and Naoki used it to signify readers outside the claustrophobic community of the *bundan*.⁴⁵ For the intellectual left, as evident in the debate for massification of literature, the masses were a new political constituency with a collective subjectivity, an agent for revolutionary change.

Shirai and Naoki did a lot to popularize the term *taishū bungaku*, popular or mass literature. It encompassed traditional adventure tales and swashbuckling fiction, as well as contemporary detective stories and the so-called lowbrow writing (*tsūzoku shōsetsu*), fiction published in women's journals. One of the first and most enduringly popular works of *taishū bungaku* was *Daibosatsu tōge* (The Great Buddha Pass) by Nakazato Kaizan (1885-1944), which was serialized for three decades starting from 1913. (Serialization was discontinued because of the death of the author). In the pre-war years, historical fiction would remain the main genre of popular literature. From the very beginning, popular writers were conscious of their marginal position in the *bundan* and created their own coteries: Shirai, Naoki and their associates formed the so-called *Nijūichinichikai* (Society of the Twenty-first) and started publishing their journal, *Taishū bungei* (Popular Fiction) in 1926. Because of their vibrant narrativity, historical novels became the preferred choice for newspaper serialization, rather than the hermetic confessional fiction coming from the *bundan*. Together with the powerful presence of proletarian literature in its most fecund years, the expansion of popular fiction brought on a sense of crisis of pure literature. Critics have noted how the concept of *junbungaku* or pure literature was formulated reactively, as a secondary gesture, in order to be differentiated from popular fiction. The discourse of *junbungaku* stressed authenticity, autonomy, and disinterestedness, in contrast to popular writing which openly flaunted its own status as a mass-produced commodity, but which also showed broader social concerns. The antagonisms between pure literature and popular fiction can be felt in the various

⁴⁵ William Gardner, *Avant-garde Literature and the New City: Tokyo 1923-1931*, PhD Thesis, Stanford University, 1999, p. 13.

roundtable discussions from that time. As early as 1926, the influential journal *Chûô kôron* published a special edition on *taishû bungaku* with important articles by Naoki Sanjûgo, Shirai Kyôji and the critic Chiba Kameo, which was the first serious attempt to engage with the phenomenon of popular fiction.

The widely publicized fascist sympathies of Naoki and Shirai and their efforts to get close to both the military and the bureaucracy should be read as expressions of a will-to-power, of an attempt at remapping the power relationships within the literary establishment.

Fascism meant engagement with the present, as opposed to the claustrophobic worlds of *bundan* writing. The radicalization of popular writers was hardly an isolated phenomenon: the later twenties and early thirties saw a powerful resurgence of the right. Mikami Otokichi wrote in an essay published in 1932: 'My only wish is to help foster new social currents, both racial (*minzokuteki*) and national (*kokkateki*); to live under a new social order.'⁴⁶ The leftist critic Hasegawa Nyozeikan (1887-1969) accused the writers of popular historical fiction of peddling an ideology of 'feudal romanticism' and idealizing the feudal mores and hierarchies of the past.⁴⁷ As Alice Yaeger Kaplan has taught us, fascism's seductions can be found in the powerful binding of dichotomous tropes, the modern and anti-modern being a prime example.⁴⁸ There is nothing contradictory in fascism's preoccupation with idealized past landscapes and retrospective utopias, and the calls for a radical renovation of the present.

The vague subterranean tensions between *junbungaku* writers and popular novelists affected the activities of the Friendly Literary Society and the running of the journal. Tokuda Shûsei and Masamune Hakuchô remained suspicious of the ties between the popular writers and the military: they feared a crass commercialization should the state foster popular fiction at the expense of pure literature.⁴⁹ Shûsei and Hakuchô were sceptical towards the idea of a literary academy, while popular writers supported it

⁴⁶ Quoted in Enomoto Takashi, 'Bungei konwakai 2: Bungei konwakai shimatsu no uchi,' *Waseda daigaku kyôiku gakubu gakujutsu kenkyû kokugo kokubungakuhon* 40 (1991), p. 72.

⁴⁷ Enomoto, 'Bunka no taishûka mondai', p. 403.

⁴⁸ Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁹ Rubin, *Injurious to Public Morals*, p. 253

enthusiastically. The *junbungaku* establishment itself seemed to be divided: Kobayashi Hideo, Hayashi Fusao and Kawabata Yasunari (a member of the society) took a rather ambiguous opportunistic position. In a roundtable discussion from February 1936 Hayashi acknowledged that the relationship between the bureaucracy and the writers had always been antagonistic, but he argued that the Friendly Literary Society should be used to elevate the status of pure literature and improve the situation of writers. The discussion included Shimaki Kensaku and Murayama Tomoyoshi who were critical of the society, and Takeda Rintarô, its most vociferous opponent. Murayama stressed that the scandal with the award refused to Shimaki was a defeat for literature in general, but Kobayashi disagreed: another work which received an award by the society, Yokomitsu Riichi's *Monshô* (The Family Crest, 1934) was selling really well, and even people previously indifferent to literature, like the military, were reading it and arguing about it. Kobayashi asserted that commercial journalism caused much more harm to literature than the Friendly Literary Society, the supposed instrument of state control. Hayashi Fusao and Kawabata insisted that if the society became a fascist organization, none of the present members would remain. Matsumoto Gaku, according to Kawabata, was a patron of the arts, and not a bad person. Takeda Rintarô seems quite impatient with such naïve reasoning: Matsumoto might be a nice person indeed, but personality does not matter in the broad political process, and writers should do more to oppose emerging fascist tendencies. Takeda also stressed the difference between the individual members and the overall political dynamics of the organization. By virtue of their membership, writers ran the risk of aligning themselves with fascism even against their own personal will.⁵⁰

This roundtable discussion is in many ways representative of the position the literary establishment took vis-à-vis the society. After the text of the discussion was published, a withering attack came from Nakano Shigeharu:

Is the existence of the Friendly Literary Society good for Japanese literature – or is it a poison for it? Is the fact that several writers have become mouthpieces for Matsumoto Gaku, good for Japanese literature – or is it poison for it? What binds the writers to the society: something

⁵⁰ 'Bungakukai dôjin zadankai,' *Bungakukai* 2 (1936), pp. 135-141.

feudal and reactionary or something democratic and progressive? If it is the former and artists are accepting this, have they become immune to shame?⁵¹

Takeda Rintarô had been critical of the organization since the very idea of creating a literary academy sponsored by the bureaucracy was publicized. His opposition to the Friendly Literary Society may have played a part in his decision to leave the editorial board of *Bungakukai* and together with other leftist writers to create a new journal, *Jinmin bunko* (The People's Library). *Jinmin bunko* started publication in April 1936, three months after the inaugural issue of the *Bungei konwakai* journal. Its *raison d'être*, at least in the beginning, was to provide a space for critique of the Friendly Literary Society: in the very first issue, there are three short polemical texts attacking the society. Hirabayashi Hyôgo criticizes a young writer, Hirakawa Koshin, for publishing a short story in *Bungei konwakai*. The society, Hirabayashi claims, has revealed its true character as the face of bureaucratic reaction. Hirakawa should have published in a coterie journal (*dôjin zasshi*) because such journals are independent: they do not have to bow to the demands of commercial journalism or to bourgeois politicians; they are in a good position to protect pure literature and resist the vulgarity of mass culture.⁵² Kosaka Takiko's piece attacks the position Kawabata Yasunari and Hayashi Fusao took vis-à-vis the society, as expressed in *Bungakukai* roundtable discussion mentioned above, and their lack of political understanding. Kosaka points out that there is not a single woman writer among the members of the society, but it is better this way, as it is a disgrace to be associated with such an organization.⁵³ Ueno Takeo analyses the editorial of the inaugural issue of the *Bungei konwakai* journal and quotes a passage from it: 'If we were to compare the Friendly Literary Society to a ship, it is neither a warship, nor a pleasure boat. At the same time it is not a merchant ship, either. We would like it to be a treasure ship which brings to the people of this land riches invisible to the eyes'. The style for Ueno is rather childish, awkward and not particularly sophisticated. He wonders why writers who have masterpieces to their names, such as Tôson and Shûsei, and Kawabata and Yokomitsu

⁵¹ Enomoto Takashi, 'Bungei konwakai' sôkan zengo: bungei konwakai shimatsu no uchi,' *Waseda daigaku kyôikugakubu gakujutsu kenkyû kokugo kokubungaku hen* 37 (1988), p.69.

⁵² Hirabayashi Hyôgo, 'Dôjin zasshi kurabu no teishô', *Jinmin bunko* 1 (March 1936), pp. 115-116

⁵³ Kosaka Takiko, 'Akirakana koto', *Jinmin bunko* 1 (March 1936), pp. 118-119.

from the younger generation, need to associate themselves with such a publication.⁵⁴

During the whole first year of publication of *Jinmin bunko*, each issue carried devastating reviews of *Bungei konwakai*.

The society ceased its activities in 1937, when the Imperial Academy of Arts (*Teikoku geijutsuin*) was created. In the late 1930s, culture was gradually hegemonized by the totalizing machinery of the state. In August 1938, the Cabinet Information Bureau held a 'friendly meeting' with writers and demanded that they go to the front to write about the attack on Hankow; this 'pen battalion' included Kume Masao, Kataoka Teppei, Hayashi Fumiko (1903-1951), Kikuchi Kan and Satô Haruo. In March 1938, Marxist authors such as Nakano Shigeharu, Miyamoto Yuriko and Tosaka Jun were banned from publishing. In the same month, the Censorship Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior held a meeting with representatives from women's journals and general magazines and established guidelines on editorial policy. Fiction which had as its theme adultery or women's impropriety was not to be published, and references to violence, gambling, homosexuality, hedonism, or love suicides were to be censored.⁵⁵ 1939 saw the introduction of new film laws modelled on the ones created by Goebbels in Nazi Germany: they included positive guidelines for producing propaganda, as well as negative controls on film production and distribution. There was pre-production censorship of scripts and after 1941 filmmakers were encouraged to create films glorifying the sacrificial spirit of the Japanese people.⁵⁶ In 1941, all literary organisations were united into the Japanese Cultural Patriotic Association (*Nihon bunka hōkokukai*), under the direct control of the government.

In the contexts of these later developments, The Friendly Literary Society retained a certain ideological ambiguity. The financial sponsorship of Mitsui and Mitsubishi prompted criticism of the close ties between big capital and the state and brought anxieties about the threat of totalitarian politics. There seemed to persist a perception of something hidden behind appearances, of subterranean currents. However, despite the general scepticism and the direct denunciations from the left, the author index of the journal

⁵⁴ Ueno Takeo, 'Sengen sonota ni tsuite', *Jinmin bunko* 1 (March 1936), p. 119.

⁵⁵ Hirano, *Shōwa bungakushi*, pp. 222-223.

⁵⁶ Tipton, *Modern Japan*, p.128.

contains the names of leftist and liberal intellectuals, even of staunch opponents of the society such as Miki Kiyoshi, Aono Suekichi, Takeda Rintarô, and Takami Jun. Almost all well-known leftist writers contributed to the journal, including Tokunaga Sunao, Murayama Tomoyoshi, Miyoshi Tatsuji, Sata Ineko. According to the index, the writers with the biggest number of contributions are Abe Tomoji, Itô Sei, Uno Kôji, Kawabata Yasunari, Shimazaki Tôson, Chikamatsu Shûkô, Nakamura Murao, Hirotsu Kazuo, Hasegawa Nyozeikan and Yoshikawa Eiji.⁵⁷ While not a single leftist writer was invited to join when the society was formed in 1934, the journal, which started publication in 1936, seems to have been quite open and inclusive. Enomoto Takashi argues that Matsumoto's intentions gradually changed: a shrewd politician, he seemed to have realized that his dream of unification of literary discourse under the principle of Japanism was close to impossible. According to Enomoto, this shift in Matsumoto's approach allowed for subtle gestures of resistance. The society, paradoxically, provided a forum for writers to take a unified stance against the rising fascisms. Enomoto even insists that it played the role of popular front for the literary intelligentsia.⁵⁸

Matsumoto's vision, judging from his statements, the visits to Shôsôin and the attendance of military exercises, was to promote literature with wider social concerns, something beyond the hermeticism of the *shishôsetsu* and the superficiality of popular fiction. It is useful to remember that the call for a socially engaged literature (literally 'socialization of literature', *bungaku no shakaika*) first came from the left in the late 1920s. Social engagement, however, remained a concept with ambiguous ideological inflections, which could appeal to different political registers. It could be mobilized by radical rightist discourse, as evident from the statements of 'fascist' popular writers such as Naoki and Mikami. Ironically, this demand for a socially meaningful writing led to the Friendly Literary Society, the 'pen battalions' and the Japanese Literature Patriotic Organisation. Enomoto again writes, in a revealing phrase, that Matsumoto aimed to neutralize any opposing principle, hence his rejection of proletarian literature.⁵⁹ If Japanese Marxism was premised on alienation from reality and opposition to an undifferentiated emotional

⁵⁷ Bungei konwakai: *kaisetsu, sômokuji, sakuin*, Tokyo: Fuji shuppan, 1997, pp.5-11.

⁵⁸ Enomoto, 'Bungei konwakai', p. 235.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.235.

commonality, as Fujita Shôzô has argued, then Matsumoto's approach resonates with *tenkô* discourse and the rhetoric of abandoning abstract ideology to immerse oneself in the aesthetic community of the nation. Matsumoto's dream of unifying popular fiction and highbrow writing was bound to be frustrated: tensions and divisions between the two camps remained until the very end. Nevertheless, the society cannot but strike us as the attempt of the state bureaucracy to bring about in its own bluntly direct way what Yokomitsu presented as his vision of the 'pure novel' which will bridge the divide between serious and popular. These convergences between the intentions of the state and Yokomitsu's writing accentuate Kevin Doak's reading of his essay on the pure novel: as a deeply ideological manoeuvre aimed at the neutralization of the political and the unification of Japanese intellectuals around a single hegemonic position.⁶⁰ Indeed, this will to transcend the dichotomy between high art and mass fiction resonates uncannily with fascism's binding of doubles.

Behind Enomoto's rather idealistic reading of the *Bungei konwakai* as a united *front populaire* of writers, lies a familiar critical reflex eager to uncover in the 1930s Japan structures of resistance similar to those in Europe. The explanation for why so many writers, from all ends of the ideological spectrum contributed to the journal of the society should instead be sought in a radically altered landscape of cultural consumption and the rise of commercial mass culture. Some form of bureaucratic patronage from the state could save high art from the homogenizing forces of the market. As Kobayashi Hideo stated bluntly in the roundtable talk discussed above, commercial media had done much more harm to literature than Matsumoto's Friendly Literary Society. The feared commodification of culture, together with the establishment of the society and the figure of Matsumoto, an embodiment of the state apparatus of repression, did generate profound anxieties about the loss of the autonomy of literature. The whole edifice of modern literature in Japan rested on this ideology of autonomy, ever since Tsubouchi Shôyô argued for the separation of literature from material considerations and ethico-political concerns. Tsubouchi reacted against the schematic moralism of *gesaku* fiction and his call for a radical modernization of literature also included a demand for the recognition of

⁶⁰ See chapter 1, note 123.

its autonomy. The modern institution of art in general is premised on the notion of autonomy inherent in Kant's disinterested aesthetic judgment, but rigorous historicizations have revealed the ideological subtexts behind its claims for universality. Andreas Huyssen had stressed that art's aspirations for autonomy, which essentially meant separation from church, state and aristocratic patronage, became possible only when literature, painting and music were organized according to the principles of a market economy.⁶¹ It is only when exchange relations become the norm, severing art from sacred contexts and institutions, that the work of art can become autonomous, hence universally exchangeable. The Kantian aesthetic vision, in to which art does not serve overtly political or religious purposes is, in Terry Eagleton's analysis, inseparable from the rise of the European bourgeoisie and the establishment of a mode of domination based on hegemony and not coercion.⁶² In modern Japan, disinterestedness was a key notion in the construction of pure literature as an autonomous discursive configuration. In the mid-1930s, the dichotomy of high art and degraded mass culture, and the idea of art as free from commercial and political concerns, were still the normative parameters within which literature was thought. Among the literary left, Matsumoto's Friendly Literary Society and the stifling vulgarity of mass culture were conceptualized as threats to the free and creative development of 'proper' literature, as can be seen in the piece by Hirabayashi Hyôgo mentioned earlier, or the statements of the participants in the *Bungakukai* roundtable discussion. On the opposite side of the ideological spectrum, the manifestos of the romantic school also employed this rhetoric of low popular literature and lofty elevated poetry. Yasuda Yojûrô, always critical of the bureaucratization of culture and dismissive of pragmatic concerns, also attacked the Friendly Literary Society, and unlike Takeda Rintarô and Takami Jun, did not publish in its journal.

Takami and the other writers who coalesced around *Jinmin bunko* regarded as their mission the fostering of literary realism and the defence of pure literature against the onslaught of popular novels. The second part of *Auld Acquaintance*, from chapter eight onwards, was serialized in *Jinmin bunko* from March until October 1936. The erosion of

⁶¹ Andreas Huyssens, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 17.

⁶² Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*, pp. 96-99.

the autonomy of literature under the control of the state and the levelling forces of the market are present *symptomatically* in the work. The collapse of the separation of culture and the state is allegorically transfigured into the collapse of traditional realist narrative and ontological levels. In other words, the ontological volatility of the characters and the intrusive narrator are figures of the state's assault on subjectivity and its will to circumscribe the limits of cultural discourse. In this way, *Auld Acquaintance* exposes the ideological charge of the celebratory discourse of the cultural revival and its rhetoric of pure art untainted by politics or commodification. What *Auld Acquaintance* does with the figure of a protean narrator who manipulates his characters and deprives them of subjectivity is to enact the collapse of the ideological structure centred on the autonomy of art as a discursive realm.

Nihon romanha and Jinmin bunko

Jinmin bunko and *Nihon romanha* (Japanese Romantics) were the two journals which in a way defined the ideological parameters of the literary discourse of the 1930s. *Jinmin bunko*, as mentioned above, was conceived by Takeda Rintarô as the progressives' answer to the *Bungei konwakai*. Although Takeda was one of the founding editors of *Bungakukai*, he was losing patience with the ambiguous ideological stance of the journal; according to Takami Jun, Takeda felt stifled there and his hegemonic position was threatened by Hayashi Fusao.⁶³ The inaugural issue of *Jinmin bunko* came out in April 1936. Funding for the journal came from Takeda himself: at that time he was something of a fashionable writer, serializing works in major newspapers like *Miyako shimbun* and the *Asahi*. This meant that *Jinmin bunko* could be truly independent, 'without the background of big money and without the protections of power,' as Takeda wrote in the issue from March 1937 which marked the first anniversary of the journal.⁶⁴ The editorial collective consisted of young writers associated with the coterie journals *Genjitsu* (Reality) and *Nichireki*, most of whom were previously members of the Proletarian Writers' League: Takami Jun, Hirabayashi Hyôgo (1903-1939), Araki Takashi (1905-1950), Shibukawa Gyô (1905-1993), Nitta Jun (1904-1978), Honjô Mutsuo (1905-1939), Tamiya Torahiko (1911-

⁶³ Takami, *Shôwa bungaku seisuishî*, pp. 388-9.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Kawachi Kôji, 'Nihon romanha to Jinmin bunko', *Ikutoku kôgyô daigaku kenkyû hôkoku: Jinbun shakai kagakuhen* 3 (March 1979), p.47.

1988), Hotta Shôichi (1903-), Ôtani Fujiko (1903-1977), and Yada Tsuseko (1907-1944); Inoue Tomoichirô (1909-1997), Tamura Taijirô (1911-1983) and Minamikawa Jun (1913-1955) joined later. *Jinmin bunko* published fiction, criticism, essays, and short pieces on current affairs. Most of the materials were authored by the editorial group, although some established figures, such as Aono Suekichi, the doyen of Marxist criticism, were invited for special contributions.

The few literary historians who have written about *Jinmin bunko* are divided about the origin and meaning of its name. According to Kawachi Kôji, it is related to *jinmin sensei*, the Japanese rendering of the French *front populaire*. The concept of a united front against the rise of the radical right and the corporatist drives of the bureaucracy was imported in 1935 and *jinmin sensei* became a popular phrase in the media. Kawachi also refers to an open letter published in the September 1936 issue of *Jinmin bunko* addressed to Jean-Richard Bloch (1884-1947), the French Communist writer who chaired the International Writers' Association for the Defence of Culture. The association was formed in June 1935 in Paris as the writers' voice of protest against fascism and Nazism and included figures like E.M. Forster, André Malraux, André Gide, Heinrich Mann, Robert Musil and Bertold Brecht. Takeda's text takes the form of a response to a letter from Bloch; he confirms that progressive Japanese writers should unite themselves in a broad cultural front and set up a Japanese branch of the association.⁶⁵ According to Enomoto Takashi, however, the meaning of *jinmin bunko* is unrelated to the popular front and there is no clear political consciousness behind it. Enomoto quotes Honjô Mutsuo who recalls that the editorial group used *jinmin* very casually, in its meaning of common people. It was purely a coincidence that at the same time *jinmin sensei* was taken up by the media and came to possess such radical political connotations.⁶⁶ Enomoto concludes that indeed

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.48-49

⁶⁶ These connotations of *jinmin* might have been the reason why *Jinmin bunko* had problems with the authorities, although the content of the journal was not explicitly political. On 25 October 1936, sixteen members of the editorial group who had met for a monthly literary study meeting (the intention was to discuss the works of Tokuda Shusei) were arrested on the pretext that they did not have permission for the gathering. They were taken to Yodobashi police station and released the next day. The incident was widely reported in the media – the Tokyo and Osaka *Asahi* and the *Tokyo Nichinichi shimbun*. The reporting was quite sensationalist: the articles talked about rising leftist writers and the movement for a popular front, about Takeda Rintarô being engaged in 'frantic bolshevik activities' (Kawachi, '*Nihon romanha*', p. 49)

there was no clear ideological intent behind the name of the journal; it was just a lazy, populist title.⁶⁷

True to its name, *Jinmin bunko* placed great importance on being together with the ordinary people. The writers often organized lecture tours and meetings with readers outside Tokyo. There were special pages for readers letters, and a feature called 'street talk' (*shisei dangi*), devoted to the discussion of current affairs and common problems affecting the everyday lives of ordinary people. In an editorial from May 1936 Takeda claims that the journal proved to be selling extremely well, surpassing expectations. He even goes on to say that without exaggeration *Jinmin bunko* was the best-selling literary journal at that time. (Literary historians, however, estimate the actual figure to be four or five thousand copies a month). *Jinmin bunko*'s readers, according to Takeda, were the former readers of *Senki* (Battle Flag), the journal of the Proletarian Writers' League: students and the intelligentsia, but also workers.⁶⁸ The journal was not ideologically bound and exclusively leftist; content was varied and open in terms of themes and techniques, although the editorial group insisted on realism.⁶⁹

Enomoto Takashi has criticized *Jinmin bunko* for the lack of any will towards a unified literary movement with distinctive artistic aims; its position was purely reflexive, as a forum of critique aimed at the *Bungei konwakai* and *Nihon romanha*. In the editorial of the anniversary issue mentioned above, Takeda describes the stance of *Jinmin bunko* in the following way:

Attacking the *Bungei konwakai*, the bureaucratic control over literature and the writers' acceptance of this; developing further a tradition of orthodox realism and a vigorous spirit of prose; to summarise, protecting culture and disseminating proper high writing: we devoted all our energies to these aims.⁷⁰

'The spirit of prose' (*sanbun seishin*) was actually the closest the *Jinmin bunko* writers came to a particular artistic position. The term can also be translated as 'the spirit of the

⁶⁷ Enomoto Takashi, '*Jinmin bunko nôto*' *Kokubungaku kenkyû* 5 (1966), p. 107.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Kawachi, '*Nihon romanha*', p. 47.

⁶⁹ Yakushiji Noriaki, '*Nihon romanha to Jinmin bunko*', *Kokubungaku* 44: 1 (1979), p. 64

⁷⁰ Quoted in Kawachi, '*Nihon romanha*', p. 47.

novel' as it was intended to capture the essence of the genre. Sometimes Satô Haruo is credited with the phrase, but it was the writer and critic Hirotsu Kazuo who developed it most fully and it is generally associated with him.⁷¹ The term emerged in critical discourse in late Taisho, during the various debates about how to preserve the purity of art and at the same time reconcile it with ideological commitment. The dichotomous conceptualization of 'art' and 'politics' was evident in the so-called debate on the intrinsic value of art between Satomi Ton and Kikuchi Kan, and the responses to Arishima Takeo's (1878-1923) 'Sengen hitotsu' (A Declaration, 1923). Arishima's position – finding it impossible to be a pure artist because of his inability to abstract himself from his own life, and remain indifferent to social problems – was criticised by Hirotsu Kazuo as too claustrophobic.⁷² Arishima's torment is understandable within the disintegrating discursive context of Taisho with its insistence on an abstract humanism divorced from social concerns, and the emerging calls for a more politically committed art. In an essay titled 'Sanbun geijutsu no ichi' (The Position of the Art of Prose), Hirotsu argued that 'the purest and most essential quality of prose art is to be side by side with life'.⁷³ According to Kamei Hideo, such a position opened up new spaces, beyond the pessimism and the sense of a crisis of art under the sweeping rise of leftist politics. Later, Hirotsu's ideas were rediscovered by the writers who coalesced around *Jinmin bunko*. He gave a lecture titled 'On the Spirit of Prose' in the Tsukiji Little Theatre on 18 October 1936 and developed it into an essay which was published in three parts in the Tokyo *Asahi* from 27 to 29 October. Hirotsu also participated in a roundtable discussion organized by *Jinmin bunko* whose text appeared in the November 1936 issue of the journal. The *Asahi* essay is a response to Hayashi Fusao's dismissal of the spirit of the novel as 'sordid realism' (*kuso riarizumu*). Hirotsu asserts that the spirit of prose is not synonymous with the dreariness of everyday reality or the cold soulless rationalism against which romanticism rebelled.⁷⁴ In the highly charged atmosphere of the time, the term gradually acquired connotations of resistance, albeit vague and abstract, and came to signify a certain ethico-political

⁷¹ Kamiya Tadataka, 'Shôwa 10-nendai no "sanbun seishin" ron' in *Shôwa no bungaku*, Nihon bungaku kenkyû shiryô kankokai (ed.), Tokyo: Yûseidô, 1981, p. 100.

⁷² Odagiri Susumu and Kindai bungakukan (eds) *Nihon kindai bungaku daijiten*, vol. 4, Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1977, p.164.

⁷³ Quoted in *ibid.* p.164.

⁷⁴ Hirotsu Kazuo, 'Sanbun seishin ni tsuite', in Muramatsu, *Shôwa hihyô taikai*, vol.2. pp. 96-99.

position. Hirotsu's essay mentions 'the impregnable wall which frustrates the advance of Japanese culture' and the necessity to 'confront the storm of anti-culture'.⁷⁵ He insists on a method which would explore reality without conferring moralistic judgements of good and evil upon it. This insistence on withholding value judgements was probably intended as Hirotsu's revision of the schematic dogmatism in the proletarian literary theories of Kurahara Korehito and Miyamoto Kenji. 'The spirit of prose' is, according to Hirotsu, an analytical stance: it presumes the existence of an objective reality, no matter how complex, and a writing subject, in contrast to the epistemologies of identification and the blurring of subject-object distinctions dominating the discourse of the literary revival. Hirotsu calls for a method which 'closes around the object, just bearing silently and resisting, but reverting to an attack when a looseness opens'.⁷⁶ These metaphors of struggle, resistance and attack seem to be quite common in the discussions of realism coming from the *Jinmin bunko* circle. In an essay about the Japanese romantics, Takami Jun uses a similar language of resistance to reality: 'That reality, which was once possible to dissect calmly and may be even to put in order, today cannot be confronted without extreme resistance'.⁷⁷ Another recurrent motif in the discourse on the spirit of prose is also actuality; never losing sight of a contemporary, complex, unfinished reality.

The idea of the spirit of prose as egalitarian, vernacular and belonging to an indeterminate present was developed further by the critic Yazaki Dan. Yazaki argued that in Japan this egalitarian spirit was crushed by the aristocratic aesthetic of *mono no aware*, the transient beauty of things, and what he called the spirit of sensuous insight (*kankakuteki teikan*), 'a naïve understanding based on intuition' which stifled a more analytical and constructive approach.⁷⁸ In more recent times, the escapist retreat from a mundane reality in the *bunjū* tradition, and ideas of art for art's sake, have hindered the development of the true spirit of the novel. As a stance, *sanbun seishin* opposes this retreat from the dizzying movement of phenomenological reality and the complexities of the social. Yazaki argued that it is premised on a strong positivistic spirit, and the lyrical

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.96,97.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.98.

⁷⁷ Takami Jun, 'Romanteki seishin to romanteki dôkô,' in Takami Jun zenshû vol. 13, p. 112.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Kamiya, 'Showa 10-nendai no "sanbun seishin" ron,' p. 102.

sentimentalism of the Japanese character proved to be the biggest obstacle for its growth.⁷⁹ 'The spirit of prose' thus emerged as a powerful, albeit vague term with layers of meaning and connotation around it. It also came to mean an ethico-political position of resistance when confronting an ideologically complex reality, a departure from the prescribed dogmata of Soviet style socialist realism and its application to the Japanese context in the writings of Kurahara Korehito and Miyamoto Kenji. It signified an epistemological position which upheld the spirit of rational inquiry and maintained a clear distinction between an objectively existing reality and a writing subject.

It is possible to understand the passionate calls for a spirit of prose only if we resituate them within the context of a neo-romanticism which advocated a hermeneutics of intuition and a return to a rarefied Japanese tradition. *Nihon romanha* became a powerful totemic sign associated with the radical undoing of the Marxist project. Neo-romanticism in many ways seems like a cancelled Marxism: it substituted emotions in the place of theory, the sensuous and the particular for the universal, the timelessness of the Japanese classics for the progressive march of modernity, infinite plenitude and pleasure for stoic self-sacrifice, and aesthetics for politics. Even purely biographically, all important figures in the romantic school were former Marxists – Kamei Katsuichirō and Hayashi Fusao were previously members of the Society of New Men active in the radical student movement; Yasuda, although never formally involved, used to write Marxist propaganda novels while at higher school, and, according to Hashikawa Bunzō, was reprimanded and disciplined by the school authorities.⁸⁰ If *Jinmin bunko's* insistence on realism was indeed reactive, a response to a powerful romanticism, then romanticism itself was a secondary gesture, born out of the domination of Showa Marxism.

Yasuda's romanticism has also been seen as a highly idiosyncratic interpretation of Marxism: as Hashikawa Bunzō has pointed out, Yasuda simply replaced proletarian realism and the dialectic with irony and romanticism.⁸¹ The romantic project indeed

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.103.

⁸⁰ Hashikawa Bunzō, *Nihon romanha hihan josetsu*, Tokyo: Kōdansha gakujutsu bunko, 1998, p.30.

⁸¹ Quoted in Yamaryō Kenji, 'Nihon romanha' in Shisō no kagaku kenkyūkai (ed.), *Tenkō: kyōdō kenkyū*, vol.1, p. 251.

resonates with what the cultural revival termed 'the humanization of Marxism': erasing the radical otherness of the social and reverting to the Taisho brand of abstract humanism. Yamyaryô Kenji has located in Yasuda's romanticism a logic of internalizing – not only Marxism, but *tenkô*, the war, defeat and nationalism.⁸² The very concrete political antagonism between state power and the individual is transfigured into an opposition between 'politics' and 'man' in general. Yasuda writes that at some point, Marxism became an outlook unrelated to the Soviets and even unrelated to Marx himself, a desire to fight for justice. For Yasuda, the enthusiasm to reform Japan on a world scale brought a fundamental change to Marxism.⁸³ Hashikawa Bunzô also stresses that apart from Marxism, the origins of the Japanese romantics should be traced back to the Manchurian incident as an incident in the spiritual history of Japan.⁸⁴ The following is an often quoted passage by Yasuda:

When the idea of Manchukuo began to be understood as a new philosophy (*shinshisô*), as a revolutionary worldview, we the Japanese romantic school were still in a state of germination. It was a fact confirmed by everybody that this understanding was born out of the desperate sentiments of the young generation. The general public began to understand this philosophy after the [Manchurian] incident. The dominant knowledge of Japan began to understand it after the Hitler revolution advanced beyond the walls of Paris.⁸⁵

For political radicals both on the left and on the right, the Manchurian incident seemed to be the answer for the aporias of western-derived modernity. Manchuria could indeed represent an entirely new worldview: a space conceived outside western domination, where a planned economy and a total integration of the state would resolve the social antagonisms of modernity; an idea of 'capitalism without capitalism', in Slavoj Zizek's phrase.⁸⁶ The meanings of the Manchurian incident should be sought not only in the end of radical leftist politics, but in the atmosphere of despair and oppressiveness hanging over middle class in general, as articulated by Yasuda.

⁸² Ibid., p. 255.

⁸³ Yasuda Yojûrô, "Manshûkoku kôtei ni sasaguru kyoku" ni tsuite' in *Yasuda Yojûrô zenshû* vol. 11, pp. 105-6.

⁸⁴ Hashikawa, *Nihon romanha*, p.33.

⁸⁵ Yasuda, "Manshûkoku kotei", pp. 106-7

⁸⁶ Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, p. 205.

The manifestos of the romantic school captured some of the libidinal currents of the time – the feelings of liberation from the master narratives of Marxism and from politics in general, the will to transcend the aporias of Japanese modernity – and this is probably the reason why they caused such a sensation in the literary world. The advertisement for *Nihon romanha* was published in the journal *Cogito* in November 1934, signed by Jinbô Kôtarô (1905-1990), Kamei Katsuichirô, Nakajima Eijirô (1910-1945), Nakatani Takao (1901-1995), Ogata Takashi (1905-1938) and Yasuda Yojûrô, founding members of the journal. There was a difference between the original members and figures like Dazai Osamu, Satô Haruo and Hagiwara Sakutarô who remained only loosely affiliated with the group. The editorial foreword to the first issue of the journal in March 1935 is similar in tone and rhetoric to the advertisement, although perhaps more lucid. Both texts employ the ornate pseudoclassical style which would come to be associated with the Japanese romantics and specifically with Yasuda Yojûrô. Both revolve around the opposition between degraded fashionable writing and lofty high art, the transient and the immutable. There is also an emphasis on youth and the purity of youth with vaguely fascist intonations. In the advertisement the romantics voice their disdain for realism and vulgar naturalism, both western imports alien to the Japanese spirit, and their opposition to the technicization of art and the soulless utilitarianism of post-Meiji knowledge.⁸⁷ A return to the classics, to an originary aesthetic moment, is their answer to the malaise of contemporary literature. Both texts call for the resurrection of the traditional lofty figure of the artist and for plundering (*dasshu suru*) from the past its sublime poetic forms. The call for plundering betrays a consciousness of fundamental discontinuity between modernity and the past and of the impossibility of authentic return. This is a profoundly modernist stance towards the past, a spirit of montage which recontextualizes images severed from their organic historic backgrounds. The anti-modern charge of Japanese romanticism is actually articulated through resolutely modernist strategies; as Alice Kaplan has remarked, a social defence against modernization can itself be (aesthetically) modern.⁸⁸ If historicism implies the progressive unfolding of history and the validity of a narrative presentation of the past, the romantic hermeneutics is one of anti-historicism: history is

⁸⁷ Yasuda Yojûrô *et al*, 'Nihon romanha kôkoku' in Muramatsu (ed.), *Shôwa hihyô taikai*, vol. 1, p. 497-8.

⁸⁸ Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, p.26.

seen as a repository of timeless ideals and immutable archetypes. The romantic identification with the classics is, in some sense, a derealization of history. This consciousness of the past as articulated in the manifestos does support Kevin Doak's argument that the romantic attitude towards the possibility of genuine return was profoundly ironic: 'The Japanese romantics made clear...the artificial nature of 'ethnicity' or 'culture' in modern Japan, and, hence, the need to consciously produce within the context of the modern world what would appear as native, traditional and pure'.⁸⁹ They attempted to overcome the ideological tensions of culturalist discourse through an ironic stance which deliberately rejected reality for the beauty of artifice. Irony as a trope could yoke together oppositions and cancel them; it could combine an attitude of passionate identification with the past with a modernist reappropriating of the past; could neutralize all historical binds. Romantic irony, as Karatani Kôjin has pointed out, is serious play; it despises anything experiential and confirms the primacy of the transcendental self, refusing Hegelian dialectic and the rationality of ends.⁹⁰ For Yasuda, as we will see, history was simply a pretext for aesthetic creation.

This retreat from a troubled present and the abandonment of social concerns for the solipsistic plenitude of the subjective world of the artist earned the romantics the harsh criticism of the *Jinmin bunko* group. *Jinmin bunko* published devastating reviews of Yasuda's representative essays, 'Meiji no seishin' (The Spirit of Meiji, 1937) and 'Nihon no hashi' (Japanese Bridges, 1936). In 'Japanese Bridges', according to Shibukawa Gyô, Yasuda was reconstructing classical art as an object of exoticism and abstracting fragments divorced from their historical context. Shibukawa is also critical of Yasuda's ornate and almost impenetrable language, his indifference to the tragedy of the masses and his fascination with heroic authoritarianism. While Yasuda located in Nara art the authentically Japanese and idolized it, Shibukawa stresses that in fact Nara was open to foreign influences.⁹¹ Another memorable piece is 'Romanteki seishin to romanteki dôkô' (The Romantic Currents and the Spirit of Romanticism, 1934), in which Takami Jun points

⁸⁹ Doak, *Dreams of Difference*, p. xviii

⁹⁰ Karatani, *Kindai Nihon no hihyô I*, p.167.

⁹¹ Shibukawa Gyô, 'Bungei jihyô: Yasuda shi no "Nihon no hashi" o chûshin ni' in Hirano, *Gendai Nihon bungaku ronsôshi*, vol.2, pp. 334-338.

out that originally the debate was between romantic and realist circles *within* the proletarian literature movement. Takami attacks the romantics' escapism and their preoccupation with the abstract landscapes of the spirit: the true realist resists the transcendence of reality, even though he hurts himself in the wall of that reality. Takami also detects in the romantics a will to self-deception which is almost ironic: although they obsessively differentiate themselves from current voguish trends, in fact they *are* the dominant discourse.⁹²

A heated debate between *Jinmin bunko* and *Nihon romanha* took place in June 1937, organized by the newspaper *Hôchi shimbun*. The *Jinmin bunko* group consisted of Takami, Nitta Jun and Hirabayashi Hyôgo, while the romantics were represented by Yasuda, Kamei and Nakatani Takao. In it the *Jinmin bunko* group repeatedly criticizes the romantics' foreclosure of the dimension of reality and their ahistorical appropriation of the classics. Hirabayashi questions the romantics about their reasons for conjuring up 'the spirit of the *Man'yôshû*' and 'the spirit of Meiji' exactly in such a historical moment. The same implicit accusation in indulging in essentialist, ahistorical tropes comes from Takami in his insistent questioning of what exactly Yasuda means by *nihontekina mono*, things Japanese.⁹³ In response Yasuda explicitly differentiates himself from official Japanism; this stance will remain a constant in his rather mercurial ideas. He has only contempt for bureaucratic Japanism, which for him is an extension of what he called 'the logic of civilization and enlightenment' (*bunmei kaika no ronri*), the positivistic and utilitarian spirit of Meiji. It becomes clear in the course of the debate that the two groups have very different ideas of culture: for the romantics, with their unabashed elitism, culture is the orthodox lineage of classical Greece, the Renaissance and European classicism. Contemporary Japan is barren and vulgar; there is no culture which is worth protecting and only the classics are the healthy body. Takami Jun, on the other hand, again stresses the devotion of the *Jinmin bunko* group to the genre of the novel as a vernacular form which emerged in the disintegration of high classical culture, and its mongrel, egalitarian spirit. Takami underlines the contrarian stance of the novel as a genre, its ethos of

⁹² Takami, 'Romanteki seishin to romanteki dôkô, *Takami Jun zenshû* vol. 13, pp. 110-117.

⁹³ Takami Jun *et al.*, '*Jinmin bunko, Nihon romanha tôronkai*' in Muramatsu (ed.), *Shôwa hihyô taikei* vol. 2, p. 415.

rebellion and resistance. Although at times the criticisms of the *Jinmin bunko* group appear aggressive and superficial, the writers are conscious of the ideological dimension of literature. The romantics, on the other hand, talk about the lofty and the sublime and voice repeatedly their indifference to politics and the sordid contemporary reality.

Nihon romanha and *Jinmin bunko*, however, have remained in literary history as 'two branches of the same tree,' in Takami Jun's own words.⁹⁴ It is true that both the romantics and the *Jinmin bunko* writers were, to a greater or lesser extent, affected by experience of *tenkō* and its aporias. Both had an uneasy relationship with the political, similar to the psychodynamics of repression and displacement. The *Jinmin bunkō* writers sought to transcend the implacable contradictions of *tenkō* through an aesthetization of the common people. Kawachi Kōji describes the dominant style of the journal as a flat, unreflective realism; the obsessive focus on the everyday lives of common people harbouring a danger of descending into middle-brow genre fiction (*fūzoku shōsetsu*).⁹⁵ Takami argued on the pages of *Jinmin bunko* that the writer belonged to the people, which essentially meant sharing their 'given powerlessness' and 'the mediocrity forced upon them'; 'living in the same poor tenement houses and telling their stories with their words'.⁹⁶ This identification with the common people also explains the almost deliberate anti-intellectualism of the journal: contemporary critics called the 'street talk' feature 'leftist *kōdan*'.⁹⁷ The analyses of social issues and the discussion of current affairs were, according to Enomoto Takashi, close in tone to those found in women's magazines.⁹⁸ The fixation on the common people probably came from a Dostoyevskian empathy with the hurt and the unheard, but it is also possible to detect a certain sentimentalization. *Shomin* (ordinary people) is a vague, essentialist term, a departure indeed from the rigorous class consciousness required from leftist writers. The ideological ambiguity of this aesthetization of the masses can be quite problematic. It is striking that despite the intention to be part of a united popular front against fascism, *Jinmin bunko* failed to

⁹⁴ Takami Jun, 'Rinriteki ishiki no nihonteki hikyoku,' in *Nihon romanha: Nihon bungaku kenkyū shiryō sōsho*, Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1977, p. 14.

⁹⁵ Kawachi, '*Nihon romanha*', p. 48.

⁹⁶ Takami Jun, 'Bungaku ni okeru kanson minpi', *Takami Jun zenshū* vol.13, p. 144.

⁹⁷ A popular form of oral storytelling.

⁹⁸ Enomoto Takashi, '*Nihon romanha to Jinmin bunko: Nihon romanha no tame no oboegaki I*,' *Nihon romanha kenkyū* 2 (1967), p. 30.

engage with the Marco Polo bridge incident of July 1937 and grasp its meaning. The following passage is from the editor's postscript to the September 1937 issue:

The outbreak of the incident brought disquiet into our hearts. But like before, the flow of everyday life is close to stagnation. The immutable truth is in the latter. It is almost becoming difficult to be everyday. This month's media was preoccupied with the problematic of the moment. All the more this journal will adhere to its decided course.⁹⁹

The return to the people, to the bonds of empathy and community, and the abandonment of any political and ideological position are, as we saw, the typical tropes of *tenkô* discourse. If, as Hashikawa Bunzô writes, the romantics dissolved politics into tradition and history, then *Jinmin bunkô*'s identification with the immutable truths of common people also represents an evacuation of the political. It is significant that in a later text published in 1951, Takami is much more sympathetic to the romantic project: he finds in it a healthy ethical consciousness and a reflexive examination of beauty. Resisting the fascist tendencies which grew stronger every day was indeed the intention behind *Jinmin bunko*, according to Takami, but that was a weak-kneed resistance. 'We denounced the romantics as reactionary and thought of ourselves as progressives. But now I think that *Nihon romanha* and *Jinmin bunkô* were two forms of *tenkô*, two branches of the same tree'.¹⁰⁰

Textual Politics: Takami and Yasuda

It is not in his writings in *Jinmin bunko* and in the direct confrontations with the romantics, but through *Auld Acquaintance* that Takami puts forward a politics of the literary text which undermines the strategies of Yasuda. The treatment of language and representation in Takami and Yasuda has crucial ideological implications – and it is on this level that the formal inventions of *Auld Acquaintance* become figures of resistance to the reactionary metaphysics of Japanese neo-romanticism and the cultural revival in general.

⁹⁹ Odagiri Susumu, 'Zasshi *Jinmin bunko* saimoku', *Rikkyô daigaku Nihon bungaku* 5 (November 1960), p. 152.

¹⁰⁰ Takami, 'Rinriteki ishiki,' p. 14.

'We have heard that poetry is at the origins,' stated the romantics early in one of their manifestos, and this preoccupation with poetry was a conscious challenge to prose and the *shōsetsu* which had dominated modern Japanese literature ever since Tsubouchi's 'Essence of the Novel.'¹⁰¹ Their preferred genres were poetry and the essay. Among the founding members of the movement were the poets Jinbō Kotarō and Itō Shizuo (1906-1953), the latter often defined as the representative poetic voice of the first decade of Showa. Hagiwara Sakutarō was also loosely affiliated with the group. Yasuda Yojūrō did not write poetry *per se*, but in his essays the difference between poetry and prose is consciously blurred. Critics have highlighted the power of Yasuda's language. Kawachi Kōji, for example, describes his style as fragmentary, moving in leaps and convulsions; with a spellbinding quality which 'closes the reader in the chamber of Yasuda's aesthetics'.¹⁰² Hashikawa Bunzō also attributes Yasuda's charisma and the almost hypnotic fascination he exerted on the literary youth of the time to his style:

We had never seen anything like it, and there was not anything like it after Yasuda. Itagaki Naoko, one of Yasuda's earliest critics, found 'purity and grace, a serenity of style and emotion.' ...Of course there were shifts of style between earlier and later essays; there was youthful purity and nostalgia, but also sentences emptied of meaning, rigidly regressive like the language of the imperial rescripts...¹⁰³

This stylistic allure of Yasuda's writing can be felt palpably in what is probably one of his most charismatic and most notorious texts, the essay 'Japanese Bridges'. The language and the rhetorical structures of the essay are in a sense exemplary of the textual strategies employed by the romantics: effacement of representation and suppression of the fissures between signifiers, signifieds and referents. The language of the romantics was more presentation rather than representation; a profoundly anti-modern yearning for a plenitude where words are identical with things. In his reading of the essay Alan Tansman has foregrounded the performative force of Yasuda's language and its subliminal aesthetization of death and violence, its hypnotic quality and reliance on rhythm: 'Rhythm, acting on both the mind and the body of the reader, becomes

¹⁰¹ Yasuda Yojūrō, 'Sōkan no ji,' *Nihon romanha* 1 (March 1935), p. 92.

¹⁰² Kawachi, 'Nihon romanha', pp. 39-40.

¹⁰³ Hashikawa, *Nihon romanha*, p. 45.

incantation, creating an experience of harmony...Rhythm produces what Richard Wilbur called "a hypnagogic state" that mesmerises and suspends rational faculties.¹⁰⁴

Yasuda's text obscures boundaries and defies genre and thematic categories; it starts with a culturalist exploration of Japanese and Roman bridges, focusing on architecture, and then slips into more of a poetic and etymological evocation of bridges (and their names) from the classical Japanese tradition. It begins as a historical essay from which history is then curiously evacuated:

I want to tell of beauty, not of history: how Japanese beauty expressed itself in bridges and how it was thought through bridges. I want to address these general problems of aesthetics through the consideration of things Japanese sorrowful (*awareppoi*) and sad, and appeal to the young generation (81).¹⁰⁵

In the beginning it is impossible not to notice the repeated association of Japanese bridges with the semantic fields of adjectives meaning minor, subdued and sad: *mazushii* (impoverished), *kokorobosoi* (desolate), *awareppoi* (sorrowful), *kanashii* (sad) appear frequently, creating a complex cumulative effect close to the pathos of *aware*. *Aware* in turn evokes *mono no aware* and the rich intertextual matrix of Heian aesthetics and Motoori Norinaga's (1730-1801) nativism in which the sensuous *mono no aware* is posited as quintessentially Japanese and opposed to the logocentrism of Chinese thought. Typically of culturalist discourse from the 1930s – as also of its intellectually inferior postwar avatar, *nihonjinron* (theories of Japaneseness) – Yasuda sets up essentialised, loaded oppositions: Roman bridges are extensions of palace architecture, extremely artificial, stifling the contradictions of nature. Japanese bridges, by contrast, are *of* nature, as if built by beasts; they are simply the extensions of natural passages. In a common culturalist figure, Japan is discovered through an internalized Orientalist gaze as

¹⁰⁴ Alan Tansman, 'Bridges to Nowhere: Yasuda Yojūrō's Language of Violence and Desire', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 56: 1 (June 1996), p. 48. The Richard Wilbur quote is referenced to Daniel Hoffman, *Poe*, New York: Paragon House, 1990, p. 55. Tansman's rich and evocative analysis is preoccupied with the ethical dimensions of Yasuda's avowedly apolitical aesthetics, with the rhetorical sliding through which innocent musings arrive at the shedding of blood. My brief discussion is indebted to his reading and also takes up the libidinal charge of Yasuda's writing, but I am more interested in the figures which work to naturalize language and representation.

¹⁰⁵ All page numbers in the text refer to Yasuda Yojūrō, 'Nihon no hashi,' in Muramatsu (ed.), *Shōwa hihyō taikei*, vol. 2, pp. 73-95.

secondary, mediated by the West. The West is logocentric and phalocentric; fixated on meaning and the subjugation of nature. Yasuda's dichotomy extends to roads as well: in Japanese culture the road was something of nature, within nature. *Hashi*, end of the road, is at the same time a connection to the other side. This is an example of the polysemic chains and slippages which act as the major mechanisms of signification in the text. Yasuda here actualizes the homophonic connections between *hashi* (bridge) and *hashi* (end, edge, tip, margin), in a figure typical for classical Japanese poetics. Other homophonic connections explored are *hashibune* or *hashikebune*, barge, and *hashi* as chopsticks. What unites the homophones, according to Yasuda, is the meaning of *hashi* as something mediating, connecting with something else, with the other side. This crucial use of polysemy betrays Yasuda's interest in textual surfaces; it distances signifieds and referents and effaces the real. Although explorations of etymology presuppose a diachronic historical consciousness, history here is curiously absent. Etymology in the essay is closer to polysemy; it is a rhetorical strategy which erases history by superimposing the present onto the past. The classics, according to Yasuda, are not of the past, but of our present and future. Yasuda's quotes from classical poetry again reinforce through repetition this focus on language at the expense of the real. His attention is devoted to the names of bridges and their metaphors in the classical tradition, to legends and representations, rather than real bridges as architectural structures. Yasuda pronounces the Benkeibashi bridge (built in 1889 in the area of Akasaka Mitsuke in Tokyo) as the most elegant and graceful of all, because it resembles a representation, an *ukiyo*e print.

Structurally, the essay rejects rational argument and narrative causality in favour of the archetype of exhaustive listing, *monozukushi*. The repetitions of *awarena* and similar epithets create rhythmic circular effects. Such a structure again works to occlude content and meaning, to suppress the real. This will is reinforced on a thematic level as well: Yasuda privileges surfaces and rejects the metaphysics of depth, stressing how Japanese literature does not strive towards meaning and logos:

The erasure of content and meaning is the way of poetry, which tells of the faintest feelings of rain and clouds (78).

Instead of the expression of grand love novels, Japanese aesthetics conceived of delicate love poems. Japanese poetry abandoned all meaning and resembled the fleeting whisper of lovers, telling of the coming and going of feelings (78).

Instead of telling of meaning and content, [the ancient Japanese] made these transparent, reduced them almost to zero, and relied only on the allusion of the beauty possessed by meaning, content and ideas (88).

The essence of court culture was the expression of complex feelings in concise form, sacrificing everything, making even meaning shallow (90).

This movement away from referential content and from mundane de-sacralized language finds its most emphatic expression in Yasuda's yearning for *kotodama*: 'The ancient Japanese for whom words were not a mere instrument for the transmission of will, but thought of in terms of their *kotodama*, understood the powers of purification (*harai*) possessed by words, and knew the creative force of poetic words' (79). 'In the mythical time of the classics, an event was always a symbol, and therefore was literary' (93). *Kotodama* was thought of as the magical power inherent in words, the belief that words themselves can bring into existence a world. The homophonic connection between *koto* (word) and *koto* (thing) was treated as a mystical identity. Ancient songs were associated with the strongest power to make things happen to the object sung about.¹⁰⁶ Thus the recitation of poetry was believed to have the power to release *kotodama*; invocation was realization.¹⁰⁷ When the emperor travelled, the recitation of poetry settled the spirits of the place or asserted over it the emperor's shamanistic authority. With Yasuda, *kotodama* evokes the original magical unity of words and things, a powerfully non-instrumental view of language; but also a view of politics as inseparable from ritual which implicitly critiques the vulgar profanity of modern representative structures.

Yasuda's invocation of *kotodama* is symptomatic of a stance which does not recognize the otherness of the past, but longs to become one with it. At the same time there is a paradoxical reliance on artifice: the past is treated as a treasure trove of tropes which can be reassembled in a new context. The ideological contradictions of such an approach and its aporetic moments are subdued: the totemic power of Yasuda's language encourages a

¹⁰⁶ Ôsone Shôsuke (ed.), *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten*, Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1993, p. 476.

¹⁰⁷ Tansman, 'Bridges to Nowhere,' p. 46.

corporeal hermeneutic, a mesmerized submission to rapture, rather than analytical examination. Alan Tansman compares the affective charge of Yasuda's language in *Japanese Bridges* to the rhetoric of Nazism, drawing on Saul Friedlander: 'As a poem, Yasuda's prose proceeds through repetition and redundancies, creating what Saul Friedlander calls a "circular language of repetition" that acquires a hypnotic quality, like prayer.'¹⁰⁸ The morbid fascination of Yasuda's prose was experienced by Hashikawa Bunzô, Takeuchi Yoshimi and all the intellectuals who came of age during the 1930s and wrote about Yasuda after the war. Kurihara Katsumaru, for example, was seventeen years old when the essay appeared. Yasuda, Kurihara wrote in 1978, 'likened us contemporary youth to Japanese warriors of old, and drove us to tragic deaths as young heroes of the people.'¹⁰⁹

Towards its end, *Nihon no hashi* takes a strange turn as Yasuda focuses on the epitaph found on a nameless bridge which does not exist anymore. The epitaph records the simple words of a mother from Momoyama times who lost her son in battle and erected a bridge in his memory:

On the eighteenth day of the second month of the eighteenth year of Tenshō [1591], the noble Kinsuke, my child of eighteen, died in the battle of Odawara. Out of unbearable sorrow, I build this bridge. I shed tears. May you attain Buddhahood, and in future times and those after, may people chant prayers for Itsukaseishun when they see this bridge. On the thirteenth anniversary of his death. (94)

For Yasuda this is literature which three hundred years later has not lost its sublimity. The simplicity and naturalness of the words, which become one with the mother, with her sorrow, with the bridge, defeats Yasuda's attempts as a modern man to comprehend them through intellect. The sublime erases historical distance. Again, language emerges as natural and one with emotion; what we have is not representation but expression. The epitaph aestheticizes death and mourning and Yasuda's language universalizes them in a timeless archetype of a mother mourning for a son who has perished in battle. 'There is no protest or resistance, nor rebellion, nor an individual's cry for freedom to be told with

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Tansman, 'Bridges to nowhere', p. 38

exaggerated phrases,' Yasuda writes, admiring the beauty of Japanese culture which kills the self and submerges it into nature (95). In this way Yasuda's refusal of any intellectualized approach to the past and to Japanese tradition and the insistence on the aesthetic and the sensuous logically lead to the renunciation of any modern subjectivity as we know it. Subjectivity, as psychoanalysis has taught us, comes into being by overcoming the immediate and the mother-bound (what Lacan designated as the imaginary) for a subject constituted through the loss of this plenitude, alienated in the realm of the symbolic. Iguchi Tokio has insisted provocatively that Yasuda's renunciation of alterity and abstract thought, of the symbolic, means a refusal of castration. Yasuda, according to Iguchi, identified with Motoori Norinaga's construction of Japan as the feminine (*taoyameburi*): the sensuous, immediate epistemology of *mono no aware* as opposed to the masculine logos of Chinese civilisation.¹¹⁰ In Yasuda's scheme, Japanese beauty is the totality which can overcome modernity and its obsession with meaning and the subjugation of nature. Takeuchi Yoshimi, in his classic study on overcoming modernity, writes that with Yasuda, the infinite expansion of private feeling enacts the exclusion of content and meaning. For Takeuchi, in destroying all categories of modern thought, Yasuda aimed to exterminate thought itself, and to cancel the responsibility of the philosophizing subject. Takeuchi compares Yasuda to a *miko*, the female shaman who was believed to enter into direct communion with the *kami* and speak their will.¹¹¹

In *Japanese Bridges*, Yasuda's longing for the plenitude of the past and the renunciation of an alienated modern subjectivity ultimately leads to a disturbing paean of death. The death of the young Momoyama warrior is transfigured into a universalized archetype of death on the battlefield:

Long ago, in their hearts men were prepared to risk their lives; the cold-blooded yearning to die in a nameless battle under orders which cannot be broken, has been there since times immemorial. This sad strength of men has coloured history. (95)

¹¹⁰ Iguchi Tokio, "'Joseitekina mono' mata wa kyosei (izen): Kobayashi, Yasuda, Dazai', in Hasegawa Kei (ed.), *Tenkô no meian: "Shôwa jûnen zengo" no bungaku*, Tokyo: Impakuto shuppan, 1999, pp. 95-109.

¹¹¹ Takeuchi Yoshimi, *Kindai no chôkoku*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1983, p. 106.

The critic Tsuboi Hideto finds a similar renunciation of subjectivity in the rhetoric of 1930s-40s war poetry.¹¹² The aesthetization of death on the battlefield is where Yasuda's sophisticated writing and the government's propaganda techniques come together. Yasuda's haughty apoliticality indeed paradoxically ended up serving the most blatantly political aims. This is also what he has in common with Kobayashi Hideo, another avowedly apolitical literary critic and admirer of old artefacts, and with Kawabata's rarefied landscapes of the spirit. The fascist moments in the writings of Yasuda, Kawabata and Shiga, which, according to Alan Tansman, heal senses fractured by modernity, also mean achieving wholeness by stepping down from subjectivity, going back to an archaic oceanic feeling.¹¹³

In the discursive landscape of the cultural revival the opposition between *Jinmin bunko* and *Nihon romanha* functions in more complex ways than the debates and the passionate attacks on each other. The romantic elevation of poetry and *Jinmin bunko*'s insistence on the spirit of the novel also take on deeper meanings. Theirs are two profoundly different positions on aesthetic representation, with crucial political implications. Yasuda's language, with its reliance on repetition, rhythm, and polysemy, is closer to poetry than to prose. Lyric poetry, according to Peter Brooks, 'strives towards an ideal simultaneity of meaning, encouraging us to read forward as well as backward (through rhyme and repetition) to grasp the whole in one visual and auditory image'.¹¹⁴ Poetry is indeed the medium which creates metaphoric totalities of meaning; it is emphatically spatial – as Kevin Doak writes, drawing on Bachelard, poetry escapes the forward movement of history to freeze time into specific 'spaces' and is uniquely suited to the expression of an immutable communal spirit.¹¹⁵ Poetry makes possible forms of knowledge that transcend the modern dichotomies between subject and object: in Bachelard's beautiful writing, 'at the level of poetic image, the duality of subject and object is iridescent, shimmering, increasingly active in its inversions,' 'forces are manifest in poems that do not pass

¹¹² Tsuboi Hideto, *Koe no shukusai: nihon kindaiishi to sensô*, Nagoya: Nagoya University Press, 1998, p.8.

¹¹³ See Tansman, 'Images of Repose and Violence', especially p.110-111,114.

¹¹⁴ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Desire and Intention in Narrative*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 21.

¹¹⁵ Doak, *Dreams of Difference*, p. xxxvii

through the circuits of knowledge'.¹¹⁶ In his attempt to transcend the aporias of modern knowledge, Yasuda's writing moves away from content, from referential meaning (which is constructed causally, with a forward movement along the chain of signifiers) in order to create sensuous poetic totalities. It is important to note that Yasuda's crusade against the Meiji project also included a rejection of *genbun itchi* language. Yasuda urged writers to use *bibun*, the ornate style which imitates classical language and its rhetorical figures. He rejected the modern literature of nervous exhaustion, and stressed that what is needed is not the modern *shōsetsu*, but *bibun*; not ideas, but great performance (*daigeinō*).¹¹⁷

Yasuda's stance resonates with what Anthony Easthope has written about language and representation in romanticism. For Easthope Wordsworth's 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*' describes a state in which the mediating aspects of language, the alienation inherent in the relationship of signifier and signified, are strategically elided in visions of unique presence; a state which he compares to 'an extreme version of the Lacanian Imaginary':

Romantic poetic theory is founded on precisely this misrecognition. It affirms that experience is represented in language, but denies any activity of the means of representation in producing the represented...Wordsworth's 'Preface' consistently assumes that language is all but transparent to experience, that the enounced is virtually untrammelled by enunciation. A poet has greater 'power in expressing what he thinks and feels' and transparency inheres in the concept of expression. It does so because expression means that the inward can be made outward without any changes because it passes onto it as though through a clear medium. Transparency characterises both language in general as it is actually used and language in poetry. For the 'Preface' experience exists outside language and prior to signification.¹¹⁸

The Japanese romantics' suspicion towards representation reached with Yasuda towards a mode of writing which aimed to naturalize representation; to heal, through an atavistic return to *kotodama*, the gap between words and things opened up by the disjunctive logic of modernity.

¹¹⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, pp. xv,

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¹¹⁷ Iguchi, "Joseiteki naru mono", p.105.

¹¹⁸ Anthony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*, London: Methuen, 1983, p.123.

As Easthope points out, experiences in which everyday consciousness gives way to a state where subject and object appear as unity are central for romanticism, and Yasuda is no exception.¹¹⁹ In contrast, *Jinmin bunko*'s concept of the spirit of the novel, *sanbun seishin*, however clumsily articulated, insists on the division between a writing subject and a reality to be depicted, even if it is fragmented and unstable. Takami's narrative praxis in *Auld Acquaintance* puts forward even more convincingly an alternative strategy to that of the romantics. The narrator's reflexive comments, the ontological instability of the characters, the self-conscious multiplicity of narrative perspectives expose the mechanics of realist representation and its ideological support for a particular worldview, *without*, however, *abandoning representation altogether*. *Auld Acquaintance* inhabits the moment of modernism, that ambiguous ground between reference and self-reference. Similarly, the subjectivity of its characters remains volatile, poised between autonomy and its deconstruction through the close-ups of the discontinuities and gaps in their supposedly organic selves. The fluid positionality of the narrator with regards to both the characters alludes – symbolically – to certain historical intensities: the erosion of the autonomous self by the penetration of intransigent supra-individual structures and ideologies; the state's intervention in the constructions of subjectivity. The hyperretrospective obsession with the past and the paradoxical inability to articulate the past in a meaningful narrative is a radical deconstruction of the *tenkô* narrative of rebirth, of inauthentic pasts and authentic presents. This positionality of the narrator and the dislocations of the characters' subjectivity constitute a critique of the ideology of the organic self of the cultural revival. *Auld Acquaintance* articulates a perpetually fractured post-*tenkô* subjectivity; a decentred self which is somehow empowering. There is no attempt to overcome the crisis by a through an atavistic return to the communal body and a retreat into some pre-Oedipal plenitude. Amidst thickening nativist tones and calls to transcend modernity, Takami's volatile characters remain figures of resistance, resolutely decentred and modern.

Japanese critical writing on 1930s fiction often mentions the resurgence of a particular mode of narration termed *jôzetsutai* (garrulous style) or *setsuwatai*, the style reminiscent

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

of medieval tales.¹²⁰ While these terms seem to be used broadly and loosely without explicit definitions, they do mean a departure from the elliptical and elegantly restrained narration of Shiga Naoya, which by the 1930s had become somewhat of a stylistic norm. Shiga's style is indeed transparent language *par excellence*; things seem to present themselves directly, as if unmediated neither by language, nor by the presence of a narrator. In a way, the heavy, meandering sentences of *Auld Acquaintance* and its verbose narrator are the ultimate antithesis of Shiga's restrained purity, and of the romantics' idea of representation. If poetry strives towards the creation of metaphoric totalities of meaning, then prose can be said to resist totalization. The figure of prose is metonymy, and Takami's style emphasises the slippages of language, its relentless movement forward. The dense textuality of his *Auld Acquaintance* implies that texts might not have an ultimate referent, that origins might be constructed, fictionalized, lost in writing. It is through this radically anti-foundationalist position that this garrulous, digressive work performs its gestures of resistance to the epistemologies of the cultural revival.

¹²⁰ The descriptions of Takami's style as *jôzetsutai* seem to go back to contemporary reviews of *Kokyû*. See Okada Saburô *et al*, 'Zadankai: shôsetsu no mondai ni tsuite', *Shinchô*, July 1937, pp. 2-22 and Murahashi Harumi, 'Jôzetsuna watashi' in *Konmei to mosaku: Shôwa jûnen zengo*, vol. 2 of *Kôza Shôwa bungakushi*, Tokyo: Yûseidô, 1988, pp. 136-144 for contemporary references to the narration of Takami and Dazai as *jôzetsutai*. See also Kamei Hideo, 'Takami Jun ron', in *Takami Jun zenshû bekkkan*, pp. 188-202; Kiritsubo Yoshiki 'Takami Jun: hito to sakuhin' in *Sakaguchi Ango, Funabashi Seiichi, Takami Jun, Enchi Fumiko shû*, vol. 12 of *Shôwa bungaku zenshû*, Tokyo: Shôgakkan, 1987, pp.1039-1045; Nakamura Shin'ichirô, 'Takami Jun' in *Takami Jun zenshû bekkkan*, pp. 113-120; Nakamura, Tamura and Isoda, 'Zadankai: Shôwa no bungaku'; Nakata Satoru, 'Kokyû wasureu beki shiron', *Nihon bungaku shiyô* 32 (July 1985), pp. 51-60.

In the Flesh: The Historical Unconscious of Ishikawa Jun's *Fugen*

Why would the problem of identification not be, in general, the essential problem of the political?

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'Transcendence Ends in Politics'

"Presence," "immediacy," "real leadership,"
"restored unity": back to the ubiquitous maternal other.

Alice Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*

The dominance of the cultural paradigm of the *shishōsetsu* meant that until 'theory' burst upon the scene and shattered the pieties of the field, critical writing on modern Japanese literature focused mainly on discussions of the unified *oeuvre* of a writer (*sakkaron*) or on explications of a single work, *sakuhinron*. The unity of extratextual author, narrator and protagonist was often considered self-evident; the concern with ethics usually meant a preoccupation with content at the expense of form. Given the tenacity of this interpretive model, it is striking that most Ishikawa Jun commentary revolves around his style and language.¹ The sheer density and the radical allusivity of Ishikawa's language – described by Miryam Sas with the Barthesian term 'writerly' – has earned him labels such as 'difficult', 'avant-garde', or 'opaque'; his cerebral explorations of the epistemology of narrative have made him an isolated figure in the postwar Japanese *bundan*.² (Ironically, this canonization of Ishikawa Jun as a modernist again draws on biography: most studies mention that he studied French at the Foreign Language School (*Gaigo gakkō*, the predecessor of today's Tokyo University of Foreign Languages whose illustrious alumni include Futabatei Shimei and Ōsugi Sakae), taught French for a brief period at the Fukuoka Higher School, and emerged on the scene with some reviews and essays on

¹ There is a biographical study of Ishikawa Jun by Watanabe Kichirō, but this is a work concerned purely with biography, not with Ishikawa's life as authenticating his writing or providing an interpretive key. See Watanabe Kichirō, *Ishikawa Jun den: Shōwa 10-nendai 20-nendai o chūshin ni*, Tokyo: Meiji shoin, 1992.

² Miryam Sas, 'Chambered Nautilus: The Fiction of Ishikawa Jun', *Journal of Japanese Studies* 24:1 (1998), p.37.

contemporary French literature while at the same time translating Anatole France and André Gide). This is as much true about Japanese writing on Ishikawa as about the handful of critical discussions of his work outside Japan. Noguchi Takehiko, William Tyler and Miryam Sas, Ishikawa Jun's most intelligent readers, unanimously situate him in the modernist genealogy of figures like Mallarmé, Valéry and Gide.

Much of this discourse on Ishikawa as a modernist concerned with formal purity originates in readings of his early works, especially *Fugen* (Fugen, 1936).³ The heightened consciousness of artifice in *Fugen* and in other early texts such as the novella 'Kajin' (The Beauty, 1935) is often viewed in the context of Ishikawa's engagement with Gide and his *roman pur*. In an important article titled 'Junsui sanbun ni tsuite' (On Pure Prose), Noguchi Takehiko discusses in depth Gide, Mallarmé's movement for pure poetry and the symbolist preoccupation with the verbal.⁴ Chiba Sen'ichi's study of comparative modernism also includes a chapter on Ishikawa Jun, Gide and the pure novel. Chiba contextualizes the Gide boom which took over the Japanese literary world in the early 1930s: he points out that Gide's characters, seen to break the prison of reflexivity and liberate the self from conventional morals, captured the mood of the cultural revival with its troubled rhetoric of anxiety and self-consciousness.⁵ The first chapter of this thesis touched briefly on the Gidean pure novel (*junsui shōsetsu*) and how the term came to carry meanings and connotations different from its original context. The pure novel became another one of those vaguely contoured but potent signifiers; it is revealing that in 1936 the publishing house Yūkōsha brought out an anthology titled *Junsui shōsetsu zenshū* (An Anthology of Pure Novels), which included works by very heterogenous authors, from Hayashi Fusao and Kataoka Teppeï to Yokomitsu Riichi and Uno Chiyo (1897-1996).

Ishikawa Jun's understanding of the pure novel seems closer to Gide's. In a review piece titled 'Pen kurabu' (Pen Club, 1933), he discusses the style of the Swiss writer Charles

³ I prefer to preserve the original title of the work, while William Jefferson Tyler's English translation renders it as 'the Bodhisattva'. (Ishikawa Jun, *The Bodhisattva*, trans. William Jefferson Tyler, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990)

⁴ Noguchi, 'Junsui sanbun no tankyū' in *Ishikawa Jun ron*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1969, pp.54-98.

⁵ Chiba Sen'ichi, *Modanizumu no hikakubungakuteki kenkyū*, Tokyo: Ōfu, 1998, p.116.

Ferdinand Ramuz (1878-1947). Ramuz, according to Ishikawa, created 'a small universe of pastoral health'; his writing belongs to an altogether different category from the stance which investigates the technique of the novel through the pure novel (*junsui shōsetsu ni oite shōsetsu no hōhō o tankyū suru*).⁷ Most critical studies of Ishikawa do not fail to mention that Ishikawa's debut in the *bundan* was actually as a translator of Gide: he translated *L'immoraliste* (The Immoralist, 1902) in 1924 and *Les caves du Vatican* (English title *The Vatican Swindle (Lafcadio's Adventures)*, 1914) in 1928. In a later essay on Gide, Ishikawa remembers reading *Les faux-monnayeurs* (The Counterfeiters, 1926) in the original, while it was being serialised in *La nouvelle revue française*. (While in Fukuoka, he had copies of the journal sent to him by Maruzen in Tokyo.) Ishikawa admits that he was quite taken with Gide at that time, with the loftiness of his spirit, and with his novelistic experimentation. He tells of his enduring affection for *Paludes* (Marshlands, 1895), an early work of Gide's which prefigures the *mise-en-abyme* structure of *The Counterfeiters* and its self-inscription of narrative.⁸

Gide's concept of the *roman pur* owes much to symbolist poetics and to Mallarmé's revolt against the tyranny of naturalism. Symbolism was a vision of aesthetic order, purity of form and a relative autonomy of representation untainted by a vulgar and protean reality. In his 'Journal of *The Counterfeiters*' Gide argues that the great realists like Balzac annexed to the novel various heterogenous and indigestible elements; he urges writers to 'purge the novel of all elements that do not belong specifically to the novel'.⁹ *The Counterfeiters* has an anonymous narrator, but it also features a character called Edouard, who is writing a novel titled *The Counterfeiters* – which might in turn have a character writing the same novel, in an almost claustrophobic mirroring of narratives *ad infinitum*. Edouard writes in his journal that the novel is 'the most lawless genre', but exactly because of this intoxicating liberty, it has not dared forsake reality; it has never known "that formidable erosion of contours," as Nietzsche calls it, the deliberate

⁷ Quoted in Suzuki Sadami, 'Ishikawa Jun "Kajin" no seiritsu', *Kokugo to kokubungaku*, 61:7 (July 1983), p. 44. .

⁸ Ishikawa Jun, 'Jiido mukashi banashi' in *Ishikawa Jun zenshū* vol.13, Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1989, pp.155-6.

⁹ André Gide, 'Journal of *The Counterfeiters*', translated from the French and annotated by Justin O'Brien, in *The Counterfeiters*, translated by Dorothy Bussy, New York: Random House, 1973, p. 432.

avoidance of life'.¹⁰ Suzuki Sadami has found in Ishikawa Jun's 'The Beauty' a self-inscription of narrative similar to *The Counterfeiters*. Suzuki argues that the novella represents 'pure reflexivity spontaneously generated by words', an experiment more radical than Gide's: the narrator of 'The Beauty' is experiencing and writing simultaneously; it is a novel about writing *this novel (kono shōsetsu o kaku shōsetsu)*.¹¹

William Tyler, the critic whose studies remain the definitive English-language resource on Ishikawa Jun, also writes about Ishikawa's desire to be identified as a 'pure novel' writer in the manner of the symbolists and Gide.¹² Tyler's essays emphasize Ishikawa's resistance to both the naturalism of the *shishōsetsu* and the elliptic lyricism of *mono no aware*, in a gesture which effectively severs Ishikawa's work from the broader Japanese historical and cultural contexts. Instead, he situates Ishikawa within a particular strand of Western (post)modernist writing characterised by playfulness and an obsession with textual surfaces. The jacket copy of Tyler's English translation of *Fugen*, for example, tells us that Ishikawa's work is often compared to those postmodernists *par excellence*, Borges and Nabokov. In the introduction to *Fugen*, Tyler asserts that 'with the possible exception of the story 'Yamazakura' (Wild Cherries, 1936) which possesses the phantasmagorical and surrealistic elements characteristic of Ishikawa's mature fiction, no other pre-war work anticipates better his experimental novels; and in none is the metafictional technique more apparent'.¹³ The critical essay accompanying the translation again stresses that by anticipating trends in world literature, in *Fugen* Ishikawa created 'an early example of metafiction in Japanese literature'.¹⁴

The only Japanese context in which Ishikawa Jun is usually placed is the culture of the Edo era (1600-1867). Ishikawa's *edokko* origins, his immersion in Edo culture during the years of the Pacific war (what he called his study abroad in Edo, *Edo ryūgaku*), and his

¹⁰ Gide, *The Counterfeiters*, p. 185.

¹¹ Suzuki Sadami, 'Fikushon no rasen undō: Ishikawa Jun no shuppatsu o megutte', *Eureka* 20:8 (July 1988), p. 200, emphasis in original.

¹² William Jefferson Tyler, 'Introduction', in Ishikawa, *The Legend of Gold and Other Stories*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998, p. xvii.

¹³ William Jefferson Tyler, 'Introduction', in Ishikawa Jun, *The Bodhisattva*, pp. xii-xiii.

¹⁴ William Jefferson Tyler, 'The Art and Act of Reflexivity in *The Bodhisattva*', in Ishikawa Jun, *The Bodhisattva*, p.140.

reputation as the last of the Edo literati, *saigo no bunjin*, can explain this critical preoccupation. The device of *mitate* has become something of a master-signifier in Ishikawa discourse, used to describe not only the figural dynamics of *Fugen*, but Ishikawa's whole *oeuvre*.¹⁵ Probably the central trope of the irreverent aesthetics of Edo, *mitate* is found across all the arts: *ukiyo-e*, kabuki, *kyōka* poetry, *gesaku* fiction. It can be defined very generally as a technique of allusivity which links figures coming from different cultural texts; it is too broad to be subsumed in terms like metaphor or simile.¹⁶ As preserved in the literal meaning of the verb *tateru* (to raise or to elevate), *mitate* includes an element of elevation: a lowly Edo maid is treated as the incarnation of a Bodhisattva; a commoner is likened to a warrior from the *Tale of Heike*. For Noguchi Takehiko, *mitate* and its accompanying trope, *yatsushi*, in which a lofty figure appears in a humble form, reproduce the sublime realm of classical culture into the familiar, earthly world of Edo.¹⁷ In other words, these are devices of *trans-contextualization*, typical of Edo aesthetics and its dissolution of symbolic hierarchies and cultural boundaries. William Tyler and Miryam Sas also discuss the function of *mitate* in *Fugen*, but apart from the intertextual affinities with Edo, they both emphasize how Ishikawa Jun's linkings are drawn from radically diverse contexts: Buddhist iconography is superimposed onto medieval European figures in an urban narrative of 1930s Tokyo. For Tyler, the *mitate* techniques enable Ishikawa to lift the events of *Fugen* out of their spatial and temporal confines and give them a global dimension. Parallels and allusions create a palimpsestic structure which opens up non-linear possibilities of reading and liberates the narrative from the traditional chronology of rising and falling action.¹⁸ Miryam Sas explores in depth the meanings of an established *mitate* trope: the figuring of Kanzan and Jittoku, the eccentric pair of hermits often appearing in Zen painting, as reincarnations of the Bodhisattvas Monju and Fugen.¹⁹ Sas discerns a culturally and politically subversive stance, because Ishikawa's recombinatory cultural imagination not only reveals the

¹⁵ See especially two essays by Noguchi Takehiko, "'Yatsushi" no bigaku' and 'Mitate sōseiki no seikai' in his *Ishikawa Jun ron*, pp. 194-221 and 222-271 respectively; Andō Hajime, *Ishikawa Jun ron*, Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1987, pp. 45-60 and Sas, 'Chambered Nautilus', p. 43.

¹⁶ Here I side with Miryam Sas who emphasizes her intention to avoid the conflation with metaphor. Sas, 'Chambered Nautilus', p.36n5.)

¹⁷ Noguchi, *Ishikawa Jun ron*, p. 213.

¹⁸ William Jefferson Tyler, 'Art and Act of Reflexivity', pp.148-9; 'Introduction', in Ishikawa, 'The Legend of Gold', p. xvi.

¹⁹ See Sas, 'Chambered Nautilus', pp.41-48.

multilayered complexity of cultural, literary and religious images, but also undermines notions of a national or cultural unity or unproblematic authority.²⁰

It is possible to argue that the *mitate* strategies of Ishikawa are typically modernist: in the dehistoricising imagination of modernism, historically determined artistic techniques become available synchronously (what Andrew Hewitt, drawing on Peter Bürger, has called 'full unfolding'); images and devices torn from their original contexts become fragments ready to be recombined.²¹ In other words, no matter how radical the juxtapositions are, they remain safely within the realm of the textual and have the effect of *dematerializing* history. Even the original context of *mitate* is the culture of textual play characteristic of Edo; as Karatani Kôjin writes, Edo was '...a world without a point of view (a subject), one indifferent to meaning...Japanese literature was without either interiority or objectivity: it offered a pure play of language'.²² In *Fugen*, the superimposition of Joan of Arc and the medieval poet Christine de Pisan, onto Kanzan and Jittoku, who are in turn incarnations of the Bodhisattvas Monju and Fugen, divorces these figures from their original cultural contexts and erases their historicity. What William Tyler identifies as a resistance to the linear, that is, temporal and historical, movement of narrative, can be seen as a spatial strategy of signification in which analogy and allusion work to refer us to other texts, in an endless intertextual mirroring which can obscure referential reality.

Miryam Sas is the reader most attuned to the political ambivalence of this textual play; she is aware that 'such intricacies of playful language may at times threaten to float off into air – that is, to lose their attachment to the world – and hence, to become, on the contrary, objects of beauty too rarefied for political effect'.²³ Sas acknowledges that there are no explicit antigovernment or anti-propaganda statements in *Fugen*, but finds subversive politics in a passage in which the narrator longs to overturn the world, to effect a transformation into confusion and distraction, through the setting of the Buddhist

²⁰ Ibid. p.39.

²¹ Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics and the Avant-Garde*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993, pp.6-7.

²² Karatani Kôjin, 'One Spirit, Two Nineteenth Centuries', in Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian (ed.) *Postmodernism and Japan*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1989, p.262.

²³ Sas, 'Chambered Nautilus', p.39

conundrums into straight letters (*chanto moji ni tatete*). Sas notes, however, that the narrator *watashi* envisages a transformation and derangement of the world through language:

My desire is to turn the world upside down, by putting the paradoxical spinning of the Buddhist conundrums, like 'the difficult and easy are two sides of the same coin' and 'visions of the illusions of the great unwashed', into straightforward lines of writing. Without being completely overturned, this old world would never be transformed into the promised land of the enlightened.²⁴

It is possible to read in this passage the Edo dynamic of overturning reified symbolic hierarchies, of putting the obscure lines of Buddhist scripture into irreverent everyday language. The narrator's rebellion and his desire to challenge cultural boundaries, however, remains firmly in the realm of the textual: the overturning will be accomplished through language. This becomes even clearer as *watashi* goes on to say:

Oh Buddha, I pray of you: drive yourself into madness! My Bodhisattva is out in the sky whirling and dancing. Jittoku is wielding his crazy broom, spinning it in the middle of a cloud of dust. Look for Kanzan! Kanzan is most certainly out somewhere in a bar getting dead drunk. Yet isn't this scene itself the perfect design/pattern (*sic*) for a 'Record of Fugen's Saving of Lives'?

In Sas' perceptive reading, the passage performs a reflexive gesture; it frames the subversive impulse as a project of writing, an aesthetic act which cancels the will to intervention in the world.²⁵

This partial and rather sweeping summary of critical writing on Ishikawa and his *Fugen* inevitably does violence to the subtlety and intelligence of the individual readings. My aim has been to show how the critical preoccupation with Ishikawa's dense language, with the flaunted artifice of his narratives and with his recontextualization of Edoesque tropes has effectively constructed the image of his work as self-conscious modernism striving to become pure *écriture*. Such an approach inserts Ishikawa into a universalist modernist

²⁴ For reasons of clarity I use Miryam Sas' translation here ('Chambered Nautilus', p.48). The Japanese text can be found in *Ishikawa Jun zenshû*, vol.1, p. 374. All subsequent page numbers in the text refer to this edition.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 49; the Japanese text can be found in *Ishikawa Jun zenshû*, vol.1, p.374.

tradition and glosses over the complex aesthetic and political negotiations between peripheral modernisms and the Western metropole. But more to the point, this fetishization of modernist purity is implicated in an elision of historical particularity as it brackets off the political and ideological contexts surrounding the work. William Tyler's use of a term such as metafiction is in this sense symptomatic in the way it isolates *Fugen* from its immediate historical moment. The emergence of the term metafiction is usually situated in the late 1960s: William Gass used it to describe recent works 'that were somehow about fiction itself'.²⁶ Tyler projects the term retroactively onto a text from the 1930s, which is also the cultural product of a non-metropolitan modernism. Mark Currie has warned against such ahistorical ontologizing of metafiction: 'But when postmodern retrospect discovers proto-postmodernism in this way it produces a spurious self-historicising teleology which confirms that critical texts construct their literary objects according to their own interests and purposes: postmodern discourses are seen as the endpoint of history and all prior discourses are construed as leading inexorably towards the postmodern'.²⁷ Metafiction has come to denote a particular mode of postmodern reflexivity – but this preoccupation with artifice and the performance of language has also been accused of displacing the historical; depthlessness and the weakening of historicity are singled out as some of the most problematic features of postmodernism.²⁸

The association of Ishikawa Jun's early works such as *The Beauty* and *Fugen* with Gide's pure novel similarly works towards a valorization of the textual at the expense of the historical. Benjamin's passionate critique of the *roman pur* rings true here: for him the pure novel is the solipsistic extreme which the genre has reached. The birthplace of the novel, Benjamin argues, is the isolated individual whose concerns do not coincide with the experience of the collectivity; who no longer can give or receive counsel. The distinguishing characteristic of the novel is that unlike other genres it does not originate in the oral tradition nor flows back to it. The story of the modern novel is for Benjamin a

²⁶ Mark Currie, 'Introduction', in *Metafiction*, New York: Longman, 1995, p.1.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.5.

²⁸ See, for example, Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', in David Lodge (ed.), *Modern Criticism and Theory*, London: Longman, 1988, pp.385-398; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989 and Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

narrative of cultural loss, of the gradual disappearance of storytelling as an intersubjective experience: 'Indeed, nothing contributes more to the dangerous falling silent of the inner human being, nothing kills the spirit of storytelling more thoroughly, than the outrageous proportions that the reading of novels has undergone in all our lives'.²⁹ As for Gide's pure novel,

In this autobiographical commentary to his latest novel, Gide develops the doctrine of the *roman pur*. With the greatest subtlety imaginable, he has set out to eliminate every straightforward, linear, paratactic narrative (every mainline epic characteristic) in favour of ingenious, purely novelistic (and in this context that also means Romantic) devices. The attitude of the characters to what is being narrated, the attitude of the author towards them and to his technique – all this must become a component of the novel itself. In short, the *roman pur* is actually pure interiority; it acknowledges no exterior, and is therefore the extreme opposite of the purely epic approach – which is narration.³⁰

For Benjamin, the rejection of narrativity, the self-conscious destruction of the hierarchies of the realist novel, signal a hermetic narcissism, a folding of the work into itself. This withdrawal into artifice and the shrinking of referential reality can amplify an experience of atomisation and isolation. Benjamin seems to imply that in the context of his own troubled present, the retreat into pure *écriture* makes it possible for the cultural forms of fascism to claim the abandoned territory of orality, immediacy and intersubjectivity.

Without doubt, Ishikawa's text lends itself to such readings and is fully complicit in this critical focus on formal purity and the distancing of the historical. It does emphasize literary artifice on a number of levels; plot-wise it is a parodic take on the *shishōsetsu* genre; it employs a typical unreliable narrator who explicitly manipulates the narrative. On the level of language and style, various figures of citation and allusion betray a very reflexive stance. Importantly, it invokes one of the most enduring tropes of modernist purity: the work of art as redeeming a fallen reality. For the narrator *watashi*, writing is an act of purification; it is figured negatively, as the opposite of everything mundane and ugly.

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Crisis of the Novel', in Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (ed.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol.2: 1927-1934, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp.299-300.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

This is the aestheticizing strategy of modernism in which, according to Neil Larsen, the work of art has replaced historical agency.³¹

But can a text which was serialized between June and September 1936, during the months of martial law imposed after the failed coup d'état of 26 February the same year, really be concerned only with writing? Are we to take at face value what Ishikawa Jun wrote in an essay published on 1 May 1936, unmistakably referring to the insurgency – that he does not read newspapers and learns about the events in this mundane world from rumours; that most of these events are to him like the sound of the wind outside, and even the violent roar of the machine guns simply passes by his ears?³² How can we restore the ideologico-political context which both the work and the critical discourse around it seem to bracket? There have been attempts to locate the political in the figure of Yukari, the narrator's ethereal love, supposedly involved in the communist movement and forced into hiding. But a closer look at the rhetorical strategies depicting Yukari and the leftist movement betrays an ambiguous attitude: Yukari's involvement in radical politics seems to be a gratuitously inserted detail in an image which is more given to allegory and archetype. Yukari is consistently depicted as a shadow, vague and shrouded in clouds; she is locked in a chain of transformations which have more to do with myth. The scene where *watashi* catches a glimpse of Yukari at Shinjuku station, after years of separation, exemplifies this ambiguity with its sudden turn towards the grotesque; the contemporary context jars with the description of Yukari's metamorphosis from a heavenly vision into a *yasha*, a Buddhist devil. This is closer to caricature than to a realistic description of the life of communists on the run, although some critics have taken the political involvement of Yukari seriously.

But in order to restore to *Fugen* its historical particularity we may need to look beyond content and thematics. This is a modernist text which appropriates allegory and the grotesque, in a conscious gesture of resistance to realism, and it deserves more than a naturalistic reading. Because form is so important in *Fugen*, my reading will attempt to

³¹ Larsen, *Modernism and Hegemony*, pp.xxiv-xxv.

³² Ishikawa Jun, 'Makino Shin'ichi shi o itamu', *Sakuhin* 73 (May 1936), p. 38.

show how the formal *stages* the historical; to grasp what might be termed the rhetorical politics of the text. Far from being immune from history, formal inventions, as Jameson has argued in *The Political Unconscious*, are symbolic enactments of historical dilemmas and political aporias. In Slavoj Žižek's deceptively simple formulation, form articulates the repressed truth of the content.³³ My reading will focus on the pairs and oppositions which function as one of the text's main mechanisms of signification; on the structural connections between them and the accumulated layers of connotation, rather than directly articulated meaning. I will argue that these binarisms are implicated in the enactment of a historical aporia and that this text, ostensibly obsessed with verbal surfaces and narrative artifice, betrays a much closer engagement with the political than obvious at first sight. In my reading these dual structures problematize issues of mediation which were central to the political and epistemological crisis of representation in the mid-1930s. I will also draw upon the insights of Althusser, Lacan and Žižek to show that in its emphasis on language as radical alienation in the symbolic, Ishikawa's text critiques attempts to transcend the modern through the maternalized epistemologies of presence and resists a fascist libidinal economy of pre-discursive affect.

Dualities

The narrative of *Fugen* follows the adventures of the narrator *watashi* for four days around Tokyo giving the impression of simultaneity, of events unfolding as they are being written. Some of the characters – his friend Bunzō, his greedy and calculating landlady Kuzuhara Yasuko, the pet shop owner Hikosuke and his ailing wife Okumi, ravaged by morphine addiction – are introduced through flashbacks and digressions. *Watashi* is writing a biography of Christine de Pisan, a medieval poet known for her odes to Joan of Arc, and he is torn between the purity of art and the vulgarity of the world around him. *Watashi* gets seduced, quite willingly, by Otsuna, a bar hostess involved with his friend Jinsaku. The object of his platonic longing, however, is Bunzō's sister Yukari, who is in hiding because of her involvement with the communists. The climax of the narrative is *watashi's* decision to warn Yukari that the secret police knows about her arranged meeting with Bunzō at Shinjuku station. Yukari does manage to escape, but the narrator's

³³ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso, 1989, p.188

glimpse of her shatters his carefully constructed ideal: the face of this avatar of beauty and heavenly purity is ruined by time and almost repulsively ugly. *Watashi* finds consolation in the arms of Otsuna and goes home to find that Bunzô has killed himself.

Most of Ishikawa's readers discuss the spatial narrative economy of *Fugen*, in which the linear logic of the unfolding narrative is supplemented by figures of allusion and superimposition opening up different possibilities of signification. This is the familiar urge of the modernist text to uncover beneath the surface of the everyday some deeper structures of meaning; to discern patterns in a modern existence marked by contingency and flux. Modernism reigns in archetype and myth in order to hold together a world in fragments and a disintegrating narrative of being. T.S. Elliott and James Joyce are exemplary here with their epistemologies of surface and depth. But this is not the perspectivalism of the realist novel where depth means the psychological interiority of the characters. Modernism is a rejection of this interiority, which by the late nineteenth century was naturalized and regarded as self-evident; in modernist texts, interiority is exaggerated or denatured; put to the test and unmasked as a mere convention. The epistemologies of depth of modernism are provided by myth, archetype or the sublime, structures *outside* modern psychologism, and *Fugen* is no exception.

What strikes us about the deeper structures of *Fugen* is that they are organized in pairs, and often take a markedly dualistic form: the Bodhisattvas Fugen and Monju; Kanzan the poet and Jittoku the humble sweeper; Yukari and Otsuna, or woman as ideality and woman reduced to physicality; the Buddhist images of flower and dust which signify the enlightened world of the Buddha and this world, the opposition between the purity of art and the vulgarity of the world. These dualities are again typical of modernism: in the works of Wolfe and Joyce, as Stephen Connor, following Alan Wilde, has written, 'radical incoherence is not "resolved" or "unified" ...but controlled by being projected in the mode of binary conflicts (flesh and spirit, self and society). Paradox and disconnection are thus not redeemed but delimited within a recognizable aesthetic shape'. Connor points out that this is not solution, but a neurotic containment of a problem – and it marks an imminent

crisis.³⁴ Both structurally *and* referentially, *Fugen's* pairs stage a political aporia, and this is why they deserve a close examination. Chief among them are the Bodhisattvas Monju and Fugen, the pair which most readings of *Fugen* have discussed. Originally Fugen and Monju were not together, their principle of assimilation in Japanese Buddhism is different: Fugen is a semantic translation of the Sanskrit 'Samantabhadra' (universally worthy), while Monju is a phonetic rendering of Mañjuśrī, translated as 'Myōtoku' (superior virtue).³⁶ In Buddhist iconography they are traditionally depicted sitting next to the historical Buddha, Monju on the left and Fugen on the right. They are the emblematic Bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism, the doctrine dedicated to the salvation of all sentient beings (*shujō kyūsei*).³⁷ Monju represents wisdom and enlightenment, while Fugen is the bodhisattva of truth and practice (*gyō*), traditionally associated with the Lotus sutra.³⁸ Importantly, Monju embodies *prajñā*, intuitive wisdom, as opposed to intellectualized cold knowledge.³⁹

Kanzan (Chinese 'Hanshan', literally 'cold mountain') and Jittoku (Chinese 'Shide', 'the foundling'), on the other hand, were Tang dynasty (617-907) recluses whose 'whimsical antics' came to represent 'the spirit of Zen unworldliness'.⁴⁰ Kanzan was a scholar and a poet; his eccentric actions were believed to be obscure expressions of profound Buddhist truths. Jittoku was a humble sweeper who brought Kanzan leftover scraps from the monastery kitchen. Later generations held them to be reincarnations of Monju and Fugen. Kanzan and Jittoku have a long history of appropriation and reconfiguration in Japanese Zen iconography; Jittoku is often depicted sweeping scraps for Kanzan, while Kanzan, drunk, is reciting poetry.⁴¹

³⁴ Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture*, second edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, pp.121-122.

³⁶ Mitsuta Ikuo, 'Fugen: naze Fugen na no ka?' in Miyoshi Yukio (ed.), *Nihon no kindai shōsetsu*, vol.2, Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 1986, p.176.

³⁷ Yamaguchi Toshio, 'Ishikawa Jun *Fugen* ron: sono hassō keishiki ga kanō ni shita mono ni tsuite', *Setsurin* 48 (2000), p.69.

³⁸ Matsuda Tomohiro *et al*, Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts, Tokyo: Nichiren Shoshu International Centre, 1983, p.128; Suganuma Akira and Tamaru Noriyoshi (eds.), *Bukkyō bunka jiten*, Tokyo: Kōsei shuppansha, 1989, p.477.

³⁹ *Prajna* is defined as 'True wisdom or understanding, beyond the discriminating intellect and conventional truth, that emerges from the actualization of True-mind; the power and functioning of enlightened mind' (Philip Kapleau, *Zen: Dawn to the West*, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1980, p.296, quoted in Tyler, 'Art and Act of Reflexivity', pp. 167-8).

⁴⁰ Carolyn Wheelwright, 'Kanzan and Jittoku', in *Kōdansha Encyclopaedia of Japan*, vol.4, Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1983, pp. 154. quoted in Sas, 'Chambered Nautilus', p.41.

⁴¹ Sas, 'Chambered Nautilus', pp.41-42.

Another important pair are Joan of Arc and Christine de Pisan, 'the girl from Orlean and the old woman from Poissy' (333). *Fugen* depicts Christine as the sheltered daughter of a court physician and astrologer, well-versed in literature and the courtly arts. Christine's fortunes changed after the loss of both her husband and father. Burdened with three small children and an aged mother, the impoverished widow had no choice but to make a living selling her literary accomplishments: she wrote ballads and prose and distributed her work herself, rather than relying on the patronage of the church, as was the custom of the age. Thrown about by fate and displaced by the momentous events of the hundred-year war, France's darkest age, Christine found refuge in the abbey of Poissy. She was near seventy when she sang her odes to Joan. Joan was executed in 1431; not long thereafter Christine followed her to the grave (330-332). Joan and Christine are juxtaposed as the virgin and the crone; the spiritual and the all too human, the sacred divinity and the crumbling decay (332).

Yukari and Otsuna, the narrator's platonic love and his very physical passion, again embody opposing principles. Yukari is woman as purified ideality – but strangely, each time *watashi* conjures up the memory of her, he is interrupted by the intrusion of a really ugly reality. *Watashi* is conscious that this might seem like some sort of deliberately employed artifice; he admits that he cannot tell anything about her; all he has is his longing (369). Yukari is emphatically described as vague and disembodied; a shadow with a face shrouded in mist (389). She is repeatedly associated with clouds: 'a figure from between the pure clouds' (378), 'an indistinct figure enveloped by clouds' (416). Yukari's purity and innocence are directly contrasted to Otsuna as pollution (*kegare*) (378); her mist is opposed to Otsuna's fire (389); her ethereality to Otsuna's materiality. Otsuna is overwhelmingly physical, 'a lump of flesh' (*niku no katamari*, 426); *watashi* experiences her corporeality as deeply fascinating and repulsive at the same time. Unlike most other characters, her appearance is described in detail, by a lingering, almost cinematic gaze: the colour and design of her outfit, her face, her breasts, her hips (363).

She is Otsuna of the sweet and ignorant flesh (427). The mere thought of her has a bodily effect on both *watashi* and Jinsaku:

The more Jinsaku spoke, the more it seemed as if he was breathing fire; his eyes were bloodshot, his lips tightened, the veins on his receding hairline throbbing, his fists clenched. While I doubted that Mōichi might be involved with Otsuna, I also felt my face turning red, my throat drying, hoisted into the air by the hand of an invisible demon who was holding my neck. The fragrant fresh tatami suddenly felt soggy; together with Jinsaku I was hanging in the air, like two rabbits injected with the same poison. The bright haze of high noon darkened as I was writhing under the burning brand of Otsuna. 'This bastard Mōichi', I wanted to shout, but my voice deserted me; a faint murmur only echoed... (391-2)

Each time Jinsaku cried Otsuna's name, I clenched my fists so tightly that my fingernails dug into my palms; trying with all my strength to resist the desire to jump at Jinsaku and strangle him; an urge borne out of the piercing pain in my ankles, which felt as if somebody was sticking needles into them.(393).

The sight of Otsuna emerging from the back of the bar was like a sudden fresh stab in my old wound. I moved the stools and fixed my body to the wall, with nowhere to run; Otsuna brazenly leaned over my back. (413)

These pairs - Yukari and Otsuna, Joan and Christine, Kanzan and Jittoku, Monju and Fugen, are superimposed upon each other in a complex layered formation. The following passage sets out some of the structural relationships between them:

The motive for bringing together in my writing (*awasekakō*) the girl from Orléans and the old woman from Poissy is my desire to portray the ever-changing face of woman, marked by winds carrying both flowers and dust. The comparison might be a bit lame, but such treatment is part of my design (*shukō*) to relate (*mitate*) these two to Kanzan and Jittoku. If Kanzan and Jittoku are incarnations (*keshin*) of the Bodhisattvas Monju and Fugen... (332-3)

This is not, however, a rigid structure, but a dynamic constellation which undergoes changes as more relationships are added, or some of the carefully constructed oppositions collapse into identity. Yamaguchi Toshio has analyzed those painstakingly: Yukari is implicitly connected to Fugen, while Bunzō is related to Kanzan and Monju; towards the end of the narrative *watashi's* vision of Yukari is described in the corporeal language normally reserved for Otsuna; Fugen is associated with both flower and dust.⁴²

⁴² See Yamaguchi, 'Ishikawa Jun *Fugen ron*', pp.68-78.

What interests me, however, is that all these dualistic structures and superimpositions can be seen as *different configurations of mediation and immediacy*. The tropics of *mitate*, where one thing stands for another, and the Buddhist notion of incarnation, imply a mechanism of mediation. About Joan of Arc it is known that she claimed an individual experience of God's presence, without the mediation of the church; her professed direct communion with God prompted the accusations of heresy which eventually led to her trial and execution. Christine, on the other hand, uses the mediation of language to sing her odes about the Orlean maiden; in the fundamental opposition between the pure and the vulgar, she is also seen to mediate between the mundanety of the world and the sublimity of Joan. For *watashi*, Christine mediates for Joan – and for Yukari; he confesses that he set out to write about Christine because he is obsessed with Joan – but then Joan's face in his dreams is always Yukari's face:

From the very beginning I have been telling lies, but now I am confused as I seem to have lost even the ability to go on lying...If I have to speak honestly, the reason why with the tip of my pen I lifted from the dustbin of history the remains of a wrinkled old woman like Christine de Pisan is because I secretly wished for some connection with Joan of Arc, but the connection with Joan is again a heap of lies: I had superimposed (*sukiutsusu*) this girl from a distant past onto the shadow of Yukari, who has been tormenting me night and day for the past ten years, and with this unsteady painted image (*esugata*) in front of me have been whining endlessly. This tale is nothing but an act of love-driven madness. (415-416).

In the complex configurations of desire, Christine and Joan become mediators for Yukari. *Fugen* cannot but strike us as an exemplary narrative of mediated desire: *watashi's* desire for Otsuna is mediated by Jinsaku: when he hears Jinsaku talk about Otsuna, *watashi* experiences desire as physical pain. Otsuna relates to the narrator with her body, the direct physical contact is always emphasized: she reaches across his lap, her body collapsing into his; lets her body slither across the tatami like a tangle of sea grasses undulating in a wave (367); he feels the heat generated by her as she presses herself against him (414). Yukari is always somehow removed, veiled, it is as if direct contact is never possible: the eyes of *watashi* get blurred at the thought of her (406); she is 'an apparition from an unknown world behind a curtain of mist' (377). The dilemmas of

mediation are clearly embodied in the figures of the bodhisattvas Monju and Fugen: as the possessor of ultimate wisdom (*konponchi*) which is beyond language, Monju does not need words.⁴³ As the one who 'shatters the gems of Monju's wisdom and scatters them on the earth' (333), Fugen is a mediator; he is emphatically associated with words: 'for me', *watashi* writes, 'Fugen is words' (*Fugen to wa, watashi ni totte kotoba de aru*) (383, emphasis in original). Jittoku, on the other hand, is in a position similar to that of Christine: he mediates between the everyday and the unworldliness of Kanzan. The narrator *watashi* explicitly identifies with Jittoku ('the lowly and inferior being that I am, a more appropriate religious training for me would be to emulate Jittoku rather than Kanzan, to wield the broom and sweep the dust rather than howl poetry in the wind' (333)) and implicitly, with Fugen; he is also indirectly *connected* to Christine: like him she was enmeshed in the mundanety of the world, but rose above it to create her odes to Joan. I would argue that through these configurations of immediate proximity and distantiation, unity and mediation, *Fugen* enacts the tensions of its original historical moment. Mediation is the essential problem of the political: the crisis of the 1930s was marked by the collapse of representative structures and the swell of fascist longings for oneness with the emperor.

The Showa Crisis of Representation

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the Showa crisis of representation was overdetermined by the convergence of economico-political, technological and discursive developments. If the world recession and the crash of credit money exposed the arbitrariness of representation inherent in the exchange principle, as Karatani Kôjin has argued, the social effects of the recession, on a world scale, laid bare the artificiality of the ties between the political parties and the classes they were supposed to represent. For Katarani, this mediation in both the economical and the political domains is *constitutive* for liberal capitalism and its political adage, representative rule. When the system functions 'normally', however, this arbitrariness is repressed; it is revealed only in

⁴³ Mitsuta, '*Fugen*', p.185.

the times of crisis.⁴⁴ In pre-war Japan, the links between the political parties and those they were supposed to represent were traditionally weak.⁴⁵ The introduction of universal male suffrage in 1925 did not change significantly the oligarchic politics enshrined in the Meiji constitution. While the voting population did increase from three million to 14 million (out of a total population of 59 million), the military, men under 25 and, of course, women, were effectively excluded from conventional politics. The recession further deepened the alienation of the masses from the arrangements of power. The social effects of the recession and especially the exhaustion of the countryside were seen as the destructive effects of laissez-faire capitalism and interest politics. The radical right was presenting political parties as Western-style organizations which thrived on antagonisms alien to the Japanese spirit, obstructed the unification of the public with the emperor and corrupted the sacred bonds between ruler and subject through their political pragmatism.⁴⁶ If the twenties were the decade of the left, then the 1930s saw the rise of the right: while in 1923 there were 13 right-wing groups formed, in 1930 they were 26; in 1931 – 65; the numbers rose dramatically to 144 in 1932 and 131 in 1933.⁴⁷ The radical right had a strong agrarian-fundamentalist and spiritualist slant; its leaders espoused violence and direct action and called for a return to a mythical time when the emperor ruled directly without the mediation of corrupt feudal hierarchies. Waves of rightist terror irrupted in the 1930s and eventually brought about the demise of party government.

Some of the radical leaders were given to religious mysticism; Inoue Nisshô (1886-1967) and Kita Ikki (1883-1937) were ardent followers of Nichiren and the Lotus sutra. Direct action and destruction were the only strategies to resist the logic of instrumentality and the alienation of bureaucratism. At his trial Inoue Nisshô stated that destruction is itself construction and the two are inseparable. He dismissed the idea of rational motivation: 'It is more correct to say that I have no systematized ideas. I transcend reason and act upon

⁴⁴ See Karatani Kôjin, 'Representation and Repetition: The 18th Brummaire of Louis Bonaparte', in www.karataniforum.org/represent.html accessed on 16 April 2003.

⁴⁵ For Germaine Hoston the parties 'did not represent effectively mass sentiment among a population that remained largely disengaged from politics'. She joins Katô Shûichi in a flat rejection of the myth of 'Taisho democracy' which sees in the rise of political parties evidence of mass participation in politics along the lines of the Western liberal model: Katô dismisses elections as mere formalities. (Hoston, *Marxism*, p.14; Katô, 'Taisho democracy', p.229).

⁴⁶ Gordon M. Burger, 'Politics and Mobilization in Japan 1931-45', in Duus, *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol.6, p.101.

⁴⁷ Shinobu Seizaburô, *Taishô seiji shi*, Tokyo: Keisô shobô, 1968, p.752, quoted in Hoston, *Marxism*, p.295n40.

intuition.⁴⁸ Politics was conceived as suspension of the everyday; violence was sublime, an opening up of experience in what Alan Tansman, in a slightly different context, calls fascist moments, 'images of self-obliteration through the beauty of violence in the name of an idealized Japan anchored in ancient myth and transcendent of the strictures of time. They conjure wholeness in images of perceptual blending where the individual merges with a higher totality'.⁴⁹

Fascist longings for presence, immediacy and restored community were figured as the desire for oneness between emperor and people. These longings animate the writings of rightist radicals: for example, Asahi Heigo (1890-1921), an early avatar of 1930s terror who in 1921 assassinated Yasuda Zenjirô, head of one of the most prominent *zaibatsu* families, wrote: 'We want to be true Japanese (*shinsei taru nihonjin*) at the same time as being human. The true Japanese are infants of the emperor (*tennô no sekishi*), and have the right to preserve the happiness and glory of their relation to the emperor'. Social structures created for profit for Asahi 'create terrible divisions between His Majesty and his people, the two fundamentals of the life of the nation'.⁵⁰

Nishida Mitsugu (1901-1937), one of the leaders of the February 26 insurgency, wrote in his diary:

If you look hard at today's reality, the enlightened ideal of the Meiji restoration – 'people's emperor, emperor's people' – has been resurrected by a fervent spirit casting its sacred light throughout the universe. Indeed, we have perverted the ideals and forgotten the truth, and an unjust, immoral, ignorant and foolish crowd has divided the people and their most sacred, most beautiful and most beloved emperor.⁵¹

Konuma Tadashi (born 1911), a central figure in the Ketsumeidan, or the Blood Brotherhood, who assassinated former finance minister Inoue Junnosuke on 9 February 1932, recounts in his autobiography how he went to watch an imperial procession on its

⁴⁸ quoted in Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour in Japanese Politics*, London: Oxford University Press 1969, p.53.

⁴⁹ Tansman, 'Images of Repose and Violence', p.114.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Hashikawa Bunzô, 'Shôwa Ishin to ronri to shinri' in Hashikawa Bunzô and Matsumoto Sannosuke (eds), *Kindai Nihon seiji shisôshi*, vol.2, Tokyo: Yûhikaku, 1970, p.213.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 214.

way to a state military parade. A policeman stopped him because he was wearing his mechanic's overalls. Konuma exploded in anger, calling the policeman an impurity (*kyōzatsubutsu*). The policeman had judged him by his appearance; an artificially created hierarchy had deprived him from his real chance for unification (*ittaiika*) with the emperor.⁵²

Although articulated most ardently by the rightist radicals, the desire for unity with the emperor was not confined to them: Hayashi Fusao attributes the following to the proletarian writer Hayama Yoshiki (1894-1945): '[W]hatever it was that had separated His Majesty, the Emperor, from us, his subjects, has now completely disappeared. A single thread joins each of us to the Emperor'.⁵³ This desire erupted with full force during the movement for the clarification of the national polity, the fascist backlash against the respected legal scholar Minobe Tatsukichi (1873-1948) and his theories of the emperor as an organ of the state (*tennō kikan setsu*). Until 1935, Minobe's liberal interpretation of the ambiguous constitutional position of the emperor was widely accepted. The clarification campaign began as an attack on Minobe and his constitutional writings by retired major general Kikuchi Takeo in the House of Peers on 19 February 1935. Kakegawa Tomiko's analysis highlights the rhetorical strategy of the campaign and the skilful manipulation of language. Disregarding the overall theoretical system of Minobe's thought, Kikuchi's speech arbitrarily abstracted the words *tennō* (emperor) and *kikan* (organ), transforming them from legal terms into affective signifiers bound with a subliminal nationalist identification.⁵⁴ On 25 February, Minobe defended his theory in the House of Peers in a speech which lasted almost an hour. The *Tokyo Asahi's* reporting of the speech was positive; the end of Minobe's speech, it said, was greeted with applause, a rare thing in the House of Peers.⁵⁵ But the media's admiration for the persuasive force of Minobe's logic really angered his opponents; the Military Reserve Association, together with various civilian ultranationalist organizations, rose not only against Minobe, but also against the

⁵² Hara Takeshi, *Kashika sareta teikoku*. Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 2001, p.349.

⁵³ Quoted in Donald Keene, 'Japanese Literature and Politics in the 1930s', p. 242.

⁵⁴ Kakegawa Tomiko, "'Tennō kikansetsu" jiken: Nihon fashizumu no chisei e no kōgeki', in Hashikawa and Matsumoto, *Kindai Nihon*, p.320.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.321.

spineless government which did not condemn such theories.⁵⁶ The leaders of the movement saw clearly the social and ideological meaning of the incident. Their campaign played skilfully on the elitism of the intellectual class which accepted Minobe's theories, and used the power of a jingoistic mass culture to mobilize nationalist affect. In the various *zadankai* roundtable discussions in newspapers and magazines, there were complaints that *kikan setsu* was a cold-sounding term, ill-suited to the warm emotionality of the nation; that it was used to mean subordinate parts, means, implements.⁵⁷ It was probably this perceived instrumentality of the term and its lack of aura; its association with soulless machinery, with inorganicity and the inertia of matter that inflamed radical nationalists. Through the media, Minobe's concepts were transplanted into the context of mass culture, vulgarised and sensationalised. Emptied of meaning, the terms *kikan* and *setsu* (theory), were circulating in the media as pure affect, feeding into a nationalist imaginary. The campaign gradually rose into a public hysteria demanding punishment for Minobe and a government repudiation of his theory. The *Tokyo Nichinichi* came out on 27 February with an editorial by the eminent conservative journalist Tokutomi Sôhō (1863-1957). Sôhō confessed that he had not read Minobe's books and was not familiar with the complexities of his theory. However, he also stated his belief that imperial subjects should refrain from even pronouncing the phrase '*tennô kikan setsu*'. He thought that probably ninety-nine percent of the Japanese people felt the same.⁵⁸ Rational argument was pitted against the feelings of the imagined community, and feeling won. The Military Reserve Association and its regional groups flooded Tokyo with telegrams and resolutions demanding that the government silence Minobe and clarify the *kokutai*. A delegation from Nakano offered prayers in the Meiji shrine, burnt publicly Minobe's books and issued a statement condemning his 'non-Japanese, blasphemous, Europe-worshipping ideology which ignores our tradition'.⁵⁹ Mass rallies calling for the clarification of the *kokutai* were held in Kansai, Kyushu and Hokkaido.⁶⁰ Under this pressure on 13 August 1936 the

⁵⁶ The Imperial Military Reserve Association (*Teikoku zaigo gunjinkai*), created in 1910 to educate the civilian population about military values, had at that time 14 000 branches and over three million members (Richard Smethurst, 'The Military Reserve Association and the Minobe Crisis of 1935', in George Wilson (ed.), *Crisis Politics in Prewar Japan*, Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970, pp. 2-3).

⁵⁷ Kakegawa, "'Tennô kikansetsu" jiken', p. 326.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.327.

⁵⁹ Smethurst, 'The Military Reserve Association', pp.4,9.

⁶⁰ Kakegawa, "'Tennô kikansetsu" jiken', p.341.

cabinet issued a declaration, but the reservists and the civilian right wing were not satisfied with the tone of the document, and the government was forced to issue a more unequivocal statement on 15 October. It declared that the emperor is sovereign and that any foreign ideology denying the emperor's complete sovereignty had to be swept away; no ideal which ran counter to Japan's national polity, could be allowed to exist.⁶¹

The campaign was indeed led by the extreme right which came together, overcoming its internal conflicts. But most of the energies flowing into this truly popular fascist outburst came from below. In the words of Robert Mitchell, the movement 'spread like wildfire', transcending established social hierarchies.⁶² In his article on the reservists' role in the movement Richard Smethurst has also stressed that the clarification campaign was clearly an aberration because 'all of the impetus which forced the organization into a more and more virulent attack on Minobe came from below and within, not from the central headquarters or the army, as often charged'.⁶³ The backlash against Minobe laid bare the gap between the liberal modern knowledge of the universities (which taught Minobe's theory), and the simple ideological indoctrination of the school system that stressed the absolute sovereignty of the emperor.⁶⁴ The growth of a sensationalist media meant that the powerfully emotive message of the right was amplified and reproduced throughout the nation.

The Sublime Object of Japanese Ideology

Narita Ryūichi has written that during the 1930s there was a reconfiguration of the boundaries of the nation (*kokumin*).⁶⁵ Those who were previously considered second-class citizens, *niryū no kokumin*, were recognized as proper citizens in the 1930s: women, children, workers, urban and rural poor. A new gaze was directed at the lower depths (*kasō*), in an effort to redraw boundaries and rediscover a new commonality (*kyōdōsei*). These marginalized and disenfranchised groups could become political subjects through

⁶¹ Smethurst, 'The Military Reserve Association', p.23.

⁶² Mitchell, *Thought Control*, p.154.

⁶³ Smethurst, 'The Military Reserve Association', p.1.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, *Thought Control*, p.149.

⁶⁵ Narita Ryūichi, '*Rēkishī*' wa ika ni katareruka: 1930-nendai "kokumin monogatari" hihan, Tokyo: Nihon hōsō shuppan kyōkai, 2001, p.13.

their unification with the emperor; through an interpellation as imperial subjects, in the classic Althusserian way: '...the Absolute subject occupies the unique place of the Centre, and interpellates around it the infinity of individuals into subjects in a double mirror connection such that it *subjects* the subjects to the Subject while giving them in the Subject in which each subject can contemplate its own image (present and future) the *guarantee* that this really concerns them and Him...'.⁶⁶ The explosion of this desire for oneness with the emperor within the overdetermined ideological field of the 1930s can be related to what some theorists have conceptualized as the popular interpellation of fascism: class belonging becomes irrelevant; people stop thinking of themselves as members of a particular socio-economic class and experience themselves as 'the people'; in the libidinally invested language of fascism popular feelings are translated into nationalist and racialist ones.⁶⁷

Because of its nuances of being called, or hailed, interpellation, originally a juridical and rhetorical figure made famous by Althusser's psychoanalytical theory of ideology, is a good term to describe both the discursive and the libidinal workings of Japanese imperial ideology. Etienne Balibar has made an important comment on Althusser's theory: while the basic imaginary mechanisms of interpellation refer to the individual, 'the symbolic patterns (e.g. God, the Law, the Nation, the Revolution, etc.) that "interpellate subjects" and cast their practices into institutional structures are collective. They produce, so to speak, a community-effect'.⁶⁸ The totemic texts of Japanese ideology, the imperial rescripts, illustrate this interpellation of individuals into (collective) imperial subjects. The Imperial Rescript for Soldiers and Sailors (*Gunjin chokuyū*, promulgated in 1882), in the 1930s recited by conscripts and military personnel several times a day, uses the personal pronouns *chin* ('we' or 'our majesty') and *nanji* ('thou') to create the literal structure of the big Other calling, and of the called ones recognizing themselves in the address.

⁶⁶ Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001, p.122.

⁶⁷ Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, p.53

⁶⁸ Etienne Balibar, 'The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser', in E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (ed.), *The Althusserian Legacy*, London: Verso, 1993, p.12.

Soldiers and Sailors, We are your supreme Commander-in-Chief. Our relations with you will be most intimate when We rely upon you as Our Limbs and you look up to Us as your head. Whether We are able to guard the Empire, and so prove Ourselves worthy of Heaven's blessings and repay the benevolence of Our Ancestors, depends on your faithful discharge of your duties as soldiers and sailors. If the majesty and power of Our Empire be impaired, do you share with Us the sorrow; if the glory of Our arms shine resplendent, We will share with you the honour. If you do all your duty, and being one with Us in spirit do your utmost for the protection of the state, Our people will long enjoy the blessings of peace, and the might and dignity of Our empire will shine in the world.⁶⁹

'We are your supreme commander in chief', declares the rescript, and the conscripts recognize themselves as the emperor's soldiers in an interpellation which will take predominance above their identifications with family, region or class. What is striking about this text is the intimacy between the emperor and his soldiers. The Meiji constitution placed the army under the direct command of the emperor; the General Staff were largely independent from both the cabinet and the House of Representatives. According to Carol Gluck, Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922), the creator of the modern Japanese army, instructed that the rescript should be cast as a direct charge from the emperor to his – not the state's – soldiers.⁷⁰ In the text of the rescript, this intimacy is not only stated directly; various rhetorical strategies are used to reinforce an affective connection. The corporeal metaphor presents the emperor as the head and the soldiers as limbs, producing an impression of immediacy. There is a close identification between the emperor and his soldiers: they share both sorrow and honour. Further on the rescript stresses again the affective: it admonishes soldiers not to be 'led astray by current opinions', but to fulfil their essential duty of loyalty with a 'single heart'. The text is blatantly ideological in its predictable inventions of tradition: it constructs continuity between the present and the mythical times of emperor Jimmu, who according to the rescript united the land because he had supreme command over a unified army. The feudal age is construed as an aberration from this tradition and as the usurpation of imperial power; the establishment of a conscription-based imperial army in the first years

⁶⁹ 'Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors', in Ryūsaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore De Bary and Donald Keene (eds), *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, vol. 2, New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, pp.198-199. The Japanese text can be found in Asahi shimbunsha (ed.), *Shiryō Meiji hyakunenshi*, Tokyo: Asahi shimbunsha, 1966, p.396.

⁷⁰ Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p.54.

of Meiji is presented as a restoration of the ancient regime.⁷¹ As Theodore Cook has written, the imperial edict of 1872 which announced the 're-introduction' of conscription, evoked a supposed time when 'all men were soldiers', although conscription had never existed before; it was one of the epochal reforms of Meiji.⁷² But the rescript was a ritual text recited several times a day and performativity was more important than referential meaning. Lofty language, rhythmic patterns, parallel syntactical structures ('duty is mightier than a mountain but death is lighter than a feather'), organic imagery: all these rhetorical devices bound affect and reinforced the oneness of emperor and soldiers.

Similar discursive strategies are at work in that other great document of Japanese ideology, the Imperial Rescript on Education (*Kyōdoku chokugo*, promulgated in 1890) whose daily recitation became compulsory in most schools in early Showa.⁷³ Again it is structured as a direct charge from the emperor to his subjects ('Know ye, Our subjects'). Like any great ideological text, the rescript dematerializes history: 'Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting, and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof...The Way set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed to by Our Imperial Ancestors; to be observed alike by Their descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places'.⁷⁴ History is dissolved into timeless time; the unchanging time of ancient tradition is natural, not historical. Politics has been replaced by aesthetics as generations have illustrated the beauty of loyalty and filial piety. A higher ethical meaning is conferred onto the everyday; material conditions, with their possible antagonisms, are erased. The imperial rescript on education is again an emotive document depending on lofty archaic language and incantatory rhythmic patterns. Language in these texts is reduced to what Rey Chow has called 'the

⁷¹ 'Imperial Rescript', p.198.

⁷² Theodore F. Cook, Jr., 'Making "Soldiers": The Imperial Army and the Japanese Man in Meiji Society and State', in Barbara Molony and Kathleen Uno (eds), *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, p.262.

⁷³ Hara, *Kashika sareta teikoku*, p.9.

⁷⁴ Tsunoda, de Bary and Keene, *Sources*, pp. 139-140.

performative aura of the luminous, self-evident, transparent speech act [which] appears through ...refrain rather than thought and discourse'.⁷⁵

Ever since Meiji imperial ideology had emphasized the unity of emperor and people, the imperial institution itself had to maintain an uneasy balance between modern alienated power and auratic presence. That totemic term, *kokutai*, exemplifies this tension between mediation and presence. Various translations as 'the national polity' or 'the national political essence', *kokutai*, according to Najita and Harootunian, 'conjured up mythical associations of a mystical union of spirit and body that evoked a distinctive past and the creative potential for a distinct future and captured in a single verbal compound the entire range of ideological virtues that defined what it meant to be Japanese as opposed to "other"'.⁷⁶ One of its official sanctifications by the supreme court in 1929 defines it as 'the condition whereby a line of emperors unbroken for ages eternal deigns to reign over our empire and to combine in itself the supreme right to rule'.⁷⁷ It is a profoundly aesthetic concept, but it was also employed in the abstract discourse of political theory and in the notorious Peace Preservation Law of 1925 whose first article stated that 'anyone who has organized an association with the objective of altering the *kokutai* or of denying the system of private property and anyone who has joined such an organization with full knowledge of its object, shall be liable to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a term not exceeding ten years'.⁷⁸ It is a potent affective term first mobilized in the writings of the Tokugawa nativist scholars; as Germaine Hoston stresses, it was the backdrop against which western constitutional theory was introduced.⁷⁹ As the unbroken line of imperial rule, *kokutai* imparts to the emperor system the powerful ideological association with the natural and the spontaneous. A ritual term (Maruyama Masao calls it magical, *majutsuteki*), the *kokutai* exemplifies Mark Neocleous' idea of the nation as a community based on sentiment, emotion and instinct.⁸⁰ Vague and mystical, often described in lofty impenetrable language, the *kokutai* is another purely performative term: it does not *signify*,

⁷⁵ Rey Chow, *Ethics After Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, p.122.

⁷⁶ Najita and Harootunian, 'Japanese Revolt against the West', p.714.

⁷⁷ Maruyama Masao, *Thought and Behaviour*, pp.316-317.

⁷⁸ Robert Mitchell, 'Peace Preservation Law', in *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, vol. 6 p.168.

⁷⁹ Hoston, *Marxism*, p.28.

⁸⁰ Neocleous, *Fascism*, p.31

it *embodies* the national totality, the national community incarnate. Even semantically, *kokutai*, written with the Chinese characters for 'country' and 'body', retains an organic relationship to the body, before the violent disjunctions of modern rational thought.

Mobilized by radical restorationism, the discourse of unity resonated with particular power in the 1930s, amidst the bureaucratic elitism, the exhaustion of the countryside and the widespread alienation from conventional politics. The clarification movement succeeded in reining in the mythical performative power of the *kokutai*. The language of the campaign, like the discourse of the radical right, shares with central ideological texts like the imperial rescripts the libidinally invested discourse of presence and immediacy. Scholars note the obscure archaic language of the rescripts and the lofty, almost impenetrable descriptions of the *kokutai* in 1930s school textbooks.⁸¹ But ideology does not conform to a rationalist model of perfect communication; it was not so fundamental for these texts to be understood conceptually; rhythm precedes meaning; ritual and performativity are more important than the lucid intellectual presentation of a doctrine. As Iguchi Tokio has written, the language of the imperial rescripts harks back to *norito* and *semmyô* ritual incantations; it transcends history and blurs distinctions between nature and culture.⁸² It is not the language of alienated conceptual thought, but a language of corporeal immediacy, short-circuiting directly towards affect. The effects of this language give us a privileged insight into the unconscious support of ideology, into the pre-linguistic affect which sustains the libidinal economy of nationalism.

It should be emphasized that there was nothing unique to Japan in this ideological mobilization of affects and pre-discursive intensities, although the cliché that the Japanese distrust structured abstract thought and prefer direct emotion has become a staple of *nihonjinron* discourse. Even infinitely more sophisticated thinkers like Maruyama Masao and Fujita Shôzô can be co-opted by this discourse because of their thesis that the rational modern subject endowed with agency and self-mastery is absent or

⁸¹ See Kazuko Tsurumi, *Social Change and the Individual: Japan before and after Defeat in World War II*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, pp. 119-120; Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, p.283.

⁸² Iguchi Tokio, "Joseiteki naru mono", p.105.

insufficiently developed in Japan. No matter how atavistic this surge of desires for unity with the emperor may seem, we should be wary of branding it as ahistorically and uniquely Japanese. These longings for immediacy should be contextualized as a reflex specific to a particular historical conjuncture. In the essay discussed above Karatani Kōjin has emphasized that it is these modern mediated political structures, whose arbitrariness is revealed during a crisis, that *produce* bonapartism and emperorism; emperorism is a very modern solution to a very modern crisis of representation.⁸³ Presence, community and organicity are tropes uniting all fascisms. Alice Kaplan tells us that European fascism was also conceived as 'a revolt of human consciousness against a so-called undramatic liberalism, against the estrangement of the individual from government...Against the distance between the state and the people, they hoped for immediacy; against alienation and fragmentation they hoped for unity of experience'.⁸⁴

Fugen relates to this overdetermined historical moment not so much directly, on a purely referential level, but through *form*, through the binary tropes and the various superimpositions which highlight structures of mediation and immediacy. Mediation, and the characters who mediate, are important: Joan and Christine for Yukari, Fugen for Monju; the mediated nature of desire is emphasized and isolated for contemplation; the role of language as an ultimate mediator is pushed to the surface. These preoccupations resonate symbolically with the ideological crisis of the 1930s; they *enact* a historical aporia. The fascist discourse of intimate unity between emperor and people is both a symptom and a response to this crisis of representation. Through its formal structures *Fugen* highlights the crisis which fascist discourse works to disguise; the tensions between mediation and organic unity. As the following sections will show, language is conceived in *Fugen* as alienation in the symbolic, against those (maternal) visions of corporeal presence.

Bodies

⁸³ Karatani, 'Representation and Repetition'.

⁸⁴ Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, p.3

Fugen strikes the reader as a text striving for self-reflexive purity which is at the same time deeply fascinated with bodies, with corporeal materiality. The opposition between the ugly and the elevated, the purified and the mundane, one of the main structural mechanisms in *Fugen*, is often figured as abject flesh and sublime spirit. It is as if the text is captivated with the corporeal against its own will and the will of its narrator, who is seeking the spiritual, be it Fugen, Yukari, or Joan. Fascination is mixed with distaste: bodies, especially female bodies, are described as excessively physical; dead bodies, or bodies close to death, are associated with the abject.⁸⁵ All women are emphatically associated with flesh; towards the end, even Yukari is transformed into a grossly physical being. This transformation is quite remarkable in its grotesque overtones and the Buddhist imagery and the passage deserves to be quoted in full. Sitting in a bar at Shinjuku station, waiting for Yukari, *watashi* lets his thoughts wander towards Fugen, in a poetic prayer asking to find in Yukari a petal of the divine shadow of the bodhisattva, floating above the dust of the world (409). But what assaults him violently, almost knocking him off his chair, is a different vision:

Nothing like the blossoms of a heavenly flower, but a lump of human fat; no less than the weight of the flesh of Yukari whom I had only glimpsed ten years ago. Each time I thought of Yukari, what came in front of my eyes were the contours of her face in the dim light; conveniently, her body was shrouded in vague mist. But the apparition I saw now was transformed into the sultry shining naked body of a sorceress: her head was floating in the air, separate from the body; the gushing blood echoed the laughter of Ganesha; the cloying beauty of the limbs was suffocating: they slipped under my underwear, eating into my skin and scraping inside my body, the pure white arms, melting like sweets, clung around my neck... (409)

It is an intensely corporeal and unabashedly erotic vision. Yukari's ethereal presence has given way to an almost excessive materiality. At the same time the image is mediated

⁸⁵ Kristeva describes the abject as 'a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness which, as familiar as it might have been to me in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as something separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A mass of non-sense that is anything but insignificant and that crushes me. At the border of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture'. Bodily fluids, objects of expulsion, and especially dead bodies are the typical territories of the abject: 'The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection' (Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, pp.2,4).

strongly by Buddhist iconography and myth. The Buddhist tones get even stronger when *watashi* describes the real Yukari, shocked by how time has ruined her face: the features are unchanged, but the skin is yellow and rough, with blotches which give her a callous expression, her eyes burning with greed (*kendon*, a Buddhist term), her lips contorted into a curse (*juso*), blowing murderous ghostly light like a *yasha* (411). This scene indeed borders on the grotesque and is utterly unconvincing when read in purely naturalistic terms. Other characters do not enter the realm of the grotesque, but still share this overwhelming corporeality: Kuzuhara Yasuko, the narrator's landlady, is introduced by the sound of her footsteps on the stairs (334); her glowing ample figure (*mizumizushiku futotta*) and the thick makeup give the impression that she is around thirty-five when in fact she is over forty; she has 'smeared her lustful body smell like mud all over herself' (348). We already noted how Otsuna is reduced to an eroticized physicality which again verges on the repulsive: while lying next to the sleeping Otsuna, *watashi* feels his body 'sticky with the mush that was Otsuna's body, hair, sweat, oil, powder' (417); her powerful smell almost stifles him (418).

This motif about the excessive physicality of a woman's body, site of an eroticism dangerously close to the abject, unfolds fully in the description of Okumi on her death bed. Dead bodies in *Fugen* are in general unspeakably abject. Even while alive, Okumi's mother is described as 'a misshapen form crouching in the corner of the room' 'a figure of rarely seen ugliness', jarring with the bucolic atmosphere of the Tabe house with its frolicking dogs and chirping birds (350). In death, the old woman's corpse is like 'a lump of wet ash that has then turned solid'; the shrivelled limbs resembling a dog rather than a human being (351). The sight of Okumi on the verge of death evokes morbid fascination: on his way to the house of the Tabes, *watashi* conjures up Okumi's face, 'pale like a stagnant sewage water', and the soul urging to escape from 'the fetid putrefying flesh'.(398). But what he sees is even beyond his imagination:

It was hard to believe that the body lying before my eyes was human. 'Only flesh and bones' is a hackneyed expression, but Okumi's body really was hollowed like a ear of wheat after the grain has been taken out; the shrunken skin was stretched over each and every crumbling

bone, the sockets of her half-opened withered eyes, full of black mucus, looked like netsuke, the joints, from the ribs to the fingers and the toes, protruding stubbornly, horrifyingly scraping the crevices of a body from which the blood had dried up... (399)

But Okumi is associated with repulsive physicality not only because she is close to death: with her the erotic explicitly seeps into the abject. *Watashi* is gripped by primal horror because Okumi shows clear signs of physical arousal:

Suddenly, as if possessed by an unknown force and shaken by an unknown instinct, the body lying on the floor sat up, its bones creaking; the protruding ashen grey eyeballs shone with lust; she ripped the silence with the cry of an insect emerging from a cocoon for a second life, turned towards Hikosuke and spread her arms and legs...What swelled inside me was not an aesthetic judgement on the beautiful and the ugly, nor an analysis of emotions, but the dread of a primitive taboo. I was dazzled by what I should not have seen. Okumi was shaking her arms and legs and her *yukata* had slipped revealing a naked black form. Deafened by the anger of a thunder reverberating around the room, I ran into the next room, closed the *fusuma* and clung on to the wall to take my breath... (400-401).

These repulsive bodies are always female, but it would be hopelessly naïve to read them as simple misogyny. If we restore the text to its original historical contexts, these stubbornly material bodies become figures of resistance to the aestheticized female body of the 1930s, as theorized by Nina Cornyetz with regards to Kawabata. The Izu dancer from Kawabata's eponymous early story and Komako and Yôko from 'Snow Country' exemplify what Cornyetz calls woman-as-artwork, an aesthetic formation cut off from materiality.⁸⁶ The little dancer is an embodiment of purity; Komako is also repeatedly described as clean, although she has more bodily presence than Yôko. For Cornyetz, Kawabata's famous nature is troped as quintessentially Japanese; woman is often elided with nature, as in the famous scene from 'Snow Country' in which the reflection of Yko's face in the window of the train is superimposed and dissolved into the landscape flowing past, creating what she calls 'an aestheticised and cultured Yôko-nature construct'. With Kawabata, asserts Cornyetz, 'the experience of the acculturated-aesthetic is facilitated by

⁸⁶ Nina Cornyetz, *The Ethics of Aesthetics in Modern Japanese Literature and Cinema: Polygraphic Desire*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, p.57.

a particular deployment of *women's bodies*'.⁸⁷ Kawabata's (national) aestheticism is bound to a female body in a trope similar to that employed by the philosopher Kuki Shūzō. Kuki, as Leslie Pincus has persuasively argued, 'aspired to forge a link between aesthetic taste and a sensate body – a body that, when risen to a higher power, became a national body equipped to incorporate cultural meaning with the directness and immediacy of sensory appropriation'.⁸⁸ Kuki and Kawabata can be seen as symptomatic of a wholesale emergence of the sensate body in the discursive space of the 1930s. It is important to stress that this body appeared in cultural discourse *after* the foreclosure of the political, when not only the communist movement, but any progressive politics were stifled by government repression. The body of Kawabata and Kuki is explicitly gendered, while the body of *tenkō* writing is neutral but implicitly male: stripped from artificial ideological inscription and abstract theory; from the ethics and austerity demanded by radical politics. It was a sensuous body restored to its natural Japaneseness, to the soil. The philosopher Miki Kiyoshi both registers and attempts to problematize this emergence of the body in the following words:

The new literature has to have a new corporeality (*nikutaisei*). We recognize that the problem of the flesh (*nikutai*), which at first sight appears to be primitive (*genshiteki*), is a problem of thought; that the body which at first sight is completely natural, in fact carries historical and social meanings.⁸⁹

With Kawabata, the purified female body, inscribed with cultural meaning and elided with nature, is often perceived as a superficial image emptied of depth, by a male observer who exemplifies aesthetic detachment. Cornyetz connects this disinterested stance with a fascist aesthetics celebrating the visual fascination with an image emptied of mediation and complexity.⁹⁰ Kawabata's body-as-aesthetic-formation is also a fascist aesthetization

⁸⁷ Ibid. pp.46-47.

⁸⁸ Pincus, *Authenticating Culture*, p. 204.

⁸⁹ Miki Kiyoshi, 'Nikutai no mondai', *Bungei* 5 (1935), quoted in Yamaguchi Toshio, 'Ishikawa Jun *Fugen* ron (chū): sono hassō keishiki ga kanō ni shita mono ni tsuite', *Setsurin* 49 (2001), p.86 n66.

⁹⁰ Cornyetz, *The Ethics of Aesthetics*, p. 49. Alan Tansman associates the aesthetics of Japanese fascism with a feminine figure from a different perspective. He identifies as one of the features of this aesthetic a melancholic strain often troped by writers and filmmakers as feminine. 'The native "content" many Japanese called upon was the traditionally sanctioned aesthetics of the pathos of melancholy loss, revolving around the affective pull of a feminine figure—a figure that appears

of the (Lacanian) Real; an attempt to fix desire to a nationalized image of the female body.⁹¹ The abject, the most unsightly of the unsightly, is one of the figures of Real.⁹² In this sense, nothing can be further from Kawabata's purified aestheticised female images than the bodies of *Fugen*: stubbornly material and disgustingly close to nature, to the festering putrefaction of the abject, their cloying viscosity marking the limits of signification.

But the scene of the men who have gathered around Okumi's death bed can also be read as a reflexive intervention into the conventions ruling the visual representation of woman. The scene is clearly structured around the scopic; there are several references to looking. The image of Okumi's aroused body and her exposed genitals fills *watashi* and Bunzō with unspeakable horror and disgust. This image functions similarly to Courbet's (in)famous painting *L'origine du monde* (1866), in which the frame is filled by an aroused, exposed female torso, with the genitalia taking the centre. Zizek locates in this image the dead-end of traditional realist painting, whose object - impossible, never directly disclosed, but always suggested – is the sexualized naked body, the ultimate object of the male gaze. Zizek' calls Courbet's strategy 'a gesture of radical desublimation': Courbet directly depicted that which previous realistic art only suggested, its concealed ultimate point of reference. Exposed, the sublime object becomes the abject, nauseating and abhorrent.⁹³ A similar desublimation occurs when Okumi's already polluted, half-dead body suddenly shows sexual agency; *watashi* experiences this conjuncture of death and arousal as the abject itself. The screen of fantasy which has constructed woman as a passive object to

across culture, in a complex modernist essay and a sentimental popular movie... This is in strong contrast to Klaus Theleweit's discussion of the German fascist aesthetic, which reveals a cult of masculinity and misogyny'. (Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*, forthcoming from California University Press; see also Klaus Theleweit, *Male Fantasies*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987)

⁹¹ Cornyetz, *The Ethics of Aesthetics*, p.52. The Lacanian Real is 'that which resists symbolisation absolutely' (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar Book I. Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-54*, trans. with notes by John Forrester, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.66, quoted in Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.159). Zizek approaches it through a series of oppositions: the Real as the hard, impenetrable kernel which resists symbolization and the Real as a chimerical entity which lacks ontological consistency; the Real as the starting point, the basis of the process of symbolization (preceding the symbolic order and subsequently being structured by it), but also the Real as the product, remainder, leftover of this process of symbolization; the Real as the fullness of inert presence but also the Real as the gap, a hole, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order. (Zizek, *Sublime Object*, pp.169-170.

⁹² See Cornyetz, *The Ethics of Aesthetics*, pp. 52-3; Slavoj Zizek, 'Modernism and the Stalinist Sublime' *Parkett* 58 (2000), p.9.

⁹³ Zizek, 'Modernism', pp. 7-9.

be looked at suddenly dissolves and what fills the terrified gaze is the Thing, the Real. There is a momentary disintegration of the symbolic; the sight clearly exceeds the available economy of signification: 'I don't have words to tell any more, nor am I allowed to tell', says *watashi*. (400). But this scene also registers an insistent attempt to avoid the Real, to somehow contain it in the symbolic. It can be detected in the efforts of *watashi* to attribute existing cultural meanings to Okumi's body, to reduce it to a representation: he muses that 'only skin and bones' is a hackneyed expression. His depictions objectify her as 'the body'; she is compared to a medieval illustration of human suffering, to a shadow picture of Buddhist transformations (399) in an attempt to textualize, to fill the void with cultural meanings and avoid the horrifying Real of woman *qua* nature. The scene reverses conventional power configurations of the gaze: it is actually Okumi who has the agency and the power of to-be-looked-at-ness; *watashi* and the other men around her bed are frozen in powerless fascination. The meaning of the Buddhist references which crop up in the description of the ravaged face of Yukari is similar: to describe the object is to master it, to reduce a terrifying Real to a representation. Disgusting as they are, the female bodies of *Fugen* in fact work to problematize the fascist aesthetization and objectification of woman and the emergence of a naturalized (as opposed to historical) body stripped of political subjectivity.

But it is also possible to uncover other, less obvious convergences between the textual and the historical, between *Fugen's* obsession with graphic physicality and the new proximity of the *imperial* body in the interwar years, as well as the gathering of deeply ideological maternal connotations around the emperor. The emphasis of imperial ideology on immediacy and organic presence meant that the visibility of the imperial body was of tremendous importance. As early as 1878, Inoue Kaoru (1835-1915), one of the elder statesmen (*genrō*), wrote about the imperial tours that 'the emperor's visiting all parts of Japan...offers the opportunity of displaying great imperial rule in the flesh, thus dispelling misgivings' about monarchical government.⁹⁴ The *kokutai*, as noted earlier, retained an organic relationship to the body, to the sensate and the corporeal; as Leslie Pincus has

⁹⁴ Quoted in Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, p.75

written, it signified 'a potent fusion of the "sacred and inviolate" body of the emperor with a mythic national past'.⁹⁶ The *kokutai* exemplified what can be termed *aesthetic* domination, in two overlapping and important meanings: the corporeal and sensuous residue in the concept itself, and the presentation of the ethical as coinciding with the beautiful in *kokutai ideology*, in an effort to evacuate the political. Hara Takeshi has also argued that the imperial system worked not as abstract alienated ideology, but as very *concrete* visual domination. Hara's visual domination (*shikakuteki shihai*) is different from Takashi Fujitani's employment of the term in a typical Foucauldian conceptual framework: Fujitani positions the emperor as the transcendental subject casting a centralizing gaze across the nation, while the people, made visible to one dominating and all-seeing monarch, recognize themselves as citizen-subjects and objects of this unremitting surveillance.⁹⁷ Hara's emphasis is on the *visibility* of the body of each concrete modern emperor (Meiji, Taisho, Showa). Fujitani employs Benedict Anderson's conceptualization of the nation as an imagined community and stresses the simultaneity of the citizen-subjects' experience of the emperor – the imperial tours of the 1870s and 1880s in this sense became outdated ideological devices because they did not provide the crucial temporal coincidence, and that is why in the 1890s they were superseded by pageants and ceremonies taking part in the new imperial capital.⁹⁸ For Hara, power operated as concrete visual domination through the imperial travels and the display of the imperial body (especially to those alienated from conventional politics – women, children, students, foreigners); for him modern Japan is not an imagined community, but a visualized empire.⁹⁹ Hara stresses both the continuity and the difference between Tokugawa power and modern visual domination: Tokugawa power relied on the display of the status and authority of the ruler (for example in the pilgrimages to Nikkō and the *sankin kōtai* processions), but the body of the ruler was irrelevant; people did not look, they prostrated themselves in front of the *daimyō's* procession. Modern visual domination, in contrast, converges directly on the imperial body. The ideological crisis of Taisho, the rise of conceptions of politics and articulations of subjectivity other than those proscribed by the

⁹⁶ Pincus, *Authenticating Culture*, p.228.

⁹⁷ Hara Takeshi, *Kashika sareta teikoku*, p.11; Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 24-25.

⁹⁸ Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*, pp.201-203.

⁹⁹ Hara, *Kashika sareta teikoku*, pp. 11-12.

Meiji regime, cannot be disengaged from the ailing body of the Taisho emperor.¹⁰⁰ There was a conscious attempt on the part of prime minister Hara Kei (1856-1921) and the *genrō* Yamagata Aritomo and Saionji Kinmochi (1849-1940) to overcome this crisis through the skilful mobilization of the media, and that attempt was focused on the body of the young imperial prince, the future Showa emperor. This association of the modern monarchy with technologies of communication was nothing new: Yoshimi Shun'ya traces the development of communication systems from as early as Meiji, as inseparable from the construction of the emperor system. According to Yoshimi, the media is the 'enabling structure' of the modern monarchy which cannot exist independently of communication technology; from its very inception it was organized around the emperor's body: from the development of a regional telegraphic network in conjunction with the emperor's travels in early Meiji, to the construction of a radio broadcasting system in the mid-1920s.¹⁰¹

Seeing the imperial system purely as discursive formation and media construct surely glosses over the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which imperial ideology functioned, not least the libidinal support which sustained it. But it cannot be denied that especially in the 1920s and 1930s, the media was increasingly used to reinforce visual domination and to create simultaneity. The campaign to promote the future Showa emperor as the 'young prince' began in March 1921, when he embarked on a widely photographed six-month world tour in preparation for assuming the regency in November of that year. According to Miriam Silverberg, photographs in newspapers and magazines inserted the emperor into mass culture, troping him as a glamorous male in a conscious effort to appeal to female readers.¹⁰² When the three commercially owned radio broadcasting stations in Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya were brought under direct state control and combined into the NHK, all effort was directed towards the completion of the nation-wide radio broadcasting network on time for the ceremony for the accession of the Showa emperor. The emperor's journey from Tokyo to Kyoto, the enthronement ceremony held at the imperial palace in Kyoto and his return to Tokyo were broadcast

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.8

¹⁰¹ Yoshimi Shun'ya, 'The Cultural Politics of the Mass-Mediated Emperor System in Japan', in Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Crossberg and Angela McRobbie (ed.), *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, London: Verso, 2000, p.396, 400.

¹⁰² Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*, p. 28

direct.¹⁰³ The NHK stationed announcers with microphones in several locations and pioneered on-the-scene radio reports broadcast simultaneously throughout the nation. It was not so much the content of these reports (there were actually prepared scripts), but the fact that they described what was happening at this very moment, that was important. On their part newspapers acquired the technology for wireless transmission of photographs in anticipation of the enthronement and began transporting newsreels, photographs and other material by air.¹⁰⁴

In other words, an illusion of immediacy was created through extraordinary technological mediation. Live broadcasting fostered the sense of shared temporality emphasized by Fujitani, which was more important than content. Synchronicity of time and space, a sense of direct participation in the rituals of the state, affect and performativity bound together the imperial community. New forms such as the cinema, the microphone and the radio could mobilize the appeal of ritual and obfuscate their inherently mediating, alienating nature.¹⁰⁵ Early Showa was also the time when large-scale state ceremonies centred on the emperor began to be staged in the spaces around the imperial palace, the external gardens and Nijūbashi square: the ceremony commemorating the fiftieth anniversary from the promulgation of the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors held in April 1931, for example, drew crowds as large as 34, 000 people.¹⁰⁶ It is in this new visibility of the emperor's body, direct or technologically mediated, that the workings of imperial ideology in early Showa differ from earlier times. Hara Takeshi has argued that the desire of the young radicals to be one with the emperor was predicated on the proximity of the emperor; on opportunities to see him *in the flesh* during state pageants or get the latest information about the emperor's body from newspapers, newsreels and the radio. The emperor was not an abstract image, but a corporeal presence – and it was this radically new perception, compared to the fairly abstract and removed images of his

¹⁰³ Yoshimi, 'Mass-Mediated Emperor System', p.400.

¹⁰⁴ Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*, pp. 236-237.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, p.23: 'My point is not that all disembodied political voices were fascist but that the machinery of the media gave birth to a new kind of ideological vulnerability. It was mother bound and fascism 'knew' it'.

¹⁰⁶ Hara, *Kashika sareta teikoku*, p.9.

father and his grandfather, that triggered Konuma Tadashi's anger at the policeman in the episode described above.¹⁰⁷

The imperial body made visible by technology was a masculine body dressed in military uniform and often captured observing military exercises astride a white horse. Takashi Fujitani has provided us with a fascinating account of the efforts to masculinize the imperial figure during Meiji and transform a reclusive poet-shaman into a virile modern monarch.¹⁰⁸ In the 1930s, however, ideology began to emphasize also the maternal, all-embracing and forgiving aspects of the emperor. The Showa emperor was presented as a direct descendent of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, and not of Jimmu, the mythical male progenitor of the imperial line. Ideological discourse actualized a certain gender ambiguity that had always existed around the gender politics of the emperor system. The historian Ben-Ami Shillony has traced this ambiguity in detail. Both Japanese and Chinese chronicles, for example, describe a female starting point for the imperial line: Chinese histories mention Queen Pimiko who unified Japan during the third century, while the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* tell of Amaterasu and also refer to female shaman queens. For most of Japan's history, Shillony argues, the passive and unassertive emperors remained closer to the matriarchal figures of Shinto tradition or to the Confucian image of the submissive mother who leaves the masculine function of government to others. They devoted themselves to the artistic pursuits of poetry, calligraphy and painting, surrounded by wives, concubines, ladies-in-waiting and priestesses.¹⁰⁹ The *daijōsai* enthronement ceremony, in which the emperor is accompanied only by female attendants, contains elements normally coded as female: the comb and the fan on the holy bed (*shinza*).¹¹⁰ *Tennō no sekishi*, the emperor's infants, was a phrase which often appeared in the discourse of the radical right, as seen from the writings of Asahi Heigo. *Kokutai no hongī* (Fundamental Principles of Our National Polity, 1937), the preeminent ideological text of the 1930s, emphasizes that the emperor 'loves and protects [his subjects] as one would

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* p.349.

¹⁰⁸ Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*, pp. 171-180.

¹⁰⁹ Ben-Ami Shillony, *Divinity and Gender: the Riddle of the Japanese Emperors*, Oxford: Nissan Institute for Japanese Studies, 1999, pp.9-11.

¹¹⁰ Carmen Blacker, 'The *Shinza* or God-seat in the *Daijōsai*: Throne, Bed or Incubation Ground', *Japanese Journal for Religious Studies*, 17: 2-3 (1990), pp.179-198, quoted in Shillony, *Divinity and Gender*, p.11.

sucklings; 'nurtures them'.¹¹¹ The relationship of the emperor with his subjects was presented as natural and spontaneous; as Kanô Mikiyo has written, it is the mother, not the father, who is identified with nature and carries the strongest meanings of natural. If the authority of the Meiji family state, *kazoku kokka*, rested on the natural bonds between emperor and his subjects, then the emperor, as Kanô has argued, had to be a mother; this is why pre-war ethics textbooks referred more frequently to the mother than to the father.¹¹² The feminist historian Yoshiko Miyake also notes a shift in the emphasis of family-state ideology from father to mother in the 1930s.¹¹³

This ideological accentuation of the maternal aspects of the imperial figure resonates with the emergence of *bosei*, maternity or simply the maternal, both in cultural discourse and state policy. While in the 1920s the media was preoccupied with issues of gender equality, in the 1930s there was a marked shift in discourse towards an emphasis on motherhood.¹¹⁴ This shift paralleled other troubling developments: prominent feminists who during the 1920s had argued for equality and social participation – Ichikawa Fusae, Kôra Tomi, Hani Motoko – after the Manchurian incident aligned themselves with state policy (*kokusaku*).¹¹⁵ After the China incident in 1937, the whole women's movement, which had until then managed to preserve an anti-war position, changed radically its stance and voiced its support for the war. There was a boom in books devoted to the themes of mother and nation; newspapers and magazines were flooded with journalistic eulogies to motherhood.¹¹⁶ In the late 1930s, when historical discourse became blatantly ideological and virtually indistinguishable from myth, there appeared titles like *Josei sanbi to bosei sūhai* (The Glorification of Woman and the Cult of Motherhood, Kagawa Toyohiko), *Bosei no rekishi* (The History of Motherhood, Ifukube Toshiko), *Nachisu no josei* (Nazi Women) and *Nihon no josei* (Japanese Women, Hatano Hanzô). Among those,

¹¹¹ Robert King Hall (ed.), *Kokutai no hongî: Cardinal Principles of Our National Polity*, trans. John Gauntlett, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949, p. 45,76.

¹¹² Kanô Mikiyo, 'Bosei fashizumu no fûkei', in Kanô Mikiyo (ed.), *Bosei fashizumu: haha naru shizen no yûwaku*, Tokyo: Gakuyô shobô, 1995, p.39.

¹¹³ Yoshiko Miyake, 'Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women's Factory Work under State Management in Japan, 1930-1940', in Gail Lee Bernstein (ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, p. 270.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p.270.

¹¹⁵ Narita Ryûichi, 'Sensô to jendâ' in Komori Yôichi *et al* (eds) *Iwanami kôza kindai Nihon no bunkashi*, vol.8: *Kanjô kioku sensô*, p.3

¹¹⁶ Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment, Sexuality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.109.

Josei nisenroppyakunenshi (Two Thousand and Six Hundred Years of Women's History, 1940) by Takamure Itsue (1894-1964), a very charismatic figure who started out as an anarchist poet and later retreated to the countryside to devote herself to anthropological research, became a bestseller.¹¹⁷

This beautification of motherhood cannot be disengaged from the national appropriation of motherhood; the state moved in to manage reproduction and sexuality as part of fascism's drive to hegemonize previously private domains and practices. The Society of Midwives of Greater Japan (Dai Nihon Sanbakai) was formed in 1927 and Mother's Day (the second Sunday of May) was introduced in 1928. (Wakakuwa Midori juxtaposes these developments with the mass arrests of some 1600 communists and other progressives on 15 May 1928 and the establishment throughout the country of the notorious *tokkô*, the special higher police.¹¹⁸) In 1936, The League for the Protection of Mother and Child (*Boshi hogo renmei*) was created in Osaka and Kyoto. Mothers were required to register their pregnancies and the pregnancy record book (*boshi techô*) was introduced. The Mother and Child Protection Act was promulgated on 31 March 1937 and became effective on 1 January 1938. It provided support to mothers and grandmothers when the father had died, was ill or had left the family. Mothers with more than ten children received medals from the state. Another meaningful juxtaposition which can be gleaned from Wakakuwa's timeline is the closure of birth control clinics with a police ordinance and the creation of the Ministry of Welfare (*Kôseishô*) in 1938.¹¹⁹ The mandate of the Ministry of Welfare was closely related to the Mother and Child Protection Act: it oversaw the implementation of the law; ensured support for pregnant women, new mothers and infants; encouraged marriage and birth and protected sick and disabled children.¹²⁰

After the beginning of the war with China, *bosei*, the maternal, was ubiquitous in the discourses of politicians, military men, bureaucrats, academics and writers. Women's

¹¹⁷ Yamashita Etsuko, *Takamure Itsue ron: haha no arukeorijii*, Tokyo: Kawade shobô shinsha, 1988, p.180.

¹¹⁸ Wakakuwa Midori, *Sensô ga tsukuru joseizô*, Tokyo: Chikuma bungei bunko, 2000, p.69

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 74.

¹²⁰ Kanô Mikiyo, "'Ômigokoro" to "hahagokoro": Yasukuni no haha o umidashita mono', in Kanô Mikiyo (ed.), *Josei to tennôsei*, Tokyo: Shisô no kagakusha, 1979, p. 69

literature was no exception: while figures like Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951) and the early feminists of *Seitō* had moved away from the maternal, the work of 1930s writers like Okamoto Kanoko (1889-1939) pushed motherhood to the foreground. Women's literature was conscious of its male readers and its status as a literary commodity and writers like Uno Chiyo and Okamoto Kanoko stood open to accusations of conforming to male expectations and packaging the feminine for male consumption.¹²¹ This marked shift in gender discourses and the new centrality of an ideologically charged notion of the maternal worked to reassert officially sanctioned gender roles and conservative conceptions of *ryōsai kenbo*, 'good wives and wise mothers', at a time when the furore around the modern girl and the gender ambivalence of the culture of urban play threatened the fixity of established subject positions. According to Miriam Silverberg, in the 1920s women could cross both cultural and gender boundaries; contours were more important than fixed content.¹²² Terms like *otokorashisa* (male-likeness) and *onnarashisa* (female-likeness) were used to 'anchor uneasy definitions of masculinity and femininity at a time when women thronged the urban streets en route to work, play and political demonstrations'.¹²³ Among other things, the reification of maternity as a female vocation and the rigid fixing of gender roles represented a search for the authentic amidst the perceived artificiality of modern life: fascism was opposed to what Pound called 'indefinite wobble', be it in social relations, politics or sexuality.¹²⁴ In the 1930s the female body was conceived as exclusively reproductive, but at the same time this physiology was filled with ideological meanings. The term *bosei*, with all its connotations of being natural, 'just there' and inherently Japanese, is in fact contingent and historical: it did not exist until the beginning of the 20th century and is a translation of the Western term. Kanō Mikiyo also stresses that in the West, motherhood and the maternal were invented around the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries, contemporaneously with the birth of the nation-state.¹²⁵

¹²¹ Ozawa Nobuo, Kurihara Yukio, Kanō Mikiyo, Nakagawa Shigemi and Hasegawa Kei, 'Zadankai: 'Hijōji no bungaku': 'Shōwa jūnen zengo' o megutte', in Hasegawa Kei (ed.), *Tenkō no meian: Shōwa jūnen zengo no bungaku*, Tokyo: Impakuto shuppan, 1999, pp. 16-17.

¹²² Miriam Silverberg, 'Advertising Every Body: Images from the Japanese Modern Years', in Susan Leigh Foster (ed.), *Choreographing History*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 134.

¹²³ *Ibid.* p. 130.

¹²⁴ quoted in George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, New York: Howard Fertig, 1985, p. 153.

¹²⁵ Kanō, 'Bosei fashizumu', pp.35-37.

This official sanctification of motherhood cannot be disengaged from the powerful libidinal currents yearning for presence and immediacy amidst the flux of modernity. As discussed in chapter one of this thesis, an often sentimentalized metaphoric of loss pervaded literary and philosophic discourse in the 1930s. Like the emergence of the body, the maternal is not unrelated to the end of radical politics, as Wakakuwa Midori's juxtapositions eloquently show. A powerful ideological notion, the maternal could offer a respite from the ravages of modernization; from the cold instrumentalism of modern reason and capitalism's relentless logic of abstraction. Maternalist discourse has all the roots which fascism can easily appropriate – and Japanese fascism did. For Japanese fascism, as Yamashita Etsuko has argued, the mother was a potent signifier of transcendence and exteriority.¹²⁶ Woman, after all, is the embodiment of affect; maternal love does not know instrumentality. In psychoanalytic terms, the 1930s collapse of representation was a crisis of the symbolic order marked by the resurgence of maternalized epistemologies which rejected the castration of Western modernity emphasizing instead an archaic preindividuated imaginary. The representative structures of modernity are founded on patriarchy, compulsive heterosexuality and reified gender differences; a crisis in the patriarchal symbolic order effects a release of heterogenous flows associated with the feminine and with the power of the mother. One of the symptoms of this crisis in the 1930s was the fascist explosion of energies previously confined to the domestic and the private, into the public political space, as seen in the infectious rise of the so-called *Kokubō fujinkai*, the National Defense Women's Association. The organization began in March 1932 in Osaka with 40 women, building on the currents of popular nationalistic feeling unleashed by the Manchurian incident. At the end of the 1935, it had 23 regional headquarters; a year later, they were 36 and membership had grown dramatically to three million and a half; by 1942 it counted nine million members.¹²⁷ The women from National Defense Women's Association always wore *kappōgi*, the Japanese apron, a marker of motherhood and domesticity. The members put together care packages to be sent to the soldiers on the front; collected

¹²⁶ Yamashita, *Takamure Itsue ron*, p.168

¹²⁷ Sandra Wilson, 'Mobilizing Women in Inter-War Japan: The National Defence Women's Association and the Manchurian Crisis', *Gender and History*, 7:2 (1995), p.305; Vera Mackie, *Feminism*, p. 104.

monetary donations on the streets; gathered at ports and railway stations to see off departing soldiers and serve them tea. The military remained ambivalent towards the organization: they used it skillfully for propaganda purposes, but at the same time there was a certain uneasiness: these women did not exactly conform to the staunchly patriarchal discourse of the army and its visions of virtue, obedience and domesticity.¹²⁸ Although such feverish nationalist mobilization of women suited the army, theirs were *political* activities which threatened the accepted boundaries of the public and the domestic. The slogan taken up by the association, *daidokoro kara gaitô e* (from the kitchen to the streets), was later changed to *kokubô wa daidokoro kara* (national defense starts in the kitchen), possibly to please the army. Conservative voices saw in these women the dissolution of the family and the destruction of order: there must have been something uncanny about these figures in white aprons seeping into the public and male space of the street. As Fujii Tadatoshî has pointed out, they could throng through the streets, gather in public spaces and attend meetings; it is difficult to grasp fully the phenomenon that was the association without taking into consideration this element of a release from the domestic.¹²⁹ It is possible to argue, like Vera Mackie has, that the National Defense Women's Association preserved the established divisions of labour – they prepared tea, food and care packages – but what is important is that these activities took place in *public* spaces. Like the hysterical energies of the campaign for the clarification of the *kokutai*, the National Defense Women's Association represented spontaneous fascism from below which did not fit comfortably with the intentions of the government and the military. Both demonstrate eloquently the inadequacy of conceptions of 'fascism from above' (which deprive the people of agency, but also clearly absolve them of responsibility). The explosive growth of the association represents the anarchic moment of fascism, or the aesthetization of the public domain, in Benjamin's terms.

The maternal was a highly mediated cultural construct which, however, succeeded in reining in a prelinguistic imaginary. Fascism and the maternal resonated together in all those libidinally invested images of immediacy and plenitude which promised a release

¹²⁸ Yamashita, *Takamura Itsue ron*, pp.168,170.

¹²⁹ Fujii Tadatoshî, *Kokubô fujinkai*, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1985, quoted in Yamashita, *Takamura Itsue ron*, p.169.

from the alienation of modernity. But it should be emphasized that this was only a mode of resonance *specific* to the historical conjuncture of the 1930s. In the maternalist discourse of the 1930s the mother's love was always selfless and sacrificial; a mother was expected to be always ready to offer her children – the emperor's children – to the country. Fascism demands sacrifice; it is always defined in distinction to some rotten bourgeois degeneration: after the beginning of the Pacific War, perms were regarded as Western decadence and women were admonished to wear *monpe*, clothes originally worn by peasant women working in the fields. Maternal sacrifice and the sacrifice of fascism are both structured as a renunciation of enjoyment, but as Žižek has stressed, this very renunciation *produces surplus enjoyment*; there is obscene *jouissance* at work in the sacrifice required by fascism.¹³⁰ It has become almost commonplace to associate fascism with hypermasculinity, with the intrinsically violent nature of male desire. While actual fascisms fixed gender roles and reduced women to reproductive biology, in their anarchic gathering moment they fed on maternal affect; in the words of Alice Kaplan, the phallic fascist was dependent on 'mother-nature, mother-machine, mother-war': 'One cannot 'decide' between the mother-bound and the father-bound elements of fascism. They get bundled up in fascism's totalizing imagery and offered up in fascist language to appeal to different emotional registers at different moments in fascism's history'.¹³¹

Yamashita Etsuko notes that during the years of the Pacific War, many women mental patients were described as identifying themselves with Amaterasu, the ur-mother: 'Women calling themselves Amaterasu appear one after the other in this country, causing a real headache for imperial power'.¹³² This can be read as a symptom of the crisis of the patriarchal symbolic order, but is also another fascinating figure for that overwhelming desire for unification with the emperor – who was being presented to the masses as a direct descendant of Amaterasu. The powerful ideological identification of the emperor with the maternal was premised again on the naturalness of the imperial system; its

¹³⁰ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, p.82

¹³¹ Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, p.11. 24

¹³² Kōno Nobuko, *Josei to tennōsei*, quoted in Yamashita, *Takamure Itsue ron*, p. 171.

exteriority vis-à-vis history and modernity. A maternalized emperor system, according to Yamashita, is system-less system, not an emperor as a (transcendental) patriarch.¹³³ In an essay titled 'Kamigokoro' (The Spirit of the Gods, 1944), Takamura Itsue elides the maternal heart (*hahagokoro*) with the spirit of the gods. It is, of course, the emperor who embodies the spirit of the gods, and this is how the august imperial heart (*ômigokoro*) is identified with the maternal, in a profoundly ideological rhetorical sliding.¹³⁴ As long as the emperor is associated with the maternal, he is within the realm of pure affect, immune from rational scrutiny. 'Mother', 'nature', 'soil', 'emperor' become tautological, bound together in the totalizing dynamic of fascism.

Karatani Kôjin's provocative position in the essay *Sôkeisei o megutte* (On Bilineality) comes close to the compelling arguments of Kanô and Yamashita. For Karatani as well, the nativist epistemologies of Motoori Norinaga's feminine, *taoyameburi*, have been only recently – and insufficiently – suppressed in favour of modern patriarchy. The modern Oedipal subject, Karatani contends, was formed in centralized Meiji structures; patriarchy in the strict sense was instituted with the enactment of the Meiji civil code in 1898. This engendered a compensatory drive to recover the maternal, clearly visible in the work of writers like Kyôka and Tanizaki. The philosophy of Nishida Kitarô and the writing of Shiga Naoya for Karatani represent a stepping down from Oedipalized subjecthood into pre-Oedipal narcissism; the language of Japanese fascism, according to Karatani, is not Céline, but *écriture féminine*.¹³⁵ Karatani has been criticized by feminist scholars such as Ueno Chizuko and Ayako Kano for what they see as an essentialized and ahistorical notion of Japanese femininity which ignores the actual oppression of women.¹³⁶ Criticism has also been directed at Kanô Mikiyo (by Takashi Fujitani) for her emphasis on the feminine and the motherly in 1930s imperial ideology, and at Yamashita Etsuko (by Ueno Chizuko) for her association of uncentred, rhizomatic fascism with a maternalized

¹³³ Ibid. p. 171.

¹³⁴ Kanô, *Ômigokoro*, p. 71

¹³⁵ Karatani Kôjin, 'Sôkeisei o megutte', in *Senzen no shikô*, Tokyo: Kôdansha gakujutsu bunko, 2001, pp. 165-92.

¹³⁶ Ayako Kano, 'Towards a Critique of Transhistorical Femininity', in Molony and Uno, *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, pp. 520-554; Ueno Chizuko, 'In the Feminine Guise: A Trap of Reverse Orientalism', in Calichman, *Modern Japanese Thought*, pp. 225-245.

emperor system. For both Fujitani and Ueno, the modern nation-state and its colonial aggression were legitimized through a masculinized emperor.¹³⁷

The analyses of Fujitani and Ueno, however, focus on the representations of the emperor in official iconography and they remain within the problematic of gender. The work of Kanô, Yamashita and Karatani, on the other hand, is not studies of gender, of the embodied existence of women, and their arguments should not be dismissed on such grounds. Karatani is concerned with the feminine and the patriarchal as symbolic registers and psychoanalytical epistemologies. Yamashita Etsuko has emphasized that the mother of 1930s maternalist discourse did not exist in reality; for both Kanô and Yamashita the maternal was an overdetermined and libidinally invested signifier; a reified ideological construct. Both are interested in the institutionalized maternal, in the maternal *as a system*.¹³⁸ Kanô has demonstrated persuasively how the maternal could always be excavated as a counterdiscourse to capitalist modernity. They are not concerned with iconography, but with *ideology*; both examine the intersections of different ideological orders: the activities of fascist women's organizations such as the National Women's Defence Association (Yamashita); the official sanctification of motherhood (Kanô); the collective fantasy sustaining the myth and the rhetorical mechanisms which worked to identify the emperor with the maternal. While the analyses of Fujitani and Ueno are limited to discourse, Yamashita and Kanô turn their attention to the libidinal investments through which emperor ideology mobilized its subjects. Neither has claimed that the emperor was unambiguously feminized: Kanô sees the different ideological articulations of the emperor as fulfilling different purposes: the paternal to legitimate the Meiji structures of patriarchal domination and the maternal to tap into the archaic undercurrents of the popular psyche. The emperor could be *both* paternal and maternal, just like the imperial institution could be resolutely modern and at the same time retain aesthetic elements. Different ideological registers (not all exclusively discursive) were actualized to appeal to different imaginaries.

¹³⁷ Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*, pp.171-172; Ueno, 'In the Feminine Guise', pp. 239-241.

¹³⁸ Kanô, 'Bosei fashizumu', p.38

But in psychoanalytic terms the maternal is profoundly ambivalent: it can be associated with the Lacanian order of the imaginary, before the child's entry into language, with the completeness of the full body before its mortification by the symbolic – but it can also be the horrifying Real, the remainder that can never be symbolized. Kristeva associates the abject with the mother and the primal; and the abject, the repulsive object of pollution, is one of the substances of the Real.¹³⁹ The identification of the emperor with the maternal, so strong in the 1930s and 1940s, is inscribed with this ambivalence: the emperor is an aesthetic presence before the alienation of modernity, but he can also be the Real of modernity, the uncanny remnant after modernization. This is how I understand Harry Harootunian's comment that the emperor masks a fundamental disorder which cannot be symbolised.¹⁴⁰ He is certainly not *only* an almighty patriarch or a transcendental signifier, but, as the radical right put it, both father and mother (*chichi ni shite haha naru mono*). The emperor *embodies* what Žizek has called the Nation *qua* Thing, that pre-symbolic maternal thing at the heart of the symbolic order.¹⁴¹

Fugen and its repulsive bodies *enact* this ambivalence; they show that the eternal pleasure of the imaginary can also be the domain of the Real and the abject. To quote Žizek at length,

In fantasy mother is *reduced* to a limited set of symbolic features, but as soon as an object gets too close to the Mother-Thing – an object which is not linked to the maternal Thing only through certain reduced features, but is immediately attached to it – desire is suffocated into incestuous claustrophobia. Here we again encounter the paradoxical intermediate role of fantasy – it is a construction enabling us to seek maternal substitutes, but at the same time a screen shielding us from getting too close to the maternal Thing.¹⁴²

It is in immediate proximity that bodies become overwhelmingly corporeal and almost disgusting for *watashi*; when erotic fascination is tinged with disgust: in the taxi with Kuzuhara Yasuko, lying in bed next to Otsuna. The scene in which the narrator glimpses

¹³⁹ 'But devotees of the abject, she as well as he, do not cease looking, within what flows from the other's 'innermost being', for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside the maternal body.' (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 54)

¹⁴⁰ H. D. Harootunian, 'Review Article: Hirohito Redux', *Critical Asian Studies* no. 4 (2001), p.610.

¹⁴¹ Žizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, p.202.

¹⁴² Žizek, *Sublime Object*, p.119-120.

Yukari at Shinjuku station is strikingly similar to Žižek's description of the proximity of the maternal Thing. *Watashi's* desire for Yukari is always mediated; she is disembodied, removed, shrouded in clouds. Her closeness, however, proves too much to bear: the ravaged skin, the eyes burning with greed, the contorted lips. As discussed above, what unites these descriptions is not only their extreme physicality, but also the resort to Buddhist imagery in an attempt to symbolise an unbearable Real: thus Okumi's half-dead body is compared to a medieval illustration of human suffering, to a shadow picture of Buddhist transformations; Yukari to a Buddhist devil.

The relationships of *Fugen's* material bodies to their contexts are complex and multivalent: they work to problematize an aestheticized and nationalized female body emerging in the 1930s, in a gesture of desublimation which restores to these purified constructions the logic of the abject. Their excessive physicality can be seen to respond to an official maternalist discourse in which the female body was conceived as exclusively reproductive. But most importantly, they are figures of resistance to the increased proximity and visibility of the imperial body; to the reactionary identification of the emperor with the maternal. The closeness of the maternal is monstrous; imaginary plenitude becomes abject flesh. *Fugen* supplements the fascist longings for immediacy and unity – focused on the technologically mediated presence of the imperial body – with the logic of the Lacanian Real. Through its particular appropriation of the female body, Ishikawa's text engages the fundamental political problems of its time.

Textual Traces

My reading has focused on how the representations of bodies and the narrative strategies of *Fugen* structurally resonate with the tensions of its political and cultural moment. In his sustained and innovative work on Ishikawa Jun Yamaguchi Toshio has explored the thematic elements which work on a purely referential level to invoke again a more direct engagement with the historical. In Yamaguchi's view, while most Ishikawa Jun commentary has been focused on *Fugen*, readings have remained one-dimensional, either centred on the importance of the famous phrase 'for me, *Fugen* is *words*' (383), or

on the device of *mitate* as an organizing principle of the work. Yamaguchi's intention is not only to trace the historical and cultural complexity of *mitate*, but also to move towards the contemporary, to uncover the meaning of a strategy which actualizes this Edoesque trope in 1936.¹⁴³ Part of his extensive analysis includes a careful contextualization of the fictional and historical figures *Fugen* refers to. One of them is the British writer D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930). Waking up in bed after a night spent with Otsuna, *watashi* quotes two lines from Lawrence's poem 'Last Lesson in the Afternoon' (1909):

I am sick, and what on earth is the good of it all?
What good to them or me, I cannot see! (418)

The context is a bit incongruous: *watashi* is lying in bed yearning for the pure celestial *Fugen*, but bound by the cloying physicality of Otsuna, while Lawrence's poem is about the frustrations of a teacher and the soul-destroying boredom of teaching children. In Yamaguchi's analysis, in the context of the novel 'they' is meant to refer to all the vulgar characters around *watashi*: Tabe Hikosuke, Tarui Moichi, Kuzuhara Yasuko, Otsuna.¹⁴⁴ But it is the gesture of quoting Lawrence itself, according to Yamaguchi, that is deeply meaningful. At that time the Japanese literary world experienced something of a Lawrence boom. Lawrence was introduced to Japan in 1930-31, together with Joyce, and they were considered part of a new psychologism (*shin shinrishiugi*). In the mid-thirties, publishers were competing to produce translations of Lawrence. In 1937 Mikasa Shobô began publishing his complete works, although the series was discontinued after five of the planned ten volumes were out. Kawakami Tetsutarô probably summed up the mood in his call to writers to move 'from Gide towards Lawrence'; Lawrence's writing was experienced as a return to sensuous literature after the cerebral experiments of the *roman pur*. Other contemporaries enthused that Lawrence's was a literature which moved; its slogan was 'from the intellect to the flesh'.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, as seen in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Lawrence's romanticism was proletarian but at the same time reactionary; his rejection of industrialized modernity and bloodless enlightenment knowledge and the

¹⁴³ Yamaguchi, 'Ishikawa Jun *Fugen* ron, pp.67-68.

¹⁴⁴ Yamaguchi, 'Ishikawa Jun *Fugen* ron (chû)', p.73.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.73.

elevation of the sensuous epistemologies of instinct (identified with phallic sexuality) were deeply resonant with the Japanese cultural revival of the 1930s. Russell Berman has written that Lawrence's recovery of an auratic intersubjectivity with nature, presented in terms of a mythic cosmos, entails the regeneration of an original knowledge that has been occluded by the superficiality of science; a project strikingly similar to that of the cultural revival.¹⁴⁶ Ishikawa Jun's contemporaries were conscious of this resonance: according to Yamaguchi, the surrealist poet Nishiwaki Junzaburô (1894-1982) commented that the popularity of Bergson, Nietzsche and Lawrence signals a romantic resurgence; the critic Ara Masato described Lawrence as an 'anti-social' writer.¹⁴⁷ The Lawrence boom also coincides with the emergence of the body in post-*tenkô* cultural discourse. Like Lawrence's bodies, it was a sensuous body unified with nature, cleansed from the abstractions of modern knowledge.

The Noh play *Semimaru*, again analyzed in detail by Yamaguchi, is another deeply meaningful intrusion of the historical in the text. It is introduced through the figure of *watashi's* friend (and rival) Terao Jinsaku, a playwright working on a modern adaptation of this classic play. The text tells us that *Semimaru* has elements which can be regarded as expressing disrespect (*habakari aru*) towards the emperor (literally *kumo no ue*, above the clouds) and that is why the Kanze Noh school has been reluctant to perform it (380). Indeed, in 1934 performances of *Semimaru* were cancelled after pressure from the extreme right and claims that the play violated the dignity of the imperial family (the same had happened to the Noh play *Genji monogatari* (The Tale of Genji) the previous year).¹⁴⁸ The plot is centred on *Semimaru*, a blind prince who was abandoned in the wilderness, allegedly the son of emperor Daigo, and his mad sister Sakagami.¹⁴⁹ The reign of emperor Daigo and the so-called Engi era (901-923) is famed as a golden age, politically and culturally: the imperial history *Nihon sanki jitsuroku* (901) and the poetic anthology *Kokinshû* (905) were among its achievements. Politically, the rule of emperor Daigo saw a

¹⁴⁶ Russell Berman, *Modern Culture and Critical Theory: Art, Politics and the Legacy of the Frankfurt School*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, p.31.

¹⁴⁷ Yamaguchi, 'Ishikawa Jun *Fugen ron* (chû)', p. 76.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.78.

¹⁴⁹ See the article 'Semimaru' by Susan Matisoff in *Kodansha Encyclopaedia of Japan*, vol.7, pp.61-2.

revival of the *ritsuryō* system of centralized sovereign power and complex bureaucratic hierarchies. It is also known as the era of direct imperial rule (*tennō shinsei*), that is, without the intervention of Fujiwara regents. *Semimaru* draws on popular stories about the darker undercurrents excised from official history; of defilement, disability and immoral conduct at the heart of the imperial family. The presence of *Semimaru* in a narrative serialized in the summer of 1936 invokes surreptitiously not only the vision of direct imperial rule entertained by the radical right, but also the ambivalence of the emperor, the undertones of pollution and abjection around this most purified of bodies.

Joan of Arc is another ideologically loaded figure, a potent symbol of popular nationalism. She is surrounded by so many layers of myth and history, that at first sight it is difficult to grasp exactly what the text intends to actualize from that corpus of accumulated meaning. Ishikawa Jun's Joan seems to be primarily associated with spiritual purity; the chosen one, the sacred which has risen above the profane and the earthly. But according to Yamaguchi Toshio, Joan of Arc was present in school textbooks after Meiji as a paragon of loyalty to king and country.¹⁵⁰ At the time *Fugen* was written, Joan was also unambiguously claimed by French fascism. After the Dreyfus affair, Joan had become the archetypal symbol of Frenchness. The myth of Joan and the myth of the Jews, as Michel Winock has written, simultaneously define each other: Joan as the emblem of land and roots versus the wandering Jew, peasant simplicity against urban capital, the people against the intellectuals, spirituality against materialism. The cult of Joan became one of the ordinary rites of the Pétain regime.¹⁵¹

There is also a certain gender ambivalence about Joan: she was a virgin, that is, not fully a woman; she insisted on wearing men's clothes. The motif of the ambiguity and instability of gender is quite prominent in *Fugen*: Christine, the privileged daughter of a court favourite, after the death of her father had to 'cease being a woman and become a man', to earn her living and support her children with her writing (331). The Bodhisattva *Fugen* can change gender and assume any form; he is often depicted as luscious and

¹⁵⁰ Yamaguchi, 'Ishikawa Jun *Fugen* ron (chū)', p.63.

¹⁵¹ Michel Winock, *Nationalism, Anti-Semitism and Fascism in France*, trans. Jane Marie Todd, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 105-110.

gracefully feminine.¹⁵² There are strong female connotations around him: he protects the ones who worship the Lotus sutra (the Lotus sutra preaches that it is possible for women to attain Buddhahood). During Heian, images of Fugen accompanied by ten murderous women (*jū rasetsujo*) were often ordered for the memorial services of high ranking court women. The ten women were dressed like Heian ladies-in-waiting, and thus the dead mistress was likened to Fugen.¹⁵³ After Heian 'Fugen' was often used as a synonym for a beautiful woman, *bijin*.¹⁵⁴ From Kamakura on, this Bodhisattva often appears in vernacular storytelling as a courtesan, a motif dramatized in the Noh play *Eguchi*. These textual traces – the motif of gender ambivalence, the perceived subversive content of *Semimaru* and its connotations of abjection, the fascist appropriation of Joan of Arc and Lawrence's reactionary romanticism support an engagement with the political which, I have argued, the text articulates through its representations of the body and through the formal strategies which juxtapose mediation to organic unity.

Writing against Immediacy

The empathetic hermeneutic favoured by the cultural revival, its critique of rational knowledge and the elevation of the epistemologies of affect; the return of the natural self of *shishōsetsu*: in these figures the rarefied aesthetic discourses of the 1930s, supposedly removed from politics, converge with the voices of rightist radicals and the slogans of the *kokutai* clarification movement. These voices stressed immediacy in an attempt to obliterate distance and explode the symbolic abstraction of the modern state. All these motifs are embodied by the potent ideological signifier of the *kokutai*: the aura of corporeal presence, the natural bonds between emperor and people, the wholeness before the disjunctions of rationalism. As an irreducible totality, *kokutai* renders any mediation by language obsolete. In the imperial rescripts and the slogans of the radical right language *qua* signification is replaced by language *qua* presence, short-circuiting directly towards affect. According to Iguchi Tokio, the language of the imperial rescripts should be grasped in the framework of styles used by the modern Japanese nation-state:

¹⁵² Sugauma and Tamaru, *Bukkyō bunka jiten*, p.482.

¹⁵³ Kimura Saeko, *Haha, onna, chigo no monogatariishi: kodai chūsei no sei no haichi*, PhD Dissertation, Tokyo University, 2004, p. 143.

¹⁵⁴ Ono Yasuhiro (ed.), *Nihon shūkyō jiten*, Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1985, p. 318.

genbun itchi, *kanbun kundoku*, and *bibun*. *Genbun itchi* is the supposedly transparent and gender-neutral idiom which belongs to the masses; it is the language of the media, of the interiority of modern literature. *Kanbun kundoku*, the language of government regulations and newspaper editorials, is not everyday, but sublime; it connotes centuries of Asian civilization and the authority of Chinese history. *Bibun*, the ornate imitation of classical language, on the other hand, represents the beautiful; the poetry of Yamato words. The language of the imperial rescripts, Iguchi writes, fuses the beautiful and the sublime; it is archaic, reaching back to the old *norito* and *semmyô* ritual incantations.¹⁵⁵ Kristeva has taught us that rhythm, repetition and intonation belong to the pre-semantic maternal register, to the body's drives; they stem from the archaisms of the semiotic body before its entry in the symbolic. What Kristeva terms the semiotic or the poetic – and which might as well be called the aesthetic – is a reinstatement of that maternal territory, of the instinctual body, into the very economy of language.¹⁵⁶ The language of the imperial rescripts depends on these aesthetic irruptions in the symbolic; it conjures the immediacy of the voice, of the full body, in order to mobilize longings for oneness with the emperor. As we saw with Yasuda in the previous chapter of this thesis, this magical language was ubiquitous during the 1930s.

Fugen is a text extremely sensitive to these resurgences of the aesthetic and the crisis in the symbolic, as the following passage shows:

Strangely, my obsession with this world still does not seem to wear off; I had the whim to try to write something. I took my pen. I couldn't. I have completely forgotten the characters. No, not really forgotten. I discovered myself as someone who does not know the written characters. Writing, the characters, are odd things. Why do people scribble such things? I tried to write the character for my name, lori. I did a couple of strokes and then did not know what followed next. Or rather, maybe I did know, but I did not trust myself. (372)

Bunzô describes an experience in which the arbitrariness of the connection between signifiers and their signifieds is suddenly revealed. Written characters seem strange; the

¹⁵⁵ Iguchi, "Joseiseki naru mono", p.105.

¹⁵⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, pp.136-137.

supposedly motivated becomes the contingent. Bunzô's inability to remember the characters presents a crisis of the signifying function of language.

As argued in this chapter, the breakdown of representation and the rise of a fascist economy of immediacy is supported by magical language. Through its formal structures *Fugen* registers this collapse of mediation and the destabilization of the symbolic function, and works to enact a radical estrangement from this shamanic power of language. What we have in *Fugen* is *language as artifice*: denatured, materialized, treated as a technical convention. A number of strategies work to reflexively push language to the foreground, to isolate it for scrutiny. Language is thematized, for example, through the deployment of a narrator who is a writer struggling with his project for a biography of Christine de Pisan. Thematically and plot-wise, *Fugen* is a parodic reworking of the *shishôsetsu* genre. All classic *topoi* of the *shishôsetsu* are here: some of them ironized, others made strange by being taken too literally or at times exaggerated to almost grotesque proportions; some are attacked directly in self-conscious digressions. The narrator is a struggling writer living in squalor together with his friend Bunzô, another literary youth (*bungaku seinen*) doomed to tuberculosis and decadent heavy drinking. *Fugen* parodies the obsessive preoccupation with the sordid aspects of reality, and the confession as salvation, motifs which structure most *shishôsetsu* narratives. The entanglements of the narrator-protagonist with dubious women from the demimonde are also a familiar theme. There is also the narrator's often-quoted polemic with the naïve aesthetics of sincerity (*seijitsu*), a key tenet of Japanese naturalism and the I-novel. Such writing, according to *watashi*, retains too much of the writer, of his psychology and physicality, and he finds that unbearable:

If when the pen starts moving, it is caked in the grease of the hand holding it; the blue veins on the writer' face, the sweat on the tip of his nose, or the hunched shoulders – if all this stench adheres to it, how is the flower of sincerity to bloom? If one can see the body and the figure of the writer behind the writing, then the work is a dreadful farce. (340)

Various strategies which highlight literary artifice betray a reflexive stance to language and literature. *Watashi* is a typical unreliable narrator who sometimes avoids or postpones inconvenient details, such as his first encounter with Otsuna during the ill-fated night out with Moichi described in chapter one: he did mean to write about 'the woman [he] met in that bar' but somehow his inspiration deserted him (330). *Watashi* explicitly manipulates the narrative, laying bare the process of creating narrative order. In a crucial self-conscious aside, he admits that it has all been a fabrication. He is aware that he has not offered an explanation which will provide his story with closure or with a moral; that he is probably disqualified as a narrator. But he *himself* needs an explanation: in an exemplary modernist gesture, the work strives to incorporate its own interpretation, a meta-narrative – although this gesture is highlighted negatively, through its frustration:

I have the habit of taking up only things that I like and to kick away things I find unpleasant, and it is only natural that my story would suffer from an imbalance between the deep and the shallow, the rough and the refined...I would rather ask the others for a clever commentary (*chûshaku*). (424-425)

From the very beginning I have been telling lies, but now I am at a loss as I seem to have lost even the ability to go on lying...If I have to speak honestly, the reason why with the tip of my pen I lifted from the dustbin of history the remains of a wrinkled old woman like Christine de Pisan is because I secretly wished for some connection to Joan of Arc. But the relation with Joan is again a heap of lies: I had superimposed (*sukiutsusu*) this girl from a distant past onto the shadow of Yukari, who has been tormenting me night and day for the past ten years, and with this unsteady painted image (*esugata*) in front of me have been whining endlessly. This tale is nothing but an act of love-driven madness. (pp. 415-416)

Drawing attention to the process of constructing his narrative – and, towards the end, to its status as a fabrication – the narrator defamiliarizes established conventions. Reflexive comments are strewn everywhere: when describing what a horrifying and repulsive sight Okumi's dead mother is, he muses that with some more tweaking, the peaceful image of her funeral urn among the birdcages on the shelf can become good material for a popular novel (*fûzoku shôsetsu*) (352). In the first paragraph of *Fugen*, the narrator wonders if his acquaintance Tarui Moichi would make a good character for a novel: 'But the breezes

from the world of narrative', *watashi* reflects, 'are far different from the winds of this mundane world' (323).

One of the dichotomies which structure *Fugen* is the presentation of *watashi's* work on Christine de Pisan as writing, and the emphatic references to his own story, i.e. the text of *Fugen*, as a spoken narrative. This is pure literary artifice, as *Fugen* is without doubt a written text, dense and premeditated in its techniques. The rather pompous style with its obscure Buddhist terms and the formal Chinese-derived words clearly belong to the realm of writing. Yamaguchi Toshio also treats it as a written text disguised as orality: it does employ stylistic strategies meant to signify orality, like long, drawn-out sentences and rhetorical asides. The language of Ishikawa's early stories was close to the vernacular and the conversational; this was noticed by contemporary reviewers who compared him with other verbose (*jōzetsuna*) writers such as Uno Kōji and Takami Jun. However, according to Yamaguchi *Fugen* shows a marked departure from the simple language of the early works. Its style is truly extravagant: contemporary Tokyo slang, *kango*, formal Chinese-derived words, Japanese words (*wago*), elegant poetic words (*gago*). Kawakami Tetsutarō likened the language of *Fugen* to the exuberant style of the Kenyūsha writers.¹⁵⁸

This conceit of spoken narrative is crucial, because it makes possible the juxtaposition of orality and writing with all its ideological implications. The spoken words (*shaberu kotoba*) which *watashi* is spewing (*hakichirashite iru*) carry the inescapable physiology of language: '...the quivering of the vocal chords, the rustle of the throat become dregs which clog the folds of the intellect, and make it lose the strength necessary to penetrate the unfortunate heart of the matter' (p. 351). Contrasted to this irreducible physicality of the spoken are the words coming from the pen, 'refined words detached from the odour of the flesh' (351). In a typically modernist trope, writing is redemption; it is figured negatively, as the transcendence of the sordid topography of the world in which *watashi*

¹⁵⁸ Yamaguchi, 'Ishikawa Jun *Fugen ron*', p.85

moves. Not only that: for *watashi*, Fugen is *words*; writing becomes synonymous with the enlightened practice of Buddhism.

Previous Ishikawa Jun commentary has explored in depth this valorization of writing, but it has been seen and articulated in ahistorical, universalist terms. Along with 'for me, Fugen is *words*', two other phrases have been elevated by critical discourse to the status of master-signifiers standing for the ultimate meaning of Ishikawa Jun's work. They appear in Ishikawa's essays on literature and are again read with the historical context bracketed off. One is '*seishin no undô*' or the movement of the spirit, although in translation it takes on romantic-esoteric meanings probably not intended by Ishikawa. In his writings on literature 'spirit' (*seishin*) can be defined negatively, by elimination, as 'that which remains when the writer is stripped from psychology, interiority and intention'.¹⁵⁹ *Seishin* is also conceived in an opposition to *shinri* (psychology). In an essay titled 'Tanpen shôsetsu no kôsei', (The Composition of Short Fiction) from the collection *Bungaku taigai* (Outlines for Literature, 1940), Ishikawa emphasises that the interference of the writer's psychology should be avoided if the work is to achieve 'purity as a novel' (*shôsetsu to shite no junsusei*) and that the writer cannot reach (*tsunagaru*) towards the spirit without cutting himself off from psychology.¹⁶⁰ *Shinri* can be seen as Ishikawa's trope for *shishôsetsu*-like writing and its obsession with the personal as the locus of authenticity. *Seishin*, then, becomes a stance more estranged and impersonal, achieved through a rejection of the immediate and the affective. The other phrase, *pen to tomo ni kangaeru*, thinking with the pen, also appears in the same essay. It is a concept borrowed from the theory of prose elaborated by the French philosopher Alain (real name Émile Chartier, 1868-1951). This phrase also sounds awkward in translation, but Ishikawa uses it to describe the scene of writing: before taking up the pen, the writer does not have anything but an earthly reality; writing, however, severs him from this reality and opens up a world of a higher order where words connect with the spirit.¹⁶¹ 'For the writer thought

¹⁵⁹ Noe Keiichi, 'Kotoba no entoropii: Ishikawa Jun no gengo tetsugaku', *Shinchô* 93:1 (January 1996), p. 334.

¹⁶⁰ Ishikawa Jun, 'Tanpen shôsetsu no kôsei' in *Ishikawa Jun zenshu*, vol. 12, p. 288.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 286.

begins with language – suddenly, abruptly, at the utmost limit'.¹⁶² This is a view of language which is in direct opposition to a naturalistic aesthetic of *expression* which considers language a transparent medium. While I would not regard these three phrases as authenticating the ultimate meaning of Ishikawa's whole *oeuvre*, they form an intertextual whole which indeed advances a particular conception of language, a conception which is crucial for *Fugen's* engagement with the historical. Reflexivity and textual play, in other words, become resolutely political if the text is restored to its overdetermined historico-political moment. The valorization of written language in *Fugen* reverses the fascist emphasis on the immediacy of the oral and the aura of the visual.¹⁶³ The rhetorically dense style highlights the mechanics of language; the element of mediation inherent in the relationship of signifier and signified, the disjunction between signs and referents. Language is conceived as radical exteriority existing prior to thought and subjective consciousness; it comes into being through a rejection of immediacy and affect. Like Takami's verbose narration in *Auld Acquaintance*, this is a style concerned not with the plenitude of meaning, but with the perpetual metonymic movement of language. Reflexivity and the denaturing of language are, of course, quintessential modernist strategies, but modernism remains an aesthetic practice which can be politically ambivalent. What distinguishes *Fugen* is its defiance to both realist representation and the reconstituted archaic power of language.

Nina Cornyetz has written that within the fascist order 'signification itself (meaning) and 'true' subjectivity founded on self-recognition through the radical difference of the other is replaced with a performative identification of the other (refusal of difference)'.¹⁶⁴ The conception of subjectivity which we find in *Fugen* rejects the *heimlich* tautology of the same and the fascist erasure of difference. *Fugen* does not abandon a modern interiorized subjectivity for the collectivity of myth, neither does it return to the absence of perspectivalism and the non-centrality of the subject typical of Edo aesthetics. In the characters of *Fugen* we find modern interiorized subjectivity, but it is emptied out, reduced

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 287.

¹⁶³ About fascism's privileging of the visual and the oral (as corporeal presence), see Berman, 'Foreword: The Wandering Z', pp.xi-xxiii.

¹⁶⁴ Cornyetz, *The Ethics of Aesthetics*, p.31.

to a convention, held for contemplation. Subjectivity is conceived as purely differential; it is as if this evacuation stages the subject's entry into language, the process of symbolization which, in Žižek's words, 'mortifies, drains off, empties, carves off the fullness of the Real of the living body'.¹⁶⁵ Depth and perspectivalism are still there, but somehow denatured; the characters remain modern, but at the same time they can be quite puzzling if we attempt to read them in naturalistic terms only, as coherent, psychologically motivated agents of narrative. Like Tarui Moichi, they are put to the test – what would they be like if they were fictional characters? – but such a reflexive gesture has the effect of highlighting the fact that they *are* constructions. This estrangement is achieved through devices of substitution and superimposition, through a modernist appropriation of allegory. Even Yukari's name implicitly suggests these operations: 'yukari' can mean relation, connection, affinity; the word is used in this meaning at least once in the text (344). Of all the characters, Yukari is the most opaque, removed and ambiguous. The face of Joan which *watashi* sees in his dreams is actually Yukari's face (353); Joan, the girl from the distant past, is superimposed onto Yukari (415); she is the pure disembodied image contrasted to Otsuna's physicality. But as Yamaguchi Toshio's perceptive reading has made clear, this opposition between Yukari and Otsuna collapses into identity: *watashi* has a vision of 'Yukari's face, shrouded in clouds, and Tsuna's nipples, burning with earthly desires, flashing together' (389); the fantasy of Yukari as a sultry temptress with cloying suffocating flesh, uses exactly the rhetoric and language used to describe Otsuna.¹⁶⁶ The collapse of this carefully constructed opposition makes it impossible for us to consider Yukari and Otsuna as interiorized individuals. Yukari is implicitly associated with Fugen; they are both protean and can change appearance: Fugen can assume any form and be found anywhere; Yukari can be 'an unreliable temporary shape' of a returning Bodhisattva or enter the realm of the grotesque and be likened to a Buddhist devil. The characters are interchangeable; difference can turn into identity, substance is emptied out: Joan and Christine can also be elements of a tableau, ciphers of 'the ever-changing face of woman' (332). Supposedly interiorized individuals undergo grotesque transformations; psychological depth is yoked with allegory and

¹⁶⁵ Žižek, *Sublime Object*, p.169.

¹⁶⁶ Yamaguchi, 'Ishikawa Jun *Fugen ron*', pp. 71, 73.

archetype. There is a moment when Jinsaku is gripped with fear, because his wife Hisako in her jealous rage over his affair with Otsuna might become *ikiryô*, that her possessive spirit might take a will of its own and devour him (393-394). Here, the text refers to spirit possession and all pre-modern conceptions of the body associated with it.

The narrator *watashi* is certainly an interiorized individual; he does not undergo any bizarre transfigurations. But even his identity is precarious: he experiences a moment when he loses the understanding of who he is and the only thing left to him is to talk aimlessly (382). This is a performative conception of identity – sustained purely by the act of talking, again very different from the organic, *apriori* existing self of the *shishôsetsu*. (It is surprising that some critics still read *Fugen* within the paradigm of the *shishôsetsu*, or according to the developmental teleology of the *bildungsroman*: as the journey of *watashi* away from introvert self-consciousness and the desiccated world of books, to the sensuousness of life and reality, embodied by Otsuna.¹⁶⁷) Slippages, shifts, superimpositions: again, there is no plenitude of identity, only the movement of metonymy. In *Fugen*, the modernist conception of subjectivity as pure difference is used to critique certain structures of realist representation; subjectivity is estranged, but not abandoned for a fascist preindividuated imaginary. This evacuation of subjectivity makes us uncomfortable; identification is refused to us. *Fugen* demands a detached, intellectualized approach. The effect is similar to that of Brechtian alienation, and should lead the reader towards the historical, towards 'conclusions about the entire structure of society at a particular (transient) time'.¹⁶⁹

These technologies of estrangement – of the supposedly organic subjectivity of the characters, of the magical performativity of language – are the fundamental rhetorical mechanisms of Ishikawa's text. They are, of course, the exemplary devices with which the modernist work defies a realist regime of representation. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the critical preoccupation with the modernist textuality of Ishikawa can be somehow refreshing in the climate of *sakkaron* or *sakuhinron*-obsessed

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, Andô Hajime, *Ishikawa Jun ron*, Tpp. 45-60; Azechi Yoshihiro, *Ishikawa Jun zenki sakuhin kaidoku*, Osaka: Izumi Shoin, 1998, pp. 123-131.

¹⁶⁹ Bertold Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. by John Willett, London: Methuen, 1964, p.98

Japanese literary studies and in its resistance to the allures of a culturalism which still haunts discussions of Japanese literature in the West. It is not that critical commentary on Ishikawa has wilfully depoliticized his work; rather, the focus on *mitate* and Gidean reflexivity has effectively marginalized the political and ideological contexts surrounding *Fugen*. It has to be emphasized again that Ishikawa's text remains ambivalent; to a certain extent it is complicit in this elevation of the formal at this expense of the historical. In a way, mine has been a reading against the grain, a search for the political in the rhetorical micropractices of the text and an attempt to open it towards the material conditions of its production. There is no purely self-referential movement of language – even the most detached and self-consciously artificial narrative is inscribed with historicity. The modernist devices of *Fugen* are resolutely political; their effects of estrangement isolate for contemplation the libidinal support of ideology and highlight the affective economy of fascism.

Reproductions of the Self: Dazai Osamu

One is an artist at the cost of regarding that which all non-artists call form as content, as the matter itself. To be sure, then, one belongs in a topsy-turvy world: for henceforth content becomes something merely formal – our life included.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*

In the representation of human beings through the apparatus, human self-alienation has found a most productive realization.

Walter Benjamin, 'The Artwork in Its Age of Technical Reproducibility' (first version)

In *Fugen* Ishikawa Jun's narrator resists the kind of writing which relies on the figure of the author behind the text; the suffocating proximity of writer and work, as we saw, is evoked through graphically physical language: the grease of the hand holding the pen, the tensed blue veins on the forehead, the sweat of the nose. If we go along with the corporeal metaphor, Dazai's body is present in his texts probably more than that of any other modern writer. The life inscribed onto this body - flirtations with radical politics, alcoholism, drug addiction, failed suicide attempts – cannot but strike us as the stuff of modern media celebrity *par excellence*; the death as sensational and uncanny as the life: Dazai's body was found in the Tamagawa river on 19 June 1948, exactly thirty-nine years after he was born, on 19 June 1909; there were speculations that this was not a double suicide, that his lover Yamazaki Tomie had strangled him before dragging him into the water. A strand of critical writing on Dazai barely conceals a voyeuristic impulse, and the whole discourse which has coalesced around him reveals the *shishōsetsu* paradigm in its clearest form with its reigning themes of biography and ethics. But even if we fall into the trap of intentionality and accept that Dazai put too much of himself in his writing, his approach is radically different from the sincerity expected of autobiographical fiction. In Dazai's texts the disjunction between the raw experience and the biographical fact, on the one hand, and their narrativization, on the other, is emphasized and held for scrutiny. The

life is objectified and relentlessly fragmented; fragments are inserted into different contexts or juxtaposed in collage-like assemblages. While some of Dazai's best known works are indeed driven by deeply ethical questions, at the same time they are obsessed with *words*, with the duplicity of language. Formally, they are anything but straightforward: perspectives shift and multiply, parodies rework existing texts, letters and direct addresses to the reader disrupt the narrative flow. While Dazai's hypersensitivity to language is often noted, the dominant approach has tended to overlook the complex rhetorical structures of the texts. Even critics who have engaged seriously with Dazai's radical experiments in *The Final Years* are still tempted to reach for ethics, in a familiar hermeneutical manoeuvre: Tôgô Katsumi, for example, writes that 'the destruction of narrative form in the early Dazai means a collapse of the author's sense of order, a reflection of his nihilism; this is a disintegration of the novel which corresponds to the disintegration of the self'.¹ The construction of what some more complex readings have called 'the Dazai myth' has meant an obsessive search for an authentic voice and a naked face.² This is, of course, a necessary generalization: unlike Takami Jun and Ishikawa Jun, two writers who if not outright marginalized, have nonetheless remained peripheral in the canon of modern literature, Dazai has generated an impressive corpus of criticism, with a staggering number of monographs and literary journal specials devoted to him. The fascination of the critics is matched by the seductive hold he has on general readers: *Ningen shikkaku* (No Longer Human, 1948), canonized as his representative work, has sold more than eight million copies; the paperback *bunko* edition still sells about 100,000 copies every year.³ Lately, some interventions have attempted to deconstruct the myth, focusing instead on the complex intertextual performance of the Dazai persona, the subtlety with which his texts simultaneously evoke, cite and then distance themselves from *shishôsetsu* models. On the other hand, the obsession with 'the real Dazai' persists: each volume of the most recently published complete works contains a section of reminiscences by friends and contemporaries. Ironically, these are of the

¹ Tôgô Katsumi, 'Dazai Osamu: ironii to shite no shôsetsu', *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshô* 44:1 (1979), p.145.

² Sakakibara Richi, 'Review of *Dazai Osamu: yowasa o enjiru to iu koto* by Andô Hiroshi', *Nihon bungaku* 52:4 (2003), pp.84-85.

³ Andô Hiroshi, *Dazai Osamu: yowasa o enjiru to iu koto*, Tokyo: Chikuma shinsho, 2002, p.9.

writer who exposed the unreliability of memory; for whom origins are fictionalized and always mediated by language.

The emphasis of critical writing outside Japan understandably has been different. Although incomparable to Mishima, Kawabata or more recently Murakami Haruki, Dazai is a widely translated writer, although the absence of more experimental works from *The Final Years*, such as 'The Flower of Buffoonery' and 'Mekura sôshi' (Random Writings) among the English translations is conspicuous. *No Longer Human* is easily assimilated into a universalist existentialist framework of reading: as Donald Keene has remarked, it is refreshingly free of cherry blossom reveries and puzzling Oriental character motivations.⁴ Reviews of the English translation of *No Longer Human* have indeed compared the novel to Kafka ('brings us face to face to with the formless, nameless terror of life') and Dostoyevsky.⁵

But the narrative experiments from *The Final Years* have been seen by western critics as deeply flawed: Masao Miyoshi, for example, notes the absence of coherent unity in the collection: 'Even as short stories, the items in this volume are fragmentary. There are a few stories which are meant to be collections in turn of shorter units, these having, however, no common denominator between them'.⁶ It is not difficult to see here that Miyoshi implicitly privileges the principles of the nineteenth-century western realist novel: 'rounded' characters, unified narrative perspective, the construction of a fictional world independent from that of the writer. In a familiar Orientalist figure, Dazai's texts are conceptualized as absences, as secondary gestures which fall short of duplicating faithfully their western originals.⁷ In a response which emphatically valorizes what Miyoshi perceives as lack, Phyllis Lyons argues that compared to the 'painfully clear boundaries of the modern Western self' (the phrase is Miyoshi's) what we have in Dazai is a 'diffuse-

⁴ Donald Keene, *Landscapes and Portraits: Appreciations of Japanese Culture*, Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1971, p.186.

⁵ Quoted in *ibid.* p.188.

⁶ Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, p.125.

⁷ In his later work Miyoshi has been one of the first critics to problematize such assumptions, especially in his ground-breaking essay 'Against the Native Grain: The Japanese Novel and the "Postmodern" West', in his *Off-Center: Power and Culture Relations Between Japan and the United States*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991, pp.9-36.

focus' self-concept.⁸ This conceptualization of the self, according to Lyons, makes Dazai's fiction even more modernist and reflexive than Western fiction, and thus offers possibilities for bridging East and West. On the other hand, Lyons sees Dazai as the raw voice of "unreconstructed" emotions' in a society that 'ritualizes all forms of interpersonal expression'; in this insistence on unmediated expression her analysis converges with *shishōsetsu* writing.⁹ The essentialist conceptions of a Japanese self and a Western self employed by Lyons; the monolithic view of culture which elides questions of history and conflict; the construction of smooth unproblematic continuities between modern fiction and premodern aesthetics (the lack of depth in the characters); the making of these premodern Japanese aesthetic practices into precursors of Western postmodernism (a recurrent theme from Barthes' *Empire of Signs* to Peter Greenaway's *Pillow Book*): Lyons's interpretive system still implies the primacy and centrality of the Western experience. It is easy indeed to criticize Lyons and Miyoshi from where we stand, as their essays show the limits of critical discourse before the theoretical turn forced it to be reflexive about its own methods and assumptions. While a Foucauldian genealogy of the main currents in Dazai discourse has yet to be written, Alan Wolfe gets close to such an approach in his treatment of Dazai 'as a convenient construct revealing certain underlying premises of Japanese literary studies'.¹⁰ Wolfe's study of suicide and its textualization is not centred entirely on Dazai, but still remains the boldest attempt to deconstruct the Dazai myth; to historicize the discourse without losing sight of the texts themselves. For Wolfe Dazai criticism is complicit with more unambiguously ideological discourses: 'Dazai's emergence as the earliest postwar manifestation of the genuinely alienated writer may best be seen as part of the effort, by both Japanese and Western critics, to represent a recently militarist Japan as a "human society" sharing a universal humanity with the West'.¹¹ Universalist-existentialist readings, in other words, have depoliticized and decontextualized Dazai's work. Wolfe makes a compelling case for a historicized reading; for him Dazai's texts confront allegorically dominant interpretations of Japanese history

⁸ Phyllis Lyons, "Art is Me": Dazai Osamu's Narrative Voice as a Permeable Self, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41:1 (1981), p. 102

⁹ *Ibid.* p.102.

¹⁰ Alan Wolfe, *Suicidal Narrative in Modern Japan: The Case of Dazai Osamu*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, p.4.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p.161

and modern literature. Wolfe sees Dazai's textual strategies –fictionalization, discontinuous temporality, refusal of closure – as devices of resistance to the hegemonic narratives of Japanese modernization as a linear teleological process.¹²

This chapter will attempt a similar historical reading which, however, will be concerned more with immediately relevant material and discursive contexts. My focus will be on the narrative experiments from *The Final Years*, such as 'The Flower of Buffoonery' and 'Sarumen kanja' (The Youth with the Monkey Face). I am interested in the figures which disrupt the established structures of the *shishôsetsu* and emphasize the fictional, bringing forward the material existence of language. The customarily made distinction between these complex works, on the one hand, and a simple folkloric tale such as *Gyofukuki* (Metamorphosis) or the supposedly autobiographical *Omoide* (Memories) can be challenged, as these texts also employ techniques which problematize the textualization of experience and transgress genre conventions. But my reading will also attempt to flesh out how the formal intersects with the historical: I see Dazai's destruction of *shishôsetsu* norms as symptoms of a realist representational regime altered by the technologies of cultural dissemination. I argue that the evacuation of authenticity and the collapse of narrative hierarchies in works such as 'The Flower of Buffoonery' and 'The Youth with the Monkey Face' are related to the epistemological anxieties brought on by an intensified logic of reproduction. But my analysis also uncovers a different dynamic: these same stories work to forge an intimate bond between the narrator and his readers, referred to either as the affective community of *shokun*, gentlemen, or as the singular and more personal *kimi*, you. The often employed addresses to the reader call attention to the scene of writing, but at the same time they dramatize a yearning for perfect communication, a vision of authentic communion which transcends the deceptions of language. Writing often masquerades as oral storytelling, invoking a concrete situation of address. These stories are of course written texts, literary artefacts which appeared at a time when the traditional *bundan* community was being transformed irrevocably by the

¹² *Ibid.* p.15,16.

commodification of the artwork and the shift to an opaque mass readership. My reading will attempt to grasp the meanings of this contradictory dynamic – the exposure of literary artifice which at the same time seduces the reader with figures of intimacy – and the ideological implications of this reconstruction of the orality and immediacy of a storytelling situation, in the context of the 1930s.

'The Flower of Buffoonery'

The primary narrative of 'The Flower of Buffoonery' is simple enough: like a classic realist work, it begins with a third-person narration and a protagonist staring at the sea outside his sanatorium room. Ôba Yôzô is taken to the sanatorium after a fishing boat picks him up off the coast of Kamakura; the woman with whom he attempted a double suicide is found dead. The plot revolves around Yôzô's four days of convalescence at the sanatorium and the people surrounding him: his friends Hida and Kosuge, his older brother, the nurse Mano. The behaviour of Yôzô and his friends is marked by a purposeful lightness, by a very deliberate effort not to be serious. There are oblique attempts to discuss the motives behind Yôzô's desperate move, but there are no straightforward answers and certainly no confession. There are equally oblique hints of feelings growing between Yôzô and Mano. The story ends abruptly, with Yôzô and Mano standing on top of a cliff above the sanatorium and staring at the deep abyss of sea beneath them. But this story is often interrupted by the first-person voice of *boku*, the ostensible author of the work. The two narratives unfold simultaneously, the primary diegesis and the story of the writing itself. It is a structure which resists conventional narrative categories. There have been predictable comparisons with Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, although Dazai's work does not have the exemplary *mise-en-abyme* structure of Gide's novel.

'The Flower of Buffoonery' is the central text in the collection and is in many ways symptomatic of the methods and premises of the critical discourse on Dazai. Donald Keene treats the complicated structure of the work and the peculiar voice of the first-person *boku* as Dazai's inability to maintain the objectivity of third-person narration very

long: 'he shifts to "I" whenever he feels obliged to explain why he is writing this story'.¹³ Such an interpretation not only assumes that any deviation from the sustained third-person narration is necessarily the failure of the text to measure up to the western realist norm, it also conforms to 'the Dazai myth', according to which Dazai's self-obsession made it difficult for him to create independent characters. On the other hand, there is an important article by Satô Yasumasa which shifts the terms of analysis onto the work itself and avoids referencing it with biographical facts. For Satô 'The Flower of Buffoonery' is a critique of the *shishôsetsu* tradition; its theme is the method of writing itself (*hôhō*). He focuses on the image of the 'dim misty abyss', which appears at the beginning and at the end of the work and has been read predominantly in ethical terms. Satô argues that this image metaphorically evokes the scene of writing. He also relates the structure of the work to Bakhtinian ideas of dialogism and polyphony. His conclusion, however, reaches for an ethico-biographical explanation: Dazai, according to Satô, was physiologically (*seiritekini*) unable to sustain this complex polyphonous structure to the end and the work remains monologically closed off. It is Dazai's painful consciousness of sin, a homologous lack on the level of consciousness and the level of narrative method, that leads to the failure of the technique.¹⁴ Another notable intervention that pioneered a more detached formalist reading is Nakamura Miharū's article on metafiction in 'The Flower of Buffoonery'. For Nakamura the work is exemplary metafiction: it creates a narrative and simultaneously adds a meta-level which is *about* that narrative. Nakamura distinguishes three levels of metafictional comments; he also looks for the meanings and the effects of these strategies. For him the reflexivity of *boku's* discourse not only exposes the fictionality of the novel and art's powers of deception, but it also valorizes fiction as a revenge to a mundane and utilitarian reality, motifs which resonate with later metafictional works from the postwar era.¹⁵ Nakamura's article broke new ground in its focus on the formal and its rejection of the old rhetoric of expression and intentionality. At the same time his embrace of metafiction, a critical term with origins in post-war American writing, can be a self-fulfilling proleptic manoeuvre which harbours its own problems. Indeed,

¹³ Keene, *Dawn to the West*, p.1036.

¹⁴ Satô Yasumasa, "'Dôke no hana" o dô yomu ka: Dazai Osamu sono shudai to hôhō', *Nihon bungaku kenkyū* 22 (1986), pp. 129-140.

¹⁵ Nakamura Miharū, "'Dôke no hana" no metafikushon kôzô' in Torii Kunio (ed.), *Nihon bungaku kenkyū taisei: Dazai Osamu*, Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1997, pp. 91-112.

readings such as Nakamura's, which focus on the so-called 'world-wide synchronicity' (*sekaiteki dôjisei*) of Showa writing, have been criticized as a fashionable discourse which decontextualizes its objects and obfuscates the historical.¹⁶

From the time it was first published, 'The Flower of Buffoonery' seems to have laid out the interpretive parameters of Dazai discourse. Together with another work by Dazai, 'Gyakkô' (Against the Current, 1935) it made it into the preliminary selection for the first Akutagawa prize. One of the judges was Kawabata and in his comments on the selection process, published in the journal *Bungei shunju* in September 1935, he wrote about the different impression he got from the two works, as if they were written by different people. 'In "The Flower of Buffoonery", the author's experience and his literary views seem to have fused into one, but in my personal opinion, an unpleasant cloud hangs over this writer's life and one feels dissatisfaction because the real talent cannot come forth naturally'.¹⁷ Kawabata probably had in mind Dazai's bohemian life and his addiction to sleeping pills, but his rather offhand comments had a lasting impact: Kawabata had authorized an approach in which Dazai's works could not be separated from his personal life. Dazai responded with an angry, emotional, rambling piece, protesting the fact that he has been reduced to one of his characters.¹⁸

'The Flower of Buffoonery' indeed has an ambivalent relationship with biographical fact: Dazai did attempt a double suicide on the coast of Kamakura with a woman he barely knew and who died, but some painstaking biographical research has also highlighted crucial differences: after examining all previous scholarship, Ômori Ikunosuke concludes that although in 'The Flower of Buffoonery' Yôzô and the woman throw themselves in the sea from a cliff, Dazai and Tanabe Shimeko actually took sleeping pills on the beach, without entering the water at all.¹⁹ But the important thing is that although the work in a

¹⁶ Sone Hiroyoshi, *Shôsetsu no shôsetsu* in Tôgô Katsumi (ed.), *Dazai Osamu jiten*, Tokyo: Gakutôsha, 1995, p.145.

¹⁷ Quoted in Watanabe Yoshinori, 'Bannen shiron: "Dôke no hana" o chûshin ni' in *Dazai Osamu kokoro no ôja*, Tokyo: Yôyôsha, 1984, pp.103-104.

¹⁸ 'Kawabata Yasunari e', in *Dazai Osamu zenshû*, vol.11, Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1998, pp. 35-38, first published in *Bungei tsûshin* 3: 5 (1935).

¹⁹ Ômori Ikunosuke, 'Ôba Yôzô nyûsuiin rongi shiken: Dazai Osamu ron no kôtsû seiri', *Sapporo daigaku joshi tanki daigakubu kiyô* 30 (1987), pp. 1-12.

way invites a *shishōsetsu* reading, it also does its best to frustrate it, to subvert reader expectations. Its overall dynamic is to highlight, restructure and at times parody crucial elements of the *shishōsetsu* code and realism in general. These elements are not directly abandoned, but objectified and reduced to mere technical conventions; the blurred outlines of the *shishōsetsu* paradigm are still there, but they have been manipulated and reversed. The work begins with the promise of a confession, but its whole structure is built around the deliberate emptying out of that confession:

'Through me is the way to the sorrowful city'.

Standing away from me, my friends look at me with sorrowful eyes. Oh, my friends, talk to me, laugh with me!... My friends turn away their empty faces. Oh friends, ask me! I will tell everything. With these very hands, I sank Sono in the water. With the arrogance of the devil, I prayed that Sono would die, even if I was myself revived. Shall I tell more? But the friends only look at me with sad eyes. (108)²⁰

The text addresses the friends – and its readers – with the promise of absolute disclosure: 'I will tell everything'. The secrets alluded to can be suitably sensational; they involve not only an attempted double suicide, but possibly murder. The style of this address is one of awe-inspiring solemnity and almost biblical force. But what follows is an intrusion by the narrator *boku* who bemoans its stodgy pretentiousness:

Ôba Yôzô was sitting on the bed, staring at the sea in the distance. The sea appeared dim in the rain.

I wake up and reread these several lines, and their ugliness and obscenity make me want to disappear from the face of the earth. How insufferably pompous!...First, what about this Ôba Yôzô? Drunk out of my senses, intoxicated by something stronger than alcohol, I applauded myself for this Ôba Yôzô. It seemed the ideal name for my protagonist. It symbolized perfectly his unorthodox spirit. 'Yôzô' sounds somehow fresh. One could sense the truly new gushing forth from the bottom of the old-fashioned. One also felt the pleasant harmony in the order of these four characters: 'Ôba Yôzô'. Even by this name alone, wasn't my writing already epoch-making? (108-109)

In his first appearance, *boku* subjects the previous passage to a relentless critique. The sublime is revealed not only as ridiculous, but also as fictional. The solemn style was in

²⁰ Page numbers in the text refer to *Dazai Osamu zenshû*, vol.2, Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1998. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

fact a deliberate play with the style of naturalism; what seemed as a prelude to a lurid disclosure of a shameful truth is nothing but a simulation of the rhetorical posture of the confession. This strategy is typical of parody, a mode which always relies for its effect on incongruity, on bringing lofty themes and figures down to earth. What is brought into focus instead is the scene of writing, the materiality of language. Albeit exposed by the intervention of *boku* as fiction, this is the closest the text comes to uncovering the truth of the actual 'incident', as it is often referred to. Yôzô's reasons behind it are never revealed; they form the empty centre of the work. The implications may well be that there *is* something which resists representation or can never be symbolized, some fundamental rupture between raw experience and its textualization in the *shishôsetsu*. Paradoxically, this absence of the true confession is also accompanied by an excess of *inauthentic* narratives of Yôzô's motives. Everybody has their own version. Hida's is rather naïve: the impossibility of the relationship as the woman was already married. For Kosuge, Yôzô is above all an artist and artists are complicated; there are bigger reasons behind Yôzô's suicide attempt, reasons which he might not be conscious of. The friends are not clear exactly how deep Yôzô's political commitment was, but for Kosuge Yôzô's ideas (*shisô*) and his involvement in the illegal communist movement are important: life as a communist sympathiser has meant further exhaustion for the physically fragile Yôzô, and there is also the sensitivity and vulnerability of the artist (117-118). Neither Yôzô himself, not even the otherwise judgemental *boku* confirm these interpretations. When confronted directly, Yôzô thinks of a dizzying number of reasons, without actually voicing them out:

Yôzô lowered his eyes. Vanity. Indolence. Acquiescence. Shrewdness. Vice. Exhaustion. Anger. Murderous intentions. Avarice. Weakness. Deceit. All of these assaulted him in confusion. Shall I just say it, he thought. In a deliberately depressed manner, he muttered:

'The truth is, I don't know the reason myself. It feels like everything, the whole lot'. (124)

Instead of a sincere confession, here we have again artifice. The long list of words swamps the printed page, creating an effect of redundancy, of over-interpretation. The words chosen seem to be intentionally turgid, obscure Chinese-derived compounds – in

the original most of them are glossed in *furigana*. They are excessively literary; very far from the spontaneity and naturalness of the confession, where words should be just transparent vessels for those overflowing feelings. But even if the style was less formal, the mere proliferation of reasons cancels the validity of the whole search for a motive and frustrates the will to disclosure, highlighting instead the rhetorical structures, the purely linguistic mechanisms sustaining the *shishōsetsu*-esque confession. Notions of intentionality, agency and psychic mastery are radically defamiliarized. This dynamic of estrangement is nowhere more apparent and compelling than near the ending.

Shall I end it here? The old masters would end it, meaningfully, here. But Yōzō, myself, and possibly you, gentlemen readers (*shokun*), we are already weary of the comforts of such deception. The new year; the prison; the prosecutor: it is all the same for us. From the very beginning, was the prosecutor on our mind at all? We just want to reach the top of the mountain. What is there? What can be there? We just want to go to the top. (162).

This is a passage which enacts a certain narrative collapse: *boku*, Yōzō and the readers are referred to as 'we', as entities of the same order; Yōzō is suddenly elevated to a meta-level from which he can critique his own narrative. It also reinforces the affective bonds between *boku* and his readers, a trope which will be discussed further in this chapter. But even without the confusion of narrative levels and the epistemological uncertainty, this still remains a complex passage which not only comments on the primary diegesis – the story of Yōzō and Mano – but also defies the ideology of literature, the impulse to saturate everything with meaning, to endow every narrative element with a deeper symbolism. The old masters' belief in meaningful endings is treated with merciless irony and explicitly rejected; exposed as a deception which offers the consolations of narrative coherence.

Yamazaki Masazumi reads this passage as liberation from the metaphysics of truth and an abolition of the dichotomy of surface and depth (which for him constitutes the essential structure of the confession).²¹ It is tempting indeed to leap to larger epistemological

²¹ Yamazaki Masazumi, *Tenkeiki no Dazai Osamu*, Tokyo: Yōyōsha, 1998, p. 134.

conclusions and see *The Flower of Buffoonery* as some sort of proto-postmodernist celebration of surfaces and a release from the tyranny of meaning. The passage does critique the depth perspectivalism of the modern novel, but the dialectic of surface and depth remains important in the way subjectivity is conceived in the text. Yôzô, Hida and Kosuge are depicted through the figure of clowning (*dôke*), but that does not mean the complete abandonment of interiority. What the text stresses instead is the gap between interior and exterior. The sad clowning is a careful defence mechanism which still depends on the externalization of an interior emotion. While the habitual posing of Yôzô and his friends threatens to become second nature, there is still emotion inside; they are determined to make other people laugh even at the cost of hurting themselves. But the text – or *boku* as its omniscient narrator – still says unequivocally that this impulse comes from a hidden soul sometimes capable of self-sacrifice, even by dominant moral standards (121-122); among the affected words and the careful posing, at times something really genuine comes out (125). This is not a postmodern decentring of the subject, but a classic modernist subjectivity alienated from itself and its surroundings, in which inside and outside are starkly separated.

The strategies of estrangement vis-à-vis the tropes of the *shishôsetsu* are most visible in the discourse of *boku*. His discourse is positioned as a critical meta-commentary to the primary diegesis, but at the same time *boku* remains quite protean. He can be just a disembodied voice which reveals the process of writing, at times despairing at the inadequacy of his techniques and designs; he can also disclose with an unflinching eye the vain motifs behind his literary attempts. But *boku* can also be a fully embodied person enmeshed in a mundane everyday existence: he has an unfaithful wife and money problems, his manuscripts are rejected by editors. The passage from the beginning quoted above gives a good idea of the critical stance *boku* takes towards his own writing. Further on, he comments on his awkward attempts to manipulate narrative temporality (116); admits that he is not very good at writing landscape (118); wonders ironically if he is nothing but a third-rate writer (121). The passage where he attempts to justify his own meta-discourse deserves to be quoted in full:

I will reveal everything. The truth is that I made this *boku* appear between the scenes and descriptions in this novel and say things which might as well be left unsaid, because I had a cunning idea. Without the reader noticing, with this *boku* I wanted to bring a unique nuance into the work; I flattered myself that this would make a fashionable, foreign-like (*haikarana*) literary style unseen in Japan. I was defeated. No, even the confession of this defeat figured in there, in my plan for this novel. If at all possible, I wanted to say that a little bit later. No, I have the feeling that even these words were prepared in advance. Oh, do not believe me any more! Do not believe a word I say! (127-128).

This is another passage which begins with the sincere promise of full disclosure, only to end with an appeal to the reader not to believe anything *boku* says; it mimics the rhetoric of the confession only to expose its unreliability. The text here is driven by an unrelenting dynamic of relativisation: each subsequent utterance dissolves or cancels the previous one; truth claims are discarded in favour of pure narrative performance. The passage does thrust the reader into an epistemologically uncertain position: Are we supposed to believe *boku* that he is lying or is this again a rhetorical trick? If we are to take him literally, should we abandon reading at this point? What are we supposed to make out of this text? Equally confusing can be those key moments when *boku* abandons the narrative order he has himself created. The parallel structure of primary diegesis and meta-narrative is not sustained throughout the work; from an author coolly dissecting his characters from a meta-level, *boku* can become one of them: 'The eccentric mood that had overtaken Yôzô, Hida, Kosuge and me, the four of us, withered without a trace because of these two adults' (127). In some situations, *boku* explicitly erodes the difference between himself and Yôzô, while in the passage quoted earlier, he is again positioned at the same narrative and ontological levels as both Yôzô and his reader: 'Yôzô and me and possibly you, gentlemen readers, we are all weary of the comforts of such deception' (162). These moments impart a certain epistemological indeterminacy to *boku*, his characters and the readers being addressed. Here the text stages a dissolution of diegetic frames (what was considered to be outside the primary diegesis of Yôzô's convalescence at the sanatorium is suddenly included within it), a confusion of ontological orders and a dissolution of the carefully articulated hierarchies of the realist novel. The normal protocols of reading are

disrupted; the reader is forced into a more active intellectual mode which does not take for granted the reality effects and the positions of identification created by the text. But this strategy of estrangement is undercut by a different dynamic, which in terms of both referential content and formal strategies enacts visions of a perfect communication beyond the artifice of language. The feelings between Yôzô and Mano are never articulated clearly, but there is a growing bond between them which does not need words. Most interestingly, the relationship between *boku* and his readers is also presented as organic communion. Even the first passage of the work, translated above, is animated by a plea for sharing, for a commonality of experience, although its overflowing emotionality verges on the sentimental. What I have translated as 'talk to me' in the original is actually '*boku to katare*', a construction which implies shared, reciprocal telling. This vision of togetherness remains only a vision: Yôzô and his friends avoid intersubjective experience beyond the boundaries of the individual self; the reality of their relationship is isolation and the fragile performance of the clown which the title of the work alludes to:

These youths do not have serious arguments. With the utmost care they try not to touch the nerves of the other person, while at the same time shielding their own nerves...If they are hurt, they want to kill the other person – or themselves. They exchange glances of mutual compromise, but in their guts they despise each other. (118)

The will to radical intersubjectivity persists not between the characters, but in the union of narrator and readers. The readers are addressed as an explicitly masculine affective community ('gentlemen'). They share *boku's* experience of his own work (his bad, farcical writing makes his nerves – and probably the nerves of his readers – stiffen (154)). At times the narrator guesses and guides the expectations of the readers, again with the aim to achieve a common understanding of Yôzô's story:

What do you think of [Mano's] softness? Would you dislike such a woman? Then laugh at me for being old-fashioned! (155)

You (*shokun*) seemed dissatisfied with their careless behaviour – now you can cry with delight: 'Serves them right!' (139)

There is also a single 'you', *kimi*, addressed with an intimacy which implies not the highly mediated constellation of writer, printed text and reader, but the immediacy of a direct exchange between storyteller and listener. *Kimi* appears in *boku*'s first intervention in Yôzô's narrative; at the end of his ironic deliberations on Yôzô's name: 'You think this is strange? How would you do it, then?' (109). It is not made entirely clear what exactly the reader might think strange – but this seems to be a deliberately sought effect. Even from the very beginning, *kimi* is set up as a listener, a confidante and an accomplice in the making of the story of Ôba Yôzô. Because the bond between *kimi* and *boku* is so close, a lot can be left unfinished and unsaid; their intimacy does not need many words. *Boku* implores *kimi* to understand the 'sorrow of these youths, who create the delicate flower of buffoonery and try to shield it even from the wind' (139). Understanding is very important; *kimi* is urged to be one who understands, not one of the suffocatingly pragmatic and one-dimensional adults. Perfect understanding can obliterate the distance between *boku* and *kimi*: 'Farce is the only form of resistance left to a man crushed by reality. If you don't understand that, then you and I will remain strangers forever' (159). *Kimi* is invited to help *boku* re-write the story of Yôzô: 'Shall I do it again, from the very beginning? Where do you I should start from?' (160). The casual style and the directness of these addresses, the informal verb endings: these work to simulate the spontaneity of a concrete situation in which storyteller and listener share both time and space, linked by the organicity of the raw voice. If *boku* and the 'gentlemen readers' are bound together by their shared experience of Yôzô's story, the understanding between *boku* and *kimi* is absolute, transcending the material existence of the text and the alienation of language; it is as if the text exists only as a pretext for this performative togetherness. This motif of the affective and the intuitive which do not rely on words is also found in the relationship of Mano and Yôzô. In much of Dazai's writing, woman is conceived as an instinctive and authentic being before language, outside the abstractions of the verbal; or as Iguchi Tokio has argued, innocent and ignorant of the torments of reflexive consciousness.²² Mano's responses are not only verbal; the text stresses the moments in which she reacts *physically* to things and situations related to Yôzô. Hearing about Yôzô's tortured

²² Iguchi, "Joseiteki naru mono", pp. 98, 99.

relationship with his older brother and his powerful repressive family makes her voice suffocate in tears (131); in another situation she blushes all over, to the top of her ears, while defending Yôzô and his devotion to his art, insisting that he suffers because he is too serious (*majime*) (155). When she is called and severely reprimanded by the head nurse because of the inappropriate behaviour of Yôzô, Hida and Kosuge, Mano dashes out of the head nurse's room feeling that she would start crying; for her this intervention is unjustified and cruel. As Andô Hiroshi has pointed out, Mano is positioned as the character who unconditionally empathizes with Yôzô.²³ Not much is said between them and the text does not articulate exactly what draws them to each other; there is an emphasis on direct, physical reactions: her coughing, sighing and noisy turning during the last night she spends sleeping on the couch of Yôzô's room (159); Yôzô's rough breathing while they are climbing the steep hill behind the sanatorium (162). The communication with this person, who feels closest and relates to him without distance, irony or deliberate performance, remains non-verbal. Tropes of immediacy which transcend the alienation of language are found even in *boku's* musings on writing, in his attempts to find and define a proper stance towards his material. While 'The Flower of Buffoonery' is a text focused on the artifice of fiction, the narrator's attitude to his own approach remains ambivalent. In the beginning, his ironic detachment and preoccupation with style are justified by the phrase 'beautiful feelings make bad literature' (121), which critics have traced to Gide's lectures on Dostoyevsky. But his chosen approach and his acceptance of the essentially arbitrary, non-motivated nature of language, lead *boku* to an aporia of radical contingency, a proliferation of inauthentic effects: every word, every sentence bounces back to his chest in ten different meanings. Wrecked by doubts, *boku* seems to lose faith in his method: writing should be done innocently, unselfconsciously (*mushin ni*) (142). He curses the aphoristic prescription about beautiful feelings and bad literature and declares that novels should be written in rapture, in fascination (*munen musô*) (143). *Munen musô* is a Buddhist term which among other things implies the suspension of rational thinking. In the context of *boku's* writing, *munen musô* points to a conception of language as plenitude immune from that mortifying effect of symbolization,

²³ Andô, *Jiishiki no Shôwa bungaku*, p.150.

where words and things are still identical; as Yamazaki Masazumi has stressed, *munen musô* is a vision of a ideal model of communication in which reading coincides with writing and words can scoop completely the essence of *boku*.²⁴ Where reading is equated with writing, interpretation can be nothing but tautology; *boku* and *kimi* can indeed be bound in perfect togetherness.

'The Youth with the Monkey Face'

The whole of *The Flower of Buffoonery* is animated by this contradictory logic: it exposes the rhetoric of the confession and reveals the fictionality of the text, while simultaneously relying on figures of unmediated intimacy (between Yôzô and Mano, between narrator and reader), of authentic communication beyond words. In somewhat different registers and tropes, this dynamic also structures other works from *The Final Years*. 'The Youth with the Monkey Face' is a story driven by a hermeneutics of unmasking, of revealing the hidden mechanics of representation. From the very beginning there is an air of weary nihilism about the excesses of literature: we encounter a man, *otoko*, who loses interest in a novel after the first two or three lines: he reads *through* them, he knows too well the rhetorical tricks (164). In somewhat scatological terms, he is described as 'born from the excrement of literature' (*bungaku no kuso*) (165). Like *boku* from 'The Flower of Buffoonery', the man is too conscious of language; he chooses his words even when he is thinking. There is also the familiar motif that this hypertrophied literary self-consciousness means loss of authenticity. His marriage is described as a banal romance; experience is mediated by novelistic stereotype. The role of strategic citation and intertextuality is more prominent in this story; texts always refer to other texts, heightening anxieties about authorship and intentionality. Suitably, the story invokes lines from Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* to describe his protagonist: a master of caricature, a Muscovite in Harold's mantle, an adaptation of somebody else's thoughts (164).²⁵ The invocation of

²⁴ Yamazaki, *Tenkeiki*, p.140.

²⁵ The English translation of this passage is as follows:

...what is he? Just an apparition,
a shadow null and meaningless,
a Muscovite in Harold's dress,
a modish second-hand edition,
a glossary of smart *argot*...

Onegin in a story which is a radical critique of realism is deeply meaningful: like Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, *Onegin* was written before the conventions of the nineteenth-century realist novel solidified into an orthodoxy which concealed its own historicity. Like *Tristram Shandy*, *Onegin* is a work conscious of its own unevenness and heterogeneity: it has a very intrusive narrator and abounds in reflexive comments; Pushkin himself makes an appearance as a friend of Onegin's.

There are two embedded narratives in 'The Youth with the Monkey Face'. The premises of the first one can be summed up like this: if such a profoundly cynical man who resists the seductions of literature, wrote a novel, what kind of work would that be? The man rereads old abandoned manuscripts; what stays with him is a story called 'Tsûshin' (Correspondence). The plot of 'Correspondence' is simple: each time the protagonist faces a difficult time, a letter from an unknown sender comes to save him. The first message comes when he has to deal with the frustrated ambition to be a writer; the second when he fails as a revolutionary and the third when he becomes a salaried employee tormented by doubts about comfortable bourgeois life. This protagonist is referred to consistently as *kare*, a third-person pronoun, in contrast to 'the man' of the frame narrative. 'The man' changes the title of this old manuscript to 'Kaze no tayori' (Message from the Wind) and revises it – and then the text of it follows. It centres on the literary tribulations of a nineteen-year old youth, *kare*, who dreams of being a writer, and his first self-published novel, *Hato* (The Dove). *The Dove* is savaged by the reviewer of the local newspaper and the youth feels the reaction of the readers of that newspaper in the silent sneer of his father (180). The screw of narrative manipulation is turned again: if this youth, in quiet desperation after the failure of his naïvely vain bid to become a literary sensation, were to receive a strange letter on New Year's day, what would that letter be? Then we have the text of this letter. The voice is familiar and coquettish, unmistakably that of a young woman: it encourages the youth to have more faith in life. After this letter, a line in brackets informs us that "'Message From the Wind" does not end here' – and another letter follows (182). It gradually dawns on us that this second letter is actually

a parody, an empty show?

(7. xxiv)

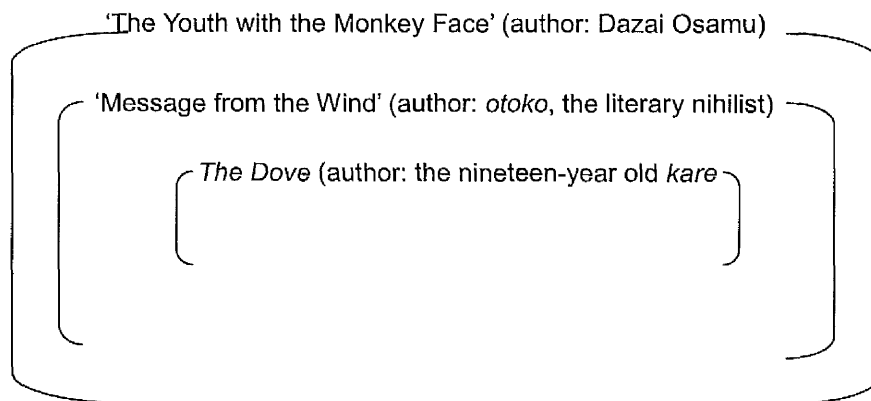
(Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, trans. Charles Johnston, London: Penguin, 2003, p.158.)

addressed to the man, *otoko*, the literary nihilist who is the author of the story. 'You deceived me', the letter begins, 'you promised that you would have me write a second letter, and then a third':

It looks like you are about to kill me off, after making me write that strange New Year's message. I knew from the very beginning that it would be like this. But I was praying, for my sake and yours, that the so-called inspiration would descend on you, and that you might let me live...Oh, you are thinking of tearing up this manuscript? Please reconsider - the public might actually applaud you for killing me off like that...Really, I am not mad at you...Farewell, you spoilt young master (*botchan*). May you become even more wicked. (182-183).

The man looked down at the half-finished manuscript, thought for a while and put a title: 'The Youth with the Monkey Face'. He thought these words would be appropriate – appropriate almost beyond hope – for his gravestone. (183)

On a first reading especially, the narrative perspective is almost bewilderingly complicated, and a diagrammatic presentation, such as the one provided by the critic Watanabe Yoshinori, can be really helpful.²⁶



But these are not just three embedded narratives: the second frame is not neatly and predictably closed. We have again a blatant violation of narrative order: the second letter is *from a character to her author*, from the woman to the man (*otoko*) who writes 'Message From the Wind'. For us, this is a familiar metafictional trick, but in the 1930s it

²⁶ Watanabe Yoshinori, ' "Sarumen kanja": sakuhi no kôzô', in *Dazai Osamu*, p.123, modified.

was probably quite shocking for readers, a rare deviation.²⁷ It is somehow not surprising that Masao Miyoshi dismisses this eccentric structure as yet another unsuccessful attempt on the part of Dazai to disguise his personal voice: the work, according to Miyoshi

...maintains an ostensible third-person framework, insisting on the presence of a would-be writer distinct from Dazai Osamu. But the mask is admittedly transparent...The requisites for a complex narrative manipulation are all there. With Dazai, however, his apparent preference for vocal complexity derives less from his overall artistic plan, than from his serious unease in the discipline of maintaining an even fictional distance from his work.²⁸

For other critics, this movement of framing and embedding of narratives privileges form in order to mask the evacuation of content: for Andô Hiroshi, it highlights negatively what *cannot* be described, and mirrors Dazai's own nihilistic vacuum; the girl's letter for Andô is addressed to the biographical author, Dazai Osamu.²⁹ 'The Youth with the Monkey Face' is, however, strikingly similar to 'The Flower of Buffoonery', although in a way more radical in its wilful destruction of narrative hierarchies. The letter from the girl to the author of her story brings estrangement to the romantic, gently sentimental 'Message from the Wind'. Even the basic requirement for narrative closure is ignored: 'Message From the Wind' is just abandoned half-way. But if 'The Youth with the Monkey Face' is a deliberate attempt to frustrate a naively naturalistic reading, to unmask the rigid conventions of realism and to expose the unreliability of language, these same technologies of estrangement are again held in tension by figures of intimacy and intersubjectivity. There is the premise of a dialogue, of somebody who is asking (*kiku aite*) what kind of novel such a cynical man would write. There is again the direct address to the imaginary community of readers (*shokun*) and a single reader, 'you' (*kimi*), although, crucially, these appear in the embedded narrative, 'Message From the Wind':

Do you, gentlemen readers, dislike letters? If at a time when you stand at the crossroads of life, crying in despair, a letter arrives out of nowhere and gently lands on your desk, carried by the wind— would you refuse such a letter? He is a lucky one – three times he received letters which made his heart flutter....Ah, do you (*kimi*) know the strange joy, a cross

²⁷ Suzuki Sadami, 'Dazai Osamu: kyokô e no tensei', in Torii, *Nihon bungaku*, p.144.

²⁸ Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence*, p.126

²⁹ Andô Hiroshi, 'Dazai Osamu: "Sarumen kanja" e no dôtei', in Torii (ed.), *Nihon bungaku*, p.72.

between envy and affection, which one feels when telling of another's happiness?... (168)

While the inclusion of the girl's letter interrupts narrative flow and complicates not only narrative voice, but the whole structure of the work, engendering again a certain ontological uncertainty (how can a character write a letter to her author?), the two letters remain symbols of authentic communication. A letter is always private and intimate, its handwritten (at that time) form implying directness and immediacy. The first letter is elevated to the status of that crucial something which will unlock the deep existential meaning of the youth's life. The girl's letter actually says rather banal things in clichéd phrases – it seems like it is not content, but affective performativity, the power of a consoling voice, that is important. There are also other evocations of a closeness which breaks normal alienated existence: while trying to promote his novel, the youth sends silent glances of gratitude to the people he passes by on the street; tries to imagine and dreams of meeting in person the critic behind the devastating newspaper review.

'Metamorphosis'

This contradictory dynamic of denaturing convention while at the same time weaving figures of authentic intersubjectivity can be found not only in reflexive, self-consciously experimental works from *The Final Years* like the ones analyzed above. The seemingly uncomplicated 'Metamorphosis' does not have any embedded structures or direct addresses to the reader. On the contrary, it aspires to a certain organicity in which the narrative voice is one with the tale it tells. At first sight this story possesses the primal simplicity and the power of a folk legend. Tôgô Katsumi, among other critics, has written about the subliminal, corporeal presence of the oral folkloric tradition of Tsugaru within Dazai; this is the dominant framework in which 'Metamorphosis' has been read.³⁰ A recent intervention by Kikuchi Kaoru has seen the text in more complex terms: his reading focuses on the tension between oral folk narrative, *monogatari*, and the modern novel; the repetition of *monogatari* against the novel's temporal logic of singularity. Kikuchi sees this disjunction manifest itself as a stylistic opposition between suffixes which imply

³⁰ Tôgô Katsumi, *Dazai Osamu to iu monogatari*, Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 2001, p. 62.

hearsay and a completed past world removed from the present of speaker and listener (*sô*, *to iu*, *de aru*, *no de aru*), and *ta*, an ending which is felt to be the marker of the modern novel: the student's fall in the waterfall, for example, is told in *ta* endings. These purely linguistic devices register a tension between repetition and singularity, which according to Kikuchi not only structures the novel, but is also behind the tragedy of its heroine, Suwa.³¹

The structuring opposition identified by Kikuchi can be seen in even larger terms, as the intrusion of modernity, objective knowledge and the exchange principle into the closed world of folklore. I would like, however, to reverse the terms and argue that 'Metamorphosis' appropriates the folkloric in order to bring some effects of estrangement vis-à-vis the modern novel and its premises of objective representation and interiorized subjectivity. Even if the beginning stylistically mimics the voice of legend by its reliance on the style of hearsay and *de aru*, a different mode of understanding intrudes: the bird's eye view of the scene and the reference to a map definitely point us to the modernity of the nation-state and its production of objective spatial knowledge.

The story is marked by retrospections and anachronies, manipulations of temporality which clearly belong to the novelistic. On the other hand, it deviates from the modern novel, because the centrality of the human in the landscape is radically eroded. Almost as much attention is devoted to scenery and topography (the hills, the waterfall, inorganic nature in general) as to the characters. This is not nature as we encounter it in the modern novel; the landscape does not yield interiority. Characters do not dominate, they merge with their natural surroundings. The scene of the student's fall, however, again marks a return to a more modern understanding of nature. The student himself, coming from a university in the capital to collect rare ferns, is an agent of modernity as represented by natural history; plants are to be observed, classified and studied. Although not directly located in time, the change in Suwa's perception of the waterfall is not unrelated to the student's death; she begins to observe the waterfall and its physical

³¹ Kikuchi Kaoru, 'Hanpuku to ikkalsei: Dazai Osamu "Gyofukuki" ron', *Waseda daigaku kokugo kyôiku kenkyû* 22 (2002), p.44.

properties more carefully, as if she has internalized the scientific gaze exemplified by the student:

She could now tell that the waterfall didn't always keep the same shape. In fact the varying width and the changing pattern of the spray made one dizzy. Finally the billowing at the crest made her realize that the falls [*sic*] was more clouds of mist than streams of water. Besides, she knew that water itself could never be so white.³²

But the conventions of *monogatari* are also parodied: Suwa is not transformed into a big serpent as in the Tsugaru legend of Saburô and Hachirô, but into a small carp; she is herself disappointed. The ending is ambiguous and arbitrary; it provides neither the restoration of the absolute cosmic balance of myth, nor the closure of the novel. If Suwa throws herself in the waterfall *twice*, is the first time then just a transformation? Is the second time another metamorphosis or death?

But if 'Metamorphosis' can be seen as a modernist attempt to probe the narrative structures of both folk tale and novel, it is also a fable about authentic intersubjectivity. Saburô and Hachirô, the two brothers from the legend which Suwa's father tells, emerge as the figures of perfect communication. Because of his unreasonable curiosity and greed, Saburô is transformed into a serpent, a talking serpent nonetheless, and the two brothers are doomed to forever calling to each other. Although separated by Saburô's transformation, their communication has ideal reciprocity: it is not the content of the message, but its pure performativity, that is important. What Suwa longs for is similar togetherness and reciprocity – the communication with her father is impoverished and ritualized; the student, further in the work identified as her only friend, dies in the waterfall. With her beautiful voice, Suwa keeps calling to the tourists visiting the waterfall to stop by, but her cry is always drowned by the roar of the water; nobody responds, nobody comes. A vision of ultimate communion between storyteller and listener exists only in the past: as a child Suwa was so moved by the legend of Saburô and Hachirô, told to her by her

³² Dazai, Osamu, *Crackling Mountain and Other Stories*, trans. James O'Brien, Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1989, p.74. (The Japanese text can be found in *Dazai Osamu zenshû*, vol.1, pp.65-75). O'Brien translates the title as 'Undine'.

father, that she thrust her father's fingers in her mouth and cried inconsolably. While this gesture has sometimes been read as erotic, precipitating in some way the father's drunken attempt to rape Suwa and her flight into the waterfall, for me the scene is utterly asexual, just a figure of *monogatari* producing affect at its most direct and corporeal.

'Metamorphosis' is not a radical experiment in narration like the other stories analyzed in this chapter, but it does share with them a detached modernist stance in which both modern realism and oral storytelling are denatured. This stance demands more than a naturalistic reading and frustrates empathetic identification on the part of the reader. But similarly to 'The Flower of Buffoonery' and 'The Youth with the Monkey Face', these strategies of estrangement are complicated by figures of authentic reciprocity. To make sense of these contradictions we may need to look beyond the texts, into the broader material and discursive contexts in which they were inserted.

'Enpon Culture' and the Commodification of the Literary Work

The dissolution of realist epistemologies and the modernist consciousness of the materiality of language are not unrelated to those fundamental changes in the production, distribution and consumption of the literary work which took place during the late 1920s and the 1930s, especially the *enpon* boom of cheap paperbacks. Although the boom began in 1927 and by 1932 had turned into a bubble, it is a symptom of the penetration of the market into the supposedly autonomous domain of culture and the radical restructuring of the literary establishment during the 1930s. It is worth summarizing briefly the main moments of the *enpon* phenomenon. *Enpon* were books from series sold by subscription, one volume containing around five hundred pages and its cost working out at about one yen. The pioneer was Kaizōsha which in December 1926 began publishing a series of thirty-seven volumes entitled *Gendai Nihon bungaku zenshū* (Collected Works of Modern Japanese Literature). The series was publicized through a massive and well-orchestrated marketing campaign; it is said that Kaizōsha took an unprecedented number of subscriptions exceeding the figure of 350,000. Shinchōsha followed in 1927 with its own series, *Sekai bungaku zenshū* (Collected Works of World Literature), which attracted

580,000 subscribers.³³ Other publishers brought out anthologies of popular literature, children's literature, drama and philosophy. Their marketing techniques, especially those employed by Kaizōsha and Shinchōsha, were remarkable in terms of sheer scale and the variety of media used: full-page advertisements in major newspapers were not a rare sight and two-page spreads also began to appear; handbills and posters were dropped by plane; advertising balloons and *chindon'ya* musical bands were also used. This led to a massive expansion of advertising in print media: in 1928, at the peak of the boom, advertisements from the publishing industry increased sixty percent from 1925, overtaking those for cosmetics.³⁴ During the 1920s, newspapers and magazines had experienced their own period of exponential growth: cultural historians often focus on the sensational launch of *Kingu*, a general magazine started by Kōdansha in 1925 and based on their research into Western mass journalism. The aim was to reach sales of one million from the very first issue, and the advertising drive behind it was unprecedented. In the late 1920s and 1930s, *Asahi* and *Mainichi* became truly national newspapers, but there was also an explosion of smaller titles: while in 1928 there were 3,123 titles registered under the newspaper law, in 1932 their number leapt to 11,118.³⁵ The growth of publishing and media in the decade after the earthquake into what critics have called '*katsuji no hanran*', the proliferation of print, was made possible by the technological innovations of the big printing companies: from the introduction of Japanese-language monotype in 1920 and the adoption of high-speed rotary presses by both the *Asahi* and the *Mainichi* in 1922, to *Mainichi's* pioneering use of aeroplane to transport flash news of the Taisho emperor's death in 1925 and the installation of telephotographic apparatus in the Tokyo and Osaka offices of the *Asahi* in 1927.³⁶ To read the *enpon* boom and the growth of mass media as the straightforward, unproblematic effects of technological developments would be to fall in the trap of determinism; technology, as Jonathan Crary has stressed, is 'always the concomitant or subordinate part of other forces'.³⁷ The explosion of media and print was related to processes of concentration and rationalization

³³ Minami, *Shōwa bunka*, p.287.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 289-290.

³⁵ Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p.59.

³⁶ Fujitake Akira, 'The Formation and Development of Mass Culture', *Developing Economies* 5 (1967), pp. 773.

³⁷ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p.9

of their industries, to the establishment of networks of circulation and to purely demographic factors such as literacy rates and urbanization. After the first world war, for example, both *Asahi* and *Mainichi* were transformed from limited partnerships into joint stock companies; huge increases in capitalization enabled them to acquire the latest technology.³⁸ The *enpon* boom was both a symptom and a factor for the rationalization of the publishing industry: publishers like ARS, whose *enpon* strategies failed among the intense competition, went bankrupt. Just like any other commodity, the literary work had entered a world determined by market forces, relations of exchange and circuits of distribution. 'Enpon culture', the term used by the cultural historian Minami Hiroshi, meant a paradigmatic transformation of the cultural economy, of the ways in which literature was produced, disseminated and consumed. Komori Yōichi singles linguistic homogenization as one of the effects of *enpon*; the spread of *genbun itchi* standardized language and the suppression of its historicity. Related to this was the establishment of a canon of 'modern Japanese literature', and the division between pure and popular literature: one of the first big collections was Heibonsha's *Taishū bungaku zenshū* (Collected Works of Popular Literature) launched in 1927.³⁹ The sheer scale of the subscriptions encouraged a privatized mode of consumption: the famous Kaizōsha advertisement presented images of ubiquitous middle-classness:

We let you read great books for a low price! With this slogan, our company has carried out a great revolution in the world of publishing, liberating the art of the privileged class (*tokken kaikyū no geijutsu*) for the entire populace (*zenminshū*). One subscription for each home! A life without art is like a desolate, wild moor. Why is it that our countrymen, who can boast of the great Meiji literature to the entire world, do not accomplish its national popularization (*zenmishūka*) as the English have done with Shakespeare? To this end, our company has gone forth with out bold plans for one million subscriptions and awaits the readership of every household in the nation!⁴⁰

Crucially, the advertisement employs quasi-socialist rhetoric: masterpieces which have been the preserve of the elite, now will be available to the many. As Maeda Ai has pointed

³⁸ Young, *Japan's Total Empire*, p.62n16.

³⁹ Komori Yōichi, 'Kigen no gensetsu: Nihon kindai bungaku to iu sōchi' in Kurihara Akira *et al.* (eds), *Naiha suru chi:shintai, kotoba, kenryoku o aminaosu*, Tokyo: Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 2000, p. 138.

⁴⁰ Gardner, *Advertising Tower: Japanese Modernism and Modernity in the 1920s*, Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Centre, 2006, p.23. The advertisement was published in the *Asahi* on 18 October 1926.

out, the text reads like a parody of the so-called debate for the massification of literature which was taking place within proletarian culture circles.⁴¹ Herein lies the political ambivalence of the *enpon* publishing revolution and the expansion of mass media. The Marxist boom is inseparable from this commodification of the artwork: proletarian literature had a dedicated volume in the Kaizōsha collection, edited by Nakano Shigeharu; works by leftist stars such as Kobayashi Takiji sold extremely well. Marxism did depend on the structures of mass publishing and its distribution mechanisms, an early example of how even the most radical critique of capitalism could be co-opted by it. There was an element of fashion in the Marxist boom: as Yoshimi Shun'ya has written, at that time Marxism had the biggest intellectual commodity value in the synchronous networks of discursive practice on a global level.⁴² *Das Kapital* was published in Japanese in 1920 in the translation of Takabatake Motoyuki: later both Shinchōsha and Kaizōsha produced mass-market editions which were so popular among students that extra print runs had to be ordered; unable to keep up with the demand, Kaizōsha announced that it will be publishing the complete works of Marx and Engels.⁴³

The penetration of the equalizing logic of the market into the supposedly autonomous realm of literature meant the dissolution of the old-style *bundan*. Ever since its formation during mid-Meiji, the *bundan* had been premised on what Gregory Golley calls 'the notion of an autonomous (i.e. socially exclusive, commercially "disinterested" and politically disengaged) aesthetics that stood in opposition to more "vulgar" entertainments'.⁴⁴ After the earthquake, the novels serialized in newspapers had a direct impact on their sales figures; generous manuscript fees and *enpon* royalties meant that established writers suddenly found themselves rich. From traditional outsiders contemptuous of the vulgar pursuits of mainstream society, writers became media figures and centres of attention. But this mythologization of the writer in the media actually radically eroded the centrality of the writer in the *bundan*; what was important instead was the reader as consumer, and

⁴¹ Maeda Ai, *Kindai dokusha no seiritsu*, Tokyo: Iwanami bungei bunko, 2001, p.296.

⁴² Yoshimi Shun'ya, '1930-nendairon no keifu to jihyō', in Yoshimi Shun'ya (ed.), *1930 nendai no media toshintai*, Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2002, p. 24.

⁴³ Nakamura Takafusa. *A History of Showa Japan, 1926-1989*: University of Tokyo Press, 1998, p. 58.

⁴⁴ Golley, *Voices in the Machine*, p.388.

the impersonal, opaque mechanisms of circulation.⁴⁵ The *bundan* was restructured around the mass literary magazines of the big publishers, Kikuchi Kan's *Bungei shunjû* and *Shinchô* the most obvious examples. Writers and critics were involved in the advertising strategies of the publishers: Kaizôsha's marketing campaign, for example, included public lectures by writers and critics throughout the country; in the months before his suicide, Akutagawa was dragged around Tôhoku and Hokkaidô to promote Kaizôsha's *enpon* collection.⁴⁶

The logic of the commodity, in other words, was the disavowed underside of the cultural revival's obsession with authenticity and the call for the rebirth of pure literature liberated from ideological concerns. By the mid-1930s, it was in fact becoming impossible to conceive of literature outside the works published in the media. Literature had to bow to the logic of the market and novelty and originality had to be manufactured, as Matsumoto Katsuya has shown in his analysis of the media discourse centred on the discovery of *shinjin*, emerging writers. Numerous literary prizes were established and almost every newspaper and magazine organized a literary competition. Funabashi Seiichi (1904-1976), himself one of the *shinjin*, expressed a pervasive ambivalence when in 1934 he wrote in *Shinchô* that while young writers attracted the eager expectations of the media, at the same time they had their autonomy circumscribed by it; they were treated like 'the new commodities of journalists and entrepreneurial capitalists'.⁴⁷ In 1935 in an essay titled 'Jûnengo no bungaku' (Literature in Ten Years' Time), the critic Ôya Sôichi offered a sarcastic sketch of the commodification of popular literature. Pure literature, according to Ôya, would be dominated by popular writing and like classical forms such as Noh theatre, would need subsidies from the state in order to survive. Mass literature, on the other hand, would deepen and develop further its character as a commodity, through tie-ups with popular media such as film, radio and phonograph records. Like film actors and record singers, the fashionable writers would belong to publishing companies and the *bundan* will be split by the tremendous power of media capital. The publishers would scout young writers and promote their work through elaborate sales and marketing strategies; the

⁴⁵ Matsumoto Katsuya, 'Daiikkai Akutagawashô to "Dazai Osamu" no seiritsu: Shôwa 10-nen no gensetsu fuchi no naka de', *Bungei kenkyû* 9 (2001), p. 41.

⁴⁶ Minami, *Shôwa bunka*, p.290.

⁴⁷ Matsumoto, 'Daiikkai Akutagawashô', p.41.

writers would be no different from the starlets of popular culture, *tarento*. The process of writing would also be corporatized (*kigyōka suru*) and Taylorized: separate departments would provide the raw materials, process them into literary works, finish, package and sell them. Product placement techniques would be widely employed: the heroine of a novel, for example, would say that she prefers Mitsukoshi to Takashimaya. Ōya admitted that his was a caricature version of the future, but insisted that some of these developments were already visible in the *bundan*.⁴⁸

The commodification of the literary work, its entry into a homogenized terrain of circulation and the reorganization of the literary establishment by print capital were developments which very much defined the discursive landscape of the 1930s. The early works of Dazai analyzed in this chapter are acutely sensitive to their own status as commodities. In 'The Flower of Buffoonery' the tone is unmistakably ironic when *boku* tells of Yōzō's flirtation with leftist ideas and his doctrinaire pronouncements, typical of the rigid positions of student radicals. 'Art is nothing but gas from the bowels of the economic structure', Yōzō declares; for him even a masterpiece is in fact a commodity no different from a pair of socks (113). *Boku* sounds more serious when he insists on the opposition between 'artist', somebody who cannot be outside the logic of the market, and 'work of art', which seems to imply more traditional conceptions of autonomy and disinterestedness. For him, Hida and Yōzō are 'not so much artists as works of art' (113). 'An artist of the marketplace' is a synonym for bad, unreflective, superficial writing in which quantity is more important than quality: 'If you ever encounter an artist from the marketplace, you would throw up before finishing the first few lines' (113). 'Let's move towards the next description. I am an artist of the marketplace, not a work of art' (128). These rather abstract references to the literary market take on a more concrete form when the narrator *boku* refers to his own manuscript, which has come back from the editor with a black circle on it, obviously having been used as a coaster (159). In 'The Youth with the Monkey Face' we find a wryly ironic take on the cultural revival: 'Now in Japan loud voices are clamouring for something meaningless called 'cultural revival'; they are seeking new writers and paying manuscript fees of fifty *sen* per page'(167).

⁴⁸ Ozaki Hotsuki, 'Taishū bunka no yōsō', *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū* 20:9 (1975), pp. 80-81.

Paradoxically, the obviousness of the motivation (you *have to* write, you will find both fame and money) makes the character even more incapable of putting pen to paper. The embedded story 'Message From the Wind' actually stages all the marketing techniques of the publishing industry. The young protagonist asks his father for money in order to pay for the printing of his book; the book itself is described as a material object: a pretty 500-page small-size (*kikuban*) edition, with a beautiful cover of a strange bird resembling an eagle with spread wings, the copies piled high on his desk. First, he sends a signed copy to each of the major newspapers in his prefecture; he then goes around the bookshops in the town and leaves five or ten copies in each; he sticks bills ('each fifteen centimetres square, the passionate call 'Read *The Dove!* Read *The Dove!*' printed densely'), he runs about town with a bunch of those and a bucket full of glue (178). The intensity of the efforts make him feel like he got to know the people in the town overnight – and he exchanges silent glances of gratitude with everybody he meets on the street. Then come the cruel comments of his classmates and the devastating review in the local newspaper which is summarized in some detail in the text. This is a reflexive inscription of those mediated processes of production and circulation, of the material existence of the book which most literary texts suppress. The quantified conception of writing (a number of words equalling a certain amount) came into being together with the emergence of mass publishing and the expansion of print media; it embodies the rupture between the naïvely humanist views of literature in Taisho and the cultural economy of Showa, penetrated by the equalizing logic of the market. But this same quantifying logic did not only bring about notions of the literary work as a commodity; it was also responsible for a radically new perception which saw the printed character objectified and materialized: as Yokomitsu Riichi famously pronounced in a 1928 essay, 'the written character is a material object'.⁴⁹ While *enpon* culture indeed meant unprecedented levelling, homogenization and naturalization of *genbun itchi* language, the sheer proliferation of printed characters at the same time pushed to the foreground the material nature of language. If print in general caused standardization, then the accelerated logic of technological reproduction in the late 1920s and 1930s meant a further reification of the word. Apart from the *enpon*, the

⁴⁹ See chapter 1, p.19.

density of advertising messages and the imaginative use of typography also participated in a semiotic reversal: as Kôno Kensuke has pointed out, the written character ceased to be a simple carrier of meaning; its purely visual and figural aspects became increasingly important.⁵⁰ The technologization of the word posed a radical challenge to ideas of linguistic transparency and affected issues of narrative and representation. The visual experiments of the modernist poets who gathered around journals such as *Mavo* and *Damdâm* in the twenties, should not be disengaged from these developments.

The Mediatized Self of Photography

Photography and the filmic image are the forms of technologically reproducible culture *par excellence*; they exemplify the forces of mass production and exchange which undermined the dominant realist regime. Such a claim would appear to contradict the discourse which has coalesced around the photograph: from the very emergence of the new medium in the 1830s, the photograph was described as a mirror of the world, a record of a moment in reality exactly as it happened. As Martin Jay, *pace* Victor Burgin, notes, such views were very much a product of their own historical moment and the realist reaction to romanticism.⁵¹ In Japan as well, photography was considered one of the technologies exemplary of rational knowledge. It was adopted and utilized fully in the establishment of the administrative structures of the nation-state.⁵² Remarkably, the discourse on photography intersected directly with Meiji literary debates and helped shape conceptions of mimetic realism in both literature and visual culture. It is known that the *genbun itchi* experiments of Shôyô and Futabatei were deeply indebted to the bestselling *Kaidan botan tôrô* (The Ghost Story of the Peony Lantern, 1884), a *rakugo* tale by the famous San'yutei Enchô (1839-1900). This was, however, a doubly mediated written text, the rendering in *kanji* and *kana* Japanese of a shorthand transcription of the story. The shorthand method for transcribing Japanese purely phonetically with separate signs for homophones, perfected by Takusari Kôki and his disciples, was called *kotoba no*

⁵⁰ Kôno Kensuke, *Shomotsu no kindai: media no bungakushi*, Tokyo: Chikuma gakugei bunko, 1999, p.191.

⁵¹ Martin Jay, 'Photo-unrealism: The Contribution of the Camera to the Crisis of Ocularcentrism', in Stephen Melville and Bill Readings (eds), *Vision and Textuality*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, p. 345.

⁵² Kôno, *Shomotsu no kindai*, p.160.

shashinhô, a photographic method of words which recorded living speech the way photography captured the world.⁵³

While much of the discourse on photography has revolved around its ontological status, on the mimetic (or indexical, in semiotic terms) relationships between image and referent, Jonathan Crary's intervention has radically shifted the terms of the discussion by focusing instead on the detachable qualities of the photographic image, its abilities to circulate independently of its referent. For Crary photography participates in the epistemic shift of the nineteenth century and the newly established commodity economy; it is a central element 'in the reshaping of an entire territory, on which signs and images, each effectively severed from a referent, circulate and proliferate'. Crary stresses that photography should be understood in this new cultural economy of value and exchange, not within a linear teleology of visual forms:

Photography and money become homologous form of social power in the nineteenth century. They are equally totalizing systems for binding and unifying all subjects into a single global network of valuation and desire...Both are magical forms that establish a new set of abstract relations between individuals and things and impose their relationships as real. It is through the distinct but interpenetrating economies of money and photography that a whole social world is represented and constituted exclusively as signs.⁵⁴

Crary's argument is, I believe, valid for the historical moment which this thesis focuses on because precisely in the late 1920s and the 1930s Japan saw the completion of these homogenized networks of circulation (it was after the earthquake, for example, that the leading newspapers established a nation-wide sales network), but also the explosion of commodity culture and the rising importance of consumption and display. The filmic image in a way represents an intensification of the mobility of the photograph, a further obfuscation of materiality and of the mediating apparatus: as Alexandra Keller has pointed out, film has no auratic original and in this sense is 'a representation of itself,

⁵³ Seth Jacobowitz, 'Photography and Automatic Writing as *Idée Fixe* in Ozaki Kôyô's *The Gold Demon*', in James Dorsey and Dennis Washburn (eds), *Reading Material: The Production of Narratives, Genres and Reading Identities*, PAJLS 7 (2006), p. 107-108; Kôno, *Shomotsu no kindai*, pp. 153-154.

⁵⁴ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p.13.

something consumed without a material trace'.⁵⁵ My reason for bringing up photography and film is not to juxtapose the verbal and the visual or to explore the rather obvious avenue that visual forms of mass entertainment presented a threat to the domination of literature as high culture, although such anxieties did exist, as evident in numerous critical essays and roundtable discussions from that time. What I am interested instead is how Dazai's works *embody* the duplicitous logic of the photograph, its claim to capture reality directly, without mediation, while at the same time remaining a representation of itself. It is well-known how acutely sensitive Dazai was to photography; he is probably the modern writer who most consciously staged his portraits and was most controlling about how they were used.⁵⁶ Suzuki Sadami tells of Dazai's fondness for posing and disguise in front of the camera while in higher school: in kimono, in student uniform, with and without glasses, hair smooth or tussled, imitating portraits of Akutagawa and Sôseki.⁵⁷ But what interests me is not so much biographical details or actual references to photography in the texts (although the photography appears, crucially, in 'Memories', Dazai's debut story published in 1933 and in his last novel, *No Longer Human*), but how the epistemological indeterminacy of the photograph – its validating identity while at the same time being part, in the words of Tom Gunning, 'of a new system of exchange which could radically transform beliefs in solidity and unique identity' – relates to the narrative strategies of the works from *The Final Years*.⁵⁸

Photography became an agent in the denaturing of realist representation not only through the sheer multiplication of images and the acceleration of technological reproduction, but also through the adoption of techniques which departed radically from the perspectival space of classical painting. Until the mid-1920s, photography in Japan was very much confined to the professional's studio; the dominant style was that of the so-called *geijutsu shashin*, art photography. Art photography remained within the pictorial conventions of Japanese painting; it produced many sentimental landscapes and portraits in uniform soft

⁵⁵ Alexandra Keller, 'Disseminations of Modernity: Representation and Consumer Desire in Early Mail-Order Catalogs', in Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (eds), *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p.156.

⁵⁶ Marukawa Tetsushi, *Teikoku no bôrei: Nihon bungaku no seishin chizu*, Tokyo: Seidôsha, 2004, p.87.

⁵⁷ Suzuki, 'Dazai Osamu', p.132.

⁵⁸ Tom Gunning, 'Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detection and Early Cinema', in Charney and Schwartz, *Cinema*, p.18.

focus. The advent of the smaller portable camera which used film after the earthquake (Leica being the typical example) changed profoundly the ways photography was produced, circulated and consumed. The medium left the portrait studios; the amateur replaced the professional photographer, the carefully composed and staged portrait was abandoned for the spontaneity of the snapshot. Amateur photography expanded on a national level in the beginning of Showa; it brought about the perfection of snapshot techniques which could indeed capture on camera the appeal of a visually dense urban environment.⁵⁹ Powerful companies like the *Asahi* set up and supported the photography journals of the amateurs, such as *Asahi kamera*, which began in 1926. But the pictorialism of the art photography was challenged not only by technological developments, but also by the modernist shift across the visual arts. The so-called new photography (*shinkō shashin*) was influenced by the avant-garde techniques of European photography, from the drive to explore the expressive potential of the medium beyond the predictable visual grammar of painting. Artists like Murayama Tomoyoshi, who had recently returned from abroad, introduced on the pages of amateur journals the work of artists like Man Ray, El Lissitzky and László Moholy-Nagy. The new photography enthusiastically adopted techniques like photomontage, extreme close-ups and bird's eye views.⁶⁰ While exhibitions were the preferred forum for Kansai photographers, in Tokyo the exponents of the new photography utilized widely print media.⁶¹ From the mid-1920s, multi-colour offset print became possible; technological improvements in equipment and film also spurred the development of photographic reportage, *hōdō shashin*.⁶² All these contributed to the accelerated mobility and ubiquity of the technologically reproduced image. The 1930s, in Japan and in the rest of the industrialized world, saw the beginnings of an era of consumption of images in which the dialectics of originals and copies was weakened by the emerging logic of the simulacrum. The snapshot participated in an alarming dissolution of the boundaries between public and private, intimacy and circulation, organicity and commodification. Photography fragments – the body, temporality, experience – this dynamic is exaggerated in the avant-garde techniques of

⁵⁹ Minami, *Shōwa bunka*, p.442.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 438.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 447.

⁶² *Ibid.* 452.

the new photography. It isolates lived experience from the whole corporeal sensorium to fix it only through the sense of sight.⁶³ Operations of framing and cutting, on the other hand, erase context and that embeddedness of experience in a concrete situation (*bashosei*).⁶⁴ The technological and chemical mediation of the apparatus, as well as the considerations of lighting, shot composition, camera distance and angle, are suppressed; from the very beginning images were manipulated and retouched. But most importantly, photography arrests the flow of time, creating, in Martin Jay's words, 'a temporality of pure presentness in which the historical becoming of narrative was stripped away'.⁶⁵ In 1927, Siegfried Krakauer wrote that 'in illustrated newspapers the world is turned into a photographable present and the photographed present is completely eternalized. It seems to be snatched from death; in reality, it surrenders itself to it'.⁶⁶ Photography plays a role in this dissolution of narrative and the increasingly specularizing and spatializing dynamic of the twentieth century. Photography shares with modernism that ambiguous semiotic ground between reference and self-reference and becomes a powerful trope in its critique of traditional mimetic regimes, both visual and verbal. Dazai's texts not only register and respond to the duplicity and ubiquity of the technologically generated image; in the case of works such as 'Memories' and 'The Flower of Buffoonery', this new epistemology provides the fundamental structure within which the text works. In 'Memories', the photograph appears more directly, in a crucial moment of the closure of the work. The young narrator *watashi* and his brother peer over a box of photographs they found in the family library:

After a while he handed me a newly mounted photo, evidently taken when Mother and Miyo called upon my aunt. Mother was sitting by herself on a low couch, while Miyo and my aunt who were both the same height, stood behind. In the background of the photo the roses in my aunt's garden were blooming in abundance.

We drew close to the photograph and gazed upon it for some moments. My brother and I had already become reconciled – or so I thought – and I hesitated to tell him the truth about Miyo. I could now observe her image with a degree of calm. She had moved during the exposure, and the outline of her shoulders and head were blurred. My aunt, hands folded

⁶³ Kōno, *Shomotsu no kindai*, p.164.

⁶⁴ Takahashi Seori, *Kankaku no modan: Sakutarō, Jun'ichirō, Kenji, Rampo*, Tokyo: Serika shobō, 2003, 98.

⁶⁵ Jay, 'Photo-unrealism', p.349.

⁶⁶ Siegfried Krakauer, 'Die Photographie', in *Das Ornament der Masse: Essays*, Frankfurt, 1963, p.35, quoted in *ibid.*, p.349.

upon her sash, was squinting. I saw a certain resemblance between them.⁶⁷

Miyo, the young maid for whom the narrator has vague feelings, has been dismissed because of a fight with the grandmother. 'The truth about Miyo' comes from a young servant who 'liked to read novels' (63): another servant had violated Miyo and she could not bear to stay after the other maids learned about it. The aunt appears in the very beginning of the story, in the earliest memory of the narrator, the warm maternal presence which his real mother never was. It is tempting indeed, as some critics have done, to read this last scene as the firm association of Miyo with the aunt, with a longing for the lost plenitude of the maternal, a reading which the thematics and the atmosphere of 'Memories' seem to reinforce. But the mediation of the photograph makes such a reading problematic. The last sentence of the Japanese text utilizes to the full the ambiguity of Japanese syntax: while the English translation states explicitly that the resemblance is between Miyo and the aunt, the Japanese text reads only '*watashi wa, nite iru to omotta*' (64). It is not said clearly who resembles whom; other readings are possible: it may be that the mother and the aunt look alike, or the mother and Miyo. But even if it is indeed the aunt and Miyo, what is striking is that although the narrator has known their faces for years, he discovers the resemblance *in the photograph*; he needs the mediation of a technologically produced image to notice that they look alike. Significantly, the text draws attention to the material existence of the apparatus: Miyo has moved during the exposure. What we have here is an example of photography's alienation of lived experience; the most intimate and familiar suddenly looks strange and opaque in a photograph. 'Memories' is indeed a psychoanalytic narrative, but to me the emphasis seems to be not on longing for the plenitude of the maternal, but on how the fullness of childhood and the pre-Oedipal is drained off and abstracted by the process of symbolization as figured by the photograph.

It is possible to see this same epistemological confusion, photography's challenge to a realist representational regime, in the actual first edition of *The Final Years* and the

⁶⁷ Dazai Osamu, *Selected Stories and Sketches*, trans. James O'Brien, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, p.50. The Japanese text is in *Dazai Osamu zenshû* vol.2, pp. 63-64.

photograph of Dazai included in it. Kôno Kensuke has traced the entry of the photograph in the book and the evolution of a particular visual rhetoric of writers' images, in which camera angle, posture and expression aimed not for the stiffness of the portrait, but for a certain bohemian lyricism exemplified by that most photogenic writer and first literary star, Akutagawa Ryûnosuke.⁶⁸ *The Final Years* was published by a small company, Garasuya shobô, and it is well known how involved Dazai was in the whole process, even to the most minute details: from the composition of the collection and the order in which the stories appeared, to the white cover which had the title characters embossed in black relief calligraphy. The photograph of Dazai in *The Final Years* is in the style of a snapshot, framed and cut rather askew; the natural background and the play of light and shadow also markedly deviating from those of stylized and poised portraits. The book also has a sash, *obi*, the band of paper typical of Japanese books. On the band there are quotes from private letters: one from Satô Haruo to Dazai's friend Yamagishi Gaishi, containing praise for 'The Flower of Buffoonery', and another from Ibuse Masuji (1898-1993) to Dazai, which describes him as 'the student with shabby clothes and torn hat, dishevelled hair and face beautiful as a flower'.⁶⁹ The fact that the design, layout and presentation were so carefully chosen by Dazai, invites us to view the text, the para-textual and the material object of the book as a continuum, as a performative bundle. But if writers' photographs in books work to present a concrete person, the author, as a single unifying source of meaning for the text, then what is the role of Dazai's photograph in the beginning of a book which wilfully deconstructs certain naively organic notions of authenticity; which employs unreliable narrators whose discourse is exposed as fiction; in which a character named 'Dazai' appears (in 'Das Gemeine'), and inauthentic narratives and selves proliferate? The reader sees the photograph of Dazai, but at the same time she is confronted with the duplicity of the photograph in the final scene of 'Memories'. What are we to make of the usage of private letters used as a blurb on a book, a mass-produced product which, although executed with the utmost care, as if crafted and unique, would be bought by an indefinite number of readers? Torn from their concrete context, the letters, like the photograph, question divisions between private expression and public

⁶⁸ See Kôno, *Shomotsu no kindai*, pp. 153-183.

⁶⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.183.

circulation. The stories collected in *The Final Years* emphasize the element of self-alienation always present in photography. Dazai's photograph and the design of the collection again work to reinforce the epistemological indeterminacy and the narrative derangement at the heart of the collection, to complicate established cultural paradigms.

A central element of visual mass culture, the photograph embodies the advanced logic of technological reproduction in the late 1920s and especially the 1930s. What distinguishes this decade from earlier ones is not only the sheer proliferation of mass culture: radio, phonograph records, film. The very speed of reproduction also accelerated in the first decade in Showa; Hasumi Shigehiko gives the example of the emperor leaving the imperial palace in Tokyo for the accession ceremony in Kyoto at eight in the morning – by noon, the newsreel of the imperial departure was already playing in Asakusa cinemas. It was indeed the beginning of an era of consumption of images removed from referents, which Guy Debord among other theorists would identify as the society of the spectacle.⁷⁰ The scale of these developments is different from today, according to Hasumi, but structurally the constellation of the 1930s has a lot in common with today's mass media.⁷¹

The mass technologies of modernity participated in an erosion of the dialectic of surface and depth, of traditional humanist conceptions of subjectivity and the inner life, those master tropes onto which the whole edifice of modern Japanese literature rested. The vague, but powerful discourse of self-consciousness (*jiishiki*) discussed earlier in this thesis, does not represent only the tautological closing off of literature after the frustration of the political in 1932-33 and the advent of a new culturalism. Yokomitsu's definition of his famous fourth person, 'the self looking at the self', remains abstract and ambiguous. It is actually Kobayashi Hideo who in his 'X e no tegami' (Letter to X, 1932) offers a powerfully evocative image for self-consciousness: he compares it to a camera freak who has settled in your head and keeps taking snaps of you, without permission.⁷² In other

⁷⁰ While the onset of Debord's 'society of the spectacle' is generally placed in the second half of the twentieth century, Cray, following on a brief comment by Debord, has argued the case for locating its origins in the 1920s, at the time of the technological and institutional beginnings of television, the introduction of synchronised sound in film, the use of mass media techniques by the Nazi party in Germany, and the political frustration of surrealism in France. See Jonathan Cray, 'Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory', *October* 50 (1989), pp. 96-107.

⁷¹ Karatani (ed.), *Kindai Nihon no hihyô I: Shôwa*, p.72.

⁷² Iguchi Tokio, 'Taihai suru nininshô mata wa saiki daimeishi no sôshitsu', *Eureka* 30:8 (1998), p.60.

words, the reflexive turn in 1930s cultural discourse cannot be disengaged from the crisis of humanism unleashed by ubiquitous technological reproduction and mediation: Yokomitsu's 'The Machine', with its dissolution of subjectivity under the onslaught of opaque chemical and technological forces, might actually give us the proper interpretive context in which his 'Essay on the Pure Novel' and the fourth person should be read. Kobayashi's notion of self-consciousness as mediated by technology resonates powerfully with Ernst Jünger's (1895-1998) 'second consciousness'. Technology for Jünger brings a second nature and a second consciousness; this 'second, colder consciousness shows itself in the ever more sharply developed ability to see oneself as an *object*'.⁷³ For Jünger, this should not be confused with the self-reflective stance of traditional psychology. Similarly, the photograph 'stands outside the sphere of sensibility...the object photographed [is] seen by an insensitive and invulnerable eye'.⁷⁴ The Japanese *jiishiki*, that powerful trope of 1930s writing, does not go as far as Jünger's celebration of this consciousness outside pain (which for Jünger is both the armour and the weapon of the soldier, the new human type in the authoritarian state envisaged by him) but it shares the notion of a reflexivity which departs from purely humanist conceptions. This is the reflexivity of a mediatized self, increasingly split and unknown to itself. As the media stars of a mass publishing industry dense with images and advertising messages, writers were increasingly faced by experiences of self-alienation and objectification: in the postscript to the sequel of her bestselling novel *Hôrôki* (Diary of a Vagabond, 1930), Hayashi Fumiko (1903-1951) wrote of the strangeness which confronted her when she saw her own name, 'Hayashi Fumiko' in advertisements for literary magazines.⁷⁵ Although literary histories obsessively narrate the end of Taisho with the death of Akutagawa, in many ways his was a death typical of Showa, a death in an age of mechanical reproduction. It was featured on the front page of numerous newspapers, both national and local; invariably accompanied by his photograph; 'Aru kyûyû e okuru shuki' (A Letter to an Old Friend), the suicide note which contained that potent phrase, 'vague anxiety' (*bon'yari shita fuan*), was published in both the *Asahi* and

⁷³ Ernst Jünger, 'Photography and the 'Second Consciousness'', in Christopher Phillips (ed.), *Photography in the Modern Era*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989, p. 207, emphasis in original.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁷⁵ Gardner, *Advertising Tower*, p.4.

the *Nichinichi*. Again, traditional boundaries between the private and the public, the event and its consumption as an image seemed to have shifted; Akutagawa's highly mediated, sensationalized death was consumed as a scandal.⁷⁶ In 1931, the foreword to an anthology of essays on journalism declared that 'the people of today find it impossible to conceive of a world without newspapers, magazines, radio and publishing, even for a day'.⁷⁷

There is an acute awareness of this mediatization of experience in the stories from *The Final Years*. 'The Flower of Buffoonery' was written five years after Dazai's actual suicide attempt on the beach at Kamakura, but for most of its readers, the experience of the work was already mediated, firmly fixed in a certain framework of expectations. This first of Dazai's suicide attempt was reported in the media: Dazai was the youngest son of a very prominent Tôhoku family, his father had been a member of the House of Peers and his elder brother was a member of the prefectural assembly at that time. According to Ômori Ikunosuke, the incident made it into the evening editions of the *Tokyo Asahi* and the *Tokyo Nichinichi shimbun* from 29 November 1930 and into the regional *Tôhoku Nippô* (the morning edition of 30 November) which also had Dazai's photograph.⁷⁸ In a typically reflexive gesture, 'The Flower of Buffoonery' incorporates this moment: Yôzô asks Hida if he learned about the incident from the newspaper. Hida replies with a vague 'yes', although in fact he heard it on the radio news (114). The work is conscious that its reading will be mediated by the scandalous persona of its author and the actual suicide attempt, that is why the textualization it offers is ambiguous, articulated through double narrative structures which further distance and complicate the real. In a brilliant contextualized reading of 'The Flower of Buffoonery', Andô Hiroshi has argued that the work is conscious not only of the widely reported incident and the construction of a Dazai persona by the media, but also of a powerful discourse on suicide. The five years separating the Kamakura incident and the publication of 'The Flower of Buffoonery' were a time of a grim boom of suicides (*jisatsu*) and double suicides (*shinjû*) of educated, intelligent young people, a boom unparalleled in history. Numerous sensationalized

⁷⁶ Marukawa Tetsushi, *Teikoku no bôrei*, p.84.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Matsumoto, 'Dai ikkai Akutagawashô', p.41.

⁷⁸ Ômori, 'Ôba Yôzô', p.3.

stories of suicide circulated in the media; women's magazines especially discussed it in terms of contemporary mores and customs (*fūzoku*). A double suicide from 1932 in which the girl was found to be a virgin was taken up by the media as an exemplar of pure love; the site became a famous place, *meisho*, for tourists; the story was made into a successful film.⁷⁹ In the more elevated discourses of literature, suicide was seen within a rigid Marxist framework, as the inability of contemporary youth to overcome class origins. In the case of young intellectuals, 'death' became firmly associated with 'suicide' and 'class'. (When confronted with the shock of Akutagawa's suicide, Dazai and his leftist friends at higher school had also turned to this powerful Marxist conception of class). For Andô, 'The Flower of Buffoonery' strategically cites and distances both the consumption of suicide in the media and the rigid Marxist discourse, highlighting issues of agency and inner logic.⁸⁰ This consciousness of the mediatization of experience is present structurally and formally not only in a radically experimental work such as 'The Flower of Buffoonery', but also in the elegiac 'Memories', traditionally regarded as Dazai's 'honest self-portrait written in a free, relaxed style'.⁸¹ Marukawa Tetsushi, in a ground-breaking intervention, has argued instead that 'Memories' can be read as a history of reception of various media whose magic infects the young protagonist, of the cultural forms and devices experienced as fragments from the capital: magazines, phonograph records, photographs, films.⁸² But there is also a recurrent motif about reality being mediated by representations, images, pre-existing narratives. The young narrator is more affected by his father's death as a media sensation – the local newspaper reports it in a special edition and he is excited to see his name in the paper as one of the bereaved– than by death as raw experience (39). From a very young age he is infatuated with *kabuki* and *kyôgen* and even stages his own plays; he summons the servants to watch films and panoramic slides; draws *manga*. When at high school he starts a coterie magazine; alarmed by this literary obsession, his elder brother sends a long and stiff letter lecturing him on the dangers of literature: unlike science, one can understand literature only in the right environment and when a certain age has been reached (49). Love is mediated by

⁷⁹ Andô, *Jiishiki no Shôwa bungaku*, pp. 137-139.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142, 152-153.

⁸¹ Okuno Takeo, quoted in Andô Hiroshi, 'Dazai Osamu "Sarumen kanja"', p.63.

⁸² Marukawa Tetsushi, *Teikoku no bôrei*, pp. 78-79.

literary melodrama: the supposedly 'natural' awkward adolescent feeling for Miyo comes after a teacher's sentimental story about a red thread connecting everybody to their future wife. *Watashi* admits that he is incapable of reading great novels with detachment; 'a work by a well-known Russian writer' (Tolstoy's *Resurrection*), makes him see himself and Miyo as the student and Katyusha kissing for the first time under the blossoming lilac (53). The ambiguous last passage with the unspecified resemblance in the photograph is a really appropriate ending for such a work. Not only is reality always mediated by the image; 'Memories' registers the emerging of a new semiotic economy in which direct sensuous experience becomes secondary to the image, in which representations produce the material real.

But we need to go back to 'The Flower of Buffoonery' to see how this mediatization and the technologies of the visual have penetrated the literary text itself, how profoundly they affect its rhetorical structures. At a moment when *boku* despairs that his story has really 'lost it' (*bokete kita*), he comes up with the idea for a complete turn: 'Shall I insert a few panoramic shots here?' (132). The narrative strategies of the text are here explicitly grasped through metaphors of photography and the filmic. The logic of technological reproduction is behind the radical narrative experimentation of the whole collection. The appearance of several inauthentic selves in 'The Flower of Buffoonery' and 'The Youth with the Monkey Face' should be thought in the context of proliferation of copies and the crisis of stable reference; the immanent subjectivity of Taisho has become the increasingly technologised, opaque and alienated self of Showa. This shift is also registered in the multiplication of perspectives: in the 'The Flower of Buffoonery' we have two intertwined, simultaneously unfolding lines; 'The Youth with the Monkey Face' features three embedded stories. In all these works we have a mirroring of narratives; this common dynamic of reflexivity is what makes the stories from *The Final Years* a unified whole, a textual bundle. In 'The Flower of Buffoonery', this reflexivity is most explicitly critical – the meta-narrative of *boku* stages not only the writing of Yôzô's story, but also its interpretation. This is one of the signature gestures of modernism: the work of art striving to be total, incorporating efforts at its own interpretation. At the same time, this tendency towards self-objectification is far from the traditional psychological reflexivity, as

articulated most directly in Jünger's writings on photography. Perspectivalism reigned supreme not only in the visual arts: consider the metaphors of depth or three-dimensional characters used to describe the nineteenth-century realist novel. Modernism's strategies of Brechtian estrangement or the formalist 'laying bare of the device' are in a way indebted to the effects of photographic media on classical representationalism. The strategies of reflexivity employed in *The Final Years* aim for effects similar to those of Brechtian alienation. They successfully invoke reader expectations – the powerful paradigm of the *shishōsetsu* – only in order to deviate from them, to complicate the experience of reading. It is worth remembering again that at the time the stories from the collection were written, realism was becoming not only exhausted and formulaic, but also relentlessly *commercialized* in the historical tales of revenge and the popular novels serialized in women's magazines. Dazai's modernist reflexivity, the multiplication and confusion of narrative levels, the attempts to produce a work of art which incorporates its own critique, serves to shock, to frustrate the easy consumption of the text. By incorporating its own meta-narrative, 'The Flower of Buffoonery' makes a utopian attempt to restore the aura of disinterestedness, autonomy and non-instrumentality. It is a familiar modernist defence described by Terry Eagleton:

Modernism is among other things a strategy whereby the work of art resists commodification, holds out by the skin of its teeth against those social forces which would degrade it to an exchangeable object...To fend such reduction to commodity status, the modernist work brackets off the referent or the real historical world, thickens its textures and deranges its forms to forestall instant consumability, and draws its language protectively around it to become a mysteriously autotelic object.⁸³

Reflexivity is often troped as textual narcissism; it is a mirroring, a tautological valorization of literature. But this self-inscription of literature also necessarily entails the further distancing or even the displacement of the referential; it is one of those ambiguous features of modernist writing. However, we also noted in the analysis of 'The Flower of Buffoonery' and 'The Youth with the Monkey Face' the fact that these reflexive structures are dissolved and that the multiplication of narrative lines is not sustained: in crucial

⁸³ Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', p.392.

interventions, the supposedly transcendental *boku* positions himself on the same level as his characters *and* his readers, while in the other story a character writes a letter to her author. These strategies of narrative derangement put the reader into an epistemologically uncertain position, resisting easy reading and consumption. I would argue that this collapse of the orders of realism again should be read as a symptom of that perceptual rupture caused by reproduction technology. The structures of reflexivity imply critical distance; the parallel levels of primary diegesis and meta-narrative in 'The Flower of Buffoonery' enable *boku* to critique his own work. The collapse of these two levels together – *boku* joining his characters – means the collapse of that critical distance. I understand critical distance in the sense elaborated by Hal Foster in an important article, which focuses, among other things, on the Western discourse on technology in certain key discursive moments, the one of the 1930s embodied by Benjamin's seminal essay on the artwork. In Benjamin's essay aura is defined as 'the unique phenomenon of distance'; mechanical reproduction destroys this aura of art, '[bringing] things closer, "spatially" and humanly'.⁸⁴ Benjamin develops this insight by contrasting the painter and cameraman through a surgical analogy: unlike the magician who preserves a certain distance between himself and the patient, working with his hands on the surfaces of the body, and who 'greatly increases [the distance] by virtue of his authority', surgery penetrates into the patient's body, and there is of course no auratic authority. Similarly, 'the painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, [while] the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web'.⁸⁵ Hal Foster focuses on the crucial implications of this conception of distance:

The new visual technologies are thus "surgical": they reveal the world in new representations, shock the observer into new perceptions. For Benjamin this "optical unconscious" renders us both more critical and more distracted (such is his great hope for cinema), and he insists on this paradox as dialectic. But here too is not clear that it could be maintained. Already in 1931 Ernst Jünger had argued that technology was "intertwined with our nerves"...not much later, in 1947, Heidegger announced that distance and closeness were folded "into a uniformity in which everything is neither far nor near."⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, London: Pimlico, 1999, pp. 216-217.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 226, 227.

⁸⁶ Hal Foster, 'Postmodernism in Parallax', *October* 63 (1993), p.18.

In the essay, Benjamin famously outlines the politically emancipatory possibilities of the logic of reproduction (the politicization of aesthetics in Soviet avant-garde art and filmmaking), as well as the mythically regressive elements of the aesthetization of politics. (Hal Foster points out that when the essay was published in 1936, the progressive alternative could not hold in the case of the Soviet Union of Stalin, who was about to sign his pact with Hitler).⁸⁷ Similarly, the collapse of distance and of the auratic privatized contemplation of art for Benjamin meant possibilities for a more collective and at the same time more critical experience, possibilities which do not exist for later theorists of the culture industry and the spectacle such as Debord, Adorno and Horkheimer. Benjamin's situating of the problematic of distance within the technological regime of reproduction and the further elaboration of Hal Foster have a striking resonance with the Japanese discursive context. The trope of self-consciousness, the exaggerated, hypertrophied reflexivity, cannot be isolated from the mediatization of both self and experience. Through its textual strategies – the staging of reflexivity via the incorporation of a critical meta-narrative within the work, and then the obliteration of the critical distance provided by this narrative; the collapsing of distance between authors and their characters – Dazai's writing both registers and responds to this new cultural and political constellation. It is true that the mimetic regime of realism does lend its support to a particular worldview associated with 'the old masters' and it is possible to detect in these works the energy of Oedipal revolt, a delight in relativism, contingency and the radical fictionalization of experience. But before we attempt to grasp the political and ideological implications of these strategies, we need to look at the contradictory dynamic noted in all the works analysed in this chapter, namely, the motif of organic communion beyond words and the persistent figures of reciprocity and inter-subjectivity.

Katari and the Technologization of the Voice

What distinguishes the more experimental stories from *The Final Years* – 'The Flower of Buffoonery', 'The Youth with the Monkey Face', 'Gangu' (Toys), 'Random Writings' – is the fact that they are emphatically *narrated*. In that grand opposition of 'showing' and 'telling'

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

which has defined narrative since, if we believe Genette, Homer, they belong unambiguously to a 'telling' tradition. The narrator can be a hovering presence or a more strongly contoured and personified writer, but there is always an enunciating subject in these texts. Contemporary critics referred to such discourse as *setsumatai*, the style of oral storytelling. Some of Tanizaki's works such as *Manji* (The Swastika, 1931) and *Mōmoku monogatari* (Tales of a Blind Man, 1933), are also regarded as *setsumatai* narration. While the rather gaudy eroticism of *The Swastika* did not impress the critics, *Tales of a Blind Man* is part of a bundle heralded as Tanizaki's 'return to the classics', works which both thematically and stylistically seem to identify with a rarefied Japanese tradition.⁸⁸ It is tempting to situate the works of Takami and Dazai from a couple of years later within this shift to premodern modes of storytelling, *katari*, and subsume them under the totalizing atavistic ideologeme of the return to Japan. If the return to Japan is the resurgence of epistemologies suppressed by the regime of modernity, then *katari* is again a return to the contextual and other-directed style which literary realism and *genbun itchi* language sought to erase. As Tomiko Yoda explains, narrative discourse before Meiji worked in 'the powerful force field of the performative *katari*, which invokes the concrete scene of address involving the narrating subject and the audience'.⁸⁹ The search for the modern self of Japanese modern literature was a search for a first-person discourse free from second-person relationships. *Genbun itchi* cancels the other-directedness of language; its supposed neutrality enables the writer to construct an independent fictional world.⁹⁰ The narrators of Edo period illustrated fiction, *yomihon*, openly manipulate their material, narrating themselves in and out of the story, varying the distance between narrator and content and making explicit the process of constructing their narrative with phrases such as '*sore wa sate oki*' (we will leave that for later), the unmistakable signatures of the storyteller. But the epistemic rupture of Meiji brought about the new hegemony for realism and the search for a vernacular that would shake off the ornate rhetoric of classical language. The signs of the storyteller, the performativity and

⁸⁸ For an illuminating reading of one representative such work, *Shunkinshō* (Portrait of Shunkin, 1933), as a gesture which subverts the mythology of Japanese tradition, see Golley, *Voices in the Machine*, pp. 423-527.

⁸⁹ Tomiko Yoda, 'First-Person Narration and Citizen-Subject: The Modernity of Ōgai's "The Dancing Girl"', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65:2 (2006), p. 280.

⁹⁰ Iguchi, *Taihai suru nininshō*, p.63

contextuality of the utterance, the flamboyant persona of the Edo narrator, had to be erased. In that founding text of modern Japanese literature, *The Essence of the Novel*, Tsubouchi introduced ideas of realism (*mōsha*), of 'simply describing reality the way it is' (*tada genjitsu o ari no mama ni utsusu*). The novelist, Tsubouchi emphasized, is not a puppeteer; when he sets out to depict things, he should be as dispassionate as possible: he should empty and calm his heart; he should bury his ideals and feelings so that they are not visible on the outside.⁹¹ Tsubouchi's vision found its fulfilment in Japanese naturalism and its central notion of *byōsha*, or description, articulated most distinctly by Tayama Katai, the representative figure of the movement. *Byōsha* does not only include discourse outside dialogue; in many respects it overlaps with the mode of 'showing'. *Byōsha* was opposed to the rhetorical embellishments of pseudo-classical writing, to the overwhelming presence of the narrator, and the didacticism and sentimentalism of Edo fiction. Katai called for a stripping off of artifice, for a 'plane' (*heimen*) or 'naked' (*rokotsu*) description, as explained in his influential essay 'Sei ni okeru kokoromi' (The Experiment of Sei):

Without bringing into it anything subjective, without imparting any designs, just writing the materials the way they are, as materials...Not only keeping out the subjective views of the writer, but without entering inside objective phenomena, without crossing into the inner psychology of the characters, just describing phenomena they way they are seen, heard and touched. My emphasis is on plane description. Describing one's real experience without anything subjective, without any interior explanation or dissection, just the way it is seen, heard and touched...⁹²

Katai's argument is for a narrative stance or style, but it also implies a particular view of language as language degree zero, a transparent vehicle for those descriptions. It is impossible not to notice in this often-quoted passage the emphasis on directly physical perception, as if without any cognitive or linguistic mediation. But what in 1908 seemed a refreshingly and fashionably scientific objective stance, by the 1930s had come to be seen as outdated convention, the signature of the exhausted realism of the 'old masters'. The revolt against the tyranny of *byōsha*, which also included the obligatory descriptions

⁹¹ Quoted in Andō, *Jiishiki no Shōwa bungaku*, p. 42.

⁹² Tayama Katai, 'Sei ni okeru kokoromi', in Yoshida Seiichi and Wada Kingo (eds), *Kindai bungaku hyōron taikei* vol.3, Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1972, p.448, originally published in *Waseda bungaku*, September 1908.

of landscapes and natural scenes, was represented by Takami Jun's sarcastically titled essay 'One Cannot Just Lie Back Behind Description' from 1936. Takami starts by stating bluntly that he cannot stand descriptions of nature, but after this emotional beginning there follows a sharp and thorough historical analysis of the novel, 'the genre of civil society', and of *byōsha* as the most democratic literary mode: no matter how humble an object or a scene are, they are worthy of appearing in a novel. For Takami, the present crisis of the novel is precipitated by the increasing domination of the visual; in terms of pure objective description, literature cannot rival the directness of film: in the novel, visualization is always mediated by the act of reading. Takami refuses to limit the essay to facile comparative theories of film and fiction; he probes the historical origins of this will to objective description and its connection to a modern civilization which privileges science and technology. But although the current intellectual climate, according to Takami, is marked by a loss of faith in the structures of 'common objective perception' (*kyakkanteki kyōkansei*), this does not warrant a return to pre-scientific modes of understanding and representing the world.⁹³ Because of the disintegration of common perceptions, even such self-evident truths as white things being white, cannot be relied on. The writer him/herself must appear *in the text*, to make a conscious effort to convince the readers that something is indeed white. This is a stance which the so-called *setsuwatai* makes possible, but it does not mean decadence or regression.⁹⁴ Takami's essay was important because it registered a cognitive rupture, a dissolution of the certainties of modernity which affected literary representation and the mode of realism. Objectivity, the basis of *byōsha*, is suddenly revealed as historical, as convention and artifice. It seems like the only guarantee of meaning, of narrative authority, which can keep the world of the novel from dissolution, is the narrating subject – hence the insistence that he or she appears within the text and be made explicit and embodied. In a trope common to the cultural discourse of that time, reality is perceived to be in a flux: the essay ends with the sentence 'Things *before* literature are tearing literature into million pieces'.⁹⁵ Takami's essay advocates a stark relativism and subjectivism, a stance which he experiments with in his own novel of the previous year. *Auld Acquaintance*, as seen in chapter two of this

⁹³ Takami Jun, 'Byōsha no ushiro ni nete irarenai', in Muramatsu, *Shōwa hihyō*, vol.2, p.398.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.398.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 399.

thesis, is a decentred universe of autonomous, radically isolated characters and their truths. Takami's novel also has an intrusive narrator who openly manipulates his characters and transgresses the ontological levels of the narrative universe, although perhaps in a way not as blatant and strongly emphasized as Dazai's.

The discourse around the so-called *setsumatai* in the 1930s needs itself to be historicized and returned to its original contexts, as it intersects with other material and discursive developments. Tsuboi Hideto has made a powerful argument that the recovery of storytelling represented by the *setsumatai* is profoundly mediated by the technology of the voice:

The singing and narrating voice heard from the phonograph evokes in the listener an awareness of his or her own voice, and awakens the consciousness of a style of "writing as one speaks"...This seems like restoration of *monogatari* in the world of the novel, but it is nothing close to purely oral narrative which can generate numerous versions and variants...It is not possible to understand these attempts at re-presenting the voice outside the formations of sonic technology which could record the raw voice and its breathing'.⁹⁶

Yoshimi Shun'ya has aptly titled his social history of the technologizing of the voice through the telephone, the radio and the phonograph, *Capitalism of the Voice*. Yoshimi stresses the disjunctions caused by audio reproduction: the deviation from the fundamentally tactile quality of sound (every sound is essentially waves touching membranes), but also the erasure of the situatedness (*bashosei*) of natural sound. The sound which comes from the radio or the phonograph is not rooted in a concrete location; it has infinitely reproducible flatness and homogeneity. Yoshimi borrows R. Murray Schaffer's notion of schizophonia as 'the split between an original sound and its electroacoustical transmission or reproduction'.⁹⁷ Reproduced sound for Yoshimi is separated both from its producer and from the site of production; with direction and situatedness erased, it can be ubiquitous both spatially and temporally.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Tsuboi, *Koe no shukusai*, pp.3, 5.

⁹⁷ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, Rochester: Destiny Books, 1993, p. 90.

⁹⁸ Yoshimi Shun'ya, *Koe no shihonshugi: denwa, radio, chikuonki no shakaishi*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1995, pp. 13-15 passim.

The 1920s and 1930s in Japan and in the industrialized world in general, cannot but strike us as *the* historical moment of the commodification and technologization of the voice. The 1930s saw a real explosion of recorded hit melodies (*ryūkōka*) in Japan, a boom underpinned by both technological innovation and capital accumulation. In 1927, there was a switch from acoustic to electric recording which was introduced in Japan in the following year. Again in 1927, the American recording company Victor set up a fully owned Japanese subsidiary; in 1928, the investment of American capital in a Japanese company, Nippon Chikuonki Shōkai, led to the establishment of Columbia Japan.⁹⁹ The system for the industrial production of records was thus established. These structures profoundly altered popular song: earlier, popular melodies had emerged naturally and spread spontaneously, from below, but in the 1930s, more and more of them were manufactured from above, by the record industry. The first hit was the famous *Tokyo March* (*Tokyo kōshinkyoku*) from 1929 which sold more than 250,000 records. *Tokyo March* was a very real example of that landscape of media mix and total commodification which Ōya Sōichi presented as exaggerated satire several years later: the song was created for a film which itself was based on the eponymous novel serialized by Kikuchi Kan in *Kingu* magazine. *Tokyo March* was the first specially created theme song for a film.¹⁰⁰

The relationship between the record industry and the other explosively popular sonic medium, the radio, turned out to be one of symbiosis rather than competition: both nurtured the sentimental escapism of the popular song, *kayōkyoku*; popular songs were a big factor in the penetration of radio.¹⁰¹ The growth of radio was remarkable: while in 1930 the number of subscribers was a little above 770, 000, it rose to nearly two and half million in 1935 to reach a staggering five and half million by 1940.¹⁰² Unlike the record industry, however, radio was under the total hegemony of the state. Yoshimi Shun'ya chronicles the exciting polyphony of early experimental radio broadcasting by amateurs, until the government stepped in promptly to establish control over the powerful medium of

⁹⁹ Minami, *Shōwa bunka*, p.470.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

¹⁰¹ Iwasaki Akira, 'Atarashii media no tenkan', *Shisō* 6 (1976), p. 246.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.246.

wireless communication: the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, NHK was created in 1926, placed under the direct control of the Ministry of Communications and subject to strict mechanisms of prior censorship. Radio was the medium of state propaganda which ordinary people misrecognized as entertainment; but even the *naniwa bushi* ballads, the most popular element of radio programming, sang of loyalty to one's lord and love for one's country. News items were always vetted by the state. As discussed briefly in chapter three, the broadcast of the rituals of the nation-state - the funeral ceremonies for emperor Taisho in 1927, the accession of the Showa emperor in 1928 – exploited the illusion of immediacy produced by wireless technology to create a sense of shared temporality for the imagined community.

Yoshimi stresses the significance of the reconfiguration of sonic media advanced by both industry and state: it was at this point that everyday oral exchanges between people came to be seen as an important market. This commodification of everyday speech is also closely related to the reconfiguring of the nation, in what he calls 'the national spatialization of oral communication'. It was a process through which the voices of the radio and the telephone were made to circulate through the homogenized space of the nation-state.¹⁰³ Significantly, Yoshimi employs a figure similar to that of Hal Foster in his analysis of the discourse of technology in the 1930s: this circulation for Yoshimi had as its basis the abolition of distance in the ability of radio and telephone to radically restructure spatial and temporal relations.

Like the other disjunctive forces of urbanized modernity, this mediatization of the culture of the voice had a direct impact on the waning of authentic oral traditions. *Katari* and the *setsuwatai*, as they emerged in the 1930s, should be viewed as compensatory constructions in an age which saw the gradual disappearance of the organicity of the face-to-face encounter between storyteller and listener. The establishment of *genbun itchi* language as a linguistic norm and the suppression of its historical origins were again processes powerfully aided by the spread of mass publishing and radio. The hegemony

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 274-275.

of *genbun itchi* meant a weakening of inherent other-directedness of Japanese, of the addressee always presumed in an utterance. *Katari*, then, is a return of the suppressed signs of the storyteller. By including a narrator, whether as a hovering voice or a concrete being, the *setsuwa* style attempts to recover on *the level of narrative* what has been suppressed by standard vernacular language. *Katari* thematizes the act of narration and its embeddedness in a concrete situation: in a roundtable discussion on 'the problem of the novel', Murayama Tomoyoshi remarks that the beauty of the *setsuwatai* lies in its proximity to the reader, its evocation of a storyteller sitting cross-legged and addressing his audience.¹⁰⁴ But it should be stressed that the storytelling style of Tanizaki and Uno Kôji, of Takami and Dazai, is far from an authentic return to premodern *katari*, much like the primitivism of European modernism has nothing to do with the original objects of tribal art it embraced. The premodern themes of Tanizaki in 'Tales of a Blind Man' or 'Portrait of Shunkin' should not obscure the profoundly modernist narrative strategies of these texts. The *setsuwa* style is a purely modernist – meaning selective and technical – appropriation of a premodern narrative mode, mediated profoundly by the technology of the voice, as argued by Tsuboi. Like other strategies of textual reflexivity, *katari* brings to the foreground the discursive activity of the enunciating subject which *shishôsetsu* writing conceals. In the confusing multiplication of perspectives, Dazai's narrators expose that gap between narrating 'I' and narrated 'I', the impossibility of absolute identity between the two. But before we interrogate the historical and ideological implications of *setsuwatai*, its re-emergence in an age when both print and audio media worked to disjoin the reader from concrete forms of community, we need to look closely at the other potent figures which work to restore the other-directedness of oral narrative in *The Final Years*: the frequent address to either a very personal and singular 'you', or to a community of listeners, the construction of a reader *within the text*.

The Politics and Erotics of Storytelling

In the article discussing the magical pull of Dazai's writing, Okuno Takeo points out that the power of Dazai's style should be sought in the openness of his texts not to the reader

¹⁰⁴ Okada Saburô *et al*, 'Zadankai: Shôsetsu no mondai ni tsuite', p.3.

in general, but to a very concrete 'you', an effect achieved through the *setsuwa* style and the direct address. The reader as an implicit grammatical second person (*sanzaitekina nininshô*) is made to appear in the text.¹⁰⁵ According to Okuno Takeo, this makes it almost impossible to read Dazai's texts as a stranger (*tanin*), as a removed separate world, without projection and identification. Rhetorically, his style creates the illusion that *you* are the chosen reader, the only person who would understand the truth and the agony of Dazai. For Okuno, this is a consciously sought effect, but its complexities are again reduced to the psychological, to Dazai's character.

Like the modernist and technologically mediated recovery of the oral storytelling mode, this inclusion of the reader in the text can be only a construction, both symptomatic and compensatory. It is true that the Taisho edifice of pure literature was based on *genbun itchi* writing which weakened the relationship between a narrating subject and the addressee of his or her discourse as they had existed in pre-modern oral modes. But I would argue that what was lost on the level of language and style was compensated through modes of reception and the structures of feeling which sustained the *shishôsetsu*. The master trope of the *shishôsetsu*, the confession, is after all a mode directed to an other; it does imply a listener. The demands for sincerity and full disclosure worked to construct an intimate communion between writer and reader. Sincerity also meant the towering pre-eminence of the ethical. As most studies of *shishôsetsu* and the discursive landscape of Taisho have shown, the writer was considered a sage conscious of his followers; readers sought in literature ethical coordinates for their lives. Masao Miyoshi has stressed this intersubjective, performative dynamic of the Japanese *shôsetsu*: the writer's will is directed towards allowing order to emerge between himself, his work and his readers, rather than within the work itself.¹⁰⁶ Sincerity was joined by another potent trope, *hanzoku*, the rejection of the vulgar and the pragmatic; both writers and readers shared faith in the cultivation of a unique personality through humanistic pursuits. Suzuki

¹⁰⁵ Okuno, 'Dazai bungaku no maryoku', *Bungakukai* 19:8 (1965), p.149.

¹⁰⁶ Miyoshi, 'Against the Native Grain', p. 23.

Sadami has also pointed out that this rapport (*kôtsû*) between writer and reader forms the psychological foundations of the *shishôsetsu* genre.¹⁰⁷

The Taisho reader was a distinct and knowable figure; he or she moved in the circles which had emerged around the journals of the naturalist movement and later *Shirakaba*. That this was a small and tightly knit community shows even in the fact that before the advent of the *enpon*, big names such as Sôseki and Ôgai still sold only around a thousand copies.¹⁰⁸ Even when conceived broadly, Taisho readers were basically the small humanistically educated elite; as Karatani Kôjin has written, this very definite community of readers was what made the Akutagawa-esque sophistication of form in late Taisho, the density of artifice, possible.¹⁰⁹ Literary works were printed texts produced in multiple copies and read silently, in isolation. But the small size of the Meiji and Taisho *bundan*, its proud self-imposed marginalization from mainstream society and the powerful ethical tropes meant that the inherent mediation of the printed word could be obfuscated in favour of visions of an immediate and intimate relationship between writer and reader. This community would disintegrate with the beginnings of mass publishing. The *enpon* boom and the massification of publishing exposed mechanisms of production and distribution, of commodity circulation, which needed to be suppressed for the Taisho ideology of authenticity to take hold. For Taisho figures such as Akutagawa and Arishima Takeo, social classes like the intelligentsia and the farmers were self-evidently separate and different entities.¹¹⁰ The *enpon* and the whole expansion of the mass culture of film, radio, advertising and popular literature meant farmers, workers, and the urban petit bourgeois could also become fully-fledged consumers of culture. From the very concrete reader of Taisho, now the reader could be conceived only as an abstraction.¹¹¹ In the late 1920s and 1930s, literature became just another commodity exposed to an unknown and unlimited number of readers who, as Shinozaki Mioko has emphasized, did not have to

¹⁰⁷ Suzuki Sadami, 'Dazai Osamu', p.130.

¹⁰⁸ Yamamoto Yoshiaki *et al.*, 'Zadankai: enpon no hikari to kage', p.23.

¹⁰⁹ Karatani, *Kindai Nihon no hihyô I*, p.24.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

share the intimate certainties of the Taisho *bundan*.¹¹² The lofty ethical concerns of the Taisho community of writers and readers became parodies of themselves; the writer as sage became the writer consumed as a commodity; the sense of intimacy was replaced by the production in the media of all kinds of gossipy, sensational information about literary figures. Suddenly cultural discourse focused almost obsessively on the reader as a mass consumer of literature, as if to mark the end of the centrality and domination of the writer. In his essays the critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke argued the primacy of the reader: for him, there was first a reader and then a writer; he did not condemn the commodification of literature outright because it also brought about the liberation of the reader.¹¹³ The writings of critics like Ôya Sôichi and Ôkuma Nobuyuki, as analyzed by Tsuboi Hideto, also reflect the perception that the focus of art is shifting from producer to consumer; for Tsuboi, the concepts employed by Yokomitsu Riichi in his 'Essay on the Pure Novel', *gûzen* (chance, accident) and *kanjô* (sentiment), also mean that Yokomitsu consciously targeted the reader.¹¹⁴

Dazai's *kimi*, 'you', is a compensatory attempt to construct a very concrete and intimate addressee in place of this opaque and ungraspable mass reader; at once it registers and plots to overcome the disintegration of the performative bond between writer and reader in the community of the Taisho *bundan*, a bond which made it possible to distance the realities of mediation, both linguistic and extra-discursive. Like Dazai's adoption of the *setsuwa* style, this is a strategy which stages the concreteness and intimacy of a storytelling situation. It comes as no surprise that vaguely erotic metaphors of seduction abound in critical accounts of Dazai's hold on the reader. Phyllis Lyons describes Dazai's interaction with the reader as seductive unmediated merging: 'Dazai, undoubtedly to his own personal detriment, invited his readers actively to merge with him, to enter into his mind, as fluids pass through a permeable membrane. There is something organic about

¹¹² Shinozaki Mioko, "'Geijutsu"ka no henyô: buntai kara jôhôte', *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyôzai no kenkyû* 46:11 (2001), p.73.

¹¹³ Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, 'Shôhin to shite no kindai shôsetsu' in *Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke bungei hyôron zenshû* vol.1, Tokyo: Bunsendô shoten, 1975, pp. 303-309; 'Shôgyôshugi to gendai no bungaku' in *ibid.*, vol.2, pp.234-236.

¹¹⁴ Tsuboi, *Koe no shukusai*, p. 148. About the reader theories of Ôya and Okuma see also Maeda, *Kindai dokusha*, pp. 313-376.

the relationship he sets up'.¹¹⁵ Okuno Takeo has highlighted the palpable discomfort with which other writers talk about Dazai: as if they are treating 'an explosive', a 'poisonous substance', a 'bacterium carrying an infectious disease'. Metaphors of this kind – poison, fascination, taboo – are indeed there in the words of writers such as Yasuoka Shôtârô (1920-), Yoshiyuki Junnosuke (1924-1994) and Shimaô Toshio (1917-1986).¹¹⁶

There have been some sharp and insightful attempts to grasp the rhetorical devices which create this bond with the reader and trace their larger implications. 'In the intimate dialogue between "you" the reader and "I" the narrator', writes Reiko Abe Auestad, the "you" is prompted into believing that his understanding and engagement are "sincerely" solicited and the reader becomes what the text strategically positions him/her to be'.¹¹⁷ In *The Final Years*, this strategic interpellation of the reader is achieved through the direct address to *kimi* and *shokun*; through the narrative reversal in 'The Flower of Buffoonery' which sees *boku*, Yôzô, and the readers bound together. These rhetorical strategies reinforce an experience of reading as identification, a surrender to the seductions of the text.

Aeba Takao has warned of the dangers of this hermeneutics of assimilation: because most readers encounter Dazai at the gate of youth, they discover themselves in his texts. There is no separation between self and object; the process of this narcissistic identification feels so natural that it is taken to be self-evident.¹¹⁸ Such reading can have profoundly ambiguous ideological effects: just like Dazai's focus on the act of narration, the communion between writer and reader displaces the referential content of the work. Questions of truth and the larger realities behind the text become secondary. The relationship between writer and reader encourages a certain timelessness divorced from historical contexts and specificity, directing even more critical readers towards the ethical or existentialist interpretations which form the bulk of Dazai commentary.

¹¹⁵ Lyons, "Art Is Me", p.109

¹¹⁶ Okuno, 'Dazai bungaku', pp. 135-136.

¹¹⁷ Reiko Abe Auestad, 'Re/reading "Modern Japanese Literature" as a Critical Project: The Case of Dazai Osamu's Autobiographical Novel *Tsugaru*', in Michel Hockx and Ivo Smits (eds), *Reading East Asian Writing: The Limits of Literary Theory*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003. p.258:

¹¹⁸ Aeba Takao, *Dazai Osamu ron*, Tokyo: Kodansha, 1976, p.1.

But we noted in the analyses of the concrete works that the performative bond with the reader is also joined by tropes which reinforce ideas of unity and perfect communication beyond words. In the larger political contexts surrounding *The Final Years*, it is impossible not to notice how these motifs echo ideologically loaded visions of immediacy and organicity found in the discourse of the cultural revival. What is indeed the significance of the complex, contradictory dynamic at work in *The Final Years*: the intimate togetherness of the storytelling situation, on one hand, and the exposure of the artifice of language, the technologies of estrangement which work on the level of form? If the *setsuwa* style of the collection and the emphasis on narration are indeed compensatory recoveries of a disappearing oral tradition, how does such a strategy relate to the fascist fetishization of the voice? Fascism elevates the authenticity and the erotic pull of the voice over the abstractions of writing; as Alice Kaplan observes, 'Where there is reverence for the voice, reverence for presence, nature and immediate communication often follow'.¹¹⁹ Hitler has said that the Nazis would not have conquered Germany without the loud speaker; it is well-known that Goebbels exploited the archaic, ritual appeal of both radio and film for propaganda, but denigrated the written word because writing implied time for reflection and thought.¹²⁰ Tsuboi Hideto's study of Japanese war poetry is titled *Koe no shukusai*, festival of the voice. He locates a radical rupture in the 1930s: while the modernist poetic experiments of the twenties explored the materiality of the printed character on the page, the late thirties saw the spectacular rise of the movement for national poetry, *kokuminshi*. This was verse which emphatically eschewed Chinese compounds and loan words and was written specifically for oral recitation, either on the radio or at specially organized and overwhelmingly popular poetry recitals.¹²¹ Fascism's reverence for the reproduced voice might seem paradoxical in the light of its professed anti-modernism, but this paradox is mirrored by the ideologically and perceptually ambiguous character of modern media itself. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the technologies of reproduction intensified an experience of alienation, threatening to dissolve identity and older metaphysical structures in general, but at the same time they could obfuscate their own mediating

¹¹⁹ Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, p.8.

¹²⁰ Yoshimi, *Koe no shihonshugi*, p. 257, Crary, 'Spectacle', p. 104.

¹²¹ Tsuboi, *Koe no shukusai*, pp. 9, 10.

operations and generate powerful visions of community. Thus for the fascists it was not so much the raw voice, but the reproduced and amplified voice which conveyed archaic values; broadcasting could extend subjectivity into a collectivity.¹²² Modern media fragmented perception, isolating and privileging single senses – radio disembodied the voice and film cut up the body – but these same forms could also be the conduit of ideologically vulnerable experiences of organicity and wholeness. How do indeed the efforts to recover the voice of the storyteller in the *setsuwa* style intersect with this cultic place of the voice in the fascist libidinal economy? *Setsuwa* storytelling implies the immediacy of the oral; especially in its addresses to the reader, Dazai's texts simulate the directness of an oral exchange. At the same time, however, other subtle gestures and strategies bring effects of estrangement, pointing towards a type of writing which merely *simulates* orality. 'The Flower of Buffoonery' and 'The Youth with the Monkey Face' contain indications that these are written texts, especially the framed stories of Yôzô and the young author of *The Dove*; there are references to the narrators reading and rereading their works. Such reflexive devices point to the status of the texts in general, not only the embedded narratives, as fiction. The addresses to the reader, those figures of raw voice and immediate communication, are in fact in standard *genbun itchi* language, which at that time still signalled the artifice of the written. It would be possible to miss these subtle gestures if *The Final Years* did not contain a story which highlights negatively their significance. Dazai's native tongue is, of course, not standard *genbun itchi* language but the heavily accented and idiosyncratic Tsugaru dialect. (There are accounts of how thick Dazai's accent was; although he made very conscious efforts to lose it when he moved to Tokyo, it was still recognized by fellow northerners). Only one story in the collection, 'Suzumekko' (Sparrow), is written entirely in the Tsugaru idiom, everything else is in *genbun itchi*. Thus *genbun itchi*, the style from which other-directedness has been suppressed, is used to address the reader and stage the concrete community of storytelling; what we have here is actually written and highly mediated artifice mimicking orality. Even the seduction of the reader is not done with abandonment; a certain detachment and self-consciousness persist in the most supposedly intimate

¹²² See Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality*, pp. 134-137.

addresses. The first-person narrator of 'Random Writings' insists that even death should be met with a posture of *kôgen reishoku*, literally 'sweet words with a cold expression' (310). An old phrase from the Analects, *kôgen reishoku* describes a skill with words which, however, lacks empathy; a flattery based on style with no substance. The plea for communion and understanding which opens 'The Flower of Buffoonery' in all its stark solemnity, is mercilessly relativized by the next passage as pompous and self-conscious, exposed again as a purely stylistic exercise. Visions of organicity are actually made and unmade: *boku* vows to abandon his preoccupation with technique and to write in rapture without intellectualizing it all (*munen musô*), but later he rejects this stance because the result is only drawn out, tedious writing (144). Research on Dazai's juvenilia has highlighted his experimentation with a dizzying variety of styles: some of the early stories are written in the manner of Akutagawa, others resemble Kikuchi Kan; there are similarities to both new sensationist writing and Izumi Kyôka-like grotesquery, with proletarian writing also a powerful influence.¹²³ For Suzuki Sadami this interest in style is manifested clearly in 'Ha' (Leaves), the story placed at the beginning of *The Final Years*, which is a ready-made art object à la Duchamp, a collage of fragments from earlier stories.¹²⁴ This will to style privileges alienated surfaces; it becomes possible only through profound detachment from the affective power of language. Such a position makes possible the questioning of the Taishoesque dialectic of surface and depth and the emphasis on posturing and clowning. The self and the narratives of the self are exposed as heavily mediated by previous plots, by literary epistemologies, like the adolescent love of the narrator of 'Memories' for Miyo. The stories from *The Final Years* expose the ideology of literature; in that respect they resist the logic of culturalism which, as we saw, mythologized literature. There is, of course, the reflexive inscription of literature in the texts (the embedded narratives, the plots involving writers and writing), a typically modernist technique which aims to rescue the work from instant consumability. But this negative valorization of literature is very different from the organicism of the cultural revival. Both the reflexive structures and their dissolution, the collapsing together of narrative and ontological levels in works like 'The Flower of Buffoonery' and 'The Youth

¹²³ Suzuki Sadami, 'Dazai Osamu', p.132.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.140-141.

with the Monkey Face', become possible *because of* the commodification of the literary work, because of the technologies of reproductions which affected the texture of experience. The addresses to the reader and the figures of perfect communication are still found in texts which reflexively point to their own masks; which undo their own effects and expose their own fictionality. The unity between 'me' and 'you' is just a fragment from a fractured fictional narrative; the intimacy with the reader and the immediacy of the storyteller can be at times *too* literal, *too* exaggerated. In *The Final Years*, the tropes of authenticity and the longings for collectivity so typical of the discourse of the cultural revival are in fact framed and isolated for contemplation; Dazai's writing stages *both* the alienation of experience and the ideologically reactionary attempts to overcome it, in an attempt to forge an alternative and ironic reflexive praxis.

Conclusion

This study inevitably remains a brief and incomplete glimpse of Japanese fiction from the mid-thirties. My intention has not been to present an all-encompassing narrative, but rather, to map the broad discursive unities and the common textual strategies of 1930s modernism. The three writers belonged to divergent genealogies and embraced different literary visions, but separated from schools, movements and debates, the works analyzed here show common concerns with broader issues of language, subjectivity and the nature of representation. One of my aims has been to consciously disjoin these texts from intentionality and authorial presence and return them to larger historical processes. My readings have been set against specific developments, but the master context has remained the cultural revival of the mid-1930s: the elevation of the epistemologies of instinct, the mythologization of tradition, the resurgence of magical language. These aesthetic discourses resonate disturbingly with the ideologically unambiguous slogans of the radical right and the fascist longings for presence and immediacy. Against such historical intensities, the texts of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai present a fractured modernist subjectivity which is a break away from the organicism of the Taishō self, but they resolutely resist the fascist dissolution of the self into the collectivity. While the regime of realist representation and the *shishōsetsu* in particular are critiqued and put to the test, linguistic mediation is not abandoned for pre-discursive affect or the luminous performativity of *kotodama*. The emphasis on narration and the sheer verbosity of these texts push forward the density and the material existence of language.

That these were attempts at an alternative aesthetic practice can be seen even in the immediately relevant contexts of literary politics in the mid-1930s. As mentioned earlier, 'The Flower of Buffoonery' was in the preliminary selection for the first Akutagawa prize in 1935; Takami Jun's *Auld Acquaintance* even made it onto the shortlist. The prize, however, went to Ishikawa Tatsuzō's (1905-1985) *Sōbō* (The Common People), a formally conservative work narrating the experiences of Japanese emigrants in Brazil. It

was criticized for being based on the author's own life, but at the same time its 'wholesomeness of method' and 'the influence of the age (*jidai*)' were praised by Kikuchi Kan.¹ Matsumoto Kazuya has made a compelling argument about how the choice of *The Common People* shows the inflection of *shishōsetsu* discourse circa 1935. Kobayashi Hideo's influential 'Essay on the I-novel' and the notion of a socialized self (*shakaika sareta watakushi*) it presented did articulate a certain shift. This discourse insisted that there was nothing wrong with the *shishōsetsu* as form, but it needed to go beyond the privatized, hermetic conception of the self: the self had to be inserted into a community and the work had to be more open towards the age. In the mid-thirties, notions of the social and the political changed their earlier ideological connotations: from subversive leftist terms they came to signify forms of engagement sanctioned by the authorities. The discourse of the socialized self of the *shishōsetsu* fed into the drive for national literature, *kokumin bungaku*, and the total hegemonization of culture by the state.²

The formal experimentation of Takami, Ishikawa Jun and Dazai and their fractured versions of both narrative and subjectivity are indeed radical departures from the 'socialized self' and the required wholesome technique. (*Fugen*, however, was awarded the Akutagawa prize in 1936). But if we step away from the texts to take in the bigger discursive politics of the time, certain ambiguities persist. As discussed briefly earlier in this chapter, the *Jinmin bunko* writers' identification with the common people and the brushing off of the China incident of 1937 in order to be true to the everyday are somehow troubling; Takami and Takeda, the most vociferous opponents of Matsumoto Gaku's Friendly Literary Society, contributed to its journal. A few years later both were sent to the front and their writings about Indonesia and Burma make uncomfortable reading.³ In the late 1930s, Ishikawa Jun embodied a stance of haughty apoliticality; Dazai's 1944 travelogue *Tsugaru* stages the ecstatic undoing of alienation in the festival of the village community. The garrulousness and the narcissistic reflexivity of the earlier texts on which this study focuses also in a way participate in a displacement of the

¹ Matsumoto Kazuya, 'Shōwa jūnen zengo no shishōsetsu gensetsu o megutte', *Nihon Kindai bungaku* 68 (2003), p.74.

² *Ibid.*, p.72.

³ See Keene, *Dawn to the West*, p.931, 940; Kweon Seok-Yeong, 'Teikokushigi to hyūmanizumu: puroretaria bungaku sakka o chūshin ni', *Shisō* 882 (1997), pp.138-158.

referential; the cultural revival's foreclosure of political agency is contained symbolically as a breakdown of the narrating subject and the disintegration of the hierarchies of the realist novel; the ideological crisis becomes a crisis of aesthetic representation. This is modernist ambiguity, a doubleness towards the main forms of modernity which for T.J. Clark is constitutive for modernism as artistic practice.⁴ What I have identified as strategies of resistance still remain very *textual*; my argument is that these narrative experiments cannot be understood outside the historical forces which shaped the cultural revival and its organicist visions. Culturalism itself contained all the tropes and slogans which fascism could easily appropriate, but at the same time remained ambivalent towards official Japanism and government propaganda. The texts of Takami, Ishikawa and Dazai are not politically committed art, but as Althusser taught us, 'in the aesthetic world...ideology is always in essence a site of competition and a struggle in which the sound and fury of humanity's political and social struggles is faintly or sharply echoed'.⁵

⁴ Clark, 'Origins of the Present Crisis', p.90.

⁵ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, London: New Left Books, 1965, p.149n6.

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