

Winter 2009

The Work of Abe Kobo in the 1960s The Struggle for Identity in Modernity; Japan, the West, and Beyond

Devon A. Cahill

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**The Work of Abe Kōbō in the 1960s
The Struggle for Identity in Modernity;
Japan, the West, and Beyond**

**By
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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in the
Department of Asian Studies at Seton Hall University
South Orange, New Jersey**

May 2009

The Work of Abe Kōbō in the 1960s
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Thesis Title

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Devon A. Cahill

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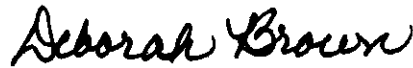
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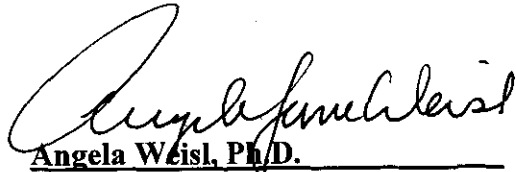
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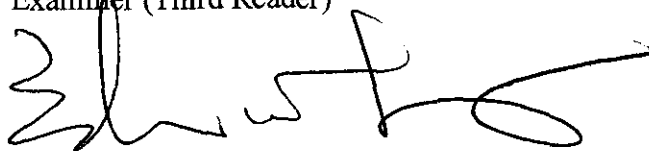
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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Asian Studies at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ.

To my mother, for the gift of thought,
to my father, for the gift of writing,
and to Sarah, for never allowing me to give up on either

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Shigeru Osuka for his guidance and inspiration throughout my graduate studies and completion of this thesis. I also would like to thank Dr. Deborah Brown for her tireless editing and high expectations, and Dr. Angela Weisl for her enthusiasm and invaluable breadth of knowledge. Finally, I would like to thank fellow graduate students, James Wheatley, M.A. '08, Kelly Fink, M.A. '08, Evelyn Huang, M.A. '09, and Nandor Forgach, M.A. '09 for sharing both the agony and joy of this experience.

Abstract

After World War II, the Japanese experience of the devastation of war and the psychological uncertainty during the American occupation, matched with Japan's own complicity in the atrocities committed against other Asian nations, left a void in the Japanese psyche. While many authors and artists in this era struggled to define a new Japanese identity, the works of playwright and author Abe Kōbō 安部 公房 (1924-1993) looked beyond the confines of national boundaries to communicate a common identity for all individuals in modernity. In a direct attack against Western "Orientalism," Abe's work of the 1960s is characterized by protagonists who suffer the detachment and loss of purpose common to all modern societies. To this end, Abe reached beyond the limitations of cultural and geographic borders to examine the human condition in modernity, using a universal language.

Abe's unusual experience as Japanese outsider in Japanese culture granted him an uncommon viewpoint from which to observe not only the existential strains of modernizing Japan, but also the common challenges that faced modern societies around the globe. To highlight Abe's creation and implementation of a universal language it is important to position his work in the context of the avant-garde art movement in Japan and how its importance transcended the realm of literature. This relationship will be emphasized in this exploration of Abe's major works of 1960s that includes a partial translation of his screenplay for the 1962 film, *Otochiana* おとし穴 [The pitfall].

Introduction

The end of World War II left Japan in the unenviable position of having to redefine itself in the face of Western military and economic dominance. As the population in Japan's urban centers swelled during its post-war economic renaissance, the way Japanese people communicated with each other and related to their environment created new existential dilemmas to be addressed by emerging artists. One of the most successful artists to emerge during the post-World War II era in Japan was author, playwright, photographer, musician, and inventor Abe Kōbō¹ 安部 公房 (1924-1993). Abe is often compared to Western writers such as Albert Camus (1913-1960) and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) for his use of absurdist conventions that elicit poignant criticisms of the individual and the human condition in modern society. Abe is best known in the West for his novel *Suna no onna* 砂の女 (1962, tr. *The Woman in the Dunes*, 1964), and its subsequent film adaptation directed by Teshigahara Hiroshi 勅使河原 宏 (1927-2001) released in 1964.

Abe's early work of the 1950s employs avant-garde techniques such as surrealism and metamorphosis to demonstrate his political and cultural idealism. During this period, Abe saw the potential for humanity's reunification with its essential identity through a return to its communal past that he believed was the potential outcome of a Marxist society. In his work during the 1960s, however, Abe abandoned his dependence on social systems for pure examinations of the human condition in modern society, free

¹ Throughout the thesis, Japanese names will be cited in the Japanese style, with family name first followed by given name. "Kōbō" is a pseudonym for Abe's given name, Kimifusa. Each name is an alternate pronunciation of the same kanji, 公房.

from the contexts of oppressive ideologies that he found in both modern capitalist and communist societies.

During the 1960s, Abe's vision of a modern humanity detached from the essential identity of its communal past is embodied in his frustrated protagonists who search for identity and freedom in a never-ending struggle between the ideas of "the individual" and "the collective." In Abe's own words, "Whereas now we operate under new social relationships, our inner selves still cling to older values. Thus there is a conflict between the self who seeks a new social relationship and the self who tries to maintain the older form."² Through the use of complex layers of symbolism, then, Abe exposes modern society's seemingly irreconcilable dependence on inherited identity roles from an agricultural society that prove to be anachronistic in a modern context. This thesis, therefore, will show that in his definitive works of the 1960s, Abe posited that the path to modern identity and liberation is an individual one in which community itself becomes an adversary.

To this end, chapter 1 will explore Abe's early experience in Japanese occupied Manchuria which enabled him to write in a universal voice that distinguished his work from his more typically "Japanese" contemporaries. Also, it was during this period that Abe began to negotiate his relationships with three key locations in his life: the frontier, the hometown, and the city. These locations appear symbolically throughout his work and are the basis for his understanding of the machinations of modern society and the individual's role both within it and outside it during the various developmental stages of society.

² Abe Kōbō, quoted in Timothy Iles, *Abe Kōbō: An Exploration of His Prose, Drama and Theatre* (Fucecchio, Italy: European Press Academic Publishing, 2000), 7.

For a complete understanding of his philosophy and fiction, as well as their impact on the culture of his time and implications on our current understanding of the human condition, chapter 2 will examine origins of the Japanese avant-garde and the unique atmosphere of post-World War II Japan from which Abe's work was born. Positioning Abe in the artistic movement of the time will allow for a deeper understanding of Abe's philosophy in relation to concurrent movements in art outside the realm of literature, and provide a deeper understanding of his disillusionment with communism.

Chapters 3 through 5 will delve into the texts directly and expose Abe's matrices of symbolic meaning. Chapter 3 will employ a Marxist reading of *Suna no onna* to focus on his treatment of the character of "the woman," and highlight Abe's shift from his faith in communism as the source for humanity's liberation in modernity, to that of the "individual" which typifies his writings of the 1960s. In chapter 4, Abe's 1967 novel *Moetsukita chizu* 燃えつきた地図 (tr. *The Ruined Map*, 1969) will be examined as a work of "anti-detective" fiction and its postmodern implications explored. Through careful analysis, both of these works will be exposed as exemplary of Abe's optimism for an individualistic freedom within the framework of modern society and the ideology it reproduces. Chapter 5 will provide a partial translation of Abe's 1962 screenplay for the film, *Otoshiana* おとし穴 [The pitfall].

Chapter 1

The Life of Abe Kōbō

“What were you looking at?”

“A window.”

“No, no. I mean what were you looking at through the window?”

“Windows...lots of windows. One by one the lights are going off.

That's the only instant you really know somebody's there.”

——Abe Kōbō, *Moetsukita chizu* (1967, tr. *The Ruined Map*, 1969)

In Abe Kōbō's fiction of the 1960s, we find frustrated everyman protagonists in ever-shifting landscapes, searching for identity and struggling with the ideas of individual and community. This chapter explores the experiences in Abe's life that equipped him with the tools to address these issues in a voice that resonated more sympathetically with the West than those of his Japanese contemporaries. Although connections will be made between many of Abe's experiences and his work of the 1960s, the study of Abe's childhood and adolescence in Manchuria, before and after the Japanese occupation of 1931-1945, gives the most insight into the source of Abe's philosophy and literary dilemmas.

Childhood and Adolescence

Abe Kōbō was born in Tōkyō in 1924, but moved with his family to Mukden (present-day Shenyang), Manchuria, where his father was employed as a medical doctor during the Japanese occupation. At school in Manchuria, Abe excelled in Kendo and studied entomology.¹ More importantly, it was during these years that Abe first became attracted to the idea of storytelling.

¹ This interest in entomology would provide the background for Abe's protagonist in *Suna no onna*.

As Abe recounted:

I read Poe's stories and I told them to my classmates. I had to read one story a day in order to maintain my standing, and there was still a demand even after I had finished all the translations. I then found myself having to invent stories during the winter. That was the first time I began to write the kind of story that could entertain other people.²

Even at a young age, then, Abe was developing an approach to writing that obscured the boundaries of Japanese national literature. It is important to consider that Abe was a Japanese outsider in Manchuria, who found inspiration in American literature that was even more outside of his experience. He would incorporate these disparate influences into his production of stories that embraced the common experiences of his classmates. His ability to use outside influences to create a new vocabulary to communicate his ideas hinted at the borderless nature of Abe's future work.

Although Abe spent most of his youth in Manchuria, in 1931 during the Japanese invasion of mainland China, Abe stayed in his mother's hometown in Hokkaido, the rural northern island of the Japanese archipelago.³ It was in these two locations, Manchuria and Hokkaido, both technically part of Japan but detached from everything commonly associated with it, that Abe's own psychological relationship with the idea of mainland Japan and "Japaneseness" began to mirror his geographical remoteness from the heart of his native country.

In Abe's own words, "In short, my place of birth, the place where I was brought up, and my place of family origin, are three different points on the map... . Essentially, I

² Nancy Shields, *Fake Fish: The Theater of Abe Kōbō* (New York: Weatherhill, 1996), 33.

³ Iles, 23.

am a man without a hometown. That is one thing I can say.”⁴ From his vantage points in Manchuria and Hokkaido, Abe would observe psychologically remote mainland Japan, the home of Japanese cultural trappings and modernization that were the source of his idealism.

Abe uses mainland Japan, Manchuria, and the remote northern island of Hokkaido throughout his work, either alone or pitted against one another. For example, the rural village life that he experienced in Hokkaido comes to represent community, not only in the sense of a group of people working for the common good, but also in its rigidity and its stifling of individualism. This trope is effectively used in his 1962 novel, *Suna no onna* (tr. *The Woman in the Dunes*, 1964), in which Abe’s protagonist, a wandering entomologist searching for bugs in the sand dunes, finds himself ensnared by desert villagers and consigned to live at the bottom of a sand pit with a woman whose existence is consumed with shoveling the ever-encroaching sand from her home. The protagonist’s first impression of the village is a romantic one. When asked by the “good, simple fisherfolk” if he would like to stay the night in the desert village, the protagonist responds, “I should be very grateful if you would. Of course, I will expect to show my appreciation. ...I am particularly fond of staying in village houses.”⁵ This notion is quickly upended, however, when he realizes that he is, in fact, the victim of the villagers’ scheme, and thus the ugliness of group mentality is exposed.

Abe’s experience in Manchuria, on the other hand, with its bustling chaos, provides the perfect backdrop for Abe’s symbolic “city,” which he inhabits with

⁴ Andrew Horvat, *Abe Kōbō tanpenshū* 安部公房短編集 [The collected short stories of Abe Kōbō] (Tōkyō: Hara shobō, 1973), 487, quoted in Lianying Shan, “Narrating the Colonial Past in Manchuria and Shanghai in Postwar Japanese Literature” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2007), 101.

⁵ Abe Kōbō, *The Woman in the Dunes*, trans. E. Dale Saunders (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 20.

characters who are disconnected and whose nebulous relationship with community leaves them isolated and ill-equipped for real communication. As Abe commented, “People [in the big city] are lonely—given their mistrust and isolation they have turned into veritable crustaceans.”⁶ In its culturally diverse environment, Manchuria is itself in perpetual flux and in constant struggle with its own idea of identity. This setting becomes the backdrop for works such as his 1964 novel, *Tanin no kao* 他人の顔 (tr. *The Face of Another*, 1966) and *Moetsukita chizu*, published in 1967, that engage the idea of the disintegration of order and stability, a collapse of society that is the source of the alienation of man from his identity in modern society.

As Abe noted in an interview with Nancy Shields, Manchuria was “a frightening place in many ways. There was no law in the streets, where sometimes children were sold as slaves.”⁷ It is in this unpredictable and shifting environment that Abe is forced to formulate his understanding of the world that becomes the source of his bleak portrayal of the individual in modern society. However, referring to Mukden, Manchuria, he continued, “It was nonetheless a fascinating city, a maze, a labyrinth with very dirty buildings made of black bricks.”⁸ Abe’s observation points to his fascination with his surroundings both physically and symbolically, as urban life and the idea of labyrinths and loss of direction serve as powerful themes in his work. Abe’s Manchurian experience emerges in the symbolic “city” in his work of the 1960s.

⁶ *Abe Kōbō zensakuhin* 安部公房前作品 [The Early Works of Abe Kōbō], 15 (Tōkyō: Shinchōsa, 1977), 269-70, quoted in Fumiko Yamamoto, “Metamorphosis in Abe Kōbō’s Works,” *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 15, no. 2 (November 1980): 171.

⁷ Nancy S. Hardin, “An Interview with Abe Kōbō,” *Contemporary Literature* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 1974): 443.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Abe's experiences in Manchuria as a child are also important to his understanding of the role of mainland Japan in his development. In an interview with Donald Keene, Abe remembered this association: "Whenever I would be scolded by my teachers, they would always tell me straight away that 'a child back home would never do such a thing.' And so in my head I really yearned for Japan."⁹ The attachment that Abe felt to his idyllic vision of mainland Japan is underscored in his account of the "Harmony of the Five Races."¹⁰ Unlike the homogeneity of Japan of the 1930s, Manchuria was a hub of multi-racial activity. As Abe described his experience, "We had what was called the 'Harmony of the Five Races' in Manchuria. ... We were taught as children that the five races were all equal and that this was a great paradise of racial harmony. We were taught to believe this."¹¹ In this account, we see the formation of Abe's utopian vision of life in mainland Japan, a place where school children always behaved and upheld the ideal of racial equality. This version of Japan was his romantic birthplace, or "home," to which he longed to return.

In Abe's writing, it is this "home" for which his protagonists long, but they must at some point learn that it is an illusion. Later in his account, Abe commented on the disgust he felt when Japanese would visit Manchuria and defy the ideals which had been instilled in him. The blatant hypocrisy of racism in modern society kindled a struggle in his conscience between his mental ideal of Japan and the ugly reality. The result of this struggle was that Japan became a strange and foreign place to him. The romanticized

⁹ Abe Kōbō, "Bungaku to Fūhensei," *Hangekiteki ningen* (Tōkyō: Chuōkōronsha, 1973), 91, quoted in Iles, 24.

¹⁰ Abe's "Harmony of the Five Races" (Chinese: 五族共和; pinyin: *Wúzú gōnghé*) refers to one of the key principles in the ideology of the Republic of China that called for unity among its five ethnic groups (Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan). This philosophy was co-opted into the propaganda of Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere during the occupation of Manchuria (1931-1945).

¹¹ Iles, 24.

home for which he once “yearned” did not exist. It is logical, then, that we find the protagonists in many of Abe’s works trying to reconcile the urge to return to home, a fixed and static place of comfort, with the frustrating reality that home itself is illusory. A central theme in Abe’s work is the idea of “home” and the insatiable longing for it, which leads, invariably, to a thwarted attempt to return.

The longing to return to a simpler and “purer” time in social development is also a common theme in Western literature, which can be found in works such as Herman Melville’s (1819-1891) *South Seas Trilogy* and Joseph Conrad’s (1857-1924) *Heart of Darkness*. While it is the moral dilemma of colonialism that is most explicitly explored in these Western works, the protagonists also find themselves on a quest for the perceived pure and utopian world of the past, only to find that not only are they no longer welcomed in their previous communities, but also wondering whether their ideal “home” ever really existed. As in the work of Abe, the frustrating search for “home” leaves the protagonist only more isolated.

Abe’s childhood experiences placed him outside of his own culture and the sense of belonging that being raised in Japanese society would have afforded. These experiences, however, allowed him to gain a perspective beyond the borders of his island nation. As Abe stated, “Certainly, since I was raised in the colony at a time when Japanese nationalism was most strong, this created my custom of looking at Japan from the outside, relativistically.”¹² Therefore, unlike traditional Japanese authors whose value systems were Japanese first, Abe explored the human condition free from cultural and nationalistic attachments. This is most clearly illustrated by the unnamed protagonists and locations that characterize his novels of the 1960s.

¹² Ibid.

Abe's experiences outside Japan proper also contributed to the successful detachment of his characters and stories from typical "Japanese" themes. Unlike the works of "traditional" authors such as Mishima Yukio 三島 由紀夫 (1925-1970) and Kawabata Yasunari 川端 康成 (1899-1972), who use culturally specific references to temples, festivals, and Zen arts as their sources for poignant symbolism, Abe's works of the 1960s and beyond are consciously and intentionally devoid of these trappings. In fact, the roots of Abe's quest to free himself from the confining label, "Japanese author," can be found in this crucial period of personal development. As Abe remarked, "I have the habit of doubting the significance of belonging to a nation, be it Japan or any nation, or belonging to any society. And so, in a certain sense, I've lived without especially mystifying nationality."¹³

After the end of World War II, Abe's vision of the world became even more fragmented as he watched the social order, which was already the source of so much confusion, dismantled and replaced with another that was no more comprehensible. No longer was he able to rely on the status of being Japanese to save him from the horrors of city life in Manchuria. However, it is the new adversity for Japanese that solidified Abe's concepts of nationalism and identity as false constructs and inspired his critique of modern society through the protagonists of his work. Abe noted in a conversation with literary and art critic Hariu Ichirō 針生 一郎 (1925-), "I completely lost trust in things that are stable. For me that is a very fortunate thing."¹⁴ From the ever-shifting sands of *Suna no onna*, to the idea of an unfixed and malleable identity in *Tanin no kao*, to the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ "Kaitai to shōgō" 解体と総合 [Deconstruction and Synthesis], *Hassō no shūhen Abe Kōbō taidanshū* 発想の周辺 安部公房対談集 [A Collection of Conversations Regarding the Philosophy of Abe Kōbō] (Tōkyō: Shinchōsa, 1974) 158-9. Translated and quoted in Shan, 103.

amorphous and uncharitable city in *Moetsukita chizu*, instability becomes a dominant theme in his work. To this end as well, Abe's works can be understood as pure studies of the human condition, because they are not designed to provide solutions.

It was during his return to Manchuria after the war that Abe became fascinated with surrealism and learned to “subordinate consciousness to an object (*taishō*) and by using objects create the process of collapse which takes place in a man's consciousness.”¹⁵ Abe addressed these issues explicitly in his two Manchurian novels. While the protagonist in Abe's *Owarishi Michi no Shirube ni 終りし道の標に* [The sign at the end of the road] exiles himself in Manchuria, the protagonist in *Kemonotachi wa Kokyō wo Mezasu けものたちは故郷をめざす* [Beasts aim for home] makes the decision not to return home after the war.¹⁶ The underlying explorations of the idea of the individual pitted against the idea of home and community in these early works laid the groundwork for Abe's works of the 1960s that were less time-and space-specific.

In sum, the three primary locations of Abe Kōbō's youth provide much insight into the sources of Abe's literary dilemmas. When examining his works, one must consider his precarious position as a native-born Japanese with full entree into a closed and homogeneous society in the light of his separation from his culture, both physically and mentally. Being forced to reconcile this unusual situation granted him an unusual viewpoint from which to observe not only Japanese society, but also the nature of modern society, in general. As Abe researcher Timothy Iles notes, “Abe is part of the system of Japanese literature, but he exists within this system as a ghost in the machine, as a proponent of radical social, structural change—as a writer who himself rejected any

¹⁵ Yamamoto, 173.

¹⁶ Shan, 95.

associations with ‘Japanese literature’ in favour of the broader context of world literature.”¹⁷

Adulthood

The Close of World War II

Abe finished high school in 1943 and entered the prestigious Tōkyō Imperial University Medical School. For Abe, this choice was only partially the result of his academic interests. Abe recalled, “Those students who specialized in medicine were exempted from becoming soldiers. My friends who chose the humanities were killed in the war.”¹⁸ Abe’s studies were interrupted near the end of World War II when he went to Manchuria to assist his father, who was suffering from typhus, with the family practice. Abe’s return to Manchuria was marked by a growing intensity of chaos, as Japan was losing its grip on its colonies at the end of the war.

Although he would never practice medicine, Abe’s training provided the background for his hyper-realistic and pseudo-scientific explanations of the surrealist settings in which he casts his protagonists. He is, therefore, extremely particular in his descriptions of seemingly irrelevant details. In *Suna no onna*, for example, he describes an insect that the protagonist, an entomologist, had discovered in the sand:

One day in the dry river bed near his house he discovered a smallish light-pink insect which resembled a double-winged garden beetle (*Cicindela japonica Motschulsky*). It is common knowledge, of course, that the garden beetle presents many variations in color and design. But the form of the front legs, on the other hand, varies very little. In fact, the front legs of the sheath-wing beetle constitute an important criterion for its classification. And the second joint on the front legs of the insect that had caught the man’s eye did indeed have striking characteristics.¹⁹

¹⁷ Iles, 5.

¹⁸ Shields, 34.

¹⁹ Abe, *The Woman in the Dunes*, 11-12.

This type of description, which Abe continues in the same manner in another paragraph, serves not only to create the illusion of reality for his fantastic stories, but also to highlight the absurdity of man's endeavors.

Similar to his experiences in Manchuria and Hokkaido that allowed him to explore modern Japanese society from a vantage point outside the mainstream, Abe said that his medical training "permitted the habit of looking at the human body from the outside, without mystifying it."²⁰ This can be seen in *Tanin no kao*, for example, when the protagonist is working out a formula for facial expressions for his life-like mask. After calculating a list of the content and ratios of different facial expressions, the protagonist notes:

It cannot be considered satisfactory to analyze such a complicated and delicate thing as expression into these few components. However, by combining just this many elements on my palette, I should be able to get almost any shade. The percentages, needless to say, indicate the frequency of occurrence of each item. In brief, I postulated a type of man who expressed his emotions in approximately such ratios.²¹

Abe owes his ability to enable readers to suspend their disbelief in the absurd to his academic experiences in medical school and the influence of his father's profession. The ability to objectify the body, gleaned from his medical training, matched with his ability to objectify location from his experiences in Manchuria, contribute to Abe's vision. The resulting interpretations of his surroundings produce eloquent explorations of the human condition in modern society.

In 1947, at the age of 33, Abe married Yamada Machiko 山田 真知子 (1926-1993), an art student who went on to have a successful career as an artist and stage

²⁰ Abe, quoted in Iles, 25.

²¹ Abe Kōbō, *The Face of Another*, trans. E. Dale Saunders (New York: Kodansha, 1992), 102.

designer and who provided the pen and ink illustrations that accompanied some of the early editions of Abe's novels. Perhaps it was her influence that inspired Abe to see his own artistic endeavors as legitimate, because, after his graduation in 1948, Abe abandoned his medical internship and career to pursue writing full-time. Abe and his wife would have one child, Neri ねり (1954-), who would carry on the family tradition of medicine that her father had abandoned.²²

Abe Kōbō after World War II

The cultural and political vacuum of the post-war years in Japan gave Abe an opportunity to explore the ideal that his experiences in Manchuria and his vision of Japan had instilled in him. To this end, the U.S.-led occupation was welcomed, as it ignited a renewed interest in democratic ideals and their promise of a society of equals that first emerged during the Meiji Period (1868-1912),²³ but was subjugated by nationalist fervor during Japan's era of imperialism. The desire for expression and understanding led Abe to avant-garde surrealism, and this in turn led him to communism. As Abe noted,

I was an existentialist during the war, I suppose. That is why, perhaps, I wrote *Owarishi Michi no Shirube ni*. The idea is based on the thesis 'existence precedes essence,' but that is extremely self-negating. The more I tried to grasp it, the more I failed. It was from my postwar experience that my belief in existentialism started to crumble.²⁴

For Abe, as for so many other intellectuals in the post-World War II era, the idealism of the Marxist ideology behind communism inspired his dream of the possibility of a classless society in which opinions could be expressed freely through art and discourse. As Abe Kōbō once stated, however, "It is important to note that what the

²² Iles, 25-26.

²³ 明治時代 Meiji jidai

²⁴ Iijima Koichi, "Abe Kōbō," in *Abe Kōbō, Oe Kenzaburo*, 4, quoted in Motoyama, 308.

literati of the time joined was not an established Communist Party but a revolutionary movement for ‘a new commune’, a new party of Communism.”²⁵ This idealism was also effectively expressed by Tokuda Kyūichi 徳田 球一 (1894-1953), the first chairman of the Japanese Communist Party, who, upon the Japanese surrender in 1945, announced that a democratic revolution had begun that would eventually overthrow the emperor system entirely.²⁶ These lofty ambitions for a new Japan would inspire a generation of writers and artists who had lived through the war and had seen the horrific effects of a megalomaniacal military state that had effectively suppressed freedom of expression.

It was during his return to Manchuria immediately after the war that Abe had become fascinated with surrealism. After returning to Japan, he joined Hanada Kiyoteru’s 花田 清輝 (1909-1974) surrealist literary group, *Yoru no kai* 夜の会 [Night assembly]. Hanada’s philosophical inspiration encouraged Abe to begin experimenting with surrealism in his writing, resulting in the publication of numerous surrealist short stories. For Abe, the self-described “man without a hometown,”²⁷ his transition to surrealism and communism was logical. Wishing to avoid the constraints of nationalism and complicity that the group-think of the Japanese mainland would have required, Abe looked to communism as a logical progression of his thought and philosophy. The bond between Abe’s politics and the philosophy of his early works is seamless. This can be seen in his 1949 surrealist masterpiece “Dendorokakariya” デンドロカカリヤ [Dendrocacalia], a short story in which the protagonist, “Common,” slowly metamorphosizes into a plant through

²⁵ Watanabe Hiroshi, *Abe Kōbō*, (Tōkyō: Shinchōsa, 1976), 59-60. Translated and quoted in Motoyama, 313.

²⁶ Robert A. Scalapino, *The Japanese Communist Movement, 1920-1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 48-49.

²⁷ Abe, quoted in Nancy Shields, *Fake Fish: The Theater of Abe Kōbō* (New York: Weatherhill, 1996), 27-28.

a series of transformative seizures. During his transformation, one of his pursuers argues that, as a plant, he will be worshiped by society as a “god of the modern times” for his ability to come to terms with the schizophrenia induced by modern society.²⁸

The story is an excellent example of Abe’s use of surrealism to establish a definitive break from Japan’s past and to imagine an ideal for Japan’s future. As Mark Gibeau notes, this story goes beyond the obvious destruction of the concept of reality through the creation of an allegory.²⁹ Abe’s use of the dendrocacalia, while perhaps a nod to Hanada’s philosophy of “kōbutsushugi” 鉱物主義 [mineralism],³⁰ is intentional in that it is not loaded with symbolism or hidden references. We are therefore free from the didacticism of traditional allegorical fiction to imagine the protagonist’s metamorphosis as a pure commentary on the human condition in modern society. It is through the use of this new language that Abe challenges the confines of literature that had existed until this point.

Abe after Communism

In 1951, Abe received the Akutagawa Prize for Literature for his communist-charged work “Kabe” 壁 [The wall], which ensured his career as a professional writer.³¹

In the years that followed, however, Abe began to see the conflict between the idealism

²⁸ Abe Kōbō, *Beyond the Curve*, trans. Juliet Winters Carpenter (New York: Kodansha International, 1991), 59.

²⁹ Mark Gibeau, “Transformation of the Self: Surrealism in the Early Works of Abe Kōbō,” *CUHK Journal of Humanities* 3 (January 1999): 156.

³⁰ “Mineralism” is Hanada’s own version of the philosophy of “materialism,” which posits that the only thing that can be proven to exist is matter. In an interview with Abe’s daughter, Neri, she summarized, “Materialism provided a sort of inspiration for revolutionary forms of art among artists of that time. Hanada Kiyoteru is known for his mineralism and for such slogans as “from animate to inanimate.” But it was materialism that provided a basis for this change of values, and it was this that provided artists with a new sense of direction after the reign of militarism.” Kato Koiti, *Interview with Abe Neri*, trans. Mark Gibeau, 1997. <http://www.horagai.com/www/abe/xneri.htm> (accessed December 3, 2008).

³¹ First published by Getsuyō-shobō 月曜書房 [Monday books] in October 1951.

of Marxism and the dogma of the Communist Party as irreconcilable. As Abe revealed, “It seemed to me that if the Party’s doctrine and policies about culture were right then they should have expanded the freedom of art, but that didn’t happen.”³²

In her essay, “The Literature and Politics of Abe Kōbō: Farewell to Communism in *Suna no onna*,” Motoyama Mutsuko poses the inevitable question, if individualism supplants communism in Abe’s later works, has he betrayed the avant-garde movement? She finds, however, that at the core of the avant-garde movement is a “resistance to inflexibility and establishment.” Therefore, much like the ever-shifting sands that we find in his famous novel, *Suna no onna*, Abe too resisted stability.³³

Abe’s disillusionment with communism culminated with his trip to Eastern Europe in 1957 for the Twentieth Convention of the Soviet Communist Party, where he saw first-hand the actuality of the communist state in its oppression of the human spirit and in its racism against the gypsies in whom Abe found kindred spirits. Their wandering lifestyle and lack of national identity struck a chord deep inside him.³⁴ The Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1958 was the last straw for Abe, who found that communism in practice was against everything in which he believed. As Abe noted in his essay, “Journey through a Wormhole in the Earth,”

I feel nothing but repugnance for the pseudo-culture which tries to legitimize the walls surrounding nations by insisting on a particularism of customs and habits which is in fact no more than a mere ramification of culture. All the same, countries try to give legitimacy to such pseudo-culture. Naturally, the people, who have been manipulated by the state, come to think of true culture as heresy.³⁵

³² Quoted in Shields, 35.

³³ Motoyama, 314.

³⁴ Shields, 38.

³⁵ Abe Kōbō, “Journey through a Wormhole in the Earth,” trans. Donald Keene, *New York Times Magazine*, June 11, 1975, 43.

Although Abe quit the Japanese Communist Party soon thereafter, it was not until 1962 that the party officially expelled him and twenty-seven other literary members for disloyalty.³⁶ It was against this backdrop that Abe completed his most critically acclaimed and well-known work, *Suna no onna*. Now, free from the confines of politics and the idealism of his youth, Abe embarked on a new phase in his writing.

Abe in the 1960s

In Abe's work during the 1960s, he expresses his rejection of communism through his abandonment of his ideal of community that characterized his works of the 1950s. This new era in Abe's career is highlighted by concentrated examinations of the individual's frustrated search for meaning and value in modern society. In the surreal and amorphous desert setting of *Suna no onna*, for example, the symbolic interplay of Abe's three primary locations of Manchuria (the modern "city"), Hokkaido (the agrarian "community"), and mainland Japan (the idyllic "home") can be seen clearly, as the protagonist leaves the confines of the city for the wilds of the dunes where he encounters the primitive community of sand dwellers. His positive first impression of the bucolic community, however, is challenged when he is confounded by the backward nature of the village and the futile existence of its inhabitants. As Abe's protagonist observes about the woman in the dunes,

She looked like some kind of insect, he thought. Did she intend to go on living like this forever? From the outside, this place seemed only a tiny spot of earth, but when you were at the bottom of the hole you could see nothing but limitless sand and sky. A monotonous existence enclosed in an eye. She had probably spent her whole life down here, without even the memory of a comforting word from anyone. Perhaps her heart was

³⁶ Motoyama, 320.

throbbing now like a girl's because they had trapped him and given him to her. It was too pitiful!³⁷

While a prisoner of the desert community, the protagonist first tries to rationalize with the villagers and to encourage them to give up their attachment to their meaningless existence. In the end, however, the absurdity of the life in the dunes can be read as a mirror of the protagonist's life in the city. Much like the woman trapped in the bottom of the sandpit, the protagonist has been trapped in his own futile and ultimately absurd life in modern society. The idea that trying to achieve meaningful existence is futile is reinforced later in the story when the protagonist attempts to escape from the dunes, but is thwarted. When he is returned to the sand pit, he confides in a conversation with the woman,

“I have failed!”

“Yes.”

“I have really failed!”

“But there hasn't been a single person who made it...not one.”³⁸

The fact that “there hasn't been a single person who made it” speaks to humanity's frustrating quest for meaning in modern society. Though many have tried to find purpose beyond everyday reality, in the end, there is only existence itself. The protagonist's absurd desert experience, then, can be interpreted as a mirror of his existence in the city—the existence of man in modern society. This trajectory of thought culminates when the protagonist eventually consigns himself to a life in the dunes:

When he thought about it, he realized there was absolutely no way of knowing when and in what way an opportunity for escape would come. It was possible to conceive of simply becoming accustomed to waiting, with no particular goal in mind, and when his hibernation was at last over, he

³⁷ Abe, *The Woman in the Dunes*, 63.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

would be dazzled by the light, unable to come out. Three days a beggar, always a beggar, they say.³⁹

In another reference to the futility of man's existence, the protagonist's crow-catching device, ironically named "Hope," although flawless in its engineering, is a complete failure. However, the placement of his contraption results in his eventual discovery of a means to extract water from the sand. The invention of a device that promises to liberate the protagonist and the woman from the dominance of the community can be understood as Abe's claim that the assertion of individuality is the source of meaning in modern society:

And it happened that "Hope" had cut off the circulation some place. Probably the chance placing of the bucket and the crack around the lid had been enough to prevent evaporation of the water that had been sucked up in the bucket.... If he were successful in this experiment he would no longer have to give in to the villagers if they cut off his water.⁴⁰

Despite the futile nature of human existence, the ability of the individual to create, invent, and assert oneself (combined with dumb luck) provides humanity with the impetus to carry on. Like the bugs he collects, the protagonist, a representative of modern man, is also trapped in a jar from which there is no escape. In *Suna no onna*, one's only empowerment comes from the individual's ability to define themselves in their own surroundings.

Abe's shift in focus from the community to the individual is expressed in another work from his post-communist period, *Tanin no kao*. In this novel, he explores identity through another scientific protagonist, who has suffered a laboratory accident resulting in horrific keloidal scars that cover his entire face. With this loss of his face, the protagonist begins to lose his grip on his own identity. In an attempt to seize upon this opportunity to

³⁹ Ibid., 218.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 234.

recreate himself, he decides to make and wear a life-like mask, which results in even more existential contemplation and hijinks. The protagonist reflects:

Again, the mask had become presumptuous, forgetting all about our truce. ...But I was no less tipsy than it. ...Could I be responsible for tomorrow's plans in such a state...? These questions were not pressing, and without realizing it, I went along with the mask's demand for autonomy.⁴¹

In this work, Abe continues his exploration of individual identity and the strained relationships it produces in modern society. Struggling to grasp their own modern and individual identities, his characters have lost the capacity for communication. As the mask in *Tanin no kao* slowly subsumes and obscures the identity of the protagonist, the man's ability to communicate with his wife is compromised. Despite the fact that his wife is aware of his plan and the mask he has created, the protagonist attempts to expose his wife's infidelity by seducing her under the assumed identity of the mask:

At last you have come, threading your way through the endless passages of the maze. With the map you got from *him*, you have finally found your way to my hideaway. ...You peep in, looking for *him*. But he isn't there, not a trace is left; and an odor of ruin floats in the air. A dead room. ...Have I lost to *him* or has *he* lost to me? Either way, my masked play is over. I have murdered him, and I proclaim myself the criminal.⁴²

Through the protagonist in *Tanin no kao*, the insecurity and schizophrenia induced by life in modern society are exposed.

As Timothy Iles notes, in Abe's works of the 1960s, "Communication fails because its participants have lost first of all themselves, and without this prerequisite definition of their own identity, there is nothing for them to communicate."⁴³ In *Tanin no kao*, this phenomenon is explored in the irreconcilable relationship between the

⁴¹ Abe Kōbō, *The Face of Another*, 152.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴³ Iles, 75.

schizophrenic man and his wife. In *Suna no onna*, this phenomenon can be observed in the reluctant relationship between the protagonist and the woman. Because Abe's works of the 1960s lack the didacticism of traditional allegorical fiction, we see the dysfunction in the relationships that he creates as the unavoidable consequences of life in modern society.⁴⁴

Perhaps the most striking transformation in Abe's work of the 1960s, however, is the move away from defined spaces. For example, the confines of the botanical garden in "Dendorokakariya" and the walls in "Kabe" are replaced with the shifting sands of *Suna no onna* and the ever-transforming identity of the mask in *Tanin no kao*. As Motoyama notes, no longer do the protagonists in Abe's works transform into an object that serves the common good.⁴⁵ In the unstable environments of Abe's post-communist work of the 1960s, his protagonists are assertive, creative, and most importantly, individuals. Presented with the uncertainty of their environments, Abe's new protagonists' symbolic struggles, therefore, mirror that of man's struggle for individual identity in modernity.

Although it is logical to assume that any author will draw upon his or her own experiences as inspiration for his or her work, in Abe's case, these connections are essential to understanding not only his fiction, but also why his work was embraced by audiences in the West, unlike any other Japanese author before him. Ultimately, Abe's experience in Manchuria and his relationship with Japan as an outsider afforded him a remote vantage point from which to observe Japan's rapidly developing modern society and to comment on it unencumbered by the cultural restrictions of a "homeland." This was compounded by the fact that he experienced first-hand not only the idealism and

⁴⁴ Gibeau, "Transformation of the Self: Surrealism in the Early Works of Abe Kōbō," 156.

⁴⁵ Motoyama, 322.

dominance of the Japanese empire during World War II, but also the atomic devastation and subsequent unconditional surrender and occupation of Japan at the end of the war.

For Abe, who was already physically detached from his homeland, the instability of the idea of Japan embodied the struggle that existentialists believed was taking place universally in modern society. Abe's relationship with the three locations of his childhood, therefore, provided the inspiration for the ever-fluctuating environments of his novels and captured modern man's struggle to reconcile cultural, philosophical, and geographical instability.

Abe's Manchurian experience was also what attracted him to the expressive freedom and idealism of Hanada Kiyoteru's writing group, *Yoru no kai*, where he formulated his unique literary voice and philosophy. The works he produced during this time provided an international audience to him and the confidence to reach beyond the boundaries of his art and his nationality. His subsequent renouncement of the Japanese Communist Party allowed him to enter a new phase of writing in the 1960s. Untethered by ideology or agenda, Abe Kōbō produced his most definitive literary works that embraced modern man's struggle against the futility of his own existence.

As Abe said in his essay, "Journey through a Wormhole in the Earth,"

It goes without saying that culture itself is powerless. No matter how much it regrets the existence of walls, it is inconceivable that countries will ever tear them down. I am not an optimist on that point. Although the contradiction of the earth is in itself culturally desirable, it is hard for me to accept present conditions without a struggle.⁴⁶

Abe's work during the 1960s, therefore, established the self-proclaimed "man without a hometown" as the universal voice of the individual and modernity.

⁴⁶ Abe, "Journey through a Wormhole in the Earth," 43.

Chapter 2

Abe Kōbō in Context: Identity, Modernity, and the Japanese Avant-garde

.....Ha ha, well, you can't hear me very well.....I suppose not,
I'm a dead person. The living can't hear the voices of ghosts.

——Abe Kōbō, *Otoshiana* [The pitfall], 1962

Avant-garde art and philosophy played a significant role in the development of modern Japan and the nation's historical struggle with its own identity in the context of Western modernity both before and after World War II. Therefore, it is important to explore the role Abe played, both directly and indirectly, in the Japanese avant-garde artistic movement of the times, how his works helped define this era, and how the art movements of the post-war era in Japan revolutionized the existing ideas of what it meant to be Japanese. Perhaps most importantly, the work of the Japanese avant-garde during this era spoke to the universal human experience in modern society.

Japan and the West: From Conflict to Coexistence

Historically, Japan's relationship with the Western world was a reluctant one and, as a result, Japan was twice faced with the task of redefining itself in the face of Western military dominance in the modern era. First, during the waning years of the Tokugawa shogunate, Japan was forced out of the slumber of isolationism by Admiral Perry and his black ships, and second, it was awakened from the spell of militarism when atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Against all odds, however, Japan seemed to benefit from the adversity, emerging from both situations as a strong and singular nation.

After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, for example, Japan took advantage of its access to Western knowledge and accomplished in a generation a modernization process that had only slowly developed in the West over hundreds of years. As a result of its successful implementation of Western models of education, infrastructure, and industrialization, Japan quickly found itself shoulder to shoulder with the great military powers of the West. However, it was also faced with a new economic reality, forcing the nation to confront the reality of its limited natural resources and size. The eventual subjugation of the Ryukyu Islands in the south and the settlement and fortification of Hokkaido in the north marked the rise of Japan's military aspirations during the late nineteenth century.

As Japan began its inroads into Asia, its empire rapidly spread throughout Korea, China, and South East Asia. As a result of its defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), Japan was finally recognized as a global power. If it hoped to maintain that status, however, Japan needed not only a plan for expansion, but also a method for keeping the hearts and minds of its people united. The dubious claim that Japan would act as the protector of Asia from the West as a justification for imperialism would lay the groundwork for Japan's Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere¹ policy that emerged during the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and defined Japan's ideology at home through the end of World War II in 1945.

After Japan's subsequent unconditional surrender at the end of World War II, the island nation once again excelled during the American occupation. America's new

¹ The term, Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere (大東亜共栄圏 *Daitōa Kyōeiken*), implied that both Japan and occupied peoples would benefit from Japanese occupation. It was used as propaganda to convince the Japanese people that the subjugation of other Asian nations was justifiable. For a more complete explanation see A. J. Grajdanzev, "Japan's Co-Prosperity Sphere," *Pacific Affairs* 16, no. 3 (September 1943): 311-28.

relationship with Japan led to the use of demilitarized Japan as a satellite factory, providing munitions and supplies to fuel the conflicts between other Asian nations and the West. The Korean War of the 1950s alone brought employment and production to pre-war levels, and marked the beginning of an economic renaissance in Japan that would lead the tiny nation into a new era of economic superiority that would last through the 1980s.²

Stripped of its military as a provision of its surrender, Japan took advantage of its economic success to establish itself as a valuable member of the world community, and focused on international events such as the Tōkyō Olympic Games in 1964 and the Japan World Exposition '70 (日本万国博覧会 *Nihon bankoku hakuran kai*) in Ōsaka to represent itself as a model of peace and cooperation for the second half of the twentieth century.³ As in the Meiji period, however, Japan found itself forging ahead into the future without a clear understanding of its own identity or the role it would play on the world stage.

The struggle for post-World War II identity in Japan, therefore, has many parallels with its experiences during the Meiji period, when the nation was desperately trying to maintain its individuality under the deluge of Western modernity that threatened to usurp its own rich heritage and culture. After World War II, Japan was at odds with itself again as it grappled with trying to understand the pain it had inflicted on others, the pain that the Japanese people had endured under military rule, the humiliation of occupation and demilitarization by a foreign power, and as the only nation to have

² Duncan McCargo, *Contemporary Japan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 36-37.

³ Charles Merewether, ed., with Rika Iezumi Hiro, *Art Anti-Art Non-Art: Experimentations in the Public Sphere in Postwar Japan 1950-1970* (Los Angeles, CA: Getty Research Institute, 2007), ix.

suffered an atomic attack. Once again, Japan faced unlikely odds in maintaining its singularity in the post-war era.

While Japan had taken some blame for its inexcusable actions during its era of imperialism, the suffering of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki left the Japanese psyche in limbo to reconcile its role as both aggressor and martyr. Who was left to tend to the damaged psyche of the nation of Japan to help it reformulate its identity for a new era? As companies such as Sony and Honda provided the machinery to rebuild the nation, avant-garde artists such as Abe Kōbō set out to find a new identity for Japan by mending the heart of the nation and exploring the implications of Japan's modern existence.

Emergence of the Avant-garde in the Taishō Period

The roots of avant-garde art in Japan after World War II can be traced back to the early twentieth century. The term “avant-garde,” French for “advance guard,” signifies movements in art that pit themselves against the accepted standards of expression and style, and outside of cultural, artistic and political establishments. In Japan, this idea is embodied in the term *Zen'ei bijutsu* 前衛美術 [avant-garde art], which came into the lexicon during the Taishō period⁴ (1912-1926) and was ascribed to artists engaged in radical critique of the culture and politics of Japan at the time. Hints of avant-garde art and philosophy first appeared as a side effect of the unprecedented proliferation of Western thought during the first part of the twentieth century.⁵

⁴大正時代 Taishō jidai.

⁵ Alexandra Munroe, “Scream Against the Sky,” in *Scream Against the Sky*, ed. Alexandra Munroe (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 22.

In response to this assault on Japanese culture, a call for “overcoming modernity” by rejecting the Western model of modernization in favor of a native one began to be voiced. In this environment, Japanese intellectuals imagined a future forged in ideals that were based in Japan’s own culture and heritage.⁶ It is also important to note that it was avant-garde artists in Japan who challenged the rise of militarism during the early Shōwa period⁷ in an underground plea for individual rights and freedom of expression. Beneath this banner of the avant-garde, movements such as futurism, dadaism, and surrealism⁸ flourished under the radar of a nation poised for global military confrontation.⁹

The ideas that Japan should resist the wholesale adoption of Western styles and systems and at the same time avoid “Orientalism,”¹⁰ would become a theme that echoed in the avant-garde art of the post-war era as well. The main goal of the avant-garde, to speak with a voice unhindered by national boundaries, is a theme that would carry on and inspire the works and philosophies of post-war artists such as Abe Kōbō.

In the literary world of the Meiji period, for example, Natsume Sōseki 夏目 漱石 (1867-1916) was very outspoken on the issue of writing beyond the borders imposed by nations. Sōseki once wrote:

We are the young people who cannot stand the oppression of old Japan, but at the same time we cannot stand the oppression of the new Occident... . We do not study Occidental literature and art to be captured by them. We study them so that we can release ourselves from them.¹¹

⁶ Kikuchi Yuko, *Japanese Modernisation and Mingei Theory: Cultural Nationalism and Oriental Orientalism* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 24.

⁷ 昭和時代 Shōwa jidai.

⁸ For a complete look at the transition from Dada to Surrealism, see John G. Frey, “From Dada to Surrealism,” *Parnassus* 8, no. 7 (December 1936): 12-15.

⁹ Munroe, “Scream Against the Sky,” in Munroe, 22.

¹⁰ This term was coined by Edward Said in his 1978 book, *Orientalism*, to describe the West’s historically derogative opinion of the East. Said contends that this negative attitude, both explicit and implicit, arose during the age of European imperialism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

¹¹ Natsume Sōseki, quoted in Kikuchi, 78.

Albeit a bit more nationalistic, this resistance to “Orientalism” can also be seen in Tsubouchi Shōyō’s 坪内 逍遥 (1859-1935) introduction to *Shōsetsu shinzui* 小説神髓 (1885-86, tr. *The Essence of the Novel*, 1981), in which he contended that the influx and influence of Western ideas on literature was merely a stepping stone for the progress of Japanese literature:

It is because I also believe I have come to understand something of the true purpose of the novel that I now presume to offer my theories, such as they are, to the world. I hope that they will bring readers to their senses and at the same time enlighten authors, so that by henceforth planning the steady improvement of the Japanese novel we may finally bring it to the point where it outstrips its European counterpart and shines together with music, poetry, and painting on the altar of the arts.¹²

In fine arts, this philosophy manifested itself in the philosophy of Yanagi Muneyoshi (柳 宗悦 aka Sōetsu, 1889-1961) and his foundation of *Mingei* [folk craft] theory that vitalized the Japanese folk crafts movement of the 1920s and found new language for expression in the crafts of Japanese colonies, such as Korea.¹³ Yanagi stated,

It is deplorable that the world should think that there is such a complete difference between East and West. It is usually said that self-denial, asceticism, sacrifice, negation are opposed to self-affirmation, individualism, self-realisation; but I do not believe in such a gap. I wish to destroy the idea of a gap.¹⁴

This idea was inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain and the United States at the time, which incorporated the simplicity of Asian design to create new and original work.

¹² Tsubouchi Shōyō, *Shōsetsu Shinzui: The Essence of the Novel*, trans. Nanette Twine (Brisbane, Australia: Department of Japanese, University of Queensland, 1981) <http://archive.nyu.edu/html/2451/14945/shoyo.htm> (accessed October 31, 2007).

¹³ Christine M. E. Guth, “Modernist Painting in Japan’s Cultures of Collecting,” *Japan & Paris: Impressionism, Postimpressionism and the Modern Era* (Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2004), 23.

¹⁴ Yanagi Sōetsu, quoted in Kikuchi, 79.

Avant-garde art movements, both in Japan and the West, questioned the legitimacy of philosophical and aesthetic boundaries based on national origin and laid the groundwork for radical experimentation to be undertaken by their artists. Above all, the movement clamored for freedom of expression and freedom to define one's own identity. This is evinced in the 1920 Manifesto of futurist artist Kanbara Tai 神原 泰 (1898-1997), who exclaimed, "Painters be gone! Art critics be gone! Art is absolutely free. There is no poetry, no painting, no music. What exists is creation only. Art is absolutely free."¹⁵ These issues set the stage for a modern understanding of the individual in modern society during the Meiji and Taishō periods, and would be revisited again as Japan confronted its next cultural renaissance at the close of World War II.

The Struggle Against Orientalism

The phenomenon of "Orientalism" is crucial to understanding how Japan has been defined by the West as well as how it defines itself in a modern context. The goal of the avant-garde to speak with a voice unobstructed by national boundaries characterized the movement from the beginning. Despite the idealism of Kanbara Tai's exclamation, in the early twentieth century, there was a struggle for international legitimacy of modern Japanese art. When looking at the cultural contributions of Asian countries, there is an inherent tendency for Western audiences to exoticize works that have no reference to Western culture or to dismiss those that do, as merely imitative and therefore invalid and valueless. It is "Orientalism," then, that becomes the most ominous foe of the Japanese identity in modernity.

¹⁵ John Clark, "Artistic Subjectivity in the Taishō and Early Shōwa Avant-Garde," in Munroe, 41.

In her essay, “Scream Against the Sky: Japanese Art after 1945,” Alexandra Munroe comments on the perception that pure Japanese culture ended with the opening of Japan to the West, and points to the subsequent collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate as the basis of this misunderstanding. As a result of this demarcation line being drawn at the dawn of the Meiji period, Munroe believes that Japanese art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been largely disregarded by Japanese specialists in the West, “As if modern Japan, corrupted by Westernization and industrialization were incapable of creating a significant culture of visual art that could equal the achievements of the classical past.”¹⁶

Munroe contends that the source of this unequal treatment lay in the deeper cultural issues that separate Asian and Western cultures and understanding. She turns to cultural critic Edward Said for clarification on this matter. In his book *Orientalism*, Said notes:

Now one of the important developments in nineteenth century Orientalism was the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient—its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness—into a separate and unchallenged coherence.¹⁷

This inescapable conundrum for modern Japanese artists is best summarized in Karatani’s, *The Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, in which he states, “Japanese modern literature, because it is not Western, cannot be fully modern. The flip-side of this idea is that, if a work’s materials and themes are non-Western, the work must be anti-modern.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Munroe, “Scream Against the Sky,” in Munroe, 20.

¹⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), quoted in *ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸ Karatani Kōjin, quoted in *ibid.*, 21.

Therefore, the efforts of the avant-garde in Meiji Japan not only worked toward the preservation of Japanese culture, but also established the resistance to being defined in terms of the West. In their insistence on a transcendence of borders in cross-cultural understanding, the artists and intellectuals of the time laid the groundwork for a borderless modern identity that would find its voice reiterated in the art movements during Japan's second ascendancy into modernity after World War II. For example, this concept is embodied in the nameless, nationless protagonists of Abe Kōbō's work during the 1960s.

In his 1910 essay, "Midori-iro no taiyō" [The green sun], Takamura Kōtarō 高村 光太郎 (1883-1956) mused, "Perhaps the work I have created may have something 'Japanese' about it, for all I know. Or then again, perhaps not. To me, as an artist, it makes no difference at all."¹⁹ In his essay, Takamura very succinctly relates the idea that the source of creativity must transcend the limits of nationality. When observed through this lens, the themes and identity issues tackled in the works of the post-war avant-garde artists are a continuation of the struggles that faced their counterparts at the turn of the twentieth century.

Surrealism and Communism

In 1928, surrealism was making its impact on Japan at a time when proletarian art,²⁰ the most popular means of artistic expression among communist groups, was under the scrutiny of the militaristic government concerned with the effects of unchecked left-

¹⁹ Munroe, "Scream Against the Sky," in Munroe, 23.

²⁰ Proletarian art is based in the Marxist ideal that class-based struggle and eventual overthrow of the capitalist system were essential to liberty. Proletarian works boldly represent and promote this vision. See Heather Bowen-Struyk, "Introduction: Proletarian Arts in East Asia," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 251-52.

wing organizations and propaganda. While the roots of surrealism can be traced back to the dada movement and its wholesale rejection of categories and labels, dada was generally considered to be reactionary and limited by its negativity. Surrealism, on the other hand, embraced traditional art forms and mediums as important, but insisted that they should not be limited by traditional boundaries of imagination and interpretation.

The utopian vision for art without boundaries was especially attractive to artists with Marxist leanings, who were inspired by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and for whom the pitfalls of the Leninist experiment in the newly founded Soviet Union had not yet become apparent. These artists, however, were more interested in the ideals espoused in Marxist philosophy than in the confines of its political reality. The true intent of surrealism was perpetual revolution in both thought and expression. For example, in *Légitime défense*, surrealism's founder André Breton (1896-1966) criticized Soviet intellectual Henri Barbusse (1873-1935), who advocated an "artistic renewal" to coincide with the Bolshevik revolution. Breton stated, "What does this artistic renaissance matter to us? Long live the social revolution, and it alone! We have a serious account to settle with the mind, we are too uncomfortable in our thought... ." ²¹ Surrealism, then, is calling for art to be in a constant state of flux, liberating itself not only from the confines of categorization and history, but from politics as well.

For a short time, surrealism provided a less obvious means to Japanese artists to express their discontent with Japan's present path as well as their hopes for the future. With Japan's militaristic endeavors in East Asia in full swing, however, artistic expression suffered under the tightening grip of ideological control, and by 1936, most

²¹ André Breton, *What is Surrealism?: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Monad, 1978), 37.

non-traditional arts were deemed un-patriotic. As a result, surrealism was linked to communism, therefore the artists, exhibitions, and their critics had come under the watchful eye of authorities. This culminated in the arrest of surrealist painters Fukuzawa Ichirō 福沢 一郎 (1898-1992) and Takiguchi Shūzō 瀧口 修造 (1903-1979) on February 19, 1941. As Takiguchi recounted, “I was investigated about once a week. The center of the investigation lay on the single point of whether or not the Surrealist movement had any connections with international communism (of course, without basis).”²²

The final years of World War II were dark days for the Japanese avant-garde. As an overcommitted military struggled desperately to maintain power both at home and abroad, artists were allowed to produce only work that glorified the Japanese nation and encouraged its imperialistic pursuits. With a war ration system in place, the government suppressed the artistic voices of those who did not comply with nationalistic expectations by restricting access to materials and venues for display and performance.²³ Japan had sacrificed everything in an attempt to define itself in the modern era, but by the close of World War II in 1945, it found itself no further along in its quest than it was at the dawn of the Meiji period.

Avant-garde Art in Japan, Post-World War II

As in the Meiji period, the close of World War II left Japan with the task of defining itself within a modern context. While Japan in the Meiji period was forced to contend with unequal trade agreements to retain its sovereignty, post-World War II Japan had to suffer under the military occupation and direction of its former enemies. As the

²² Takiguchi Shūzō, quoted in John Clark, “Artistic Subjectivity in the Taishō and Early Shōwa Avant-Garde,” in Munroe, 48.

²³ Christine M. Guth, “Japan 1868-1945: Art, Architecture, and National Identity,” *Art Journal* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 20.

United States pursued military engagements in Asia, however, the successful rehabilitation of Japan's economic infrastructure benefited both countries. As Japan produced supplies for U.S.-led efforts in Southeast Asia, Japan experienced an economic boom that would forever alter its social landscape. More and more people abandoned traditional agrarian occupations to cash in on the economic opportunities in the blossoming cities which led to unprecedented wealth and materialism.

As the population in Japan's urban centers swelled, the way Japanese people communicated with each other and related to their environment began to change as well. This created new existential dilemmas to be addressed by emerging artists and movements. Building on the work of the pre-occupation Japanese avant-garde, post-World War II artists in Japan would expand the boundaries of art and nation and transform Japanese culture. The development of this new art community, therefore, mirrored the rapid readjustment of mainstream society. While the rise of new art groups was largely a youthful movement inspired by the voice of modern experience, it was also an attempt to regain the momentum of Japanese culture during the previous forty years.²⁴

Although there were many influential and provocative artistic movements in the immediate post-war period, two are important in positioning the work of Abe Kōbō in the context of post-World War II art history: the *Gutai* group that created site-specific performance and visual art, and *Yoru no kai* [Night Assembly], the idealistic and surrealist literary group to which Abe belonged as a young writer. These two groups are important not only because they display the varied artistic approaches that were taking place in the period, but also because they help us to understand the singularity of Abe

²⁴ Charles Merewether, "Disjunctive Modernity: The Practice of Artistic Experimentation in Postwar Japan," in Merewether, 1.

Kōbō's work, both in its formative stages in the 1950s and in his definitive period of the 1960s and 1970s.

For example, in a melding of performance and visual arts, the Ōsaka-based *Gutai* group took art outside of the gallery and the theater and presented it in public settings. According to *Gutai* founder Yoshihara Jirō's 吉原 治良 (1905-1972) manifesto, "When creating art *Gutai* artists do not force the material into submission. If one leaves the material as it is, presenting it just as material, then it starts to tell us something and speaks with a mighty voice."²⁵ In this way, *Gutai* attempted to extend the Japanese aesthetic of "mono no aware" 物の哀れ [the sadness of things] beyond the confines of nature and human relationships, to include the natural decay of man-made objects and even social systems. This philosophy becomes the source of the beauty in Abe's work of the 1960s, a beauty found in the tragic futility of life itself. Through a radical rethinking of the presentation and creation of art, the *Gutai* group created a new visual and physical vocabulary to express the aspirations and limitations of the human condition.

For example, a two-week *Gutai* event in 1955, Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Summer Sun, featured works that utilized both interaction with nature and the audience.²⁶ The exhibit included, among other things, a fifty-foot painting suspended from trees, and a store-bought ball set all alone on the

²⁵ Jirō Yoshihara, "The Gutai Manifesto," *Genijitsu Shincho* (December 1956). Reprinted in Kristine Stiles and Peter Howard Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 695. Originally reprinted in Barbara Bertozzi and Klaus Wolbert, *Gutai: Japanische Avantgarde/Japanese Avant-Garde 1934-1965* (Darmstadt: Mathildenhöhe, 1991), 364-69. A translation of "The Gutai Manifesto" in its entirety can be accessed at the Ashiya City Museum of Art & History Web site: http://www.ashiya-web.or.jp/museum/10us/103education/nyumon_us/manifest_us.htm (accessed November 15, 2008).

²⁶ Merewether, 9-10.

pavement path, entitled ‘Work B’.”²⁷ Although the *Gutai* group would gain international praise, it was widely dismissed by the dominant Tōkyō art scene of the time as a “bourgeois spectacle” focused only on exposure. The advances made by the *Gutai* group would not be fully appreciated domestically until the 1970s.

As Alexandra Munroe describes, “The intellectual mood in the capital [Tōkyō] after the war was increasingly Marxist and preoccupied with themes of apocalypse and existential alienation.”²⁸ It was in this environment that Hanada Kiyoteru’s *Yoru no kai*, a group that Abe Kōbō would join as a young writer, continued to build on the pre-occupation legacy of surrealism in order to blur the boundaries of expressive freedom. As Mark Gibeau notes, Hanada’s work *Don fon ron* [On Don Juan], called for the rejection of a human-centered world view. In it, Hanada stated, “Insofar as we do not make the shift to ‘mineralism’ we cannot possibly hope to overcome the difficulties of the modern age.”²⁹ *Yoru no kai* was founded with the goal of uniting likeminded writers and artists who sought to posit materialism over the realism of the pre-war period and eventually over existentialism and Renaissance humanism.³⁰

It was Hanada that would serve not only as a catalyst for surrealism in Japanese literature, but also as an inspiration to the development of Abe’s philosophy and writing style during the early post-World War II period. As Motoyama notes in her essay, “The Literature and Politics of Abe Kōbō: Farewell to Communism in *Suna no onna*,” Hanada’s argument was that “new art should be able to represent side by side opposites, such as the real and the unreal, body and soul, active and inert, the documentary and the

²⁷ Alexandra Munroe, “To Challenge the Mid-Summer Sun: The Gutai Group,” in Munroe, 83.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Mark Gibeau, “Transformation of the Self: Surrealism in the Early Works of Abe Kōbō,” 154.

³⁰ Motoyama, 312.

fictional, in order to create comprehensive art.”³¹ As a result of Hanada’s influence, Abe also became fascinated with Breton’s concept of revolutionary art, as mentioned earlier in this thesis. Breton’s idea that art and life were to be changed together was crucial to Abe’s work during this period.³²

It is important to note that, despite his negative view of capitalism and imperialism as a result of his experiences in Manchuria and in post-World War II Japan, during the 1950s, Abe still clung to the idealist notions engendered in him during his years in Manchuria as cited in his account of Japan’s use of China’s “Harmony of the Five Races” in its occupation era propaganda. Although he would witness the hypocrisy of this claim in his daily life in Manchuria, it is this vision of equality that inspired his surrealist works of the 1950s and led him to join the Japanese Communist Party in 1951.

Abe’s childhood and adolescence in Japanese-occupied Manchuria and his disjointed relationship with mainland Japan provided an objective viewpoint to him from which to observe modern society in Japan and around the globe. The cultural and political uncertainty of post-World War II Japan was the ideal atmosphere in which Abe could explore the idealism of the propaganda of occupied Manchuria and his romantic vision of Japan. The U.S.-led occupation of Japan rekindled an interest in democratic ideals and their promise of equal opportunity for all. This wave of desire for freedom of expression led Abe to the boundless medium of avant-garde surrealism and the high aspirations for communism. For intellectuals of the time who had witnessed the ravages of a totalitarian regime, communism embraced the ideal of a classless society that thrived on expressive freedom in arts and discourse. The search for “‘a new commune,’ a new

³¹ *Ibid.*, 313.

³² *Iles*, 27.

party of communism,”³³ empowered a new wave writers and artists who saw the end of the war as the ideal opportunity for social rebirth.

As at the dawn of the Meiji period, post-World War II Japan was again searching for a modern identity in the face of Western dominance. The Japanese experience of the devastation of war and the psychological uncertainty caused by the American occupation, in addition to Japan’s own complicity in its atrocities against Asian nations, left a void in the Japanese psyche.

Japanese art groups and movements, such as the *Gutai* group and *Yoru no kai*, utilized their renewed interest in Western art and philosophy to continue the work that had been initiated by artists at the turn of the twentieth century. They worked not only to create a Japanese identity, but also to communicate a common identity for all individuals in modernity in a direct attack against the West’s use of “Orientalism.” Grounded in the traditional art forms of Japan, these artists sought to expand their horizons beyond the land of the rising sun and to reach toward the shared experience of life in modern society. It is in this tradition that we find the works of Abe Kōbō, whose protagonists suffer the dread of detachment and loss of purpose common in all modern societies.

By the 1960s, Abe had begun to reach beyond the limitations of ideology and to create a voice for the individual experience that embraced both the positive aspirations and use of new language employed by the *Gutai* group to examine the experience of the here and now, with the idealism and hope for humanity that distinguished Hanada’s *Yoru no kai* and the themes of his earlier works.

The *Gutai* group’s celebration of decay would inspire the social commentary of his work in the 1960s. As Abe stated, “I have the habit of doubting the significance of

³³ Watanabe Hiroshi, *Abe Kōbō* (Tōkyō: Shinchōsa, 1976), 59-60, quoted in Iles, 313.

belonging to a nation, be it Japan or any nation, or belonging to any society. And so, in a certain sense, I've lived without especially mystifying nationality."³⁴ Therefore, unlike more traditional Japanese authors and artists whose value systems were Japanese first, Abe explores the human condition free from cultural and nationalistic attachments. In this way, the works of Abe Kōbō achieve the lofty ambitions that have been the hallmark of the avant-garde in Japan since the early twentieth century, to reach beyond the limitations of cultural and geographic borders to examine the human condition in modernity through the use of a universal means of expression.

³⁴ Abe, quoted in Iles, 24.

Chapter 3

Suna no onna: Identity Lost and Found in a Pit of Sand

He was like an animal who finally sees that the crack in the fence it was trying to escape through is in reality merely the entrance to its cage — like a fish who at last realizes, after bumping its nose numberless times, that the glass of the goldfish bowl is a wall.

—Abe Kōbō, *Suna no onna* (1962, tr. *The Woman in the Dunes*, 1964)

It is surprising that despite Abe's choice to title his work, *Suna no onna*, very little research has been done that focuses on the character of "the woman" herself. In Timothy Illes' extensive research on Abe, for example, he interprets the novel primarily as an attack on the traditional Japanese *shishōsetsu* 私小説 [I-novel],¹ a highly structured autobiographical writing style that "requires a capitulation to the social order and a bending of the author's personality to fit into 'a society that normally demands strict alliance from [its] members.'"² Also, in William Currie's reading of the novel, he focuses on "a contemporary alienated "Everyman" who comes to grips with modern everyday reality in the form of the all-encompassing sand, the novel's central metaphor."³ Currie does nod to the character of "the woman," by suggesting that the veil of mystery Abe shrouds her in is one of the reasons for the success of the novel, but his examination of

¹ The "I-Novel" genre was a product of the naturalist movement in Japan that was predicated on the idea that language must not depend on transparency and should refrain from reliance on fictional characters and settings to convey meaning. Regardless of the perspective from which the story was told, when reading an "I-novel," it was assumed that the author was telling about a real-life incident, using varying degrees of artistic license to distinguish it from autobiography. The "I-novel" is considered to be the most purely "Japanese" of modern literary forms because its directness and dependence on the real contrasted with the Western novel's dependence on the fantastic. See Suzuki Tomi, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*, (Palo Alto: CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

² Illes, 10-11.

³ William Currie, "Abe Kōbō's Nightmare World of Sand," in *Approaches to the Modern Japanese Novel*, ed. Tsuruta Kinya and Thomas E. Swann (Tōkyō: Sophia University, 1976), 16.

her is only on the periphery; she is but an accessory to the self-discovery of the male protagonist.

Admittedly, the book is resistant to an exploration of “the woman,” as the story is told entirely in the third-person narrative from the perspective of the main character, Niki Jumpei, whose interactions with “the woman” expose his own social schizophrenia. However, when one considers that the construction of “the woman” through the vocabulary and impressions of the male character is, in fact, symbolic of the female position in modern society, it begs one to read *Suna no onna* not only as the story of man in modern society, but of woman as well.

It is important to note, that although Abe had become disillusioned by his experience in the Japanese Communist Party prior to writing *Suna no onna*, he very delicately created the world of the dunes as a metaphor for the human condition within a Marxist interpretation of capitalist society. As the dunes serve as a microcosm of the society that oppresses that and defines the main character, it also serves to highlight “the woman’s” role within that system. Therefore, if one accepts a Marxist interpretation of the machinations of the relationships between characters and societies in *Suna no onna*, we can also view the role of “the woman” through the same lens. It is essential to establish this premise before focusing on interpreting “the woman” in Abe’s novel within the Marxist framework.

As a side note, for the sake of simplicity, many Abe researchers, including Iles and Currie, choose to refer to the main character as “Niki Jumpei” throughout their examination of the novel. Although the protagonist’s name is revealed during the course of the novel, Abe’s disuse of his name once the protagonist enters the desert village is

important to understanding the transformation that comes over him as he crosses the imaginary line between the city and the dunes. For Abe's novel to work metaphorically, Niki must be stripped of his identity that is symbolic of his life in the city. The loss of name also serves to emphasize the distinction between the two worlds that the main character is forced to reconcile. Niki desperately attempts to regain this "city" identity throughout the story; however, just as he never refers to "the woman" or the villagers by name, he is never referred to by name within the confines of the dunes. As the story unfolds, the protagonist slowly lets go of the trappings of city life and becomes the symbol of modern man's futile existence, disconnected from a functioning identity.

The Petri Dish of the Dunes

Suna no onna begins with Abe's protagonist, a wandering entomologist, setting out from his life in the city to search for bugs in the sand dunes. Having missed the last bus back home, he accepts the offer of the desert villagers for a place to stay, but soon finds himself at the bottom of a sand pit, confronted by his host, an attractive young widow with whom he will spend the night. Although she is reluctant to bring it up at first, the protagonist is soon informed that he will not be allowed to leave, thus, he is consigned to live with a woman at the bottom of a sand pit to share an existence that is consumed with shoveling the ever-encroaching sand from her home.

Over the course of the novel, the protagonist tries various methods of escape. For example, in his first attempt, he attacks the dunes head-on in an effort to climb the steep cliff of sand. This episode results in exhaustion and heatstroke. Next, he violently subdues "the woman" and tries to blackmail his way out by refusing to work. This tactic fails, as the villagers decide to withhold his water supply until matters return to normal.

In his most clever attempt, he actually manages to get out of the pit, but is trapped in quicksand after being chased by some local dogs and forced to return. In one of the most disturbing scenes in the novel, he makes a deal with the villagers to barter a public sex act between himself and “the woman” in exchange for escape. During his frenzy, she lands a debilitating blow, rendering him temporarily impotent. The “man of the dunes” ultimately learns that there is no escape from the unrelenting intrusion of the dunes.

As a result of the failed attempts to escape and the grueling mindless daily labor in the pit, the protagonist's will is eventually worn down, and he reluctantly grows more accepting of his plight. Over the course of the novel, his domestic and sexual relationship with “the woman” grows less hostile and he whiles away his time working on a crow-catching device that accidentally reveals to him a system for extracting water from the dunes. At the end of the novel, the protagonist is presented with a foolproof opportunity to escape, but after climbing out of the pit and concluding that he can leave whenever he wants, he returns to the bottom to wait for “the woman,” who has been taken to the hospital as a result of the conception of an extra-uterine baby by him. The last two pages of the book are official documents, including the missing persons notification filed by Niki's mother and the judgment of the court that officially declares him a “missing person.”

Before discussing the implications of *Suna no onna* on the female identity not only in post-World War II Japan but universally, it is important to point out some of the features of Abe's novel that invite a metaphorical reading. Once this premise is established, a more detailed reading of “the woman” can be justified. Through clever narrative and symbolism, Abe prepares the reader to interpret the tale of the desert

wanderer not only as the narrative story of Niki Jumpei and the seemingly crazy country bumpkins in the dunes, but also as an allegorical tale of mankind's plight in modern society. It is his use of symbolic signposts that allows the reader to look beyond the strangeness of the surface narrative and interpret the work as a metaphor for the futility of human existence. Based on this assumption, the relationship between men and women and their quest for identity can be examined.

Abe's Outsider Experience and its Influence on His Work

As discussed in chapter 1 of the thesis, when examining the works of Abe Kōbō, it is important to consider Abe's relationship with the idea of "home" in his own life. Again, we can return to Abe's experience as a youth and adolescent in Manchuria that became the reference for his symbolic "the city," which embodies the dark aspirations and ideology of modern society. Also, his visits to his mother's hometown in rural Hokkaido inspired his symbolic primitive "community." Finally, his relationship with mainland Japan was the source of his idealism and hope for humanity. In *Suna no onna*, we find the protagonist wandering far from the city that houses his fractured identity, dysfunctional relationships, and all that he has come to value in the world.

As William Currie confirms in his reading of the work, there is a conflict in the idea of "homeland" in the work of Abe Kōbō. "The first meaning represents to Abe the everyday, the routine, the inauthentic life which one leads as part of the impersonal crowd of people that make up any community."⁴ In Currie's interpretation, then, one must reject this false home of the modern city in order to return to the true home of one's existence. In this way, the dunes embody the struggle between the romantic ideal of the

⁴ Tsuruta and Swann, 1.

agrarian community of the past and its dark and often terrifying reality. The city, on the other hand represents Abe's life in Tōkyō. It is in the opposition of these worlds that Abe hopes to find a means for mankind to identify itself in modern times.

Niki Crosses the Threshold

At the beginning of the story, Abe illustrates the protagonist's transition from his civilized world to that of the desert: "The man passed through a village and continued walking in the direction of the seashore; the soil gradually became whitish and dry. After a time there were no more houses, only straggling clumps of pine."⁵ Thus begins the slow revelation of the sum of his existence. Stripped of the trappings of civilization, he can soon be read as the nascent "man of the dunes," helping to draw a connection between his experience and "the woman's."

As Niki crosses the threshold into the dunes, clues in the narrative begin to alert the reader that he has entered an alternate reality. First of all, as he surveys the village on the way to his bug hunt, he notes, "The village, resembling the cross-section of a beehive, lay sprawled over the dunes."⁶ It becomes ironic, then, that while our protagonist is normally the observer of bugs, in the dunes he will become the bug observed. The beehive reference also becomes important later as the protagonist is forced to confront the futility of labor in which the desert villagers and "the woman" are engaged.

As the protagonist contemplates, he reinforces the association between man and insect by noting that even though flies are repugnant, the flies share mankind's ability to adapt to their surroundings. As the protagonist notes, "The fact that the fly showed great adaptability meant that it could be home even in the unfavorable environments in which

⁵ Abe, *The Woman in the Dunes*, 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

other insects could not live—for example, a desert where all other living things perished.”⁷ His observation suggests, in essence, that there is no difference between humanity and the fly, once the pretention of the former is stripped away. These mental notations by the protagonist serve to signal not only a physical transformation that is taking place as he enters the dunes, but also a psychological one. This experience will ultimately challenge his perspective and the preconceived notions he has of his own identity and the primacy of mankind’s social order. His observation that the close proximity of man’s environment to that of the fly has resulted in the “abundance of mutants” also creates a connection between the plight of the fly and the replication of distorted realities that will be explored later in this chapter.

Suna no onna as Marxist Thought Experiment

As a prelude to a primarily Marxist interpretation of the novel, it is important to understand Abe’s relationship to the ideas of Marxism and the communist political system. In 1952, Abe received the Akutagawa Prize for Literature for his communist charged work, “Kabe” [The wall], that he produced under the guidance of Hanada Kiyoteru and his surrealist writing group, *Yoru no kai*. However, Abe began to question the idealism of the ideology of communism after a trip to Eastern Europe in 1957, where he witnessed the oppression of creative and intellectual freedom carried out in an effort to preserve the primacy of the Soviet state.

In her article, “The Literature and Politics of Abe Kōbō: Farewell to Communism in *Suna no onna*,” Motoyama Mutsuko posits that Abe’s replacement of his imagery of walls that dominated his work during his communist period during the 1950s, with the

⁷ Ibid., 11.

sands of *Suna no onna*, “suggests a new world in a desert after the destruction of walls.”⁸ In other words, the walls that have served as a static barrier to individualistic freedom have crumbled into the limitless potentiality of sand.

Although the subtext of *Suna no onna* points to a new world of hope in an ever-shifting landscape representative of postmodern society, it is premature to assume that Abe had completely abandoned his Marxist philosophy in such a short period of time. Although the protagonist of *Suna no onna* asserts himself and achieves a semblance of identity by the end of the novel, he does so by depending on remnants of his former life. Unlike “the woman” who often displays an animal-like communion with her daily activities, the protagonist finds himself reverting to science to assert his identity, thus incorporating his understanding of the outside empirical world with his new-found position of freedom that the dunes afford him. This is the ideal outcome of Marxist thought: Re-unification of the producer with his product, with his means of production.

In *Ideology and Narrative in Modern Japanese Literature*, Murakami Fuminobu references the four categories of “alienation” that Marx laid out in his work, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. First is the alienation of the “product of labor,” by which the worker produces goods that he will never be able to afford, thus the product becomes alien to the producer. The second category is “self alienation,” which is dependent on the first in that work done to produce the product is no longer the producer’s. If one’s life is defined by the act of production, as Marx contends, then the “alienation” of the product results in “self-alienation” as well. In Marx’s third category, he posits that human beings distinguish themselves from animals in that their activities come as a result of a notion of free will. The capitalist system, however, requires an

⁸ Motoyama, 321.

“alienation of man from his species,”...that one be distanced from one’s fundamental nature as a productive being. The fourth category arises because of this alienation of the species by which human beings are, in turn, alienated from each other. Marx calls this phenomenon “alienation of man from man.”⁹

Although Abe had left the Japanese Communist Party in 1961 because of its impotence as a political system, it is clear that he relied heavily on Marxist philosophy to inspire the writing of *Suna no onna*, using the novel itself as a Marxist thought experiment that goes awry and subsequently disproves his youthful idealism. It is not until his next novel, *Tanin no kao* (1964, tr. *The Face of Another*, 1966), that Abe fully shed his hopes for liberation through Marxism. As Abe noted, “In *Tanin no kao* I took up the problem of *tanin* [strangers] and discussed its meaning. Of course this is still only the beginning. Although I have reached the logical conclusion that the enemy is *rinjin* [neighbors] rather than *tanin*, my fear is still growing.”¹⁰

It is clear, then, that in *Suna no onna*, Abe is still experimenting with the idea that a reconnection with one’s community will be the gateway for reconnection with the self. In fact, in *Suna no onna*, it is in the community of the desert that he has found his identity. As Murakami concurs, “[the protagonist] moves from a *tanin* relationship in the city where his is alienated to a *rinjin* one in the village where he comes to realize his own identity through others.” It is, in fact, this ideal community to which Abe longs to return. This is confirmed when “the woman” tells the protagonist about the village’s motto:

Woman: “In our village we really follow the motto ‘Love Your Home.’”
 Man: “What sort of love is that?”

⁹ Murakami Fuminobo, *Ideology and Narrative in Modern Japanese Literature* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996), 50-51.

¹⁰ Abe, quoted in Murakami, 55-56

Woman: "It's the love you have for where you live."
 Man: "Great!"¹¹

The village in *Suna no onna*, therefore, can be read as another nod to the Marxist idea of the categories of alienation. Through the course of the novel, despite several fits of rejection, we watch the protagonist becoming more at ease with life in the dunes. In the end, it is his "entrapment" in the dunes that becomes the source of his re-communion with his species, his labor, his product, and most importantly, himself. Therefore, to "Love Your Home" comes to mean, love your species, love your labor, love your product, and most importantly, love yourself. Although the protagonist initially scoffs at the idea of home, in the end he realizes that it is what he has been searching for his entire life.

As feminist theorist Catherine Mackinnon notes:

As work is to Marxism, sexuality is to feminism – socially constructed yet constructing, universal as activity yet historically specific, jointly comprised of matter and mind. As the organized expropriation of the work of some for the benefit of others defines a class – workers – the organized expropriation of the sexuality of some for the use of others defines sex, woman. Heterosexuality is its structure, gender and family its congealed forms, sex roles its qualities generalized to social persona, reproduction a consequences, and control its issue.¹²

In other words, the disconnection of women from their sexuality mimics the disconnection between humanity and labor of which Marx spoke, which ultimately results in the loss of identity and freedom in modern capitalist society.

In *Suna no onna*, the reader understands "the woman," as such, via the protagonist's description of her body, and knows that she is gendered from his description of her demeanor, the clothes she wears, and her role in their relationship. As established earlier in this chapter, because of Abe's use of the third-person narrative, the

¹¹ Abe Kōbō, *The Woman in the Dunes*, 37.

¹² Catherine A. Mackinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory," *Signs* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 516.

male protagonist is the primary medium for understanding the “woman.” Therefore, when examining this novel from a feminist perspective, it is fitting that our understanding of “the woman” can come about only through the protagonist’s impressions and expectations of her. The subjugation of the female voice, her “otherness,” becomes symbolic of the female role in Abe’s metaphor of modern society. It is premature to say that Abe is in agreement with this predicament quite yet, but certainly if not consciously, he subconsciously replicates the dynamic as it exists in the societies he is representing.

In *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature*, Susan Napier parallels the encounter with the “other,” both exemplified in the activities of the village and personified in “the woman,” with the literary convention of “alien encounter” to elicit metaphorical meaning. In other words, when the seemingly “normal” is faced with the “abnormal,” not only must the encountered be defined, but in the process the “normal” must itself be reexamined and in many cases debunked. As Napier points out, “The alien’s very existence constitutes a threat to consensus reality, suggesting that reality is never entirely knowable and can, in fact, be altered.”¹³ Although we can assume that the setting of *Suna no onna* takes place on earth and the production of meaning comes from the interaction of human beings, the world is fully foreign and unusual to Niki as he crosses into the desert and becomes the “man of the dunes.”

Therefore, even before the protagonist meets “the woman,” the reader is already aware of her submissive role in the desert community. The fact that the villagers call her “granny” is especially peculiar considering that our protagonist guesses her age to be about thirty. As we learn later in the story, she has lost her husband and child to the dunes

¹³ Susan J. Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (New York: Rutledge, 1996), 98.

in a tsunami, so perhaps the villagers no longer consider her capable of performing the functions of a young woman or wife, especially with no male around to provide even a malfunctioning identity to her. Even at such a young age, she has become an old maid. In the eyes of her community, she is defined as sexually unviable.

When “the woman” presents herself to the protagonist, he comments that, “Perhaps she was wearing powder; for someone who lived by the sea, she was amazingly white.”¹⁴ When considering the Japanese origin of the novel, one immediately considers the ideal of a porcelain white face as the traditional symbol of feminine beauty. Perhaps she is being offered to the protagonist as a symbolic geisha, the embodiment of his romantic vision of purity. It is in this scene that we can appreciate “the woman” not only as the physical embodiment of the protagonist’s ideal, but also as a symbol of purity that the bucolic village represents at this point in the story.

Niki’s Affair

Abe explores the disconnection between “the woman” and her sexuality as the protagonist contemplates his extra-marital affair back in the city. As “the man” contemplates:

Yet the average woman was firmly convinced, it seemed, that she could not make a man recognize her worth unless every time she opened her legs she did so as if it were a scene in a soap opera. But this very pathetic and innocent illusion in fact made women the victims of a one-sided, spiritual rape.¹⁵

The “spiritual rape” to which Abe refers through his protagonist implies the lack of connection between the “woman’s” perception of the sexual act and man’s. In effect, the “soap opera” he describes is the lie a woman issues to herself to accommodate the male’s

¹⁴ Abe, *The Woman in the Dunes*, 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

advances. This barrier between man and woman is also symbolized in the protagonist's decision to always wear a condom when having sex with his mistress. She comments, "Well a rubber suits us pretty well doesn't it? Between us it's like buying at the department store, isn't it? If you don't like it, you can take it back anytime."¹⁶ The condom, therefore, becomes the metaphorical incarnation of Marx's "alienation of man from man," as it interrupts the ideal communion between man and the species that eventually leads to mankind's liberation. However, more relevant to this analysis, it represents the alienation of woman from her sexuality. This firmly establishes the protagonist's relationships in the city as exemplary of the oppressive social system that Abe hopes to expose in this novel.

Sexual Encounters with "the Woman"

From his first encounters with "the woman," the protagonist suffers a conflicted attraction to her. During her flirtation on their first night together, he notes:

In the same posture she gazed at the flame, smiling that unnatural smile. He realized that it was doubtless deliberately done to show off her dimple, and unconsciously his body stiffened. He thought it especially indecent of her just after she had been speaking of her loved ones' death.¹⁷

Despite posturing that he is offended by her lack of remorse for the death of her family, it is clear that this sensibility is a remnant of his life in the city. During his early encounters with "the woman," we learn that his potency is also a vestige of his life in the city; something he relies upon to reinforce the woman's "otherness." As the narrator comments, "And he was left alone on this side of the mirror, suffering with his psychological venereal disease. And so his naked—hatless—member was paralyzed and

¹⁶ Ibid., 133.

¹⁷ Ibid., 29-30.

useless. Her mirror made him impotent. The woman's innocence had turned him into an enemy."¹⁸ Without the condom, which has come to represent the barrier of communion, he cannot consummate the relationship with the pure woman with whom he is faced in the dunes. When he realizes, "Her mirror made him impotent," we can see his inability to re-commune with himself as outlined by Marx. He is still too attached to the world of the city, a world that is dependent on an inability to truly communicate with the "other."

Later in the novel when the protagonist and "the woman" do copulate, however, what starts out as a passionate scene quickly spirals into violence, as he realizes he cannot stay aroused without disconnecting from the "other." In other words, he must symbolically return to the city to retrieve his condom. As the narrator relates:

Again he spurred his courage, forcing himself on by a series of helter-skelter lewd fantasies, arousing his passion by biting her breasts and striking her body, which, with the soap, sweat, and sand, felt like machine oil mixed with iron filings. He had intended for this to go on for at least two hours. But finally the woman gritted her teeth and, complaining about the pain, crouched away from him. He mounted her from behind like a rabbit and finished up within seconds.¹⁹

Despite the fact that the protagonist has transcended his existence to return to the values of the past, as represented in Abe's georgic "community" of the dunes, it is not without irony. For example, Abe qualifies the protagonist's ability to finally copulate with "the woman" without a condom. After they are both sexually aroused, he remarks, "To disappoint her now would be like suddenly shooting a freed criminal from behind"²⁰ Also, if everything were to work out symbolically, the protagonist would show compassion for "the woman's" feelings, as if they were his own. However, he shows little concern for the well-being of "the woman," who must be taken to the hospital because of her extra-

¹⁸ Ibid., 134.

¹⁹ Ibid., 166.

²⁰ Ibid.

uterine pregnancy. As she is being hauled out of the dunes, the narrator comments, “She looked at him beseechingly with eyes almost blinded by tears and mucus, until she could see him no longer. The man looked away as if he did not see her.”²¹ Finally, what are the symbolic ramifications of the product of their union, the extra-uterine pregnancy? Possibly, Abe is suggesting that “the man” had not actually transcended the machinations of society that entrapped him in the city. Perhaps, he has merely transplanted them to the dunes. The man and woman’s symbolic inability to produce successful communication is ultimately Abe’s indictment of the prospects of the traditional community as a source of new identity and potential liberator.

A Future Beyond Boundaries for Abe

It would be ideal to trace a straight Marxist trajectory for the “the man in the dunes.” From his entrance into the village, to his valiant efforts to escape, to his acceptance of the village that finally results in the Marxist utopia of a reunion with his community, his labor, “the woman,” and ultimately himself. However, Abe is sly in leading us towards an irreconcilable ending that provokes even more thought about identity in capitalist society. This conditional freedom is most poignantly illustrated in the extra-uterine fetus that is the product of his “communication” with the “other.” In *Suna no onna*, freedom and identity are no longer housed in the illusion of community, whether in the agrarian dunes or in the modern city. Although the protagonist has begun to redefine his identity, he has not yet redefined a means of communication between the “self” and the “other” in modern society.

²¹ Ibid., 238.

Abe's use of the third-person narrative from the perspective of the protagonist makes it difficult to focus on "the woman" in the dunes, but perhaps this technique results in the greatest commentary on the female condition in modern society. She seems to have found peace at the end of the novel, perhaps the peace that Marx suggests comes from the communion with the other. However, the protagonist's interactions with her in the final scene imply that she has created yet another soap opera that allows for the same disconnected relationship and the continuation of her "spiritual rape."

Chapter 4

The Quest for Identity and Freedom in *Moetsukita chizu*

With only a matchbox and a photograph to go on, it's like trying to find a house that has no number.

—Abe Kōbō, *Moetsukita chizu* (1967, tr. *The Ruined Map*, 1969)

In his 1967 detective novel, *Moetsukita chizu*, Abe Kōbō continues to explore his signature themes of the individual vs. the collective, loss of identity, and the quest for freedom within the context of modern society. Much like the protagonist in *Suna no onna*, the detective in *Moetsukita chizu* is set adrift, unmoored from the attachments and obligations of modern society. Only this time, the constantly shifting geology of the dunes is replaced with the ultimately uncharitable labyrinth of the ever-expanding city.

When considering the two novels together, *Moetsukita chizu* might be interpreted as a telling of the same story from the perspective of Niki Jumpei's wife. One could easily imagine the missing man in *Moetsukita chizu* as *Suna no onna*'s (1962, tr. *The Woman in the Dunes*, 1964) Niki, out wandering through the dunes as his wife and the detective piece together the circumstances surrounding his disappearance. A closer reading of the novel, however, reveals the deeper meaning of the detective's own tenuous relationship with modern society.

In the same way that the creation of a wholly fictional, yet believable, desert landscape in *Suna no onna* does, the inversion of the classic conventions of "detective fiction" allows Abe to challenge the status quo and delve deeply into the existential crises of modernity. Abe's use of "anti-detective" fiction set in the ominous "city" of *Moetsukita chizu*, therefore, evokes a reading of the novel as a postmodern examination

of modernity. The important interplay of relationships among the protagonist, the players in his investigation, and Abe's archetypal "city" itself, also provide the foundation for his existentialist critique of modern society as well as the "individual's" aspirations for freedom within it.

Detective Fiction and the Exploration of Identity

Understanding Abe's use of the detective fiction formula in *Moetsukita chizu*, therefore, is crucial when reading the subtext of the novel. Much like the dilemmas that Abe takes on in his work, the classic detective novel formula, too, is a product of modern democratic society. As John Cawelti notes in his essay, "Canonization, Modern Literature, and the Detective Story," traditional detective fiction functions primarily to reinforce the existing social order. As he notes, "The detective reveals to us by his or her actions that, however corrupt or unjust society may be in some of its particulars, it yet contains the intelligence and the means to define and exorcise these evils as particular problems."¹ In this light, we can read the staple crime or unsolved murder of detective fiction as a challenge to the accepted social order, a dilemma that temporarily calls into question the basic values of the ideology. Who could have done such a thing, what is the pathology of the mind that created the challenge?

In *Moetsukita chizu*, Abe's detective nods to this function of detective fiction when he observes, "Usually as soon as a missing person's been discovered, he calmly goes back to his former haunts, as if he has suddenly recovered from some demonic

¹ John G. Cawelti, "Canonization, Modern Literature, and the Detective Story," in *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction*, ed. Jerome H. Delamater and Ruth Prigozy (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 12.

possession. Motives or explanations are not so important as people assume.”² Thus, the detective confirms that the remedy for any aberrance from the social order is, traditionally, a return to that order. In the classic formula, therefore, the detective serves as the embodiment of order, and through the empirical negotiation of seemingly unrelated information presented as clues, the detective reassembles the sequence of events and the perpetrator is punished. In the end, the primacy of society and its ideology are reaffirmed and order is returned.

Hardboiled Protagonist

At the opening of the story, the unnamed detective protagonist is poised to enter the city on an assignment to find a missing person, Nemuro Hiroshi. His client is the missing person’s wife, Haru. Aside from the fact that her husband has been missing for six months, the wife is far from forthcoming with details that might hint at the real motives or circumstances surrounding the disappearance. It is also apparent that the client’s “brother” has been investigating the case himself, and his inability to find Hiroshi after six months has led Haru to seek outside help.

In classic detective fiction style, a seemingly disassociated set of clues, including a photograph, a well-worn raincoat, and an especially vexing box of mismatched matches, leads the protagonist to detect early on that there is more to the story than what he is being told. This suspicion is compounded by the fact that the client’s “brother” claims to have found nothing of substance in his own investigation, thus, revealing him as yet another reluctant gateway for information. The protagonist’s resulting hunch that the wife and the enigmatic “brother” are complicit in their deception, leads him to the notion that

² Abe Kōbō, *The Ruined Map*, trans. E. Dale Saunders (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 133.

it is all a ruse. But what would be the motivation for confusing a hired detective? Is the “brother” really her “brother” at all? Are the wife and “brother” romantically entangled? Was there a rivalry between the “brother” and Nemuro Hiroshi of which Haru was unaware? Who are they protecting?

So, *Moetsukita chizu* creates an expectation that the story will play out according to a formula: the introduction of a problem or crime, the presentation of clues, a few twists and turns to keep it interesting, and eventually a piecing together of those clues to lead to a resolution of the problem. Abe’s choice of venue for his detective story, the grimy underworld of a modern city resplendent with a cast of unseemly characters, might be seen as a Japanese version of the American “hard-boiled” detective novel, popularized by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. In fact, much like Hammett’s Sam Spade or Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, the unnamed protagonist of Abe Kōbō’s novel is introduced as street savvy and an acutely perceptive fellow, more than well equipped to track a criminal through the labyrinthine half-truths, misinformation, and seemingly meaningless clues with which he is presented. Perhaps a *deus ex machina* will emerge in the plot, or maybe the investigator’s uncanny intuition will provide the means. Regardless, a complete resolution is promised and expected by the genre.

A Ruined Map

Almost immediately, however, Abe’s detective’s perceptive prowess is exposed as a hindrance, as each clue and unveiled reality sends him spiraling further into the uncharted abyss of the chaos of the city and everything it represents. Fittingly, the hyper-active perspicacity of the protagonist, that would normally justify the intuition required to bring the detective novel to its resolution, short-circuits in *Moetsukita chizu*. The

seemingly unrelated information that bombards the protagonist as he conducts his investigation, results in the formulation of more and more theories about the disappearance. The expanding confusion compounds the promise of clues that never materialize, such as the diary and address book of the missing man, Nemuro Hiroshi. As the protagonist comments, "I had come close to starting in on the business of the matchbox. The single piece of evidence I could verify with my eyes, touch with my hands. A single lens by which I could substantiate, bring to a point of focus, the numberless hypotheses."³ Instead of homing in on the one truth, there is an explosion of possibilities, each one just as feasible as the next.

For example, after his investigation of a fuel supplier with whom the missing man had dealings, the detective begins to speculate about a spoiled business venture in which the "brother" and the missing man were involved that may have led to the disappearance. The lead, however, is a dead end. As the detective notes, "The suspicious relationship [among the missing man, his company, and the fuel supplier] before the husband's disappearance, had resolved itself into a completely ordinary one after it; and thus my hopes of stumbling on a trace of the husband here had become more and more improbable."⁴

Later, information from a business associate of the missing man, Tashiro, exposes the missing man's secret hobby of nude photography and the "brother's" involvement in a homosexual prostitution ring. On the one hand, these clues indicate that either a sex crime or connections with the city's underworld caused the disappearance. On the other hand, it might be that the wife and the "brother" conspired to kill the husband, and then

³ Ibid., 65.

⁴ Ibid., 87.

hired a private investigator as a “cover.” Are the pictures in Tashiro’s packet of a prostitute (all of them shot from a peculiar angle so that the woman’s face cannot be seen) as he first claims them to be, or are they pictures of the investigator’s client, and how are they connected to the disappearance? It is the “brother” who is the only common thread in the theories; however, his untimely and anti-climactic death eliminates any hope of discovering the truth.

Certainly these types of dead-end leads are common to any real investigation. At first they seem to exist to build suspense, or to provide an unexpected turn in the narrative that will direct the protagonist to his goal. However, in the classic formula of detective fiction, they serve no traditional function. This is reinforced when the detective laments:

Being deceived and checkmated, being made to go miles out of my way and take all kinds of pains—I wanted to at least use this information to make my report plausible. My trip that had lasted a full two and a half hours had become just as obvious an act as casting a line in a pond.⁵

All expectations are denied, and uncertainties multiply exponentially upon further investigation. Therefore, the texts invites one to interpret these promising leads and their resultant frustration as symbolic signposts to a greater story that is being told between the lines, as the protagonist blindly stumbles through the labyrinth of the city without success. In the end, it is the convention of the detective novel itself that has become the ruined map for Abe.

The Detached Detective

Detachment is also an element shared among Abe’s protagonist and the archetypical detectives of hard-boiled detective fiction. Like Spade and Marlowe, Abe’s

⁵ Ibid., 87.

detective operates off the grid. The fact that the protagonist has severed his marriage and abandoned his 9 to 5 job prior to becoming a detective accentuates his current state of detachment. Free from the confines of social expectation and obligation, he is able to operate freely on the edge of society, as an objective observer. While this abandonment of his former life is, at first, accepted as an innocuous exposition to his current predicament, it ultimately becomes crucial in understanding the protagonist's function in the narrative. As the detective comments, "I knew what my client wanted, I could play the required role at once. It was our business to be well aware that there is no set type."⁶ Much like his hard-boiled counterparts, this outsider status enables him to shift shapes and adapt to situations as he sees fit.

Through the course of the novel, however, it becomes apparent that the plot has also freed itself from the confines of traditional detective fiction. As mentioned earlier, the detective's obsession with details and ability to view them from every angle and in every light result not in the revelation of one truth, but the presence of a multitude of truths that ultimately become pathological for him. Unraveling layer upon layer of the mystery reveals that the unraveling is infinite. In a touch of irony, through the course of his investigation, Abe's detective exposes the existence of various corruptions, including the "brother's" involvement in prostitution and a city councilman's role in kickbacks from new urban development. He is even beaten for stumbling too close to an illegal transportation ring. While these have the temporary appearance of leads regarding Nemuro Hiroshi's disappearance, in the end they are merely solutions to other people's cases, perhaps solutions to cases that don't yet exist. In the end, he is no closer to solving his own mystery than he was when he set out. Resolution in Abe's novel is like an ever-

⁶ Ibid., 8.

dangling carrot, with tension building and building, and every expectation of revelation is frustrated with yet another search. So what happens when the capacity of the detective to serve as an objective proponent of society is called into question?

***Moetsukita chizu* as Anti-Detective Fiction**

As Stefano Tani notes in his book, *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction*, the form of narrative that Abe is employing in *Moetsukita chizu* is indicative of what he calls “anti-detective” fiction. For Tani, the inversion of the classic detective novel formula is the “ideal medium of postmodernism” because it allows for a critique of the primacy of order. By calling the detective’s ability to restore order into question, the anti-detective novel explores the postmodernist admission that human perception is limited and affirms the ideal that the only solution is non-solution.⁷ When considered as “anti-detective” fiction, the inability of Abe’s detective to solve the case takes on a greater significance in understanding the novel.

Tani distinguishes three types of anti-detective fiction to emerge in the wake of postmodern sensibilities. First, there is “innovative” anti-detective fiction, which is characterized by detectives who are unable to remain detached from their cases and, therefore, arrive at biased and tainted solutions without justice. Second, there is “deconstructive” anti-detective fiction, which is characterized by the detective’s inability to arrive at a solution, but at the same time, his capacity to understand something about his own identity grows in the process. As Tani states, in the “deconstructive” version, “the confrontation is no longer between a detective and a murderer, but between the

⁷ Stefano Tani, *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian Fiction* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 41.

detective's mind and his sense of identity, which is falling apart, between the detective and the 'murderer' in his own self."⁸ Finally, Tani classifies the "meta-fictional" anti-detective novel, as exemplified by Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, in which the detective no longer exists within the novel. Instead, the clues are left to the reader's discretion, thus making the possibility of interpretations limitless and eliminating any chance to arrive at a concrete conclusion.⁹ The common feature of all three is that meaning is found outside the text. By challenging the existing ideology and its morality, it is up to the reader to form their own conclusions and assert their own understanding.

In *Moetsukita chizu*, although the detective has failed to solve his case, he repeatedly resists the temptation to attach himself to the events that are unfolding around him. This is seen most clearly in his failure to help the "brother" when he is attacked and killed, or to prevent Tashiro's suicide near the end of the novel. His ambivalence to the events surrounding the investigation is reinforced when he resists the attempts of his client to draw him in as a replacement for her missing husband. Therefore, Abe's novel falls firmly in Tani's category of "deconstructive" detective fiction. As will be discussed later, however, the complete detachment of Abe's protagonist at the end of the novel takes the work to the brink of the "meta-fictional." Completely detached from the social system and its ideology, the protagonist is at once free and, as we will discover later, non-existent.

The important distinction between the archetype of the hard-boiled detective and Abe's nameless detective, therefore, lies in the difference in their symbolic function. Although all of these characters occupy a space on the fringe of the social order,

⁸ Ibid., 76.

⁹ Ibid., 113-47.

hardboiled detectives, despite their individual character flaws, still act as guardians of that order. In a way, the hard-boiled archetype is a martyr to the social system, existing on the fringe of society so that society and its status quo may exist unchallenged. Although the hard-boiled detective formula distinguishes itself within the genre of detective fiction, it ultimately serves the same positivistic agenda. However, the symbolic function of Abe's detective is wholly different. As the detective remarks, "There were too many blank spaces on the map. Therefore, I had no obligation to force myself to fill them in. I was no guardian of the law."¹⁰ In the end, Abe's detective becomes the embodiment of the loss of identity that is an inherent byproduct of modern society. In essence, he has lost all communication with the social order.

Existentialism and the "Anti-Detective"

As William Spanos points out in his essay, "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination," whereas classic detective fiction serves to reinforce the essentiality of the ideological system, the main goal of "anti-detective" fiction is an existentialist critique of positivistic humanism. Spanos points to existentialist philosopher Paul Johannes Tillich's (1886-1965) philosophical differentiation between the ideas of "fear" and "dread." For Tillich, "fear" presupposes the existence of an object that is subject to analysis, capture, attack, and defense. Most importantly it is an object that can be overcome or put to use. "Dread," however, has no object and, in the view of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), "re-presents the essential

¹⁰ Abe, *The Ruined Map*, 34.

impossibility of defining the ‘what.’”¹¹ Where detective fiction relies on the idea of “fear,” anti-detective fiction relies on the idea of “dread.”

It is precisely this existential idea that Abe is exploring in *Moetsukita chizu*, via the convention of “anti-detective” fiction. The “dread” of which the Existentialists spoke references the detachment from one’s essential identity, a detachment created by the dependence of modern ideology on outdated hierarchies and identities of man’s communal and agricultural past. Where one searches for meaning by adherence to the ideological system, the other seeks meaning by challenging that system.

Spanos also notes that this concept was explored almost a century earlier by Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), in his seminal work, *The Concept of Dread*. This work inspired the ultimately liberating potential of the concept of dread in the postmodern interpretations of Heidegger and Tillich. In *The Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard wrote,

If a man were a beast or an angel, he would not be able to dread. Since he is in synthesis he can be in dread, and the greater the dread, the greater the man. ...Dread is the possibility of freedom. Only this dread is by the aid of faith absolutely educative, laying bare as it does all finite aims and discovering all their deceptions...¹²

Although the “faith” to which Kierkegaard referred was a Christian faith, it is a faith in the potential of liberation that drives Abe’s protagonists.

“The Individual” vs. “the Community” in the Quest for Freedom

As postulated in the previous chapter, *Suna no onna* provides us with a fictional and symbolic frontier in which Abe’s experiment with Marxist thought can unfold. In

¹¹ Heidegger, quoted in William V. Spanos, “The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination,” *boundary 2*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1972): 149.

¹² Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 139.

Moetsukita chizu, however, Abe embraces the reality of a post-frontier modern society and searches for the possibility of another route for humanity's liberation and reunification with its identity. At the end of *Suna no onna*, it is inferred that there is no escape to one's essential "self" via community, no return to Eden, either physically or psychologically. In *Moetsukita chizu*, the spiritual home of freedom and identity is compromised by the ever-expanding and amorphous city. Unbowed, Abe uses *Moetsukita chizu* as a philosophical attempt to find true freedom in modern society through complete detachment from the ideological system that creates meaning. As outposts become impermanent and frontiers are overcome, there is no longer a need to look beyond, only inside.

The "City"

Much like the qualified freedom that the protagonist realizes in *Suna no onna*, the protagonist's eventual realization of "freedom" in *Moetsukita chizu* is also conflicted. In *Moetsukita chizu*, the "city" is the symbol of modern society, with its reproduction of values and expectations. One's willingness to adhere to these values and expectations, whether knowingly or unknowingly, dictates "success" in the city. At the same time, as Abe describes, the city is a labyrinth that allows the protagonist to find his freedom within it by detaching himself from everything of value in modern society. When we meet our protagonist, he has already left his stable job and his home with his wife, in essence, his connection with the "city," for a position on its fringe as an observer. Overwhelmed with the Existentialist "dread" that Kierkegaard first postulated, the detective seeks meaning beyond the false communalities of modern society.

In the very first scene of the novel, the protagonist's tenuous relationship with the "city" is exposed after a near collision with a boy who is roller skating. While he considers admonishing the boy for being so careless, he wants to avoid the scrutiny of the woman who rushed to help. He states, "Nothing would jeopardize my situation more than their trumping up some story against me."¹³ The possibility that he might get bogged down by the machinations of the "city" (i.e., being held accountable to the woman, or perhaps having to deal with the police), is antithetical to both his newly chosen profession and also his character's function in the narrative. This is reinforced by the traffic sign he soon approaches that reads, "Unauthorized vehicles forbidden within these precincts."¹⁴ From his encounter with the sign, one can infer that the protagonist, and his symbolic quest for freedom from the ideology of the "city," are technically "forbidden" there. For this reason, he must operate under the radar; he must remain marginalized to stay objective in his quest.

The detective's job, with its symbolic relationship to the "city," serves as a way-station to the freedom that Abe's protagonist seeks, namely the freedom to observe from the outside. This place is the realm of the artist or philosopher, a place detached from the "self" and the "other." Much like *Suna no onna*, the use of transition establishes two symbolic spaces, one within and one without. In *Moetsukita chizu*, then, the protagonist transitions into the city, the symbolic home of the false communality of modern society.

As discussed in previous chapters, the symbolic "city" in Abe's work of the 1960s houses the ideology of modern society. Most important, however, is Abe's idea that the maintenance of that ideology is dependent on the illusion of communality that is no

¹³ Abe, *The Ruined Map*, 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

longer applicable to modern society. In order to preserve the importance of the community, ideology defines those who resist it as a pariah, or an enemy of the state. As Timothy Iles notes, Abe himself referred to these examinations as “literature of rootless grasses” to help explain some reader’s inability to handle Abe’s symbolic rejection of the necessity of the state. As Abe noted,

It’s not rare to feel a great resistance to this term, ‘rootless.’ It’s a fundamental, shared physiological condition of any collective to feel resistance to anything rootless. If we look at this historically, however, it is not an essential human trait. It is something which was created within certain historical conditions....I use this term ‘rootless grass’ to express my doubts about this way of thinking.”¹⁵

As established earlier, Abe’s use of the convention of the “anti-detective” novel in the telling of this story points to his intentional critique of state-produced ideology and the potential for the “dread” that the relationship produces to be a source of liberation in modern society. Abe’s “city,” therefore, is one that produces unnatural systems that require one to be “rooted.” However, the inherent problem with the human condition in modern society is that these social obligations are not a means to increased freedom for the individual or the collective. As Abe turned to communism in his earlier writing as a reaction against this stifling of the individual in capitalist society, in his writings of the 1960s, he questions all modern social systems and their capacity for tyranny and restriction of intellectual freedoms.

In many ways, Abe’s “city” is similar to existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre’s (1905-1980) city of Bouville in *Nausea*. As Sartre’s protagonist, Roquetin, observes, the inhabitants of the city,

¹⁵ Abe Kōbō, “Nenashi kusa no bungaku,” *Nami* 3, no. 11 (September-October 1969): 12, quoted in Iles, 35-36.

...have proof, a hundred times a day that everything happens mechanically, that the world obeys fixed unchangeable laws. ...And all this time, great, vague nature has slipped into their city, it has infiltrated everywhere... . It doesn't move, it stays quietly and they are full of it inside, they breathe it, and they don't see it, they imagine it to be outside, twenty miles from the city. I see it, I see this nature...I know that its obedience is idleness, I know it has no laws: what they take for constancy is only habit and it can change tomorrow.¹⁶

In Bouville, Roquetin, much like the detective in *Moetsukita chizu*, becomes painfully aware of the positive humanistic ruse of modern society and has taken a position on the edge of that society to expose it.

The relationships of the protagonist and the characters he encounters to the "city" are crucial to understanding the symbolic struggle for freedom that drives the subtext of the novel. At the opening of the story, the transition of Abe's protagonist into the "city" marks the beginning of his symbolic examination of the city's labyrinth:

It was all ordinary enough at first glance, but when one focused on the distant landscape, people seemed like fanciful reflections. Of course, if one were used to living here, I should imagine the viewpoint would be quite the opposite. The view became fainter and fainter, transparent almost to the point of extinction, and only my face emerged like a picture printed from a negative.¹⁷

This scene is not only important in establishing the protagonist's outsider relationship with the city, but also in introducing Abe's symbolic use of transparency. The more detached the characters are in *Moetsukita chizu*, the more lucid is the detective's ability to perceive them, thus, reinforcing the idea that the "city" and its ideology have separated the modern man from his identity and freedom.

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 158.

¹⁷ Abe, *The Ruined Map*, 7.

Transparency and Attached Characters

Abe's use of transparency is especially important in understanding the detective's relationship with his client, as her image is constantly eluding him. In their first meeting for example, the detective ruminates after she leaves the room, "With the girls disappearance beyond the curtain even my impression of her suddenly became faint and indistinct. ...I was quite unable to understand why my impression had suddenly blurred."¹⁸ Even when he tries to create a memorable face for the woman, his imagination betrays him. For example, when he fantasizes about ravaging the woman, he is left to contemplate the "black hole" that will confront him. Ultimately, "Her arms and legs disappeared too, and only the hole, like a bottomless well, was left."¹⁹

The client's transparency is mentioned again later in the story in reference to her wearing make-up. The detective notes:

Perhaps the attempt to conceal her real face was because she had a woman's consciousness of being seen, or it might on the other hand be a manifestation of caution. ...This woman became more transparent by using cosmetics, and she could easily be seen through.²⁰

This commentary is especially poignant if we consider the wearing of make-up by the woman as following social norms. The more closely tied she is to society and "the city," the less perceptible she becomes to the detective as he dances on the precipice of non-existence.

This allegiance to the city is also exposed in the client's adherence to her "brother's" credo that "a single map for life is all you need. ...You should go only

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., 32.

²⁰ Ibid., 126.

through places where everyone goes, places that are considered absolutely safe.”²¹ Through the course of the novel, we learn that, in fact, the “brother” assumes many identities and is involved in a multitude of nefarious activities; that he is, indeed, one of the “ruined maps” in question. The client defies his detective’s ability of “grasping the distinguishing features of things seen and filing them away,”²² because getting closer to his true nature by moving further to the periphery of society comes at the cost of being able to examine that which is a part of the society.

Another character who embodies the idea of the city and its ideology is the detective’s wife from whom he has separated. As he approaches her dress shop called “Piccola,” he comments on her decision to name the shop after her school nickname. He remarks, “I did not assume the name bore an especially pejorative meaning, but also I definitely thought it had been given her not only in a good sense. My wife interpreted it arbitrarily as being a pet name, and carrying it further, a term of endearment.”²³ “Piccola” and the success his wife has achieved under that name point toward her acceptance of a diminutive role in “the city.” For her acquiescence to the social order of “the city,” she has been rewarded with professional and financial success.

As the detective assesses the contrast between his wife’s clothes and those in which she dresses her employee, he comments, “My wife generally wore plain unobtrusive clothes herself...but for the girl she made daringly modern ones. She reckoned on the psychological effect they would have on customers. If the woman owner of a dress-making establishment dressed too flashily she would be resisted by her

²¹ Ibid., 29.

²² Ibid., 11.

²³ Ibid., 166.

clients.”²⁴ As a business owner, his wife is subject to social expectations to ensure success.

Detached Characters

To accent the symbolic space occupied by the detective, Abe juxtaposes the fixed characters of the “city” with characters much like himself who are only loosely attached. At the opening of the novel, for example, we learn that the “brother” has already been doing some of his own detective work in regard to the missing man, Nemuro Hiroshi. During their impromptu meeting at the Camellia coffee house, the “brother” confides in the detective, “It’s amusing to see things as a third person. You’re suddenly aware of things that would never have occurred to you otherwise.”²⁵ The “brother,” like the detective, is also a shape-shifter, first appearing by surprise as a parking lot attendant across the street from the coffee house and later at the fuel suppliers, where he is referred to by the workers as “some thug, I guess. Some deadhead with pull in the red-light district on the river.”²⁶ It is also during this encounter that it is revealed that the “brother” is involved in some sort of blackmail scheme.

In response to these “coincidental” encounters, the detective thinks, “I could see things better if he remained a strange shadowy character. Though he had come rather into the light, he was still a strange character indeed.”²⁷ Much like the detective’s face that emerged from the negative of “the city” mentioned above, the “brother’s” identity comes into focus as the client becomes more transparent. To compound matters, it is revealed that the “brother” is actually the wife’s secret lover and not a “brother” at all. Much like

²⁴ Ibid., 168.

²⁵ Ibid., 47.

²⁶ Ibid., 93.

²⁷ Ibid., 99.

the detective who has been marginalized because of the necessity to constantly play a role, the “brother” is also marginalized. Both the detective and the “brother” are still operating in the reality of the city, but they are hanging on by a thread.

With the death of the “brother,” the detective is left only with the missing man’s co-worker, Tashiro, to provide any information to him. However, it becomes clear, through Tashiro’s telling of a string of lies, that he is playing a role as well. According to Tashiro, on the day Nemuro Hiroshi disappeared, they had arranged to rendezvous to exchange some important documents. However, when the detective follows Tashiro’s map to meet him at the rendezvous point, the map is deliberately misleading. The detective comments, “With a map like this, it’s conceivable Mr. Nemuro might not have been able to get here.” This event calls into question the actuality of the rendezvous itself.

More importantly, however, early in the novel, Tashiro reveals to the detective that the missing man was “all wrapped up in pictures—photographs—of nudes.”²⁸ However, his story falls apart when Tashiro and the detective go to meet the model with whom Tashiro claims the missing man worked, but when she removes her wig, it is obvious that it is not the same girl as in the photos. After fumbling through a story about finding the photos on the street, Tashiro admits that he took the pictures himself and confesses, “I go so far as to tell lies I don’t have to, trying to get away from the pressure of it. If I can just get someone to believe them, I feel they would become the truth.”²⁹

Perhaps Tashiro is somehow complicit in the event, but perhaps he saw his opportunity to be a part of the investigation and took it. Regardless, Tashiro’s pathological lying exposes him as a character barely connected to the social order, a

²⁸ Ibid., 61.

²⁹ Ibid., 237.

shape-shifter just like the “brother” and the detective. In any event, with the death of the “brother” and the suicide of Tashiro, the detective’s two days of following seemingly promising leads comes to an abrupt halt.

The Mirror of Others

The characters in *Moetsukita chizu* provide many mirrors to the detective in which to examine his inability to navigate modernity. In his wife, for example, we see the clear reflection of his former, “attached” self. However, in the mirror of his wife, we also see many of the issues that confront him in this modern society. Despite the detective’s protests, his wife has built a successful business and is engaged in a lesbian relationship with her shop assistant. It is soon revealed that the two women are also living together, so the wife’s suggestion that there is space for him in her life is a qualified one. At the close of the detective’s encounter with the wife, she comments to the shop assistant, “My husband’s room is all ready isn’t it, so that he can come back any time?” The detective comments, “The girl looked at me boldly and murmured, evidently pleased: ‘I like men.’ I could not, I thought, come back after all.”³⁰ In this light, the detective has been totally emasculated, removed from both his traditional role of head of the household, both in his earning capacity and his romantic capacity.

This scene is important because it clearly references the loss of the essential self that Abe believed was inherent to community-based agricultural societies of the past, in which a strict hierarchical code ensured its function, and roles were clearly defined. These themes are expressed explicitly in *Suna no onna*, as well when the “modern man,” with all of his social schizophrenia, is injected back into the communal life of the dunes.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

In a modern context, however, although these relationships no longer exist, they are still posited as essential to the reproduction of the social ideology. This disconnection between the loss of communality and the dependence on communality for identity is the underlying pathology of man's condition in modern society.

Perhaps the most important mirror in *Moetsukita chizu* is that of the missing man himself. As the protagonist becomes impotent in his charge as a detective, he experiences a growing self-awareness that he and the missing man are one and the same. Early in the novel we learn that the missing man, too, was once a fully attached character. According to the client, "He was fond of licenses. He had a kind of license mania, I guess."³¹ She later comments about the missing man that, "He used to say licenses were the anchor of human life." To which the detective replies, "Using so many anchors for such a small boat certainly puts him in the category of dreamers, doesn't it? If he didn't use them he'd float away."³² By way of the woman's comment, the detective determines that the missing man's relationship with society was tenuous, much like his own. This resulted in the man's obsession with licenses that kept him attached and grounded in the social order. It also points to the detective's suspicion that the missing man disappeared of his own will.

It is not until later in the novel that the detective zeros in on the similarities between the husband and himself. "I search and fumble for him...but in vain. This blackness I am seeking is after all merely my own self...my own map, revealed in my brain. ...I thought I was following the husband's map, but I was following my own; I

³¹ Ibid., 134.

³² Ibid., 136.

wanted to follow his steps and I followed my own.”³³ He suddenly realizes that, much like the missing man whose licenses were not heavy enough to anchor him down, the detective’s ties to the “city” are unraveling quickly. He himself is lost in the “city” and is at a crossroads where he must decide if he is to be identified on the “city’s” terms, or on his own.

The detective even assumes the role of the missing man in his final interaction with his client, but it is clear that she is calling him back to society, that she is the last hope of his being “re-attached.” She offers, “Do you want to try on my husband’s shirt? I hope it fits you.”³⁴ Eventually they make love, but he resists the comfort of staying with her. As he leaves the apartment, it is clear that he is losing his grip on his attachments to the world, as his memory begins to fail him and all semblance of order in the reality of the city begins to melt away. As the detective describes:

Far from coming into focus, the town on the plateau beyond the curve became more and more of a blank as if continually erased by some super eraser. The color vanished...the contours, the forms vanished, and ultimately its very existence seemed to be negated.³⁵

As the entire matrix of the “city” melts away, it is clear that the detective has made a transition beyond the limitations of the ideology of the system, but still within the physicality of the “city.”

***Moetsukita chizu* and the Implications for Abe’s Vision**

Although the following quotation appears as the preface to the novel, it is not until the novel’s completion that its full meaning is realized:

³³ Ibid., 247-48.

³⁴ Ibid., 268.

³⁵ Ibid., 275-76.

The CITY—a bounded infinity, A labyrinth where you are never lost.
 Your private map where every block bears the same number.
 Even if you lose your way, you cannot go wrong.³⁶

For Abe, then, freedom in the context of modern society is not one of self-negation, but a negation of falsehoods of ideology. This realization is crucial to understanding *Moetsukita chizu* as a call to reach beyond the boundaries of the known and to accept the challenge of creating a new and fulfilling identity in the context of modern society.

As the town “beyond the curve” is erased and the detective experiences amnesia, first manifesting itself in disorientation, but ultimately in his forgetting his name, the transition outside the matrix of the “city’s” social expectation is complete. It is at this point that he joins the missing man on the path of liberation. In essence, the detective has solved the crime by discovering that the missing man and he are one and the same. In the act of forgetting, the protagonist and the missing man have liberated themselves.

As Mark Gibeau notes in his Lacanian³⁷ reading of *Moetsukita chizu*, “Just as a sign excised from language loses its linguistic value, the protagonist ceases to exist the instant he breaks away from the network of social relations.”³⁸ While this might be

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁷ Building on the work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) posited three major structures that control human desires and understanding: the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. For Lacan, the concept of the real refers to man’s primitive existence before the emergence of language, a state in which there is nothing but pure desire and there is no sense of separation between the individual and its surroundings. Although the development of language has irreversibly separated humanity from the real, it still functions forcefully against what we understand as reality, an understanding negotiated through the flawed medium of language. Lacan’s concept of the imaginary refers to the transition from primal desire to demands, the fantasies of desire, and marks the movement of the subject from primal need to what Lacan terms “demand.” Capacity for fulfillment marks the distinction between desire and demand as the insatiable demand arises from the anxiety that the individual feels that he is in fact an entity separate from his surroundings. Finally, Lacan’s category of the symbolic refers to the function of language as it exists in society. As Lacan stated, “It is in the ‘name of the father’ that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law.” It is through the negotiation of the other through the tenuous medium of language that one is allowed access to community and “others.” For further inquiry see, Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977).

³⁸ Mark Laurent Gibeau, “Nomadic Communities: The Literature and Philosophy of Abe Kōbō” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2006), 184.

interpreted as nihilistic, if we consider Lacan's idea of potentiality in the extinct, the negative implication of the outcome is avoided, at least symbolically. Gibeau refers to this as Lacan's "ephemeral moment," "between an extinction that is still glowing and a birth that is retarded. 'I' come into being and disappear from what I say."³⁹ The complete loss of symbolic subjectivity, then, is the state of liberation. At the end of *Moetsukita chizu*, we find Abe's protagonist liberated, and claiming a temporary vantage point from which to define new terms for communication with the "other" in modern society that rejects dependence on outmoded identities:

Once she glanced over toward me, but she could probably make out nothing in this narrow, dark crevice. I continued to conceal myself as I watched her. She looked up worriedly at the sky, searching. I continued to wait intently, choking back my screams behind clenched teeth. Nothing would be served by being found. What I needed now was a world I myself had chosen. It had to be my own world, which I had chosen by my own free will. ...I would forget looking for a way to the past. I had enough of calling telephone numbers on hand-written memos.⁴⁰

As the protagonist states at the close of the novel, "I began walking, relying on a map I did not comprehend."⁴¹ Liberated from the subjectivity and expectation of modern society, the detective is free to wander within the "bounded infinity" of Abe's symbolic "city."

³⁹ Lacan, quoted in *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Abe, *The Ruined Map*, 298-99.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 299.

Conclusion

When considering the trends in current literary criticism, it is unusual to posit authorial intention when examining the text. However, the abundance of Abe's literary essays and interviews provides an important supplement to understanding his work and, in fact, function as a medium for criticism on its own. Therefore, the connections between his experience and his work become essential to understanding not only his fiction, but also why his work was embraced by audiences in the West unlike any other Japanese author before him. Ultimately, Abe's childhood and adolescence in Manchuria and his relationship with Japan as an outsider afforded a rare vantage point to him from which to observe Japan's rapidly developing modern society and to comment on it, independent from cultural restrictions. Abe's capacity for objectivity was further facilitated by the fact that he experienced first hand not only the idealism and dominance of the Japanese empire during World War II, but also the atomic devastation and subsequent unconditional surrender and occupation of Japan at the end of the war.

The U.S.-led occupation awakened an interest in democratic ideals that had first taken root in Japan during the Meiji period, but were eclipsed by the rise of nationalism during Japan's era of imperialism (1894-1945). The revitalized desire for freedom and an international exchange of ideas in the post-World War II period attracted Abe to avant-garde surrealism and inspired his idealistic expectation that communism would lead to a universal reunification with identity that he felt was lost in industrial society. Furthermore, for artists and intellectuals of the time who had witnessed the oppression of Japan's totalitarian regime, communism, in theory, promised a classless society that would be accepting of expressive freedom in arts and discourse. The search for "a new commune," a new party of

Communism,”¹ empowered a new wave of writers and artists who saw the end of the war as the ideal opportunity for social rebirth.

For Abe, who was already physically detached from his homeland, the instability of the idea of Japan embodied the existentialist struggle that was taking place universally in modern society. Abe’s relationship with the three locations of his childhood, therefore, provided the inspiration the ever-fluctuating environments of his novels and capture modern man’s struggle to reconcile cultural, philosophical, and geographical instability. Abe’s Manchurian experience was also what attracted him to the expressive freedom and idealism of Hanada Kiyoteru’s writing group, *Yoru no kai*, where he formulated his literary voice and philosophy. The works he produced during this time provided an international audience to him and the confidence to reach beyond the boundaries of his art and his nationality.

Abe’s subsequent renouncement of the Japanese Communist Party, and his shift in philosophy from community to the individual as the source of identity and freedom in modernity, allowed him to enter a new phase of writing in the 1960s. Untethered by ideology or agenda, Abe Kōbō produced his most definitive literary works, which embraced modern man’s struggle against the futility of his own existence. As Abe said in his essay, “*A Journey through the Wormhole of the Earth*,”

It goes without saying that culture itself is powerless. No matter how much it regrets the existence of walls, it is inconceivable that countries will ever tear them down. I am not an optimist on that point. Although the contradiction of the earth is in itself culturally desirable, it is hard for me to accept present conditions without a struggle.²

Whereas Marxism looks to the past for a re-unification with a communal identity lost in industrial society, Abe’s work of the 1960s explores the periphery of postmodern art and

¹ Watanabe Hiroshi, *Abe Kōbō* (Tōkyō: Shinchōsa, 1976), 59-60, quoted in Iles, 313.

² Abe, “Journey through a Wormhole in the Earth,” 43.

philosophy in search of a new identity that can both reconcile the reality of modern society, and work toward an uncompromised communication with the “other.”

Abe’s philosophical departure from Marxism is instilled in the subtext of *Suna no onna* (1962, tr., *The Woman in the Dunes*, 1964), as his protagonist confronts the agrarian community of the dunes. Tainted by the memory and experience of his life in the “city,” the protagonist is cut off from the communal identity of his primitive past and left to forge his own identity as an individual, free from the confines and expectations of both the “city” and the desert community. It is clear, however, that individualism is only a starting point for Abe, as the protagonist is still left symbolically unable to communicate with the “other,” embodied in the woman of the dunes.

Abe explores the nature of modern identity itself in *Tanin no kao* (1964, tr., *The Face of Another*, 1966). When it is considered that the keloidal scars that the man suffers are common to victims of radiation exposure, the man’s loss of face becomes symbolic of both the internal struggle for identity in post-World War II Japan, and the universal struggle for regained identity lost as a result of the breakdown in communication among nations in the nuclear age. Bearing the mark of modernity, the protagonist experiments with various identities through his homemade mask, but in the end, he slips further and further away from his essential “self.” As the protagonist contemplates, “I had made the mask for the purpose of recovering myself. But it had willfully escaped from me and, taking great pleasure in its evasion, had become defiant.”³ Therefore, it is through the mask, the false identities of modernity that humanity becomes detached from its essential identity.

In *Moetsukita chizu* (1967, tr., *The Ruined Map*, 1969), the idea of a ruined map comes to symbolize the unreliability of traditional modes of understanding to find meaning in

³ Abe, *The Face of Another*, 209.

modern society. As Abe once stated, "Compared with feudalistic society of the middle ages, we now have an open society. But in another sense we have made for ourselves a cage."⁴ Trapped in outdated identities and fettered to the false ideology of the modern city, Abe's characters stumble through their lives, desperately grasping for meaning. In the end of the novel, the detective protagonist frees himself from this ideology and becomes the missing man for whom he is searching. He becomes detached, yet whole; simultaneously apart from and a part of modernity.

The move to the "outside" that gives Abe's protagonists a perspective from which to examine their environment, mimics Abe's own outsider status in Japanese literature that stemmed from his upbringing in the impermanent culture of occupied Manchuria. In many ways, Abe functioned as a detective himself, reporting on the shifting trends in philosophy and art that defined and redefined the avant-garde as it evolved from a modern into a postmodern examination of industrial society. As an integral player in the avant-garde art movement, Abe's work both reflected and inspired the cutting edge of the avant-garde exploration of the human condition in modern society. Unlike other Japanese authors, artists, and philosophers of the time, however, Abe's work of the 1960s established the self-proclaimed "man without a hometown" as the universal voice of the individual and modernity.

The work of Abe Kōbō in the 1960s reflects a crucial period in Japan's history as the nation transitioned from its humbling defeat in World War II, to its role as a level player on the global economic stage. As Japan's economy became more industrial and international, so did the existential experience of its inhabitants. No longer could Japan look only inward and to the past for the source of its identity in post-World War II society. Much like Abe's

⁴ Hardin, 450.

protagonists, Japan had to also look outward to examine the issues that confronted humanity in an industrialized and global community.

The sustained popularity of Abe's works in a myriad of translations attests to the universal appeal of the existential crises of his novels' inhabitants. Abe's use of medical knowledge to inform the pseudo-scientific symbolism of his absurdist literary landscapes has also earned him recognition as one of the founding fathers of contemporary Japanese science fiction. Abe's works and philosophy have been cited as important influences on contemporary Japanese authors, including Murakami Haruki 村上 春樹 (1949-) and Masaki Gorō 梶 悟郎 (1957-).

Although, at first glance, Abe's work of the 1960s seems nihilistic and mired in existentialist dread, it is ultimately a hopeful literature that looks to dismantle a cultural and political ideology dependent on the reproduction of functionless identities through the use of candid examinations of the human condition in modern society. During the 1960s, Abe abandoned his philosophical dependence on Marxism that looked to the communal past to reunite the individual with his or her identity, in search of new and individualistic identities that function within a modern context. To this end, Abe's works of this period are characterized by characters attempting to free themselves from the confines of oppressive societal ideologies that are reinforced by national boundaries. Abe's nameless protagonists and universal themes set the standard for Japanese literature that will not be confined by boundaries on an outdated map.

Appendix 1

A Partial Translation of the Screenplay for the Film, *Otoshiana*

Otoshiana おとし穴 [The pitfall]

A Screenplay Written by

Abe Kōbō

1962

CAST

Mr. A, a coal miner¹
His Son
His Friend, Mr. B
Mr. X
Union Chief at Post II
Assistant Union Chief at Post I
The Woman from the Candy Store
Farmer
Policeman
Reporter
Cameraman
Landlord of the Labor Lodging
The Landlady
Strange Man (Ghost)
Union Officer at Union Post II
Union Employee at Union Post II

¹ In the original screenplay, Abe refers to "Mr. A," "Mr. B," and "Mr. X" as "A," "B," and "X." I have taken the liberty of adding Mr. to ease confusion in the English translation.

A COAL MINING TOWN AT NIGHT

In the corner, a door opens and Mr. A exits with his son. They look around cautiously and walk out. They walk to the edge of the coal mining town. They hide, then, suddenly rush out under the street light. They assess their surroundings then run out to the left.

THE ROAD

Mr. A and his son come running out from the darkness. The headlight of a bicycle slowly approaches them. Mr. A and his son run back and hide themselves. The bicycle's headlight fills the frame.

THE TRACKS NEAR LOCAL TRAIN STATION

The father and child run down from an embankment. Mr. B is waiting in the shadows, behind an abandoned mine. The father and child hand their belongings to Mr. B. The boy is carried over a puddle as they look toward the station. The three people race away along the tracks.

IN FRONT OF A MINE ENTRANCE IN A WOODED AREA

Mr. A comes out of the mine entrance where he is filling a basket with dirt. He throws the dirt from the filled basket outside of the mine. Mr. A returns to the hole again. Close by, the boy is playing with clay and searching for clay in the discarded soil. Mr. A comes out of the mine.

MR. A

Here you are!
(while pitching the soil)

The boy brings the soil back to where he is playing. He pounds it and begins to play with it. The face of the boy is shown, he is spitting. An old farmer brings a lunch basket and kettle and calls out to the boy.

THE FARMER

Hey, what are you making?

The farmer comes to the front of the hole and puts down the basket and kettle. He yells down into the hole.

THE FARMER

Hey, it's meal time.
Won't you get some food?

MR. A AND MR. B

(from inside the pit)
Yes, let's go now.

THE FARMER

Boy, it's hot, isn't it?

The boy is kneading the clay, he raises his face suddenly. There is a graveyard in the background. As the boy approaches the graveyard, Mr. X can be seen among the gravestones. The boy's stares intensely. Mr. A and Mr. B come out of the pit.

MR. B

Hot, hot, huh?

MR. A

Very soon we'll break our backs on the bedrock.

FARMER

Suddenly, my dreams have come true...

MR. A

Ahh, I'm starting to believe it, ah, the soil is getting sticky.

MR. B

Mmmm...Uh huh....

THE FARMER

(stepping forward)
Is it sticky?

MR. A

It's like sticky, and dry. I can feel it.

THE FARMER

Oh, it is...ha ha ha.

MR. B

There's charcoal coming out, suddenly
you've become the owner of coal mine, eh?
Ha ha ha.

THE FARMER

Ha ha ha.....
you're not kidding, eh?.....
ha ha ha.....

Mr. A clutches some dirt and holds it, then pushes it to the farmer's nose

MR. A

Here!

THE FARMER

(with surprise)
What is it?

MR. A

How does it smell? It smells like charcoal,
don't you think?

The farmer smells the clod of dirt

FARMER

Ha ha ha.

The farmer enters the hole. A & B watch and exchange mocking laughs.

MR. B

Ha ha ha.

Mr. A and Mr. B move to the entrance of the mine

MR. B

Ahh, it's meal time.

At the mouth of the mine, the men sit down on a log lying sideways

MR. A

(to the boy)

Hey, why don't you come here?

The boy comes.

MR. A

Wash your hands.

The boy goes to wash his hands. Mr. A and Mr. B eat their rice balls voraciously.

MR. A

Ahh...white rice is good isn't it?

THE FARMER

Laughing, Yes! However, working only for your meals is bad.

MR. A

Don't worry.

MR. B

At any rate, I am not working now anyway.

MR. A

If I got paid, but the coal didn't come out, then I'd be responsible. Don't you think so?

FARMER

Ha ha ha.

MR. A

(to the child)
Do you want tea?

Shielded from view by the grave stones, Mr. X aims and takes a photo. He turns back and leaves the graveyard.

INSIDE THE SHED (AT NIGHT)

Mr. B is lying on his side on the straw

MR. B

Are you going to leave tomorrow morning?

The boy is sleeping in the corner. Mr. A is repairing the basket.

MR. A

Ahh, I will take the first bus tomorrow.

MR. B'S VOICE

Where are you headed?

MR. A

I am going to the labor lodging. Yeah, somehow I will be able to manage there.

MR. B'S VOICE

Ah, I don't think that old farmer has realized yet.

MR. A

Anyhow, this is a ghastly place. The important thing in an escape is timing.

MR. B

Yeah, I hear you.

MR. A'S VOICE

Around here, they have professionals who hunt down those who escape.

MR. B

You're right...
(*looking away*)

A dog starts sniffing around Mr. B's feet. Mr. B suddenly kicks it away.

MR. B

Filthy beast!

The dog runs away and Mr. B stands up.

MR. A'S VOICE

There's no reason to kick the dog out!

MR. B

What do you mean?.....

Again, he lies down and rests.

MR. A'S VOICE

You should have caught the dog, and we could have made a dog stew. That would have been great...

MR. B

What? (*Mr. B stands-up*) You should have told me earlier...hey, poochie, come here, come here, come here...

Mr. B goes out. Mr. A watches him go off.

MR. B'S VOICE

Oh no, the dog ran off.

Again Mr. B lays down to rest.

MR. A

Hmm, dogs and coalminers are the same; the ones who run away are the winners. *(sighs)*

Mr. A lays his jacket down flat. Mr. A opens his eyes wide and lies down.

MR. A'S VOICE

Even if I escape this, eventually I'll end up in the same situation.

A coal car filled with coal dust is moving towards him dropping dust. The coal dust is falling...

MR. B

Yeah, this trip to Hell is worse than the last. We all know too well that we're like animals chasing the bait attached to the spike of a nail. Jumping at the 1000 yen advanced payment ---only to drop to the bottom of Hell in a tailspin.

By the light of the lamp, a man digging coal appears on the right. A coal car passes through a tunnel entrance. Clumps of shoveled earth are shown in a bamboo basket. A child whose stomach has expanded strangely because of malnutrition is shown. He is sitting in front of a coal miner's house with a distant expression. Inside the desolated miner's house, there is a man washing in the kitchen. There has been a death caused by cave-in at the mine. A close up of the corpse. People are carrying the bodies of the injured. A family is crying. The coal slag heap's fire is burning, like a scene from hell. [Mr. A's] boy is soundly sleeping on the straw.

MR. A'S VOICE

In the next life, what kind of person do you want to become?

MR. B'S VOICE

Well, I don't like this kind of life. For this kind of life, once is enough.

Mr. B is now lying down.

MR. A'S VOICE

I, (*camera moves in on Mr. A*) however,
want to work in the labor union.

MR. B'S VOICE

The labor union?

MR. A

Yeah, I want to insist that our demands be
met and see them comes to pass. I want to
surprise the boss.

MR. B'S VOICE

Yeah, I am better cut out to be a demon.

MR. A

A demon?

Camera moves to Mr. B.

MR. B

Yeah, reincarnated as a demon----, anyway,
we're in Hell, so it's better to be a demon if
we're going to live in Hell.

MR. A'S VOICE

Yeah, I agree--

Camera moves to Mr. A.

--the demon is a better choice.

Mr. A falls asleep. In the next scene, Mr. A's double appears.

OUTSIDE THE SHED (AT DAWN)

Mr. A and Mr. B, accompanied by the boy, come out of the shed carrying a package. They conceal their footprints. They climb up the side of the wall and throw over their belongings. They climb over the wall.

ON THE BUS

A swaying earthen teapot is shown. Mr. B is sleeping. There is a lamp shown swaying. The conductor approaches the boy and offers him a caramel.

THE CONDUCTOR

Hey kid, caramel?.....here you go, hey....

The boy refuses and moves to the back of the bus. The conductor glares in disgust. The child stares out the window. Mr. B is looking outside, stretching.

MR. B

Hey, hey, hey!!

MR. A'S VOICE

Whaaa?

Outside the window, a billboard goes by that reads, "Taking applications for laborers."

MR. B

Hey, that was a labor recruitment billboard!

INSIDE OF THE LABOR LODGINGS

The landlady is reading a magazine. Some men are having a meal. Some men are playing Japanese cards.

A MAN'S VOICE

Well boss, can you help me... that place requires such hard work. I cannot wait any longer.

FOREMAN'S VOICE

You guys be patient.....
(on the phone) Hello? Yes, it is, sir.....
 Yes, Marusan Warehouse at 8 o'clock, yes,
 thank you.....

Many young men are entering the lodging. They sit down near the feet of the landlady and look up. The landlady yells and kicks.

FOREMAN'S VOICE

Hey!

THE YOUNG WORKER

Yes!

FOREMAN'S VOICE

I need 13 guys for loading and unloading at
 Marusan Warehouse, 8 o'clock.

THE WORKER'S VOICE

Thirteen for loading and unloading, Marusan
 Warehouse at 8 o'clock, hey, you, old man,
 you, you, and three people from there.....

Mr. A and Mr. B are standing at the entrance looking inside absent mindedly. The camera pans across to the other men eating. Mr. A and Mr. B notice a man taking off his dark glasses to rub his eyes.

THE MAN

If you each stand there like telephone poles,
 A dog might piss and scratch on you.

Everyone is holding their sides with laughter. Mr. A and Mr. B enter, timidly.

FOREMAN

.....newcomers, are you?

The landlady and foreman approach.

THE LANDLADY

Unfortunately, this is a full house.....

FOREMAN

Did you guys come down from the mountains?

MR. A AND MR. B

.....

FOREMAN

Of course you have your migration cards, right?

MR. A

No.....

FOREMAN

Ha ha ha. It's carefree for you without such things.

MR. A

Really?

FOREMAN

Let's jump.

He jumps up himself so they can see. Mr. A and Mr. B look at each other, nod and then jump. Everyone bursts out laughing. The landlady laughs out loud.

FOREMAN

All right, enough. You're healthy enough to survive. We'll hire you.

WORKER'S VOICE

Hey!

THE HARBOR PORT

The harbor locale is shown. Dockworkers are shown. Workmen are crossing a narrow bridge on foot. The laborers are transporting coal dust. Mr. A. is carrying some, too. Mr. A and Mr. B go back and forth across the bridge to a ship. Two men approach a supervisor and stop to meet him. The two men say something to the supervisor. The supervisor nods. Many laborers go back and forth across the bridge; one of the laborer's faces can be seen as he returns. He tosses his basket in the air suddenly and runs away. Two men follow him. He is caught immediately, but still struggles to escape. Mr. A and Mr. B watch him pass by.

MR. A

What happened, what was that?

ANOTHER WORKER

A runaway.

Mr. A and Mr. B glance at each other, and then look down uneasily.

IN TOWN

The boy is walking in the busy street. Mr. X quickly approaches on a scooter. The boy is frightened and hides. Mr. X continues on his way.

ANOTHER TOWN

Mr. X passes by on his scooter

2

INSIDE THE LABOR LODGINGS

The laborers line up at the cashier's window and receive their earnings from the foreman. The foreman announces their wages.

FOREMAN

....next, 280 yen....next, 300 yen....next,
250 yen....

The foreman looks at Mr. A as he receives his pay

FOREMAN

Hey, ... hey, you.

MR. A

(uneasily) Are you talking to me?

FOREMAN

Yes, yes, buddy, just come here a minute.

MR. A

What is it?

The foreman shows Mr. A a photograph when he comes out from the cashier's office.

FOREMAN

Hey, buddy, is this a picture of you?

Mr. A takes the photo and looks unhappy as his eyes meet Mr. B's.

MR. A

Yes, this is me, but I can't imagine why my picture is here...

FOREMAN

There is no need to worry; I have a job for you. *(taking out a scrap of paper)* Here is a map to the address, follow the map. I'll call them in advance.

MR. A

(Looking at the paper very strangely) This seems very weird....

MR. B

(Trying to cheer him up) Don't worry, you got a job, don't complain about it.

FOREMAN'S VOICE

Yes, yes, you are a lucky guy...

Mr. A looks at the map with an expression of disbelief. The frame becomes dark. The ruins of a coal mine can be seen. A shot of the slag heap of the abandoned mine. Mr. A's backpack. An earthen teapot is swaying. The boy is walking energetically. The father and son proceed along the ridge of the mountain where the coal mine is.

MR. A

Ha ha ha, a job, a job.....ha ha ha, I am healthy.....ha ha ha

The strange shape of the abandoned coal mine mountain can be seen.

THE RUINS OF THE COAL MINE

Mr. A and the boy stand before an empty street of row houses staring at the map. Discarded shoes are shown inside one of the dilapidated houses. A crumbling wall is shown. Mr. A turns toward the crumbling wall and can see through to the other side... Mr. A walks through.

MR. A

Is anybody here?.....Hello?.....Hello? Is anyone here?

A snake is shown crawling on the dried ground. There is a deathlike silence. The boy runs through the main street. Mr. A starts to run and looks around the town, crying out.

MR. A

Hey! Is anyone here?

There is silence around the abandoned coal mine

MR. A'S VOICE

.....Hey! Is anyone here?

Mr. X is standing in the brush. Mr. A continues to walk through the row houses with an uneasy expression. There is a girl's face in a collage. The scrap of paper comes loose and glistens in the wind, the boy comes running out. At a Mom and Pop candy store, the sliding window is half closed. Clothes drying in the backyard can be seen. Both Mr. A and the boy notice them.

INSIDE THE CANDY STORE

In the deserted tatami room, there is a woman sitting with her back turned, making some kind of hand movements. The woman picks up an ant and carries it to a bowl filled with water. An ant can be seen struggling on top of the water in the bowl. The woman is performing this task as she daydreams. Her expression is distant.

MR. A'S VOICE

....Excuse me, is someone there?

The woman face suddenly changes and she turns around.

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

It's the mail!

Mr. A comes in through the entrance.

MR. A

Ah, lady, that's good....excuse me, but could I ask you a question about these directions?

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

(dejectedly) Oh, it's not the mail, huh?

The woman gets up.

MR. A

Well, the fact is that I have a question about a location.....

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

(taking the map) Ahh, that's strange.

The woman goes outside and looks around.

Well, from here you should go this way.....

The boy is gazing at the various candies in front of the store. The cheap sweets are lined up in the front of the store. Caramels are shown. Toy masks are shown. The boy is shown as he looks over the selection of sweets.

MR. A'S VOICE

Ah, I was thinking the same thing...According to this map it's a straight road. The direction is that way...

Mr. A is looking at the coal mine.

MR. A

This place is totally dead.

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

The mine is closed. There was a worry that it might collapse. It was too much of a risk, so every one ran off in the night.

The boy is running his finger over the sweets

MR. A

Oh.

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE'S VOICE

You know, thanks to them I'm left with
7,000 yen in bad debt.

MR. A'S VOICE

That's unfortunate.

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE'S VOICE

I'll say it was unfortunate!

MR. A

You don't have anywhere else you can go?

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

Yeah, ha ha ha. I'm not a stray dog. Without
a place to settle down, I can't leave here.
One of these days an acquaintance of mine
will send for me and we'll settle down. Ha
ha ha.

MR. A

Oh, splendid. Well, we have to get going.

Mr. A glances over at the boy running his fingertips over the caramels.

MR. A

Thank you for your trouble.

Mr. A takes the map, and approaches the child. Mr. A grabs the hand of the boy who is
about to steal a sweet

MR. A'S VOICE

Don't do that!

The boy drops the caramel. Mr. A's hand is shown picking it up. He dusts the candy off,
and it puts it back on the stand. The feet of the boy running away are shown. Mr. A
begins to take a ten yen coin from his pocket, picks up his things, and looks awkwardly at
the woman. He takes the candy and puts the coin on the stand. He picks up the candy.

MR. A

Well, thanks!

Mr. A bows to the woman, and begins to walk quickly. The woman enters the shop slowly so she can see the man leave. She takes the ten yen piece as she enters.

THE PATH TO THE CRATER LAKE

Mr. A walks as he searches for the boy. He stops, and looks around.

MR. A

Hey!!!

A muddy lake is shown. The candy store can be seen in the distance. The boy is watching a frog in the marsh. The boy catches it. The boy dashes the frog to the ground, picks it up, and peels off its skin. The hand of the boy peeling off the frog's skin is shown. The face of the boy, ardently peeling off the skin, is shown. A shot of Mr. A's feet as he walks. A shot of Mr. A's hand as he puts the caramel in his pants pocket. Mr. A is traipsing through the grasses in the marsh. Suddenly, behind Mr. A, Mr. X is shown elbowing his way through the grasses. Mr. A is being followed at a distance by Mr. X. Mr. X is hidden in the grass, and then he is behind him. Mr. A continues walking carefree as he cannot see Mr. X even though he looks around and in the grasses occasionally. Suddenly, Mr. X is noticed, however, when Mr. A stops, Mr. X stops too. Mr. A keeps walking. As Mr. A becomes more nervous he begins to walk faster. Mr. X keeps the pace as he takes his gloves out of his bag and puts them on. Next, Mr. X takes out a knife and extends the blade. Mr. A runs in fear, but Mr. X subdues him and stabs him in the stomach.

MR. A

AAAAH!!

Mr. A bends backwards. He runs away from Mr. X staggering. Mr. A staggers into the grasses, short of breath. Mr. X grabs the knife and approaches.

INSIDE THE CANDY STORE

The woman is swatting at a fly. Suddenly, she collapses on the floor.

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

Why doesn't he send me a letter? I wonder
if he's making a fool of me.

The figure of the woman's back is shown.

MR. A

(Screaming)

The woman is startled and gets up. She approaches the window and looks out through a crevice in the bamboo screen.

NEAR THE CRATER LAKE

Mr. A is holding his head as he creeps along in the swamp, turning around, glaring at the back, and staggering. Slowly, Mr. X approaches Mr. A and raises the knife ——
—— He stabs Mr. A in the back violently. Mr. A suddenly stands up and begins to run while screaming. He falls, motionless. The boy watches from the tall grasses. The boy's face is shown. Mr. X approaches the corpse and throws the knife in the swamp water. The water ripples out. Mr. X returns to the corpse, walks around it, and stops. Mr. X checks his wristwatch, takes his gloves off, and it puts them in his bag. Mr. X then takes the folded map from the dead man's pants pocket, unfolds it and looks at it, refolds it and puts it in his vest pocket. He looks around. Blood is shown flowing from the wound on Mr. A's back.

INSIDE THE CANDY STORE

The woman moves from the window to the middle of the house when she hears the sound of a scooter approaching. Mr. X appears on his scooter and stops in front of the house. Mr. X gets off the scooter and takes his bag from the luggage compartment. He approaches the entrance. The woman tries to catch her breath, but she is startled when Mr. X walks up and stands at the entrance. Mr. X stands at the entrance where he opens the clasp on his bag. The toys move eerily in the breeze.

VOICE OF MR. X

Ma'am, you saw it, didn't you?

The face of Mr. X is obscured by the window curtain.

VOICE OF MR. X

.....It's ok, it doesn't matter.....

The woman moves the tip of her finger unconsciously. Mr. X looks at her intensely and very deliberately begins to take a bunch of thousand yen bills from his pocket. Five bundles of 20 bills each are counted, and he stops. Mr. X looks at the woman a moment and gives a faint smile. He puts the five remaining bundles of bills in his jacket pocket. He pulls out a handkerchief from his breast pocket, and grabs a shoe, putting it on the bundle of bills.

Sweat beads and drips from the woman's jaw. She is racked with fear.

MR. X

.....Just one thing, the fact is that I'd like your cooperation.....if the police should enquire, could you please tell them this story—

The slag heap is shown. A cloud gradually moves in and covers the entire mountain in darkness

VOICE OF MR. X

--of course, the criminal was a miner.
He wore workman's rubber soled tabi shoes.

The criminal threw the knife into the marsh.
 Then he threatened my life if I were to say
 anything. Then he went north in a hurry.
 After that, the criminal looked 35 or 36 with
 a round face and a bald spot above his right
 ear

Mr. X that watches the woman.

MR. X

That's the way it happened, right Ma'am?

The woman turns and gives him a bittersweet smile. Mr. X watches the woman, and grins widely. However, his former expression returns immediately. He takes off the damp tabi shoes and zippers them in his bag. Outside the house he takes off his hat. {His head is round and his hair is cropped short} He knocks of the dust.

The woman is sitting, her body is stiff. The footsteps of Mr. X get further away. Mr. X gets on his scooter and passes the house, the sound goes away quickly. —— The woman stands up and goes outside. She turns to the marsh side, and looks out in the direction from which Mr. X disappeared —— She rushes back to the entrance. She sees the bundle of bills, she approaches them slowly, she grabs the bundle and it pushes it to her bosom.

IN THE MARSH

The boy's skinless frog hangs by a string on a bamboo rod, swaying

NEAR THE LAKE WHERE MR. A'S CORPSE IS LAYING

The stretched out corpse slowly rises. Mr. A has become a ghost bearing a death-like facial expression, staring intently at his own dead body.

MR. A

.....can I really be dead?...

Both of Mr. A's hands are outstretched, and he attempts to hold his hands to his face.....next he grabs his wrists and examines them. The streak of blood coming from his neck confirms that wound is in the back. He sees the tabi footprints on the ground. He shows great anger as he looks around.

MR. A

Where did he go? What did he have against me? Why did he do it?

The dead body. The tracks of the work shoes. Mr. A looks around and then leaves.

ON THE ROAD NEAR THE COAL MINE

The empty street of row houses is shown. People suddenly appear in front of the row houses. An old woman is leaning against a wall, and a child is playing. Mr. A watches. He begins to walk along asking for help. There is an old man acting as though he is splitting rocks.

MR. A

Old-timer, did you see a man around here wearing white gloves?

The old man doesn't acknowledge him, and the old man continues his action in silence. Mr. A calls out to the woman who is performing a cleaning action.

MR. A

Hey!

The woman doesn't answer either. Mr. A begins walking again. He calls out to the child.

MR. A

Hey, little one!

The child also raises his eyes by chance, but no more reaction is shown. In a panic, Mr. A runs to the candy store.

INSIDE THE CANDY SHOP

Behind half a shutter the woman can be seen in the dim room thrusting her hand inside a can. She gets irritated and dumps the can out. A bundle of bills is mixed in with the peanuts. She grabs it, shuts the kitchen door in Mr. A's face and climbs the ladder to the ceiling.

MR. A'S VOICE

.....Hey, Ma'am.....Did you see a guy wearing white gloves?

The woman comes back down the ladder and puts a bundle of bills inside a brown chest.

MR. A

.....Can't you hear what I'm saying?.....

The woman puts the tea canister away quickly.

MR. A

What happened?

The woman sits down in the room.

MR. A

.....Ha ha...well, you can't hear me very well.....I suppose not, I'm a dead person. The living can't hear the voices of ghosts.

The woman opens the closet and takes out the tea canister.

MR. A

She can't hear my voice, or see me?

The woman approaches the window and looks out toward the marsh. She frowns. Mr. A brings his face close to woman. The woman looks towards the entrance. Mr. A looks right into her face. Mr. A and the woman face each other directly. The woman continues to search for a hiding place beneath the floor. Mr. A is squatting down and extremely distraught.

MR. A

Ha ha, you can't see me. If I was living it would be easy, but I'm dead. This is truly unbearable....Hey, lady!

IN THE CRATER LAKE

The boy runs from the grassy thicket towards the corpse in the swamp. The boy stands near the body, squatting down bedside it and examining the face of the corpse. Mr. A comes from the other side of marsh.

MR. A

Hey, your father is dead!

The boy, slowly walks around the corpse, and reaches his hand in his father's pocket to take out the caramel.

MR. A

....Don't worry, don't worry, it's paid
for.....

The boy peels off the wrapper and puts the candy in his mouth, staring at the corpse without expression. Suddenly in the boy looks up and sees the woman running from the candy shop. Mr. A turns around and heads for the candy shop.

MR. A

.....Yes, let's wait then.

The woman begins to run down the street. Mr. A suddenly stops walking. The woman is running between the tenement houses among the ghost residents that appeared suddenly. Mr. A looks puzzled.

MR. A

What happened to these people?

Mr. A chases after the woman. The woman is running and breathing heavily. In the ghost town, Mr. A chases after the woman and reaches up to her. He tries to talk to her, but she doesn't hear him.

INSIDE THE CANDY SHOP

The boy is standing at the storefront pushing candies into his mouth, and into his pocket.

INSIDE THE POLICE BOX

The woman calms down and begins to explain to the policeman. The policeman is taking a memo.

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

Yes, he had a round face. And he was balding here.

THE POLICEMAN

Bald?

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

Yes!

THE POLICEMAN

(he tries to write, but hesitates, moving to the right then the left)....on the right side....
About how big?

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

What? Well, more like this size. Yes, yes.

Mr. A is standing at the entrance the whole while.

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE'S VOICE

His clothes were like a coal miner's

THE POLICEMAN'S VOICE

Hmmm, he probably got in a fight with his co-workers.

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

Yes.

MR. A

You beast! Why are you lying?

The policeman takes a memo.

THE POLICEMAN'S VOICE

.....A coalminer dispute?.....

After writing, the policeman puts the pen down and stands up.

THE POLICEMAN

Ok, give me the full report later..... (*to the other room*) Shut up in there, it's really annoying.

POLICEMAN'S WIFE'S VOICE

I'm really busy, don't push me!

The policeman picks up the telephone receiver in front of the woman.

THE POLICEMAN

.....You didn't touch the dead body, did you?

THE WOMAN FROM THE CANDY STORE

Of course not!

THE POLICEMAN

With confidence, he picks up the phone and talks calmly.

Hello. We've got a murder. Yes, I'll make a report.

Appendix 2

Glossary

Works of Abe Kōbō 安部公房 (1924-1993)

<i>Dendorokakariya</i>	デンドロカカリヤ	[Dendrocacalia], 1949	Short Story
<i>Kabe</i>	壁	[The wall] 1951	Collected Short Stories
<i>Kemonotachi wa Kokyō wo Mezasu</i>	けものたちは故郷をめざす	[Beasts aim for home], 1957	Novel
<i>Moetsukita chizu</i>	燃えつきた地図	1967, tr., <i>The Ruined Map</i> , 1969	Novel
<i>Otoshiana</i>	おとし穴	[The pitfall], 1962	Screenplay
<i>Owarishi Michi no Shirube ni</i>	終りし道の標に	[The sign at the end of the road] 1948	Novel
<i>Suna no onna</i>	砂の女	1962, tr., <i>The Woman in the Dunes</i> , 1964	Novel
<i>Tanin no kao</i>	他人の顔	1964, tr., <i>The Face of Another</i> , 1966	Novel

Works of Others

Don fon ron	ドンフォン論	[On Don Juan]	Hanada Kiyoteru
Midori-iro no taiyō	緑色の太陽	1910, tr., "The Green Sun"	Takamura Kōtarō
Shōsetsu shinzui	小説神髓	1885-6, tr. <i>The Essence of the Novel</i> , 1981	Tsubouchi Shōyō

Japanese Figures

Abe Neri	安部 ねり	(1954-)	Abe's Daughter
Fukuzawa Ichirō	福沢 一郎	(1898-1992)	Surrealist Painter
Hanada Kiyoteru	花田 清輝	(1909-1974)	Author

Kanbara Tai	神原 泰	(1898-1997)	Futurist Artist
Murakami Haruki	村上 春樹	(1949-)	Author
Mishima Yukio	三島 由紀夫	(1925-1970)	Author
Hariu Ichirō	針生 一郎	(1925-)	Literary Critic
Teshigahara Hiroshi	勅使河原 宏	(1927-2001)	Director
Kawabata Yasunari	川端 康成	(1899-1972)	Author
Natsume Sōseki	夏目 漱石	(1867-1916)	Author
Takamura Kōtarō	高村 光太郎	(1883-1956)	Avant-garde Artist
Takiguchi Shūzō	瀧口 修造	(1903-1979)	Surrealist Painter
Tokuda Kyūichi	徳田 球一	(1894-1953)	First Chairman, Japanese Communist Party
Tsubouchi Shōyō	坪内 逍遙	(1859-1935)	Author
Yanagi Muneyoshi aka Sōetsu	柳 宗悦	(1889-1961)	Philosopher
Yamada Machiko	山田 真知子	(1926-1993)	Abe's Wife
Yoshihara Jirō	吉原 治良	(1905-1972)	Gutai Founder

Terms

Daitōa kyōeiken	大東亜共栄圏	Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere	
Gutai bijutsu kyōkai	具体美術協会	Gutai Art Group	
Kōbutsushugi	鉱物主義	Mineralism	
Manatsu no taiyō ni idomu modan āto yagaijikken ten	真夏の太陽に挑む モダンアート野外実験展	Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-Summer Sun	1955 Gutai Art Exhibition
Meiji jidai	明治時代	Meiji Period	1868-1912
Mingei	民芸	folk craft	

Mono no aware	物の哀れ	the sadness of things	
Nihon bankoku hakuran kai '70	日本万国博覧会	Japan World Exposition '70	
Rinjin	隣人	neighbors	
Shishōsetsu	私小説	I-novel	
Shōwa jidai	昭和時代	Shōwa Period	1926-1989
Taishō jidai	大正時代	Taishō Period	1912-1926
Tanin	他人	strangers	
Yoru no kai	夜の会	Night Assembly	
Zen'ei bijutsu	前衛美術	Avant-garde art	

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