Metafiction and Masculinities in Abe Kazushige's 90s Fiction

Inaugural-Dissertation
zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde der
Philosophischen Fakultät der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität
Heidelberg

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Heidelberg, im Dezember 2018

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Prof. Judit Árokay for inviting me to follow her to Heidelberg and for her kind feedback and support over the years. Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Brett de Bary for generously taking me under her wing during my research stay at Cornell University and after.

Many thanks also go out to my 'third and fourth advisors' Anna Andreeva and Jule Nowoitnick who have been extremely selfless with their time and a constant source of encouragement.

These last three years of my Ph.D. were funded by a DFG-scholarship from Heidelberg University's Cluster 'Asia and Europe in a Global Context'. I would like to express my gratitude to the Cluster for enabling me to complete my dissertation in a most supportive and intellectually stimulating environment.

A DFG-scholarship from the Cluster 'Languages of Emotion' from the Free University of Berlin funded the beginning of my Ph.D. I would especially like to thank Prof. Irene Albers and Prof. Hilge Landwehr for being very generous with advice and assistance at the time. Moreover, I thank Prof. Matthew Königsberg for supporting my work in these early stages.

My research stay at Cornell University was funded by a scholarship from the Berlin Consortium for German Studies. My year in Ithaca has enabled me to absorb meaningful impulses in all the seminars and lectures I attended. I would like to express my gratitude to Cornell University for making my stay so memorable.

Abe Kazushige has generously agreed to give me the publishing rights for my English translation of his film criticism "Licence to Kill" and has provided kind feedback on my work. Tokiwa Hibiki has kindly allowed me to use use his photographs.

Moreover, I have many friends and colleagues to thank for companionship and collaboration during my Ph.D.

Seth Jacobowitz was greatly generous with imparting his knowledge on Abe Kazushige at a time when there was no research in English available on him and very few translations. Our subsequent joint discussions with Anne McKnight and Jason Herlands on the author were also very insightful. Michael Emmerich kindly provided me with the contact to Abe Kazushige's agent. Prof. Reinold Ophüls-Kashima, Prof.

Kōno Shion, Prof. Tsukahara Fumi, Prof. Ono Masatsugu and Prof. Karatani Kōjin have taken the time to exchange with me on my work during my fieldwork stays in Tōkyō and given me valuable advice. The organizers of the EAJS Doctoral Workshop in 2015 and the BAJS Translation Workshop in 2016 have provided me with important opportunities for discussing early work on my dissertation with international experts. The MA seminar on 'Entangled Literatures', which I co-organized with Jan Scholz, Max Stille and Faryaneh Fadaeiresketi, proved a source of weekly inspiration and I thank my colleagues and the students of the seminar for enriching discussions. Ralf Müller has been very generous with providing me with a supportive work schedule in the last two months of completion. Norma Kleen-Lewis has kindly and meticulously proofread dissertation chapters and applications and hosted extraordinary breaks.

Heartfelt thanks further go out to my *sempai* Barbara Geilhorn, Kristina Iwata-Weickgennant and Gitte Marianne Hansen as well as to my peers Inga Anderson, Nora Bartels, Tara Beany, Kathrin Bethke, Sara Blumenthal, Daniela Cappello, Laura Coppens, Roman Ebel, Andi Eichleter, Christoph Groß, Kholoud Hussein, Tamara Kamerer, Bernd Kirchner, Judith Knippschild, Tina Lange, Tarik Merida, Peter Mühleder, Egas Moniz Bandeira, Hannah Osborne, Florian Purkarthofer, Viktoria Räuchle, Martin Rathmann, Katharina Rode, Swetlana Torno, Aditya Vaidyanathan, Matthias Wittig, Till Weingärtner and Vicky Young for input, inspiration and exchange.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their comfort and support over the years. This dissertation is theirs, too, which is why I dedicate it to them with love.

Heidelberg, December 2018

Abstract

Eclectic in style and elusive in genre, Abe Kazushige's 90s fiction defies categorization. My dissertation situates the author's novels and short stories published until 1999 within what it considers to be a global field of postmodernist poetics and politics since the late 1970s. It uses the term *écriture* to indicate the deconstructionist narrative discourse of the texts as an experimental 'writing'.

Abe's fiction describes the worlds of men. All the same, research on the author has not analyzed his novels and short stories from a perspective of masculinities studies yet. My dissertation fills this gap; I argue that the metafiction of Abe's early novels and short stories provides a literary counter-discourse to cultural narratives on shifting male identities in post-bubble Japan by evoking conflicting images. On the one hand, the protagonists, who struggle to come of age as flexible workers in mid-1990s Japan, resort to physical violence in order to affirm archaic images of embodied masculinities to counteract their subordinate male status. On the other hand, this affirmation is queered, as the men are not able to form heterosexual relationships and instead obsess over homosocial bonds with peers.

Moreover, Abe's early novels and short stories as well as his media appearances can be considered nodal points of larger avant-garde debates that challenged established assumptions of how literature was supposed to be written in Japan at the time. In fact, Abe was at the centre of a '90s generation' of writers emerging during the decade. During a marketing campaign labelled 'J-Bungaku' (J-Literature), launched in 1998, these writers positioned themselves as a new group within the literary field (*sezon-kei*) in order to initiate a public discussion about outworn hegemonies of high literature.

In the first monograph-length analysis of these important cultural discussions surrounding Abe's fiction and his public persona in the mid-1990s, I highlight Abe Kazushige's crucial role as both public face and main facilitator of this literary movement. I further reframe the 1990s in Japan as a formative phase for what some call the literature of global modernity. In the very first monograph-length study on Abe Kazushige, I introduce an under-translated author and his works into the global canon of World Literature.

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Translations of Japanese, German and French language sources into English are my own unless otherwise indicated. Japanese names are cited in the order usual in Japan with the family name preceding the given name. Terms in Japanese are rendered in the Hepburn Romanization.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Questions and Method

In Abe Kazushige's 1994 novel *Amerika no yoru* (Day by Night) the protagonist Nakayama Tadao remarks: "There is no escape from that which we call a word." (Abe 2001:30) Tadao's observation represents the general philosophy of Abe Kazushige's early novels and short stories. His outlook on life revolves around the consciousness that everything is pre-figured in some pre-existing form of speech.[1] *Amerika no yoru* and Abe's following pieces until 1999 are negotiations of the tension between these two poles.

This tension speaks to what Patricia Waugh establishes as metafiction's basic dilemma:

> "How is it possible to 'describe' anything? The metafictionist is highly conscious of a basic dilemma: if he or she sets out to 'represent' the world, he or she realizes fairly soon that the world, as such, cannot be 'represented'. In literary fiction it is, in fact, possible only to 'represent' the discourses of that world." (Waugh 1984:3)

[1] In that sense, Tadao's statement is self-explanatory: there is not 'no escape from the word'. There is 'no escape from that which we *call* word'. His observation makes a difference between the actual word and the discourse on 'word'.

Metafiction peaked as a global literary dominant between the late 1960s and 1990s. Simply put, metafiction is fiction which rhetorically points at itself being fiction. In doing so, metafiction is an exploration

> "of what has been, since the 1960s, a more general cultural interest in the problem of how human beings reflect, construct and mediate their experience of the world. (…) If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself." (Waugh 1984:2-3)

By consequence, metafiction is a literary reaction to the theoretic linguistic turn in postmodernism, namely the submission of critical thought to structuralist linguistics, and the resulting dominance of semiotics and discourse analysis.

My dissertation proposes to adopt a transcultural approach in order to situate all the novels and short stories of Abe's 90s fiction within this global field of postmodernist poetics and politics. In doing so, I reframe the metafictional narrative discourse of the novels and short stories by using the French term *écriture* as defined by Roland Barthes: *écriture* substitutes 'literature' with the notion of an experimental 'writing'. I argue, firstly, that this notion of a genre-less writing conceptually clarifies metafiction's essence. Metafiction, essentially, is a "*theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction" (1984:2). As such, it "breaks down the distinction between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction.'" (1984:6) As a result, the concept of *écriture* emphasizes metafiction as a literature, which reads as criticism because it theorizes itself. In doing so, metafiction problematizes representation; this is where it essentially matches with the concept of *écriture*.[2]

[2] From the opposite angle, Linda Hutcheon reads *écriture* as metafiction, when she considers it "the space of the postmodern" and foregrounds the subversive thrust of this sort of writing, as it challenges "both the concept of the 'work of art' and the separation of the concept from the domain of the academic critical establishment." (See Hutcheon 1988: 10-11) Hutcheon does not use the term '*écriture*', but implies it by reflecting on, as she calls it, "the blurring of the distinctions between the discourses of theory and literature in the works of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes." Hutcheon herself uses Rosalind Kraus's term 'paraliterary'. However, 'paraliterature' seemed problematic for a general use in this dissertation as it subsequently took on a different meaning in the discourse of literary criticism. (It is nowadays known as a signifier for a comprehensive understanding of literature, which includes popular fiction.) By contrast, *écriture* appeared appropriate as a basic term, which did inspire subsequent literary scholarship on postmodernism.

I secondly contend that such an understanding of metafiction exactly denominates the theoretic thrust of Abe Kazushige's 90s novels and short stories. All of them impersonate literary texts that simultaneously identify as criticisms. While the early *Amerika no yoru* (1994), *ABC sensō* (ABC War; 1995), *Kōshaku fujintei no gogo no pātī* (The Princess's Afternoon Party; 1995) and *Veronika Hāto no gen'ei* (The Phantom of Veronika Hart; 1997) are highly problematical 'criticisms turned into novels', the later *Individual Projection* (1997), *Triangles* (1997),[3] *Mujō no sekai* (Pitiless World; 1998) and *Minagoroshi* (Massacre; 1998) read as more representational, while still self-conscious at the surface. All pieces reflect on male coming-of-age themes. In doing so, the earliest texts embed this theme in primary concerns of 'how to narrate'. In contrast, the later early pieces locate it within larger cultural discussions on social issues in Japan after 1995. Thus, the earliest metafictions appear as art criticisms, while the later ones read as cultural criticisms.[4]

Overall, I argue that Abe's 90s fiction and his media appearances of that time can be considered nodal points of larger avant-garde debates, which challenged established assumptions of how literature was supposed to be written in Japan. In fact, Abe was at the centre of a new generation of writers emerging within the literary field at the time: these writers positioned themselves within the legacies of senior postmodern theorists in order to initiate a public discussion about outworn hegemonies of the *Heisei* literary scene (1989-2019). Literature in Japanese had become increasingly transcultural, experimental and thus difficult to allocate within the normative categories of 'pure' and 'mass' literature, which had been favouring elitist autobiography over popular epic fiction since before the war. Therefore, in 1998, a marketing campaign labeled 'J-Bungaku' (J-Literature) was launched: Abe Kazushige's crucial role as both public face and main facilitator of this discussion is

[3] Japanese words generally are rendered in the Hepburn romanization; with English titles, I follow the Anglo-American convention of quoting English titles of Japanese literary works in English.
[4] My definition of the author's 'early fiction' comprises his novels and short stories published between 1994 and 1999. The compilation *ABC. Abe Kazushige shoki sakuhinshū* (ABC. Abe Kazushige Early Work Collection; 2009) does end with *Minagoroshi* (and also does not include *Amerika no yoru*) (see Abe 2009).

yet to be explored, as is the significance of the tumultuous 1990s for the formation of Japanese 21st century literature in general. Whereas the transcultural shifts between continental, American and Japanese postmodernist thought since the mid-1980s are amply documented, very little has been written about the influence that postmodern 80s-criticism has had on the renewal efforts of Japanese literature in the mid-1990s. This connection, however, is obvious in Abe Kazushige's repeated publicized intellectual conversations with critic Hasumi Shigehiko.[5]

In the first in-depth analysis of these important cultural discussions surrounding Abe's fiction and his public persona in the mid-1990s, I intend to analyse both through the lense of a notional transcultural literature. Relating to this, the second aim of this study is to analyze how Abe instrumentalizes the imported concept of 'metafiction' during the 'J-Bungaku' campaign: besides it being the main narrative technique throughout the whole line of his novels and short stories, Abe publicly discusses the concept as an antithetical paradigm to 'un-falsified' traditional modes. Against this background, I posit the metafictional narrative strategies in Abe's 90s - 'criticisms turned into novels'- prose fiction as one manifestation of transcultural literature. This allows for questions such as: what transformations does postmodern metafiction undergo within the dialogue between Anglo-American and Japanese expressions of it? In general, my analysis of Abe's early fiction as transcultural literature emphasizes the importance of translation as presupposing the interactions and exchanges constituting 'World Literature', as I will explain in detail below.

The research analyzes both Abe Kazushige's prose fiction and his media appearances. It therefore goes beyond a mere close reading of the author's novels and short stories within the context of literary historical questions. Complementing such a 'classic' approach with an examination of the author's interviews and roundtable conversations published in print from 1994 onward has the benefit of locating the

[5] Hasumi Shigehiko can be considered an intellectual mentor of Abe Kazushige and Hasumi's writing seems to have had a profound impact on Abe's early fiction. Miura Toshihiko notes that Abe "cultivates meandering long sentences" in his early fiction, which is probably an imitation of Hasumi's formal mannerisms (see Miura 1997:248-249).

literary analysis within the transcultural shifts and flows agitating the intellectual field in the mid-1990s; Abe Kazushige's relevance as a public persona within the field was arguably as important as the impact that his fiction has had on the discourses of literature in Japan since the mid-1980s. I argue that within the 90s' web of complex relationships between artists, critics, scholars and editors, power was asserted and subverted through public performances of collaboration. These performances were facilitated by the common ritual of art journals in Japan to team up two or more people for detailed, quasi-informal conversations about topics related to their work (*taidan, teidan* or *zadankai*). Arguably, conversations were instrumentalized by the 'J-Bungaku' movement to publicly promote and perform their ideas in order to position themselves as a group against traditional literary circles within the field.

In doing so, I reframe the 1990s in Japan as a formative phase of what some call the literature of hypermodernity. Additionally, I hope to introduce an under-represented author into the global canon of World Literature.

2. Transcultural Literature

The recent discussion on the concept of a transcultural 'World Literature' reflects the perceived necessity within the discipline of Comparative Literature to accommodate the global shifts in literary topoi, language and form as results of the ever-new potentialities of physical and virtual mobility. Wolfgang Welsch addresses what he considers to be a fundamental change within the literary landscape of modernity:

> "We are cultural hybrids. Today's writers, for example, emphasize that they're shaped not by a single homeland, but by differing reference countries, by Russian, German, South and North American or Japanese literature. Their cultural formation is transcultural (…) – that of subsequent generations will be even more so." (Welsch 1999:98-99)

Welsch thus links what he observes to be a specific feature of modern literature, namely its transculturality, to the biographic background of their authors. This is also the approach that Arianna Dagnino adopts. While Dagnino opts for a premodern

perspective, she echoes Welsch in defining transcultural literature as the literary manifestation of the transcultural sensibilities of their neo-nomadic writers. If

> "we can infer that modes of narration of transcultural writing are a direct expression of their creators' transcultural realities and sensibilities", then, "what makes this kind of writing different is (…) its resistance to being appropriated by one single traditional national canon or being identified with one single, specific cultural/ethnic expression or tradition." (Dagnino 2013:136)

While Dagnino thus also looks at the texts, and while both Welsch's and Dagnino's observations have been fascinating reading material, I ask myself whether their approaches might risk being biographistic. They each start with the author. The text would be non-existent without the preliminary presence of the author, whose sensibilities, not to say intentions, the text is an expression of; what Dagnino calls 'literatures of mobility' are defined by the mobility of their authors and their 'creative transpatriation'.[6]

In a preliminary destabilization of Dagnino's new materialist angle, I argue in favour of taking into account the mobility of ideas and to shift the emphasis from the authors to the texts. Thus, rather than focusing on the metaphor of migration, I focus on that of translation. While keeping in view the empirical aspect of transcultural literature, I would raise a flag for not losing sight of the discursive ones: indeed, combining both might be a good idea. In doing so, I align with a large stream of recent research on Comparative Literature in a planetary age. Doris Bachmann-Medick remarks that

> "(…) literary studies faces the challenge of locating itself within the emerging world society. This means dealing to a greater extent with non-European literatures, with texts *between* cultures and with literatures of the world in a new way." (Bachmann-Medick 2012:112-113)

In a similar text-based approach, David Damrosch calls 'World Literature' a mode of reading and circulation that takes place through cultural and lexical processes of translation (see Damrosch 2003:1-36). Relatably, although with a Cultural Studies thrust, Emily Apter highlights the importance of translating literary and cultural texts adequately in order to accommodate the political challenges of a global 21st century.

[6] See Dagnino's subsequent book (Dagnino 2015) and my review of it (Roemer 2017).

She posits translation as an underemphasized philological expertise in literary scholarship and argues for what she calls a 'New Comparative Literature' (see Apter 2006:3-11). Even though I acknowledge the tactical urge behind Apter's call to arms, which was written as a reaction to 9:11, I would question whether its radicalism is at all necessary, discipline-wise. The discussion on 'World Literature' implies not so much a change in methodology, but a change in *discourse*; we still do (and have always done) close readings of texts in different languages, but now it is not about counterchecking them for their supposed cultural differences, but about foregrounding the dialogic and mutually transformative processes of circulation and translation between them.

Through engaging with this current epistemology, I was happy to substantiate my initial intention of focusing on 'translation' both in my textual analysis and as an overall conceptual metaphor; translation as one expression of the travel of ideas (Bal 2012) or the migration of knowledge (Amelung/Kurtz/Lackner 2001), as well as in its narrow lexical sense, is the necessary prerequisite for global postmodernism. Moreover, I established that I will adopt a long-term perspective in dealing with transculturality, as I single out the pre-21st century decade of the 1990s as a formative phase of global modernity.

2.1 Texts Between Cultures: Intertext as Approach

My approach of including the author's interviews into my research thus combines an examination of his texts and their dialogic interactions with other texts. To analyse these interactions, I have been exploring the methodological benefit of working with the notion of the intertext.[7] 'Intertext' allows me to work with a structural but by no means culture-less concept; Roland Barthes defines that any "text is a tissue of

[7] I would like to highlight the MA-seminar 'Entangled Literatures', which I have been co-conducting this summer in collaboration with my colleagues Faryaneh Fadaeiresketi, Jan Scholz and Max Stille. In the seminar, we explore the entanglements of Iranian, Arabic, Indian and Japanese literatures by means of the notion of intertext. The discussions and readings have been incredibly stimulating and I would like to thank everyone involved for their input.

quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes 1977:146). Even though I will not go along the radical implications of Barthes' assumption (according to Barthes, strictly speaking any piece of writing, regardless of its language, country and time of origin or author and their nationality, would be transcultural), I suggest that this concept of the intertext is both a useful metaphor and narratological tool for analyzing the various modes of circulation that characterize 'texts between cultures' (Bachmann-Medick 2012:112), apart from the established notion of translation.[8] While Abe himself would not belong to what Dagnino calls 'neo-nomadic writers', the author's early fiction is unmistakably intertextual and as such conspicuously transcultural.

Although her book is mainly a monograph on transcultural authors, Arianna Dagnino includes one single chapter on what she calls 'transcultural novels'. In this chapter, Dagnino also mentions intertextuality as an intrinsic transcultural quality of fiction:

> "The history of the novel has always been intrinsically 'transnational' (better, 'supranational'), transcontinental, and transoceanic from the beginning. (…) This view is shared by Rushdie, who stresses the transcultural nature of novelistic intertextuality: 'We are inescapably international writers at a time when the novel has never been a more international form (a writer like Borges speaks of the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson on his work; Heinrich Böll acknowledges the influence of Irish literature; cross-pollination is everywhere' ('Imaginary Homelands' 20)." (Dagnino 2015:177-178)

In a comparison between Abe's and North-American writer William Faulkner's fiction, Suwabe Kōichi equally speaks of a relationship of 'influence' of Faulkner on Abe, even though he takes into account that it would be simplifying to state that one author's oeuvre is the prerequisite of a 'predecessor author' (*senkō sakka*) (see Suwabe 2012:103). I would second that an intertextual relationship is not an asymmetric correlation, in which peripheral authors take over characteristic features of metropolitan role models. Instead, I suggest, intertextuality is a mutually

[8] I realize that this is a comparable approach to Prof. Leo Ou-Fan Lee using the metaphor of 'counterpoint' (Said; originally Ortiz) for highlighting the various contrapuntal interplays between texts of World Literature during his talk on 'Lu Xun and World Literature' at the Cluster on 13 June 2016. As he said, there are "echoes, texts send resonances but not always in total harmony." He also quotes Damrosch as saying that 'World Literature' is basically translation.

transformative *dialogue*. As a result, I prefer to speak of entanglements rather than influence or cross-pollination.

In using the transcultural as a key concept of my thesis, I locate myself within international Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies has become a transnational research approach since the 1990s, which has been established in Japan as well (see Richter/Schad-Seiffert 2001; Yoshimi 2000). This internationalization of the various national Cultural Studies research discourses is the result of an intensified dialogue between disciplines and nations in the course of globalisation. Globalisation generally has established approaches with multiple perspectives in research. This development has emphasized the significance of translation as an expertise as much as it has clarified how important disciplines such as Comparative Literature and the various foreign language philologies are for relevant research in global modernity. In fact, it may point to the continuous significance of the humanities in times where neoliberal academia largely justifies its relevance for grant support with natural sciences research.

3. Masculinities in Abe's Early Fiction

Against this background, I will analyse how the deconstructionist narrative discourse of Abe's early fiction reads as a destabilization of the essentialist assumption that sex is biological. Patricia Waugh posits that by "showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly 'written'." (Waugh 1984:18) Accordingly, I will show how the metafiction of Abe's early novels and short stories speaks to a discourse on manhood, which contends that masculinity is not internalized and natural, but relational and performative. As R.W. Connell maintains: "I emphasize that terms such as 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'marginalized masculinities' name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships." (1995:81) Thus, my dissertation will point out how ambiguous 'maleness' can be: men can be masculine, but they can also be feminine. Men can be attracted to women, but they can also be attracted to men (and the opposite).

Indeed, if we are to follow Judith Butler, when "the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one." (Butler 1999:10)

With few exceptions, Abe's novels and short stories have male protagonists and describe the homosocial worlds of men. Nevertheless, scholarship has not analysed Abe's novels and short stories from a perspective of masculinities studies yet. My dissertation fills this gap: by analysing the three texts *Amerika no yoru*, *Individual Projection* and the short story *Minagoroshi*, I highlight that the negotiation of masculine identities is an important issue in Abe's early fiction. The metafictional prose of the novels and short stories is self-conscious about being linguistic fabrication, but the narratives *do* discuss cultural problems as well.

I argue that the metafiction of Abe's early novels and short stories provides a literary counter-discourse to cultural narratives on shifting male identities in post-bubble Japan by evoking conflicting images. On the one hand, the protagonists, all flexible workers, resort to physical violence in order to affirm archaic images of embodied masculinities to counteract their subordinate male status. On the other hand, this affirmation is queered, as the men are not able to form heterosexual relationships and instead obsess over homosocial bonds with peers. In doing so, both *Amerika no yoru* and *Minagoroshi* are similar in that their stories thematize libidinized male competition in heterosexual erotic triangles. By contrast, *Individual Projection* is part of a larger cultural discourse on youth violence in the wake of the Sarin Gas Attack on the Tōkyō Subway in March 1995 by the cult Ōmu Shinrikyō. It suggests that the metafiction of these three pieces picks up a global discussion on emotion in postmodernism by deconstructing authentic feelings and instead affirming bodily images of desire. In gendering these tropes, all three narratives negotiate how their male protagonists experiment with multiple masculine identities while they struggle to come of age as flexible workers in mid-1990s Japan. In other words, *Amerika no yoru*

and *Minagoroshi* negotiate masculinities by emphasizing male sociality. By contrast, *Individual Projection* foregrounds a discussion of the masculine body.

3.1 Premises on Emotion

As a general tendency of Abe's early fiction, heterosexual relationships are problematic, as is the possible feeling of 'love'. The narratives negate any notion of authentic feelings, as they seem to reduce human emotions to an expression of 'desire'. In doing so, I suggest, they participate in a transcultural problematization of emotion in postmodernism. [9]

Moreover, I agree that all emotions, such as desire, but also anger and honour, are *gendered*. In doing so, I first presuppose that emotions are constructed and contextual, not only biological. Thus, I second Doris Kolesch's question:

> "How can a researcher determine at all her object of analysis, be it love, joy or even luck, and find out what relationship these emotions have with each other, how they differ from each other and which properties and behavioural traits characterize them, without referring back to a historical and cultural understanding of these emotions for that?" (2006:24)

I second that: emotions are not purely biological phenomena. My analysis understands emotions as sociocultural constructs and practices, namely as linguistic ones. At the same time, my emphasis on bodily discourses endows the analysis with a material foundation. Emotions are *also* physical and gendered. Indeed, I insist that we cannot speak about emotions without gendering them. We necessarily can only speak about 'male emotions' and 'female emotions'. This is why my analysis specifically focuses

[9] In *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson expresses doubt as to whether the assumption of emotions and feelings remains valid after what has been called the 'death of the subject' in postmodernity (see Jameson 1991:14). These observations have inspired succeeding problematizations of affect and emotion in postmodern art, philosophy and society (see, for example, Hoffmann/Hornung 1997 and Hoffmann 1997:180 in particular). What appears challenging in applying Jameson's observations on literary analysis is the fact that Jameson does not base his observations on literature. With his interest being focused on the commodified aesthetics of the late-capitalist image industries, the object of Jameson's analysis is the visual and its representations in the arts. It seems to be this deliberate neglect of the text in favour of the image that Linda Hutcheon later responds to by explicitly, albeit not exclusively, focusing her attention on *literary* postmodernism and its narrative techniques of parodic subversion. In her analysis of literary postmodernism, Hutcheon opposes her notion of 'parody' to that of Jameson's 'pastiche' (see Hutcheon 1988:4).

on discourses of the body, emotions and feelings: as with any performance of a gender identity, the negotiation of bodily and emotional behavioural patterns through which the subject locates itself as the male, female or transgender individual of its choice is definitive. Or, the other way round:

> "Because of the necessary embodiment of emotions and the fact that human bodies are always sexually indicated, one cannot speak about emotions independent from gender roles, gender images and concrete gender specific behaviour." (Kolesch 2006:24)

Finally, I argue that speaking about emotion and affect in relation to 'Japanese culture' necessitates the clarification of some presuppositions. For, in my experience, the traditional hegemony within international Japanese Studies of a discourse which is (rightly) critical of *nihonjinron* poses a methodological problem for japanologist inquiries into emotion. Or, at least, it demands analysis from every japanologist to take into account this discourse and to demarcate itself from it in an appropriate manner. A prime example of this problem is the debate about shame as a cultural phantasma, social emotion and 'case study'. This discussion of shame within *nihonjinron* and *nihonjinron* research clarifies how challenging speaking about cultural expressions of shame can be in a Japanese context (see Griesecke 2001; Vollmer 2003; Heise 1989a and 1990). As early as 1989, Jens Heise indicates the potential that the interconnection of cultural theory and psychiatry can have for research of Japanese cultural anthropological phenomena, in an analysis of the emotion *amae*, which circulates as a 'Japanese' or 'cultural-specific' emotion in current interdisciplinary discourse (see Heise 1989). However, I propose that the tendency of the discipline of *Cultural Psychology* to argue in *de facto* simplifying binary oppositions when examining complex cultural phenomena poses a challenge to interdisciplinary discussion, although not an insurmountable one. This is because the opposition of East Asian 'collectivist' and North-American 'individualist' cultures involuntarily evokes the impression of being a perpetuation of an empirical discourse, which definitively has been archived by postcolonial approaches. This is also indicated by Florian Coulmas in a Japanese Studies article in the social sciences that takes into account

theories of *Cultural Psychology* (see Coulmas 2009).[10] Against this background of *nihonjinron* and *nihonjinron*-critical research, I suggest that speaking about emotions and 'Japanese culture' in Japanese Studies necessitates a prior self-interrogation as to one's own discourse.

3.2 Flexible Work and Manhood in 1990s Japan

In 1990s Japan, being a male flexible worker meant not corresponding to the image of hegemonic masculinity. By the mid-1990s, the cultural ideal of manhood, represented within the figure of the *salarīman* since the post-war era, had come to be destabilized by shifts in work-life and education after the socioeconomic downturn, when the asset price bubble burst in 1991. As Romit Dasgupta explains:

> "The context of contradictory socio-economic and cultural shifts and pulls highlighted masculinity as a focus for questioning and interrogation. Over much of the post-World War II period Japanese masculinity had come to be signified by the figure of the be-suited urban, white-collar "salaryman" loyally working for the organization he was employed by, in return for benefits such as secure lifetime employment and almost automatic promotions and salary-increments linked to length of service. Notwithstanding the fact that large sectors of the male workforce never did have access to the salaryman model of corporate paternalism, the discourse of masculinity associated with the salaryman and his lifestyle came, in many respects, to dominate both Japanese corporate culture and Japanese masculinity, over the period from around the 1950s until the 1980s (Amano, 2006, pp. 18-24). In this regard the discourse of salaryman masculinity, premised on the notion of the male as breadwinner and provider for a dependent family, could be considered the hegemonic discourse of masculinity in Japan for these decades." (Dasgupta 2009:82-83)

In other words, anyone who chose to not work in this generic model, who was not a salaryman, was tagged with a subordinate masculinity. I suggest that the narratives of Abe's early fiction discuss the masculinities of their characters against the background

[10] "Identifying and defining the cultural and social variables that are good predictors of subjective well-being in a given society is another methodological difficulty that must be kept in mind. At the same time, defining a culture in terms of features generally thought to distinguish one from another bears the risk of over-generalization or anachronistic generalization. For example, the individualism-collectivism opposition is widely considered to distinguish societies prioritizing, respectively, personal goals and group goals. Japan has long been considered a paradigm example of collectivism where members of groups are interdependent and group norms have precedence over individual desires. However, while collectivist attitudes may still be determinants of behaviour and social relationships, *it would be anachronistic to describe present-day Japan as collectivist society*." (Coulmas 2009:13; my highlights)

of this cultural narrative on shifting male identities in post-pubble Japan. Not being able to be such a breadwinner of a family, not being able to rely on the corporate warrior image projected by the salaryman, is discussed as a problem. Abe's early novels focus on young men who are *freeter*: unemployed by choice. My analysis suggests that the selected texts portray different types of *freeters*: while *Minagoroshi* foregrounds the insecurities that come with flexible work, *Amerika no yoru* and *Individual Projection* both emphasize its positive aspect, namely the freedom of not having to submit oneself to the limitations of regular office work life.

Manfred Seifert addresses the challenge of a possible subjectivity trap for empirical scholarly analysis of precarity (Seifert 2009:43-44).[11] How impoverishment is perceived, approached and processed by each experiencing individual is based on phenomenological experience, which is further determined by the specific biographic factors of the individual. This contingency of precarity on subjective evaluation makes the concept integrally double-edged, as Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter observe in an assessment of its flexible element. Generally, the concept of precarity is the English translation of the French word *précarité*, and according to Neilson and Rossiter

> "refers to all possible shapes of unsure, not guaranteed, flexible exploitation: from illegalised, seasonal and temporary employment to homework, flex-and temp-work, to subcontractors, freelancers or so-called self-employed persons. But its reference also extends beyond the world of employment and work to encompass other aspects of intersubjective life, including housing, debt, and the ability to build affective social relations." (2005:1-2)

Now, the change of permanent into flexible employment antithetically implies "an interminable lack of certainty, the condition of being unable to predict one's fate or having some degree of stability on which to construct a life", as much as being "the precondition for new forms of creative organization that seek to accept and exploit the flexibility" (Neilson/Rossiter 2005:2). In other words, based on individual evaluation of the notion of flexibility, the experience of precarity oscillates between oppression and liberation, powerlessness and empowerment. Alex Foti, for instance, apprehends

[11] I have included this following definition in early research on the novel *Individual Projection* represented in the book chapter Roemer 2015:91-92; 96-99.

flexibility in terms of not being in command of one's time and life and thus emphasizes the powerlessness inherent in precarity (2005:2). Neilson and Rossiter however encourage taking flexibility as the opportunity to live an "active and free" life, rather than a normative one and thus imply an understanding of precarity as agency (2005:3).

In the Japanese context this empowering side to irregular and flexible work is articulated in the term *freete*r itself with the Japanese neologism consisting of the English 'free' and the German 'Arbeiter' (meaning worker). According to Emma E. Cook, the Japanese government defines *freeters* as

> "those aged between 15 and 34, graduate in the case of male, graduate and single [unmarried] in the case of female and, (1) for those currently employed, who are treated as part-time or *arbeit* worker by their employers, (2) for those currently unemployed, who seek the part-time or *arbeit* jobs and (3) for those not currently employed, who are neither engaged in household duties, attending educational institutions nor waiting to start a new job, and wish to find part-time or *arbeit* jobs" (Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare 2007b, 26; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications n.d.). There are now considered to be 1.8 million freeters, with numbers being split equally between men and women (920,000 and 950,000, respectively)." (2013:63)

The term *freeter* originally came up in a slogan promoted by the Recruit employment agency in 1989 and, as Anne Allison points out, was intended by Recruit to be "an attractive alternative to what had hitherto been the normative ideal – life-time employment in middle to large-sized corporations. *Freeter* connoted freedom: to freely choose – and change – jobs, and to be freed of a permanent obligation to company and therefore freed up for other personal interests." (Allison 2009:98). Similarly, Emma E. Cook emphasizes: "Initially, the spin on the term *freeter* was positive; it was the height of the Japanese bubble economy when jobs were plentiful, thus taking time out to work in different jobs and exploring alternative lifestyles were not deemed particularly problematic." (2013:62-63) Even though this one-dimensionally positive perception of irregular work has been differentiated since, "there being something that one wants to do" (*yaritai koto ga aru*) beyond the context of regular employment remained the main reason for high school students to choose irregular work in 2000 according to the numbers produced by Kosugi Reiko (2008: 42-43). The sociovisibility of this "dream-seeker type" (2008:13) led , as Genda Yūji points out, to generalizations about *freeters* in public opinion which considered them escapists with a bad work ethic. In turn,

Genda is careful to stress that for most *freeter*s their lifestyle was a choice made by circumstance:

> "Rather than young people choosing to become freeters as the result of a clear and conscious individual decision, the choice has been made for them – without their even realizing what is happening – by the socio-economic system. At the root of this system are the various subsystems (…) that give priority to middle-aged and older workers." (2005:52.)

Kosugi Reiko further indicates that those interviewees who clearly stated that they had chosen irregular work in order to pursue artistic aspirations generally took strong pride in this attitude, which they based on accomplishing "a clearly defined goal". At the same time, they were critical about *freeters* who did not have goals and made sure to distinguish themselves from them (2008:39). Emma E. Cook adds that this ambivalent perception of *freeter* as either "idle, irresponsible good-for-nothings who shirked their responsibilities", or those "who had dreams" depends on the *freeter*'s gender (2013:65). Male, rather than female, *freeter* tend to be viewed negatively: "It was apparent that when people talked of *freeters*, particularly when discussing negative views, they were talking of male *freeters*, not female. This attitude can be attributed to the fact that part-time work has often been associated with women in the postwar period (cf. Broadbent 2001)." (2013:65) Thus, while being a white-collar worker meant to represent hegemonic masculinity in 1990s Japan, being a *freeter* not only meant to incorporate a subordinate masculinity for a man, it meant to *feminize* oneself by definition of the occupation.

3.3 Abe's Fiction Within a Literature of Precarity

I now return to my suggestion that the three texts *Amerika no yoru*, *Individual Projection* and *Minagoroshi* depict different types of *freeter*. All three pieces speak to male *freeter*-dom as a liminal state. The "period of the early twenties operates as a liminal space where youth are not yet expected to be adults, nor do many of them expect themselves to be." (Cook 2013:59-60) So *freeter* is a state for trying out things before growing up and becoming a regular full-time employee (*seishain*), a "transitory"

phase (2013:68). In that sense, all of the three protagonists being unable or unwilling to form heterosexual relationships may be an expression of not wanting (or not being able to) comply with the norm, namely that "work and marriage are two of the main signifiers of adulthood and play key roles in normative ideals of Japanese masculinity." (Cook 2012:76)

In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I firstly pinpoint that *Amerika no yoru*'s protagonist Tadao, who strives to be an actor while financing himself through part-time work, speaks to an early specific image of dream-seeking *freeters* as artists. This is a narrative created by Recruit in the beginning, when it published stories about creative people "working in part-time jobs by day and pursuing creative or artistic endeavors by night." (Cook 2013:66) Recruit also published a book about celebrities who had been *freeters* before being successful in their artistic careers.

In Chapter 4, I then argue that *Individual Projection* discusses male self-chosen precarity as an escapism from the traditional middle-class model. The novel picks up on this cultural narrative from the specific perspective of a larger discussion on youth violence in the wake of the Sarin Gas Attack on the Tōkyō Subway in March 1995 by the cult Ōmu Shinrikyō. Against this background, masculinity is negotiated through Onuma's embodied performances of 'maleness' as a student of a cultish Espionage Academy.

In Chapter 5 I suggest that, by contrast, *Minagoroshi* refers to a cultural narrative on male *freeters* as good-for-nothings and societal losers. The small-time criminal Ōta, depicted as an aggressive and intellectually limited young man, is an example of a male who is not a white-collar worker because he may not have the capacities necessary to become one. Emma E. Cook adds a third category to the two above-named main groups of *freeters* as either dream-seekers or escapists from work, namely "people who find it difficult to become a regular worker" because they lack the skills. (2013:65) Ōta matches with the latter.

I locate Abe's fiction within a larger discourse of a 'literature of precarity' in the *Heisei*-era. At the same time, in my opinion, the theoretical fundament of Abe's

writing complicates a clean positioning of him within this literature.[12] The discussion of *freeter*, *hikikomori* and *nīto* - those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) - in terms of literary streams with distinct thematic features is part of a larger critical discourse on Heisei fiction that incorporates topoi from media discussions, and activist debates on what sociologist Yamada Masahiro back in 2004 was the first to call Japan's gap society (*kakusa shakai*). Labour activist and writer Amamiya Karin, who introduced the term 'precariat' into Japanese (Amamiya 2007:14; Amamiya&Fukushima 2007; Amamiya 2009), suggests the term *purekariāto bungaku* or "literature of the precariat" as an umbrella term for the works that evolved during the Heisei literary period (1989-2019) in general (Amamiya 2008). In a similar vein, Lisette Gebhardt observes what she calls a sociological turn in post-bubble Japanese literature and comes to the conclusion this was the advent of a "precariat literature" (see Gebhardt 2010:42-46) Literary critic and clinical psychologist Saitō Tamaki suggests the term *hikikomori bungaku* or "literature of social withdrawal" to cover the literary production of a large number of Heisei authors including Abe, whom he seems to consider part of a "generation of social recluse" (*hikikomori sedai*) in a wide sense (see Saitō 2004:22-37). Even though Saitō's diagnostic angle on literature might be challenging, I find the potentiality of his approach as an alternative classification of precarity literature productive. Social withdrawal has been becoming more and more of a general term in Japan to describe what Anne Allison calls a precarity of soul. If we are to agree with Allison that "being alone - literally, psychically, socially" is "the new human condition for Japan/ese in the 21st century," it might make sense to count Saitō's notion of a "literature of social withdrawal" as another conceptual term for precarity literature in general. For my analysis, I pursue the notion of precarity as literary mode, signifying "not a new class of literature, but (…) a theoretical framework to discuss representations of cultural and socio-economic change and its repercussions for individual lives," as Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt proposes

[12] I first laid out this location of Abe's fiction within a literature of precarity in early research on the novel *Individual Projection* included in the book chapter Roemer 2015:87-88.

(2012:144). With regard to Abe, it makes sense to adopt this notion of a literary mode for the wide range it offers to both thematic perspectives on precarity and literary styles. In a 2005 interview of Abe by Hasumi Shigehiko on Abe's place within Heisei literature, the author himself addresses his programmatic preoccupation with style. Both he and Hasumi suggest that the social malaise of contemporary Japan is not the initial driving force behind his writing, a fact that sets Abe apart from other writers of twenty-first century Japanese literature in Hasumi's opinion.

> "*Hasumi*: The last Akutagawa Award-winning work, *Kaigo Nyūmon* (Introduction to Elderly Care) by Mobu Norio, for example, straightforwardly focuses on care as another contemporary issue. Before it was the same with Kanehara Hitomi's *Hebi ni Piasu* (Snake and Earrings), remember? It is almost as if those works get praise for being obvious …
> In your case, though, you aren't being told that "this work is good" or "bad" based on paedophilia or domestic violence providing the background for them. Why do you think that is?
> *Abe*: Maybe, and maybe this is only the belief of the author himself, it is because I am a formalist. Azuma Hiroki pointed this out to me earlier in the commentary on *Individual Projection* … He read it, saying that it is characteristic of my works that the diachronic problems of so-called contemporary issues enter the story with a splash, but are continuously defamiliarized on the level of narrative.
> It might sound sad that an author has nothing to object to in the interpretation of a critic, but … I personally can fully agree with the idea of defamiliarization on the narrative level." (Abe&Hasumi 2005:99-100)

It becomes clear that while treating contemporary issues of immediate social concern, Abe's works can and should not be reduced to their thematic choices. What Hasumi refers to in his comment on the two earlier Akutagawa Prize-winning works by Mobu Norio and Kanehara Hitomi are the statements of the jury members, which, especially in Mobu's case, demonstrate that the novel was chosen for its social awareness and for treating a pressing contemporary issue rather than for its colloquial style. As indicated earlier, Abe's concern as a writer is first and foremost of a literary nature. Generally put, the purpose of Abe's fiction is always to question the fabric of the text and make writing a topic itself through narrative techniques, which reflect his preoccupation with poststructuralist thought and postmodernist literature and theory. Abe is indeed quite heavily influenced by the writings of his interviewer Hasumi Shigehiko himself, who is a prominent representative of the *Nyū Aka* movement, an informal school of thought

that formed in the wake of the linguistic turn of Japanese literary criticism from the late 1970s onwards. What becomes apparent in Abe's and Hasumi's exchange is that Abe's prose fiction is programmatically de-natural; it is informed by theory, and self-consciously reflects this, a feature characteristic of an intellectual postmodernism gone transcultural, as Abe's example shows. I would thus hesitate to classify Abe's early fiction as *freeter* novels (*furītā shōsetsu*) or literature of social withdrawal, as his writing definitely comes from a different place. In turn, this is precisely what makes an analysis of precarity discourses in his works interesting.

CHAPTER 2 PART 1:

Metafiction as a Travelling Concept and Counter-Discourse

"Abe's novels and short stories are all metafiction in one sense or another", Sasaki Atsushi notes in a conversation on the author with Miyazawa Akio in 2004 (Miyazawa/Sasaki 2004:85). Patricia Waugh establishes:

> "Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text." (Waugh 1984:2)

Waugh's definition of metafiction exclusively focuses on the genre of the novel. At the same time, she posits that "metafiction is not so much a sub-genre of the novel as a tendency *within* the novel which operates through exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent of all novels: of frame and frame-break, of technique and counter-technique, of construction and deconstruction of illusion." (Waugh 1984:14) Thus, for my analysis, I argue that these tensions and oppositions equally apply for the short

stories of Abe. In doing so, I second Linda Hutcheon, who states that it is "narrative general that is narcissistic" (Hutcheon 1980:19), be it novels or short stories.

1. The Metafiction of Abe's Fiction

Waugh notes that metafiction is an elastic term, which subsumes a variety of literary expressions in postmodernist Anglo-American and Romance literatures (Waugh 1984:18). It speaks for the stylistic range of Abe's novels and short stories generally, that their formal articulations of narrative self-consciousness are not restricted to one schema. Sasaki Atsushi notes: "The characteristic of Abe Kazushige as an author is that he *does not have a characteristic style.*" (Sasaki 2016:240) Accordingly, while Abe's literary narratives unanimously identify as metafiction, their respective verbalizations of *how* they identify with it are eclectic. All the same, I observe two large periods in Abe's overall writing, which both can be contained within two modes of metafiction individually.

Picking the specific example of *Amerika no yoru*, Sasaki Atsushi proposes that the problem, which the novel negotiates through using self-conscious narrative strategies, is that of the 'mind' expressed as instantaneous subjective consciousness. The narrating subject in *Amerika no yoru* is divided into Watashi (I), the narrator, and Tadao, the protagonist. In this schizophrenic arrangement, Watashi tells us the story of his protagonist Tadao, while being part of and in sporadic dialogue with him. Watashi (I) subsequently discloses his first name to be 'Kazushige'. Obviously, Kazushige also is the first name of the empirical author of the novel, Abe Kazushige. With this chain of reference, a reading of *Amerika no yoru* as autobiographic metafiction may seem evident. However, both Yamada Natsuki and Hikita Masaaki consider *Amerika no yoru* to be negations rather than affirmations of the Japanese I-novel (*shishōsetsu*). As Yamada Natsuki puts it: "In my opinion, none of Abe Kazushige's works can be located as *shishōsetsu*, rather they can be placed as works which radically criticize the traditional form of *shishōsetsu*." (Yamada 2014:8) Thus, Sasaki Atsushi states that *Amerika no yoru* departs from the angle of narrating the self

(‘*watashi’ wo kataru*), however, only to illustrate that the self can only be described by splitting it into two halves and filling it with a multitude of critical schemes (see Sasaki 2016:238). My analysis of *Amerika no yoru* in Chapter 3 will underscore that the linguistic deconstruction of modern subjectivity is by no means the sole, nor the main, characteristic of the novel’s metafiction. Instead, it will propose that there is more to it than simply the deconstruction of a modern self. Picking up Sasaki’s mention of *Amerika no yoru* being stuffed with “critical schemes”, it is going to point out that these critical schemes *in themselves* are metafiction.

Amerika no yoru remains the only piece to make a conspicuous reference to the name of its empirical author Abe Kazushige. Nevertheless, out of Abe’s other early novels and stories, *Triangles*, *Mujō no sekai*, *Individual Projection* and *Veronika Hart no gen’ei* additionally read as first-person narratives.[13] I suggest that these narratives, different from *Amerika no yoru*, are what Linda Hutcheon calls covert metafictions: covert metafictions are self-reflexive, but not necessarily self-conscious. The textual self-reflexiveness is “internalized, actualized”, while overtly metafictional texts “reveal their self-awareness in explicit thematizations or allegorizations of their diegetic or linguistic identity within the texts themselves.” (Hutcheon 1980:7) In other words, *Triangles*, *Mujō no sekai*, *Individual Projection* and *Veronika Hart no gen’ei* all have narrative settings in which a first person narrator tells his story. Yet, this subject is not split up nor reflecting on it being split up as in *Amerika no yoru*. Instead, all narratives reflect on themselves being narratives, through the technique of incorporating the reader in their stories as a narratee. In making the empirical reader a literary function, the pieces implicitly point out that they are artefacts (which narratology also calls ‘implied reader’). In other words, all narratives deconstruct the naturalness of narrating through the conscious thematization of a narratee: a narratee brings awareness to narrating being an act; the emphasis on the audience defamiliarizes

[13] An exception seems to be *Minagoroshi*, as I will discuss in Chapter 5. The short story adopts what reads as a ‘realistic’ style and displays little overt self-consciousness, albeit some instances of self-reflexiveness.

the naturalness of first-person narrations – it makes us aware that they *are* narrations. Linda Hutcheon points out that:

> "When a person opens any novel, this very act suddenly plunges him into a narrative situation in which he must take part. Certain expectations of a novelistic code are immediately established, and he becomes a reader in the above-mentioned sense of the word. Overtly narcissistic texts make this act a self-conscious one, integrating the reader in the text, teaching him, one might say, how to play the literary music. Like the musician deciphering the symbolic code of musical notation, the reader is here involved in a creative, interpretative process, from which he will learn how the book is read. In covertly narcissistic texts the teaching is done by disruption and discontinuity, by disturbing the comfortable habits of the actual act of reading." (Hutcheon 1980:139)

In *Triangles*, the narrative begins and finishes with an address to an implied reader as a narratee, who is asked to read the short story through to its end, "this time", and then thanked for having done so in the end: "I really wish very much indeed that you read this story through to its finish this time only. Really, this might be my last chance, which is why I would like to urge you to peruse it to its end!" (Abe 1999a:7). On the one hand, one could suggest that the addressee is indeed a character within the story, which takes the form of a written report by a narrating subject 'Watashi' (I), a boy. On the other, both addresses at least hint at that they could be statements of the author 'Abe Kazushige' to his readership to keep reading the short story even despite its digressive opening. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, Abe's first experimental narratives *Amerika no yoru*, *ABC sensō* and *Kōshaku fujin no gogo no pātī* jointly being language games, which all perform the difficulty of linear storytelling, are complicated to follow especially in their opening passages and may have left the readership frustrated and unmotivated to pursue them through to their ends. Yonemitsu Kazunari confirms in a 2009 *teidan* on Abe Kazushige's early fiction, that even he, as Abe's peer, found Abe's early style difficult to read and was unsure about whether he would be able to read *ABC sensō* until the end (see Asano, Īda&Yonemitsu 2009:521). We may argue that *Triangles* self-consciously addresses Abe Kazushige's reputation as an author difficult to read, which he had established by 1997, and thus participates in Abe's overall author performance carried out in non-literary media texts such as interviews.

So, the addresses in *Triangles* could also be plays with Abe Kazushige's media personality as an author and the image he had established at the time. They could be self-ironic pleas to the reader to give him, the 'author Abe Kazushige', another chance and to read this story, *Triangles*, through to its end.

In *Mujō no sekai*, equally, the implied reader is a metaphor of the empirical readership, who, within the story, is indicated to be reading the narrator's story on the internet. The story is a first-person narration by a bullied teenage boy, who, as is hinted at throughout the narrative, posts his confession on the internet as a cry for help. Thus, in this case, the reader is called to action, and is not the passive addressee anymore, neither in an artistic sense, nor in a political one. On the one hand, the technique of defamiliarization makes the reader rethink their habitualized perceptions of automatisms in the arts. On the other, they are made aware of a pressing social issue, which was thematized repeatedly in public discourse on youth delinquency and youth violence in 1990s Japan. In literally being solicited to help, the reader is implied to make a decision. As Hutcheon infers: "The unsettled reader is forced to scrutinize his concepts of art as well as his life values." (Hutcheon 1980:139) Thus, the reader is asked, albeit on a hypothetical level: what would you do in such a situation? Would you help? What to do about the fact that such youth exist in Japan nowadays? Can you remain passive to this? Or do you need to contribute a solution to this problem? That being so, form and politics play into each other in *Mujō no sekai* and demonstrate that they are not separate entities, but that the formal is always also political and, in turn, the political cannot escape from the formal.

By contrast, *Amerika no yoru* and the 1997 short story *Veronika Hart no gen'ei* and are both narratives in which the listener is an established character within the story (Esu, Tadao's literal other half in *Amerika no yoru*; the female roommate of the male first person narrator in *Veronika Hart no gen'ei*). Now, *Veronika Hart no gen'ei* is not largely homosocial, due to the female narratee, who contributes her perspective on the story of 'the man with the scars all over his body'. This is also reflected in a dispute between the two, in which the male narrator reproaches her that hers is a female view (see Abe 1997:114). In that sense, the short story stands out. In fact, *Veronika Hart no*

gen'ei and *Amerika no yoru* are the only narratives in which the listeners' gender is not clearly indicated as male. Instead, the roommate is specified as female, while Esu starts as 'Watashi' (which is the formal but also the female first person indicative), then later identifies as '*ore*' (male first person indicative for 'I'); so they could be transgender.[14] As such, Watashi in *Amerika no yoru* deconstructs what Patricia Waugh calls the implicitness of the omniscient narrator in metafiction being male (see Waugh 1984:67).

Shinsemia (2003) marks the beginning of a new era in Abe's fiction. This extensive novel earned Abe the acknowledgement of the literary establishment (*bundan*) (see Sasaki 2016:238). With it, the overall interest of Abe's writing changes from a focus on first person narratives into an exploration of an exaggerated literary realism.[15] This realism is expressed through the Yamagata region's vernacular. I would suggest that *Shinsemia*, the first volume of what Abe later calls *Jinmachi Saga*, specifically distinguishes itself in that it represents a shift from a metafictional preoccupation with the linguistic constructedness of the subject into 'historiographic metafiction'. According to Linda Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction is an exploration of the traces of history in a literary work at the same time as a destabilization of "the literary and the historical" as "two modes of writing" (Hutcheon 1988:105). Beginning with *Shinsemia*, the metafiction of Abe's novels seems to place an emphasis on historiography being narrative.

Thus, while all of Abe's novels and short stories are metafiction in one sense or another, their individual expressions of narrative self-consciousness are eclectic and diverse. Nevertheless, the focus of Japanese scholarship seems to primarily reduce Abe's metafiction to a self-conscious play with the linguistic constructedness of the subject.

[14] Nora Bartels attentively pointed to this out to me for which I am thankful.
[15] I would like to thank Jason Herlands for bringing to my attention the parallels of this style to a 'hysteric realism' of global value.

We may suggest that this tendency is related to a problem at the level of the migration of knowledge in scholarly discourse: if we are to follow Sasaki Atsushi, the Japanese research on metafiction primarily relies on the reception of Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984) (see Sasaki 2014:29). Other important classics of Anglo-American inquiry into postmodernist poetics, namely Linda Hutcheon's monographs, are not thematized to the same extent. A possible reason for this, I would suggest, is that Hutcheon's works have not been translated as quickly as Waugh's and hence have not had the same prominence in Japan as they have been having in Amero-European research. By contrast, Fredric Jameson, through his closeness with the initiators of the conference and resulting anthology on *Postmodernism and Japan* (1989), has received some attention in Japan. Nevertheless, I argue that Hutcheon is important for a complete picture on a transcultural discourse on global postmodernist poetics and politics. The suitability of her concept 'historiographic metafiction' for Abe's writing since *Shinsemia* is but one illustration of this argument.

In the following, I discuss metafiction from two conceptual angles: 1) as a travelling concept (Bal) and 2) as a counter-discourse (Foucault) to what Suzuki Tomi identifies as the I-novel metanarrative of Japanese modernity.

2. Migrating Knowledge: Metafiction as a Travelling Concept

The Japanese reception and nativization of metafiction as a scholarly discourse and a literary style appears as a premier example of conceiving, as Itamar Even-Zohar puts it, "of translated literature not only as an integral system within any literary polysystem, but as the most active within it." (Even-Zohar 2000:200) What I mean is that the case of metafiction in Japan (*metafikushon*) shows how translated literature became *central*; this, according to Even-Zohar, contradicts the common view on translated literature occupying a *peripheral* place within literary polysystems. In fact, during the 1980s, in relation to the ascendance of postmodernism in Japan as a theoretic discourse, metafiction became a literary dominant. The author Takahashi Gen'ichirō is

representative, in contemporary Japanese literary history, for experimenting with the possibilities of self-conscious writing to their fullest during the 1980s. Sasaki Atsushi says the novelty of Takahashi was that his writing "was not realism at all" (Sasaki 2016:79), but a fragmentary style, which did not tire of indicating that the subject is constructed of language (see 2016:82-83). Alongside these literary appropriations of self-conscious narrative strategies, the discussion on metafiction established itself as an influential scholarly discourse on postmodernist poetics in Japan. The question is to what extent, and if at all, postmodernist poetics in Japan at the same time also had a political effect? Meaning, was the discussion on metafiction also a *cultural* discourse on a transnational identity? And to what extent was it, as such, a counter-discourse to the nationalist I-novel metanarrative of Japanese modernity that Suzuki Tomi contours? In other words, postmodernism, globally speaking, was a translation movement; where was its place *locally* within the specific literary polysystem of Japan? While Even-Zohar's notion of literary polysystems generally structuralizes the relationship between translated literature and native literature, at the same time he is aware of the individual cultural contexts, which have to be considered. "Whether translated literature becomes central or peripheral, and whether this position is connected with innovatory ('primary') or conservatory ('secondary') repertoires, depends on the specific constellation of the polysystem under study." (Even-Zohar 2000:200) Put another way, the rise of 'metafiction' in Japan appears as a fruitful microscopic case study for the macro-level assumption of translated literature being an active agent of renewal within the overall literary polysystem of a specific culture.

Sasaki Atsushi singles out Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* for beginning his analysis of the scholarly discourse on metafiction in Japan. The monograph appeared in English in 1984 and was translated into Japanese two years later by Yūki Hideo as *Metafikushon – Jiishiki no fikushon no riron to jissai*.[16] In fact, Sasaki Atsushi calls it a classic of global

[16] Yūki Hideo (*1948) is a professor of English literature at Hōsei University. He is a specialist on James Joyce and received the Suntory Gakugei shō for his monograph Joyce's *Ulysses*, *Yurishīzu no nazo wo aruku*, which appeared in 1999.

metafiction research (*metafikushon kenkyū no kotenteki na shomotsu*) (Sasaki 2014:29). Thus, in Japanese, *'metafikushon'* (メタフィクション) is a foreign loanword. As such, I suggest that it is a travelling concept. According to Mieke Bal, travelling concepts travel across the boundaries of artistic practice and academic theory, philosophy and literature (see Bal 2012:1-2,16). I take the metaphor of travelling culturally and suggest that a concept, in travelling across *intra*cultural disciplinary boundaries, most likely will also cross *inter*cultural ones. This is because I speculate that interdisciplinary research, in most cases, is based on a textual corpus comprised of texts in more than one national language. In fact, translation and/or the reception of scholarly writing in a language different from one's mother tongue is as much *part* of academic expertise as the mastery of multiple languages is a *standard* of it.[17] I borrow Bal's notion of travelling concepts here with a re-accentuation on inter*culturality* in addition to Bal's own emphasis on inter*disciplinarity*. As such, I argue, a conceptual transfer, most likely, is also a cultural transfer.

Thus, in the following, I would like to unbind metafiction from the immobilizing embrace of a static notion of translation and emphasize translation as a dynamic, mutually transformative process. In fact, we may argue that the reception of 'metafiction' within the target language Japanese initiated a prolific dialogue with the notion from the angle of Japanese literary scholarship. In doing so, the case of metafiction shows that translation is not an asymmetric relationship of influence in which a metropolitan language chooses which oeuvres to translate from the peripheries, or in which, in turn, peripheries passively receive the translated concepts of metropolitan theories as new additions to their own canons. Instead, I second that translation is not a "one-way process", but "a reciprocal process of exchange." (De Bary 2009)

The introduction of the concept of metafiction through Patricia Waugh's translated monograph in 1986 was followed by the publication of two comparative

[17] This is Emily Apter's renewed argument for calling for an emphasis on translation as a specific expertise of the humanities after 9:11 in her 2006 *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*. In times of intercultural conflict, the humanities, with their multilingual expertise, is called to arms.

studies in Japanese on metafiction by Tatsumi Takayuki, a Japanese North-Americanist: *Metafikushon no bōryaku* (Strategies of Metafiction, 1993) and *Metafikushon no shisō* (Ideas of Metafiction, 2001). These two essentials on metafiction of Japanese scholarship were complemented by another monograph of Tatsumi's in English entitled *Full Metal Apache: Transactions between Cyberpunk Japan and Avant-Pop America,* published in 2006. Yura Kimiyoshi, a scholar of English literature, contributed a book-length study, *Metafikushon to datsukōchiku* (Metafiction and Deconstruction), to the discussion in 1995. These four works are independent pieces in that they are comparative examinations of metafiction from the perspective of Japanese scholars of Anglo-American literature and thus able to incorporate Anglo-American research into inquiries in how metafiction was expressed in either English or Japanese fiction. Thus, one of the merits of Tatsumi's work is to have recontextualized the author Tsutsui Yasutaka as "guru of Japanese metafiction" (Tatsumi 2006:53). The latest important addition to be made to the global debate is Sasaki Atsushi's *Anata wa ima kono bunshō wo yondeiru: Parafikushon no tanjō* (You are Right Now Reading these Lines: The Birth of Parafiction), which came out in 2014. Sasaki's study is a 21st century re-reading of metafiction through the notional prism of the more contemporary 'parafiction'. Different from Tatsumi and Yura, Sasaki exclusively relies on Japanese language scholarship, original works and translated ones. As such, I suggest, his study may provide us with useful insight in metafiction as translated literature within the Japanese literary polysystem.

Tatsumi Takayuki discusses Linda Hutcheon repeatedly in his monographs on metafiction. Yet, I would argue, Hutcheon's study on metafiction, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, which appeared in 1980, deserves more attention within the principal Japanese debate on the concept.[18] This may echo the Amero-European tendency to locate Waugh's monograph, despite it having appeared four years later than Hutcheon's, as the primary source of the debate. Nevertheless, I

[18] I highlight Linda Hutcheon's significance here only from a larger perspective of Translation Studies, not with respect to my own literary analysis.

argue that Sasaki singling out Waugh as the classic of global metafiction research shows that the evolution of translation literature within the literary polysystem is dependent on the selection of the source texts. Even though Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative* makes a comparable argument on metafiction expressing itself through narrative self-consciousness and appeared earlier in Amero-Europe (in 1980), the choice of translating Waugh's book into Japanese resulted in it being considered the dominant classic by some voices in Japanese scholarship. Hutcheon has not been overlooked by Japanese research; important works by her on postmodernist poetics have indeed been made accessible in Japanese language. Her book *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (1985) appeared in a 1993 translation by Tsuji Asako as *Parodi no riron*.[19] *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (1994) came out in 2003 belatedly in a translation by Koga Tetsuo as *Aironī no ejjī: Sono Riron to Seijigaku*. [20] Furthermore, Hutcheon's essential *The Politics of Postmodernism* was translated into Japanese as *Posutomodanizumu no sējigaku* quickly after it came out in English in 1989, in a 1991 translation by Kawaguchi Kyōichi.[21] Nevertheless, if we are to follow Sasaki, these contributions have not been as central in Japan for discussing metafiction as Waugh's authoritative, single monograph. As a result, the significance of translation in actively shaping local discourse should not be underestimated.

I would suggest that metafiction's quality as a travelling concept especially seems to crystallize in the back-and-forth of its specific notion of 'self-consciousness' in Japanese. 'Self-consciousness' translates as '*jiishiki* 自意識': the title of Waugh's English monograph is *Metafikushon: Jiishiki no fikushon no riron to jissai* メタフィクション自意識のフィクションの理論と実際. The notion of narrative self-consciousness is basic to most definitions of metafiction. I suggest that within the Japanese context, its

[19] Tsuji Asako specializes in English and Italian literature and teaches at Tōkyō Metropolitain University (Shuto Daigaku Tōkyō).
[20] Koga Tetsuo is a scholar of English literature who specializes in literary postmodernism (*posutomodanizumu bungaku*) and teaches at Osaka City University.
[21] Kawaguchi Kyōichi is an English scholar at Tsukuba University and has published on James Joyce and Samuel Beckett.

translation as '*jiishiki*' spoke to a local conception of autobiographic first-person narratives as instantaneous expressions of the subject's consciousness. In doing so, we may suggest, the '*jiishiki*' of metafiction entered into a dialogue with a Japanese discourse on writing the self. I would argue that the travel of the notion of 'self-consciousness' (*jiishiki*) from the English source language into the Japanese target language, and in turn, *within* the Japanese target language, may show that "the process of translation must be apprehended not as an arrival, but as movement between." (De Bary 2010:46) At the same time, through Tatsumi Takayuki, a Japanese North-Americanist, there was a further dialogue on metafiction between Japan and Anglo-America, which, I suggest, appears to make this concept a premier example through which to observe the various flows and shifts in meaning of a travelling concept.

'*Jiishiki*' is a concept widely discussed in Japanese literary criticism. I wonder whether it seems too far-fetched to speculate that Waugh's coinage of '*jiishiki*' hit a nerve when her work was translated into Japanese; indeed, it introduced a notion of '*jiishiki*' from a foreign conceptual angle. Thus, as much as the notion of *metafikushon* circulated to Japan, *jiishiki* answered this dialogue opened from a local perspective. This dialogue seems to express that in translation, "equivalences are the malleable results of various forms of negotiation." (Amelung/Kurtz/Lackner 2001:7). Indeed, the migration of knowledge through cultures is based on such discussions of specific terms:

> "For a brief transitional moment, these terms represent the only tangible interface between the two contexts and the meanings that are set in motion across their borders. To their usual role as more or less arbitrary semiotic shells, they are fully relegated only after their definitions and systematic values are settled in the new contexts – which may well require years or even decades of negotiation and debate." (2001:1)

Sasaki Atsushi emphasizes that Abe's metafiction in *Amerika no yoru* and other early works especially debates this problem of 'self-consciousness' (*jiishiki*) (see Sasaki 2016:235-240). What is meant is that Abe's early fiction continuously reflects on "narrating the self" (*watashi wo kataru*) (see Sasaki 2016:238). Thus, in that specific understanding, *'jiishiki*' indicates a notion of self-consciousness in which the self is a separate independent term that refers back to the long tradition of autobiographic writing in Japan. The I-novel (*shishōsetsu*) established a naturalistic style, in which

the subject confesses their life to the readership in quasi-instantaneous, unfalsified manner. [22] Metafictional self-consciousness defamiliarizes this impression of unmoulded first person rhetorics. However, in the global understanding, the notion of narrative self-consciousness, the basic definition of metafiction, does not specifically indicate nor restrict to first person narratives. 'Self-consciousness' indicates a general awareness within a literary narrative of itself being a literary narrative, namely an artifact. Metafiction could also be defined notionally as self-reflexive writing, which would be more abstract; instead, the choice of the metaphor 'self-conscious' points at a *subject*. 'Conscious' points at consciousness, which points at the self, which points at I, which points at the I-novel. The same goes for Hutcheon's description of metafiction as 'narcissistic' narratives. In order to metaphorize narrative self-reflexiveness, Hutcheon borrows a term from the field of Freudian psychoanalysis: narcissism as a "figurative adjective chosen here to designate textual self-awareness" (Hutcheon 1980:1). I suggest that the Japanese reception of *'jiishiki*' translates this connoted emphasis on the subject lexically implied within both Waugh's and Hutcheon's definitions of a global concept on narrative 'self-consciousness', 'self-awareness' or 'narcissism'. It translates the connoted emphasis into a local understanding of the term, which accentuates this emphasis on the subject. Yet, it does so in a manner that recontextualizes this emphasis for its own local context: the Japanese literary tradition is dominated historically by an obsession with the self. The Self provides the metaphor behind the principal cultural metanarrative of Japanese modernity, that of the I-novel, as I will detail below.

[22] The *shishōsetsu* is a canonical genre of modern Japanese literature; *shishōsetsu* essentially are "single-voiced" self-narratives, "with (usually) a single focalizer" (Orbaugh 2003:138). Edward Fowler defines *shishōsetsu* as confessional narrative forms emphasizing truthfulness "by encouraging the reader to disregard its textual boundaries and view 'real' world and 'fictional' world as an unbroken continuum", as well as a "kind of osmotic relationship that exists between author and narrator-hero – the one seemingly flowing into the other through a very permeable text." (Fowler 1988:7;8). Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit defines *shishōsetsu* as a literary genre characterized by 'factuality', an agreement between author and reader that literary reality is truthful to pragmatic reality, and 'focus figure', a narrative perspective juxtaposing author, narrator and protagonist (see Hijya-Kirschnereit 2005:175;183.) Suzuki Tomi, by contrast, defines *shishōsetsu* as a "historically constructed dominant reading and interpretive paradigm – which soon became a generative cultural discourse." (Suzuki 1996:10).

This means also that, the other way round, the Japanese discourse on metafiction deserves closer attention of foreign scholarship, or, the attention of foreign scholarship at all: in English overview articles, mostly Tatsumi Takayuki, despite him having published an English chapter on 'Comparative Metafiction' in *Full Metal Apache*, is not referenced (see Currie 1995; Berry 2012). Moreover, Sasaki's contribution on 'parafiction', not least of merit in that it reframes the English term 'parafiction' and introduces it as a new concept into the metafiction discussion, may be of interest in re-reading a 'classic' discourse from a contemporary perspective. This admitted, one may want to ask if, a contemporary perspective being that of the 21st century, this perspective is not always and necessarily a global perspective? Finally, as the title says (*Anata wa ima kono bunshō wo yondeiru*, meaning, 'You are right now reading these lines') Sasaki shifts emphasis to the role of the reader. In that he echoes Linda Hutcheon's early accentuation from 1980 without referencing the work, as it remains, as I mentioned above, inaccessible in Japanese to this day. This underscores my earlier argument that, for a complete transcultural picture on metafiction, both postmodernist and beyond, a consideration of Hutcheon's early monograph is likely to be insightful for advancing the debate.

3. Versus a Global Authentic: Metafiction as a Counter-Discourse

I propose to situate Abe's 90s fiction within what I consider to be a global field of literary postmodernism. North-American and Francophone literary scholarship has been prominent in pointing out the aesthetics and politics of narrative techniques such as parody or of genres such as metafiction – the interest of this chapter lies in how these literary discourses have translated into a Japanese context, how they have been appropriated and transformed in the process and what it thus means to speak of a transpacific discourse on postmodernism, literary and scholarly. Due to the rigorously unique prose of his early fiction, Abe Kazushige occupies an important place as both writer and public intellectual within the field of 1990s literature, a period where *Heisei*-literature was on a quest for its identity. In addition to this, Abe availed himself to be

the public face and voice of a prominent marketing campaign of Japanese literature at that time, which sold a supposedly new generation of authors as 'J-Bungaku'. Indeed, Abe's impact on both pop culture and the intellectual communities of the early *Heisei*-era was so profound that his peers claim that, "Abe Kazushige represents to [them] what Ôe Kenzaburô has been for the postwar generation." (Asano, Īda&Yonemitsu 2002:519) Against this background, I would argue that Abe's promotion of 'metafiction' as literary discourse has political implications; the question arising with regard to the epistemic hegemonies of Japanese literature once representational modes of narrating are disbanded, and self-conscious, problematical and experimental *écriture* takes over, is: what happens to subjectivity? The relationship between the representation of emotion and that of subjectivity in Japanese literature is closely tied to what Suzuki Tomi calls the 'I-novel metanarrative' of Japanese modernity, which has been normatively restricting the formal and aesthetic scope of Japanese literature since the 1920s (see Suzuki 1996:3).

The style which metafiction uses as a foil to unfold its deconstruction, in the Amero-European context, is literary realism. In its metafictional deconstruction, realism is

> "no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures. The materialist, positivist, and empiricist world-view on which realistic fiction is premised no longer exists." (Waugh 1984:7)

Within the Japanese context, I suggest that metafiction was a counter-discourse to what Matthew Koenigsberg calls the naturalistic "code of autobiographic realism" (Koenigsberg 2008:63). Koenigsberg establishes that, while literary realism did exist as temporary experiment in Japanese literature, it ended up being the tradition of autobiographic writing, which turned out to provide the hegemonic metanarrative of modernity in Japan. Thus, Matthew Koenigsberg points out formative patterns of an I-novel metanarrative, as Suzuki Tomi calls it, even earlier than Suzuki does: Koenigsberg analyses the debate surrounding the literary realism of the *ken'yūsha*-school (1880-1903; Friends of the Ink Stone), which was founded by its leader, writer Ozaki Kōyō (1857-1903). Koenigsberg indicates that Kōyō's attempt at creating a

literary realism inspired in form and technique by its European antecedent was doomed to fail due to what was, at the time, already a hegemonic impact of the naturalistic 'code of autobiographic realism'. Even though the *ken'yūsha*-realism has to be credited for exploring narrative techniques such as indirect and free indirect speech to innovatively express interior reflection processes, it ultimately had to cede the stage to the *shishōsetsu*, which was both constitutive of and compliant with the overall autobiographic metanarrative (see Koenigsberg 2008: 49-63).

In this way, 'metafiction', when introduced to a Japanese readership in 1986 through the translation of Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984), entered into a dialogue with a Japanese discourse dominated by what Suzuki Tomi identifies as the 'I-novel metanarrative':

> "As I shall argue, although I-novel discourse evolved from the 1920's through the 1960's, it maintained certain significant structural features. First, the notion of the I-novel was always formulated on a polar axis that contrasted the Western novel with its Japanese counterpart. As we shall see, the I-novel meta-narrative was premised on a binary, polar opposition between the Western novel, which was seen as a fictional, imaginative construct, and the Japanese I-novel, which was characterized as a factual, direct expression of the author's lived experience. Second, from the time of the term's appearance in the early 1920's, 'I-novel' was always a value-laden concept: the binary contrast was never neutral or simply descriptive; instead, it implied a hierarchical opposition that always raised the question of which pole was the 'truer' novel. The I-novel was, for example, alternately celebrated for its veracity and reviled for its immaturity. Third, the evaluation of the I-novel extended not only to the author's 'self' and 'life' but also to Japanese society – one writer, for example, said: 'The deformed I-novel was the product of deformed society' – and to the nature of Japan's modernity (*kindai*) as well as of its history and tradition." (Suzuki 1996: 3)

According to this factual expression, emotional self-experience in the traditional I-novel, a mostly first- or third-person autobiographical or fictional narrative, was supposed to be rendered as unfiltered as possible (*aru ga mama*). In asserting this ideal, the I-novel-discourse took up a cultural paradigm of authenticity, which had been articulated in Japanese criticism and literature since 18th century *waka* poetry. Thus, metafiction in a Japanese context is always implicitly a negation or affirmation of this dominant. Literary realism and autobiography both represented an unfalsified ideal of authenticity. As Linda Hutcheon notes, postmodern metafiction targeted authenticity and used it as the foil on which it unfolded its deconstruction:

> "Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies. It also forces a reconsideration of the idea of origin or originality that is compatible with other postmodern interrogations of liberal humanist assumptions (see Chapter 8). While *theorists* like Jameson (1983, 114-19) see this loss of the modernist unique individual style as a negative, as an imprisoning of the text in the past through *pastiche*, it has been seen by postmodern artists as a liberating challenge to a definition of subjectivity and creativity that has for too long ignored the role of history in art and thought. On Rauschenberg's use of reproduction and parody in his work, Douglas Crimp writes: 'The fiction of the creating subject gives way to the frank confiscation, quotation, excerption, accumulation and repetition of already existing images. Notions of originality, authenticity and presence … are undermined' (1983, 53)." (Hutcheon 1988:11)

I suggest that authenticity is a global concept; Judit Árokay clarifies that the problem of authenticity constitutes one major theoretic discourse of Japanese literature since the Edo period. One example are the poetics of Kagawa Kageki, in which authenticity appears as the concept '*shirabe*' and from where it builds a bridge to the contemporary I-novel and other forms of literature:

> "(…) the ideal of authenticity, which has been articulated in various expressions since the 18th century, builds a bridge to modern, if not to contemporary literature. Authenticity is connected to literary and aesthetic ideals, which seem to dominate wide areas even of modern literature, amongst them the Japanese I-novel (*shishōsetsu*). Within literature of the 20th century, it was the extremely productive and popular genre of the I-novel, which most directly followed the request for entrusting the readership with one's emotions as they were (*aru ga mama*). The bottom line was that the claim for truthfulness went so far as to consider the *shishōsetsu* the opposite pole of fiction. The 'purity' of motivation, the established experience and the sheerest possible realism of representation provided a work with a high aesthetic value. Linked to this was the myth of immediateness, in other words, the claim for a quasi-unconscious, spontaneous writing (*massugu*), that was not conceived as a facultative composition strategy, but was presumed to be the only thinkable method within the framework of the realness-principle (*makoto*). This realness-principle made sure that, especially within the genre of *shishōsetsu*, but also with all other literary text types, the opposition between actual/real/true versus conceived/unreal/lie became the main criteria for judging literary works." (Árokay 2010: 115)

Thus, authenticity and genuineness, significant ideas in early 20th century discourse, were discussed as part of a larger cultural discourse on Japan's national identity. Abe's fiction of the 1990s achieves a subversion of the power of the 'I-novel metanarrative' over Japanese literature by initiating an experimental counter-discourse, a position adopted by Abe and his peers within the literary field at the time.

For Patricia Waugh, metafiction in literature, in being parody, always and necessarily is an expression of revolt and renewal:

> "In the Russian formalist terms of literary evolution, however, such parody would be seen as a point of positive renewal in literary development, for the concept of 'making strange' or defamiliarization implies a literary dynamism: things cannot *remain* strange. In these terms, therefore, metafiction represents a response to a crisis within the novel – to a need for self-conscious parodic undermining in order to 'defamiliarize' fictional conventions that have become both automatized and inauthentic, and to release new and more authentic forms. Parody, as a literary strategy, deliberately sets itself up to break norms that have become conventionalized." (Waugh 1984:65)

Thus, Waugh analyses metafiction as an avant-garde discourse based on the notion of 'literary evolution' as defined through Russian Formalist literary theory. This is also how Abe instrumentalized the style in early interviews, as I will show in Part 2 of this chapter. Tillmann Köppe and Simone Winko note that "the choice of distinct styles can be understood as an author positioning himself within the literary field." (Köppe/Winko 2008:196) For the '90s generation of authors' (*kyūjūnendai no sakka*), as they were called in public discourse at the time, the perpetuation of metafiction, a style primarily associated with the postmodern (*posutomodan*) 1980s, as their own formalist literary method, was an attempt at renewing a Japanese national literature at a crossroads. With the boundaries between pure literature (*junbungaku*) and popular literature (*taishūbungaku*) dissolving at the time, metafiction was, at least for a few years, consciously strategized as a means to question the restraints of the literary establishment (*bundan*) on literary expression generally and its power over defining the notion of 'literary value' in Japan specifically. Self-reflexive narrative styles, be they notionally defined as 'metafiction' or just largely deconstructionist, generally speaking, seem to be part of the habitualized literary repertoire of Japanese literature nowadays. The question remaining is: what happened to the specific discourse on 'metafiction' (*metafikushon*) in Japan after the 1990s? What is the status of metafiction in 21st century literature globally and locally in Japan? Sasaki Atsushi's revisit of the concept as 'parafiction' in 2014 may provide one answer to such questions.

4. Conclusion

I would argue firstly that metafiction was more than just a local dominant in literary style; it was a *global* counter-discourse and, as such, a dialogue between comparable endeavours to provide a corrective to the hegemonic epistemes of modernity in Amero-Europe and Japan alike.

Secondly, as a global literary counter-discourse, metafiction had a *cultural* impact. It destabilized cultural precepts on the value of the original, real or true over that of the copy, fiction, false. Thus, an evaluation of literature for a complete picture of the *cultural* narrative on postmodernity is not only beneficial, but also necessary. Thus, I make a case for Linda Hutcheon's contributions to the postmodernist debate: Hutcheon and Fredric Jameson are often opposed in their contributions, as if one was forced to choose sides, with Jameson being prioritized. Instead, I suggest, the perspectives provided by *both as complements*, meaning the postmodern as a cultural phenomenon of late capitalism and an expression in the visual arts, and postmodernism as a literary style inherently political (metafiction), are conducive to a nuanced understanding of what postmodernism was as a global counterculture.[23]

Moreover, a re-evaluation of metafiction as translated literature newly highlights the potential for an inquiry from the perspective of Comparative Literature. Tatsumi Takayuki, in calling his analytic approach to metafiction 'comparative metafiction' (see Tatsumi 2006:38-59), implies this potential without going as far as to make an explicit case for it. Metafiction, I would argue, *needs* to be analysed from a comparative perspective because it is based on multiple linguistic travels in its formation. In fact, metafiction is not simply a *concept*, but always and necessarily a *travelling* one. That means that Japanese scholarship is recommended to further incorporate translations of foreign scholarship into its canon, as much as Amero-European research is urged to more consciously consider Japanese contributions, especially those available in English, for a global picture on metafiction.

[23] See also FN 9 in Chapter 1 on this comparison.

I have pointed out the analysis of Abe Kazushige's literary oeuvre as metafiction as a pertinent case study in order to highlight the benefits of deepening the dialogue between Amero-European and Japanese conceptions of metafiction. Japanese scholarship on Abe's metafiction so far has emphasized it tackling the problem of the modern subject (*jiishiki*). I have added that reducing it to this variant would mean opting for a narrow perspective. Abe's metafiction is eclectic and widely heterogeneous: it permits readings of it as parodies on criticism as much as deconstructions of historiography's empiricism. In addition to the problem of '*jiishiki*', it is the aspect of a 'literature which theorizes itself' that speaks to Abe's early fiction. Within the Japanese reception of metafiction, Patricia Waugh's globally authoritative study seems to be of primary relevance. I propose that a further consideration of Linda Hutcheon's contributions on narrative narcissism and historiographic metafiction might also be especially beneficial for advancing research on Japan's literary postmodernism and the time after. Overall, I hope to have pointed out, that the exchange between Japanese and Anglo-American theories of metafiction amply clarifies the global potential of this literary dominant; not least, it reevaluates postmodernism generally as a transcultural phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2 PART 2:

Politics of Collaboration within the 1990s Literary Field

After having situated Abe's 90s fiction within what I consider to be a global field of literary postmodernism, I now turn to an analysis of his media image. I repeat that I argue that within the 90s field's web of complex relationships between artists, critics, scholars and editors, power was asserted and subverted through public performances of collaboration. These performances were facilitated by the common ritual of art journals in Japan to team up two or more people for detailed, quasi-informal conversations about topics related to their work. There are various types of these published conversations: *zadankai* (roundtable discussions) and *taidan* (conversations between two people, or interviews) and *teidan* (conversations between three people). The inquiry focuses on a conversation between Abe and fellow '90s writer' Akasaka Mari. Arguably, published conversations were instrumentalized by the *J-Bungaku* movement to publicly promote and perform their ideas in order to position themselves as a group against traditional literary circles. A second emphasis of the analysis will concern how the group used visual markers such as images for the creation of their group appearance. In fact, I argue that by repeatedly using pictures by the photographer Tokiwa Hibiki for the cover design of selected books by '90s writers', selected

members indicated themselves as a group to begin with. Secondly, they visually associated themselves with the *J-Bungaku* campaign, as the look of the campaign, which mostly relied on the publication of a number of introductory booklets, was designed by Tokiwa Hibiki as well. It might also be said that the group appropriated the *J-Bungaku* campaign for their aims.

In the following, I analyse in cursory manner the group dynamics of the '90s writers' during the *J-Bungaku* campaign. I will analyse how the visual design of the campaign, and the published conversations with authors which are part of it, create the image of a new '90s generation' of authors and how Abe Kazushige is positioned as the spokesperson of that group. I will also look into how this group positioned itself within the field vis-à-vis the establishment at the time. In doing so, I will analyse how Abe instrumentalizes the imported concept of 'metafiction' during the '*J-Bungaku*' campaign: besides it being the main narrative technique throughout the whole line of his novels and short stories, Abe publicly discusses the concept as a 90s paradigm of writing, which, he claims, needs to be further developed and refined in order to actually overcome literary traditions.

1. Media Performances: The Author in the Public Sphere

Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt observes that, compared to foreign literary fields, the "heightened attention attributed to the author of literary texts constitutes an important characteristic of current Japanese literary discourse." (Iwata Weickgenannt 2008:179). While authors in foreign cultures also give media interviews and appear in articles of literary journals, Iwata-Weickgenannt argues that the media presence of authors in Japan is definitively stronger:

> "The media presence of contemporary best-selling authors in Japan is incomparably higher than, for example, in Germany, where the reception of literary writers in most cases narrowly relates to their texts. By contrast, their Japanese colleagues oftentimes attain the status of stars or celebrities, which exceeds their status as literary creators. This celebrity status also qualifies them for interviews on general topics in women's and fashion magazines, for instance." (2008:175)

This media exposure of literary writers in Japan is related to the importance of autobiography as the historically dominant genre in Japan. The autobiographic literary accounts fuelled an interest in real life stories behind the fiction on the part of the reader. Hibi Yoshitaka explains that this interest was fed, since the mid-1890s, by media reports on the authors accompanying the publications of their self-narratives (see Hibi 2002:41). This collaboration between authors writing self-narratives and media reporting on the authors' life turned into a system. In analysing this system, Hibi establishes that the media reports gradually instituted a habit of matching the authors' autobiographies with their empirical life. Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt adds that this established habit put in place biographistic reception as a general reading paradigm among Japanese readers, which is perpetuated in *Heisei* literature (see Iwata Weickgenannt 2008:189-199). As a result, the publication of a literary oeuvre in Japan, whether autobiographic or not, generally coincides with a parallel media coverage on its author. Within this system, any author who publishes an oeuvre will at some point also emerge as a public persona in print, TV and radio journalism. In addition to such opportunities for self-staging, nowadays, the internet offers writers multiple supplementary possibilities for identity performances in the public sphere: besides the early personal websites and blogs (see 2008:175-177), many artists and writers now have their own social media accounts. Thus, nowadays, authors have the possibility for direct interaction with their audience, unmediated through the filter of media interview selection, conduction and subsequent editing. During the 1990s, however, the venues for author performances were restricted to those moderated by print, TV and radio journalism. Thus, from a contextual perspective, the 1990s may be a *cesura* for defining Japanese literature based on its location within a media frame of reference. For my analysis, I focus on an examination of Abe Kazushige's printed interviews and conversations (*taidan*, *teidan* and *zadankai*).

I argue that Abe Kazushige is an exemplary case, in which the roles of literary author, critic, public commentator and celebrity amalgamate into one public persona 'Abe Kazushige' during the 1990s. Partially responsible for Abe's heightened

visibility in the public sphere was the marketing campaign *J-Bungaku*, which produced a booklet in 1998 in which Abe was prominently featured as the leader of a new generation of authors. He also wrote a column on semi-private topics in the women's magazine *An An*. Yet, I suggest that Abe distinguishes himself from other 1990s writers by the centrality and frequency of his interviews and conversations; apart from the regular interviews and conversations in literary journals, he has participated in a couple of serial conversations with Aoyama Shinji and Nakahara Masaya. He has also produced a series of interviews with female colleagues only, in addition to his homosocial conversations. Moreover, numerous published conversations on cinema between Abe, fellow writer Nakahara Masaya and writer/director Aoyama Shinji appeared during the early millennium.

I argue that the performances of Abe's printed interviews and conversations in constructing the author identity 'Abe Kazushige' do not rely on biographic elements, even though Abe sporadically brings up autobiographic references in his fiction (such as liking Bruce Lee and Philipp K. Dick, being from Yamagata in *Amerika no yoru* and *ABC sensō*). However, autobiographic concerns are not what characterize Abe's oeuvre generally. Hence, I argue, his interviews are not so much a forum for discussing private issues, but for discussing literary concerns. Abe's interviews and roundtable conversations are a public medium for him to make programmatic statements on literary theoretic topics in order to position himself as an author within the literary field. This is what, in my opinion, defines the importance of Abe for the formative years of *Heisei* literature. His author performances stage him as the leader of a new '90s generation of writers' during the decade and an advocate of literary formalism generally. Thus, discussing private issues and exploiting them for the creation of his public image are not part of Abe Kazushige's author performances. Instead, 'Abe Kazushige' poses as a critic, presents himself as knowledgeable in literature and theory and as a skilled commentator of his peers' works.

2. Where to Turn? The 1990s - Literature in Transition

> "In contemporary Japan, especially since the latter half of the 1980s, fiction such as that of Murakami Haruki 村上春樹 (b. 1949) and Yoshimoto Banana 吉本ばなな (b. 1964) has acquired a wide following among middle-school, high-school, and university students; and it has gone on from there to achieve best-seller status. (…) the boundary between 'pure literature' and 'popular literature' is vanishing before our eyes." (Suzuki 2006:4)

As Suzuki Sadami clarifies in *Nihon no 'bungaku' gainen* (*The Concept of 'Literature' in Japan*; transl. Royal Tyler 2006), since the mid-1980s, the postwar dichotomic separation of Japanese literature into the two halves of *junbungaku,* in the sense of intellectual fiction, and *taishūbungaku*, in the sense of entertainment fiction, had been dissolving.

In public discourse and scholarship, the conflict around the author Murakami Haruki's success, who defied easy classification into either stream, was a catalyst for a debate about a possible decline of *junbungaku* in late 1980s. Murakami Haruki, undoubtedly one of the most popular Japanese writers in global reception nowadays, from a perspective of literary history first and foremost, is a landmark case study for how the discourse of Japanese literature was at a crossroads at the time. Traditionally, *junbungaku* is the fiction associated with a higher literary value and hence has the greatest power within the literary field. It is also considered serious fiction equipped with the potential for political intervention. The conflict around Murakami Haruki exploded when his colleague Ōe Kenzaburō shut him out of the territory of *junbungaku* in a concerned comment on Japanese literature's possible degeneration, which appeared in 1988 in the journal *World Literature Today*.[24] Ensuing scholarship on Murakami then mainly focused on Murakami's problem of classification; a series of articles in the early 2000s use the notion of 'postmodern' (ポストモダン) to locate his fiction as an example that Japanese literature might have moved beyond its traditional dichotomies towards an as yet unnamable place. These articles perpetuate the literary dispute in that their argument aims at justifying a serious scholarly

[24] For the German translation of this article by Asa-Bettina Wuthenow see Ōe Kenzaburō 1995.

treatment of Murakami; in other words, they see a need to legitimize Murakami's relevance as material for profound scholarly research (see Strecher 1998a, 1998b; Loughman 1997; Matsuoka 2002.) That being so, they are testament to the epistemic shift at the time: what is now an unquestioned standard, namely a treatment of Murakami Haruki's oeuvre as an object of scholarly analysis, at the time presupposed a justification of him being a 'serious' author.

This was the situation which Japanese literature faced from around 1990 onwards: a field in turmoil, concepts in transit and a general awareness that a return to the former order was impossible, while the future remained unclear. As Fukushima Yoshiko puts it:

> "The decade of the 1990s marked a period during which the distinction of two types of Japanese literature – pure literature as serious, elite, and political and popular literature as light, common, and entertaining – became radically blurred. New writers and works, representing diversified styles and themes, surged into literary culture." (Fukushima 2003:41)

What was apparent in public discourse was that there was an opposition between the defenders of *junbungaku* and those who were considered its enemies. This debate was moral: *junbungaku* was positioned as the vanishing institution with a political consciousness, while the literary market was flooded with easy-to-read fiction for an ideal type of capitalist consumerist reader. The question Japanese 1990s literature was debating during the decade seems to be: if not strictly speaking *junbungaku* anymore, what was literature then? What was it not? And what was it instead?

Many authors who are key players of the global literary scene nowadays, such as Tawada Yōko, Ogawa Yōko et al. emerged during the 1990s. Abe Kazushige himself is an example of an author who rose to speak during the 1990s as a young avantgarde writer opposing the literary establishment and subsequently turning into an author who was recognized by it, included into it and now constitutes parts of it. Abe's initiation into the establishment came with the publication of his novel *Shinsemia* (Sasaki 2016:238) and after, when his novel *Grand Finale* won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize in 2004. Between 2012 and 2014, Abe was a juror for the Gunzō

Newcomer Award, after having received the award himself at the age of 26 for his debut novel *Amerika no yoru*.

3. *J-Bungaku*

The *J-Bungaku* campaign is multiply foregrounded as one major event characteristic of Japanese literature's renewal efforts during the 1990s (see Gebhardt 2001; Gildenhardt 2008; Sasaki 2013-2016). My reading is complementary to these descriptions and includes a hypothetical view on Abe Kazushige's role within this campaign through a visual analysis of *J-Bungaku*'s main publication, a 1998 *Bungei* special issue separate booklet. This analysis relates the visual logic of the booklet's graphic design to the cover image of Abe's previous 1997 bestseller *Individual Projection*. My argument is that Abe staged himself and was staged by the campaign as the leader of a counterculture movement. Moreover, I question whether Abe's importance for the campaign was not bigger than is generally assumed: in fact, I ask if Abe was *constitutive* for the campaign. The campaign's booklet includes the same female model from *Individual Projection*'s cover, in the same distinctive clothing so as to obviously recognize her. The consecutive publication of *Individual Projection* and the booklet, in 1997 and 1998 respectively, allows for the questions of how far-reaching Abe Kazushige's influence was for the design of the *J-Bungaku* campaign. How significant was his role for it? Subsequently, the chapter turns to an analysis of how the 90s generation of writers staged their group identity during the campaign. Therefore, the analysis will rely on two threads: firstly, an analysis of the visual appearance of *J-Bungaku* and the role of photographer Tokiwa Hibiki who shot the booklets and also the covers of several of Abe's and Akasaka Mari's books. And secondly, an analysis of an interview between Abe and Akasaka on their identification as 90s writers.

Fig. 1

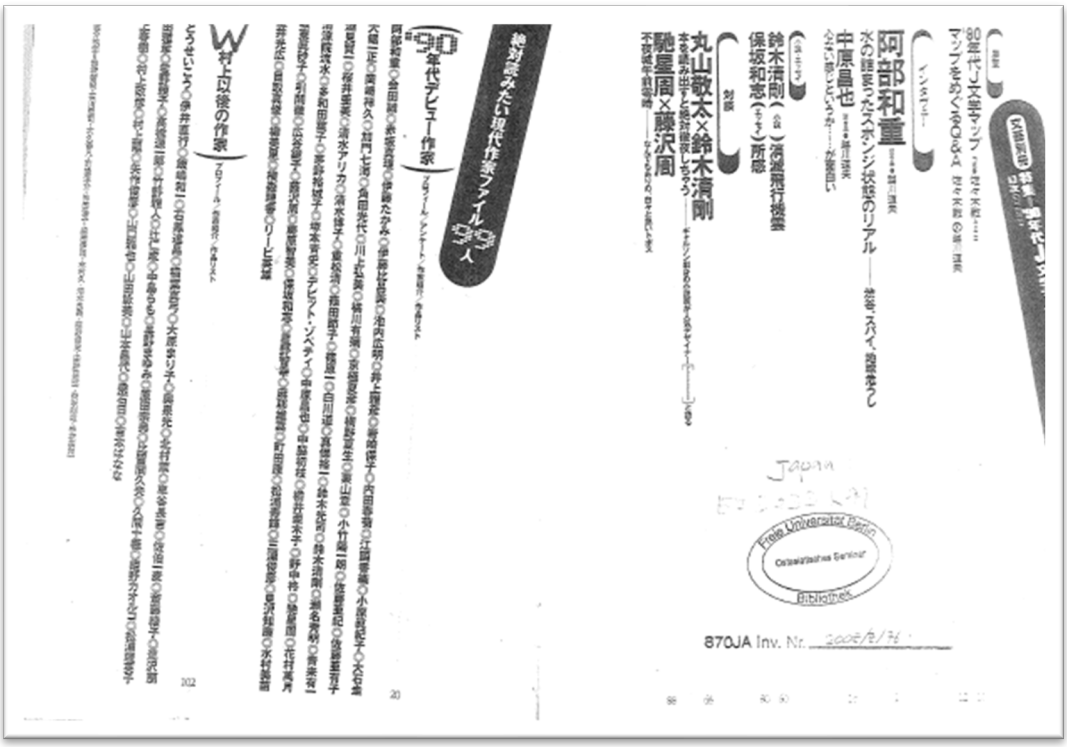
Fig. 2

The *J-Bungaku* campaign produced three notable booklets, which appeared between 1998 and 1999. Research on *J-Bungaku* usually singles out the 1998 special issue separate booklet of the literary journal *Bungei* as the main publication of the campaign, as it offers a cartography of 1990s literature and introduces 99 new must-read authors (see Gebhardt 2001, and Gildenhardt 2008). As Gildenhardt describes:

> "J-Bungaku was first used in 1998 by the renowned literary journal *Bungei.* In conscious analogy to the terms *J-Pop* und *J-Comic*, the cover of the August special issue booklet *(bessatsu)* says: '*J-bungaku.* A Sketch of 1990s Literature. A comprehensive literary guide for the generation of *J-Pop* and *J-Comic*'. The serialization of the 'J'-terms here obviously serves at winning over a young audience of readers. New texts of narrative prose fiction are supplied with attributes of pop music and comics and staged as trendy, popular, and easily understandable. In doing so, the 'J' signals two things. It characterizes the literary texts as specifically Japanese. At the same time, the English pronounciation evokes an image of Japan which is modern and internationally compatible. These aspects are reinforced by the cover image, which Gebhardt fittingly describes: 'On the cover [of the August separate special issue of *Bungei]* we can see a young woman. She is dressed as the fashion journals recommend it and sits on the deck of a skyscraper, a pile of books in front of her, which are wrapped in yellow, red and blue paper – what quasily turns these books into colourful accessories and thus 'liberates' them from a possible incriminatory function as educational provider. For the young woman, reading obviously signifies pure pleasure, for she smiles.' (Gebhardt 2000:2) One year later, a further special issue is published under the title 'Book chart, in order to be able to enjoy *J-bungaku* even more. The best 200' *(Bungei, bessatsu:* 7:1999). Its design follows the predecessor journal issue: equally pictured are fashionably dressed young women, who enjoy reading books." (Gildenhardt 2008:32-33.)

I also focus on an analysis of the first 1998 booklet, as I suggest it exemplarily lays down the law for how *J-Bungaku* stages itself then and subsequently. Through its layout arrangement the brochure lists *J-Bungaku* as a catalogue of 99 authors as well

as some critics and artists. Even though a pre-90s generation of writers is indicated as a group as well, the focus is turned on the group named as 'those writers who have made their debuts during the 90s' (*kyūjūnendai debyū sakka*) (see figure 2). Thus, *J-Bungaku* is introduced as a nouvelle vague of Japanese literature, which is mainly sustained by a '90s generation of authors' presented as a homogenous group. Moreover, the booklet centres on Abe Kazushige as the leader of this group and, right at the



beginning, includes an interview with him on his novel *Individual Projection* published in 1997. In other words, the most important interview, according to font size and order, is conceded to Abe Kazushige, who thus is established as the head of the group as well as its opinion leader. Besides further authors such as Nakahara Masaya (*1971), Suzuki Seigō (*1970), Hosaka Kazushi (*1956), Hase Seishū (*1965), Fujisawa Shū (*1959), we also find critics such as Sasaki Atsushi (*1964), Ishikawa Tadashi (*1963), Saitō Minako (*1956), scholar Chūjō Shōhei (*1953), journalist Nagae Akira (*1958), designer Maruyama Keitā (*1965) and the film producer Koshikawa Michio (*1965), who conducts most of the interviews. As a result, *J-*

Bungaku is not presented as a literary movement, strictly speaking, but as a broader artistic and intellectual grouping. This textual representation of the '90s generation' of cultural producers also includes the producers of the booklet as such. The two photographers who are responsible for the overall layout of it both began working during the 90s: Ōno Jun'ichi (*1968) started in 1990, while Tokiwa Hibiki debuted in 1997, when he shot the cover image of Abe's novel *Individual Projection*, which appeared one year before the booklet.

4. 90s Group Politics I: Tokiwa Hibiki Shoots the 90s Generation

Because of his prominence within the campaign, foreign reception often locates Abe Kazushige as a '*J-Bungaku* author'. Abe himself rejects this label. Accordingly, the profile on his personal website clearly puts it: "Contrary to the author's intentions, [the novel *Individual Projection*] turned into a work which brought with it neologisms such as 'Shibuya-style-literature' or 'J-Literature'." (See Abe Kazushige Official Site, accessed in 2015) While the content of the novel, as my analysis in Chapter 3 of this dissertation shows, indeed stands for itself, a comparison of the cover photograph of the novel with images of *J-Bungaku*'s main brochure, speaks a different language. In the following, I analyse *Individual Projection*'s jacket design, within the larger context of the *J-Bungaku* campaign. I argue that especially the cover photograph is an important paratext of the novel. Indeed, in subsequent reception, the cover seems to have had a bigger impact on cultural memory than the novel itself, as I will detail in Chapter 4.

Fig. 3

When *Individual Projection* appeared in 1997, the blurb stages the novel as an 'ultimate masterpiece' of a new type of literature. The white lettering on the low left announces: 'After an enormous media echo in various journals, the advent of the ultimate masterpiece of a new literature of the 90s' (*kaku zasshi ni daihankyō, 90nen dai shinbungaku no saikō kessaku ga tanjō*). The cover photograph was commissioned by Abe himself, who had asked his friend Tokiwa Hibiki, a graphic designer at the time who had created the cover design for *Amerika no yoru*, to shoot it. Despite its exploitative nature, the image of a scantily dressed young woman who is standing in a record store turns into an iconic motif of 1990s pop culture. It laid the foundation for Tokiwa Hibiki's subsequent career as a photographer.

Further images of the young woman in various stages of undress are scattered across the whole cover. The paperback version has pictures on the back of the cover as well on the cover's sides (see figure 5), while the original hardcover version plasters its back with images of her even at the expense of a blurb and an author profile (see figure 6).

Fig. 4

Fig. 6

Now, I suggest that both Abe's rejection of any association with the *J-Bungaku* campaign as well as his label as one *J-Bungaku* author among many may not be adequate. Instead, I propose, the importance of Abe Kazushige for the presentation of the campaign was considerable. I agree that it would be short-sighted and reductive to generally label Abe a *J-Bungaku* author; his oeuvre, before and after the campaign is about much more than *just* this marketing campaign. Still, Abe's importance *during* and *for* the campaign may have been more significant than he indicates himself. Or, put differently, if we analyse Abe Kazushige in relation to *J-Bungaku*, then we have to acknowledge that his influence on *J-Bungaku* was more important than to include his name among many others in a list-up of *J-Bungaku* authors. While Abe's actions as an agent behind the campaign are difficult for me to reconstruct, from what can I retrace based on the texts available, it may be adequate to not claim that Abe was one *J-Bungaku* author. Instead, *J-Bungaku* was an Abe campaign, or at least, a campaign that put Abe at its centre and both appropriated and perpetuated motives of his own

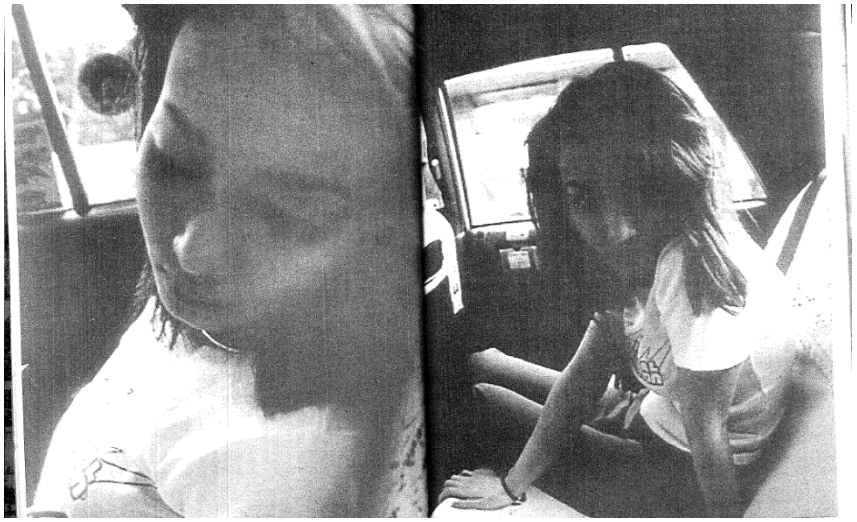


Fig. 5

independent literary marketing for its cause.[25] If we compare the cover design of *Individual Projection*, which, I repeat, had appeared one year before *Bungei*'s *J-Bungaku* booklet in 1998, we can find inconspicuous parallels between both visual designs of the booklet. As if in a direct visual quote of the novel, pictures of the same female model whom we also encounter on *Individual Projection*'s cover can be found in the brochure (see figures 6 and 7). In order to clarify the similarity, the model even wears the same clothes as on *Individual Projection*'s cover. My argument thus relies on the consecutive time order of both publications: *Individual Projection* appeared in 1997 and was a bestseller. The cover stood out and male consumers admit to having caught interest to the novel because of the image of the young woman to begin with (see Asano, Īda&Yonemitsu 2002:519; see Nagae&Lily 1999:87). The first *J-Bungaku* booklet then appeared in 1998 and features Abe as its poster author and includes images of the same model as on his *Individual Projection* cover in an open reference. At least, I suggest, this consecutive time order allows for the question of whether *J-Bungaku* without Abe may have had a different look. Or if it would even have been possible without him. Did *J-Bungaku* follow Abe's successful book marketing in conceptualizing its campaign by imitating the style of his cover, when it put a young woman reading on its cover? And did it self-referentially reflect on this imitation by including the same model as on *Individual Projection*'s cover in its booklet design?

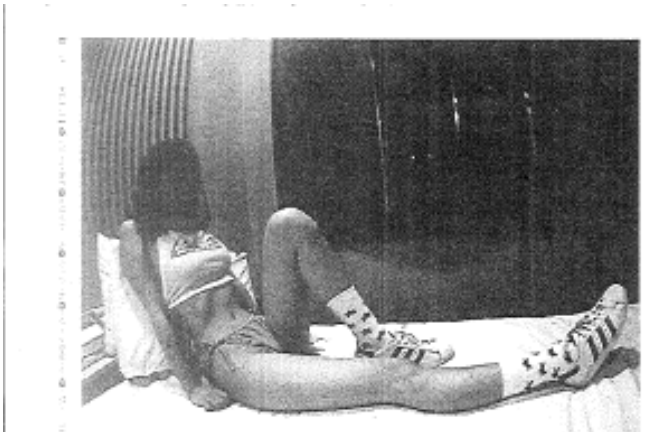


Fig. 7

Did it centre on Abe, because he was most fitting, having landed a bestseller a year earlier? Furthermore, did Abe's photogenic appearance, which the booklet exploits in several portrait images accompanying his author

[25] Sasaki Atsushi, one of the orchestrators of the *J-Bungaku* campaign, generally confirms in *Nippon no Bungaku* that Abe Kazushige was primarily responsible for triggering the campaign through his novel *Individual Projection* (see Sasaki 2016:214).

interview, play any role in him being chosen as the main representative of *J-Bungaku* and leader of the '90s generation of writers'? Returning to the question of this chapter: the repeated collaboration between Tokiwa Hibiki and Abe Kazushige seems to represent one pattern, according to which the 90s generation performed its identity as a group in the public sphere. As mentioned above, Tokiwa created the cover design for Abe Kazushige's debut novel *Amerika no yoru* before he shot the iconic image of the young woman in a record store of *Individual Projection*'s jacket.

Fig. 8

Later on, Tokiwa also created the wrapping design of Akasaka Mari's first novel *Kare ga kanojo no onna datta koro,* which appeared in 2003. As one can easily see, Tokiwa perpetuates his own signature style in it: young women, clad in little clothing (see figure 8).[26] The 1999 follow-up booklet to the 1998 *Bungei* special booklet actually features Tokiwa Hibiki with an interview under the header: 'Tokiwa Hibiki shoots *J-Bungaku*' (*Tokiwa Hibiki J-Bungaku wo toru*). Thus, an in-depth analysis of Tokiwa Hibiki's

[26] The gender bias of the *J-Bungaku* campaign orchestrated by the *sezon-kei* as predominantly male group is a topic that deserves further analysis through gender theory; the *sezon-kei* were almost exclusively comprised of male writers with Akasaka Mari being the only notable female writer associated with the group (Nagae 1999:66-79). Akasaka publicly identifies as a member of the *sezon-kei* through the conversation with Abe Kazushige analyzed below. She relates to the group's gendered image politics in the *J-Bungaku* campaign through the cover photograph of *Kare ga kanojo no onna datta koro* shown above, which visually refers to Abe Kazushige's *Individual Projection* and has the same photographer. However, the semi-nude staging of the female models in both cover photographs as such has heterosexist connotations within the patriarchal context of *Heisei*-era Japan. Female critic Saitō Minako has criticized in retrospect that the attempt at subsuming *Heisei* literature under the label of *J-Bungaku* failed in the end, because the "grouping as such was inconclusive" (Saitō 2018:ii) without explicitly addressing the exclusivity arising from the overall heterosexual maleness of the *sezon-kei* behind *J-Bungaku* as a possible problem. Still, Saitō makes a point distinguishing the 1990s as primarily characterized by the emergence of influential female writers such as Shōno Yoriko, Tawada Yōko and Matsuura Rieko (Saitō 2018:134-137), thus, contradicting previous male critics such as Nakamata Akio and Sasaki Atsushi (himself a member of the *sezon-kei*), who both single out Hosaka Kazushi and Abe Kazushige (lead members of the *sezon-kei*) as "representing" (Sasaki 2016:235) 1990s literature (see Sasaki 231-244; see Nakamata 2001:73). Nagae Akira attempts to provide insight into the artistic

role as the photographer of the campaign might be fruitful for an understanding of how the 90s generation located itself within it in general (see figure 2).

5. 90s Group Politics II: Conversations

As introduced earlier, a second manner, in which the 90s generation displayed its group identity was through published conversations and interviews. I focus on a conversation of Abe's with his colleague Akasaka Mari, which appeared in a special issue of the *Bungei* journal in 1999. I analyse how the two authors use the medium of the recorded conversations to perform a '90s generation' group identity. Before I turn to this analysis, I will prepend a short general examination of the importance of published interviews and conversations for author performances within the public sphere and explain where I see the difference in them from more contemporary digital formats of social media.

5.1 The Role of Interviews and Conversations in the Public Sphere

Peter Mühleder and Florian Purkathofer explain: "The booming magazine business of the 1970s and 1980s helped to popularize postmodern theory in Japan." (Mühleder/Purkathofer 2014:84) For that reason, I read Abe's interviews and conversations in a diachronic line with the popularization of science during the 1980s: in fact, *niū akademizumu* might have been possible only *because* interviews and conversations as a system already existed, not the other way round. Thus, the role of published interviews and conversations for the mediatization of knowledge in general, and criticism in particular, cannot be overestimated in Japan's case. Indeed, the

context of the *sezon-kei* out of which Tokiwa Hibiki's cover photographs emerged by pointing out the links of group members, particularly Akasaka Mari, to bondage and S&M subculture at the time (see Nagae 1999:67-68). I also hope that my analysis of Abe Kazushige's fiction will show that his novels and short stories invoke images of, precisely, non-hegemonic, *queer* masculinities disruptive of, rather than complicit in, *Heisei* heteropatriarchy, and, in that sense, will add to a nuanced picture of the gendered image politics of the *sezon-kei*. I hope my analysis may invite us to further explore how the paratexts of *J-Bungaku* and the *sezon-kei* locate themselves within the contexts of their fiction and media performances, 1990s literature and gender theory.

question seems not to be in how far an author *participates* in creating his media image. Rather the question is in how far it is possible to *not* be part of that creation: published interviews and roundtable conversations being fixed rituals of Japanese print publishing, they are part of any author's profession. Put another way, one cannot be an author in Japan *without* participating in these rituals; the public sphere inevitably comes with the job. Even famously reclusive authors such as Murakami Haruki participate in these media performances. In turn, even a complete refusal to participate would be an author performance and lead to the creation of an image (that of the one who refuses to participate). In other words, the question is not so much: *is* there a performance? It rather is: *how* does this performance *look*? How do authors position themselves within the public context for their own profilings?

I locate two ways of categorizing published interviews and conversations in research so far: firstly, a reading of them as self-documents. Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt argues for such an understanding of interviews and roundtable conversations as self-documents in her suggestion to analyse both literary and media narratives as constituents of one comprehensive, image-generating author discourse through the example of Japanese-Korean author Yū Miri (see Iwata-Weickgenannt 2008:198).

A second approach locates interviews and roundtable-discussions as criticisms. On the one hand, interviews and conversations are included in scholarly research on a similar level as criticisms in prose without any methodological problematization. On the other, interviews and roundtable discussions are highlighted as a specific form of criticism in Japan. Thus, Peter Mühleder and Florian Purkarthofer highlight criticism in Japan being, amongst other things, a particular institutionalized practice:

> "While the English and German discourse is searching vividly for a theory of criticism, there is less concern about the actual practices of criticism (cf. Demirović 2008). But looking at Japanese criticism from this point of view, we can observe that three practices became institutionalized: *ronsō*, a critical discussion of two or more critics published in periodicals; *zadankai*, transcriptions of roundtable discussions, normally in easily understandable language; and *zuihitsu* essays, critique formulated in a literary style." (2014:13)

This is also the thrust of Alexander Zahlten's argument in his analysis of criticism in Japan during the 1980s, when he claims that theory at the time mainly consisted in performance. (Zahlten 2017) Similarly, Sasaki Atsushi highlights 'performance' as one conceptual keyword behind Japanese criticism since the 1980s.

I would like to pick up Mühleder's and Purkarthofer's thread and paraphrase that in Japan, *taidan*, *teidan*, *zadankai*, *ronsō* and *zuihitsu* are specific practices of *doing* criticism. Considering the fact that all four formats display in the public sphere of media journalism, I specify that all four practices are manners of *enacting* criticism. Moreover, I differentiate that there is a difference between *taidan, teidan, zadankai* and *ronsō* and *zuihitsu*: *taidan, teidan* and *zadankai* are published conversations, while *ronsō* are essays exchanged in periodicals by two or more feuding critics on a conflict of their choice. Then again, *zuihitsu* are also essays. In other words, *taidan, teidan* and *zadankai* are recorded dialogue, while *ronsō* and *zuihitsu* are prose pieces, although *ronsō* put these prose pieces into a consecutive dialogue with each other. Which leads me to my argument: Mühleder's and Purkarthofer's approach in foregrounding the practices of criticism departs from cultural studies and sociology (see 2014:5) and intends to make a contribution to what they consider a narrowly angled search for a theory of criticism. Nevertheless, I would argue for the inclusion of a literary theoretical perspective as well. In other words, while I second that *taidan*, *teidan*, *zadankai*, *ronsō* and *zuihitsu* are practices, I emphasize that all of them are *texts*, too. Taking especially the former two, *taidan, teidan* and *zadankai*, as texts, liberates these recorded conversations from readings, which would situate them as factual expressions of their empirical authors' biological psyches. Instead, proposing to interpret recorded conversations as texts allows me to unlock these documents from biographism and open the view on them as objects of literary analysis. Literary analysis, in turn, has the benefit of enabling me to look into the *narrative procedures* of recorded conversations. Such an approach, again, permits me to emphasize the dynamics of *dialogic performance* inherent in these texts. In thus rejecting biographistic readings of published interviews and conversations, I claim that any assumptions of an author

intention are irrelevant. Published interviews and conversations are expressions of an author's media performance; it *can* only be possible to analyse their narrative procedures and effects, never to relate these effects to any actual intentions of an empirical author's psyche behind them.

Thus, I read printed interviews and conversations as both practices and texts. In doing so, I suggest that they are a main medium for the medial author performances of 'Abe Kazushige'. The specificity of printed interviews and conversations as opposed to text-centric social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter are, I would suggest, the fact they are *dialogic* instead of *monologic*. On Facebook and Twitter, while some interaction takes place through the mechanisms of retweeting, linking or liking, the focus is on the owner of the account and their self-staging. By contrast, in interviews and conversations, the author performance unfolds in relation to and in interaction with another person. This is why, in my opinion, they are an appropriate medium for analysing the dynamics of *group formation* within the field, in addition to those of *single* author performances.[27]

Even though Jean Bourdieu's notion of field, strictly speaking, may be difficult as it links the author to the text in preliminary and conditioning manner, as Köppe and Winko explain, it does not focus on his *intentions*, but on his *practices* through which he behaves (see Koeppe/Winko 2008:193). Thus, Bourdieu's notion of the literary field enables me not only to narrow the gaze on practices and rituals of author performances in the Japanese literary field. It also allows me to foreground the implications of *power* inherent to these performances: during the transitional phase of the 1990s, author performances served to affirm authority within the literary field. This, I argue, is a mechanism inherent to all emerging avant-garde movements. However, in the Japanese case, the printed interviews and conversations regularly offer an adequate, preexisting platform for these assertions of power. The '*J-Bungaku*' campaign spoke

[27] Similarly useful in this regard would be an analysis of commentaries in the end of books (*kansō*). *Kansō* are comments on the novels and short stories of an author, which are mostly added to the novels and short stories when they appear in paperback. They are generally written by senior colleagues, peers or scholars knowledgeable of the author's oeuvre. As such, I argue these paratexts are expressions of a group identity and revelations of a possible *network*.

to an attempt at renewing Japanese literature after the binary categories *junbungaku* and *taishūbungaku* had become obsolete. As such, the '90s generation' aimed for the distinction of their literary group from the hegemonic discourse on 'literature' of their time. Thus, I argue that the early medial narrative on 'Abe Kazushige' not only was aimed at the construction of an author identity *per se*, it was a political gesture to position and legitimize himself as an emerging author within the literary field. Franziska Schößler notes that "the argument of a 'new generation' can count as a popular distinction method in literary fields." (Schößler 2006: 61) My analysis of two selected interviews with Abe will show how far the '90s generation' stages itself as such. In looking into the context of the campaign, it will explore why publishing houses thought it was necessary to initiate such a marketing effort. I will suggest that literature in the mid-1990s was at a crossroads in Japan. *J-Bungaku* was not the only expression of it. Instead, the campaign was part of a larger self-interrogation as to where Japanese literature should turn. In my analysis, I will thus examine discourses and practices of self-staging within the literary field. In fact, I suggest that the construction of an author identity through the media discourse on 'Abe Kazushige' runs parallel to the construction of a concept of literature in his fiction. At the same time, his fiction sporadically participates in the media discourse on 'Abe' the author: his short story *Triangles* (1997) might be such an example.

5.2 Abe Kazushige and Akasaka Mari on the '90s Generation'

As the layout arrangement of the table of contents of the 1998 first *J-Bungaku* booklet shows, Abe Kazushige was staged as the leader of a new 90s generation of writers in heading the issue with a single opening interview. Accordingly, the second initiative of *Bungei* on *J-Bungaku*, its 1999 spring issue on the theme 'Let's Go, *J-Bungaku*!' (*J-Bungaku de ikō!*), features Abe Kazushige on its cover together with fellow 90s writer Akasaka Mari. Again, a conversation between both of them leads the way to the rest of the issue. The conversation is visually staged as a train ride taken by the two writers and the title of their conversation seems to allude to the heterosocial sphere of

the conversation with a male and a female writer: 'Ride on the Romance Car' (while this is an actual train to Hakone in Jaoan). Its content is detached from any such implications though. The conversation opens with Abe questioning Akasaka on her recent novel *Vaiburēta* (1999 [1998]) and unfolds into a discussion of their mutual works. Then, at the end Abe addresses the public discussion about the '90s writers' (*kyūjūnendai sakka*). In doing so, he first brings up that journals and other media started calling them '90s generation of writers' (*kyūjūnendai sakka*) shortly after they debuted within the literary scene. Thus, he discusses the label as one with which the group was tagged from the start. Afterwards, he questions the general perception that this group suddenly had appeared on the scene out of nothing. Indeed, he explains that "quite a few authors became prose fiction writers after having worked in other areas before". In fact, Abe himself had studied film direction at the *Japan Institute for Moving Image* (*Nihon Eiga Daigaku)*, the film school founded by Imamura Shōhei, and wrote film scripts before he submitted prose fiction for literary awards and finally received the Gunzō Newcomer Award for *Amerika no yoru*. During the interview, Abe reflects on the problem that he does not feel that he belongs to any of the subgroups of the '90s writers' and that it would be misleading to consider all of them as a homogenous group. Akasaka Mari agrees with Abe, as she also began her career as a journal editor before she was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize for her second novel *Vaiburēta* in 1999. Thus, I suggest, it becomes apparent that Abe assesses the media coverage about the '90s authors' as a monolithic, homogenous group critically; he always references the notion in quotation marks and thus distances himself from it. I would argue though that this critical evaluation of the public discussion about themselves as '90s-authors' in reverse is one way of performing their identity as such: Abe is clearly the driving force behind this performance, actively invoking topics related to the discussion about '90s literature' and always keeping the conversation close to it. The established institution of such published conversations gives both Abe and Akasaka a space to articulate their ideas and opinions and also to playfully react to the media resonance to a discourse which they initiated themselves.

Secondly, both authors discuss what characterizes the 'different' literary style of the '90s authors' in the perception of the media, which tries to generalize it as 'word-plays' or 'metafiction' (*kotoba asobi teki na shuhō toka, arui wa metafikushon teki na shikake*) (see Abe&Akasaka 1999:16). Even though Abe agrees that metafiction is a narrative mode, which the '90s authors' inherited from their postmodern 80s-seniors, he voices his concern about this public over-simplification of what he perceives to be a more complex issue than that. Yamada Natsuki states that in another interview, Abe discusses that in the Japanese culture industry during the 1990s, there was a feeling that until 1995 the prior 1980s had not come to an end. In other words, among young writers at the time there was a consciousness of their roles in turning previous literary trends into their own independent characteristic technique, which would clearly represent the 1990s. That is to say that there was a *group conscience* among members of the 90s generation, to do things differently from the 80s generation and establish their own identity. I suggest that the narrative technique of metafiction was a keyword in this discussion. In fact, Abe similarly brings up 'metafiction' in his 1998 single author interview, which opens the first *J-Bungaku* booklet. The interview thematically treats the publication of his bestseller *Individual Projection* one year earlier, and large parts of it are dedicated to the discussion of this novel. Inbetween though, Abe digresses on metafiction; this time he discusses that metafiction, after having been a main technique of the 1980s, has come to be in a deadlock in the end of the 1990s. In fact, Abe seems to be looking for ways to transcend metafiction which, he claims, has become but another structure by now (see Abe 1998:4).

Nevertheless, I argue metafiction is distinctly positioned as the style of the 90s generation in Abe's interviews. He does not, for example, indicate by name other possible forms of writing such as '*monogatari*' or '*shishōsetsu*', he repeatedly indicates '*metafikushon*'. Thus, I argue he defines what the 90s generation is through their common style: the display of metafictional narrative techniques is what characterizes their writing, and thus what distinguishes the group from other groups and especially the establishment. Therefore, I repeat what I have stated in part I of this

chapter, namely that "the choice of distinct styles can be understood as an author positioning himself within the literary field." (Koeppe/Winko 2008:196) I suggest that for the '90s generation of authors' (*kyūjūnendai no sakka*), the repetition of metafiction, a style primarily associated with the postmodern (*posutomodan*) 1980s, as their own formalist literary method was an attempt at renewing a Japanese national literature at a crossroads during the 1990s. With the boundaries between pure literature (*junbungaku*) and popular literature (*taishūbungaku*) dissolving at the time, metafiction was, at least for a few years, consciously strategized as a means to question the restraints of the literary establishment (*bundan*) on literary expression generally, and its power over defining the notion of 'literary value' in Japan specifically.

Therefore, I would say that the 90s generation of writers was not entirely agenda-less; indeed, I would draw from the conversations, they have an agenda that, if not explicitly, implicitly opposes the literary establishment and what it stands for (the hegemony of *junbungaku* and the I-novel), and defines them as group. This also comfirms that subculture is not at all necessarily apolitical.

Instead of picking up on the main scholarly thread, which reads *J-Bungaku* against the backdrop of *J-Cool*, I recontextualize it based on Abe's author performance as a contribution to a larger debate on the future of Japanese literature during the 1990s. *J-Bungaku* was not the only uprising within the literary field in the year 1998, even though it might have been the most visible one. Another little thematized but remarkable discussion is the *Junbungaku Debate* (*junbungaku ronsō*) of the 1990s. The *junbungaku ronsō* was an intellectual feud (*ronsō*) on the future of *junbungaku* and literature generally which was carried out by writer/critic Shōno Yoriko and critic Ōtsuka Eiji. In other words, Abe's author performance during the *J-Bungaku* campaign unrolled within a generally unsettled field. I submit that they have to be read within this larger context; in fact, it may be worthwhile to re-read *J-Bungaku* not as a marketing campaign (see Gebhardt 2001 and Gildenhardt 2008), but as a *discourse* within this same field.

6. Conclusion

Through a selective analysis of *J-Bungaku*'s images and texts, this chapter analysed the group dynamics of the 90s generation of writers who became visible as a new group within the Japanese literary field towards the end of the 1990s. In doing so, it focused on how the 90s writers staged their identity as a homogenous group, what synchronic features one can identify in their performances; in other words, what characterizes them? I pinpointed two distinct properties: the visible staging of professional collaborations on the one hand and the discussion of a 90s generation group identity in published conversations on the other hand. Besides Abe Kazushige himself, the photographer Tokiwa Hibiki may be a second important name for understanding the making of the *J-Bungaku* campaign. Tokiwa Hibiki was an unknown graphic designer until Abe commissioned him with the shot of *Individual Projection*'s cover, which then turned into a bestseller and made Tokiwa a household name in contemporary photography. Tokiwa was responsible for the homogenous look of the *J-Bungaku* booklets and also shot the cover of Akasaka Mari's 2003 book *Kare ga kanojo no onna datta koro*. In other words, Tokiwa styled the campaign; in turn, the 90s generation of writers used the recognition value of his photographs to create a visible group identity and perform it throughout the campaign. Based on these examples, the public exhibition of professional collaborations, teamwork, seems to be one pattern through which the 90s generation of writers staged their group identity.

A second pattern, I argued, was enacted in the published conversations belonging to the campaign: *taidan, teidan* and *zadankai*. While the general significance of these public dialogues for the mediatization of knowledge in Japan is indisputable, I suggested that the 90s generation specifically instrumentalized them to perform their identity as a separate new faction within the literary field. In other words, they used the pre-existing, established ritual of extensive recorded and then published conversations to voice their positions, discuss the media discourse on themselves as 90s generation and reflect on what could characterize them literarily speaking as a group. I pointed out that during the conversations Abe Kazushige repeatedly indicated

distinct narrative techniques as unifying criteria for defining what the 90s generation of writers was all about. In fact, in a 1999 conversation with fellow writer Akasaka Mari, both writers discuss how their group is portrayed as a homogenous mass by media, who enjoy creating the image of a new uniform faction within the field. Both Abe and Akasaka take a detached stance on such portrayals and distance themselves from them, as they may be oversimplifying what in reality is a more complex matter. However, Abe brings up the fact that what is considered a characteristic of the group are metafictional narrative techniques or word plays. While he takes into account that one cannot generalize this aspect either, he somehow identifies with it. In fact, in a previous 1998 interview in the first *J-Bungaku* booklet, Abe equally brings up metafiction as a narrative technique and points out that it is somehow stuck in routine and that one actually needs to overcome it and find other means of literary expression. Thus, one could deduce, metafiction is a characteristic of the 90s generation of writers in their self-staging as a homogenous group. [28] This makes metafiction political: in referencing metafiction as the characteristic style of the 90s generation of writers, Abe *takes a position* within the literary field. Metafiction was re-appropriated by 1990s literature and politically redefined as the style of a 90s generation of writers through which they aimed for distinction in the literary field. In fact, metafiction played an important role for *1990s Japanese literature*: while Abe discusses that he sees the need of 1990s literature to overcome metafiction, he also brings it up as the characteristic

[28] One may argue that Abe's group politics continue throughout the early 2000s, when he revisits the concept of metafiction in a 2004 conversation with Azuma Hiroki and Norizuki Rintarō (see Abe, Azuma&Norizuki 2005:251-319) after Azuma Hiroki had coined the concept of 'metareal fiction' (*metariaru fikushon*) in a series of articles released in the journal Fausuto between 2003 and 2005 (see Azuma 2007:11-135). Abe and Azuma had formed a friendship in the 1990s and Abe's metafictional style since *Individual Projection* reflects his intellectual dialogue with the philosopher. Abe's metafiction changes into a more 'realistic' style (as I will also discuss in Chapter 5) in which the metafictional illusion-break is conducted implicitly on the level of narrative structure rather than explicitly through a narrator in the story as in *Amerika no yoru* and *ABC sensō*. Abe's use of metalepsis and frame narratives in *Individual Projection*, *Minagoroshi* and *Mujō no sekai* appears to speak to Azuma Hiroki's notion of a 'game-like realism' (*gēmuteki riarizumu*) characterized by a "short circuit" between "character level" and "player level", in which the reader (player) is invited to decide over whether a narrative is metafiction or not: "Borrowing the terminology of contemporary thought, this is a short circuit between object level and meta level. Speaking with literary theory, this is metafiction." (Azuma 2007:34)

style of the 90s generation of writers. The fact that he brings it up, whether in critical distance from it or by identification, is important; he makes it a *topic*. Thus, the inclusion of the decade of the 1990s is necessary for a comprehensive literary history of metafiction and/in Japanese literature.

CHAPTER 3:

I Really Love Her in That Movie:

Homosocial Desire in *Amerika no yoru*

Abe Kazushige submitted *Amerika no yoru* (Day by Night) as an entry for the fiction section of the journal *Gunzō*'s 1994 Newcomer Award (*Gunzō Shinjin Bungakushō*).[29] The novel's initial title was *Ikiru shikabane no yoru*, a reference to George A. Romero's 1968 horror classic *Night of the Living Dead*. However, *Gunzō* jury member Karatani Kōjin convinced the author to change this title into the more obvious *Amerika no yoru*, the Japanese title for François Truffaut's *Day by Night* (the film is a topic within the narrative).[30] Abe's first prose fiction is a singular piece for the time. The narrative opens with a fairly long critical evaluation of Bruce Lee's martial arts philosophy, then changes into observations on a wide range of international theories, novels and films, all of which are contained within the schematic background of the coming-of-age story of a male protagonist named Nakayama Tadao.

[29] I would like to thank Anna Andreeva, Nora Bartels, Tamara Kamerer and Jule Nowoitnick, in particular, for their readings of this chapter in various stages and their helpful comments on it.
[30] This is what Professor Karatani confirmed to me about the title change when I met him in Tōkyō in summer 2016.

Abe himself says that he applied for the *Gunzō* Newcomer Award because he knew he was an outsider to the literary circles at the time (see Abe 2014). Indeed, his recipient profile in *Gunzō*, which indicates his name, year of birth and educational background with a photograph and a statement of gratitude, makes Abe Kazushige stand out from the overall group of three award winners. Ikeda Yūichi and Konno Kaoru, who share the award of the criticism section, are both university graduates.[31] Only Abe, who faces the camera seriously, almost defiantly, is a graduate of a film school and indicated by the profile as to just be 'jobbing' (*arubaito*) at the moment. Without a university degree, Abe says that submitting his work for the award meant gaining his license as an author by winning the approval of influential critics he read and admired, most significantly Hasumi Shigehiko and Karatani Kōjin (see Abe 2014). I suggest that this is one reason for which *Amerika no yoru* is so overtly intertextual. Indeed, Hikita Masaaki, in echoing Julia Kristeva, calls the novel a "mosaic of quotations" of mostly foreign fiction writers, filmmakers and theorists (Hikita 2006:2). On the one hand, *Amerika no yoru* being the author's first novel means that he was unknown at the time of its publication and had to clarify everything within the text in order to explain it to a readership which was unfamiliar with his intellectual background.[32] On the other, I argue that, through his choice of intertexts, Abe introduces himself to a group of preeminent senior postmodern critics. In fact, *Amerika no yoru* even references these critics themselves, albeit indirectly. Sasaki Atsushi points out that the narrative's opening criticism of Bruce Lee's martial arts philosophy is a parody of Karatani Kōjin's 1986 critical volume *Tankyū I* (Inquiries) (see Sasaki 2016:237). Moreover, I suggest that, besides emulating his meandering style, the novel references Hasumi Shigehiko in person when it mentions "a film critic who also bears the title of a professor at some Tōkyō National University" (Abe 2001:25). Hasumi

[31] Ikeda Yūichi (*1969) is now a professor at Tōhoku University of Art and Design, while Konno Kaoru (*1947) dropped out of university, but still works as an art critic.

[32] I would like to thank Jule Nowoitnick for suggesting this to me during a discussion on Abe's intertextuality.

Shigehiko, besides being a distinguished film critic, was indeed a professor at Tōkyō University until his retirement. As a result, Sasaki Atsushi states that some called Abe's early fiction "Hasumi Shigehiko and Katarani Kōjin's criticisms turned into novels" (Sasaki 2004:81). This is why Sasaki considers the early Abe, namely the Abe before *Individual Projection*, as "clearly a writer for connoisseurs", meaning, a writer for a small circle of initiated experts (Sasaki 2016:238).

While Abe says *Amerika no yoru* was his third attempt at being considered for nomination (see Abe 2001:155; Abe 2014), the idiosyncratic novel won him the award to great acclaim and was also considered for an Akutagawa Prize nomination (see Sasaki 2016:235). Karatani Kōjin's jury statement emphasizes the outstanding potential which he saw in 26-year-old Abe Kazushige's heterogeneous writing:

> "Abe Kazushige's *Amerika no yoru* is 'self-referential' in terms of its setting. It excels at anticipating everything a critic or theoretician would say. In that sense, Abe perfectly is like a critic. That said, he is a fiction writer. So as in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, a critical self-consciousness meets the 'outside', which turns into the beginning of a dreadful farce. Let me illustrate this by explaining that this piece begins with a Bruce Lee criticism and reaches a preliminary closure when the protagonist violently acts out some Karate. I am delighted about the emergence of someone so extremely talented." (Karatani 1994:156)

Karatani emphasizes the peculiarities of Abe's fiction writing as a general elusiveness to categorizations; *Amerika no yoru* is a literary piece, yet it self-reflexively experiments with the margins of genre and style and skillfully blends the discourses of different theories into that of literature. It is especially the novel's unconventional opening, which has earned the eclectic piece a distinct place in contemporary Japanese cultural memory. *Amerika no yoru*'s opening defamiliarizes reader expectations by not beginning with a familiar story, but with a detailed critical evaluation of Bruce Lee's martial arts philosophy. Miyazawa Akio recalls his own astonishment at this unorthodox step when he first read the novel:

> "I read *Amerika no yoru* shortly after the softcover version came out. I had no idea whatsoever of it initially having appeared in a literary magazine. I just grabbed it on some random occasion. The problem of the narrative starts with its first sentence. It suddenly starts with a martial arts analysis of Bruce Lee's combat sport and I thought, what is this sudden opening about, what is going on here? What most impressed me was the way in which the novel, telling us of the martial artist Bruce Lee with mannerisms

> of a critic, all of a sudden introduces the reader's awareness to the themes of the narrative's story. (…) this critical sense, this critical feel of the novel, made me feel that it was completely far away from previous literary works. Both were the reasons for which I caught on to it." (Miyazawa & Sasaki 2004:81)

In the following Part I of his chapter, I analyse in detail this opening of *Amerika no yoru*. I argue that this analysis, even though it is separate from Part II of this inquiry, is important for two reasons. Firstly, the analysis highlights what I suggest is by now an iconic passage of Japanese 20th century literature. It will show the significance of *Amerika no yoru* as a piece of World Literature largely neglected by research and translation up until now. The foreign reception has focused on Abe's later bestsellers *Individual Projection*, *Nipponia Nippon* and *Shinsemia* as apparent in the ample amount of translations available of these three novels. However, I argue that his earlier works are worth being introduced to a transnational audience precisely because they speak a transnational literary language. This especially becomes apparent in the early pieces' preoccupation with theoretical questions of experimental writing. Structure-wise the narrative of *Amerika no yoru* is divided into two halves: the first 99 pages can be read as both an introduction to the protagonist Tadao and an elaborate delay of precisely such an introduction. As a result, much of the first half belongs to the narrator Watashi and his verbose performance of postponing 'Tadao's story' through the insertions of passages, which read as criticisms (the Bruce Lee opening being one of them). In fact, Tadao's story only starts on page 99 of a total of 187 pages, which means that the delay of the story is ten pages longer than the story itself. Abe perpetuates similar linguistic complications in the follow-up pieces *ABC sensō* (1995) and *Kōshaku fujintei no gogo no pātī* (1995). Entirely ignoring their deconstructionist concerns with familiar manners of storytelling would mean not properly assessing what these early pieces are about to an unignorable extent, as I will explain in the analysis.

Secondly, I suggest that an analysis of *Amerika no yoru*'s opening shows in which manner the novel distinguishes itself as metafiction. As I have pointed out in Chapter 2 on metafiction, Sasaki Atsushi defines *Amerika no yoru*'s metafiction as

primarily a deconstruction of modern subjectivity. In contrast, I have argued that this comes second to a deconstruction of literary genre. Let me explain what I mean by that in detail: the novel starts with a critical evaluation of Bruce Lee's martial arts philosophy, which Sasaki Atsushi reads as a parody (*parodī*) of Karatani Kōjin's criticisms. Now, by being a parody, I would like to complete Sasaki's thought, the opening can notionally be pinpointed as one specific expression of metafiction. Parody is the technique behind the style metafiction. Both Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon define parody as a method of defamiliarization. In doing so, they univocally read parody within the theoretic context of Russian Formalism. According to Waugh: "Russian formalist theory begins with Viktor Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie* of defamiliarization. Literature here becomes a means of renewing perception by exposing and revealing the habitual and conventional." (Waugh 1984:65) In Shklovsky's 1917 article *Art as Technique* (or, Art as Device), defamiliarization is understood as a manner of waking the reader from inertia by stupefying their perception through introducing unfamiliar narrative procedures. This is a political act; the reader is shocked and called to action, is made aware of the automatisms in their cognizance. Thus, they are made a subject in the process, an active agent, and not left to remain a passive object. Patricia Waugh specifies that this effect is initiated by the concrete mechanism of "laying bare the device", "*shuhō no mukidashi*" in the Japanese translation of it (Waugh 1984:65; 1986:116). I suggest that Hasumi Shigehiko addresses this specific metafictional quality in Abe's fiction when he calls *ABC sensō* (1995) a "novel which actively 'discloses all information'" and distinguishes itself through the "trick of revealing its devices beforehand (*shikake wo arakajime hirō suru tejina*)" (Hasumi 2002:311;312). In being such a technique of 'making strange', parody is a method of critique (see Waugh 1984:65 and 68). It works as a "kind of literary mimicry" (Waugh 1984:68), which impersonates the narrative structures and mannerisms of a previous work in order to subvert them.

Consequently, I propose, *Amerika no yoru* not only is metafiction in that it negates a modern aesthetic of unfabricated subjective consciousness. The novel does

have autobiographic elements and its first-person narrator Watashi names himself 'Kazushige' midway through the narrative. However, I differ from Sasaki Atsushi's evaluation, who concludes that this makes *Amerika no yoru*'s metafiction predominantly autobiographic. Instead, we may propose that the novel primarily reads as metafiction in that it "*explicitly* masquerades as formalized critical interpretation" (Waugh 1984:15). Indeed, opening with a criticism despite identifying as a literary narrative overall is what seems to distinguish the novel more singularly in subsequent reception than its simultaneous evocation and negation of a subjective first-person narration.

In Part II of this chapter, I turn to an inquiry of how *Amerika no yoru* negotiates the problem of youthful adult masculinities in high-bubble Japan through the example of its protagonist Tadao. Despite Watashi's outspoken disinterest in linear storytelling, *Amerika no yoru*'s first 99 pages elliptically familiarize us with its protagonist and the theme of its story: Tadao is a 24-year-old film student who works part-time at S-Hall, an art space in Shibuya, in order to finance himself. He spends most of his time reading. His readings provide Tadao with male fictional role models to imitate in real life for the various social roles he performs. Simultaneously, the readings equip the novel with an intertextual tissue on which to build Tadao's coming-of-age story. Its basic conflict recounts the young man's struggle for success as an aspiring artist in 1990s Japan, his subsequent failure and resulting moral growth, particularly the insight that life is not about fame. As such, *Amerika no yoru* is also an art-world-satire, which ruthlessly strips down the self-legitimization of such worlds to a preeminent desire for recognition and reputation.

Sasaki Atsushi likens Tadao's coming-of-age story (*seishunbanashi*) to a *Bildungsroman* (*birudungusuroman*) (Miyazawa/Sasaki 2004:81). In a similar vein, yet with a different thrust, Hikita Masaaki reads *Amerika no yoru* as a maturation story when he observes: "Tadao's story, from the beginning, is a story about 'imitation'." Hikita agrees with Jean Baudrillard when he analyses Tadao's dilemma arising from it: "The principle behind Tadao's actions to become 'someone special' is all based on

imitating some discourse. Normally, being something's 'copy' does not signify 'special'. Because to be 'special' means to be 'original'. However, as I stated earlier, the relationship between the two [Tadao and Watashi] is ruled by the postmodern situation of the simulacrum. (…) How to strive for 'specialness' in such a world without 'originals'?" (Hikita 2006:9)

I second Hikita in his argument with a slightly different emphasis. Rather than extending the notion of the simulacrum to the whole narrative of *Amerika no yoru* and locating it as the main intertext, I suggest that the discourse of *Amerika no yoru* destabilizes the notion of an essential authenticity by negating it and affirming a constructivist discourse *in general*. My argument emphasizes that this constructivism specifically extends to a destabilization of heteronormative biological conceptions of male and female. While any coming-of-age tale is one of identity formation, in *Amerika no yoru*, it specifically is the formation of a *masculine* identity. From the start, Tadao's maturation explicitly is a 'story about a sad man' (*otoko*), not 'person' (*hito*) (Abe 2001:14). Thus, it is gendered from its first indication. As a result, I suggest that *Amerika no yoru*'s narrative implies a constructivist gender theory on 'imitation' and 'performance', which reads as a literary dialogue with Judith Butler. Butler, rejecting biological essentialisms, argues that any gender is performed and a matter of imitation. I suggest that *Amerika no yoru* speaks to Butler's idea of gender as an embodied mimetic performance by describing how Tadao enacts multiple masculine identities based on male role models as they appear in literature and film while struggling to come of age as a part-timing artist in 1990s Japan.

Tadao's favourite book is Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. One day, Tadao decides he needs a confidant like Sancho Panza. He asks the narrator of his own story, Watashi, if he wants to take on this role. Watashi's nickname is 'S', short for Shige, short for Kazushige. His nickname makes Watashi feel that he is the right choice for the role and he accepts the offer. Out of this self-conscious narrative arrangement evolves a parodic metafiction, in which Watashi (S), in sporadic dialogue with his

protagonist, tells us of how Tadao struggles to mature, while he imitates Alonso Quixano's delusional heroism.

Tadao's maturation is described with pungent irony: whilst Tadao is defined as the incarnation of normalcy, he ambitiously strives to be someone special. In fact, 'Tadao' is a telling name according to his signature *kanji*: 'tada 唯' means 'normal, ordinary' and 'o 生' means 'life'. Tadao thus seems predestined for an ordinary life. Yet, he is on a quest to make himself the hero of his autobiography. What endows him with the optimism for the success of such an endeavour is the fact that his birthday is on September 23rd, the day of the autumnal equinox, where light and darkness match in length. In his vivid imagination, Tadao asks himself if that gives him a disposition for specialness: on the one hand, he shares his birthday with famous people such as the Danish Godard-actress Anna Karina and North-American singer John Coltrane. On the other though, he accords great importance to a passage from Philip K. Dick's novel *Valis*, in which Horselover Fat is overcome with a theophany on the day *after* the spring equinox of March 20th, the spring equivalent to the autumnal equinox. Accordingly, "Horselover Fat encountered God or Zebra or VALIS or his own immortal self on the first day of the year which has a longer stretch of light than of darkness. Also, according to some scholars, it is the actual day of the birth of Christ." (Abe 2001:38)[33] This precipitates Tadao into a crisis. If thus real specialness is associated with the first day in the year in which light dominates over darkness temporally, and if 'light' equals 'holiness' while 'darkness' represents all things 'vulgar', then what would become of him who was born on the threshold to the time in the year when darkness becomes longer than light? Does that mean he is destined to live a life on the 'vulgar' side perpetually reigned over by darkness? Within Tadao, this perceived disadvantage lays the foundation for how he approaches everything in

[33] The English sentence is quoted from the English original, Philip K. Dick (1990), *The Valis Trilogy*, Camp Hill: BOMC, p. 228. (The Japanese translation of the sentence in *Amerika no yoru* corresponds to the English original.) *VALIS* is the first part of Dick's *Valis Trilogy*, which contains the other two novels *The Divine Invasion* and *The Transmigration of Timothy Archer*. The first two parts appeared in 1981 and the third in 1982. The first Japanese translation of *VALIS* by Ōtaki Keisuke appeared in 1982. A new translation by Yamagata Hirō came out in 2014.

life: as a fight. Based on the Marxian metaphor of a "personal class struggle", the succeeding story thus recounts a feud (Abe 2001:45). Tadao's opponent is Mutō, a colleague from film school, who is born on the day of the spring equinox. As I will detail in Part II, unlike Tadao, who describes himself as an introvert, Mutō is a cheerful, socially successful person who has achieved a professional standing to the extent that he is shooting a film right now, in which most of Tadao's and Mutō's mutual colleagues are involved as actors or as staff. While in the professional hierarchy of filmmaking Mutō thus stands on the highest ladder, Tadao feels that in order to become someone special, he must bring to fruition what he considers his greatest talent: acting. Thus, the second half of *Amerika no yoru* describes how Tadao's goal becomes to appear in Mutō's film and his main preoccupation besides reading turns into role preparation, namely exercising. Tadao is literally muscling up for the fight to come; as Karatani Kōjin also indicates, the aforementioned Bruce Lee turns out to be Tadao's role model for this self-fashioning. His arms race reads as an affirmation of power: Tadao, who feels he is the subject of repressive discourses, struggles for physical power over his opponent on the one hand, whereby physical power is a metaphor for social capital here. On the other hand, Tadao affirms power generally and in and of itself: his embodied performances of archaic masculinities are assertions of agency as an aspiring artist as much as of an adolescent man.

As with the general ironic take of *Amerika no yoru* on its protagonist however, Mutō does not meet Tadao's obsession with a similar interest. As a result, Tadao's final duel with Mutō reads as a brutal dismantling of the former's internalized self-image of grandeur; it emphasizes that his fight against the latter is but an externalized struggle with himself. Thus, the narrative informs us that after generously offering a baffled Mutō to take over a main role in his movie, Tadao keeps enacting his exercise on a children's playground in the exaggerated manner of fictional action heroes. He then paints himself half black and half white and turns up on set in this costume in order to incorporate the role he thinks Mutō has written for him. The narrative produces literary irony by depicting Tadao's delusional mannerisms without comment

and juxtaposing them with the alienated reactions of his environment: the astonished speechlessness of a group of elderly people and children who work out to a radio emission (*rajio taisō*) on the playground while an excessively animated Tadao gymnastics through their rows, covered in sweat and blood. The alienation of the film staff when Tadao turns up on set in black-and-white paint and self-importantly demands for the shoot of his role to start, while no-one expected him there. Mutō's barely contained temper and his slow explanation that he wants to start with the scenes of the lead actress first. His subsequent confrontation of Tadao in furious bewilderment. And finally, the noise of police cars when Tadao starts beating and kicking people on set, while Mutō implores him to stop, or people will die.

The police release Tadao, as they consider his violent rage explosion self-defence. While he keeps working at S-Hall, for some reason, none of his former colleagues show up. Nevermind, Tadao has a learning experience to reflect on: whereas he aspired for specialness in the beginning of the narrative, he ends up concluding that "we have to decidedly contradict the soul that is, as it were, under the delusion that 'specialness' retains 'power'." (Abe 2001:185) Agency comes with acceptance of being ordinary; as a result, Tadao accepts his humanity and comes to terms with being an 'autumnal person'. In fact, he from now on wants to "fight to protect things related to the 'autumnal equinox'." (Abe 2001:183) In the end, he even delivers a moral of the story: "However, what is certain is that to be only a normal 'human' does not refer to the image of the event, but it means to feel (*jikkan*) the event in pain and bliss, to face reality with your living body (*namami*); this is nothing else but what we call fight." (Abe 2001:183-184)

Correspondingly, the tropes of feelings and the body become sites where *Amerika no yoru* negotiates its meta-narrative: what does maturation mean and how does it involve the tension between authenticity and fiction?[34] I suggest that with this meta-narrative *Amerika no yoru* picks up on a global metafictional counter-discourse

[34] I would like to thank Professor Hayashi Michio for highlighting to me the typical postmodern opposition between 'image' and 'body' in Japanese discourse since the 1960s, which would speak to that.

(which I described in Chapter 2) and puts it into the service of its coming-of-age theme. Maturation means to shed the idea of imitating fiction and to assume an authentic self. However, the question raised is whether there is any room for authenticity when all has been said? The narrative leaves open if it believes in an answer: in its above-quoted moral, 'human' is rendered in quotation marks. These quotation marks indicate the lexicality of 'human' and point to its quality as a word; thus, the narrative gives this sentence, which affirms the notion of authenticity semantically, a contradictory twist: 'human' is just a word the quotation marks simultaneously express.

In Part II of this chapter, I would like to explore how Tadao's masculine identity performances are described throughout the narrative. Therefore, I will first turn to an analysis of Tadao's depiction as a part-timing artist in *Amerika no yoru*. In doing so, I argue that Tadao's precarity speaks to a cultural narrative on those who are flexible workers (*freeters*) by choice.

This analysis will provide me with the background for my subsequent examination of how the narrative describes Tadao's masculine identity formation by imitation. In this analysis, I will argue that the narrative complicates the notion of male sociality. I will show how this debate starts with a linguistic complication of the idea of heterosexual love, in favour of affirming the notion of a homosocial desire in Tadao's triangular relationship with his alleged object of affection Tsuyumi, a colleague from film school and an actress in Mutō's graduation film, and his rival Mutō himself. Indeed, I will point out, Tadao's romantic love for Tsuyumi is a *performance*, in which Tadao imitates various stereotypes of a male lover, because he believes that holding a heterosexual relationship is an asset in his male competition for status with Mutō. Later on, his performance changes into the imitation of a male chauvinist, when Tadao feels he has to feign sexual experience to Mutō by sexually objectifying Tsuyumi. I argue that this passage clarifies that what actually counts for Tadao is his homosocial contest with Mutō, not his alleged heterosexual romantic love for Tsuyumi. In invoking these images, I suggest that, as much as the narrative discusses the body as a site for negotiating power within Tadao's performances of

archaic embodied masculinities, it puts into question these when it indicates Tadao's obsession with Mutō. In that sense, the notion of a homosocial desire in *Amerika no yoru* counters and puts into question Tadao's struggle for a hegemonic manliness.

CHAPTER 3 PART 1:

Art of Digression:

The *Écritures* of *Amerika no yoru*

> This running in circles may extend to areas that have nothing whatsoever to do with Tadao's story.
> – Abe Kazushige, *Amerika no yoru*[35]

1. Introduction: The 'Early, Early' Abe

European and US scholarship on Abe Kazushige's 1990s fiction has tended to narrow down Abe's contribution to 1990s literature to his participation in the 1998 Japanese literature marketing campaign *J-Bungaku*, or focused on his widely translated 1997 bestseller *Individual Projection*.[36] Against this background, this chapter makes the

[35] Abe 2001:35.

[36] Seth Jacobowitz (1999) analyses how *Individual Projection* reflects postmodern subjectivity and information society within the context of emerging *Heisei* literature. Anne McKnight (2011) singles out *Individual Projection* as one example of how 1990s Japanese literature was intricately linked to subculture. Similarly, Bettina Gildenhardt (2008), introducing Abe as the most important *J-Bungaku* author, highlights, using the example of his 2001 novel *Nipponia Nippon*, how Abe's early fiction rejects the modern dichotomy of *junbungaku* and *taishūbungaku* through popular culture references. My own book chapter (Roemer 2015) on *Individual Projection* analyses how the novel's depiction of precarity and youth violence relates to the cultural discussion on Aum Shinrikyō in the late 1990s.

contribution of focusing on the author's fiction published *before* that campaign. Japanese research on Abe's earliest novels and short stories, largely remaining journalistic, has notably neglected to focus on the subversion of linear storytelling as a trademark of these pieces. Suwabe Kōichi (2012: 106) indicates that "the 'theme' of Abe's early fiction" primarily consists of "a philosophical problem on the 'meta' level" of the narrative, "namely the problem of 'not having anything to tell'." *Amerika no yoru* (*Day for Night*, 2001 [1994])[37], *ABC sensō* (ABC War, [1994] 1995), *Kōshaku fujintei no gogo no pātī* (Afternoon Party at the Duchess's Mansion, [1995] 1997) and *Triangles* ([1997] 1999) all postpone their stories through different techniques of narrative deferral. One possible reason for the lack of scholarship on narrative deferral as the main characteristic of Abe's earliest novels and short stories may be that even Abe's peers have called their radically non-linear style difficult to access (see Asano, Īda&Yonemitsu 2009:512-520) In turn, it is precisely Abe's earliest fiction's trademark of complicating linear storytelling in favour of straightforwardly conducting it that established the author as a new, unique voice in *Heisei* literature among critics during the 1990s. Indeed, this testimony of the literary quality of Abe's writing – if we understand 'literary' as *formally* ground-breaking, in other words, not necessarily aimed at being intuitively cognized as literature to begin with – may be more expressive of what Abe represents for *Heisei* literature (*Heisei bungaku*) than what he became known for subsequently through *J-Bungaku*, namely primarily being the photogenic face of the campaign in its related brochures and labelled as one of its *shibuya-kei* authors (see Gebhardt 2000:2-3). Indeed, while Abe's choice of a more straightforward style in his first bestseller *Individual Projection* (1997) as well as the short story *Mujō no sekai* (1999) could be attributed to the author's aim for better audience access, the trademark complication of linear storytelling found in Abe's earlier novels and short stories laid the foundation for Abe's ongoing distinction as

Fukushima Yoshiko (2003) lists *Individual Projection* as one of ten important novels of Japanese 1990s literature.

[37] In the following referenced as: Abe 2001 (the publication date of the paperback version). The novel initially appeared under the title *Ikeru shikabane no yoru* (Night of the Living Dead) in the journal *Gunzō* in 1994.

one of the most recognizable writers of Japanese literature, who by now has carved out an original niche for himself as a self-identified literary formalist (*keishikishugisha* 形式主義者).

In this article, I wish to reframe the subversion of linear storytelling in Abe Kazushige's debut novel *Amerika no yoru* by using the term *écriture*. I argue that, on a philosophical level, the novel's complications of linear storytelling speak to a global, deconstructionist discussion on writing understood as an open, processual experiment, a *mode* rather than a result. The digressions of its narrator take *Amerika no yoru* far away from its story. I will show that they extend to areas entirely unrelated to it, and even unrelated to 'literature' strictly speaking. Instead, the digressions grow into philosophical texts questioning the concept of language and the nature of media. In doing so, they turn *Amerika no yoru* into a deconstructionist narrative, in which meaning is radically decentralized and pluralized, and the boundaries of genre continually unsettled.[38]

2. The *Écritures* of *Amerika no yoru*

Overall, *Amerika no yoru* pretends to be a story about protagonist Nakayama Tadao, but it does not seem to want to start. Instead, after replacing the beginning of Tadao's story with a long, critical essay on Bruce Lee, *Amerika no yoru* keeps postponing its protagonist's tale; the narrator Watashi 私 ("I") repeatedly digresses to discuss apparently more pressing issues. And indeed, the coming-of-age story of film school student and freeter Nakayama Tadao's growth does not strictly begin until the middle of the book. The first 99 pages, out of a total of 187, largely consist of Watashi's performance as a conflicted narrator, who cannot help himself digressing.[39] As a consequence, much of *Amerika no yoru* belongs to the narrator Watashi and his verbose performance of postponing Tadao's story in the first half.

[38] This chapter has appeared in the form of an independent article in 2020 (see Roemer 2020).
[39] The page numbers refer to the paperback version of the novel referenced in this article: Abe 2001.

The debate on *écriture* was initiated by the international success of French postmodern theory from the late 1970s onwards, providing scholars and artists with a common idiom across linguistic and cultural borders. The interdisciplinary field of Comparative Literature, primarily, facilitated the popularization of *écriture* as a "concept of different modes of thinking and writing beyond the traditional boundaries of the disciplines", especially those of literature and philosophy (Brink/Sollte-Gresser 2004:13).[40] Narratorial digression is one specific literary practice of *écriture*, in the sense that it is "non-linear, aimed at excess, the plurality of meaning and the inscription of the Other." (Brink 2004:34) In the case of *Amerika no yoru*, the novel's digressions seem to overthrow reader expectations, according to which a novel in the first person will, somehow, narrate the story of a person.[41] We may recognize here, on a textual level, a subversion of the 'I-novel metanarrative' of modern Japanese literature (Suzuki 1996:3). However, the scope of Abe Kazushige's artistic resistance during the 1990s seems broader than that. Abe closely associated with *Nyū Akademizumu* (*Nyū Aka*) critical theorists during the 1990s; his admiration, specifically of the criticisms of Hasumi Shigehiko, has been well documented publicly.[42] According to Sasaki Atsushi, *Amerika no yoru* largely parodies *Nyū Aka* critical theory (*hihyō*), earning the author the reputation of being "a direct heir of *Nyū Aka*" (Sasaki 2016:237) at the time of his debut. Relating to that, I would suggest that the digressions of *Amerika no yoru*,

[40] Different theorists have defined *écriture* differently, sometimes even changing their definitions over the course of their career. I second Brink's and Solte-Gresser's understanding of *écritures* in a plural sense, while still using the single term *écriture* for readability throughout the analysis. My inquiry focuses on *écriture* as defined by Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes and excludes later feminist definitions of the term.

[41] In *Amerika no yoru*, the narrator Watashi is the amalgam of himself, called "Esu" (S) and his protagonist Tadao. As much as Watashi is the narrator of Tadao's story, Tadao's story is also Watashi's own story. What is more, the name "Esu" being an abbreviation of "Shige", which is short, again, for "Kazushige", establishes a link to the name of the author of *Amerika no yoru*, "Abe Kazushige". This, in turn, may suggest that *Amerika no yoru* has autofictional qualities; at the same time, it resists that label through, precisely, not doing what one expects from even an autofiction, namely, in any case, narrating the story of "Watashi"/Tadao, whether relating to "Abe Kazushige" or not. Yamada Natsuki similarly analyses *Amerika no yoru* as a deconstruction of the Japanese I-novel (*shishōsetsu*). However, he focuses on how the novel enacts this deconstruction through the imagery of film (see Yamada 2014: 129-135). Sasaki (2016:235-238) also reads *Amerika no yoru* as departing from narrating the "self", only to problematize this angle from multiple directions subsequently.

[42] See, most notably, Abe's 2005 and 2010 printed conversations (*taidan*) with Hasumi Shigehiko.

rather than subverting the conventions of a literary genre, subvert *the notion of genre* as such. Indeed, we may locate the literary historical context of Abe Kazushige's earliest novels and short stories' non-linear storytelling in *Nyū Aka* critical theory, rather than in Japanese literature, strictly speaking.[43]

Hasumi Shigehiko, in his essay on Abe's second novel *ABC sensō,* already indicates that the novel's play with the alterity between written letters of the alphabet and the Japanese script relates to Jacques Derrida's notion of *écriture* as written language, without going so far as calling the narrative discourse of the novel *écriture* generally (Hasu,mi 2002:312). I use *écriture* in both ways: to designate the experimental narrative discourse of Abe's fiction *generally*, and as a concept this fiction refers to *intertextually* to locate itself as *écriture.*[44] Derrida is an overt intertextual reference in *ABC sensō*; the novel essentially builds its narrative on the French philosopher's understanding of *écriture* as written language and discusses the

[43] "Digression" is a malleable term with regard to Japanese literature, as literary linearity, which digression is a deviation from, is not traditionally considered a principle of it. Inger Sigrun Brodey explains that, while the Western aesthetic focuses on "plot and intentional linearity – stories with a clear 'beginning, middle, and an end'", the traditional Japanese aesthetic "focuses on sequentiality, or stories and commentaries connected by the association of ideas." (Brodey 1998:196) Only in the Meiji period did Japanese writers start experimenting with Western literary linearity, without, however, entirely shedding earlier conventions. Futabatei Shimei, for example, uses the protagonist Bunzō in *Ukigumo* (Floating Clouds, 1889) to "develop a sense of unity and wholeness typical of Western, rather than Japanese, literary traditions. But he does so by using association of ideas to link scene with subsequent scene, rather than providing a Fieldingesque sense of rational order imposed externally by an authoritative and omniscient authorial or narrative voice (…)." (197) One may argue that the impression of Watashi digressing in *Amerika no yoru* derives from exactly the fact that he presents himself as such an omniscient narrative voice, only to then deviate from this role. Note that *Amerika no yoru*'s postponement of Tadao's story, on a broad scale, may well be a parody of Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro* (1914), where Sensei's story is only told by himself in part three of the novel after two parts of arousing the reader's curiosity for it through accounts of Sensei through Sensei's student (see also Brodey 1998: 193–291). The homoeroticism of Tadao's heterosexual love triangle with film school colleagues Mutō and Tsuyumi, suggests that *Amerika no yoru* references the triangle of young Sensei, his friend K, and Ojōsan in *Kokoro* to derive its own images of male coming-of-age from there. While Abe's postmodern use of popular culture certainly is demonstrable, I would stress that, at the same time, Abe's fiction, particularly that of the 1990s, notably locates itself within the context of modern Japanese *junbungaku*.

[44] Thus, the concept of *écriture* would be an addition to Hikita Masaaki's (2006) insightful analysis of *Amerika no yoru*'s multiple intertextual references on postmodern theory. My interpretation also would be a different take on Abe from that of Sasaki Atsushi, who, in his 2001 explanatory essay (*kaisetsu*) on *Amerika no yoru*, claims that Abe Kazushige's writing is not related to any "*écriture*-like problem awareness of writing being a complicated endeavour" (Sasaki 2001:194) – I consider this rather a strategic statement vis-à-vis the literary establishment at the time, aimed at softening Abe's edge and making him appear less 'avant-garde'.

term *ekurichūru* (エクリチュール) repeatedly (see Abe 1995:8, 68). I see similar, albeit covert, conversations with Jacques Derrida's notion of *écriture* in *Amerika no yoru*. Specifically, I suggest that narrative delay is shown in a play with signifiers; some sentences are not concerned with making sense semantically. They read as if assigning power to the signifier over the signified by neither making sense in a common understanding of syntactic 'sense', nor for the context of the story. Instead, the sentences are philosophical statements about language that seem to criticize the tendency to take language as a given, much in the same vein as the deconstructionist critique of structuralist linguistics. For Jacques Derrida, the notion of *écriture* implies that language is always already written. This was a deconstruction of the established assumption according to which the spoken word precedes the written word temporally and in influence. Derrida's understanding of *écriture* points to all the aspects of language that become evident through its graphisation in the first place. As a result, the written visualization of language opens up possibilities of playfully destabilizing the duality of signifier and signified. In structuralism, the former is reduced in meaning to the more powerful *thought* of a word. For Derrida, the graphic representation of language turns attention to its literalness; it empowers the representational side of the sign. In *Of Grammatology*, Jacques Derrida highlights that in the conventional hierarchy of the structuralist linguistic sign, the signifier is subordinate to the signified as a derivative expression of the latter. Derrida calls this principle 'logocentrism', meaning a prioritization of "'thought' as logos" over the linguistic expressions of thoughts as, firstly, spoken words and, secondly, written words. As a result, script comes last in this order (Derrida 2016:11-13). To overcome this debasement of writing, Derrida proposes grammatology as a science of "writing" (*écriture*), inherently increasing the value of writing as written language vis-à-vis spoken language.

I recognize in *Amerika no yoru* precisely such a self-awareness of language being a linguistic representation as well as a deconstruction of meaning in a centralized and singular sense. In addition to Derrida and his notion of *écriture*, I propose that Roland Barthes' definition of the same term is a useful conceptual angle from which to analyse

the experimental narrative modes of Abe's early novels and short stories. The reason is that the novel renders the idea of storytelling as problematic by blurring the boundaries between text types and, in doing so, the notions of 'text types', or 'genres' in general. Sasaki Atsushi already highlights that *Amerika no yoru*'s distinction is its borderless writing at the interface of literature and criticism (*hihyō*). *Amerika no yoru* in particular destabilizes the assumption that criticism and literature are different genres, as Barthes advocated for in *Criticism and Truth* (1966). Generally overthrowing the understanding of prose, poetry and criticism as belonging to different genres, Barthes posits that "not only do the writers themselves practise criticism, but their work, often, articulates the conditions of its own birth (Proust) or even of its own absence (Blanchot); the same language tends to circulate everywhere in literature and even behind itself; the book is often approached from the other side by the person writing it; there are no longer either poets or novelists; there is no longer anything but writing [*écriture*]. (…) And so it is that the critic, in a complementary movement, becomes a writer in his turn." (Barthes 2007:23; square brackets added).

I propose that *Amerika no yoru*'s entrance sequence can be read as a dialogue with what Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida call "writing", while at the same time questioning the nature of what they refer to as "writing". Through a mercurial narrator, whose digressions continuously postpone the story of protagonist Tadao, *Amerika no yoru* complicates linear storytelling and, by doing so, tackles the problem of *écriture* from multiple angles: the boundary between literature and criticism, as well as the questions of what criticism and literature are in and of themselves, are addressed.

In the following examination, I will initially focus on a close reading of Watashi's opening narratorial speech. In reading that passage as a destabilization of the notion of 'genre' in the sense of Roland Barthes, I will show that Watashi's digressive speech begins with a contradictory self-introduction as the unreliable narrator of *Amerika no yoru* that lays out the route map for a gradual turn of his speech into something different in tone and theme. Indeed, Watashi's self-introduction meanders into what reads as a theoretic piece of media criticism. The media criticism is not labelled in the

narrative as a "criticism" by means of generic indications. Yet, I will point out that we are allowed to understand it as an independent piece of evaluative analysis.

In a second step, my analysis will turn to an examination of how Jacques Derrida's notion of *écriture* is discussed in the section. For that purpose, I will single out one particular sentence from Watashi's narratorial speech and show how it reflects a preoccupation with itself being written language. In looking into this sentence's individual words, I will indicate exactly how their syllables and logograms articulate a consciousness of their own sonic and material qualities as signs, their signifying aspect in particular.

3. Writing Beyond Genre: A Kind of Media Criticism

Watashi's opening monologue immediately follows the Bruce Lee essay. The subsequent analysis shows how, throughout it, critical digressions alternate with narratorial comments. Both flow into one another and blur their boundaries, while at the same time always holding their ground as distinct representations of speech.

Watashi's monologue begins with the two sentences: "Let me tell you about a sad man. This man's name is Nakayama Tadao."(Abe 2001:14) Having said that, his words immediately lapse into a long digressive speech, that presents a dilemma: Watashi wants to talk about Tadao but cannot help himself diverging onto other pressing issues. These appear to be chosen on impulse, addressed in a random and arbitrary manner. Indeed, Watashi contradicts himself on almost every statement he makes, both on the syntactic and narrative level, through evoking and negating content consecutively or at the same time. These contradictions are a characteristic deconstructionist narrative technique of Abe's early fiction in general and possibly inspired by Hasumi Shigehiko's habit of using overly long, meandering sentences in his criticisms (see Miura 1997). Monika Fludernik points out that conventional narratives are "based on cause-and-effect relationships that are applied to sequences of events". (Fludernik 2009:2) Watashi's contradictions seem to deconstruct exactly this causality that serves to create the illusion of teleological linearity within a regular

narrative. Instead, Watashi's speech reads as if we are following the instantaneous stream of his distracted soliloquy:

> "Let me tell you about a sad man. This man's name is Nakayama Tadao. Not that I can clearly pinpoint what about Tadao is sad. 'Sad' is a word almost close to being untrue. Which is why one may apply any word for 'sad'. Yet, as 'sad' has already been chosen, I will try and tell Tadao's story 'sadly' for now. There is probably no definite reason compelling me to do so. However, neither do I see any legitimate grounds compelling me to tell Tadao's story to begin with at this point. So I will stop telling it 'sadly' for no reason and either find some plausible rationale, or rather start telling it after erasing the word 'sad'. Having done that, I still may have committed an incorrect act. If that is the case, you may as well abandon telling Tadao's story at all, people might say. Of course, they are right. While maybe not conclusive, their opinion is valid. Yet, it is in human nature to feel an attraction for incorrect acts precisely when one hears a correct opinion. Being no exception, I count myself as one example of it as well. Which is why I would like to misbehave here. However, as with anything, becoming someone is an extremely complicated endeavour. I hear that it happens a lot that people suddenly adopt a correct attitude while having intended the opposite. Or, rather than having heard it, I have read it somewhere. I read about such a topic in some book. Well, whatever. In other words, I intend to tell Nakayama Tadao's story 'sadly' for no justifiable reason. However, notwithstanding, I still do not have the confidence to clearly indicate 'yes or no!' on whether narrating something for no reason is incorrect. As a result, I do not even know whether I am already committing an incorrect act here. Which is why, of course, it is entirely possible that, while I have intended to tell Tadao's story in a 'sad manner', people may feel the exact opposite. Or, alternatively, maybe this 'different feeling' is the root to shake the horizon of my foundationlessness from its very foundations. I wonder if this is the wriggling subterranean crevice, or, in other words, the foundation. It is possible that this might be clarified at the same time as it could be left unclear. Either way, for both options, I have to first begin telling the story of a man whose name is Nakayama Tadao." (Abe 2001:14-16)

The program of Watashi's performance is digression based on narrative unreliability: Watashi evokes the image of a teleological omniscient narrator in his first statement, only to exhaustively negate it in his second. Here is a narrator well aware of what is expected of him and at the same time deeply at odds with his task. Here is a narrator who struggles with his obligations and his inclinations, when he admits to "feel an attraction to incorrect acts precisely when one hears a correct opinion". (Abe 2001:15) Here is a narrator who expresses insecurities about his duty, as he reveals that he "does not have the confidence to clearly indicate 'yes or no!' on whether narrating something

for no reason is incorrect", almost as if he wants to excuse himself (Abe 2001:15-16). In thus continuously postponing his duty of narrating Tadao's story, Watashi questions the notion of narrative reliability as much as that of narrative omniscience. The fact that Watashi is not in command of his narrative challenges his omniscience, which traditionally elevates the narrator to a God-like position. In contrast, Watashi emphasizes his weaknesses as much as his humanity and indicates that he is one of his audience rather than completely above everything. He also admits to not knowing everything as would be expected of him as an omniscient narrator.

I would like to particularly focus on one of Watashi's following digressions in this overall paragraph, which is so thorough that it stands out as an independent section, namely the discussion on 'aliteracy' (*katsujibanare*), a term that refers to the estrangement of Japanese people from printed letters during the 1980s in favour of the moving image, specifically film and television. I suggest that this digression has a self-contained value as a theoretic piece of media criticism moving far away from the speech type of narratorial monologue. Its argument attacks the truth value of news. By denaturalizing the assumed authority of an impartial newscaster as well as the empirical truth of statistical data, the digression highlights both as *devices* serving the media to construct what they report as true. In this regard, the passage cautions that, while news is presented to the consumer as facts, it in fact is not. Instead, news is a linguistic or visual representation of real events. It is humanly pre-selected and arranged. By this very nature, news is but one *discourse* producing reality, not reality *per se*.[45]

From a possible announcement of Tadao's story, the paragraph instantly digresses into the observation that news programs on TV have been reporting how more and more people in Japan have become 'aliterate' during the last couple of years. This is described as a general development from "'printed letters' towards 'images'". (Abe 2001:21) Through clarifying the detail that news programs are reporting this

[45] While *Amerika no yoru*'s media criticism, in 1994, focuses on news broadcasting, Abe revisits the issue from the perspective of 21st century information society in his most recent, 2019 novel *Orga(ni)sm*; *Orga(ni)sm* addresses the reality of Fake News in times of social media and the iPhone (see Abe 2019).

information (Abe 2001:20), emphasis immediately is placed on the complication that the passage intends to make. News, it contextualizes, is information mediated and communicated by an announcing organ. As such, it can only represent the subjective reality of those who *construct* it.

Fully deploying this problem in the following, the passage turns to making us aware of the linguistic nature of all facts. It does so through the self-referential verbal gesture of pointing at itself being speech: "The person called 'newscaster', when reporting the 'estrangement from printed letters' of Japanese people to the viewers, would probably describe Tadao as a laudable man for his active pursuit of reading books, a pursuit so uncommon for our times overall." (Abe 2001:20)

What is important here is the detail that 'newscaster' is highlighted as a word. The narrative of *Amerika no yoru* repeatedly uses the technique of referencing selected nouns, verbs or adjectives in quotation marks to emphasize their lexicality and, in doing so, refer to itself as linguistic construct. Here, it doubles this emphasis with the indication "person called". (Abe 2001:20) In this specific case, the quotation marks as well as the indicative verb serve to denaturalize the figure of the newscaster: they are not referenced as a newscaster plain and simple, but as the person who is called 'newscaster'. By indicating the newscaster as 'newscaster', they are referenced in their capacity as a linguistic sign, meaning as discourse to begin with. By highlighting the name-giving side of the sign ('person called'), emphasis is further placed on the signifier: the newscaster is a newscaster because we call them such. With this emphasis, any assumption of the newscaster's self-evident naturalness is destabilized: if the newscaster is a newscaster because we call them such, then the newscaster is *not* a newscaster because they essentially *are* a newscaster. Through this denaturalization, *Amerika no yoru*, yet again, makes a case for the primacy of language in a post-structuralist sense. In this specific case, this overall principle of the narrative serves at putting into question the newscaster's authority: it renders incredible the assumption that they are an impartial organ that supposedly announces objective facts as news. The newscaster is a person the linguistic community calls by this name. Again, in the

connotation of the narrative, they are *not* a newscaster by means of ontic entitlement. Accordingly, the narrative randomizes the newscaster as one individual labelled 'newscaster'. I would argue that, in doing so, it implicitly indicates that news is decisively dependent on the capabilities of *human beings*, with their impulses and desires, opinions and positions. As a consequence, it destabilizes the authority of news as an institution of objective knowledge-transmission generally: news not only is texts and images humanly prearranged by journalists and editors. It is also humanly transmitted to the audience by an announcer, a random living individual labelled 'newscaster'.[46] As a result, any guarantee for objectivism in an empirical sense is denied. The mere assumption of such a guarantee would be an impossibility.

Moreover, the narrative undermines the non-questionability of statistical data employed by the media as a base for news making: in a similar logic to the denaturalization of the 'newscaster' above, these sources are not simply brought up as statistical data, but as "that which is called 'statistical data'" (Abe 2001:21). In other words, the narrative similarly, yet by means of a different example, articulates its precautions vis-à-vis consuming news thoughtlessly. It highlights that empirical data are what they are because they are thus termed, reminiscent, as above, of the presuppositions of structuralist linguistics. In this case, this denaturalization serves to dismantle the unquestioned empiricism of statistical data. In a similar vein, as with the 'newscaster', the implication made is that statistical data is evidence collected by humans based on the humanly devised method of quantitative data analysis. At the same time, again, the spotlight is turned on statistical data as being just one *discourse* among others. Statistical data is what we call 'statistical data', meaning speech. The narrative makes sure this fact is highlighted: 'statistical data' is a linguistic sign.[47] Accordingly, *Amerika no yoru* attacks the truth-value of news head-on, as it continues

[46] The importance of humanity is foregrounded by the text itself: when it discusses the convenience of passive image consumption over the active intake of information through printed letters, it remarks that this is certainly owed to the idea of some "laudable people" and concludes: "In the end, these humans are somewhat to be congratulated" (Abe 2001:21).

[47] The implications of such a perspective are far-reaching, if we look at how this was exploited in recent politics. It reminds one of the former Trump administration's abuse of the notion of discourse by coining the oxymoron 'alternative facts' in 2017.

to discuss the 'aliteracy' of Japanese people: "So what about statistical data? If those were facts or something, then it would be of similar certitude that people are not estranged from printed letters yet." (Abe 2001:21) Put simply, the passage seems to imply, never believe statistical data.

The extended theoretic discussion of news as linguistic and human constructs is interrupted by an insertion of Watashi in his personal narrator's voice that weighs in to add an opinionated comment on this analytical part. This comment is another critical take on news reporting, however this time not from an enquiring standpoint but from an emotional one. One could claim that Watashi, having provided us with the analysis part of his criticism, now adds a personal judgment to it. Thus, Watashi's previous personal voice, which we have grown familiar with as a result of his intimate confessions of his professional dilemma, reemerges; however, now turning its attention to the topic of news criticism hitherto discussed in the evaluative tone of critical analysis that almost makes us forget it is narratorial speech. By this means, Watashi's personal voice takes a *position* on the discussion by first clarifying that its owner's interest is not to plead for "protecting a culture of printed letters". (Abe 2001:23-24) He then clarifies his interest in a characteristically unintelligible, long, meandering sentence (which is another variant in contradiction: a clarifying sentence that is unintelligible). The sentence plays around the phonetic similarities between the active and passive inflected forms of the verbs 'state' (述べた and 述べられた) and 'call' (呼ぶ). They succeed each other in the melodic phonetic sequence *nobeta-noberareta-yobu*. This is an early indication of *Amerika no yoru*'s consciousness of the poetic quality emanating from the sounds of words, an aspect, which I will explain in detail further below. Right now, I would like to draw your attention to the semantics of the sentence. For the first time since we have come to know his narrative voice, Watashi becomes moral:

> "I don't mean to say that I do not want to comment on 'printed letters' as a topic. Quite the opposite, I would like to get indignant for the moment about information media having shifted from 'printed letters' to 'images', that to this day there exist people who shamelessly state what are called reasons for that,

> as well as a climate in which so-called reasons stated are received and approved." (Abe 2001:24)

While Watashi has pretended to be completely indifferent and merely playful, forgetful and indifferent about his duties, without any plans or motivation, a procrastinator, with a questionable sense of responsibility, he suddenly presents himself as having an agenda and an opinion and, not the least, morals. Accordingly, he calls out those people and media, who "shamelessly" state things as if they were facts, and tags them as irresponsible liars. Shame as a moral emotion implies strong judgment here. Watashi expresses open discontent concerning the fact that the media can manipulate people so easily in current society. What the narrator is unhappy about, furthermore, is, according to his own words, what could be called the passivity of the spectator. The spectator is a lazy consumer in that they let themselves become the passive side in this. They do have the freedom to make their own decisions and be an independent agent in the process, but they mostly do not use this power. This emotionality, or the calculated passion of Watashi here, echoes the foregoing theoretic part of the passage in a different tone: Watashi's discontent is directed at the fact that the media infiltrate the spectator with information on the one hand and that on the other hand the spectator willingly allows it to happen.

Further criticising the evidence of news information, the passage then advances a counterargument. In doing so, it relies on the discourse of film theory in order to contradict the information provided by the news reporting, namely that images are for easier consumption, while reading is "tedious", requiring more effort (Abe 2001:22). Watashi proceeds, first articulating his doubt about this reported fact through four successive indirect positive questions, gradually intensifying their urge by repetitively letting them end in an anadiplosis on the question particle *ka*:

> "But is it really possible to gain a large amount of information through comfortably watching 'images'? No, is gaining a large amount of information from 'images' really that easy? What really is this large amount of information gained from what people call 'images'? What, indeed, is it?" (Abe 2001:24)

Answering these questions, Watashi builds his argument by advancing the fact that each movie image is made of 24 frames appearing and vanishing within the timespan of one second (one frame is the smallest entity to build an image). In a deconstructionist turn-around gesture, Watashi then interjects that a consumption of images *cannot* be easier than a consumption of printed letters because "there is no way that gaining information from something that appears and vanishes at such considerable speed is comfortable and easy" (Abe 2001:25). Nevertheless, sticking to his logic of contradiction, Watashi concedes in a final turn from a sensory viewpoint: "As long as the eye functions properly, it is easy to watch images." (Abe 2001:25)

Thus, I suggest that the media criticism, which, as I have shown, deconstructs the news report on 'aliteracy' (*katsujibanare*) bit by bit, is a heterogeneous text in which Watashi's narrative voice takes on different tones. As a result, the overall passage lapses from a conflicted opening performance of Watashi's, dramatizing his personal dilemma as an unreliable narrator, into an impersonal analytic piece, so thorough that it stands out from the overall passage as an independent segment. Still, midway, Watashi's personal voice chimes in again, staying in the context of the media criticism and now putting the personal tone of his narrative voice into the service of adding an opinionated comment on the preceding analytic part of the segment. Watashi then advances a counterargument against the gist of the news reporting, claiming that images are not easier to consume than printed words, while ending on an ambivalent note overall.

In confronting us with two ambiguous texts such as the media criticism identified as one part of Watashi's overall narratorial speech, ambiguous *in themselves* and *in comparison* to each other, I suggest that *Amerika no yoru* elaborately puts into question what writing is from Roland Barthes' perspective. The fact that the narrative is obviously reticent about formally clarifying what text types it is presenting us with throughout both passages, taken separately and as one, corresponds to Roland Barthes' ambiguation of any difference between dissimilar forms of writing. It is especially his destabilization of an assumed dissimilarity between the categories of criticism and

literature which I see reflected within this overall opening sequence of *Amerika no yoru*.

4. Writing Beyond Meaning: Signifiers Unchained

In the following, I would like to explore to what degree and exactly how Jacques Derrida's understanding of *écriture* is referenced in the narrative by using the example of two sentences taken from Watashi's above-quoted self-introduction. I suggest that these specific sentences distinguish themselves as a digression taken to extremes, as it is applied to the micro level of syntactic sense. I propose that we look closely at the Japanese original of the sentences:

> "Or, alternatively, maybe this 'different feeling' is the root to shake the horizon of my foundationlessness from its very foundations. I wonder if this is the wriggling subterranean crevice, or, in other words, the foundation."
>
> ひょっとしたらその「別様の感じ」というものが、 私の無根拠さの地平を地盤からゆらしめる根、それが蠢く地下の断層、つまり根拠なのだろうか。 (Abe 2001:16)

In context and in denotation, the sentence is dispensable. It does not contribute significantly to the meaning of the larger passage, neither in its choice of words nor its resulting semantics. In fact, it stands out with its very different vocabulary and semantic abstractions:

> "Of course, this is why I think it is entirely possible that while I have intended to tell Tadao's story 'sadly', I may feel completely different about it in the process. **Or alternatively maybe this 'different feeling' is the root to shake the horizon of my foundationlessness from its very foundations. I wonder if this is the wriggling subterranean crevice, or, in other words, the foundation.** It is possible that this will be clarified anyway, at the same time as it might be left unclear. Either way, I am obliged to first tell the story of a man called Nakayama Tadao."
>
> だからもちろん、私が唯生の話を「哀しく」語ったつもりが、まったく別様に感じられるということも、充分ありえる思う。**あるいは、ひょっとしたらその「別様な感じ」というものが、私の無根拠さの地平を地盤からゆらしめる根、それが蠢く地下の断層、つまり根拠なのだろうか。**そのことは、いずれあきらかにされるかもしれないし、判明せぬまま放りおかれてしまうかもしれない。どちらにしても、それ

> にはまず中山唯生という男の話を、私が語りはじめなければなるまい。(Abe 2001: 16; my highlights.)

Was it unavoidable to insert the statement in order to clarify the meaning of Watashi's overall self-reflection? Does the latter necessarily imply the former's symbolic choice of words? I would say no. Instead, the sentence is suggestive of being an example of a set of words in which signs are invoked for the morphological associations between them, rather than for their semantic congruity. Even standing on its own, the statement reads as if it rather services the narrative technique of digression the passage unfolds, rather than it having meaning in itself or for the overall story. Indeed, it reads as digression in a sentence. Instead of wanting to make sense syntactically, Watashi's utterance plays with the phonetic similarities between its single morphemes. In this regard, the phonemic transcription of the Romanization reveals what otherwise gets lost in translation: "*Hyotto shitara sono 'betsuyō no kanji' to iu mono ga, watashi no mukonkyosa no chihei o chiban kara yurashimeru ne, sore ga ugomeku chika no dansō, tsumari konkyo na no darō ka?"* Accordingly, the Japanese original resonates with an alliteration on *chi* between the three nouns *chihei* 地平 and *chiban* 地盤 and *chika* 地下, as well as with an assonance on *i* and *a* between the latter two. In a similar acoustic relationship, the endings of the verbs *ugomeku* 蠢く and *yurashimeru* ゆらしめる mutually reverberate on *e-u*-assonances. Moreover, the indeterminate *dansō [...] na no darō ka* 断層 (…) なのだろうか melodiously resonates with an alliteration on *d* and a serial assonance on *a-o*.

As a result, I propose that the sentence fundamentally prioritizes playing with the signifiers of its signs over making sense either semantically or contextually. In doing so, it privileges a significance of the signifier over the signified in detail and in general. The sentence defamiliarizes familiar perceptions of the word itself by letting unchained signifiers take a semantic life of their own. As such, it is a micro level example of how the novel's opening favours form over content as it elaborately unfolds the problem from multiple angles.

French avant-garde literature uses the construction of 'signifier-chains' by morphological association as a technique to destabilize the duality of signifier and signified which the linguistic sign presupposes as conceptually given. For example, French author Michel Leiris' autobiographical experiment *La règle du jeu* (The Rule of the Game), the third volume of which, *Fibrilles* (Fibres), was published in 1966; its narrative constructs a similar signifier chain by phonetic association between *la fièvre – la fière – Fier* (fever – the proud one – the gorges *Fier*) and comparably reflects on the similarities in corporeal appearance between the written words *Fier* and *fière* (see Leiris 2003:582). In doing so, it provocatively shifts power to the sonic representation of the sign, which structuralist linguistics consider inferior to its more important content representation, as indicated earlier. Through the inclusion of a meaningless sentence in a conventional understanding of syntactic and contextual meaning, *Amerika no yoru* opens a transcultural dialogue with these experimental upsets of global stoicisms surrounding 'language' and 'literature'.

In a second implied morphemic conversation, the single words of Watashi's statement acknowledge each other in their emblematic corporeality. In a comparable logic to French Lettrism, relationships between words are formed through similarities in look and build.[48] In other words, the *written* word takes centre stage as the basis for such an exercise. In doing so, the sentence opens a critical conversation between the spoken and written sign. In detail, it establishes a conversation between single logographic signs, or even more particularized, between single radicals of these signs: 無根拠さ (foundationlessness) – 地平 (horizon) – 地盤 (foundation) – 根 (root) – 地下 (basement) – 根拠 (foundation). As highlighted, there is a semantic variation on the radical 根 (root) from 無根拠 (non-foundation) over to 根 (root) and 根拠 (foundation). There is also a repetition of 地 (earth) in the three different meanings of the words 地平 (horizon), 地盤 (foundation) and 地下 (basement). If we single out 根 (root) and 地 (earth), there is then another semantic link between these two logograms, as the root

[48] Note that given that Japanese words are not written in Roman letters, it may be safer to speak of 'Lettrism' in inverted commas, or to call it 'Logographism'.

is known to grow in the soil. In that sense, both are complementary.[49] Note that the sentence also plays with the different linguistic options for 'ground, foundation', as 根拠 and 地平 both carry that meaning. As a result, there is also a play on the different semantic choices for 'foundation' which goes beyond that of a mere signifier play. It is repeated in the meanings of the single logograms 平 and 盤 from the composites 地平 and 地盤, which both signify 'level' in different accentuations.

In a final ever-winding turn, the sentence fits with the context of the overall passage in the sense that it is yet another of Watashi's contradiction plays: It starts with 無根拠さ (foundationlessness), only to arrive at 根拠 (foundation). While thus testifying to the limitless possibilities of signification, this sentence still is a mere play on the level of discourse; it does nothing for the narrative's story. As such, though, it blends in exactly with the general narrative delay of Tadao's story, which Watashi long-windedly performs throughout *Amerika no yoru*'s opening.

5. Conclusion

Hasumi Shigehiko has already pointed out that Jacques Derrida's definition of *écriture* as written language lies at the heart of the deconstructionist narrative discourse of Abe Kazushige's second novel *ABC sensō* (Hasumi 2002:312). In addition, I have analysed similar defamiliarizations of the linguistic sign based on an essential understanding of it as *script* throughout one selected segment from Abe's debut novel *Amerika no yoru*.

Moreover, my analysis of two different segments has shown that on top of Jacques Derrida's notion of *écriture, Amerika no yoru*'s narrative discourse reflects Roland Barthes' definition of the same term from multiple angles throughout its opening. In doing so, I have highlighted the productiveness of such an approach with regard to *Amerika no yoru*. While references to Jacques Derrida in Abe's early fiction are demonstrable, the dialogue with Barthes is less obvious. Therefore, I have shown how

[49] My colleague Michael Toole suggested that this could also be read as an implied dialogue with de Saussure's iconic use of the image of a tree to explain what he means with the notion of the signified, as a tree grows out of a root in the soil.

Watashi's opening speech incessantly shapeshifts into different text types. Indeed, the media criticism passage's evaluative analysis, which fragmentarily emerges out of his speech, initially reads as an entirely self-contained piece, only to subsequently complicate this impression by changing back into the personal narrative voice of Watashi. In this personal voice, Watashi adds a moral judgement to the criticism's foregoing analytical part, which reads as an opinionated comment on it. As such, the whole media criticism reads as the "mode of writing" Barthes tried to push for: experimental and aware of itself in that it is never able to be objective or true, but always and necessarily a subjective interpretation and re-reading. Indeed, Watashi's emotional statement not least reveals that the media criticism is composed by a subject that is conscious about it.

In that sense, using the notion of Derrida's, but especially Barthes' *écriture* for analysing the specific formalist writing of both critics and fiction writers associated with the activities and legacy of *Nyū Akademizumu* in Japan seems like a fruitful approach to precisely capture what essentially characterizes their writing. Postmodernism was, if anything, the rendering literary of criticism and rendering critical of literature on a global scale. The concept of *écriture* may help us reassess some of the complicating, verbal and non-mimetic modes of writing characteristic of not few works of Japanese literature and criticism which emerged during the 1990s.

no love is original.
– Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*[50]

CHAPTER 3 PART 2:
I Really Love Her in That Movie:
Homosocial Desire in *Amerika no yoru*

1. Dreams of Competition: The Liminality of Tadao's *Freeter*-dom

In order to finance his artistic career path, Tadao has been working part-time at S-Hall for two and a half years, mostly eight hours a day with an hour and a half off between. His professional responsibilities cover the guest reception and ticket collection in the sections of cinema and drama, while he also is in charge of security in the art section. Also, we learn, he took the job solely because it allowed him to read during his working hours. The narrative relates this theme of Tadao reading to that of precarity, in pointing out that in the beginning Tadao's employer allowed him to read during work whenever he wanted. This generosity was due to the situation that "there was the economic abundance which allowed for such times." (Abe 2001:18) However, this meanwhile has changed, the narrative subsequently informs us: "There is a 'recession' going on, serious looking people would say on any occasion. And S-Hall was not able to escape this current wave of economic crisis either, in which that other whatever-named company was executing 'cutbacks in staff', too." Thus, how Tadao personally realizes that the economy has entered a serious crisis is not primarily through people getting fired, or any such related problems, but first and foremost through a 'reading ban'

[50] Barthes 2010:136.

(*dokusho kinshirei*) that is issued for S-Hall. For: "It was not important to Tadao (…) that he could keep on working there. What was important was how he could spend the time he worked. Which is why he felt his 'Indian Summer' was over, when he was forbidden to read." (2001:19) While the theme of precarity is invoked, the narrative of *Amerika no yoru* leaves it at this invocation. Japan's economic crisis is referenced *lexically* through terms notionally related to it, such as "job" (*arubaito*), "recession" (*fukueiki*) and "staff cutbacks" (2001:17). However, it is not made a problem of the plot. As if in a metafictional twist on this, "recession" and "staff cutbacks" are only referenced indirectly as "something people talk about" (*hito ga iu*) in inverted commas, which indicate a quotation. Meaning what is referenced is the *discourse* on the economic crisis, not the economic crisis as such.

Thus, precarity remains a background topic in *Amerika no yoru*. It does not have a major influence on Tadao's male self-perception. What is important for him is that he can read and he only becomes aware of the recession going on when it interferes with this hobby. Precarity is something he hears of indirectly from other people; it is not a personal concern of his. Thus, unlike *Minagoroshi*, which I will discuss in Chapter 5, *Amerika no yoru* does not directly comment on whether Tadao's precarity affects his self-confidence as a man.

Still, while not a primary topic, overall, Tadao's personal narrative overlaps with a cultural narrative on male precarity in 1990s Japan, as he is depicted in his obsessive pursuit of a masculine artistic identity. Again, the narrative of *Amerika no yoru* never spells out the neologism *freeter.* It uses the related "jobbers", *arubaito-tachi* in Japanese (Abe 2001:18). However, it identifies Tadao as a *freeter* by typically describing him as a flexible worker: a former film school student, Tadao works part-time at the art space S-Hall in Shibuya:

> "Tadao began jobbing at S-Hall after having graduated from three years of film school. He did not feel like becoming an assistant director on film sets right away, but that did not mean that he felt like making independent films and submitting them to contests either." (Abe 2001:28)

Thus, Tadao is a *freeter*, because he does not want to take a profession (that of an assistant director) right away, but wants to have time to do whatever he wants. As a

result, I suggest that *Amerika no yoru* describes Tadao's *freeter*-dom as a liminal state. Emma E. Cook argues that in some cases, male choices of irregular work are expressions of postponing adulthood in Japan. In that sense, "the early twenties operate as a liminal space where youth are not yet expected to be adults, nor do many of them expect themselves to be" and for whom being a *freeter* signifies the agency of choice (Cook 2012:59-60). Thus, in the cultural narrative on male irregular work, being a *freeter* is associated with youthfulness, while the image of the white-collar worker represents the "dominant masculine (adult) ideals of responsibility, stoicism, breadwinning, and fatherhood" (2012:74).

I would like to emphasize that the dominant masculine adult ideal in Japan, as in most heteronormative societies, is a *heterosexual* ideal: responsibility, breadwinning and (biological) fatherhood all presuppose a man's commitment to heterosexual marriage. Thus, heterosexual marriage is one main masculine attribute in Japan, which is part of the white-collar worker narrative: "Outside of work the salaryman is expected to marry at a suitable age and once married perform his role of husband, provider, and father appropriately by providing for the family (Dasgupta 2003)." (Cook 2013:71) Heterosexual marriage being part of the *white-collar worker's* narrative, in turn, highlights that the idea of it necessitates a financial base for a man to be eligible for marriage in Japan. A regular income is the male qualification for marriageability and thus the first asset in a man's heterosexual narrative towards maturing: regular income enables you to be a breadwinner, enables you to marry, enables you to be a father, enables you to be an adult, masculine man. Thus, capital is a crucial prerequisite for a man's stereotypical success story in Japan. In turn, male *freeters* mainly struggle with marriage due to their relatively low income. In male *freeters*' self-perception, their inability to marry is one main issue why they expect to fail when transitioning into adulthood, "be it either failing themselves by giving up on their dreams or failing to become a full adult member of society in the eyes of those around them and wider society. Importantly, however, this expectation of failure applied only in cases where men wanted to marry and have families." (Cook 2013:30) This perception mostly forms when male *freeters* reach the age where others have transitioned into this male

adult ideal, namely, have married while working a regular job, which is in their late twenties (see Cook 2013:31).

In Tadao's case, I argue, marriage is not a topic yet. Firstly, he is still young enough not to have to marry. Secondly, *Amerika no yoru* amply indicates that he prioritizes his wish to be successful as an artist. His professional ambitions are his expressed primary concern. Indeed, Tadao's *freeter*-dom emphasizes that irregular work and the implied material forfeits are not always a negative experience. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, Kosugi Reiko singles out the 'dream-seeker type' among *freeters*. This term applies to those temporary workers who actively reject regular employment options because they consider them unattractive and averse to what they aspire to in an empowered, liberated, individualistic life. Moreover, they mostly aim for a professional occupation in the creative industries. The sociovisibility of this 'dream-seeker type' (2008:13) in Japan, means that one stereotypical image of the male *freeter* remains the artist. The literary-counterdiscourse of *Amerika no yoru* emphasizes the desire for fame within this cultural narrative on artists as *freeters* in its depiction of Tadao's delusional ambitiousness in particular. It also generalizes this emphasis, when it indicates that "people who want to be 'different from others' (*kawarimono*) or 'special' (*tokubetsu na sonzai*), are mostly to be found at 'artistic' universities or vocational schools (technical schools)." (Abe 2001:51)[51]

At the same time, for the artist, fame, or professional success generally, is a prerequisite for capital; fame enables the artist to accumulate capital. Thus, one could argue that Tadao prioritizing his career at this early stage of his professional life is an important step towards later marriage. Marriage in Japan would only be possible for the precarious artist after fame, because he needs the material base to be eligible for it.

Nevertheless, I suggest that *Amerika no yoru* takes on a different thrust towards the idea of youthful male irregular work by describing it as a liminal phase in the

[51] Honda Yuki also points out that one distinct group of freeters, those who choose irregular work because they want to pursue their own projects, do it because they want "to be famous" (see Cook 2013:31). Emma E. Cook further indicates that *From A*, the job magazine which created the notion of freeter, "published a book about celebrities who had been freeters before making it big in their chosen professions." (Cook 2012:66).

heterosexual male marriage narrative. I argue that a third reason for which heterosexual marriage is not a topic for Tadao yet is that he may not be interested in it at all. R. W. Connell describes male coming-of-age as a phase of sexual exploration, which also includes homosexual practices with other men. Compulsory heterosexuality, she argues as a result, is not only enforced on women. It is also part of heteronormative male transition into adulthood to leave homosexual exploring behind and settle into a heterosexual masculine identity (the norm) (see Connell 1995:104). Indeed, Abe Kazushige's fiction repeatedly describes sexual practices exchanged between young men, such as for example, in *Mujō no sekai*, *Individual Projection* and *Veronika Hart no gen'ei*.

I suggest that *Amerika no yoru* explores male same-sex attraction through a different image: as detailed in the summary of the novel above, Tadao's quest for fame involves the competition with his male colleague Mutō. This competition reads like a real affective investment with him, which I call a homosocial obsession. It especially does so, as *Amerika no yoru* narrates Tadao and Mutō's relationship in direct comparison with Tadao's alleged 'actual' love story, which I argue is not one; a short episode of *Amerika no yoru* is dedicated to the depiction of this love story, throughout which Tadao explores possible heterosexual amorous feelings for female film school colleague Tsuyumi. My analysis suggests that the narrative interconnects Tadao, Tsuyumi and Mutō in a three-sided character constellation, which allows for a reading of it as an 'erotic triangle' according to Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's definition of it.

In *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), Kosofsky-Sedgwick's emphasizes that the libidinous energy in heterosexual erotic triangles with two male rivals is less directed at the single female loved individual, as one would assume.[52] Rather, it is shared between the two male rivals through what she calls structural 'homosocial desire'. Similar to R.W. Connell, Kosofsky-Sedgwick also

[52] "While Sedgwick's book deals with British literature, her insights have also been foundational in thinking about homosocial desire in Japan. *Between Men* and Sedgwick's second book *Epistemology of the Closet* were published in Japanese in 2000 and 1999 (…) and widely cited in Japanese literary scholarship." (Vincent 2012:3)

argues that male coming-of-age involves the exploration of homosexual attractions. Homosocial desire is an expression of a libidinized same sex attraction, while not implying a physical sexual exchange:

> "'Homosocial desire,' to begin with, is a kind of oxymoron. 'Homosocial' is a word occasionally used in history and social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism obviously formed by analogy with homosexual and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'. In fact, it is applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear or hatred of homosexuality. To draw the 'homosocial' back into the orbit of 'desire,' of the potentially erotic, then, is to hypothesize the potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial and homosexual, a continuum whose visibility for men in our society is radically disrupted." (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1985:1-2)

Thus, the coinage of homosocial desire is a critical effort in spotlighting same sex attractions as general expressions of the human libido (while not genital) and thus as attractions, which can be part of all kinds of same sex relationships in our culture whose heteronormative rule deliberately obscures such expressions, especially if they occur between men. Kosofosky-Sedgwick uses the term 'desire' in homosocial desire "in a way analogous to the psychoanalytic use of 'libido' – not for a particular affective state or emotion, but for the affective and social force, the glue, even when its manifestation is hostility or hatred or something less emotively charged, that shapes an important relationship." (1985:2) Thus, homosocial desire always and necessarily implies an erotic preoccupation, which can be felt consciously or not, in a positive or negative manner.

As a result, the notion of homosocial desire subverts most societies' heteronormative exclusion of the possibility of especially *male* same sex erotic preoccupations (female same sex attraction is less tabooed)[53] by, conversely, claiming

[53] Accordingly, Kosofsky-Sedgwick observes that "the diacritical opposition between the 'homosocial' and the 'homosexual' seems to be much less thorough and dichotomous for women, in our society, than for men. At this particular historical moment, an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women's friendship, 'networking,' and the active struggles of feminism. The continuum is crisscrossed with deep discontinuities – with much homophobia, with conflicts of race and class – but its intelligibility seems now a matter of simple common sense." (1985:2)

that these are part of any male same sex relationship, especially those that society makes men hold during their life course:

> "If such compulsory relationships as male friendship, mentorship, admiring identification, bureaucratic subordination, and heterosexual rivalry all involve forms of investment that force men into the arbitrarily mapped, self-contradictory, and anathema-riddled quicksands of the middle distance of male homosocial desire, then it appears that men enter into adult masculine entitlement only through acceding to the permanent threat that the small space they have cleared for themselves on this terrain may always, just as arbitrarily and with just as much justification, be punitively and retroactively foreclosed." (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 2002 [1999]:159)

Seconding her argument, I would like to put another way that figuring out one's sexual orientations is an important part of maturation generally and male maturation in particular. In the language of the narrative of *Amerika no yoru* – if maturing means finding your authentic self, then choosing one's sexual orientation is part of it. In that sense, I suggest that Tadao's relationships speak to Kosofsky-Sedgwick's notion of a structural homosocial desire as observed in erotic triangles. Its specific interpretation of the notion references a postmodern discourse on the dichotomy of authenticity and metafiction: Tsuyumi is a mere quotation, while Tadao's preoccupation with Mutō sounds real in its obsessive intensity. The narrative suggests that Tadao *imitates* a discursive notion of heterosexual love, while his competition with Mutō implies real affective investment. In fact, my analysis will show how Tadao's and Mutō's competitive same sex relationship is organized *around* Tsuyumi. Tadao's desire for Mutō, expressed in his obsession with him, is routed through the *non-existent* desire for his alleged 'love interest' Tsuyumi.

The narrative does not offer any conclusion as to a possible *choice* of sexual orientation by Tadao in the end. I argue that it contents itself with the subversion of invoking a homosexual-heterosexual pseudo-opposition and suggests that the general struggle for male adulthood always and necessarily implies a self-interrogation as to which side one is inclined to choose. At the same time, one could deduce, this ambivalence of the narrative is in fact a crystallized literalization of the argument that it does not matter what choice one makes. What matters is that there *is a choice* to

begin with. Put differently, I suggest that the narrative makes a case for a queer sociality.

As a result, the liminality of Tadao's *freeter*-dom is described as a postponement of compulsory heterosexuality in general. For the context of 1990s Japan, one could say that his choice of irregular work gives Tadao the freedom not to submit to a heterosexual male adult life trajectory immediately, which includes taking a regular position in order to be able to marry a woman afterwards. Instead, the transitional phase allows Tadao to explore whatever affect surfaces within him, which needs to be suppressed or left behind in his prescribed future as an adult male in heteronormative Japan.

2. Erotic Triangles in Theory

In the following, I will analyse how the erotic triangle Tadao-Mutō-Tsuyumi is depicted in *Amerika no yoru*'s narrative. Therefore, I begin with a clarification of the theoretic concepts on which my analysis relies.

I would like to undertake a comparative reading of Kosofsky-Sedgwick and Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*[54], which suggests that, while less critically pronounced, the earlier Barthes makes a similar argument to Kosofsky-Sedgwick. In doing so, I argue that Barthes anticipates Kosofsky-Sedgwick's notion of homosocial desire and provides a queer theory *avant la lettre*.

In *A Lover's Discourse*'s section on 'connivance', Barthes describes the problem of rivalry in erotic triangles and, very similar to Kosofksy-Sedgwick, Barthes' notion of rivalry turns the attention to how the *two opponents* relate to each other. Meaning rivalry highlights the relationship between the two lovers, who compete for the attention of the single loved individual within the triangle. In other words, rivalry does *not* reference, as one might assume, the respective or intertwined relationships of both lovers with their mutually loved individual; rivalry focuses on the relationship

[54] *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* appeared in French in 1977 and was translated into Japanese in 1980 by Miyoshi Ikuo, a Romance scholar at Kyoto University, as *Ren'ai no diskūru: danshō*.

between the two lovers and *exclusively* so. For Barthes, rivalry is the "pleasure of complicity" (*agrément de complicité*); however, 'complicity' not with the loved individual, but with the *other* individual in love with said loved individual. According to Richard Howard's English translation: "The subject imagines himself speaking about the loved being with a rival person, and this image generates and strangely develops in him a pleasure of complicity. *Le sujet s'imagine parlant de l'être aimé avec une personne rivale, et cette image développe bizarrement chez lui un agrément de complicité*." (Barthes 2010:65; 1977:79)

Rivalry is pleasurable complicity - as such, I suggest, Barthes, similarly to Kosofsky-Sedgwick, implies that rivalry is eroticized: it expresses the apparent paradox of a libidinous connection between two people, who are opponents by definition of their positions within the triangle, yet form a union amongst themselves by sharing a common topic of conversation in what Barthes calls '*discours duel*':

> "The person with whom I can in fact talk about the loved being is the person who loves that being as much as I do, the way I do: my symmetric partner, my rival, my competitor (rivalry is a question of place). I can then, for once, discuss the other with *someone who knows*; there occurs an equality of knowledge, a delight of inclusion; in such discussion, the object is neither distanced nor lacerated; it remains interior and protected by the dual discourse. I coincide simultaneously with the Image and with this second mirror which reflects what I am (on the rival countenance, it is my fear, my jealousy which I read).
>
> *Celui/celle avec qui je peux bien parler de l'être aimé, c'est celui/celle qui l'aime autant que moi, comme moi: mon symétrique, mon rival, mon concurrent (la rivalité est une question de place). Je peux alors enfin commenter l'autre* avec qui s'y connaît*; il se produit une égalité de savoir, une jouissance d'inclusion; dans ce commentaire-là, l'objet n'est ni éloigné ni déchiré; il rest interieur au discours duel, protégé par lui. Je coïncide en même temps avec l'Image et avec ce second miroir qui reflète ce que je suis (sur le visage rival, c'est ma peur, c'est ma jalousie que je lis).*" (2010:65; 1977:79)

Like Kosofsky-Sedgwick, Barthes foregrounds that this ambivalence between attraction and rejection is expressed with jealousy as the key emotion behind the relationship rivalry. Jealousy builds the emotional interface between the two opposing parties. The ambivalence of jealousy is that, as much as it is a rejection of the opponent, it is also an avowal of respect for them, as jealousy is the fear of losing the loved individual to the opponent, at the same time, as it is the belief in the opponent's ability of winning over the loved individual (the fear behind jealousy expresses a suspicion of

the rival's superiority). Nevertheless, with Barthes, this jealousy between both rivals is suspended as all competition gets carried away in the mutual delight over each other's company:

> "Bustling gossip, all jealousy suspended, around this absent party whose objective nature is reinforced by two converging visions: we give ourselves over to a rigorous, successful experiment, since there are two observers and since the two observations are made under the same conditions: the object is *proved*: I discover that *I am right* (to be happy, to be injured, to be anxious). (…) Which brings us to this paradox: it is the loved being who, in the triune relation, is virtually *de trop*. (…) The *odiosamato* (as the Italians call the 'rival') is also loved by me: he interests me, intrigues me, appeals to me (…).
>
> *Papotage affairé, toute jalousie suspendue, autour de cet absent don't deux regards convergents renforcent la nature objective: nous nous livrons à une expérience rigoureuse, réussie, puisqu'il y a deux observateurs et que les deux observations se font dans les mêmes conditions: l'objet est* prouvé*: je découvre que* j'ai raison *(d'être heureux, d'être blesse, d'être inquiet). (...) On en vient à ce paradoxe: c'est l'être aimé lui-même qui, dans la relation trielle, est presque* de trop*. (...) L'*odiosamato *(ainsi se dit 'rival' en italien) est* aussi *aimé de moi: il m'intéresse, m'intrigue, m'appelle (...)."* (2010:65-66; 1977:79-80)

I suggest that *A Lover's Discourse* here makes two notable references on a queer sociality. The narrating subject is, at least in this episode, male by definition of its choice of masculine personalized adjectives. In English, the translator Richard Howard chooses to explicitly indicate the subject as male: the gender neutral '*chez lui*' in French, as mentioned in the first quote referenced above, is not translated as 'they/themselves' but as 'himself'. Now, the episode leaves open if the rival is male or female with both options taken into account through the explication of the demonstrative pronoun '*celui/celle*,' meaning 'him/her' and translated into English as 'that person'. This non-specification, I would argue, is the implication of a queer sociality: if we assume the loving subject to be male, then the triangular constellation could be male-female-male, as much as male-male-female, or, male-male-male. In other words, in offering both options, that of a male *and* a female rival as quoted above (him/her), *A Lover's Discourse* infers both the possibilities of a homosexual and a heterosexual erotic triangle; most importantly, it infers the possibility of a homosexual

triangle.[55] Heterosexuality being the norm, this indication of a homosexual possibility speaks for itself in a book which, according to Koestenbaum, generally chooses to express itself through the ambiguity of nuances. Koestenbaum notes that "on the purgative level, *A Lover's Discourse* is an attempt to get rid of 'love' – its roles, its attitudes – in order to find that luster that remains when the stereotypes have been sent packing." (Koestenbaum 2010:x). Nevertheless, a complication of gender was not of Barthes' interest, who longed for an "imagined space, where the battle between binaries (such as 'male' and 'female') has ceased to rage, he sometimes called the 'neutral' and there he wanted to rest (…)." (Koestenbaum 2010: xi) This, Koestenbaum asserts, is why Barthes did not promote 'homosexual discourse' in the book, one possible reason why the "book had the enormous commercial success that a more rebellious gay book could not have enjoyed":

> "Because of this preference for the uncategorizable, Barthes omitted overt gay statements in *A Lover's Discourse*; instead, he chose a 'feminized' position, or a wounded one (…): 'I refused to proffer a homosexual discourse. Not because I refuse to recognize homosexuality, not through censure, or prudence, but because *A Lover's Discourse* is not anymore related to homosexuality than to heterosexuality.'" (Koestenbaum 2010: xiii)

However, considering the hegemony of heteronormativity, is not offering the option of a homosexual triangle as such rebellious? Implying the possibility of homosexuality *despite* a heterosexual norm necessarily signifies to imply it *against* this norm.

In other words, *A Lover's Discourse*'s suggestion of a homosocial attraction in erotic triangles anticipates Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's later definition of structural

[55] Wayne Koestenbaum observes that *A Lover's Discourse* is "reasonably upfront about the maleness of Barthes' ideal love objects" generally (2010: xii). Thus, explaining the text with statements of its author would speak for a homosexual erotic triangle. Nevertheless, I would discuss from a perspective of textual analysis that, in quoting romantic love as a discourse, *A Lover's Discourse* mainly relies on images of heterosexual love, taken from sources such as Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Thus, as the loving subject in *A Lover's Discourse* is indicated as male and the notion of love is based on a heterosexual ideal type *generally* in the book, the reader may well infer that the rival is potentially male as well, while the loved individual is female. In other words, I would argue, the triangular relationship described in the fragment on 'connivance' is *possibly* heterosexual. At the same time, in describing the attraction of this triangle's two male competitors to each other and how this attraction is channelled through the female individual in it, I suggest that *A Lover's Discourse* destabilizes this evoked heterosexuality by eroticizing the male-male competition.

homosocial desire. Kosofksy-Sedgwick emphasizes what Barthes implies: the *desire* behind same sex rivalry is not directed at the supposed *centre* of the triangle, the loved individual, but it is channelled *through* this individual to the *peripheries* of the triangle: the two competitors. As a result, the peripheral parties become the subjects, while the centrally placed loved individual is objectified and becomes peripheral. In fact, both Barthes and Kosofsky-Sedgwick position the *female* loved individual as a medium through which homosocial desire is routed. It has a *structural* function within the erotic triangle; it gives the two competitors an occasion to establish contact, it gives them a means to interact and a reason to stay in touch. In thus arguing, I would add, according to both Barthes and Kosofsky-Sedgwick, rivalry in love generally reads as the expression of an inherent paradox: rivalry in love is the *deconstruction* of a love proclaimed and the *affirmation* of a love implied.

Overall, *A Lover's Discours*e's eroticization of male-male competition in erotic triangles queers a hegemonic notion of heterosexual masculinity as much as it queers heterosexual love being the norm. As a variant, I would add, Barthes puts stronger emphasis than Kosofsky-Sedgwick on pleasure expressing itself through *discourse* between the two competing same-sex parties, and on the fact that the mutual object of affection *is created* in this discourse. Talking *about* the object is a substitute for actually interacting *with* it; at the same time, exchanging information *on* the object gives it shape *to begin with*. By definition of *A Lover's Discourse*'s philosophy, the loved object is *discursive*. In other words, Kosofksy-Sedgwick conceptually centres on affect, while Barthes prioritizes that affect is based on and *in* language. This allows us to read Barthes as a complement to Kosofsky-Sedgwick, not a counterargument.

For my analysis of *Amerika no yoru*, I apply Kosofsky-Sedwgick's notion of structural homosocial desire in heterosexual triangles, expressed in an eroticized male-male competition, on a close reading of the affective economies within the triangular relationship Tadao-Tsuyumi-Mutō. In analysing their erotic triangle within *Amerika no yoru*, I read the competition between Tadao and Mutō on the conceptual foils of both Eve Kosofksy-Sedgwick's notion of homosocial desire and Roland Barthes' *discours duel*: on the one hand, the narrative describes male rivalry as an eroticized

competition; on the other, it puts primary emphasis on the role of discourse in this competition.

3. Between Men: Homosocial Obsessions

The competition with Mutō preoccupies Tadao with an obsessive intensity. Most importantly, it preoccupies him more than his alleged feelings for Tsuyumi. This is clarified in a passage in which an erotic dream, which Tadao tries to have of Tsuyumi, is interrupted as Mutō suddenly shows up in it.

> "In order to fall into a gentle sleep, Tadao imagined Tsuyumi. This then changed into masturbation to satisfy the paroxysmal sexual desire that had seized hold of him. That did not mean that he made Tsyumi appear within the vague imagery, which one watches through a thin layer of silk spread out within one's mind in giving imagination a hand so as to reach the peak of pleasure quickly. That causality had become entirely meaningless by then, also because he was chasing away the bitterness tasted from Mutō's image, which had come up without him having had the intention of invoking it." (Abe 2001:69-70)

In fact, the passages in which Tadao thinks of Mutō are longer than the ones in which he thinks of Tsuyumi.

The narrative introduces Mutō early on as Tadao's perceived enemy. While his envy makes Tadao criticize Mutō as a "stereotypical guy" and a "cliché person" (Abe 2001:51) his obsession with him defines their subsequent relationship:

> "No doubt, Tadao had an interest in Mutō. When he found out that Mutō was a 'spring equinox' person, the man who had been just a cohort member at film school and a colleague at work now turned into Tadao's enemy. (…) – among his colleagues he was a bit of a 'popular character' who possessed the experience of his directorial film having received considerable acclaim at the presentation of the graduation works during his days as a student at film school. He was a stereotypical guy like the ones frequently seen in comics or novels. Or, to put it differently, Mutō was a cliché person." (2001:50-51)

Mutō is sketched as Tadao's antithesis. He is an extrovert, while Tadao barely speaks to others but himself. Mutō is a stand-out and popular among colleagues, while Tadao has to work hard on being considered 'special' by others. Particularly in their art school environment where, as the narrative comments, the students compete for professional significance, social capital is a potent currency.

Tadao ultimately chooses Mutō as his declared rival, when he realizes that his birthday is in March on the day of the spring equinox, which makes him Tadao's diametric opposite:

> "Once it had become clear that Mutō was a 'spring equinox person', there was no way that Tadao, who had the impression that Mutō was a man who you would constantly encounter in literature and comics etc. – or rather a man who takes a liking to 'eccentric' persons as described in literature and comics and imitates them in turn – could not not take a refreshed interest in him after all. (…) It looked as if the idea of 'Mutō as the enemy' had a tight lock on Tadao's mind." (2001:52-53)

Tadao finds out about Mutō's birthday through his female colleague Kijōyo, when she consults with him about which present to buy:

> "He learned about Mutō's birthday from Kijōyo. One day in March, she instantly had to buy a present. Which is why Kijōyo, who did not seem to be especially troubled by having to make a decision on what to buy, consulted Tadao. Upon being asked for whom the present was, she answered that it was for Mutō to which Tadao, who was never content without probing the very depth of people's words, thought that they must be 'in a relationship' at that moment. It was only later that he found out that that was not necessarily the case. (…)
>
> – Birthday is on the 21st.
>
> As Kijōyo mentioned the date as familiarly as if she was speaking of herself, Tadao, who showed a curiosity for the dating life of others almost on the level of women's magazines, assumed to himself that, as expected, both must be 'totally smitten', or, Kijōyo must have a one-sided crush on Mutō, or one or the other. He did not even stumble over the date '21st' mentioned by her. He definitively learned about Mutō being born on 'the day of the spring equinox' a few days or so after Kijōyo had consulted him, on a March 21st long ago. Tadao was at S-Hall that day as any other day. However, Kijōyo and Mutō had the day off. Tadao noticed that it was both of them together. Probably because Tadao's intuition was working fully again, he remembered Kijōyo's words. Alright, he thought, today is Mutō's birthday then and while noting down that date into his daily notebook, he let out a miserable sound 'Aaah', looking as if he had just realized that some decisive moment had escaped his attention." (2001:49-50)

From Kijōyo's simple information, that she intends to buy a birthday present for Mutō, Tadao comes to the far-reaching conclusion that Mutō and Kijoyō must be "totally smitten" (*atsui naka*) (2001:50). What is more, he believes that both are in a "relationship" (*ren'ai kankei*) with each other. I suggest the following: as Tadao is not interested in Kijōyo, his premature assumption of Mutō and Kijōyo being in love is not about the fear that Mutō might take someone away from him whom he exclusively cherishes. Instead, his assumption is an expression of his belief in Mutō's success with the other sex. In turn, it shows how insecure Tadao is himself in that field. Thus, Tadao

is not *jealous* of Mutō for possibly winning Kijōyo's heart. He is *envious* of him for potentially being *capable* of winning it. Accordingly, I suggest, Tadao's subsequent competition with Mutō for Tsuyumi is based on Tadao's obsession with what he hallucinates to be clear evidence of Mutō's superiority in the competitive field of erotic conquest. Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick observes that this is a recurring logic behind erotic triangles. Oftentimes "the choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival." (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1985:21) Thus, I propose, Tadao's suspicion of Mutō and Kijōyo being in a relationship defines how Tadao socializes subsequently: his instinctive suspicion speaks for his rivalry with Mutō. His envy of Mutō motivates his subsequent idealization of Tsuyumi. In turn, his 'love' for Tsuyumi is subordinate to his actual obsession with Mutō.

Fittingly, within the order of the narrative, Tadao's 'love' story starts after Mutō was introduced as a rival and after Tadao has come to convince himself that Mutō is popular with women, or, that Mutō is in a heterosexual relationship. I suggest that as a result, Tadao *decides* that he needs one, too, in order to keep up with Mutō in terms of male status. It is then that Tadao first reflects on his desire, which "hadn't touched upon any such thing as moderation" and "will not grow tired either" (Abe 2001:56). Thus, while a notion of feelings is negated, one of desire is affirmed, a constant dialectic throughout Abe Kazushige's fiction. In fact, Tadao is a man of strong desires, an intensity of character that has been established since the beginning, when Watashi wondered about the pencil-strength of Tadao's handwriting. It is confirmed now, as Tadao's desire makes him struggle to fall asleep. Yet again, his desire is not about Tsuyumi, it is an expression of anger at Mutō's power being so strong over him that it keeps him awake" (2001:56). Indeed, Watashi, in indicating Tadao's love story, does not choose the noun *'ren'ai banashi* 恋愛話', but the less colloquial '*irokoibanashi* 色恋話'. '*Irokoibanashi*' connotes not only 'love' as in '*koi* 恋', but also erotic attraction as in '*iro* 色'. The dictionary *Kōjien* explains it as both *'shikijō* 色情*'* (sexual appetite) and *'ren'ai* 恋愛*'* (love). Ironically, the masturbation scene interrupted by Mutō's

image clarifies that Tadao's desire seems to culminate in one single focus: his ambition in winning the upper hand in his self-proclaimed rivalry for male status with Mutō.

4. Deconstructions of Heterosexual Love

4.1 Love as an Image Repertoire

Tadao first brings up love as a discourse when Kijōyo tells him about Mutō's birthday and he asks himself if that means that Kijōyo and Mutō are 'in a relationship' (*ren'ai kankei*) with each other or that they are 'totally smitten' (*atsui naka*). The fact that 'in a relationship' and 'totally smitten' are indicated in inverted commas clarifies that Tadao thinks about these expressions as linguistic concepts from the start. In referencing them in quotation marks, Tadao is referring to the *discourse* on love, not the *feeling* of love essentially. In characteristic self-consciousness, the narrative subsequently underscores this thread from multiple angles. Indeed, it points out that Tadao's curiosity about Mutō's and Kijōyo's relationship is almost on 'the level of women's magazines' (*josei shūkanshi-nami*). Through this indication, the notion of heterosexual romantic love is related to a feminine popular public discourse on it. In doing so, the narrative suggests that the feeling of love is always pre-figured in some prior *speech*. As a result, it argues that there is no such thing as 'love', as there is no such thing as authentic feelings generally. Love has lost its innocence: it is a mere representation of what mass media are portraying as 'love' (which can be read as a connective reference to the media criticism of the beginning).

I suggest that in thus dismantling heterosexual romantic love, the narrative speaks to Roland Barthes' deconstruction of love as an 'image-repertoire' (Barthes 2010:9;11). In fact, in a subsequent scene described earlier, the one in which Tadao struggles to fall asleep due to his obsessive thinking about Mutō, he looks for topics to distract himself with. One option that comes up in his mind is "that thing called image of 'love'" *(ano 'koi' no imēji to iu mono)* (Abe 2001:57):

> "Did Tadao possess an image which would give him a feeling of amusement and happiness? Well, it wasn't that he did not possess one. For example, even a man like him did possess what probably can be called one of those images that entice people into

> such feelings of amusement and happiness, namely that thing which is called the image of 'love'. However, again, not as something to make you feel at peace with yourself. Rather, as something with the potential to ultimately result in a fantasy with a disappointing ending looming ahead. Nevertheless, Tadao's mood turned optimistic thinking that he should have thought of it in the first place. So he indulged in his sweet thoughts without even attempting to seek out other images." (2001:57-58)

By consequence, *Amerika no yoru*'s discussion of heterosexual romantic love explicitly starts with the clarification that love is not an authentic feeling but a *figure*. Love is referred to as "that thing which is called image of 'love'" not love actually. Accordingly, Tadao's love story starts with Watashi's self-reflexive clarification that Tadao's love story is *fiction*:

> "Either way, it is possible that the story of Tadao's 'love' could turn into a boring episode, immature in a bad sense, an episode one would hesitate, to a certain extent, to even call 'love' – or, even worse, an episode one might find unnecessary to mention at all. At the same time, I am unsure whether all the invididual stories told until now have been interesting enough to make us feel we want more, as much as I cannot exclude that the episode of Tadao's image of 'love' might not be told, somewhere and sometime in the future, as the most important story of all of them. Thus, while my mind is unable to settle on a a conclusion, I will, after all, narrate that story in the following. (…)" (2001:58)

Before Watashi turns to narrating Tadao's explicated love 'story', he starts with an enumeration of proverbs on love that point at its linguistic nature:

> "There are proverbs such as 'Love is blind', or, 'Love is for Fools' (Love is dangerous), or, 'Love is Without Reason', moreover, 'It is Dark in Love', 'Slave of Love', 'Love is the Downfall of Saints' and so on. However, in Tadao's case 'blind love', 'love in darkness', 'love of a fool' may seem more appropriate." (2001:58)

I suggest that all these references clarify that love is lexical; feelings are language. I suggest that *Amerika no yoru*'s general emphasis of the fact that the feeling of love actually is but a word makes it contribute to a large like-minded transcultural discourse that complicates 'love'.[56] The problematization of emotions in postmodernism questions the assumption of 'authentic love' based on a general disavowal of the notion

[56] Also, the *kanji* is '*koi*' (恋) not '*ai*' (愛) which makes a difference for the Japanese discourse on 'love'. Saeki Junko traces the etymological trajectory of '*ai*' as 'romantic love' in the sense of a respectful, faithful partnership of choice between two equals. '*Ai*' (愛) is a concept which was brought to Japan from the West in the Meiji era in order to translate Western notions of romantic love. In that sense, 'love' connotes marital love with a chosen partner. By contrast '*koi*' etymologically originates in the concept of 'love' established during the geisha culture of the Edo period and the Japanese tradition of arranged marriage and signifies a 'love' with erotic and non-committal connotations (see Saeki 2000).

of authentic feelings after the death of the subject. Indeed, Tadao's 'love' for Tsuyumi is explicitly *discursive*. In describing his alleged feelings for the actress, the narrative constantly points out that Tadao likes Tsuyumi as an image on the one hand (he is attracted to how well she acts in Mutō's film) and that his feelings are contingent on some discourse on the other. As such, his feelings are not essential, not authentic. This rejection of heterosexual love in turn upgrades Tadao's homosocial obsession with Mutō.

The narrative's general conflict between 'real' and 'discursive' love crystallizes in one single sentence's language game. At one point, the narrative comments:

> "While not necessarily causal, as everyone knows, there is no way that 'imagined love' or such ever bears fruit. *Dakara to iu wake de wa nai ga, dare mo ga shiruyōni, 'sōzōjō no koi' nado, minoru hazu wa nainoda.* だからというわけではないが、だれもが知るように、「想像上の恋」など、実るはずはないのだ。" (2001:58)

The word play unfolds between the Chinese-derived reading of the logographic *kanji 'jitsu* 実*'* within *minoru* 実る (bear fruit) and the term *sōzōjō no koi*「想像上の恋」(imagined love). *'Jitsu* 実*'* by itself primarily means 'truth, reality'. In this primary reading, there is a clear semantic opposition between '*jitsu* 実' as in 'real' and *'sōzōjō no koi* 想像上の恋*'* as in 'imagined love'. This opposition between both semantics is underscored by the detail that 'imagined love' is referenced in inverted commas, which clarifies its linguistic nature. Love as an image, a figure, as speech is not actual love. As such, the whole sentence is yet another deconstruction of heterosexual romantic love on the microscopic level of lexical sense.

4.2 'I Really Love Her in That Movie': Love as a Performance

Barthes explains how the lover relates to his figures:

> "So it is with the lover at grips with his figures: he struggles in a kind of lunatic sport, he spends himself, like an athlete; he 'phrases,' like an orator; he is caught stuffed into a role, like a statue. The figure is the lover at work." (2010:4)

In other words, for Barthes' lover, loving is a performance with a script – which is exactly how Tadao enacts his own role. The difference from Barthes' lover is that

Tadao's lover is unmistakenly gendered as 'the man in love' *(koi suru otoko)*. I argue that 'the man in love' is yet another image Tadao imitates to assert a masculine identity.

Tsuyumi is a friend of the aforementioned character Kijōyo. Both frequent the same university and sometimes come to S-Hall, which is where Tadao knows Tsuyumi from. The narrative indicates that they also have gone for dinner with Mutō in the past. Thus, immediately, the subsequently problematized erotic triangle is established.

> "Alright, returning to Tadao's 'tale of love and lust', the name of the opposite person, who made him hold a bittersweet attachment in his innermost heart, was Tsuyumi. Tsuyumi was a friend of Kijōyo's and both went to the same university. As Tsuyumi often came to visit Kijōyo at S-Hall, Tadao had exchanged a few words with her and also shared a meal with her after work with Mutō joining in. Yet, that did not result in him actively watching her as is necessary in order to develop that thing, that said attachment. In these meetings, Tadao's heart did not especially show different signs from normal, such as feeling oddly suffocated with his pulse stopping. Tadao was a person obsessed with fiction. So in order to activate those feelings of love for Tsuyumi a renewed intervention of fiction was necessary – comparably, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* the act of climbing the 'stairs', which fulfills the function of Hitchcock's main topic of 'transformation', is a prerequisite for 'psychoanalyst' Ingrid Bergman to achieve her transformation into a 'woman in love'."[57] (2001:59-60)

I suggest that in the following passage, the narrative introduces a further twist on its overall deconstruction of heterosexual romantic love. Thus, it points out that Tadao encountered a "Tsuyumi unbeknownst to him until now", in an 8mm film of Mutō's, almost "as if she was someone else". In other words, Tadao falls for Tsuyumi through fiction, by seeing her as a *fictional character* in Mutō's 8mm *film*. The added detail "as if she was someone else" sounds comic here, for Tsuyumi obviously cannot be anyone but 'someone else' in the film, as she necessarily is enacting a *role* in it.

> "What did a renewed intervention of fiction mean? That simply meant that Tadao had discovered a Tsuyumi unbeknownst to him until now, almost as if she was someone else, in one 8 mm film he had seen which Mutō was the producer of. Nevertheless, that event was fully sufficient to include him in the 'men in love' group. The fact that its length extended to a little less than 30 minutes meant that it was an 8 mm film, which enforced an unbelievably boring time upon its viewers. Tsuyumi, whose screen time was so long that one could call her the lead actress, was playing a woman who was doting on five men and women with her home cooking and basically made one dish of rice wrapped in egg omelet after another for five people. Even so, that simple scene was filled with a sense of tension to an abnormal degree. In Tadao's eyes, her performance (*miburi*)

[57] I would like to thank Jule Nowoitnick for pointing out to me that the example of Ingrid Bergman as a 'woman in love' in comparison with Tadao is yet another feminization of him, as it reverses his performed role of a 'man in love'.

> appeared to have a certain kind of grace and nobleness, almost similar to that of Lauren Bacall in Howard Hawks' *To Have and Have Not*, or Gena Rowlands in John Cassavetes' *Gloria*. With a bit of a vacant gaze, her mouth slightly opened, with an expression in which earnestness and absent-mindedness intermingled, she broke countless eggs and poured out their contents, either because she was irritated or just clumsy, with terribly blunt mannerisms that could mean both, she handled cooking utensils and dishes randomly and poorly. Despite being born of such crudeness, the five people's omelet rice appeared on screen in superb execution, as if ordered from a different level somewhere. Tadao was overwhelmed by that performance of Tsuyumi, in which she, while showing no signs of self-satisfaction, continuously maintained the same figure as shown in the frame before and a posture shown since the beginning, which would have to be called infinitely cool coquetry." (2001:60-61)

The passage takes *ad absurdum* heterosexual romantic love yet again, as it spells out anew that Tadao's love *cannot be* whatever true love is understood to be: Tadao explicitly is attracted to a fictional character, not the real Tsuyumi. I suggest that this implies that Tadao's love is not about loving Tsuyumi for her true self, but about being 'in love' at all, by whatever means. The passage reveals that this need is motivated by his priority to be initiated into the homosocial community of 'men in love' ('*koi suru otoko*'). Holding a heterosexual relationship is an important step towards male maturation. At the same time, it is an asset in the homosocial competition between men for male status, especially in the sexual field.

I suggest that the passage produces literary irony by juxtaposing Tadao's two entirely different perspectives on Tsuyumi. This contradiction puts into question the consistency of Tadao's feelings for Tsuyumi and underscores yet again that they are not authentic. First Tadao compares Tsuyumi's acting to that of legendary actresses such as Lauren Bacall or Gena Rowlands. Then the passage lapses into a nine-line sentence that ridicules this comparison. Accordingly, Tsuyumi's acting challenge is restricted to breaking countless eggs and pouring out their contents, which she does with a "vacant gaze, her mouth slightly opened" and "terribly blunt mannerisms" that could imply that she is "irritated or just clumsy". Indeed, she handles dishes "randomly and poorly". Nevertheless, Tadao concludes that he is "overwhelmed" by this performance. The contradictory logic of this passage reminds me of how Barthes describes 'To Love Love' by referring to Johann Wolfgang Goethe's novel *The*

Sorrows of Young Werther and how the male protagonist Werther relates to his female object of affection Charlotte:

> "Charlotte is quite insipid; she is the paltry character of a powerful, tormented, flamboyant drama staged by the subject Werther; by a kindly decision of this subject, a colourless object is placed at the centre of the stage and there adored, idolised*, taken to task*, covered with discourse, with prayers (and perhaps, surreptitiously, with invectives); as if she were a huge motionless hen huddled amid her feathers, around which circles a slightly mad cock." (2010:31)

In Barthes' words, I suggest that in Tadao's gaze on Tsuyumi *he* is the subject, not Tsuyumi. His description of Tsuyumi's acting is an expression of *his* performance as the 'man in love'. The actual stage is Tadao's, not Tsuyumi's, who is reduced to a paltry character in *his* overall drama. Tsuyumi remains a colourless object in Tadao's monologue, which never seems really interested in a dialogue.

Moreover, I suggest that in the passage, Tadao first performs the male machismo he later on intensifies in homosocial conversations on Tsuyumi with Mutō. The fact that he proclaims his attraction to a fictional Tsuyumi based on her excellence in a traditionally female task (home cooking) is patronizing. It fortifies a patriarchal image of women as nurturers and caretakers. In turn, it reveals that Tadao wants the traditional masculine role of a patriarch in heterosexual relationships. This choice may be a compensatory impulse for not actually being the breadwinner in them as a precarious artist. Barthes invokes these same clichéd gender roles, when he states that "Werther is captured by this image: Charlotte cutting bread-and-butter and distributing the slices to her brothers and sisters. Charlotte is a cake, and this cake is divided up: each has its slice (…)." (2010:145)

The narrative subsequently describes how Tadao entirely works himself up into the idea of 'being in love'. Indeed, he enacts the 'man in love' with the hysterical enthusiasm he seems to consider necessary for the part.

> "Some time afterwards (*sorekara to iu mono*), Tsuyumi became one idol for Tadao. Of course it happened all the time that he had comparable feelings for all sorts of actresses who would appear in films. (…) However, these women, who would make his heart rejoice so greatly and who were supposed to exist in considerable quantities, were actually fictional so that he also came to the conviction that, if he did not imagine them, they would disappear, like the ghost of a deceased person. Yet, in Tsuyumi's case, she was already an acquaintance. As a result, shortly after having watched the film, Tadao

> put himself together and tidied up his attitude so that the people around him would not recognize the fact that she had stolen his heart. When he thus cast a furtive glance next to him, the ghost, which had just given him a pleasant disquietude, had materialized and was looking over to him, smiling. That situation, actually rather common and which must have happened to Tadao in similar manner during school, for a moment made him turn into a state where his sense of distance fell into extreme confusion, like one says the border between fiction and reality dissolves, a state which blatantly unsettles you. Afterwards, Tadao had to think of Tsuyumi in the film over and over, time and again. He asked himself why he had been so unsettled. Thinking of what was different between the practice classes in filmmaking during school and the film itself, he became aware of the perfectly obvious fact that they were completely different. The actresses' mannerisms were fuller, which determined the excitement of facing the real person right in front of him after the film. Thereupon, Tadao grew even more excited and imagined this and that of Tsuyumi's performance and while murmuring 'How cinematic' to himself, he even came to think, 'I want to be the same.'" (2001:61-63)

Semantically, the contradiction play of the passage perpetuates how Tadao's alleged romantic infatuation with Tsuyumi as his 'idol' is but a competitive resolve. On the one hand, he still adores her as an *actress*, meaning as a fictional character in Mutō's film. On the other hand, even his feelings for her as a fictional character are not exclusive; indeed, he has 'comparable feelings' for 'all sorts of other actresses who would appear in films' and who, if he does not imagine them, disappear, like phantoms. While he acknowledges that Tsuyumi is different from them, as she is an actual acquaintance, he still cannot help but thinking that Tsuyumi's mannerisms as an actress determine his 'excitement in facing the real person'. He admires her gestures as 'cinematic' and longs to be 'the same'.

5. Duelling Discourse: Tsuyumi in Tadao's and Mutō's Words

This hallucinatory idealization of a fictional Tsuyumi is brutally nullified by Tadao's sexist remarks on her to Mutō in the following conversation. After Tadao has seen the film, he talks to Mutō about it. The narrative suggests that this exchange between the two men on Tsuyumi is not primarily about her, but about their own mutual competition with each other for what Eva Illouz calls erotic capital. Illouz argues that in the modern dialectic of romantic love, women have been asserting their value through the demonstration of female exclusiveness, while men have been affirming their status in the sexual field through the performance of a cumulative sexuality (see

Illouz 2011:39-114). Illouz highlights that these male performances are not so much addressed at the women, but rather at other men. A cumulative sexuality is a representation of male power vis-à-vis other men in the sexual field and as such a male status symbol: "A serial sexuality is attractive to men from all social strata, as it symbolizes the status of a man in case of limited access to women – his victory over other men. The competition, the affirmation and the status of men was channeled through the realm of sexuality." (2011:142.) Within this logic, the conquest of a woman is less about a mutual expression of interest between a man and a woman, but rather about a male-male homosocial communication: "And finally, [heterosexual] sex was a means for men to compete and fraternize with each other by turning the bodies of women into objects of male solidarity." (2011:142)[58]

The narrative itself clarifies this homosocial emphasis, when it points out that during their long conversation Tadao and Mutō realize that they ultimately "seemed to discuss things that actually had nothing to do with Tsuyumi." (Abe 2001:68) In this homosocial logic, Tadao thinks he has to like Tsuyumi, because he thinks Mutō likes her; his mimetic desire makes him go for the competition for the competition's sake, not for Tsuyumi's.

I suggest that Tadao's and Mutō's dialogue expresses what Rachael Hutchinson calls "male discursive structures", namely, "male structures of discourse – the ways in which men talk about, construct, think about and ultimately treat women in society." (Hutchinson 2016:106) I specifically would like to apply Barthes' notion of duelling discourse *(discours duel)*, which I have mentioned earlier. Duelling discourse

[58] Eva Illouz relies on Western sources for the concept of 'erotic capital'; however, her dialectic of female exclusiveness and male cumulative sexuality arguably applies to Japan as well; male polygamy (as opposed to female exclusiveness) was a patriarchal custom from the Heian period well into the Meiji era (see Morris 1964:220; see the chapter "The Paulownia Pavilion" in Murasaki Shikibu's novel *The Tale of Genji*; see Enchi Fumiko's novel *The Waiting Years*); the patriarchal separation of female desire into either maternal or erotic instincts in the Edo period through the opposite feminine gender roles of 'wife and mother' or, 'concubine' persisted well into postwar through the '*ryōsai kenbō*' ideology in the Meiji period (see Mackie 2003:16-25; see Kano 2016:29-63). At the same time, Alexandra Hambleton summarizes with Emma E. Cook for contemporary Japan that "'there remains a fundamental assumption in Japan that a man's masculinity is embedded in his productivity' – both economic and sexual (…)." (Hambleton 2020:2).

emphasizes the role of speech within male-male homoerotic competition. For Barthes, the pleasure of complicity between two competitors in erotic triangles is aroused through *conversation*: on the one hand, duelling discourse approaches the two opponents in an erotic union of inclusion. On the other, it is a medium for them to carry out their competition. The French original of *discours duel* denotes two semantics: duelling speech, as in 'speech that fights with each other' as a metaphor for rivalry, and dual speech, meaning 'two speeches' as a structural term. Richard Howard's English translation of *discours duel* as 'dual discourse' makes a clear case for a meaning of it as dual speech. I apply the term with *both* its denotations of 'dual' and 'duelling' and understand it as a duelling discourse between two male rivals. In doing so, I highlight that the term *duel* contains a gender specification: the duel is historically a male ritual of competing for status by asserting the emotion honour. In that sense, I claim that in *Amerika no yoru*, Tadao and Mutō compete for male status by duelling each other through speech. Discourse is a means for them to fight for the superior position in their race and to assess each other's strengths and weaknesses. Tadao's and Mutō's duel begins with Tadao's praise of Tsuyumi's acting to Mutō by sexually objectifying her: "Even if that was shaving her bikini zone in order to wear some risky swim wear! The problem is not what she did, it is how she behaved, director. A masterpiece, aren't they, her mannerisms":

> "Why indeed, was Tsuyumi's performance in the film so outstanding? Was it the result of Mutō's acting direction? Tadao inconspicuously asked Mutō and his answer was – probably he was mimicking the pose or words of some grandiose film director – that he was the type not to give any directions. To Tadao, who had fallen silent over having to face incomprehensibility anew, Mutō, on the contrary, with an unnatural expression as if he was forcibly hiding a smile, asked, are you so shocked about the simple performance of making omelet rice? He thought that through the shock that the execution of his own oeuvre had provoked in Tadao, his superiority over the friend right in front of him was evident. Tadao did not seem to especially mind Mutō's presumptuous attitude and returned the following answer.
>
> – You're so stupid. Me being impressed had nothing to do with her making omelet rice. Probably it was ok for her to do whatever she wanted. Even if that was shaving her bikini zone in order to wear some risky swim wear! The problem is not what she did, it is how she behaved, director. A masterpiece, aren't they, her mannerisms. To deliver so finely in the end after having pretended to be so unmotivated in the beginning, doubtlessly is 'cinematic'. And what's more, that it does not look like calculated,

> conscious 'acting', instantly elevates her to an 'existential' level. That's no joke, man, I'm serious." (2001:63-68)

Without any further ado, Tadao's subsequent toxic machismo is introduced with an axe. What was submissive adoration ("I want to be like her") in his single performance as 'the man in love', now turns into patronizing benevolence in his homosocial exchange with Mutō. The role Tadao enacts in this male competition for status is that of a male chauvinist. His sexist remarks about Tsuyumi aim at simulating sexual experience to Mutō, whom he may suspect to be ahead of him in the male race for erotic capital. His desire is focused on his homosocial competitor, not anymore on his heterosexual love interest.

I suggest that the verbal exchanges between Tadao and Mutō on Tsuyumi put into question one main issue of Barthes' definition of duelling discourse, namely the claim that the object discussed is protected within it: "(…) in such discussion, the object is neither distanced nor lacerated; it remains interior and protected by the dual discourse." (2010:65). Instead, I argue that duelling discourse is never ideally protective of the loved individual. This is because duelling discourse ultimately prioritizes asserting status over making a case for the loved individual, if needed at its expense.

I propose that the narrative is ironic about Tadao's sexism after all, by clarifying in the beginning of his love story that he is a man generally unsuccessful in love. With this information, the blatancy in which Tadao puts his chauvinistic performance into words reads as an ironic denouncement of it and ridicules him. Indeed, Tadao's sexism may be a toxic expression of his male insecurities. Like his exercise of physical violence, his verbal violence towards Tsuyumi is a radical affirmation of whatever Tadao personally considers to be empowered masculinity on the one hand and what his environment considers it to be on the other. In that sense, his sexism may read as the externalization of Tadao's own internal conflict. Whether he fears that he does not deserve Tsuyumi, or possibly, that Tsuyumi is not interested in him anyway – he projects his own disbelief in himself on Tsuyumi and then believes to see it in her for which he hates her in turn. At the same time, his sexism yet again

questions the value of Tadao's proclaimed heterosexual romantic love for Tsuyumi and highlights that his main interest is to appear superior in his homosocial competition with Mutō.

Overall, the passage clarifies that Tadao's and Mutō's dialogue, while addressing the topic of Tsuyumi, is about themselves and their mutual competition. Tsuyumi is but an intermediary object in it. The narrative produces literary irony by juxtaposing Tadao's and Mutō's derogative thoughts about each other with their words of complimentary pretence. Thus, Tadao actively shows interest in Mutō's direction of Tsuyumi, while he secretly suspects Mutō's answer to be an imitation of the "pose or words of some grandiose film director". Mutō commits to the conversation only to secretly relish his superiority over Tadao. At the same time, I suggest that the passage contains the possibility of a word play within Mutō's answer to Tadao, which would underscore the asymmetry in their mutual competition:

> "To Tadao, who had fallen silent over having to face incomprehensibility anew, Mutō on the contrary, with an unnatural xpression as if he was forcibly hiding a smile, asked, are you so shocked about the **simple** performance of making omelet rice?
>
> *Soko de futatabi fukakaisa wo oboete damarikonda Tadao e, hantai ni Mutō ga, hohoemi wo muri ni kakushiteiruyōna gigochinai hyōjō de,* ***taka ga*** *omuraisu dukuri no shibai ga sonnani shokku ka, to (...) toikaketa.*
>
> そこでふたたび不可解さをおぼえて黙り込んだ唯生へ、反対に武藤が、微笑みをむりにに隠しているようなぎごちない表情で、**たかが**オムライスづくりの芝居がそんなにショックか、と、問いかけた。" (2001:64; my highlights)

The adverb '*taka ga*' signifies a reduction as in 'only, mere', which indicates the banality of Tsuyumi's performance in this sentence. Yet, taken by itself '*taka ga*' also reads as a first name 'Taka' followed by the particle '*ga*'. Indeed, the Japanese *kana* syllabary does not specify capital and small letters. In that sense, Mutō possibly calls Tadao by a *wrong* nickname in this scene (the right appellation would have been 'Tada' not 'Taka'), which clarifies that Mutō's interest in Tadao does not match Tadao's own obsession. Whereas Tadao writes down Mutō's birthday in his notebook, once he hears about from it from Kijōyo, Mutō does not even seem to care about the right pronunciation of Tadao's first name. As a result, his perception of being superior to

his colleague is right. Tadao competes with Mutō, rather than Mutō with Tadao, yet Mutō clearly enjoys his advantage.

This logic continues throughout their following conversation:

> "Mutō was laughing. The fact that this Nakayama Tadao, who was his same-generation colleague from film school, would show a degree of enthusiasm, as if he had misunderstood something about his own private film-like 8 mm movie, which he had just shot after graduating from school with a casualness as if he just wanted to kill time, without even having invested any ambitious ideas, and using his close friends as actors, made Mutō, in overestimating his own talent, send a chilly gaze towards his friend who was standing right in front of him, as if he was something inane like scum or such, and laugh. Just, you know, Tadao continued, ignoring Mutō's laughter.
>
> – Just, you know, the normal her is almost different. Of course, because it is probably acting, it is not weird that she is different. In other words, the fact that her behaviour is completely different in film and in real life probably means that she has talent as an actress, I guess, presumably. What direction have you given her as the director? In that omelet-making scene?
>
> He had not given her any direction or such at all, was Mutō's answer. He said that he had just asked her to make omelet rice. Upon hearing that, Tadao said to Mutō in a tone as if he was talking to himself, that then there may have been another part that was not acting. Mutō, who had replied, maybe, in almost entirely random fashion, actually had no comprehensive memory of the time on set. Tadao showing such a serious expression just appeared strange to him.
>
> – You like it that much? That? Man, you must have a crush on her, Mutō said, and laughed.
>
> – Tadao, not afraid, after having replied, Aa, had to follow up with additional words in order to withhold his feelings expressed within the 'Aa' just uttered." (2001:65-66)

The passage begins with the focalization shifting from Tadao to Mutō. Irony is created again through the juxtaposition of Mutō's own perspective on his film and the outward acclaim for it: whereas everyone in school praises Mutō's short film as a directorial masterpiece, he himself admits that he merely made this 'private film-like' movie in order to 'kill time'. This contrast reads as a criticism of how the art scene sacralizes ordinary artifacts as artworks. One could also read this as a criticism of the grading in higher education generally – due to the lack of objective grading parameters, how we read and understand school works is subjective.

Furthermore, after all we have heard about Tadao's preoccupation with Mutō, Mutō's thoughts underscore that Tadao's obsession is unrequited. Quite the opposite, Mutō is not the even impressed by the enthusiasm 'this Nakayama Tadao' displays for

his film and sends a 'chilly gaze' towards him 'as if he was something inane such as scum'. In Mutō's perception, Tadao clearly is unworthy of even being considered a competitor.

I suggest that at this point, Tsuyumi becomes but a means for Tadao to carry on the conversation. While Mutō keeps answering him that he had not given any directions to Tsuyumi, Tadao keeps returning to the topic, as if he was fighting him. While Mutō's laughter becomes an expression of his superiority, Tadao on his part, "not afraid" as the passage indicates, ignores it and keeps the conversation going. Mutō finally suggests that Tadao's persistence means that he "'must have a crush" on Tsuyumi, which Tadao counters with an unaffected 'Aa'. I suggest that the choice of this vaguely affirmative 'Aa' underlines that Tadao is rather interested in keeping a cool façade in his competition with Mutō, than in making an argument for his alleged romantic love for Tsuyumi, in which case his answer could have been 'yes'. Clearly, his homosocial priorities with Mutō are superior to his alleged heterosexual feelings for Tsuyumi.

Tadao keeps going on about Tsuyumi's acting towards Mutō in a long statement, which does not seem to want to end. Again, he expresses his admiration for Tsyumi as a fictional character: thus, he exclaims that "her in the film is far more alive than the real her" and praises her for appearing "like an extraterrestrial" in the film. In doing so, he expresses his adoration for Tsuyumi based on her appearing like a staple character of a science fiction narrative:

> "– The Tsuyumi of your film and the Tsuyumi who comes to S-Hall most likely are the same person, but in my perception her in the film is far more alive than the real her. I can't really figure out the real one, even if I talk to her she always just laughs like you now. I like the cool way she has in the omelet-making scene. (…) Finishing the omelet rice Tsuyumi almost was like an extraterrestrial, no?!" (2001:63)

By contrast, Mutō's "laughter had reached its climax" (2001:63). I suggest that Mutō, after having enjoyed his superiority over Tadao throughout the whole of their conversation, ultimately sets out for his strike against Tadao, whom he considers an annoyance. This strike consists in insults of Tadao's masculinity and turns Mutō into

the winner of their duelling discourse, while his continued indifference towards Tadao may have declared him the winner all along. Thus, Mutō answers:

> "You say you like her cool thing? Does that not mean that you want her to be cruel to you or something? By coincidence? Meaning that you like getting excited about seeing that violent use of things, where you are never sure when they will break, don't you have such a tendency? If that's the case, you're just a pussy, man." (2001:68)

The question of whether Tadao likes being treated cruelly by women equals Mutō calling Tadao a masochist. For a man, being called a 'masochist', as Kaja Silverman points out, would mean an inversion of the male sadism/female masochism pseudo-opposition and thus the invocation of a marginalized masculinity. "The male subject (…) cannot avow feminine masochism without calling into question his identification with the masculine position. (…) what is acceptable for the female subject is pathological for the male." (Silverman 1992: 189-190) Mutō insults Tadao by *feminizing* him. This is underscored by Mutō calling Tadao a 'pussy' (*shōshin na yatsu*), which would be another indication of him as weak and unmanly. Tadao's and Mutō's discourses clarify that their duel is gendered: both young men fight each other through negotiating their manliness. Their competition consists of who is the stronger man. While Tadao tries to appear masculine through expressions of blatant sexism, Mutō counters by feminizing Tadao and invalidating his performance. Mutō's final win is clarified by Tadao's speechlessness; while Tadao's choice of weaponry is to keep the conversation going even despite Mutō, he ultimately is at a loss for words vis-à-vis Mutō's obvious offence. What is more, he lets it get to him and becomes insecure. In answering that he does not know, he validates Mutō's insult and is defeated. That gives Mutō the room for his final blow, which is to drive Tadao's feminine narrative even further:

> "Tadao was a bit at a loss for words. Now that he said it, he realized that he was as likely as not to have such a tendency.. Tadao was unsure and simply answered that he did not know. Upon which Mutō considered that the moment to disclose his strength had come:
> – I have a good idea. I would like to shoot a film with you and her. That's a great idea, isn't it? A film about a cool woman and a loser man. The hottest time in summer would be best for shooting. This time I'll let you appear for sure. And then, let's submit it to film festivals if possible. What do you think? It just occurred to me listening to your story, you know.
> And so on, Mutō explained in a manner as if he was telling a joke." (2001:63-68)

Mutō's attack brutally expresses that he is fully aware of his win in the duel: in conciliatory pretence he generously offers Tadao a role in a future film of his, in which Tadao would enact a 'male loser' (*dameotoko*) to Tsuyumi's 'cool woman'. Firstly, that means that he lets Tadao, who so desperately fought for recognition as a heterosexual chauvinist, know that he can have Tsuyumi if he wants to. Meaning, Mutō implies that he can afford not being interested in this particular woman. His heterosexual self-confidence does not depend on her attention. Secondly, Mutō perpetuates the narrative of an unmanly Tadao, in letting him know straight out that he would cast him as the masochist to Tsuyumi's sadism. Also, he implies that he had rejected Tadao as an actor in one of his films before, which would underscore yet again that Mutō is superior to Tadao anyway, as he does not respond to Tadao's obsession with him. It may read as a yet another brutally ironic demontage of Tadao through *Amerika no yoru*'s narrative, that he actually *takes* Mutō's offer and aligns his whole subsequent life with preparing for this unflattering role. Which he ultimately does not get. For Mutō, the offer is but a momentary ridicule of Tadao, mainly aimed at finally silencing a piteous rival and ending an unwanted conversational duel on a high note.

6. The End of No Story

Overall, it becomes clear that Tsuyumi is but an intermediate in Tadao's and Mutō's male competition. She is a pawn in their game, which Tadao puts all his effort into playing well, while in reality he is casually played by Mutō all along. Tadao's heterosexual 'love' for Tsuyumi comes second to his frantic attempts at winning a homosocial competition he actually never even had a chance at being *considered* a competitor in.

Throughout Tadao's love story, Tsuyumi is never given a decisive voice, nor do we learn much about her apart from Tadao's take on her. Mutō is given a voice, as the narrative sporadically focalizes through him. Yet, *Amerika no yoru* never grants Tsuyumi a chance to establish herself as a round character, as the narrative is not interested in taking her point of view. Her female perspective on the erotic triangle

with Tadao and Mutō, which she indisputedly is part of, is not articulated. As with Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's logic of the schematic female character in heterosexual erotic triangles, according to the narratological choices of *Amerika no yoru,* no subjectivity is made possible by the narrative other than Tadao's own. I suggest that in making these choices, the narrative underscores that the triangle is not actually about Tsuyumi, but about the two men in it; it is not about their competition for her affection, it is about their competition amongst each other. Tsuyumi is but an object in it, necessary for Tadao to establish contact to Mutō and to unfold a conversation with him. Then, throughout their conversational fight for manliness, Tadao uses Tsyumi's body for positioning himself as a sexually experienced heterosexual chauvinist, while Mutō uses Tsuyumi for positioning Tadao as the exact opposite of that. As a result, Tsuyumi is "bracketed" (see Kosofsky-Sedgwick 2002:163). As such, in turn, she is the perfect projection screen for whatever Tadao or Mutō want her to be in their collective fantasy.

The narrative underscores Tsuyumi being bracketed throughout the scenes where Tadao actually meets her in person. I suggest that these scenes are a continued deconstruction of Tadao's heterosexual love for her. On the one hand, whenever Tadao encounters the real Tsuyumi he is reassured in his overall fascination for a fictional Tsuyumi and claims not to have the same feelings as when he sees her on screen. Ironically the narrative indicates that Tadao finds her totally different from her screen presence; which is logical because on screen she acts out a role. It would rather be illogical if her screen persona matched with her real life personality. On the other hand, Tadao does not get to know the real Tsuyumi much, as he mostly exchanges 'sound', not 'words' with her. Her voice mainly articulates through her laughter, while Tadao is the one speaking. Within the pattern of how the narrative establishes Tadao's sociality, this small information, which we get on Tsuyumi, may read as an expression of her disinterest in him; similarly to Mutō's bemused ridicule of Tadao's interest in him, Tsuyumi's laughter may be a polite way of reacting to Tadao's conversation with her yet not actually engaging in it.

> "However, whenever he was dealing with the reality of the actual Tsuyumi, Tadao almost never felt controlled by any of those feelings he had when watching the fictional Tsuyumi in the film. Any feelings that occurred with regards to the actual Tsuyumi,

> even feelings such as confusion, were of a different kind. His confusion was of the following nature: I had mentioned earlier that Tadao had exchanged words with Tsuyumi, but actually, it would be correct to say that, rather than having exchanged words, they had exchanged voices. The ones to utter words were almost exclusively Tadao or other people. Tsuyumi, on her part, would normally only laugh 'Ahaha Ahaha', which meant that there was no way that a conversation-like conversation could develop between Tadao and her. This was what Tadao felt a little confused about. He asked Kijōyo why Tsuyumi was just laughing all the time, but he only got the answer that Tsuyumi was always like that. What is more, the actual Tsuyumi usually never showed any of that coolness she displayed in the film, while her actual manner of handling objects lacked the refined crudeness she showed in the film. Tsuyumi's actual manner of handling objects was only either careful or a just a little bit messy; neither was especially appealing, Tadao acted disenchanted." (2001:63)

Even when Tadao goes on the offensive and asks Tsuyumi out on a lunch date, he is the one actually *saying* something while Tsuyumi stays as a schema. One may add that she *prefers* to stay a schema:

> "However, the only words he managed to get out of Tsuyumi over Chinese food were 'mixed fried noodles', 'Enjoy your meal', 'That was delicious' and 'Thank you'. Everything beyond that was the familiar 'Ahaha Ahaha', meaning only that laughter of Tsuyumi's, which had the distinction of sounding like she was imitating someone else's." (2001:69)

In the end, Tadao realizes that neither meeting Tsuyumi in real life nor trying to imagine her in his dreams results in him being able to make himself a picture of her.

> "Thus, the image of 'love' for Tsuyumi which Tadao had imagined, just like the notions of the 'human being' and the 'self', extinguished altogether. His love was like the cusp of a fruitless blossom, which, while fleeting, eternally would not flourish." (2001:71)

In a last ironic take the narrative notes that Tadao's love story ends as it began: with nothing, actually.

7. Conclusion

I have pointed out that Tadao being a dream-seeking *freeter* in mid-1990s Japan means he is identified with a subordinate masculinity. The definition of hegemonic masculinity relied on the professional choice of becoming a white-collar-worker, a *sararīman*. Not being able to be such a breadwinner for the family, not being able to rely on the corporate warrior image projected by the *sararīman*, implied the need for a fundamental reorientation as a man. I suggest that *Amerika no yoru* reflects this

conflict as a basic insecurity of Tadao's, His insecurity is expressed within his struggle as to how to define himself as a male artist vis-à-vis the stereotype of the white-collar-worker that represented hegemonic masculinity at the time. I located Tadao's exercise of physical violence as an expression of this insecurity, contrarily articulated in the performance of the archaic embodied masculinity of a warrior. In that sense, the Bruce Lee prologue fulfills the function, within the story, of providing Tadao with the role model of a martial arts fighter for his enactments of embodied masculinities. These embodied performances are a way of asserting a powerful masculine self-image, averse to what he represents in society through his professional choice as a part-timing artist. In that sense, *Amerika no yoru* is a literary counter-discourse to cultural narratives on the softening male in Japanese society during the 1990s.

Moreover, I propose that in discussing Tadao's love story, the narrative poses the question of how far the complication of heterosexual love may relate to the theme of precarity: in that sense, how Tadao, the part-timing artist, approaches heterosexual love could be influenced by his professional choice. In other words, not being able to be the breadwinner for a potential family influences his attitude. Tadao is a *freeter* by choice, which distinguishes him from subsequent depictions of *freeters* as social losers in *Triangles* and *Minagoroshi*. Nevertheless, I suggest that we can understand Tadao's ambitious self-fashioning described earlier as compensatory efforts for being a part-timer, not a breadwinner. Tadao's ambition for becoming someone special and being successful in his chosen flexible profession may speak for a hidden need to counterbalance the fact that this flexible profession destines him for a subordinate masculinity in the social hierarchy of 1990s Japan. In this regard, Tadao's apparent rejection of heterosexual love could be an expression of his insecurity as a man. Then again, for an artist, economic precarity is contingent on fame: fame is a way out of precarity, is a guarantee for financial capital. Which may allow for the explanation that for Tadao the competition with Mutō for distinction is of primary importance: it is a means for him to strive for artistic excellence, which in turn results in the accumulation of capital and the ascent from a strictly subordinate masculinity to an exceptional status

of societal importance. Against that backdrop, for Tadao, building a heterosexual romantic relationship might come secondary to achieving a professional standing.

For Tadao, growing up means "not the image of the event, but to feel (*jikkan*) the event in pain and bliss". That means to fall in love actually on the one hand. On the other, it means to fall in *heterosexual* love. That means also, for a man in heteronormative society in Japan, to grow up and marry. For Tadao, it means to submit to compulsory heterosexuality and take up a heterosexual relationship with a woman. His homosocial inclinations, his homosexual explorations are over. I suggest, though, that the narrative at least implies the question: would that really mean to assume an authentic self? Is the heterosexual male really Tadao's actual self? Or, is it a denial of his actual self?

The desire for brutality to generate events
that show how ordinary gestures matter.
The desire for sex to interrupt ennui,
the ennui of living for a living.
The desire for spectacles of dramatic risk
to display a success that might negate
the persistent numbness and exhaustion
of meaningless labor.

– Lauren Berlant, *Life Writing and Intimate Publics*[59]

CHAPTER 4:

Precarious Attraction: Embodied Masculinities in *Individual Projection* Post-Aum

1. Introduction

Individual Projection initially came out in 1997 in the journal *Shinchō*. It was Abe's first bestseller and made him known to a larger readership. In Chapter 2, I have analysed the novel's jacket design, especially its cover photograph. I have argued that the cover is an important paratext of *Individual Projection*, which mostly associates the novel with the 1990s *J-Bungaku* campaign in cultural memory. The choice of this cover photograph may have partially been motivated by Abe's wish to sell. After having established himself as a household name among critics with his earliest

[59] Berlant&Prosser 2011:186.

narratives, *Individual Projection* is Abe's first 1990s piece to have an accessible style. In a 1998 interview, which appeared in the afore-analysed *J-Bungaku* booklet, Abe claims to have done extensive marketing research for the composition of *Individual Projection*. Accordingly, his choice of turning the novel into a diary was aimed at making it readable during daily commutes on the train. The small separate diary entries supposedly correspond to the lengths of such train rides (see Abe 1998:2). These statements, together with the choice of the novel's cover photograph, which shows a semi-nude young woman, lead me to speculate that Abe aimed for a mainstream career in literature after his first success with critics. Both the interview and *Individual Projection*'s cover photograph read as ironic expressions of a self-aware author performance, which openly admits Abe's wish for commercial success. Sasaki Atsushi also states that Abe had adopted a "commercial strategy" at the time with this choice of a cover photograph. That strategy turned out to be wildly successful. As a result, popular reception generally claims that Abe "changed with *Individual Projection*" into a bestseller author. Critics, however, point out the opposite, namely that *Individual Projection* is an imitation of *Amerika no yoru* (see Miyazawa&Sasaki 2004:84; see Yamada 2014:130).

Individual Projection indeed has similarities with *Amerika no yoru*: it equally is a first person coming-of-age narrative, although without an omniscient narrator. Rather, *Individual Projection* reads as Tadao's notebook entry from *Amerika no yoru*'s opening turned into the diary of its own protagonist Onuma. *Individual Projection* is a comparable first-person narrative of a schizophrenic narrator. Yet, it is rather representational; its metafictional self-referentiality is less spelled out and more incorporated into the fabric of the narrative's story. At the same time, *Individual Projection* is more obvious with its metafiction than Abe's subsequent short stories, as I will point out in Chapter 5. Consequently, I suggest that *Individual Projection* acts as a transition in Abe's writing from the excessively verbal earliest narratives towards a simpler, realistic style. Furthermore, I argue that *Individual Projection* is also an interface to a culture-referential discourse in Abe's later 90s fiction. I relate this shift in tone and topics to the historical incident of the Sarin Gas Attack on the Tōkyo

Subway on 20 March 1995 by Ōmu Shinrikyō. This criminal escalation brought to the fore how urgent it was to reflect on pressing social issues. *Individual Projection* represents the awakening of Abe's fiction to a social consciousness. His less-discussed short stories, written around the same time as *Individual Projection*, elaborate similar cultural concerns on precariousness and juvenile delinquency through different themes and images.[60]

2. The Impact of 20 March 1995

1995 began entering Japanese contemporary history as a fatal year, when an earthquake of the magnitude 7.2 sent shockwaves through the Kantō region surrounding the metropolis of Kobe city on 17 January. Over 5000 people lost their lives in what is considered to be *the* major natural disaster devastating Japanese collective memory before the Fukushima Daiichi Accident on 11 March 2011. The Kobe Earthquake in 1995 painfully made people aware of how unstable the ground was on which modern urban life was built and how fragile the safety it provided. The national shock was still prevalent, when this first disaster was followed, only two months later, by a second one, unimaginable and unanticipated by most.

In the morning of 20 March 1995, five members of the cult Ōmu Shinrikyō deposited plastic bags, wrapped in newspaper and containing the fluid poison sarin, in railcars of five different Tōkyō subway lines meeting at Kasumigaseki station. They ripped these deadly parcels with the sharpened tips of umbrellas they had brought for this purpose and released the poison, which quickly evaporated into the cabin air. Then they immediately exited the crime scene and left in cars waiting for them at the station gates. 13 people died in this assault. Over 5000 were severely injured and will remain in medical care for the rest of their lives.

The Tōkyō subway sarin attack, usually referred to as Subway Sarin Incident (*chikatetsu sarin jiken*) by Japanese media, remains one of the incisive tragedies of

[60] An early shorter version of this chapter appeared as a book chapter in 2015 (see Roemer 2015). While this chapter contains passages from this 2015 book chapter, it is a reworked and expanded version of it.

20th century Japan. "For the first time in history," Iris Wieczorek clarifies the scope of the crime, "a religious movement not only proclaimed the approach of the apocalypse, but took active steps in initiating it." (2002:94) The Ōmu Shinrikyō formed as a yoga circle founded by Asahara Shōkō (born 1955 as Matsumoto Chizuo) and around 15 of his disciples in Tōkyō's Shibuya district in February 1984.[61] In April 1986, the group gave itself the name of *Ōmu Shinsen no Kai*, which in July of the same year was changed to *Ōmu Shinrikyō* (*Ōmu Supreme Truth School*). The sanskrit term 'Ōmu' signifies the 'creation and preservation of good and the destruction of evil', while '*shinri*' means 'truth' and '*kyō*' means 'teaching' (see Reader 2000: 61).[62] Ōmu was one of the new religions, which attracted an especially urban and educated studentship from the late 1970s onwards (2000:47-50). From there, it evolved into a lethal cult within the short time period of eleven years. This startling evolution is commonly attributed to both the sect's ideological affirmation of violence and murder and the troubled personality of Asahara himself, who acted as the cult's absolute leader. Asahara's aggressive outbursts and his promotion of the religious 'purifying' practice *poa*, which was used as a pretext for killing, first led to the gradual escalation of an internal culture of violence within the group. From there, the brutality spread outwards and led to a series of criminal transgressions involving civilians. Sadly notable among these is the murder of Sakamoto Tsutsumi, a lawyer critical of the cult, and his wife and their infant in 1989, a gruesome delict which was widely covered by Japanese media, but despite obvious evidence against the cult did not lead to arrests by the police. It was followed by poison gas assaults on inhabitants of the town of Matsumoto between 1994 and 1995, which fulfilled the function of test runs before the ultimate strike on the Tōkyō subway on March 20th was to happen within the same year. In 2018, all 13 former Ōmu members convicted and sentenced to death for the crime, including Asahara Shōko himself, were executed by hanging.[63]

[61] I refer to the cult by its Japanese name or its abbreviation Ōmu. The English translation generally used is 'Aum Supreme Truth Movement'.
[62] On the meaning of Ōmu's various names see Reader 2000: 61-62.
[63] For a critical assessment of these executions see two news reports by Amnesty International on the case (2018a and b).

The Ōmu tragedy was largely perceived of as a symptom of a society gone wrong and has been followed by intense soul-searching in the fields of science, media and the arts. The trauma of the Sarin Gas Attack left a deep impact on the collective consciousness and led to a rush of artistic articulations after 1995. Jasper Sharp offers an overview of a large number of films and documentaries appearing from the late 1990s to early 2000s, which deal with the cult in one way or another (see Sharp 2011:31-32). The literary world seemed deeply troubled by the harrowing crime, which so unexpectedly disrupted the monotony of their comfort zones and put into question the assumed safety of daily commuting in a first world country (see Nakamata 81-85).

3. Liminality, Religion and Embodied Masculinities: *Individual Projection* Post-Aum

In Nakamata Akio's opinion, it is evident that *Individual Projection* is a direct literary response to the tragedy of the Sarin Gas Attack on 20 March 1995:

> "*Individual Projection*, published in 1997, makes Abe Kazushige known to a broader readership. The wide-spread reception of the novel was owed to an author image arefully constructed by marketing media as the next big thing and a 'Shibuya-style' writer. (…) However, the novel is not about a trendy story, as the label 'Shibuya-style' could make you expect. Indeed, I consider the incidents surrounding the Ōmu cult as one main topic of the work. (…) The record of 'I', the protagonist, starts on 15 May. The date on which the Metropolitan Police Department arrested Ōmu Shinrikyō's Asahara Shōko after forcefully raiding the cult's compound '6th Satian' in Kamikuishiki in the Yamagata prefecture, was the early morning of 16 May." (Nakamata 2002:85-87)

My analysis explores Nakamata's reading of the novel. To what extent is *Individual Projection* a dialogue with cultural narratives dealing with the traumatic events of March 1995? I argue that *Individual Projection* reflects on what could have motivated young people from the late 1980s to late 1990s in Japan to join a secluded community with totalitarian structures that promoted the exercise of violence and murder. A main public dispute after 1995 centred on the question of why young people would join a lethal cult and identify with its murderous principles. According to Daniel A. Metraux,

in 1995 almost half of Ōmu's approximately 10,000 converts were between 20 and 29 years old, which makes the sect "primarily a youth-movement" at the time of its peak. The average age of the "hard-core member" in 1995 was 27 (see Metraux 1999:51).[64] As I will detail below, Ōmu converts kept expressing their dissatisfaction with Japanese society at the time. On the one hand, they did not receive the emotional support they were craving from their families. On the other, the materialism of late capitalist society at the time left many alienated and in need for alternatives in their search for a spiritually fulfilled life. *Individual Projection* projects this dissatisfaction from the specific perspective of young men.[65] The story of *Individual Projection* is told from the third person perspective of the protagonist Onuma via chronologically dated journal entries of varying length in the present tense with occasional flashbacks into the past. Onuma is a *freeter* who works a daytime-job as projectionist in a movie theatre in Tōkyō's Shibuya district. In her research on male *freeters*, who choose irregular work in order to postpone adulthood, Cook quotes interviews with young male *freeters*, who claim that they chose irregular work because they did not want to "follow their parents' examples in work and lifestyles" (2012:59). Not willing to submit to the stereotypical life cycle of the general middle-class model, flexible work meant the freedom to explore various life patterns while still young (see 2012:68).

I argue that, comparable to *Amerika no yoru*, *Individual Projection* emphasizes young male irregular work as such a transitory state between childhood to adulthood. In the cultural narrative on male irregular work, being a *freeter* is associated with youthfulness, while the image of the white-collar worker represents, as I repeat, the

[64] See also the age profiles produced by *Mainichi Shimbun* in Reader 2000:96.
[65] In that sense, *Individual Projection* calls to mind Chuck Pahlaniuk's novel *Fight Club* (1996). I would like to thank Seth Jacobowitz for pointing this out to me. Fukushima Yoshiko draws the same parallel, albeit to the filmic adaptation of Pahlaniuk's novel by David Fincher: "*Individual Projection*, similar to the Hollywood film *Fight Club*, is a murder mystery written in a diary format." (2003:43) Indeed, the similarities are so striking, that one blog even calls *Individual Projection* a plagiarism of *Fight Club* (see Christopher 2010). This is very improbable though, as the film only came out in 1999 (in December 1999 in Japan), meaning two years after *Individual Projection*. So if *Individual Projection* references *Fight Club*, it would have to be the novel *Fight Club*. It even would have to be the English original of the novel, as the Japanese translation of it only appeared in February 1999. Under these circumstances, an imitation is highly unlikely.

"dominant masculine (adult) ideals of responsibility, stoicism, breadwinning, and fatherhood" (Cook 2012:74). In Chapter 3, I have argued that *Amerika no yoru* focuses on liminality as a transitional phase to postpone compulsory heterosexuality. By contrast, *Individual Projection* variably describes liminality, namely Onuma's and his male colleagues' coming-of-age as students of the Higher Truth School, as a desire for a prolonged childhood (through playing 'strong men' at the School) and as a striving for male adulthood by affirming adult masculine attributes (such as stoicism).

Onuma has graduated from the Higher Truth School the year before, returning to Tokyo six months ago. As becomes apparent through the depiction of a former *kunren* (professional training) in physical combat methods at the School, the young man leads the double-life of an agent sleeper, waiting for his next mission. His life is characterised by a feeling of constantly being on the alert, because of the unsettling presence of an expected conflict between two factions of academy students regarding a hidden ransom from a joint kidnapping attack on a yakuza boss, consisting of eighty-five million yen and a certain nuclear bomb within a plastic ball. The text manifests a negotiation of the human desire for violence through Onuma's reflections on his own aggressive drives and his way of living them out under the professional guise of his activities as an agent spy.

After being shocked out of inertia when reading in the newspaper about four former fellow students having been killed in a mysterious car accident, Onuma gives an account of how he joined the Higher Truth School and of his time there. The narrative begins after he met Masaki, the founder and only teacher of the School, when he was looking for an adequate person to interview for his graduation documentary at a film school. In the beginning, Onuma perceives Masaki as a phony and erratic fraud, whose agendas behind teaching physical self-defence and detective work at a small martial arts *dōjō* to five youngsters change as spontaneously as he imagines them. The rest of the film crew nevertheless enrolls in the School in order to make a more accurate film about its leader. Masaki is being portrayed throughout the journal narrative from Onuma's point of view. Only in the epilogue to the novel, he purportedly speaks through his own voice. Masaki is older than his students, a man in his late forties,

without qualifications but with considerable skills in smooth talking. Gradually, his martial arts *dōjō* evolves into an ideologically loaded spy training centre. Masaki's and the students' obsession with the spy as the "final form of refinement in human aesthetics" (Abe 2006:54; 1997:40), exemplifies the radicalisation and militarisation of the group. In the novel this is displayed via the group's involvement in "real espionage" (2006:58; 1997:43) through criminal acts such as wiretapping devices of the neighboring town and eavesdropping on its residents including the families and friends of the students themselves. It also involves the sexual abuse and torture of former bullies of one student with "a club-shaped 15,000-volt stun gun" (2006:62; 1997:54). As Onuma notes, none of the students ever questions the legality of their actions. On the contrary, they agree to further engage in a large-scale plan to kidnap a yakuza boss in an ultimate attempt to get "concrete results to how close we could come to a 'supreme existence'" (2006:62; 1997:54). The activities of Masaki and the students of the Higher Truth School finally find an involuntary end, when Masaki is caught red-handed by the police molesting a young girl. His students are unaware of their leader's pedophilic inclinations until his arrest, which causes them to split up into factions, some staying and others leaving the school.

The 'Higher Truth School' not only mockingly mimics the 'Ōmu Supreme Truth Movement' in the title,[66] but the literary depiction of its organization and evolution evokes associations with the real-life cult's ideologically structured communal life and gradual radicalisation, which was characterised by physical violence as well as ideological and technological delusions of grandeur. Members of the Ōmu Supreme Truth Movement strived for spiritual liberation through continued practice of *kundalini* yoga and strict asceticism.[67] Accordingly, Ōmu compounds were

[66] Note that the emphasis on 'truth' in the title is a translation choice by Seth Jacobowitz. There are other translations possible for *Kōtōjuku* 高踏塾; the Japanese word '*kōtō*' denotates an elevatedness that can be translated with different connotations into English. However, I agree with the interpretation of Jacobowitz and the resonances between the 'Higher Truth School' and the name of the real-life cult Ōmu Shinrikyō.

[67] Nakamata Akio also makes this connection between Ōmu initially having been a yoga circle and Masaki's Higher Truth School having started from a martial arts *dōjō* (see Nakamata 2002:86).

called *dōjōs*, which is similar to what Masaki calls his martial arts training centre in the beginning.[68]

I suggest that *Individual Projection* answers to the cultural discussion after 1995 by framing its depiction of male coming-of-age with theoretic discourses on revolution, violence and totalitarianism. In doing so, the novel denounces Ōmu as a totalitarian movement to begin with. Secondly, it depicts Onuma's personal struggle for adult masculine empowerment as a battle for independence from Masaki's authority after willingly submitting to it in the beginning. I argue that this dynamic equals the specific interplay between totalitarian leadership and followership: a totalitarian leader is created through his followers, at the same time totalitarian followers are nothing without their leader. In doing so, I argue that *Individual Projection* makes a problem of the responsibility of young male Ōmu followers. Its counter-discourse precisely questions if young men joined Ōmu and submitted to Asahara's absolute authority because the cult offered them a liminal space for exploring masculine images of power. In turn, the narrative questions the influence of such cultural images on young men's self-perception and behaviour.[69]In this way,

[68] Note that one prominent member of Ōmu, Hashimoto Satoru, was also a martial arts master. Hashimoto was sentenced to death for participating in the murder of lawyer Sakamoto Tsutsumi and his family as well as the gassings of Matsumoto. Hashimoto was executed on 26 July 2018.

[69] At the same time, the metafiction of the narrative also alludes to an identification with these young men. The youngest leading member in 1995 was 25-year-old Inoue Yoshihiro, who had joined the cult at the age of 17 and quickly became an Asahara favourite. Inoue is also the name of the Higher Truth School student, who later on becomes Onuma's rival and psychotic *alter ego*. Onuma's confusion "I am Inoue", taken as a statement in itself, reads as an identification of *Individual Projection* with the actual Ōmu member Inoue. It may even read as a statement of the author: Inoue was born in 1969, Abe Kazushige only one year earlier in 1968. Like Abe, Inoue was a school dropout. Ian Reader points out that

> "Inoue had felt uneasy as a child and at school, even though he did well in the education system, attending a private high school and being accepted into a highly regarded university to study law. Like many others of his fellow Aum members, he had doubts about the nature of Japanese society and the contradictions and the egotistical influences that he felt were inherent within it. His doubts were resolved when he came across books by Asahara, particularly when he came across Asahara's assertions that the world was evil and that the truth was to be found within oneself. (…) As a result, Inoue decided, while still only 17, to become a monk – a decision strongly opposed by his parents who wanted him to go to university. He partially accepted their wishes, sitting and passing the university entrance examinations. At this point, however, he rebelled and took the decision to become a *shukkesha* [full-time member] rather than continue with his studies." (2000:118)

"I am Inoue" may read as the author's question to himself: how could a regular middle-class youngster similar to myself, who was looking for meaning in life, turn to a murderous cult and become one of its

religion becomes an expression of liminality: according to Sigmund Freud, coming-of-age necessarily is related to the exploration of ideologies and beliefs (illusions) as a substitute for parental guidance:[70]

> "The derivation of religious needs from the infant's helplessness and the longing for the father aroused by it seems to me incontrovertible, especially since the feeling is not simply prolonged from childhood days, but is permanently sustained by fear of the superior power of Fate. I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection." (Freud 1962:19)

As Peter Gay explains:

> "The child fears the power of its parents, but also trusts them for protection. Hence, growing up, it has no difficulty assimilating its sense of parental – chiefly paternal – power to ruminations about its place in the natural world, at once dangerous and promising. Like the child, the adult gives way to his wishes and embroiders his fantasies with the most fanciful decorations. They are at bottom survivals: the needs, the very vulnerability and dependence of the child, live on into adulthood, and therefore the psychoanalyst can contribute a great deal to the understanding of how religion came into being. 'Religious conceptions originated in the same need as all other achievements of culture, from the necessity of defending oneself against the crushing superiority of nature,' and 'from the urge to correct the painfully felt imperfections of culture.'" (Gay 2006:530)

Along these lines, I argue that *Individual Projection* depicts the Higher Truth School as a religious organization, which substitutes parental guidance with totalitarian leadership. Like Asahara with Ōmu, Masaki takes over a paternal role for his School's male students. However, *Individual Projection*'s specific interpretation foregrounds that the School is not attractive to the students because it offers them ideologies. Rather, the School offers them a space for weaponizing themselves against their own youthful vulnerabilities through training in physical power and violence. What the men are looking for is to turn into images of what Pierre Bourdieu describes as "dominant manliness". Similar to Judith Butler, Bourdieu argues that dominant manliness is not

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most prominent killers? In 1995, Inoue was considered second to Asahara in power, a "ruthless enforcer" of his dictates, while being the youngest member of Ōmu's elite (2000:117).

[70] Freud's "psychoanalysis of religion" (Gay 2006:544) when beginning to write his cultural theoretical essays on human nature, namely, *The Future of an Ilusion*: "Freud cunningly injected religion into his analysis. Cunningly, because by underscoring human helplessness he could link up the need for religion with childhood experiences. He thus manoeuvred religion on the homeground of psychonalysis. Admittedly, religion is among the most prized possessions of mankind, along with arts and ethics, but its origins lie in infantile psychology.

an essential quality each man is born with, but the result of a "long labour of socialization" (Bourdieu 2001:49). In addition, he suggests that dominant manliness, which includes a masculine exercise of violence, could be based in vulnerability. Against this hypothesis, Bourdieu claims that the exercise of violence is also an expression of such male vulnerability, by, in turn, performing violence as a male cliché.

> "Everything thus combines to make the impossible ideal of virility the source of an immense vulnerability. It is this vulnerability which paradoxically leads to sometimes frantic investment in all the masculine games of violence, such as sports in modern societies, and most especially those which most tend to produce the visible signs of masculinity, and to manifest and also test what are called manly virtues, such as combat sports." (2001:51)

Individual Projection portrays Onuma as a young man who suffers from migraines and a psychotic disposition. Through this indication of Onuma's vulnerability, the narrative describes youthful masculinity as a fragile state. However, in Japanese society in the 1990s, adult hegemonic masculinity meant *not* to be fragile. Instead, by referring to the image of the corporate warrior, Emma E. Cook describes the adult masculine man as the exact opposite of fragile, meaning as a strong fighter. By consequence, Onuma's personal struggle coming-of-age consists in affirming adult masculine affects in order to armour himself: stoicism (coolness) is one such affect, another one is violence.

As a result, I argue the novel approaches masculinities from the body, different from *Amerika no yoru* and *Minagoroshi*, which emphasize sociality. According to R.W. Connell, "true masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men's bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body." (Connell 1995:45) "The physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the cultural interpretation of gender. Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex." (1995:52-53) Most importantly, "the power of this perspective lies in its metaphor of the body as a machine." (1995:48) This is exactly the notion of masculine power referenced in *Individual Projection*, when Onuma

claims that he used the training of the Higher Truth School in order to become as strong as a cyborg.

In doing so, I suggest that the narrative locates this basic premise on masculinities within the context of post-Aum: the novel approaches violence from various theoretic angles and universalizes it as a basic human drive innate in both sexes. Nevertheless, the narrative genders its depiction of violence through the invocation of masculine images of power. In turn, the exercise of physical violence is described as a performance of masculine power in *Individual Projection*, in the sense that performing an "innate urge to violence" is an indication of masculinity in most cultures (Connell 1995:45).

Indeed, Nakamata Akio reads *Individual Projection* as a critical text between criticism and literature as well. In his opinion, *Individual Projection* is a 'violence critique'. I would like to pick up that thought and approach it from a different angle. In that sense, the metafiction of *Individual Projection* is similar to that of *Amerika no yoru*, in that it also is a novel that "explicitly masquerades as criticism" as Patricia Waugh has said. I suggest that *Individual Projection*'s 'violence critique' is its testimony to the trauma of the Sarin Gas Attack. In turn, this highlights the conceptual potential of metafiction for an evaluation as one distinct manner of narrating trauma in literature; metafiction being 'meta' allows us to say the unsayable through a layer that is not the actual narrative. As a result, I argue that while *Individual Projection*'s realistic style does not explicate its metafictional comments on the cultural narrative, it still does contain such criticisms under the surface. Indeed, while the novel's *metonymies* remain silent, its *metaphors* speak their own language. This is a manner of expressing the trauma of any historical tragedy in literature. Addressing the traumatizing events as such is challenging; yet, literary images enable us to say the unsayable in an indirect language. I argue that *Individual Projection* escapes into the metalanguage of theory to express the unspeakable through references on specific concepts and discourses related to totalitarian power dynamics. As such, the novel reads as a cultural criticism of the events around March 1995. Here, the discourse of irregular work overlaps with that on Ōmu Shinrikyō; therefore, I would situate the

novel within a post-March 1995 artistic context with the topos of precarity connecting it to the cultural impoverishment-discourse on the working poor.

4. Precarious Attraction: Escapes from Boredom

After graduating from film school, Onuma and his fellow students immediately join the Higher Truth School. Having failed to make a smooth transition from high school to regular employment, most of the other students who had already joined earlier are school dropouts, one of them explicitly "refusing compulsory education." (Abe 2006:31; 1997:43) Kosugi Reiko calls 'failure to make a smooth transition' the process in senior high school students of either failing to actively look for and/or finding regular employment as *seishain* (full-time regular employee) in a company. School dropouts figure as one distinct group within her systematization (see Kosugi 2008:76-77;76-91). In *Individual Projection*, in order to finance themselves and boost the School's budget the students take on typical part-time jobs in gas stations and supermarkets. None of them experiences material poverty as disadvantage; on the contrary, they see these jobs as useful for their training. Even factory work, often a symbol for labour exploitation, is experienced as attractive against this background. While unemployment as a national problem is mentioned through a newspaper article right in the third diary entry (see Abe 2006:5; 1997:9), Onuma explicitly notes that none of the School members are concerned about their future – on the contrary:

> "For our part as well, none of us gave much thought to our prospects after graduation. We had no real concern for whether we would be able to secure jobs for ourselves, we just had the typical worries students feel right before graduation. (…) I suppose we used the academy as an escape from reality. (…) Unable to take pleasure in mundane existence, we certainly led extraordinary lives. We were able to feel as though we were viewing society from the outside." (Abe 2006:33-34; 1997:45)

Their self-chosen precarity is thus experienced as highly empowering by the students in the story of *Individual Projection*. Much in line with Nelson and Rossiter's positive assessment of the flexibility inherent in precarious work (see the Introduction), they perceive their irregular jobs as liberating for the possibility they offer to live exciting lives. Similarly, one could argue that in the economy-focused society of flush- and

late-bubble Japan, Ōmu became a catch basin for many who felt alienated and for whom a self-chosen life of material deprivation within the sect's communes ironically suggested fulfilment. The religious practice of Ōmu Shinrikyō was attractive to many converts in that sense.[71] Indeed, in interviews, full-time converts of the cult (*shukkesha*), who fully disconnected from their former lives in order to entirely dedicate themselves to Ōmu and its spiritual aims and worldly ambitions, repeatedly state social alienation as a motivation to join the cult:

> "Such alienation and dissatisfaction did not, however, result from material disadvantages. Indeed, as the *Kumamoto Nichinichi* reporters have commented, the *shukkesha* they talked to appeared to have come from generally well-off and comfortable backgrounds and, on the surface, often appeared to be archetypical examples of the modern Japanese success story. (…) However, as they looked further into the matters, the reporters found a recurrent theme of deprivation and alienation, **not at the material but the emotional and spiritual levels**. They found that the aspirations of the devotees' parents were often so heavily focused on success in quantifiable terms (…) that they had given their offspring little emotional support or nourishment." (Reader 2000:102-103; own highlight)

Even after the economic bubble burst in the early 1990s, Japan was still a wealthy society with the second-largest consumer market in the world, having lost this position only recently to China. Fabio Gygi summarizes that:

> "The heyday of the bubble economy, from 1984 to 1989, is univocally represented and remembered as a period of exuberant consumption and decadence, when fashionable urbanites ate sushi topped with real gold foil (Miura 2014: 114); consumers consistently chose the more expensive version of a functionally equivalent product (Tobin 1992: 21); and it was not unusual for a middle-class couple to change their entire furniture every second year (Clammer 1997: 80). While the economic realities for a large part of the population were very different from this image of excess, the conspicuous consumption of the 1980s was the result of a shift of patterns from family-centred consumption to the indulgence of more personal desires that started to emerge after the oil shock of 1973. In the period of high growth after the war, companies could cater to the population as a whole and marketing was focused on the idea that consumption was a means of achieving happiness. One's own career and status were mirrored in being able to afford the 'one rank up' product (which assumes a fairly fixed value hierarchy both in terms of people and things). The baby boomer generation in Japan was the driving force behind mass consumption, and the standardization of the life course that Emiko Ochiai (1997) calls the 1955 system was also responsible for the notion of the homogeneous consumer with clear-cut desires and wants. The change that occurred in the 1970s is both historic and demographic: the oil crisis revealed the unsustainable and vacuous

[71] Ian Reader repeatedly highlights this throughout the 249 pages of his book. See especially Reader 2000: 95-125.

> nature of high-growth ideology, while at the same time the offspring of the baby boomers, sometimes called the *shinjinrui* (new breed), were more interested in consumption as a means of self-expression (Havens 1994: 151-7).” (Gygi 2018:136)

In contrast, Ōmu consciously positioned itself as a world-rejecting movement with a strictly anti-materialist agenda.[72] As becomes apparent in their statements, on the one hand, life in the cult provided those converts lost in the face of too few opportunities in regular Japanese society with career options and lifestyles alternatives. On the other, the community of the cult offered spiritual guidance and a sense of belonging to those who had missed it within their actual families. Indeed, Ian Reader’s above-quoted conclusion indicates that in a lot of interviews, converts of Ōmu Shinrikyō stated that it was easy for them to break up with their families and join the communal life of the cult, as they felt more emotionally supported by the latter than by their own relatives. Indeed, Bell Hooks argues that lack of love is one major problem of global capitalist consumerism: “While the zeal to possess intensifies, so does the sense of spiritual emptiness. Because we are spiritually empty we try to fill up on consumerism. We may not have enough love but we can always shop.” Referring to Erich Fromm, she argues that ”the principle underlying capitalistic society and the principle of love are incompatible.” (Hooks 2001:71-72)

Hannah Arendt points out that the individual’s perceived loneliness is essential for fostering the motivation to belong to totalitarian movements.

> “Totalitarian movements are mass organizations of atomized, isolated individuals. Compared with all other parties and movements, their most conspicuous external characteristic is their demand for total, unrestricted, unconditional, and unalterable loyalty of the individual member. (…) Such loyalty can be expected only from the completely isolated human being who, without any other social ties to family, friends, comrades, or even mere acquaintances, derives his sense of having a place in the world only from his belonging to a movement, his membership in the party.” (Arendt 2017:423-424)

On the one hand, for Arendt loneliness is an affective motivator for joining totalitarian movements. As such, as Maria Popova summarizes, it is both a “profoundly personal anguish and an indispensable currency of our political life.” (Popova 2016) On the

[72] Note that Asahara himself thoroughly indulged in material pleasures once the cult grew larger while preaching abstinence to his disciples.

other, the isolation of individuals *within* totalitarian movements makes them want to, or need to, stay in them. Indeed, Ōmu's systematic isolation of its converted members from the outside world facilitated the cult's totalitarian structures. Shimazono Susumu sees a special responsibility in Ōmu being a closed community, requiring its converts to become full-time members (*shukkesha*) within their communes, in facilitating the evolution of a parallel-world ruled by ideological principles which legimitized violence and murder. This is where Shimazono stresses Ōmu's difference from other Japanese new religions at the time which were secular. Based on Ian Reader's earlier notion of 'world-rejection', Shimazono calls this central feature of Ōmu '*gensei hitei*' (see Shimazono 1997:71; 13-14).

Similarly, I relate that the emotional and spiritual dissatisfaction of young people in flush- to late-bubble Japan seems to play a considerable role in *Individual Projection*'s parodic take on Japanese consumer society of that time: human relationships are subjected to market forces, while the logic of commodity has come to entirely regulate cultural processes, including sexuality, human relationships and even individual drives and fantasies. Onuma's interpersonal contacts, hetero- and homosocial, seem limited to the satisfaction of instinctual needs for sex and violence. In turn, the exercises of sex and violence seem to be the only ways for Onuma to feel himself. Onuma is the image of a young Ōmu convert when he criticizes the consumerist society surrounding him in a singular serious political statement:

> "On weekend nights the whole area is transformed into the world expo of vomit, and rats show *en masse*. Everything else being equal, it's the rats that I can't stand. Don't you think something's got to be done? Nowadays, Shibuya has been completely conquered by vermin. People's heads are filled with nothing but fashion and sex and no-one gives serious thought to the menace posed by the rats. With all this going on, it isn't inconceivable that totalitarianism might stage its return. Thinking along these lines, I decided that I should become one with the landscape. Actually, after leaving the academy, it's a smart move for me to blend in with the streets of Shibuya. I was forced to live a stoic lifestyle for more than five years, so I wonder if I'm simply mesmerized by the young people in Shibuya who fashionably drape themselves with violence. Or is it that I feel emboldened when I look at these people who lay bare their desires to the world, as though they never had a single embarrassing moment in their lives?" (Abe 1997:28)

Onuma's perspective on consumerist society in mid-1990s Japan denounces its decadence based on its shameless display of desires (*yokubō*). Similarly, Ōmu's religious teaching preached that one was supposed to cleanse oneself from corrupt 'data' and bad worldly desires (*bonnō*), a term taken from Buddhist doctrine, through the regular practice of asceticism and kundalini yoga (see Reader 2000:13). Moreover, there is an obvious moral critique in Onuma's statement through the invocation of the emotion shame in the word *hajirau* 恥らう: "as if they never had a single embarrassing moment in their lives *hajirau miburi mo sezu ni*". Put differently, Onuma asks: are they not ashamed of showing off their desires so openly? Shame (*haji* 恥) is a rare emotion specifically addressed as an emotion in *Individual Projection*'s narrative. One may categorize shame as a social emotion or self-conscious emotion, as it is felt when looking at oneself from the perspective of another person, be this other person real or imagined. This gaze of the other implies the perspective of the society or the norm, which the person feeling ashamed has internalized (see Demmerling/Landweer 2007:220; 226-231). Thus, shame can be understood as an emotional social corrective with ethical implications. June Tangney points out that "the link between moral standards and moral decisions and/or moral behavior is influenced in important ways by moral emotions." (Tangney, Stuewik & Mashek 2007:346) Moral emotions such as shame, guilt, embarrassment and pride are an emotional moral barometer that gives us immediate feedback if we behave according to ethical standards (pride) or not (shame, guilt, embarrassment) (2007:347). Within the context of literary character development, the mentioning of a self-conscious emotion such as shame is remarkable, as this emotion alone psychologizes a character. Shame alone makes a character three-dimensional and gives Onuma unexpected moral depth in this passage. One could almost detect in him a tendency towards moral pride here, an emotional acknowledgement to be doing right as opposed to the 'rats' he calls out, which generally strengthens the self-confidence (2007:347).

It is shame's power as a moral indignation, which makes it an emotional fuel for revolution according to Karl Marx:

> "Shame is already a revolution; shame really is French Revolution's victory over German patriotism through which it was defeated in 1813. Shame is a kind of rage turned inward. And if a whole nation would really be ashamed, then it would be a lion crouching for a leap." (Marx 1844:337)

I suggest *Individual Projection* criticizes that while Onuma plays revolution after joining Masaki's Higher Truth School, his moral concerns end here. The statement remains insular. Indeed, his rejection of consumerism is not the reason why Onuma falls for the School in the first place. Repeating another quotation from above, Onuma explains: "I suppose, we used the academy as an escape from reality. (…) Unable to take pleasure in mundane existence, we certainly lead extraordinary lives." (Abe 2006:33-34; 1997:45) Thus, the narrative spells out that the Higher Truth School's idea of revolution has nothing to do with moral indignation. Instead, the School is a place for youthful escapism (*genjitsu hinan*) of young male *freeter* who thus postpone their transition into adulthood in order to play secret agents. None of them can resist the fun of the School's unreal life (*higenjitsuteki na seikatsu*), which provides them with the "specific pleasure" (*dokutoku na tanoshimi*) their usual life (*futsū no seikatsu*) does not offer them. The Higher Truth School is a liminal space for trying out various models of adult masculinities based on fictional images of male power. I argue that Onuma's statement specifically theorizes what remains implicit in the main cultural narrative on the emotional and spiritual dissatisfaction of young Ōmu converts. Christopher Gerteis explicates:

> "Importantly, Asahara did not persuade twenty to thirty thousand followers to join him by offering a vision of the apocalypse. Interviews by Murakami, Mori, and Reader show that *Ōmu* was most successful at recruiting followers from among mid-level professionals in industrialized nations who seemed to be experiencing the *ennui* of social and economic conditions very unlike those that fostered the radical islamicism at the root of *al-Qa'ida*'s ability to garner recruits." (Gerteis 2008:5)

Thus, the literary counter-discourse of *Individual Projection* emphasizes the above-detailed, expressed dissatisfaction of young male Ōmu converts as an expression of modern boredom. Jorg Kustermans and Erik Ringmar establish: "Modernity is a transnational condition and boredom is for that reason a transnational mood", while boredom generally is "an affective state; it is an emotion." (2011: 1779;1778) Boredom "is the consequence of a form of enforced powerlessness; a powerlessness bereft of

religious or cultural metanarratives, which makes a mockery of the modern 'expectation of the optimum utilization of capacities'." In thus expressing a lack of spiritual input, boredom is the "emotional apprehension of meaninglessness. (…) When meaning is absent, boredom arises and leads the individual towards the construction of meaning, be it in private expressions, in interpersonal or communal relationships, or in violence." (Kustermans/Ringmar 2011:1777)

In that relation, a first point made by *Individual Projection* seems to be that Japanese society at the time, which Onuma criticizes in his statement, is as bored as Onuma himself. Jorg Kustermans suggests that the alienation of modern boredom surfaces as a general lack of care: "it is alleged *we* have become care-less. Modern people fail to care anymore. They observe the world and find *it* boring." (Kustermans 2017:1) On the one hand, the "estrangement of oneself from one's sense of self" seems to result in emotional apathy (Kustermans/Ringmar 2011:1778). Indeed, one of Onuma's first diary entries mentions that a "suicide boom" is going on in Japan at the time (Abe 1997:7). Similarly, Fukushima Yoshiko comments on the cruelty of society as depicted in *Individual Projection*: "Abe (…) portrays the empty and callous landscape of noisy Shibuya, flooded by people who are indifferent and cruel to one another." (Fukushima 2003:44) On the other hand, Onuma's diary observations describe a society where interpersonal exchange is reduced to the satisfaction of desires of various natures. The necrophiliac right in the beginning, who sleeps with dead bodies (see Abe 1997:7); the woman who part-times at Onuma's convenience store with bruised wrists, which her coworker tells Onuma come from her taste for bondage; this coworker's own leg fetish (see 1997:34); the public sexual play Onuma finds the woman from the convenience store to be doing later with her husband in the streets of Shibuya (see 1997:82); the leg fetishist he meets later with a black eye (see 1997:117); Masaki's sexual fetish for the under-aged; Onuma's own Julio Iglesias fetish (see 1997:86); the voyeuristic chain Onuma describes, when he peeps on couples making out from the projectionist's room in the cinema, while watching a white-collar worker watching these couples as well, while in turn being watched watching by his boss (see 1997:23) – in a continuous sequence, the narrative enumerates how unsublimated

drives are expressed through sex and violence. It reads like a catalogue of all kinds of expressions of polymorphous sexualities and fetishes, each more transgressive than the other, all aiming to "restore a sense of agency to their limbs and lives" (Kustermans/Ringmar 2011:1785).

Secondly, I suggest *Individual Projection* highlights that the emotion behind the Ōmu converts' desire for revolution is boredom, not allegedly moral shame. If anything, *Individual Projection* indicates the *amorality* of the Higher Truth School in describing how its youngsters take pleasure in their curriculum: they perform physical violence and torture without questioning their actions even once. On the contrary, they openly enjoy them. Thus, Onuma's moral statement contains an inherent paradox that reads as a criticism of the School: while Onuma criticizes consumers laying bare their desires shamelessly, the young men at the Higher Truth School do so as well. The School gives them a space to celebrate their aggressive drives, as they can freely give in to their desires for violence. Onuma self-consciously reflects on this in another statement: "What's more, for those of us with a craving for violence [*bōryokuteki na mono wo hosshiteita* 欲していた], the Higher Truth School was a perfect match." (Abe 1997:45) Moreover, while Onuma laments that people's indifference may lead to the emergence of totalitarianism (*zentaishugi*), he participates in a movement with totalitarian structures *himself* as a student of the Higher Truth School. Thus, his statement is ironic in that he actually criticizes himself. If Onuma had chosen a different manner of dealing with his own boredom than to do exactly what he accuses society of, his criticism of it might carry actual weight. Similarly, Ōmu preached cleansing oneself of worldly desires; however, it actively promoted the exercise of physical violence and murder and thus created a space where converts could indulge in their aggressive drives. *Individual Projection*'s criticism reveals this crucial paradox in Ōmu's religious practice.

I suggest that by contextualizing violence with boredom, *Individual Projection* moreover emphasizes that Ōmu's violence was violence born out of privilege. At one point, Onuma openly admits: "I suppose it's fair to say that violence fills the vacuum

produced by boredom *(taikutsusa ni yotte dekita ana*)" (Abe 1997:16). Ōmu's target converts were middle-class youngsters, some of them graduates from Japan's elite universities. Their motivation for joining the cult was not, as Sartre puts it, the "volcanic fury" of the underprivileged (Sartre 1963:16). Even if it was a revolt against their parents or against the system, fundamentally, Ōmu converts' expression of their spiritual and emotional dissatisfaction was a problem of their privilege. This privilege makes their adherence to Ōmu look as *Individual Projection* parodies it: the seeking of "refuge from the tedium of a well-ordered society in the theatrics, the momentary bliss, of revolution." (Kustermans 2017:11)

Thus, in foregrounding the significance of boredom for the formation and evolution of Ōmu's religious violence, *Individual Projection* clearly takes a critical perspective on it. Indeed, in *The Roots of Evil*, John Kekes lists boredom as one reason for evil-doing. His designation of boredom as the "disenchantment with ordinary life" (Kekes 2005:101) echoes almost literally how *Individual Projection* describes Onuma's above-stated interest in the "specific pleasure" Masaki's Higher Truth School offered them, a pleasure they did not find in their ordinary lives (*futsū no seikatsu*).

Overall, *Individual Projection* indicates that the Higher Truth School's revolution is based in a transnational modern fatigue with late capitalist excess. In doing so, it puts into question Ōmu's ideologization of violence and exposes it actually as random.

5. 'As Strong as Cyborgs': Images of Masculine Power

It is generally agreed on that Ōmu's ideological legitimization of *poa* was a core-problem of its religious violence; *poa suru* meant to save someone from acquiring negative karma and was a metaphor for killing. Ian Reader traces back the outbreak of violence within the cult to as early as 1988, when Asahara started beating disciples. The first conscious exercise of *poa* occurred a year later and led to the death of the member Taguchi Shūji, who wanted to leave the group (see Reader 2000:137; 143-145). The first criminal transgression involving civilians occurred in 1989, when Sakamoto Tsutsumi, a lawyer critical of the cult, and his family were murdered. It was

followed by poison gas assaults on individuals and the town of Matsumoto between 1994 and 1995 and the abduction and murder of Kariya Kiyoshi in 1995 (see Reader 2000:137; 206-214).

From its own perspective of modern boredom, *Individual Projection* ridicules this ideological legitimization of violence, when it lets Onuma reason:

> "We had no need for so-called 'political' ideology. What we were looking for was to use our training to become as indestructible as the cyborgs in comic books (a different sort of ideology)." (Abe 1997:45)

Onuma indicates that for the youngsters, in joining the Higher Truth School, questions of ideology do not matter at all. As I pointed out earlier, with violence designated as a basic human drive, what counts for them is that the School provides them with an environment to live this desire. The narrative spells out very clearly that their interest in the School is neither spiritual nor emotional – there was 'no need for so-called 'political' ideology'. Instead, it adds that the youngsters were looking for a way "to use our training to become as indestructible as the cyborgs in comic books (a different sort of ideology)." By wanting to become as "indestructible as cyborgs" (*kyōjin na saibōgu no yō ni nareru*), Onuma expresses his wish for adult masculine sovereignty. Thus, the Higher Truth School, in being a liminal space, is a place for the young men to learn techniques, which enable them to perform masculine images of power they take from fictional sources.

This thread is one main contribution of *Individual Projection* to the post-Aum debate, as I suggest: the narrative emphasizes the significance of *images* within culture in general and for influencing the decisions of young men to want to join revolution in particular. Accordingly, *Individual Projection* repeatedly references media images of male heroes using physical violence, whom Onuma aspires to imitate: the characters of the movie G*oodfellas*, the male protagonists of *Dirty Harry* and the manga *Akira* respectively. These popular culture images of heroic masculinities provide Onuma with adult male role models to identify with as a maturing man. At the same time, the

Higher Truth School provides him with an environment to actually *be them* in real life.[73]

One important reference of the narrative for the argument that images inspire revolution may be Georges Sorel's violence theory. Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* was translated into Japanese in 1933 and has been received as a standard reading of theories of violence in Japanese (see Funaki 2016:442). Sorel is one of the theorists of the French Revolution tradition, who justifies violence as a legal right of the oppressed individual to claim independence vis-à-vis the state. I see a similar relationship between violence and individualism in this reflection of Onuma's:

> "For now I imagine the mechanism that lures people into violence according to the following. The act has been acknowledged as an obviously formidable method of solving problems. But as violence is repeated, waves of stimulation emerge that are transformed into the effects and pleasure of a beautiful image. This causes it to veer away from its original intentions, such that seeking violence for its own sake becomes the goal. This, in turn, appeals to us as a free chance to take individual action.
>
> 人が暴力的なことに惹かれるメカニズムは、とりあえずぼくにはこんなふうに想像できる。問題解決へのより明解な手段として認知されていたその行為が、反復されてゆくなかで生じた美的なイメージの効果や快へと転ずる刺激の波及によって当初の志向から外れてゆき、暴力的なことそのものの目的化が起こる。つまりオマケの独り歩きにぼくらは魅せられているというわけだ。" (Abe 1997:17)

Similarly, drawing on Henri Bergson, in the fourth chapter of his book, *The Protelatarian Strike*, Sorel sketches an argument on revolution being motivated through *affect*. Accordingly, the human being needs images in order to be inspired to revolt. Language is inapt at stimulating sentiment, while images speak to human intuition. In other words, rather than being *rational,* revolution is *visceral*. Which somehow relates to Freud's theory on aggressive drives and war being an expression of living these drives. The selection of *Individual Projection*'s intertextual references

[73] In relation to this, Jorg Kustermans and Erik Ringmar point out the influence of media in providing fictional spaces, through which bored individuals can imagine themselves transgressing. Accordingly:

> "boredom makes us dream dreams of transgression. To transgress, from the Latin *transgressus*, literally refers to the act of 'passing to the other side' or 'going beyond or overstepping some boundary or limit'. It is by transgressing, in this etymological sense, that we escape from our present condition. Yet, most transgressions take place vicariously; they happen, as it were, in the third rather than the first person. It is media – newspapers, books, film, radio and TV – which make vicarious transgressions possible. (…) By engaging with a mediatised account, we are taken out of ourselves and allowed to experience things as though we were someone else." (2011:1782-1783)

emphasizes this specific argument of Sorel's to begin with. Moreover, for being able to stimulate the visceral, Sorel suggests, revolution needs "enchanting pictures":

> "Ordinary language could not produce these results in any very certain manner; appeal must be made to collections of images which, *taken together and through intuition alone*, before any considered analyses are made, are capable of evoking the mass of sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by socialism against modern society." (Sorel 2004:116;113)

As a reason for this, Sorel explains, a

> "thought of Bergson's may be usefully quoted: 'We do not obtain an intuition of reality, that is, an intellectual sympathy with the most intimate part of it, unless we have won its confidence by a long fellowship with its superficial manifestations. And it is not merely a question of assimilating the most conspicuous facts; so immense a mass of facts must be *accumulated and fused* together, that in this fusion all the preconceived and premature ideas which observers may unwittingly have put into their observations will be certain to neutralize each other. Only in this way can the bare materiality of the known facts be exposed to view.' Finally, what Bergson calls an *integral experience* is obtained." (2004:121-122)

Ultimately, with the general strike thus being put into action, "a kind of irrepressible wave will pass over the old civilization." (2004:130). I suggest that the terminology of Onuma's statement, which intuitively does not make immediate sense, could speak to Georges Sorel. This especially becomes apparent in its use of the terms "wave of stimulations" (*hakyū*) which are transformed into "images" (*imēji*). The final sentence then seems to relate to the implications of Sorel's justification of violence for individual freedom: if violence is so positive, then of course people keep on seeking violence for its own sake. Violence becomes yet another chance to express individualism – even though this seems to be a speculation derived from Sorel, rather than a direct reference to him. However, Walter Benjamin's assessment of this reliance on natural law in justifying violence spells out what *Individual Projection* similarly concludes from Sorel:

> "It perceives in the use of violent means to just ends no greater problem than a man sees in his 'right' to move his body in the direction of a desired goal. According to this view (for which the terrorism in the French Revolution provided an ideological foundation), violence is a product of nature, as it were a raw material, the use of which is in no way problematical, unless force is misused for unjust ends. (…) the individual (…) has *de jure* the right to use at will the violence that is *de facto* at his disposal." (Benjamin 1996:277-278)

Indeed, the Japanese phrasing, which I have translated as 'take individual action' is '*hitoriaruki*'; '*hitoriaruki*' literally means 'walking alone', or, metaphorically, 'doing things in one's own way'. However, '*hitori*' is not rendered in the most literal logographic *kanji* for 'alone', '一人', but in the sonically identical '独り'. The kanji '独' signifies 'alone', but 'alone' not in a numerical sense, but in that of 'independent', which connotes 'individualism'.

Thus, *Individual Projection* speaks to Georges Sorel and relates his theory on revolution needing images to the post-Aum debate in mid-1990s Japan. In turn, the novel suggests that images of heroic masculinities are one important cultural influence on young men wanting to partake in violent counter-culture movements. In doing so, it highlights the significance of images in Japanese culture in general.

5.1 Excursus: Pictorial Enchantment and Disenchantment

Before I turn to this analysis, I would like to relate that the rhetoric of Jean Paul Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* reflects on Sorel's argument that violent revolution needs 'enchanting pictures'. Not in the sense of pictorial representation, but in the sense of rhetoric images, such as metaphors. There seems to be some truth in the point that it is difficult to convince someone to revolt by verbal persuasion, meaning by linguistic constructions of metonymy. Metonymy makes sense in that its meaning is clear, but it does not excite. Clarity does not stimulate imagination and, in doing so, enchant, delight or charm. By contrast, the visuals of the metaphor have the potential to do exactly that – carry someone away with an alternative view. In his preface, Sartre tries to justify the violence of the oppressed, namely the violence of the colonized against their colonizers: "for at first it is not their violence, it is ours, which turns back on itself and rends them (…)." (Sartre 1963:17) In doing so, Sartre generally resorts to a language of passion rather than reason throughout his essay. In the end, he takes a definitive position for violence, stating that Fanon "shows clearly that this irrepressible violence is neither sound and fury, nor the resurrection of savage instincts, nor even the effects of resentment: it is man recreating himself." (1963:17)

"Man recreating himself" is metaphoric in that it paints the picture of man newly creating himself from himself by exercising violence. In the English translation, the verb 'recreate' has a biological connotation through 'create', which is also part of 'procreate'. Procreation is sexual reproduction. As a result, man recreating himself almost sounds as if man recreates himself out of his own womb by exercising violence. In the French original, the metaphor *"l'homme lui-même se recomposant"* (Sartre 2002:29) is less corporeal, as 'se recomposer' rather denotes 'to put oneself together anew', than to 'create'.

In the German version of her article *On Violence* (1969), which came out one year after the English original and which she proof-read and authorized herself, Hannah Arendt translates the metaphor as "*Mensch, der sich selbst schafft*", while she adds the noun "*Selbsterschaffung*" as a clarification behind 'non-fact' (*Non-Faktum*):

> "Und obwohl man einwenden könnte, daß alle Vorstellungen vom **sich selbst schaffenden Menschen** auf eine Rebellion gegen eines der Grundfakten menschlicher Existenz hinauslaufen — schließlich ist nichts offenkundiger, als daß der Mensch, als Gattungswesen wie als Individuum, seine Existenz *nicht* sich selbst verdankt — und daß somit, was Sartre, Marx und Hegel gemeinsam haben, von größerer Relevanz ist als die spezifischen Wege zur Verwirklichung dieses Non-factums (der **Selbsterschaffung**), so läßt sich doch kaum leugnen, daß ein Abgrund die wesentlich friedlichen Tätigkeiten des Denkens und Arbeitens von allen Tätigkeitsformen der Gewalt trennt." (Arendt 1970:8; my highlights)

In German, both '*schaffen*' and '*erschaffen*' mean '*create*', however, in an unequally unreproductive sense, as '*procreate*' would be '*zeugen*' (meaning, '*Mensch, der sich selbst zeugt'* or *'erzeugt'*). I suggest that Hannah Arendt's criticism, while maybe familiar with the French original (Arendt lived in France before migrating to the US), dialogues with the procreational image of the English 'man recreating himself out of himself' when she points out that, *de facto*, the human being does not owe its existence to itself (but to actual procreation):

> "This shows to what extent Sartre is unaware of his basic disagreement with Marx on the question of violence, especially when he states that 'irrepressible violence … is **man recreating himself**,' that it is 'mad fury' through which 'the wretched of the earth' can 'become men.' These notions are all the more remarkable as the idea of man creating himself is strictly in the tradition of Hegelian and Marxian thinking; it is the very basis of all left humanism. But according to Hegel man 'produces' himself through thought, whereas for Marx, who put Hegel's 'idealism' upside down, it was labor, the human

> form of metabolism with nature, that fulfilled this function. And though one may argue that all notions of **man-creating-himself** have in common a rebellion against the very faculty of the human condition – nothing is more obvious than that man, be it as member of the species or as an individual, **does not owe his existence to himself** – and that therefore what Sartre, Marx, and Hegel have in common is more relevant than the specific activities through which this non-fact should have come about, it is hardly deniable that a gulf separates the essentially peaceful activities of thinking or laboring from all deeds of violence." (Arendt 1969:4-5; my highlights)

Arendt's criticism is directed at Sartre's "glorification of violence", which she argues "goes much farther (…) than Sorel", all of which she calls out as "irresponsible grandiose statements of the intellectuals" (Arendt 1969:4;8). I would like to highlight that Arendt's fundamental criticism targets the visual quality of Sartre's attempted definition of violence as 'man recreating himself' and problematizes it as such, when she emphasizes it as 'non-fact'. Later on she explicates: "To be sure, a guarantee that in the final analysis rests on not much more than a metaphor is not the most solid basis to erect a doctrine upon (…)." (1969:10) Thus, Arendt removes the fuel from Sartre's emotional call for revolution by *empirically validating* his images and, in doing so, *in*validating them. This is the method of her criticism of violence, against Sorel, theoretician of 'revolutionary violence needs images', and Sartre, practitioner of exactly that theory. She counters intuition with reason. This is her method: she points out that images are images; she stays with the facts. The general merit of Arendt's reflections *On Violence* lies, amongst other things, in its debate with theories on violence which justify or glorify the use of violence as a legitimate means for revolution. A second merit, I suggest, is that she provides a *method* for countering Sorel's proposed approach for enchanting people into revolution through images, namely by disenchantment through facts.

5.2 Hallucinations of Heroism

Revolution is not reasonable. It is "stubborn, increasing and passionate resistance" according to Sorel (2004:126). Revolution is also affect, because it *needs* to be affect. Rational thinking would not convince anyone to potentially commit suicide. Therefore, revolution needs the romanticism of a *heroic narrative* to be attractive:

> "Socialists must be convinced that the work to which they are devoting themselves is a serious, formidable and sublime work; it is only on this condition that they will be able to bear the innumerable sacrifices imposed on them by a propaganda which can produce neither honours, profits nor even immediate intellectual satisfaction. Even if the only result of the idea of the general strike was to make the socialist conception more heroic, it should on that account alone be looked upon as having incalculable value." (Sorel 2004:130)

Likewise, the cultural narrative on Ōmu highlights the delusions of Ōmu converts, who used the cult as a space to live out their own high tech-fantasies. In his essay *Thoughts for the Time of War and Death* (1915), Sigmund Freud observes that war

> "strips off us the later layers of civilization and allows the primitive sapient in us to come to the surface. It forces us to be heroes again, who cannot believe in their own death; it indicates us that strangers are enemies, whose death one should induce or wish for; it advises us to override the deaths of loved ones." (Freud 1994:160)

Thus, war is a pretext for enacting heroic self-narratives, male or female, as "it *forces* us again to be heroes". I suggest that by referencing media images of heroic masculinities and violence, *Individual Projection*'s counter-discourse highlights how Ōmu invented a war, which provided its male converts with a script for acting out heroic roles in their individual science fictions.

Ian Reader dates Ōmu's "turn to 'science'" back to the year 1994, when the emerging influence of what he calls a science lobby within the movement led to its increasing use of modern technology within religious practices (see Reader 2000:185). In addition to this, the cult had been literally arming itself for the expected end-of-the-world war at the turn of the millennium, a thematic that was integral to its ideology from early on. Indeed, Reader traces the origin of the war theme within Ōmu's ideological discourse back to a vision of Asahara's in 1985 according to which he was named a sacred warrior in a war to come between the forces of good and evil. His optimistic perspective of Ōmu incorporating the role of a world saviour in this war gradually turned pessimistic with a nuclear Armageddon at the end of the century considered as imminent threat (see 2000:89; 126-137).

The attraction that the cult must have had in providing an environment with financial and technical resources for members curious about science is clear, even though their testimonies might not admit it. Indeed, reconstructing the motivations of

Hirose Kenichi, one perpetrator of the Sarin Gas Attack who was thirty years old at the time, for joining the cult from his statements given during his trial in 1998[74], Furihata Kenichi adds:

> "On the other hand, the fact that the religious group with its rich financial background provided high-level analytical equipment and different sorts of technologies which they had never seen or used before, and that if needed would be able to buy even more of them however highly priced they might be, must have appeared extremely attractive to the defendant Hirose and other natural sciences students [of Ōmu]." (Furihata 2000:106)

Like Hirose, who had graduated as an applied physics master's student from Waseda University's Faculty for Science and Engineering immediately before converting to Ōmu full-time in 1989, many of the other converts, especially in the upper ranks, had elite educational or professional backgrounds in the natural sciences. Well-known examples are Murai Hideo, one of Asahara's closest confidants around 1994, who was publicly stabbed to death a year later, and Hayashi Ikuo, another perpetrator of the sarin gas attack and former elite cardiologist. The question raised by the narrative of *Individual Projection* is to what extent these youth enacted the lives of mythical heroes in a "quasi-scientific fantasy world of underwater cities, prophecy machines, astral teleporters and the like", in which they ambitiously pursued careers based on precisely the same system of meritocratic vertical ascent they had refused to submit to in the work life of regular Japanese society (Reader 2000:186-187). Adding to this fantastic character was the fact that the members were given 'holy names' *(hōrī nēmu)* of Buddhist figures taken from Sanskrit by Asahara once they had attained higher ranks. Ishii Hisako was the first member on whom was bestowed the name of Maha Khema Taishi in 1986 (see Reader 2000:82-83). Ian Reader stresses that from 1994 on, the technical visuals in Asahara's increasingly paranoid sermons, which were mirrored by the general perception within the science lobby, grew more and more fantastic and turned into what he tellingly pathologizes as "not just a persecution complex", but "a

[74] The Ōmu trials started after the police arrested Asahara on 16 May 1995, which became known as 'X-Day' in the Japanese media. In court testimonies of 1998, Hirose based his attraction to the movement on the encounter with Asahara's early books which intrigued him for their body philosophy of *kundalini* yoga (see Furihata 2000:100-107). Hirose was sentenced to death in 2000 with Asahara's own sentence following in 2004.

world of imaginative fantasy and technology madness—almost a science-fiction virtual world that was divorced from reality." (2000:186) At the same time as reflecting this delusional descent of Ōmu's leading members in the representation of Onuma's gradually worsening psychosis, which ultimately results in him acutely losing his grip of reality, the narrative of *Individual Projection* emphasizes the converts' conscious or unconscious aspirations for power which are not emphasized in their official testimonials. In doing so, moreover, the counter-narrative of the novel is clearly gender-based; despite Ōmu generally offering equal opportunities to converts of both sexes[75], most science lobbyists were certainly men.

From the gendered perspective of its parody, the Higher Truth School in *Individual Projection* becomes a playground for male performances of embodied masculinities based on the exercise of physical violence. The School provides them with a space in which to live out their aspirations of power based on SF fantasies and their own aggressive drives. As such, on the one hand, the Higher Truth School as a liminal space allows the youngsters to postpone adulthood in favour of being able to play generally and play heroes in particular. On the other hand, the performances of heroic masculinities are youthful assertions of masculine power.

In other words, the notion of power in *Individual Projection*'s discourse on violence is linked to a male coming-of-age theme. *Individual Projection*, in referencing media images of idealized male heroes, seems to question how far these images influence youthful male definitions of empowered masculinities. To what extent do fictional images of powerful heroic masculinities, which all celebrate a male exercise of violence, influence what young men want to become when they grow up? Or, while they grow up? In that sense, violence becomes one means of self-protection against

[75] This would be a gendered manifestation of precarity as agency, as Aum offering equal opportunities to both its male and female members may have appeared attractive to the latter. Career options for women in the regular work life of Japanese society were generally limited; both Ishii Hisako and Ōuchi Sanae were 'office ladies' at the time they joined Asahara's yoga group back in 1984. Within Ōmu, however, Ishii went on to become one of only five members to hold the rank of *seitaishi* (sacred grand teacher) as well as being in control of the cult's finances. Reader accords the waning of her power around 1994 not least to the fact that she ultimately took on the traditional female gender role of a mother by giving birth to three of Asahara's children in the 1990s. Ōuchi Sanae held one rank below Ishii and was a *seigoshi* (sacred awakened teacher) (see Reader 2000:10; 185).

one's own vulnerabilities. If you threaten my identity, I will kill you. At the same time, *Individual Projection* contains a criticism of this attitude generally. This criticism is clarified if we return to Freud's above-quoted observation. According to this, war, either fictional or actual, *does* force us to be heroes. However, heroes stripped of any deposits of civilization, who instead perform the reappeared primitive men and women we are to begin with. According to Freud, war and the exercise of violence in war is a regression to the primitive pleasure ego (*Lust-Ich*).

As a result, *Individual Projection* critically asks to what extent The Higher Truth School, while indeed being a space for young men to experiment with fictional images of adult masculinities, is also is a space for regression for these same young men into childhood. This is where its verbal irony points its finger: coming-of-age is one thing, but how about the other side to the Higher Truth School, namely, it being a space for deliberately returning-to-immaturity? Or, in real life, how about Ōmu providing a fantastic parallel world to its male converts for enacting science fictional heroes? How responsible are any of them for their own decisions to pursue their personal pleasures? How conscious are they of giving in to their drives for play at the expense of others?

5.3 Pleasure and Power: Violence Critiqued

Thus, I also agree with Nakamata Akio, who suggests that the criticism of violence in Abe Kazushige's works lies in ridiculing violence through irony:

> "This novel is rich in devices through which to read it, and even though it would be interesting to just pursue these hidden interpretations, the narrative's main thread lies in turning reality's pathetic state into something laughable. The protagonist 'I' fritters away the 'combat skills', which he has learned at the Higher Truth School, on the stupid aim of a fight with some yob high school student in Shibuya. (…) [I]n Abe Kazushige's works, violence is always depicted in a set with comics. In other words, the romanticism surrounding violence is entirely relativized." (Nakamata 2002:87-88)

Nevertheless, I argue that *Individual Projection* gives priority to a discussion of violence as a basic human drive. This is clarified in a detailed separate passage, in which Onuma sets on to an exploration of his explicit 'desire' for violence: "But what

exactly are my desires (*yokubō*)? To be honest, I have a fascination with violence (*bōryokuteki na koto ni hikareteiru*).” I would like to show that the passage references multiple cultural theories on violence while relating them to the Ōmu narrative. In doing so, the passage explores possible motives behind the cult’s religious violence. Violence is part of any totalitarian rule. I argue that *Individual Projection* prioritizes a discussion of Ōmu’s violence as the expression of a basic human drive, which *enables* the emergence of totalitarian movements.

The passage of *Individual Projection* first relates violence to boredom (*taikutsusa*), when Onuma acknowledges that violence does indeed act as a stimulus for bored individuals to feel themselves.[76] However, it then emphasizes that even after boredom disappears, the desire for violence remains. As a result, this desire as such is primal:

> “If so then, why is it that I, or anyone else, is attracted to violence? I suppose it’s fair to say that violence fills the vacuum produced by boredom, but when the boredom disappears, it still doesn't diminish your interest in violence.”
>
> “ではなぜぼくは、もしくは人は、暴力的なことに惹かれるのだろうか？退屈さによってできた穴を、暴力的なことで埋めようとしているといえば辻褄があいそうだが、退屈さが消えれば暴力的なことへの関心も失わせるとはいいきれない。” (Abe 1997:16) [77]

Similarly, in an earlier segment Onuma suggests that computer games are another medium which provides young men with a means of performing heroic self-narratives in fiction while living their aggressive drives. The interactivity of these games makes them an almost realistic place for transgression. In turn, their influence on nurturing youth violence is certainly considerable. Nonetheless, the passage emphasizes that while computer games are a breeding space for violence, their success is owed to there being a human aggressive drive *in the first place* and not the other way round:

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[76] Within the context of modern boredom, violence is an attempt at meaning-making. All the same, Jorg Kustermans points out, modern violence precisely feels meaning*less*: “Rarely does boredom convince as an explanation of actual instances of violence. Precisely when boredom becomes mobilized as a purported cause of violence, does boredom reveal itself for the discourse it is: a moralizing discourse about or around said violence, typically spoken by the privileged.” (2017:2)

[77] The Japanese translations in this segment are my own slightly altered interpretations from the Seth Jacobowitz’ translation in order to emphasize lexical affinities to the intertextual references suggested.

> "No doubt the reason computer games featuring fight matches sell so well is that everyone latently nurtures a desire for violence. You hear this sort of thing everywhere, but there certainly aren't many people who *don't* have an attraction to violence.
>
> 格闘対戦型のコンピュータ・ゲーム・ソフトが売れているのは、誰もが暴力的な欲望を潜在的に抱いているからに違いない。これはいかにもありふれた見方だが、しかし暴力性に魅せられた人々が少なからずいることは確かだろう。" (Abe 1997:10)

I relate Onuma's expression of a human 'desire for violence' (*bōryokuteki na yokubō)* to Sigmund Freud's drive theory, which I already made reference to earlier when I used the notion of 'aggressive drives'. According to Freud, there are two kinds of human drives: "those which seek to preserve and unite – which we call 'erotic', exactly in the sense in which Plato uses the word 'Eros' in his Symposium, or 'sexual', with a deliberate extension of the popular conception of 'sexuality' – and those which seek to destroy and kill and which we group together as the aggressive or destructive instinct." (Freud 1933:208) As an expression of the latter, violence inevitably becomes an urge, which the human being struggles with throughout his or her life, no matter under which circumstances. This is what Onuma seems to speak to, when he reflects on his habitualized exercise of physical violence as a teenager: "We couldn't live without it (*yarazu ni wa irarenakatta*)." (Abe 1997:11) At the same time, Freud calls the sublimation of this aggressive drive (*Triebsublimierung*) the cultural mandate of any civilized individual, namely its cultural work (*Kulturarbeit*) in his essay *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930): "Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life." (Freud 1962:44) At the same time, and very similar to *Individual Projection*, Freud suggests that the "lust for aggression and destruction" is so pleasurable that it may have *preceded* the creation of ideologies behind past political crimes:

> "When we read of the atrocities of the past, it sometimes seems as through the idealistic motives served only as an excuse for the destructive appetites; and sometimes – in the case, for instance, of the cruelties of the Inquisition – it seems as though the idealistic motives had pushed themselves forward in consciousness, while the destructive ones lent them an unconscious reinforcement. Both may be true." (Freud 1962:209)

This is because the destructive drive is an articulation of the primal pleasure principle. The human being pursues pleasure, while the absence of pleasure is distressing for it: "It is clearly not easy for men to give up this satisfaction of this inclination to aggression. They do not feel comfortable without it." (Freud 1962:61) It is the pleasure of aggression, which makes it such an irrepressible force within the human being to begin with. Part of this pleasure is to gain from it a sense of one's own powerfulness. In quoting Bertrand de Jouvenel, Hannah Arendt indicates "that 'a man feels himself more of a man when he is imposing himself and making others the instruments of his will,' which causes him 'incomparable pleasure.'" (Arendt 1969:12). Violent domination is pleasurable in a sadistic sense. It is libidinal in that it is intoxicating, as Onuma reflects on as well:

> "But wasn't the reason I bothered taking part in Hirasawa's old-fashioned vendetta last night clearly because I knew I would come off better than my opponents? It sure seems that way. Or maybe I justified it by convincing myself that it would be a good time to check on the progress of my training, when in fact I'd gradually been wanting to fall in love with the appearance of myself getting stronger and stronger, demonstrating overwhelming force. But I feel that I shouldn't confuse the satisfaction gained from violence with a self-intoxicating [narcissistic] feeling of satisfaction."
>
> わざわざあのヒラサワの時代遅れな復讐劇に加わったのは、あきらかに相手よりも自分のほうが強いという公算が大きかったからではないのか？なるほどそんな気もしないではいない。あるいはぼくは、訓練の成果を確認する良い頃合だなどとそれらしい理由を思いつきつつも、一方では、そろそろ強さを増やしているはずの自分が圧倒的な力を示す姿に惚れ惚れしたくなっていたのかもしれないのだ。しかしながら暴力的なことによって得られた充足感と、自己陶酔的な満足感とは、区別すべきだという気がする。" (Abe 1997:17)

However, as Arendt points out too, this intoxication is not to be confounded with actual power: "What never can grow out of [violence] is power." (1969:20) Which Onuma seconds, when he says that he should not confuse the satisfaction gained from violence with self-intoxication, while at the same time describing it as exactly that. This is because the power felt when dominating someone violently is not actual power. It is the same with any intoxication – once it subsides, the powerful feeling is gone and one is left as unsatisfied as before. In turn, the temporary kick is addictive. Sigmund Freud tellingly lists the aggressive drives in one line with the intoxication achieved through

drugs as a chemical influence capable of averting suffering: "I do not think that anyone completely understands its mechanism, but it is a fact that there are foreign substances which, when present in the blood or tissues, directly cause us pleasurable sensations; and they also alter the conditions governing our sensibility that we become incapable of receiving unpleasurable impulses." (Freud 1962:25;44) Fittingly, Onuma also admits to a casual intake of drugs, a detail which he mentions right in the beginning. As he self-medicates his migraine, he asks himself if he has taken a meta-amphetamine by accident.

While *Individual Projection* makes no explicit moral judgement, the fact that it explains a human tragedy such as the Ōmu murders as being an expression of human nature may read as sufficient criticism in itself. Adopting Freud's overall standpoint, *Individual Projection* may also contain the moral implications of it, which Freud is very clear to explicate, too, in relating his drive theory to a statement on the human condition:

> "The element of truth behind this, which people are so ready to disavow is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and kill him. *Homo homini lupus*. Who, in the face of all his experiences of life and history, will have the courage to dispute this assertion?" (Freud 1962:58)

As a result, in my opinion, *Individual Projection*'s criticism of violence firstly references theories of revolution and violence at the same time as deconstructing them through Sigmund Freud's cultural theories on the human condition.

6. What Power? Totalitarian Leadership and Followership

Secondly, *Individual Projection* criticizes violence by questioning the assumption that violence equals power. According to Hannah Arendt, "power and violence, though they are distinct phenomena, usually appear together." (Arendt 1969:19) Either "impotence breeds violence, and psychologically this is quite true", or, politically

speaking, "loss of power tempts into substituting violence for power" (1969:20). Ōmu's violent rule, which targeted critics and possible defectors, was a murderous effort to maintain power, where power risked being lost. This is exactly how Arendt describes the interplay of power and violence in politics:

> "To sum up: politically speaking, it is not enough to say that power and violence are not the same. Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course its end is the disappearance of power. This implies that it is not correct to say, the opposite of violence is non-violence: to speak of non-violent power is actually redundant. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it." (1969:21-22)

Indeed, if anything, Ōmu's failure to achieve its political aims of overthrowing the state exemplarily underscores that "violence can't be derived from its opposite, which is power." (1969:22) Nakamata similarly points out Ōmu's ultimate failure, which according to him is the ironic outcome of the cult's nonsensical ideological self-legitimization: "(…) the 'Higher Truth School' in *Individual Projection* (…) is depicted as an actually pathetic organization measured by the loudness of its cheers for itself. This precisely corresponds to Ōmu Shinrikyō's pathetic quality as a group, which (…) gloriously failed at overthrowing the Japanese nation." (Nakamata 2002:87) Ōmu's failure, in turn, underscores Arendt's overall observation on totalitarian movements: "Nothing is more characteristic of the totalitarian movements in general and the quality of fame of their leaders in particular than the startling swiftness with which they are forgotten and the startling ease with which they can be replaced." (Arendt 2017:399)

This emphasis on the *failure* of political violence presents the second argument of *Individual Projection*'s criticism of violence. While Onuma and his colleagues struggle to become as powerful as cyborgs, a metalepsis at the end of *Individual Projection* nullifies his struggle. The metalepsis introduces an epilogue: following the narrative proper of Onuma's diary is a short *kansō* (critical commentary) signed with the initial M, indicating that it might be attributed to Masaki. With this epilogue, the narrative shifts to a problematization of agency versus authority within cultish organizations by pointing to the general limitations of individual autonomy inherent in

their totalitarian structures themselves. In doing so, I propose, *Individual Projection* subverts its own subversion – the assertion of gendered potency through the Higher Truth School youngsters' embodied performances of archaic masculinities as represented within the novel is not negated but certainly relativized towards the end of the narrative on the level of its discourse.

On the one hand, the metalepsis creates a hierarchy implied by the leap from a lower narrative level to a higher one, a hierarchy that mimics the vertical pecking order between Onuma and Masaki in the story. On the other hand, Masaki's commentary functions as a frame narrative; throughout Onuma's narrative proper we learn that writing reports is a major training exercise for the students of the Higher Truth School. Masaki encourages them to sharpen their sense of observation as well as to strengthen their imaginative capacities through regular writing assignments of 'long, detailed narratives' which he then evaluates. Indeed, Masaki's epilogue begins with a critical assessment of Onuma's writing:

> "For the most part there are no major problems. As usual, the physical sensation your work imparts is rather weak. Several of your judgments are made a little too forcefully and there are some inconsistencies, but for all that it is reasonably well arranged. It is fair to say it is a positive sign of improvement. Moreover, by simultaneously activating multiple consciousnesses and keeping them under control, you approached a more complete perfect state of being. I doubt that's what you had in mind, however. Doing it when you don't intend to is a risky business." (Abe 1997:190)

Thus, Masaki's commentary *on* Onuma's journal *succeeding* Onuma's journal reveals in hindsight that what started out as the former's diary was a student report by him to his teacher Masaki. While the narrative self-consciousness obvious in this makes *Individual Projection* an exemplary case of metafiction, more importantly it implies an order of authority; the narrative voice of the frame's extradiegetic narrator, Masaki, is superior to that of the embedded metadiegetic narrator, Onuma. In a final turn, this submission of Onuma's voice to that of Masaki's on the level of discourse is reflected within what the story of *Individual Projection* represents on the whole. Insofar as Onuma's embedded journal figures as the coming-of-age tale of his identitary quest for agency based in gender and labour throughout and after his time at the Higher Truth School, Masaki's succeeding frame narrative makes Onuma a student again and thus

puts him back into a state of immaturity and dependence. By the same token, the pragmatic reality of life within the Ōmu movement accorded its converts little freedom. As indicated earlier, Ōmu relied on an absolutist and intensely hierarchical vertical system, the different echelons of which members had to "challenge" (*charengi* or *chōsen suru*) in their religious practice from the bottom to make it to the top of the group's spiritual elite. Their success in this was verified by Asahara himself, who decided his disciples' ascent or stagnation and constituted the very top of the spiritual and social hierarchy of Ōmu. While Ōmu converts thus strove for spiritual liberation (*gedatsu*) by definition of their belief, this spiritual freedom was ironically dependent on the person of Asahara, to whose authority any individual agency, spiritual or social, was ultimately submitted. According to Shimazono Susumu, achieving the state of ultimate detachment (*seimutonjaku*) was equal to ultimately complying with Asahara's absolute leadership: "The cultivation of detachment, which was perceived as an expression of the highest levels of spiritual attainment, thus involved controlling one's own mind and transforming it into a copy of the guru's." (Reader 2000:80-81) The training included the application of a specific purifying practice called 'cloning the guru' (*guru no kurōnka*). 'Cloning the guru' signified the transfer of Asahara's pure thought patterns into the minds of his disciples in order to replace their impure data, through fasting, meditating and listening to Asahara's taped sermons. From 1994 onwards, converts were further using an electronic PSI ('perfect salvation initiation') headgear and consumed LSD (see Shimazono 1997:92-100).

The metalepsis visualizes this religious practice of Ōmu on a narratological level. It is a hierarchical switch from Onuma's record of his mind (his diary) to Masaki's expression of thoughts (his commentary). Thus, in a way, the students are encouraged to turn their own thoughts into Masaki's thoughts.

The final metalepsis clarifies that Onuma's identity remains submitted to Masaki's control. In doing so, the Higher Truth School deconstructs itself, like all totalitarian movements, one may add. If totalitarianism is a struggle for individual power, then this struggle's failure starts with its own logic. The only powerful person in totalitarian movements is the totalitarian leader. The followers however, remain

followers, even though they submit their lives to the goal of attaining ultimate liberation, as Ōmu's converts did. However, based on the cult's totalitarian structures, power remained restricted to the absolute authority of its leader, Asahara Shōko.

Thus, *Individual Projection*'s counter-narrative seems to ask: does the self-chosen precarity of the youngsters really lead to more freedom? The choice of being a *freeter* was motivated by the wish to avoid being "slaves to their companies" (Cook 2013:66). However, *Individual Projection* seems to raise the question: how far-reaching was their freedom considering that it was limited fundamentally by Masaki's totalitarian authority as tyrannical leader of the Higher Truth School? Does that not make him the owner of their lives?

Indeed, the Higher Truth School's leadership, while initially based on the voluntary acceptance of the students of Masaki as their authority, ends up in coercive enforcement, which includes surveillance in order to ensure total control. If we are to follow Hannah Arendt, in that totalitarianism is the pervasion of the *private* through politics and thus the loss of the privacy, then Masaki's surveillance of his students makes the Higher Truth School a totalitarian movement midway through its evolution.[78] In that sense, the metalepsis in the end of *Individual Projection* is also readable as an expression of Masaki's surveillance of his student Onuma.

7. Conclusion

I sum up that *Individual Projection* approaches the post-Aum debate on why young middle-class men felt motivated to join a murderous cult through various issues. Firstly, it highlights the role of contemporary boredom, which I have related to a string of philosophies on the problem. Secondly, it suggests to look at the significance of images in culture: by referencing Georges Sorel, it proposes that images have the power to enchant young men into violent revolution by showing them pictorial representations

[78] "The rise of totalitarianism, its claim to having subordinated all spheres of life to the demands of politics and its consistent nonrecognition of civil rights, above all the rights of privacy and the right to freedom from politics, makes us doubt not only the coincidence of politics and freedom but their very compatibility." (Arendt 1969:443)

of heroic masculinities, which the men in turn aspire to be. Secondly, the novel suggests that violent revolution is something that speaks to human nature anyway by referring to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic cultural theories. In doing so, *Individual Projection* provides an elaborate critique of Ōmu's religious violence in particular and of totalitarian movements in general. It does so by questioning the power dynamics in totalitarian movements, as it asks if the youngsters really did reach their goals in feeling more empowered in joining the Higher Truth School? The metalepsis in the end of the narrative represents Masaki's authority and control over his students. In turn, by pointing out the student's own ambitions in joining the Higher Truth School and willingness to submit to Masaki's authority, *Individual Projection* also emphasizes the students' own responsibility. Did they really abandon their own sense of self, or did they retain personal motives in participating in murderous attacks on civilians? The questions that *Individual Projection* as counter-narrative thus raises are not only those of Aum converts' hidden aspirations for power in joining the cult, or how these aspirations might be influenced by and based in culture. As much as the novel problematizes their limitations of agency within totalitarian cultish structures, it asks us how far the members of Aum *consented* to these inherent power asymmetries, as the cult served their own interests.

A lover's adventure. It cost money like all the others.
– Georg Buechner, *Danton's Death* [79]

CHAPTER 5:

A Breadwinner, a Winner?
Competing Masculinities in *Minagoroshi*

1. Introduction

Minagoroshi (Massacre) first appeared in 1998 in the journal *Gunzō* and in 1999 it was published within the short story volume *Mujō no sekai* (Pitiless World) together with *Triangles* (1997, *Gunzō*) and the titular *Mujō no sekai* (1998, *Issatsu no hon*). *Minagoroshi* is the longest of these three pieces and thus rather a novella (*shōhen*) than a short story (*tanpen*). It was adapted into a graphic novel (*manga*) in collaboration with the designer Miyake Ranjirō in 2007. Abe says of himself that he is mostly perceived as a writer of novels, which is also owed to the fact that he is best-known for his sprawling epic *Shinsemia* (see Abe 2013:255). This may be one reason why research on Abe generally has focused on his novels. Nevertheless, I suggest that his short stories are worth an analysis. Abe has published four short story volumes in total: besides *Mujō no sekai* (1999), he included short stories in the hardcover volume of *Gurando Finãre* (2004) and released two exclusive collections of short pieces entitled *Deluxe Edition* (2013) and *Ultimate Edition* (2022). According to Abe, *Deluxe Edition* is the first volume for which he wrote short stories while being conscious of

[79] Buechner 1971:6.

the characteristics of the genre. In contrast, he states that he still wrote *Minagoroshi*, *Mujō no sekai* and *Triangles* without any consideration of the potentiality and peculiarity of the short form (see Abe 2013:255). Yet, I propose that these three stories are different in style from either Abe's early linguistic experiments *Amerika no yoru*, *ABC sensō* or the less complicating but still theory-referential *Individual Projection*. Short stories, being short, demand simplicity and do not leave much room for either verbal exercises or self-referential comments besides narrating the plot. As a result, all of Abe's early short stories, including *Kōshaku fujin no gogo no pātī* (1995) and *Veronika Hart no gen'ei* (1997), are comparatively representational while still metafictional. Katō Norihiro calls *Minagoroshi* "the major read" of the volume *Mujō no sekai*, "the most intriguing" of the three stories and the one "worthy of being called a masterpiece" (Katō 1999:218). Assessing the novella's aesthetics, Katō observes:

> "The pieces compiled within this volume, more than anything, make me think of the images of computer graphics (CG). Put simply, there is no obscurity in CG images. The world we put ourselves in, the world we establish our existence in is a world utterly devoid of 'interiority' – a *Pitiless World* [literally: 'World Without Feelings']." (Katō 1999:212)[80]

Thus, around 1997 Abe's style changes from the former 'criticisms turned into novels' into an exaggerated literary realism. Critics have pointed out the lack of interiority of Abe's characters. When the author was awarded the 2004 Akutagawa Prize for his novel *Gurando finãre*, jury member Ishihara Shintarō criticized that the narrative simply was a "collage of trendy social topics", "lacking any sort of 'internal necessity'". Murakami Ryū, who ultimately voted for Abe, was of similar opinion. He raised the concern if the author, by insufficiently exploring the psyche of the male first person pedophilic narrator, had failed to do service to this delicate topic chosen. One may take into account that Abe probably had established himself as a writer with a taste for black humour and sarcasm by then and the jury could have felt that this style was inappropriate. One may however also assume that Ishihara and Murakami

[80] Katō Norihiro's choice of imagery speaks to Azuma Hiroki's concept of 'game-like realism' (*gēmuteki riarizumu*) discussed above, which similarly points to the influence of contemporary media (computer games) on how literature is perceived and theorized (see Azuma 2007:11-135).

misunderstood his style altogether.[81] Or that at least Ishihara's harsh criticism was aimed at the postmodern ideology Abe represented within the literary scene at the time.[82] If anything, it is not the concern of Abe's fiction to psychologize its characters; in metafiction, characters are conscious linguistic constructs. Patricia Waugh states: "Through continuous narrative intrusion, the reader is reminded that not only do characters verbally construct their own realities; they are themselves verbal constructions, *words* not *beings.*" (Waugh 1984:26) Indeed, metafiction sometimes expresses itself through the "dehumanization of character" (1984:22). Now, the brevity of the short story does not leave *Minagoroshi* enough room for a narrator who could make such open intrusions. *Minagoroshi* does have a narrative voice, which sometimes emerges and which cannot be Ōta's. However, the narrative arrangement appears like a realism that depicts, not comments, much as in Gustave Flaubert's sense of a literary realism (Flaubert also has emergences of the narrator through their voice only). In other words, *Minagoroshi* references a similar theoretic discussion to *Amerika no yoru*. Yet, it does so without the discussion, but by representing the discussion's *conclusion*, meaning its consequences for the literary depiction of reality and the human psyche. The discussion as such remains invisible within the narrative discourse. *Minagoroshi* presents us with the consequences of the argument, not the argument as such. In other words, *Minagoroshi* stays within literature, while *Amerika no yoru* rises above and out of literature. *Minagoroshi* does not quote metafiction's 'reality is discourse'-principle as ostentatiously as *Amerika no yoru*, which makes this reference a principle of its metafictional composition. *Minagoroshi*'s narrative does occasionally reference its belief in the existence of some prior discourse to our reality such as women's magazines, TV series (Abe 1999b:116) or leaflets (1999b:144), which we tend to

[81] By contrast, female jury member Takagi Nobuko thought the novel was a "truly frightening depiction of the inner life of a sexual deviant". Yamada Amy gave a positive evaluation as well (see Jewel).
[82] Ishihara Shintarō being a famous right-wing politician may likely have been opposed to the left wing Niū Aka and its intellectuals, as whose successor Abe had positioned himself within the literary field of the 1990s and early 2000s. Indeed, Hasumi Shigehiko was supportive of Abe's Akutagawa Prize nomination, stating in a 2005 interview that he thought that the award should have been given to Abe the previous year for *Shinsema* in the first place. Accordingly, he says to Abe that "(...) scandalmongers claim that the 'Akutagawa Prize has woken up from brain death' with your win." (Abe&Hasumi:89).

imitate. However, these comments are not as profiled as in *Amerika no yoru* and largely remain part of the narrative's story.

Different from the earliest pieces, the three short stories *Minagoroshi*, *Mujō no sekai* and *Triangles* concentrate on portrayals of serious social issues of their time. Abe describes his motivation behind the collection as wanting to "put three pieces on the common topic of information society and hallucination together" (Abe 2013:255). Indeed, as a variation on *Amerika no yoru* and *Individual Projection*, *Minagoroshi* highlights Abe's new theme of media and technologies and resulting from it the topic of surveillance. On the one hand, it addresses surveillance thematically; Ōta's scepticism and sporadic radical rejection of the restaurant husband's surveillance of his wife reads as a criticism of surveillance generally. Surveillance has been important reference discourse in Abe's fiction since around *Individual Projection* in 1997, which addresses the theme in its depiction of the Higher Truth School as an espionage academy training the students in wiretapping and other surveillance techniques. Abe also addresses the topic in one of his film criticisms, which I have translated into English:

> "So where *is* 'justice' nowadays? Perhaps it is better to say that, at present, it seems that 'justice' is only prospering within the delusions of the individual. The rapid development and spread of information technology has exceptionally increased the possibilities for document-verification (in Japan, we are at an age where the results of a 15-year-old girl's investigation on the truth behind the 'Wakayama poisoned curry incident' using free internet research is published as a book and the precision of the results create a huge stir). At present, conspiracy theory interpretations on the internet have turned into common practice. As part of a larger discussion on keeping track of the state of affairs in Afghanistan after '9:11', a debate on whether the Osama Bin Laden featured in an *Al-Qaida* video is real or a double immediately spread after the video's release. On the other hand, the trend towards legalizing electronic surveillance through the construction of communication interception programs such as Echelon or Carnivore, the installation of surveillance street cameras and the development of medical technologies such as implantable biochips and other various techniques for authenticating the individual, has increased the scepticism of some net users. The increased efforts of both government agencies and non-governmental organizations in pushing for a system of information management has stirred the unease of a 'privacy crisis' and ultimately will drive us all into paranoia. At present, when we must live depending on all sorts or kinds of (unproven) information that wildly circulates through a multitude of communication media (while the frequency of misunderstandings increases), it is inevitable that our thinking will become delusional (paranoid). Nevertheless, this paranoia sometimes is effective as a means for accepting reality, if we channel it into what we may call a pursuit of a healthy and proactive potentiality. As such, paranoia can become a key to plotting policies of resistance against an excessively

> controlled society. One may acknowledge the condition of a contemporary 'justice' here. Delusions often turn people into complaint-loving pessimists and encourage anti-socialism, but that still must be better than to not think at all, at least right now. Of course, there is little sense in wasting time trying to investigate whether the 'powers of darkness' depicted in conspiracy dramas such as *Conspiracy Theory* or *The X Files* really exist. The delusional imagination precisely ought to be used for a creative activism aimed at resisting a self-righteous 'justice' in the first place." (Abe 2018 [2002]:10-11)

Minagoroshi may be particular in the author's literary oeuvre in that surveillance is formally relevant in it. Indeed, the narrative incorporates surveillance into its construction of metafiction: in that sense, the discussion on fact and fiction, which metafiction typically unfolds, is re-negotiated based on the introduction of a new, virtual reality.

I suggest that *Minagoroshi* sets in scene a variation on the erotic triangle. Again, the conflict unites two men over a woman. This time however, its structure is based on projection: two men, who are in separate triangular relationships, meet and project these relationships onto each other, which creates a new perceptive triangle. The male opponents in *Minagoroshi* are distinctive by material wealth: Ōta is a *freeter*, while the signifier of fashion indicates that the unnamed man in the restaurant is a white-collar worker (*sararīman*) (as I will point out in detail later). As a result, Ōta sees his lover Hitomi's white-collar worker husband in the man, while the man recognizes his own wife's young lover in Ōta, who he believes to be either a student or a *freeter*.

As in the previous *Amerika no yoru* and *Individual Projection*, the narrative of *Minagoroshi* thus picks up on the cultural narrative of shifting masculinities in 1990s Japan. This time, masculinities are negotiated as a conflict between hegemonic and subordinate masculinity on the foil of Ōta's and the man's conflicted heterosexual relationships, which make both of them compete internally with their perceived superior rivals. These conflicts are then doubled, as they are projected onto each other and subsequently acted out. This is a different accentuation of the erotic triangle from *Amerika no yoru*, where both Tadao and Mutō are *freeters* and thus probably nearly equal in material wealth. Tadao's and Mutō's competition aims at both social and erotic capital: Tadao is envious of Muto for being an extrovert, which makes him popular with their colleagues at film school and attractive to the other sex. By contrast,

Minagoroshi, by opposing the white-collar worker husband and the part-timer lover *freeter,* establishes an antinomy between the notions of financial capital and erotic capital. Yet, the narrative also indicates that both notions may be linked.

In doing so, the short story sets in opposition different sociotypes of men in the 1990s through Ōta who is a *freeter* and the man in the restaurant who is a white-collar worker. This opposition is generalized throughout the narrative, as it turns the white-collar worker husbands and unemployed lovers into rivalling social groups. In doing so, I suggest that *Minagoroshi* discusses the problem of male precarity through the mens' capability of holding heterosexual relationships. In turn, the possibility of a heterosexual relationship for men is linked to precarity; marriage is discussed as a societal male status symbol.

Emma E. Cook shows that marriage is a key topic of identitary debates for male freeters specifically: "Male freeters often have difficulty maintaining long-term romantic relations and transitioning from dating to marriage, in part because of their irregular employment status and low breadwinning ability (…)." (Cook 2014:2) Being able or not able to be the breadwinner still defines the self-confidence of male *freeters* to this day. In case studies Cook shows that "they remain, in practice, most focused on traditional ideals of romantic and marital roles, especially their breadwinning (in)ability or on having achieved breadwinning ability." (2014:5)

I suggest that by returning to the theme of the erotic triangle, the narrative of *Minagoroshi* revisits the notion of homosocial desire. Homosocial desire is expressed based on a general depiction of a gender divide; while the women are variously depicted as absent, the abandoned men form homosocial unions. The union between Ōta and the restaurant husband is depicted as an actual connection based on a conversation, which oscillates between competition and companionship. Keith Vincent explains that male homosociality "encompasses many points between the poles of overt homoeroticism and what is sometimes called 'male bonding,' between loving intimacy between men and defensive alliances between women." (Vincent 2012:4) I would call the union between Ōta and the restaurant husband such a form of male bonding. Yet again, heterosexual relationships are depicted as problematic, as is

the possible feeling of 'love'. The narrative negates any notion of authentic feelings, as it reduces human emotions to an expression of 'desire' in line with a general tendency of Abe's early fiction, which seems to participate in a transcultural problematic of emotion in postmodernism as indicated in the Introduction.

2. *Minagoroshi*: A Summary

The story of *Minagoroshi* recounts one day in the life of Ōta Tatsuyuki, a young man in his "early twenties living in the late 1990s" in Tōkyō (Abe 1999b:112). After waking up in a woman's apartment, Ōta heads home leaving the sleeping woman. On the way, we learn through a direct speech monologue of Ōta's that he is in a relationship with Hitomi. This relationship appears binding and exclusive to him. In fact, Ōta sleeping with the unnamed woman was an act of revenge based on the frustration of Hitomi spending her night with her husband and not being available to him. The woman as a character has no other function in the story than to lie naked on the bed sleeping; she never wakes up, could even be dead according to the deliberate ambivalences of the narration.[83] Ōta returns home from his one-night stand and sees Takeda, the boss of his corner shop, waiting for him in a café across the street with some other men.

Ōta finds a message on his voicemail from a man named Uno, the shop owner, who tells him to show up at his workplace today, otherwise his physical safety cannot be assured anymore. Ōta understands that Takeda and the other men are awaiting him with no good purpose and is able to evade them. The reason for the men lying in wait for Ōta is soon explained: Ōta works in Uno's corner shop, but largely finances himself through fraud: he steals items or cheats on the revenue. This fraud is discovered when a customer writes a complaint letter to the shop, which Takeda opens first. A boy had ordered a 200.000 Yen wristwatch and not received the product after payment. Takeda reimburses the money, however the watch remains lost. The customer had called before, but was brushed off by someone from the shop, which turns out to be Ōta.

[83] As for the question of whose massacre is meant by the title, one thus could interpret it as the massacre of this woman at the beginning.

Takeda tells Uno about the fraud and both are angry and feel betrayed. Especially Uno, who had a bond with Ōta, seeks revenge and calls the suspect. Ōta on his part thought the fraud would go unnoticed.

Ōta had left the watch at Hitomi's place and because Hitomi did not keep their scheduled appointment, the watch is still there. Ōta tries to call Hitomi but does not reach her. Instead, Uno calls him and tells him to show up at the store with all his stolen items. Ōta decides to run away, as he cannot return home for Takeda and the other men are waiting for him there. He just roams around aimlessly. He passes S-park and exits on a street with two family restaurants. He decides to enter the one called *Denny's*, as he is too exhausted to walk any further. Before Ōta enters the restaurant, Hitomi calls him back. Hitomi explains why she was not able to see him, namely that her husband got a couple of days off and that they went on a trip to the hot springs (*onsen)* together. Ōta reacts in characteristic impulsiveness with an outburst of anger. After Hitomi brushes Ōta off, he lets her know that he is waiting for her at *Denny's* and asks her to bring the watch there.

Before Ōta enters *Denny's*, he picks a fight with a man sitting on a bench right next to his. Ōta turns to the man who is about to connect his computer to the internet and kicks him in the back several times. Then Ōta enters *Denny's* and lets the waitress know that another person is arriving later, namely Hitomi. Ōta's confidence in Hitomi joining him later, however, does not match with the previous information provided by the narrative; accordingly, Hitomi's response to Ōta asking her to come to *Denny's* had been noncommittal and 'light' (*karui*) (Abe 1999b:136). Again, *Minagoroshi*'s narrative implies that Ōta's perception of how dependable the relationship is might not correspond to what Hitomi considers it to be. Ōta calls Hitomi again, but her phone is off. Ōta leaves a message on her mailbox, in a weak voice saying: "I'll do everything you say, but please come here." (137) Again, the indication of weakness on Ōta's side: he explicitly is indicated as being weak vis-à-vis a seemingly stronger, absent Hitomi. Hitomi calls him back, which triggers another stream of thoughts within Ōta, in which he opposes himself to her husband. Then he starts a conversation with a man, who sits alone at a table with a portable computer. This conversation spans 29 pages of a total

of 96 pages of the short story and reads as its central scene. The absence of the women seems substituted by the presence of the men, who confess their stories to each other and project them onto each other while also acting out their conflicts upon each other. At the same time, the real objects of their conflicts, the husband's wife and Ōta's lover Hitomi, are not available and not interested in any argument with them. The man is married, however, his wife cheats on him with a younger lover. The man is sure of that, as he spies on his wife and watches her and her lover committing the act of adultery through the screen of his portable computer. I suggest that the conflict between both men revolves around a notion of honour: the husband feels humiliated by the younger lover and sees him in Ōta. In order to maintain his dignity, he decides to 'show' Ōta that he is a real man, literally: he shows Ōta how he kills the lover and his wife by making him watch the killing on the screen of his portable computer. Surveillance enables the main conflict here; the other possible option for the husband would have been to drag Ōta to his place to actually watch the scene of killing, which probably would have been more difficult to initiate. In any case, the husband returns to the restaurant smeared in blood with the weapon used in the crime, a baseball bat. He ends up hitting two of Ōta's persecutors with it as well, who have turned up at the restaurant and have sat down to order food. Ōta manages to escape from the scene and thus also from his persecutors, who remain at the restaurant injured and obviously forgetful about what they came for. So Ōta, who in a way is responsible for triggering the killing, manages to escape without any inconvenience. The short story finishes, as Ōta's long wait for Hitomi finally comes to an end. She does show up, however, shortly: she waits for him when he returns home to his apartment. When Ōta asks her for the watch in question, she tells him that her husband has taken it. An argument evolves between the two and Hitomi ends up giving Ōta the money for the watch, breaks up with him and leaves quickly.

The short story ends with a change in perspective and a flashback to the scene in the park, where Ōta had kicked the man carrying the notebook in the back. This time, the narrative is focalized through this man, who is kicked in the back and wonders about the strange man, who must be Ōta from the logic of the narrative's circular

dramaturgy. The man accesses the internet and clicks on a website through which he is able to spy on young women in their bedrooms. Thus, he too is revealed as one of *Minagoroshi*'s lonely men who only are able to approach women through the mediation of technical devices.

3. A Good-For-Nothing's Life: Ōta's Precarious Masculinity

Ōta is a man without any actual profession, who works part-time at a corner shop and finances himself by the theft of the store's goods. As a result, Ōta is a *freeter* different from the dream-seeking type represented by Tadao, the artist, and also the escapist type represented by Onuma, the terrorist. Both are profiled as *freeters* who actively choose flexible work in order to sustain a life dedicated to the pursuit of creative endeavours, or, in order to fulfill boyish fantasies of war and conflict. By contrast, Ōta is pictured as someone who lacks the necessary skills to meet the obligations of proper employment as a white-collar worker in a regular company. In fact, while Tadao and Onuma are both protagonists with intellectual capabilities, it is questionable if the Ōta described in *Minagoroshi* has any capacities that enable him to reflect on himself at all. In fact, his main psychological features are frequent outbursts of anger, uncontrollable and unmanageable, all impulse, no contemplation (see Abe 1999b:117; 135). His motto is that all happens 'according to one's desires'.

> "[Vis-à-vis such a self-reflexive Hitomi,] Ōta, who had never even once spent a thought on this, was living the motto that all, eventually, 'would happen according to one's desires (*yokubō no omomuku mama ni*)'.'" (1999b:116-117; my abbreviation)

Even though he is aware of the saying 'impatience brings nuisance' (*tanki wa sonki*), he never is able to contain his anger about anything (1999b:117).[84]

His impulsiveness, thus, is different from Onuma's. Ōta quotes a similar masculinity discourse on the importance of retaining one's cool: "In these moments, it was certainly necessary for Ōta to regain his cool (*reiseisa*)." (1999b:118) However,

[84] This may be also a reason why Ōta is alone. According to Sara Ahmed, "the rage against others surfaces as a body that stands apart or keeps its distance from others." (2004:4) Rage as an emotion isolates, as an enraged person, you are *against* others. Rage is opposed to 'attaching emotions' such as longing or love.

he is not able do so as he lacks any techniques in sublimation or self-control. Unlike Onuma, Ōta is someone who follows his desires freely and without remorse. Only the narrative voice of *Minagoroshi* seems to introduce a reflective level into the story. We see it in the quote above (‘all, eventually, ‘would happen according to one’s desires’’) through the inverted commas, the indication that all, even affect, is discourse, which shows us that Ota’s impulsiveness is both lexical and impulsiveness to begin with. Indeed, the narrative setting often remains ambiguous, while it is uncertain whether that is a deliberate choice of literariness or the result of it. Often it is unclear which narrative voice we are dealing with, that of the intellectually skilled narrator or of the intellectually limited Ōta. I suggest that the narrative reflects the technique of free indirect speech in unfolding its ambivalences. In other dubitable cases, the narrative contradicts itself: for example, when Ōta points out his motto that all happens according to one’s *desires*, the conceptual term ‘desire’ references a theoretical metanarrative that is hardly part of Ōta’s personal everyday idiom. Only the narrator would be capable of providing such a reflexive level. Yet, the statement is accorded to Ōta himself by indication of the narrative, which thus leaves open where this exceptional reflective insight comes from.

Because of his intellectual and mental limits, Ōta obviously lacks the prerequisites for higher education, which would enable him to take a regular job. Genda Yūji observes that most youth unemployment in 1990s Japan was “voluntary, i.e., chosen of one’s free will.” (Genda 2005:4). However, Ōta is not a *freeter* by choice, but a *freeter because he has no other choice*. His character speaks to Genda’s assessment of young people at the time, who generally displayed a:

> “diminished sense of commitment to work (…): Many young workers are not acquiring skills or experience and so are losing the will to work. This situation has the potential to generate enormous social costs that can never be recouped.” (2005:6-7)

Ōta’s precarious living is indicated lexically as ‘drifting’ *(īkagen na kurashi)* in a passage during which Ōta asks himself if a life like his is only possible in a large, anonymous urban space like Tōkyō (Abe 1999b:143). ‘*Īkagen na kurashi*’ does not exactly indicate precarity as in ‘having no regular job’ or ‘being deprived of material

wealth', but rather 'living a good-for-nothing's life'. In Ōta's case it seems to mean flunking out on the obligations of a regular office job, in order to be able to spend his days hanging out without too much investment of energy into anything. His reduced intellectual ability is highlighted when he reads a leaflet of *Denny's* entitled *Mini Denny*: he takes in the picture (of a heroic man in a near future SF combat suit, which he thinks to be quite attractive), but cannot read what is printed in small letters underneath (Abe 1999b:144). Moreover, the narrator later on comments on his protagonist's limited intellect by indicating that Ōta's mind worked "unusually" (*mezurashiku*) quickly, when he converses with the man in the restaurant (1999b:156).

Different from *Amerika no yoru* and *Individual Projection*, *Minagoroshi*'s narrative spells out the word "*freeter*" (*furītā*) with respect to the restaurant husband's wife's lover (1999b:166). As for Ōta, it references the lexical field of flexible work by indicating Ōta's workplace not as 'shop' (*omise*) or 'office' (*kaisha*) but as "place where he jobs" (*baitosaki*) (1999b:118). Similar to *Amerika no yoru*, the metaphor of life as a fight is referenced through a Darwinian indication of a "fight for survival" (*seizon kyōsō*) (1999b:123). Yet, *Minagoroshi* indicates Ōta's popularity with women as his only asset in this fight, which gives him the recognition of the same sex (1999b:123). By generally depicting Ōta as a good-for-nothing without a regular job or girlfriend (or wife), it rather appears to ask whether has he not already lost the fight according to societal standards of how hegemonic masculinity was defined at the time? Namely as that of a married white-collar worker as the breadwinner of a family?

Indeed, in his mind, Ōta contrasts himself to Hitomi's husband: when Hitomi calls him back in the end after having returned from her marital weekend trip (1999b:145-146), her call triggers a monologue of Ōta's consciousness in which he enviously rants about Hitomi's husband as a "man who likes to work" (*shigoto zuki na otoko*):

> "Still, what a work-loving guy Hitomi's husband was, who said he had to go to the office immediately! To leave directly after having come home from vacation – could one believe that?! Was her husband really intending to go to work?! However much people were talking about the recession?! Did that mean that times had aggravated to the extent that the husband had to work off his vacation days?!" (1999b:146)

In this way, Ōta indicates the husband as the polar opposite of himself. We already know at this point that Hitomi's husband is the typical white-collar-worker and the breadwinner of the family, as Hitomi herself does not work (see Abe 1999b:143). Ōta by contrast scratches a living by part-timing, stealing and cheating in order to survive, while he always reflects on having no money (1999b:128). Thus, Ōta and Hitomi's husband are differentiated in the narrative by their economic status and their employment status, not by other attributes such as physical attractiveness, or goodness of character or intellect. This implies that the narrative, in discussing heterosexual relationships, especially at the time of its publication, initially in 1998, wants to turn its focus not on the latter attributes, but explicitly on questions of work and masculinity in post-bubble Japan. Thus, by means of how it describes its characters, of what information it gives us about them and what it makes its characters say about each other, *Minagoroshi* explicitly references a specific cultural narrative on shifting masculinities at the time. I suggest that it opposes Hitomi's husband as the embodiment of corporate hegemonic masculinity to Ōta as the personification of subordinate masculinity in being a flexible worker. Indeed, in the above-mentioned quote, Ōta specifically mentions the ongoing "recession" (*fukueiki*), while thinking about the husband (1999b:146). Thus, Ōta's and Hitomi's husband's competition over Hitomi can be seen as a struggle between these two specific oppositional masculinities. While Ōta thoroughly is preoccupied with Hitomi, his jealousy of her husband becomes apparent through his angry thoughts about Hitomi's obvious preference of her husband over him. In fact, the opening scene of *Minagoroshi*, in which Ōta wakes up at the unnamed woman's apartment and remembers having slept with her (1999b:114) can be read as an act of revenge on the absent Hitomi, who, as we learn in the following, is away on a trip with her husband (1999b:134). Ōta investing the energy to take these measures testifies how important Hitomi is to Ōta, while the narrative leaves open whether she is important to Ōta as such or for validating him.

4. Complications of Heterosexual Relationships

4.1 Absent Women, Waiting Men

I suggest that the lexical choices of the characters' names in *Minagoroshi* underscore the fundamental gender divide, which distinguishes the narrative: while all men are signified in *katakana* (オータ,タケダ,ウノ), Hitomi (瞳), the only woman who is given an appearance unmediated by technology, in person, in which she is alive and awake and speaks through her own narrative voice, is indicated in *kanji*. The sleeping woman from the opening scene and the wife of the spying husband remain anonymous, which makes Hitomi the only woman with a name in *kanji*, but still does not change the reality that all men are indicated in *katakana*, while the women are not.

I would argue that this expresses that there is a clear division between the sexes in *Minagoroshi*. The female characters in the novel are absent until Hitomi makes her short personal appearance in the end: the woman in whose apartment Ōta watches TV in the beginning is either sleeping or dead throughout the whole scene; Hitomi herself is mediated through Ōta's cell phone and, as a doubling of her initial absence, largely is unavailable to his calls throughout the narrative; the wife of the man in the restaurant is mediated through his computer and the camera he watches her with, which means that their relationship is defined through absence as well. The only relationship the restaurant husband has with his wife is through spying on her; this is the closest he can get to her, the only connection he seems to be able to establish with her. Thus, the control of marital fidelity through surveillance might also be a pretext here for a husband aiming for some form of access to a connection with his wife at all, who is not interested in him. Thus, Ōta's and the husband's respective relationships with Hitomi and the wife are unidirectional; the men's preoccupation with the women remains unrequited. I suggest that this divide between the sexes in *Minagoroshi* has implications for how the gender relations are depicted in it on a general level: heterosexual relationships do not actually exist. Instead, we only see homosocial relationships between men, who are abandoned by the women they long to be with for whatever reason.

In fact, all the men depicted in closer detail in *Minagoroshi* fit into this pattern. Ōta's boss Uno equally does not have a (hetero)sexual relationship with his wife anymore, as she has lost interest in the physical part of their marriage. As his wife does not sleep with him anymore, Uno watches pornographic videos (Abe 1999b:122). Again, and through a different image, *Minagoroshi* unfolds the case of a relationship in which a man seeks access to a woman through the mediation of a technical item, this time the pornographic video from the rental video store, or, the camera of the film set. While his wife is unavailable to Uno, he resorts to watching other women, yet, these are also actually absent. As the other heterosexual relationships described in *Minagoroshi*, Uno's relationship thus equally is one-sided. Uno is described as the "classical pervert old man" (*inkō oyaji*), who likes high school girls (*joshikōsei*) (1999b:121).

Even the man in the park, through whom the narrative is focalized in the end, fits into the general scheme of the narrative: he visits online sites through which he can spy on women in their private bedrooms (1999b:205-206). Thus, yet again, he represents the typical male of *Minagoroshi*: lonely, seemingly affluent, who only is able to have access to women through the mediation of a technical device, which means that yet again, he desires women who are absent or nor interested in him.

How does Ōta fit into this pattern? Ōta is an antihero typical of Abe's early fiction: the narrative describes him as a 'male loser' (*dameotoko* ダメ男). Katō Norihiro describes the protagonist as "Ōta Tatsuyuki, a male loser in his early twenties, as shallow as gold leaf." (Katō 1999:211) In Japanese popular discourse, the *dameotoko* is sometimes opposed to the *moteotoko*(モテ男), namely the womanizer, or the man popular with women. This opposition would fit with how *Minagoroshi* problematizes the male loser: the notion of the *dameotoko* depends on how successful a man is at building and maintaining heterosexual relationships. Ōta is a *moteotoko* according to the narration of the story, which describes him as a womanizer, a quality other men around him envy him for. Takeda and Uno are envious of Ōta for being popular with women: "This man called Ōta was popular with women to the extent that he was

genuinely envied by the men around him." (Abe 1999b:123) Takeda explicitely hates Ōta for his only gift; lexically he does not *envy* (*īgaru*) but *hate* him for it (*urameshii*) (1999b:123). Yet, while the story unfolds, one gets to question Ōta's description as a womanizer, for we learn that Ōta really is committed to a married woman Hitomi, who obviously does not respond to his commitment by not being sufficiently interested in having a relationship with him. On the contrary, the structure of the short story is provided through the situation of Ōta waiting for her to call him. Her call does not happen until towards the end, with a negative result; when Hitomi finally comes to meet Ōta as wished for, the confrontation quickly stops at an argument which makes her run away from him and vows to never see him again (1999b:201). As a result, one may deduce, the ironic take of *Minagoroshi*'s narrative dismantles Ōta as a man with the reputation of a *moteotoko*, who actually is a *dameotoko*.

Roland Barthes suggests that 'waiting' for someone is the definition of love itself: "'Am I in love? – Yes, since I am waiting.' (…) The lover's fatal identity is precisely: *I am the one who waits.*" (Barthes 2010:40) In detail, Barthes precisely chooses the image of waiting for a loved one's telephone call: "For the anxiety of waiting, in its pure state, requires that I be sitting in a chair within reach of the telephone, without doing anything." (2010:39) Moreover, Barthes argues that waiting is a gendered trope. Indeed, men waiting for women is a feminization of them:

> "Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails aways, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so; she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, cavalcades). It follows that in any man who utters the other's absence *something feminine* is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized. A man is not feminized because he is inverted but because he is in love." (2010:13-14)

In Japanese literature, 'men waiting for women' would further be an inversion of the trope of 'feminine patience' in classical poetry and prose (see Strong 1991:178). Indeed, I argue that Ōta's and Hitomi's relationship represents a destabilization of patriarchal gender roles in heterosexual romantic love. It masculinizes Hitomi as a woman who is non-committal to begin with: Hitomi is married to someone else and

considers her affair with Ōta to be an affair, not more. By contrast, Ōta admits at some point throughout the narrative that he has 'fallen for Hitomi in a big way' (*migoto no hamatteiru*):

> "In other words, what I'm stuck to internally is that woman. After all, I seem to have majorly fallen for that Hitomi. That utterly average housewife has turned into an important figure for me (…). However, she is not mine. A civil office has already decided so. That is a real problem. If I want to make her mine, I have to fight with my own country, or, no, I don't, she is not that important. What I have to do is take on her wimp of a husband. That's it, that's all." (Abe 1999b:143-144)

Ōta affirms a male heterosexual machismo here by firstly indicating Hitomi by her traditional female gender role of a housewife and secondly performing his resolve for a masculine conquest of an unavailable woman. Nevertheless, what he does afterwards is wait. As a result, his actual strategy for gaining access to Hitomi is not his planned masculine conquest. It is that of a feminine wait. The contrast between Ōta's affirmed male machismo and his actual feminized behaviour emphasizes its femininity even more clearly.

4.2 Hitomi as the Unconventional Woman

I suggest that while Ōta keeps feminizing Hitomi through relating her to the traditional female image of a 'housewife' in patriarchy, the narrative positions Hitomi as the masculine part in their heterosexual relationship. She is the empowered part in it as she makes Ōta wait to begin with. While Ōta claims that "Hitomi loves melodrama" (*merodorama zuki na Hitomi*) (Abe 1999b:144), the narrative points out that "it was exclusively Ōta who got emotional about things" in their relationship (1999b:117). Moreover, it indicates that Hitomi is smarter than Ōta. While it describes her as someone who only looks at the pictures in magazines and does not read the text, the narrative points out her capabilities of "self-analysis" (*jiko bunseki*), a self-awareness which Ōta lacks entirely (see 1999b:116-117). This may be one additional reason for why Ōta's relationships with women are reduced to sexual encounters – it is questionable if this character, who is sketched as all drives, is capable of the self-reflection necessary for experiencing what is called feelings. And it underlines that his

obsession with Hitomi is not based on feelings, but on other motivations such as a competition with her husband, financial dependency, self-validation, and in line with this, maybe the hope for an actual relationship with a woman at all. This also implies what I mentioned earlier, namely that Ōta's success with the other sex, for which he is envied by his same sex peers, is based on his ability to make sexual pursuits, not on his capability of building and maintaining friendships and steady relationships. This in turn underlines what counts for men in the sexual field according to Eva Illouz: her notion of erotic capital is based on cumulative sexual experiences, which upgrades a man's value vis-à-vis his same sex peers (see Illouz 2011:39-114).

Hitomi's most important superiority over Ōta probably is the fact that she possesses more money than him. While Ōta is said to be a man successful with women, this has nothing to do with material wealth: indeed, he borrows money from Hitomi and is indebted to her, which means that he is dependent on her financially (see Abe 1999b:129). His financial dependence on Hitomi may also explain his commitment to her, and him clinging to their relationship, while she mostly is not present.

Ōta is indicated as being weak vis-à-vis a stronger, absent Hitomi. If we are to follow Lauren Berlant, who points out that love always implies non-sovereignty as it means "entering into relationality" at one own's risk, "without guarantees, without knowing what the other side of it is" (Berlant 2011), then it is only Ōta who is non-sovereign as he becomes relational, while Hitomi rather keeps to herself and remains independent. The result stays the same: Ōta acts as if he is in love, Hitomi does not.

I suggest that Hitomi as the strong female character among all the struggling male characters in *Minagoroshi* exemplarily puts into question the patriarchal logic of Japanese society at the time. The narrative clearly makes her stand out through the choice of her name, the only name to be indicated in *kanji,* as mentioned earlier. Only Hitomi's name is put as a logographic *kanji* for 'pupil, eye, sight': 瞳 (*hitomi*). Judith Butler argues that the feminine gaze is a reversal of what traditionally is a male gaze:

> "For that masculine subject of desire, trouble became a scandal with the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency, of a female 'object' who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position." (Butler 1999:vii-viii)

I propose that this is exactly Hitomi's agency in *Minagoroshi*: among all the male subjects of desire, Hitomi is the empowered female object who 'looks back', which is signified by her name 'Eye'. In doing so, Hitomi reverses the gaze of the male subject which objectified her and in turn objectifies the man. The impact of her reversed gaze and its relevance for destabilizing the patriarchal norms becomes all the more relevant as the men in *Minagoroshi*, while not being able to have actual contact with women, *look* at women, and, mostly, take pleasure in it. According to Laura Mulvey, the male gaze is active while the female is the passive object, the looked-at party: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly." (Mulvey 1999;837). In reversing the gaze, Hitomi also reverses these traditional patriarchal power dynamics by turning into the actively looking subject that objectifies men. In other words, Hitomi's name becomes a metaphor for her empowerment in the narrative, in which heterosexual gender relations are structured through the gaze only, as other interaction does not take place. In turn, one could read this not as a neglect but as a theoretic emphasis on the role of the gaze in gender power dynamics. The gaze is an important theoretical discourse here through the topic of gendered surveillance, which is a different accentuation of surveillance from the surveillance in *Individual Projection* (which, while implicitly male, did not involve any power asymmetries between the male and female characters). The male gaze and how the female object reverses this gaze and speaks up to patriarchy is one conceptual angle from which *Minagoroshi* approaches the theme of surveillance.

5. Queer Intimacies: The Male Complaint

I suggest that the narrative's general complication of heterosexual relationships sets the tone for its main scene, the long conversation between Ōta and the unnamed white-collar worker husband, who spies on his wife through a portable computer in the restaurant *Denny's* (and, one may add, the only male in *Minagoroshi*, who, despite his objectifying gaze on the passive/female, does not gain pleasure from looking at her,

but instead suffers through the humiliation of having to witness the adultery of his wife live). The conversation between Ōta and the husband oscillates between companionship and competition. For all its ambivalence, it is the only real human connection, which the narrative describes. Laura Kipnis opposes the one-night stand to the affair, in that the former is a collision of bodies "in relatively impersonal ways", while the latter involves

> "exchanges of intimacy, reawakened passion, confession, and idealization – along with books, childhood stories, marital complaints, and self – often requiring agonizing consultation with close friends, because one or both parties are married or committed to long-term monogamy with someone else; all this merging and ardor taking place in nervous, hard-worn secrecy and turning your world upside down." (Kipnis 1998:29)

Accordingly, only the affair allows for intimacy. However, in *Minagoroshi* exclusively Ōta's world appears turned upside down, while Hitomi, the actual married party in their affair, deals with it rather as if it was a one-night stand. As a result, I suggest, the intimacy in their affair is one-sided; while Ōta acts intimately, Hitomi rather appears impersonal.

By contrast, the narrative describes a scene of intimacy when Ōta meets said white-collar worker husband, who watches his wife's adultery on a computer at *Denny's*. Lauren Berlant generally defines intimacy as communication; intimacy is contingent on verbal or gestural exchanges between two parties, who thus create an attachment between them:

> "To intimate is to communicate with the sparest signs and gestures, and at its roots intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity. But intimacy also involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way." (Berlant 1998:281)

I propose that intimacy in *Minagoroshi* unfolds through communication: a narrative about something shared, a personal story.[85] Ironically, 'something shared' here is both the actual wife of the husband and Ōta's projected 'wife' Hitomi.

[85] Alison Alexy argues that due to the postwar stem family system (*ie seido*), "for much of the postwar period, a responsible and loving father might demonstrate his feelings by working so hard as to remove himself from a family's daily life (…). Love, care and intimacy were demonstrated through behaviors that might, at first, seem to include non of those feelings." (Alexy 2018a:3). Since the 2000s though, Alexy argues, marital counselors have increasingly emphasized the importance of communication for

The restaurant is a space known for being part of the public sphere, yet at the same time serviced to the fulfilment of private desires and needs. Moreover, the restaurant as a public space presupposes a notion of intimacy that cannot help but contain a confrontation with its antithetic concept 'public'. Lauren Berlant coins the notion of intimate public spaces as an expression of "affective commons" (Berlant/Greenwald 2012:77)[86], "constituted by strangers who consume common texts and things" (Linke 2011:16). Jay Prosser narrows down the concept as follows:

> "What we might take from her notion of intimate publics are both the strangers formed into communities by affective ties; and the assumption of shared emotions and worldviews that precede, create, and then often render anxious and ambivalent such publics. (…) the force of this concept is to grasp intimate and public not in some relation of antithesis (which common sense or intuition would have), but as absolutely intricated." (Jay Prosser 2011:180)

Moreover, Gabriele Linke observes that "self-disclosure also plays an important part in Berlant's concept of intimate publics:

> I do not mean a public sphere organized by autobiographical confession and chest-baring, although there is often a significant amount of first-person narration in an intimate public. What makes a public sphere intimate is an expectation that the consumers of its particular stuff *already* share a world view and emotional knowledge that they have derived from a broadly common historical experience. A certain circularity structures an intimate public, therefore: its consumer participants are perceived to be marked by a commonly lived experience. (…) So if, from a theoretical standpoint, an intimate public is a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted through the general, what's salient for its consumers is that it is a place of recognition and reflection. (Female viii)" (Linke 2011:16)

In *Minagoroshi*, Ōta's and the man's intimacy in the public sphere of a restaurant is based on them *already* sharing the emotional knowledge of their common experience with adultery. According to Minagoroshi's narrative, adultery is a cultural phenomenon in Japan at the time, a *social pattern*, and as such, part of a shared cultural memory (see Abe 1999b:116). In describing Ōta's and Hitomi's adulterous relationship, the narrative indicates:

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creating marital intimacy (see Alexy 2018b:93). *Minagoroshi* speaks to this cultural narrative on the importance of communication for creating intimacy.

[86] Jordan Greenwald rephrases Berlant's own statement as "the affectivity of being in common" (Berlant/Greenwald 2012:78).

> "His partner was a woman named Hitomi. Radically speaking they were in a relationship of adultery. While Ōta Tatsuyuki had no wife, Hitomi had a husband. Hitomi, who is said to have married right after college, still had a lot of exploring to catch up with and thus had met Ōta on some night out. Hitomi had met him in a discotheque while her husband was on a business trip and they had done it once that time and ended up doing it again a couple of times after that. Recently such examples appear quite often and various media are saying they are typically contemporary images of coupledom." (Abe 1999b:116)

In other words, the typical couple in 1990s Japan is an unofficial one, an impossible one, an image of the impossibility of love and commitment. This may read as yet another description of interhuman relationships being reduced to the satisfaction of drives, not to the pursuit of one's feelings, such as love. I suggest that Ōta's and the man's *already* shared emotional knowledge makes their mutual projections possible and enables the dramaturgical conflict that arises from it. I second Lauren Berlant, furthermore, in that the narrative does indeed highlight the significance of autobiographical confession and first-person narration for the creation of intimacy, as the white-collar worker husband intimates his story to Ōta. In my opinion, this confession feminizes the man by definition of its speech pattern. Lauren Berlant explains how the complaint is a typically female discourse in patriarchy: "Everyone knows what the female complaint is: women live for love, and love is the gift that keeps on taking." (Berlant 2008:1) Accordingly, the complaint is seen as a typically female speech pattern. Like Barthes' 'duelling discourse', which I have analysed in Chapter 3 on *Amerika no yoru*, the 'female complaint' is homosocial speech, albeit this time among women. Similar to duelling discourse, the women, by sharing their complaint about a male lover amongst each other, disrupt the privacy of their relationship with this lover: "The lover's complaint is always an implicit rupture of privacy, an admission that private communication no longer works." (Berlant 1988:243). However, instead of competing with each other (as would be the case in male duelling discourse), the women create an attachment; complaining is a bonding experience. Interestingly, in *Minagoroshi* we have the case of a *male complaint*: the restaurant husband complains about his wife to Ōta, which, I argue, feminizes him to the extent that he has to resort to the radical masculine acts of violence and killing in

order to reclaim his masculinity. His complaint creates an attachment with Ota, which I analyse as intimacy.

In the following, I will analyse their conversation for its dialectic of connection and competition. I argue that while it indeed establishes an intimate relationship between Ōta and the man in the public sphere of *Denny's*, their intimacy is ambivalent: on the one hand, both men find comfort in each other. On the other hand, their closeness leads to them projecting their internal conflicts onto each other, which ultimately leads to a fatal unravelling of their meeting.

5.1 Connection and Confession

The man sits right next to Ōta and has a portable computer. Ōta starts talking to the man watching the screen of his computer and asks him why he comes to the restaurant, when he does not eat. The man replies he is not hungry and returns his gaze on the computer screen immediately. Ōta aks himself if the fact that the man has come here without any appetite for food means that he is skipping work. Ōta's curiosity is aroused: he cannot understand why the man skips work and comes to the restaurant when he is not hungry. Ōta asks him: "What are you watching?" This time, the man looks up immediately, but does not seem to understand the meaning of Ōta's question. To the man's answer "Huh?", Ōta points at the portable computer to which the man answers "Oh…", smiles strangely and replies: "This… I am watching what is going on at home… you know…" The man turns the screen towards Ōta so that he can see it. Ōta recognizes a living room of a private house. He concludes from "what is going on at home", that this must be one room of the man's house. Ōta concludes that this is a man with strange hobbies. The man does not seem bothered by Ōta's curiosity at all, so Ōta decides to inquire on him further. (See Abe 1999b:147-149)

This motivation for Ōta beginning the conversation is explained in quite a lot of detail. I suggest that this long forerun may reflect Ōta's homosexual panic, in the sense that he justifies to himself his interest in talking to this man: he is anxious of what this

interest could *imply*. In other words, he is afraid of his own possible homosexual attraction to the man. According to Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick:

> "So-called 'homosexual panic' is the most private, psychologized form in which many twentieth-century Western men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail; even for them, however, that is only one part of control, complementary to public sanctions through the institutions described by Foucault and others as defining and regulating the amorphous territory of 'the sexual'." (Kosofsky-Sedgwick 1985:89)

Correspondingly, the man all of a sudden stops watching the screen of his computer and turns his gaze on Ōta. To which Ōta gruffly replies: "What?" Which is answered by "Do you have time right now?" Ōta reacts by being afraid that the man could intend to pick him up. He articulates this thought manifestly as if joking. (See Abe 1999b:150) The latent content of his words though, seems to ask if this is not a homosexual panic expressing itself there. This idea is underscored by the fact that Ōta's latent anxiety is followed by a manifest self-assurance of the man not possibly having any interest in him: "However, from his perspective, I might appear puzzling as well. In any case, I am restless, and I look terribly unhealthy and my clothes are dirty from sweat and vomit." Thus, Ōta assures himself that the man *cannot* be interested in him, due to his own bad looks and dirty clothing. The narrative then indicates that, as Ōta is not perfectly free, he replies: "Well, I'm waiting for someone." (1999b:150) Note that 'I am waiting for someone' meaning 'I am not free', also could signify 'free' in a figurative sense of the word.

Ōta decides to let the man join him, as sitting alone would make him uncomfortable. Again, the narrative alludes to a homosocial attraction through the notion of the Japanese word *aiseki* (1999b:150). *Aiseki* means 'sitting at the same table'. However, its *kanji* 相席 allows for an ambivalent reading of it: 相 alone means 'mutual, together' and is also included in a similar constellation in the word for 'partner', *aikata* 相方. Moreover, one could argue that in telling himself that he does not know if and when Hitomi will show up, Ōta *justifies to himself* being approached by the man. If out of the fear of his own homosocial attraction, or just because he is socially hesitant in general, Ōta has reservations in letting the man enter his space and come physically

close to him. Ultimately though, he lets it happen and the two men reluctantly approach each other. In doing so, they enter their projected erotic triangle, in which Ōta stands for the lover and the man for the husband of their mutual non-committal women.

The man says "Thanks" and a smile emerges on his face. He thus seems to be genuinely grateful for the company, which could imply that he is not used to it generally. Indeed, Ōta feels that there is something pitiful about this man. Being curious about why the man is watching the screen of a computer at a restaurant, Ōta asks: "Are you doing that as a hobby or something?" The man replies: "Not as a hobby." He does not seem bothered by Ōta's question, rather pleased that someone has asked him. As if to second that, he asks Ōta; "Are you interested? In what I'm doing here?" Ōta, opposed to what he is really thinking, thinks he has to hold himself back here and replies, "Not interested, no." But the man, as if he had turned into a different person, begins to actively start speaking. Thus, he is depicted as having a desire to tell his story, even despite Ōta claiming to be uninterested. Accordingly, the man has a longing to connect; all we get to know about his wife is that he is only able to see her on the computer screen. She obviously does not listen to him. Indeed, the man voices his *need* for confession to Ōta: "No problem, you came just right, really. In fact, I just was looking for someone to listen to me." (See Abe 199b:151-152)

The story of the man begins with 'America'. Thus, the narrative establishes an instant connection between the two, in linking them through their common topic of interest 'America'. Through this common topic, both strangers form a community by affective ties; deprived of intimacy in their heterosexual relationships, they create a homosocial attachment amongst each other. While the man starts talking, his gaze is turned towards the computer screen all the time. Through the detour over 'America', he starts addressing the topic of surveillance. (See Abe 1999b:154-155)

"You know what a babysitter is?" he asks Ōta and explains this manner of child caring not ubiquitous in Japan to the younger man. What his story really aims at though, is the detail, which he saw on TV, namely that American families have started installing surveillance cameras in their children's bedrooms in order to monitor the babysitters. This is to make sure that the babysitters do not physically abuse the

children while their parents are away. Ōta inquires: "Why is a surveillance camera American?" To which the man replies: "Don't you feel like that? This separating between two realities? And this thorough pragmatism…" To which Ōta replies: "What? I thought it was because it is the land of the FBI or CIA." In doing so, he addresses the surveillance through these American intelligence services.[87] To which the man replies in turn: "Right, this also plays into it", and adds that while watching the news on TV, he thought he was watching fictional images from TV serials. In doing so, the man addresses the virtual reality invoked by surveillance images, which he consumes as if they were fictional.[88] (See Abe 1999b:154-155)

After thus introducing Ōta to the topic of surveillance, the man gradually links this topic to his personal situation. The following passage recounts Ōta's slow initiation into the man's private affairs, which begins with his initial genuine interest in the question of why the man is watching the screen of his portable computer alone and in public. I suggest that the passage, in depicting how the surveillance takes place on the one hand and how estranged Ōta reacts to the man secretly spying on his wife on the other, makes a problem of surveillance itself. Ōta first doubts that the man tells him all this in order to lead over to his own story, which entails that he has installed surveillance at his own home for protecting his children. Yet, the man lets him know that he has no children, but a wife. By consequence, Ōta's curiosity as to why the man watches the screen of a portable computer in a restaurant is aroused to the extent that everything else becomes secondary. For the first time, one observes that Ōta forgets his obsession for Hitomi's calls over his curiosity to understand why the man spies on his wife. In other words, for the first time, he is distracted from Hitomi and has a full connection with the man. (See Abe1999b:156) Ōta speculates that the fact that the man

[87] As a variation from the short story, in the Manga *Minagoroshi* (2007) the man in the park in the end thinks about running amok and then accesses the US Pentagon through online hacking with the words: "This is going to be a massacre." (See Abe/Miyake 2007:110-112)

[88] A much-discussed example of recent media history is the setting in scene of the Gulf War like a fictional war entertainment by American TV news stations (CNN serially reported on the war). Abe discusses this issue in his 2011 short story on the Gulf War, *Geronimo-E, KIA*, which appeared in 2013 in the volume *Deluxe Edition* (see Abe 2013:13-47).

has a wife means that she could be at home right now. This man secretly spies on what his wife is doing. As if he has guessed Ōta's thoughts, the man points at his portable computer and states the following: "Here, that is my wife." The narrative hints at an almost telepathic connection here between the two men, by suggesting the husband "has read Ōta's thoughts" (see 1999b:156). The man introduces his wife to Ōta as if she was sitting right next to him. He carries her with him wherever he goes. In a way, through the mediation of a technical item, he is thus able to be closer to her than in real life, where you cannot always have people with you all the time. I suggest that situation expresses all the marital loneliness of the man: there seems to be a desire to be with his wife, a preoccupation that is unrequited, as a) she is not with him in person and b) even on the screen she is not occupied with him, but with another man. While he obviously struggles to have access to her life by carrying her with him on a portable computer, coming to a restaurant not in order to eat but to keep watching her, she does not have him on her mind at all. (See Abe 1999b:157)

By contrast, I suggest that the narrative points out yet again how close Ōta and the man feel to each other in the following passage: after being initiated into the fact that the man spies on his wife in public, Ōta acknowledges the abnormality of the situation by asking himself why someone would do that. His confusion is doubled by the meaningful statement that he could "think of a couple of possible reasons for it. Even though not many." (1999b:157) Ōta thinks maybe the husband's wife has already given her agreement on being watched, which would explain the marital surveillance as a sexual fetish. Nevertheless, his confusion at the surveillance remains, as he adds: "Or rather, he hoped that it would be that way." (1999b:158) Despite his general confusion, Ōta feels he gets sexually aroused about the prospect of possibly becoming privy to the couple's marital intimacy. However, the man begins an entirely different confession, when he starts explaining why he spies on his wife. Namely, because he wants a proof for her marital infidelity. I suggest that both Ōta's and the husband's reactions again show how close they feel to each other in that Ōta expects to be initiated into sexual details of the husband's marital intimacy, while the husband opens up to Ōta about his failed marriage, which is why he spies on his wife in public. In fact, the

choice of a public space such as a family restaurant for this intimate conversation as well as the privacy of an act such as a husband spying on his wife at all, foregrounds the actually private nature of both even more and highlights the conflict between their privacy and the public space of a restaurant in general.

Ōta sees on the computer screen, unclear and positioned far away from the camera, a single woman who appears to be ten years younger than the man, watching TV while eating some snack. So here the second main female character is introduced within the story of *Minagoroshi*. In highlighting that she is "necessarily only a projection on a display", the narrative makes sure to point out the virtualness of her appearance, the fact that she is merely an image here, projected on a technical item such as the display of a portable computer (see Abe 1999b:157). At the same time, the description reads like a *mise-en-abîme* in spectatorship: the men are watching the husband's wife, who is watching a fictional TV show, series, film or quasi-fictional TV format. This doubled gaze turns attention to the *fictionality* of the situation to begin with. Moreover, the chain of watching, from the surveillance images on the portable computer to the TV images, seems to put both media into a relationship with each other; surveillance is depicted like a consume of images similar to how other people watch TV. It seems to put into question the blending into each other of surveillance and entertainment, which is the principle of reality TV.

The man begins his confession: "Well, as I have already told you a lot, I'll tell you everything then. Or, rather, as I said earlier, I somehow want you to listen to my story. And then I would like to hear your opinion on that, or whatever, to hear what you think about it." After this introduction, the man begins to explain why he is secretly spying on his wife. Ōta still first and foremost remains sceptical about the surveillance itself, which the narrative clarifies within the statement: "For Ōta, [all of] this was not more than a stupid story, neither interesting nor anything." (1999b:158) 'Stupid story' is a strong judgement, which contains an audible criticism by Ōta on the man spying on his wife. Interestingly, Ōta's critical perspective, who has a criminal record of theft and fraud, even enforces the criticism of surveillance in the narrative, in the sense of: 'If even Ōta criticizes it…'.

The man recounts the story of his wife's adultery: accordingly, his wife has a lover and their relationship allegedly continues to this day. "I became aware of it about one month ago", the man says while he turns his gaze onto the computer screen once again. "But it seems my wife had started doing this even a while before that and three months have passed since. I am rather of the numb kind and did not understand what was going on at all. My wife made use of that and lived her affair to the fullest. I was told by a woman from the neighborhood that she kept taking a man home. My wife (*uchi no yatsu*) is not really well-seen by the neighbours. This is why rumours spread quickly." The man looks at Ōta now with his gaze turned upwards; again he is in his own world as much as he is in the conversation with Ōta. Ōta's suspicion grows. The man replies: "You'll probably know by now." Then he returns his gaze to his computer and adds: "That I am watching that." (See Abe 1999b:159)

I suggest that the following passage aims at psychologizing the man's decision of spying on his wife and at making the unorthodox choice of such a step look more understandable. The man, who was thus informed about the cheating by someone in the neighbourhood, did not believe it immediately and was looking for something like a proof, but was not able to find anything decisive. He thought it might be a rumour to betray him. As his wife was so unpopular with the neighbourhood it would have not surprised him. The man recounts that once the suspicion of his wife cheating on him had taken hold of him, his paranoia was triggered (he did not know what was true or false anymore) and their marital communication became complicated. Every little thing came to look like a proof for the adultery and while the man's hallucinations became stronger, he was not able to make a decision on the problem. Accordingly, the man's first reason for resolving to spy on his wife was that he thought he could not make a decision unless he had seen his wife actually committing adultery. (See 1999b:160)

The narrative subsequently suggests a second reason for the man's transgression by asking if he is mentally challenged. In doing so, through yet another argumentative turn, it puts into question the normalcy of the situation by suggesting that the man's story is simply not true and a result of his paranoia. For a minute, Ōta

thinks that maybe all of this is solely a product of the hallucinations of the husband (see 1999b:161). Because ultimately he said that his suspicion was based only on what the neighbours had said, he could not find any tangible proof. Even the testimony of the neighbour could be just a hallucination. Yet, the man himself insists that he was in need of a proof as he was not able to find one, and was desperately trying to find out whether the rumours were true. What seems remarkable here is the fact that the man did not do the obvious: he did not ask his wife. This may be a reflection of their specific marital problems, which have been behind her decision of adultery. In any case, the man explicitly states that he, while going mad, did not choose to simply ask his wife. Emma E. Cook notes that lack of communication is a characteristic of stereotypical Japanese marriages since the post-war period: "Notions of duty and obligation have been in the foreground, with companionate intimacy little acknowledged or discussed. Indeed, Matthews (2003) has noted that Japanese marriages have not emphasized the importance of communication between spouses." (Cook 2014:4) If intimacy is communication, as Berlant states, then there is no intimacy in the marriage of the restaurant husband and his cheating wife.

Ōta still doubts whether the man has told him the truth and continuously questions the validity of possible motives behind the situation. He wonders if maybe this man had just told him a lot of nonsense. (See Abe 1999b:162) Thus, Ōta keeps incorporating the part of the critical viewer of surveillance. By contrast, the man's subsequent testimony further serves at legitimizing his actions by psychologizing them. Thus, he explains his motivation of needing to see his wife commit adultery:

> "I needed a decisive proof. In other words, I needed to see the scene of the adultery. I had no other choice but to verify it with my own eyes. And this was when I remembered the surveillance videos, which showed the infant abuse of the American babysitters, you know, the hidden surveillance cameras. I thought this is the only possible option. I am not really familiar with these things. But nowadays, there are quite a few manuals sold as books. And when I had a look at one of them I read that you have to go to Akihabara and you'd get everything you need. And then the employee in the shop explained everything really well, so the surveillance could be done smoothly. The first time I tried it out was Sunday, the day before yesterday. I tried it with an UHF frequency. On channel 15, I believe it was. (?) The camera was one of those small CCD cameras, I installed it in some lightning tech in the house, so it is hidden well enough to not be discovered. Actually I was asked yesterday, what is that, and I got quite nervous. The

> images are unclear and dark. The reception is bad. Ah, my house is behind that and that right over there." (1999b:162-163)

However, I suggest, the man's testimony does not serve at making his actions and situation more understandable; on the contrary, the fact that he sits in a restaurant right around the corner of his own house and spies on his wife from there make both appear fully ridiculous if anything. It clarifies the absurdity of his acts: he sits in walking distance from his own house, he is almost close enough to talk to his wife, or even spy through a window, but he uses all this ridiculous surveillance equipment (1999b:163).

While talking about all this, the man at some point lifts up his face and looks at Ōta, scanning his expression. It seems as if he wants to examine Ōta for possible expressions of surprise, but Ōta who has not expected this turn of events does not disclose any reaction. I suggest that with both men facing each other, the narrative begins to evoke the projected erotic triangle between Ōta, the man and their respective absent women. It does so by subsequently describing Ōta's identification with the husband's wife's lover. Ōta's identification sometimes makes him suspicious about actually *being* the lover, but this suspicion is left at the invocation of a projection without turning into the usual paranoid delusion common for Abe's male protagonists. Accordingly, Ōta's heart takes a leap at the information that the man's wife is cheating on him. In self-referential awareness, the narrative spells out its dramaturgical pun, when it adds that Ōta's astonishment of course is owed to the fact that he *himself* is the lover of another's husband's wife. (See Abe 1999b:158) 'Of course' reads as free indirect speech in that particular sentence – it could be Ōta, who becomes aware of the irony of the situation himself, which makes his heart leap in turn, or Ōta believes to have actually met Hitomi's husband in person. However, the statement could as well be attributed the voice of the narrator who self-ironically comments on the obviousness of *Minagoroshi*'s dramaturgy here. In any case, the self-referentiality of the passage means that we have a mirror situation: the husband tells his story within the narrator's story of Ōta, which is a similar story within a story, in that it tells Ōta's story from the opposite angle.

5.2 Competition and Projection

In the next part of the story, Ōta fully projects his own struggle with his personal situation on the man. The narrative first indicates this projection by describing how Ōta does not disclose his astonishment to the man, but keeps his expression and smokes a cigarette. And while smoking, he becomes incredibly relaxed and even begins feeling superior. This feeling of superiority slowly changes into open disdain for the man. (See 1999b:160) I suggest that Ōta projects his own inferiority complex vis à vis Hitomi's husband on the man – which seconds the hypothesis that Ōta's motivation is not so much to win over Hitomi herself, but to outrival a competitor who is superior in material wealth in the sexual field. The narrative's opposition of white-collar-workers and unemployed part-timers exemplarily materializes here in Ōta's and the man's subsequent competition. Indeed, both consciously bring up these categories themselves, which means that they perceive their respective opposite masculinities through the labels of these sociotypes. Accordingly, Ōta, immediately finds the man in the restaurant "white-collar-like" (*sararīman-fū*; Abe 1999b:178). Moreover, the man is identified by the narrative as a white-collar worker through the indication that he is wearing a "suit" (*sūtsu sugata*), the typical attire of 'white-collar' workers (1999b:185). In turn, later on, the man, without hesitation, without even considering any other option, instantly calls his wife's lover a "student or a *freeter*" (*gakusei ka furīta ka*) (1999b:166). Thus, when addressing male adulterers in 1990s Japan, the husband brings up students or *freeters*, precisely men who are not in regular employment and, one has to add, younger in age and, thus, potentially more physically attractive to the other sex. As a result, the husbands are the cheated-on group within the imagination of the adulterer Ōta and the flexible workers are the group of adulterers within the imagination of the cheated on husbands.

I suggest that their conflict addresses an inherent paradox to the concepts of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, which R.W. Connell points out himself:

> "Marriage, fatherhood and community life often involve extensive compromises with women rather than naked domination or an uncontested display of authority. A great many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers, are

> never violent towards women, do their accustomed share of the housework, bring home their family wage, and can easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists." (Connell 1995:79-80)

Minagoroshi evokes a societal pattern of adultery in which husbands are cheated on by their wives. The narrative does not thematize the possibility of husbands cheating on their wives – male marital infidelity in high bubble Japan, institutionalized in the *kyabakura* (cabaret clubs), for example, is not a topic in the story. What *Minagoroshi* sets in scene instead is a husband who, literally, clings to a relationship with his absent wife by carrying her with him in a computer through which he observes her in secret. A husband who spends his days staring at this computer in a seemingly desperate attempt at playing any role in his wife's life, in which he does not seem to be important, from what we hear of their marital life. Who takes the time to do so instead of working. The question is if the husband takes time off work in order to observe his wife, or if he has stopped working in order to do so. Or if he got fired from work because all he did was observe his wife, even at work. This can be read as an expression of the man's despair at the same time as it reflects the sadness of his situation. Whether he quit his job, is taking time off or got fired, observing his wife any minute of the day seems to be paramount to him at the time Ōta meets him the restaurant. The sadness arises from the fact that while his wife seems of primary importance to the man, the logic of his situation clarifies that this is not the case the other way round. The paradox incorporated by the man is that while he is the breadwinner of his marriage, he is not the winner in it. Indeed, he rather seems like its loser. Moreover, by describing Ōta's tactical humiliation of the husband, which seems fuelled by his perception of his projected opponent's miserable appeal, the narrative seems to second Abe's fiction's general question of to what extent stable concepts of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities hold their ground? Or, to what extent their stability is a matter of constant negotiation, as it is destabilized from various perspectives. The narrative speaks to Connell's emphasis:

> "'Hegemonic masculinity' is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable." (Connell 1995:76)

In opposing the white-collar worker husband to the good-for-nothing Ōta, *Minagoroshi* seems to ask which of them is actually the empowered man? And based on what qualities? How is 'hegemonic masculinity' in post-bubble Japan challenged, when the topic of male sexual pursuit enters the equation? How does capital compete with *erotic* capital?

As the whole short story of *Minagoroshi* is entirely focalized through Ōta, apart from the circle structure ending, we never get to know from the restaurant man himself if he responds to Ōta's projection. However, from his physical and verbal reactions and his ultimate surrendering to Ōta's provocations, one can at least deduce that he feels inferior to him. Thus, he seems to respond to Ōta provoking him by wanting to show him that he is a 'real man' after all by killing his adulterous wife in order to reestablish his degraded male honour. As a result, I suggest that the man projects his own marital humiliation on Ōta, as much as Ōta projects his inferiority complexes on the man. Ōta's projection is clarified in a following passage by an interior monologue, which reveals that he sees 'the husbands' as an opposite group. He divides "these husbands who got cheated on by their wives" into two subgroups based on their reactions to the discovery of their wives' cheating on them. One group would think "Ah, I knew it", while the other would react shocked: "What? I can't believe it!" He decides that the man sitting opposite to him belongs to the latter group, which obviously is the less empowered of both; thus, on the one hand, Ōta's interior monologue confirms that he feels of superior vis-à-vis the husband. (See Abe 1999b:160) Still, on the other hand, Ōta's perception of the husbands as an opposite social group to his own underscores that Ōta is aware of the fact that these husbands are different from him: white-collar-worker *husbands* necessarily are married and have regular jobs. We may suggest that this latter inferiority complex of Ōta's reveals an internalized societal logic: white-collar-worker husbands are *able* to marry *because* they have jobs. Indeed, Emma E. Cook points out:

> "Research on delayed marriage points to the fact that men in low-income jobs find it harder to marry than other men (Sweeney 2002), and it is clear in the Japanese context that irregular workers marry less than their regular counterparts. For example, recent surveys suggest that approximately 30% of men in their thirties in regular full-time

> employment were married whereas just 6% of irregularly employed men were (Cabinet Office 2011). Male freeters often have difficulty maintaining long-term romantic relations and transitioning from dating to marriage, in part because of their irregular employment status and low breadwinning ability (Cook 2013; Miura 2007)." (Cook 2014:2)

This has resulted in a what Cook calls "freeter failure dilemma": male freeters tend to feel they are failures in Japanese society, if they do not ultimately take a regular profession in order to establish their marriageability (Cook 2013:30). This is because heterosexual marriage in Japan "is still considered important, 'natural' (*atarimae/shizen*), a part of common sense (*jōshiki*), and an important transition to adulthood. Opting out of, or being unable to marry, therefore often carries the implication that a person is both strange (*hen*) and is not a full adult (Edwards 1990; Lunsing 2001)." (Cook 2013:37) Against this background, we may argue, Ōta compensates for his internalized inferiority complex vis-à-vis these white-collar-worker husbands by enacting the masculine identity of an unmarried, albeit younger and, thus, sexually appealing 'lover', whose erotic capital poses a potential threat to the husband's marital safety. The reverse question would be: is Ōta so successful in the sexual field because he has the *time* to make cumulative conquests while the husbands, who are regularly employed, are too busy working?

In the following, both men's projected conflict gradually escalates. Ōta solidifies his superior attitude and openly starts humiliating the man. The man responds to these humiliations with an ultimate outburst of anger and the exercise of physical violence in an attempt at recuperating his honour. Honour is a masculine emotion, whose opposite is shame. I suggest that both men use the conversation as a negotiation of their mutual male honour. By continuously humiliating the man, Ōta dishonours and emasculates him. In turn, the man reclaims his masculinity in the end through the drastic action of committing a massacre, which both agree would be a genuine masculine reaction to a wife's adultery.

The man lets Ōta know that before resorting to technical monitoring, he actually had found a used condom on the sofa of his living room. To which Ōta thinks that that was a proof which would have fully testified to his wife's adultery. As a result,

Ōta thinks this man is a genuine idiot and openly embarrasses him for the first time with a hitherto undisplayed aloofness: "This is a blatantly conspicuous proof, that. You don't really need a surveillance camera, no? You really are miserable. Your wife is totally cheating on you!" Ōta thinks this will silence the man. (See Abe 1999b:165) However, contrariwise, the man starts speaking actively: "Well, yes, you are right, I'm probably a miserable man, but without getting proof from the scene of adultery itself, I will not be able to confront my wife. A condom is a thing, just a thing. I have not seen the lover myself. I do not know whether he is a student or a *freeter*, I do not know how he looks like! (…)". (Abe 1999b:166) This whole direct speech is a monologue in which the man either performs his exasperation with the situation in order to be able to provide a reason for the surveillance or he is really exasperated.

The growing intensity of both men's exchange is underscored by the information: "The man had looked up." Thus, the man, whose gaze was glued to the screen until now, as the narrative had made sure to point out repeatedly, has finally looked up and "without returning his gaze to the screen of the computer, he continued his speech while facing Ōta. The faces of the two men were covered in sweat." (Abe 1999b:166) The turning of the man's gaze towards Ōta and at the same time, his return of Ōta's gaze towards him, establishes a connection, which changes the men's exchange in intensity and emotional investment into each other. All of a sudden, their faces are covered in sweat, which testifies of their unspoken internal struggles. Both project that their mutual opposite represents their real-life opponents, which explains that they sweat with excitement and expectation, or, threat and fear. Their intimacy is stronger than before and one might suggest that the man's desire for the first time is not focused on his wife anymore, but actually on Ōta. This is physically expressed in the act of facing him, meaning turning his gaze away from his wife and on Ōta.

The husband continues his emotional speech. When he finishes his breathless monologue, Ōta does not feel as if he has to pity him at all. He rather thinks the man is comic and keeps feeling condescending. Relentlessly, Ōta comments: "You really are miserable." Ōta tells the man that he thinks what he does is 'dirty' and that the wife could just as well be innocent. To which the man replies that a condom is sufficient

proof to assume that she is not innocent. To which Ōta replies that then there would be no need for the surveillance and that that is weird. (See 1999b:167-168)

The man listens to Ōta's words and it is not clear if what is running down his cheeks now is sweat or are tears. To which Ōta finally asks him the question, he might have asked earlier: "Why do you tell *me* this story?" (1999b:168) Ōta seems to be suspicious by now of the man and assumes he could be Hitomi's husband. This is the underlying tension of the whole conversation, the suspense which the dramaturgy of the narrative invokes and ambiguates at the same time. The man replies, he was confused by his own situation and thought that it would clear his mind to talk to someone about it. Ōta blows the fume of his cigarette into the man's face and after the man does not reply to his question of if he was able to find a conclusion, Ōta follows up by observing: "See? You cannot do anything about it." Finally, the man gets angry as well and yells back at Ōta: "So? What would you do? What would you do in my position?" Ōta, who has expected that answer, replies laughing: "Me? Well, I don't really care about these things." (See Abe 1999b:169)

Ōta thinks there is no need to give a proper answer to that. Or, put differently, he, who is the lover of another man's wife, has never thought about what he would do if put into this other man's shoes. He can just think about being as truthful to his feelings as possible. Thus, he replies the following:

> "Well, wouldn't I just kick their asses? I mean, this is what most men do, no? If their women are stolen from them? This is also what people in TV *doramas* do. One of my friends actually almost killed his woman and the guy she was cheating with. So, beat the shit out of them! Until they are almost dead!" (Abe 1999b:170)

The narrative self-referentially states that it is referencing a fictional narrative on erotic triangles here, in which the conflict between the two competing men is solved by the cheated-on side using violence against the cheater, which is what the husband then does himself in the end, when he beats his cheating wife and her lover to pieces. Ōta suggesting this use of violence is expressive of how he understands his masculinity; like Tadao in *Amerika no yoru*, Ōta dreams up a masculine ideal in which violence is an empowered reaction for a man, a form of communication. The irony of *Minagoroshi* is that, while Ōta gives such advice and performs such an embodied masculinity, the

narrative repeatedly states that Ōta actually is physically not in the condition to use violence against anyone (Abe 1999b:144); in fact, Ōta is a man who runs away, not a man who confronts; in the end, he runs away from the scene of violence he himself induced through teasing the husband, thus, contradicting himself. (Abe 1999b:203-205).

What follows is a metafictional passage of the narrative in which it comments on its own dramaturgical pun of a projected conflict between Ōta and the husband, which I called mirror situation earlier in my own words. The narrative uses the language of psychoanalysis. Thus, Ōta slowly understands why he is so angry: Ōta, or rather, Ōta's subconscious (*muishiki*) had juxtaposed the man in front of him and Hitomi's husband, even though he could not exactly say since when. This seems to be the narrator's voice here, who identifies with Sigmund Freud, rather than Ōta himself. The narrative is almost a little ironic in this passage, in explaining the obvious to a reader whom it apparently expects to be intellectual, or initiated into the discourses it references. Thus, while the style of the narration gets easier to read in Abe's early works after *Individual Projection*, the narrative of *Minagoroshi* seems to still presuppose a certain initiation in intellectual thought. The narrative makes itself very clear here: it specifies that for Ōta the other man was like an enemy and that he was "the double of Hitomi's husband" (*Hitomi no otto no bunshin*). (See Abe 1999b:173)

Furthermore, in this self-referential passage, the narrative spells out what may have been obvious to the reader anyway. Based on explaining his projections to himself, Ōta concludes that he is but someone who is put in second place whenever Hitomi's husband is able to take time off, despite being the lover Hitomi spends her off time with. Even though unsure whether that thought is true, Ōta realizes that it is what he has come to believe in recent days. He also comprehends that this is what has kept making him angry during this time. Again, 'anger' (*ikidōri*) is the emotion verbalized by the narrative. At the same time, Ōta's desire (*yokkyū*, not *yokubō*) to make Hitomi his own grows day by day. Characteristically, it is *desire* which is indicated by the narrative, not feelings. Also, the impression that Ōta wants to possess Hitomi for his

own sake, not for hers, is underscored by the wording '*jibun no mono ni shitai*'. (See Abe 1999b:173)

The husband brings Ōta back to reality. A reality that still clarifies to him painfully that the person Hitomi has chosen to spend her husband's off time with is her husband, not him. Based on the fact that within Ōta, her husband and the man are juxtaposed by projection, the narrative indicates that Ōta's feeling of defeat, as the one not selected, begins to grow. (Note that the noun '*haibokukan'* for 'feeling of defeat' brings in a notion of feelings after all here). In other words, Ōta, seeing Hitomi's husband in the husband before him, feels he has lost out to an utterly miserable man. Indeed, Ōta is disturbed by the realization that the woman he has been aspiring to make his own by all means, "had chosen an idiot who was not even worth a piece of shit." (1999b:174) The only thing that improves Ōta's mood at this point is the fact that he believes he has said whatever he wanted to say to this man without even being contradicted. He even regrets maybe having said too much. The man still does not say anything and remains "as stiff as a stone statue". (1999b:174) His gaze is turned downwards and he is still watching the computer screen with weirdly widened eyes. He has wiped off the sweat dripping from his face cleanly. He bites his lip just a bit. After a while, the man finally opens his mouth: "You think I really cannot do anything right?" Upon which unfolds a heated dialogue, in which Ōta thinks, "Wow, I really have made him angry now." (1999b:176) He did not expect that reaction and thinks that the situation has turned bothersome.

Overall, Ōta, by humiliating an already humiliated man, ultimately provokes a reaction. I would assume that the man equally projects his own conflict on Ōta, even though I repeat that we never get to know his perspective on the conversation. We are only told about his bodily reactions, such as sweat (bodily metaphors substitute an invocation of feelings here). In fact, I suggest that the man, while the passage is never focalized through him, speaks through body language: his gaze, him sweating, or crying. Finally, the man downs a glass of water and replies that even he is able to half-kill someone. To which he stands up and hands the computer over to Ōta telling him to look after it, while he would "go and do it". (1999b:176) The screen shows the wife

and a young man sitting on a sofa, half-naked, which makes Ōta think that this is a scene of adultery after all. The man says: "What do you mean? I will kill them!" This links over to Ōta's direct inner monologue: "He is serious! I have to stop him!" He tries to stop the man but he hears a familiar voice yelling at him. (See Abe 1999b:177)

The scene makes a cut and then follows up on this *blanc* with the information that Takeda and two of his friends, who obviously have arrived at *Denny's* in their search for Ōta, are having a a pork cutlet. Ōta looks at the screen of the computer, anticipating what is to going happen soon, fearing the pornography visible at the moment could turn into a "splatter movie" real soon. (See 1999b:178) The narrative uses *'supurattā mūbī'*, as an explicit reference to fictional film genres, which is self-referential, as much as it foregrounds the virtualness of the reality shown on screen. At the same time, Ōta, by indication of what he says here, consumes this virtual reality like just another fictional movie. This links back to an indication of surveillance as spectacle, which I addressed earlier. From the angle of the short story's dramaturgy, Ōta thus watches the murder of the wife and her lover by the man in real-time live. What follows now is a narrative exploitation of exactly the possibility that an incorporation of the topic of surveillance in that form offers for a dramaturgy, namely the creation of parallel realities. While Ōta is being beaten by Takeda and the other men, he simultaneously keeps watching on the computer how the wife and her lover are being butchered by the man. That is what the title obviously references: a massacre.

The massacre itself is detailed throughout two pages, as Ōta witnesses the scene where a man with his face painted in black in a suit beats the wife with a stick. At the same time, as he watches the scene under his table, he maintains a conversation with Takeda and the other men. At some point, the man disappears from the computer screen, only to turn up at the restaurant instead, smeared in blood with the baseball bat he used as a weapon. (See Abe 1999b:183) The man, obviously the husband from earlier, starts shouting at Ōta: "What?! This is not funny! What am supposed to do now? I have done it! I have done it because I thought you were watching! What now?! How much do you have to ridicule me in order to be satisfied?" (1999b:187) In fact, the man acts as if he has something to prove to *Ōta*; this is a reflection, yet again, that

the husband projects his own conflict on Ōta as much as Ōta projects his conflict on the husband: showing Ōta that he is capable of killing the couple is showing 'the lover' of his wife that he himself is not the loser that 'the lover' implies him to be. This whole exchange between the husband and Ōta is yet another substitute for their actual conflicts with other people.

The scene ends in a bloodbath, which repeats the one that has just taken place in the virtual reality of the husband's home. Takeda interrupts the conversation asking what is going on. The husband and Takeda start arguing and the husband strikes Takeda with his baseball bat. Takeda falls from his seat, his face covered in blood. The people around them start screaming in terror. Meanwhile, the man smashes Hirota's head as well, then lets the bat rain down on the table and collapses on it. Gaffers gather around the table and one of them calls for an ambulance. Ōta slowly walks away from the table and tries to sneak out, when finally the restaurant owner catches him and asks him if the husband is an acquaintance of Ōta's, which Ōta denies. What follows is the depiction of the chaos inside the restaurant. It ends with the narrative's realization that Ōta has disappeared.

Ōta meets with Hitomi, who runs away from him after a disagreement over whether she has to pay him the money for the watch. The story closes with an epilogue from the perspective of the man Ōta had met in the park.

6. Conclusion

The narrative of *Minagoroshi* thus sets in scene a common conflict of Abe's early fiction by looking into the homosocial worlds of men. It revisits the complications of male sociality discussed in its previous works from the angle of a different character constellation. The latter serves to tackle the issue of shifting masculinities in 1990s Japan from a variety of social stereotypes: the narratives of Abe's early fiction present us with different '*freeters*' and thus unfold a heterogenous literary counter-discourse on various modes of precarious living of young men in post-bubble Japan. I suggest that as a novelty to the discussion, it introduces the opposite sociotype of the white-

collar worker, who is represented by the husband in the restaurant. The literary counter-discourse of *Minagoroshi* destabilizes the perception that the white-collar worker always and necessarily is the powerful sociotype as he represents hegemonic masculinity according to the cultural narratives on masculinities. It does so by showing us a husband who is everything else but empowered. Like Tadao in *Amerika no yoru*, the husband compensates for his lack of agency by resorting to physical violence as he kills his wife and her lover, and injures Ōta's pursuers in the restaurant. Again, the narrative thematizes the question of what masculinity is in making a problem of male insecurities and self-affirmation. At the same time, it renegotiates the conflict between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities through setting in scene a confrontation between exactly these two stereotypes, which are represented through Ōta and the horned husband. In doing so, it opposes the notions of financial capital and erotic capital and asks how important the latter is for male self-confidence: in fact, the narrative can be read as a reevaluation of 'erotic capital' vis à vis capital *per se*. As a result, it suggests that there is a way for *freeters* to empower themselves and counter their dominant cultural narrative.

As I have indicated in the chapter, Emma Cook points out the significance of capital for Japanese traditional notions of heterosexual relationships: heterosexual marriage was enabled by the man having the economic potency to be the breadwinner; in turn, this qualification made the man eligible for women. Thus, heterosexual relationships prioritized capital over personal issues such as sympathy for the other, having things in common etc. The husband's and Hitomi's marriage reflects this traditional model clearly. This conflict between emotional attachment and economic and social concerns defines marriages of male freeters in Japan to this day. Male freeters express their desire for intimacy in heterosexual relationships more. Yet, "looking for relationships that prioritize emotional satisfaction over economic and social considerations, individuals in Japan are taking a middle way that incorporates structural considerations and normative expectations (…)." (2014:7). Nevertheless, male freeters remain attached to the traditional marital role of being the breadwinner, "putting in the caveat that what would ultimately happen in marriage would depend on

social and economic factors." (2014:13). As a result, capital appears as a paramount prerequisite for forming intimate heterosexual relationships in Japan. I argue that Ōta's story illustrates this conflict of male self-confidence in Japan that is so inextricably linked to economic potency. Erotic capital is discussed in its value to potentially counter the hegemony of capital in Japan. Yet the narrative remains ambiguous about a conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Fukunaga Shin observes that there is a virility (*otokokusasa*) to Abe's prose: it brings to the reader's awareness how vast the scope is of male-dominated spheres, with an intensity that makes the reader forget about the female characters in them (see Abe 2013b:263). I second that in general. However, I argue that if we look closer at Abe's homosocial worlds, we realize that his male characters perform virile masculinities, while actually struggling with these performances. It gives their performances of maleness a tragic veneer which makes the reader want to laugh on not a few occasions, even though that laughter is ambivalent. Indeed, I would relate that the concept of male (anti-)heroism is probably a useful one to apply to an analysis of Abe's early novels and short stories. Overall, Abe's fiction *destabilizes* traditional understandings of masculinities and femininities. Indeed, my dissertation has pointed out that, if anything, Abe's early fiction shows how gender identities are *fluid*. In doing so, I locate Abe's literature as a counter-discourse against cultural narratives on masculinities in 1990s Japan. According to Michel Foucault, literature as a 'counter-discourse' has the potential to oppose dominant cultural narratives by being a fictional forum that allows for transgression (Foucault 2002:48; 1979:91). I see two expressions of such transgression in *Amerika no yoru*, *Individual Projection* and *Minagoroshi*. Firstly, Tadao's, Onuma's, Ōta's and the restaurant husband's exercises of physical violence are transgressions of societal norms according to which such a use of violence is

criminalized by law. Nakamata Akio locates Abe's early fiction within a *diachronic* discourse on violence in Japanese literature since the 1970s (Nakamata 2002:86-87). I would like to sketch a *synchronic* perspective here: against the backdrop of my analysis, I have argued that all men's usages of violence are attempts at affirming archaic images of embodied masculinities. For the narratives suggest that their male characters, being flexible workers, are feminized in society due to their profession. Firstly, because flexible work is a female occupation by tradition and, secondly, because flexible work is opposed to the regular office work associated with hegemonic masculinity (as I explained in the Introduction).

The narratives choose different images for invoking these feminizations: *Amerika no yoru* depicts its protagonist Tadao's homosocial attraction for his same sex competitor Mutō in a heterosexual erotic triangle. *Individual Projection* emphasizes Onuma's fragility through the indication of a vulnerable mental disposition, which includes a psychotic nervous breakdown. *Minagoroshi* describes how a homosocial intimacy develops between Ōta and the restaurant husband. In addition, the narrative feminizes both its male characters building on the trope of 'male waiting'; waiting for a loved person feminizes a man according to Roland Barthes's theory of romantic love. Moreover, 'male waiting' inverses the classic figure of 'female patience' in Japanese prose fiction and poetry.

Ambiguous Masculinities During the 1990s

In doing so, one could suggest, Abe's early fiction speaks to a growing cultural discussion on ambiguous masculinities in Japan during the 1990s. As explained earlier, the burst of the asset price bubble in 1991 and Japan's subsequent socioeconomic downturn gave rise to social dislocation. Gender emerged as the foil on which this general cultural debate unfolded. Indeed, these years of change led to a

> "growing visibility in the public domain of debates about societally dominant discourses of gender, specifically dominant expectations of men. It was really during these years that masculinity as an object of scrutiny really emerged, both in academic and non-academic spaces." (Dasgupta 2009:80)

The 1990s in Japan were a decade of radical flux in male gender identities in Japan. In my dissertation, I focused on a discussion of how the two sociotypes of the white-collar worker (as representing hegemonic masculinity) and of the flexible worker (as representing subordinate masculinity) are related to each other in the fiction of Abe's novels and short stories. I would like to add here that the 1990s witnessed the emergence of a variety of other male sociotypes, most notably feminized ones. Indeed, the hegemonic model of white-collar-worker masculinity was challenged by diverse manifestations of subordinate maleness. One significant figure was that of the 'herbivore male' (*sōshokukei danshi*). This softened male specimen appears as the radical antithesis to traditional hegemonic manliness. According to Ronald Saladin:

> "Hardly any other term that emerged in recent years in Japan has influenced public discourse on so many different levels as much as the expression 'herbivore man'. Fukazawa's aim was to express an allegedly new quality of young men whose most striking characteristic is that they have lost interest in sex and/or in engaging in love relationships with women. Herbivore men are not asexual, but they are not as proactive towards women as men of previous generations were and in the way that is perceived to be normative masculine behaviour in Japan. Sex has become a commonplace act which is initiated by women as well, and which thus makes the idea of the conquering man and conquered woman obsolete. (…) However, even though Fukasawa intended to describe a positive development of young men, the term quickly received a negative connotation and herbivore men are now seen as not being 'proper' men, because they are said to lack assertiveness and ambition. Therefore, they are viewed as a problem for Japanese society and, among other things, connected to shrinking birth and marriage rates as well as Japan's economic downturn." (Saladin 2017)

Thus, the herbivore male as non-competitive man, not interested in the performance of heterosexual male conquest characteristic for the hegemonic masculine man, was a radical subversion of the white-collar-worker narrative. Not surprisingly, herbivore men in fiction tend to be *freeter* not *salarymen*, such as for example the male protagonist of the TV series *Ohitorisama* (The Single Lady) broadcast on TBS in 2009 (see Saladin 2017). The question arises whether the heterosexual disconnection of Abe's male characters speaks to this image as well. In turn, one would have to investigate to what extent Abe's protagonists' main affective feature, their desire, is not a contradiction of the herbivore man's non-competitiveness and lack of sexual appetite? In other words, is 'desire' the key characteristic which differentiates Abe's fictional characters from the herbivore man of the general cultural and media narrative?

Are characters' masculine performances of physical violence a cardinal counter-gesture against his feminine personality?

Within the Homosocial Continuum

While these exercises of violence are transgressions, Tadao's and Ōta's homoerotic obsessions and intimacies with their respective male counter-parts can be discussed as literary transgressions as well. This is because in 1990s Japan, *hetero*sexuality is the norm. In such a heteronormative society, any aberrance of the heterosexual norm, which dictates men and women how to behave and how to feel, is considered a transgression. Thus, a literature which highlights homoeroticisms despite a cultural heterosexual norm is a counter-discourse against that heteronormativity. Keith Vincent points out that the establishment of a heterosexual norm in Japanese culture began in the late Meiji era. Before that, Japanese pre-modern fictional narratives had been rich in images of especially male same-sex erotic practices. Indeed, Tokugawa homosexual culture is one much-analysed phenomenon of Japanese Studies scholars with a gender theoretical emphasis. Even a Heian period classic such as *The Tale of Genji* highlights moments in which male sociality appears ambiguous. On the one hand, *The Tale of Genji* depicts prince Genji as a dominant masculine character, who conquers his female love interests and mostly is successful with it due to his high societal position as a prince, but also as a man, which gives him power over women in patriarchal society at the time. Feminist theory has criticized these depictions of Genji as a man who takes what he wants. There is even a *Genji-girai* (a 'detestation of Genji') among Japanese scholars according to Royall Tyler (see Tyler 2002). Indeed, Otilia Milutin has been doing highly thought-provoking research on the ambivalence of Genji's heterosexual conquests. She suggests that some of these conquests can be read as rape scenes, because *The Tale of Genji* alludes to their non-consensual nature by invoking negative female affects, which propose that the women might have resisted Genji (see Milutin 2008:1-23). On the other hand, Paul Gordon Schalow has suggested in a queer reading of *The Tale of Genji* that there are images of male same-sex friendship that border on the homoerotic. In other words, male friendship in *The Tale of Genji* is an

expression of the concept of homosocial desire, which I also analysed in Abe Kazushige's *Amerika no yoru*. Indeed, the second chapter of *The Tale of Genji*, "The Broom Tree", finishes with such an evocation of homosocial desire. The chapter mainly is a discussion of patriarchal values by being a conversation between heterosexual male characters about how they want their ideal women to be, a combination of patience, duty, beauty and modesty (see Murasaki 2001:21-35). However, the chapter subverts these affirmations of patriarchy with a hint at a male homoerotic scene between Prince Genji and a boy:

> "'Very well, then you, at least, shall not leave me.' Genji had the boy lie down with him. The boy appreciated his master's youth and gentleness that they say Genji found him much nicer than his cruel sister." (2001:44)

In other words, Genji's overall performances of heterosexual masculine conquests are rendered unstable in this last scene, which depicts him as a male subject who prefers the company of men over women. Nonetheless, the modernization of the Meiji era brought with it a gradual obscuration of such images of male same sex erotic attractions and practices in fiction and instead "installed heterosexual object choice as a natural and normative telos." (Vincent 2012:4) As Keith Vincent explains:

> "Until the late nineteenth century, Japan could boast of an elaborate cultural tradition surrounding the love and desire that men felt for other men. It figured in the cultural imagination as a familiar literary trope, as a legitimate and widely accepted practice, and as a nexus of cultural value. In this patriarchal but not heteronormative world, moreover, relations between men in general could be mapped on an increasingly uneasy but still navigable topography in which 'men-loving-men' and 'men-promoting-the-interests-of-men' coexisted and colluded in relative harmony. By the first years of the twentieth century, however, as exclusive and compulsory heterosexuality became associated with an enlightened modernity, love between men was increasingly branded as either 'feudal' or immature. The resulting rupture of what Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick has famously theorized as the 'male homosocial continuum' thus constituted one of the most significant markers of Japan's entrance into modernity. And yet just as Japanese modernity often seemed haunted by stubborn remnants of the premodern past, the nation's newly heteronormative culture was unable and perhaps unwilling to expunge completely the recent memory of a male homosocial past now read as perverse." (2012:3)

Against this background, I locate the evocations of male same sex attraction in Abe Kazushige's *Amerika no yoru*, male same sex intimacy in *Minagoroshi* as well as male comradeship in *Individual Projection* within this homosocial continuum in Japanese literature (and in doing so, move over to a diachronic perspective in this segment). The

question arising is what memory of 'men-loving-men' and 'men-promoting-the-interests-of-men' Abe's narratives rely on.

Is Abe Kazushige's fiction homosocial narrative? And where does its awareness for masculinity come from to begin with? Is it the seeming preoccupation of Abe Kazushige's works with modern male *junbungaku* writers such as Mishima Yukio and Natsume Sōseki? Is it 1990s feminism, which raised a general gender awareness and made *Heisei* male writers conscious of their own sex to begin with?

Within World Literature

A last question, which my analysis implies, is why Abe Kazushige, as an author whose oeuvre is rich in references on a transcultural corpus of theories, novels and films, is so little accessible to an international readership? Indeed, it is remarkable that an author of Abe's status in Japan is so little translated into English, or – to borrow Arianna Dagnino's words here once more – seems to have had so little success in negotiating his "access to the (…) Anglo-American-dominated, highly competitive and highly concentrated metropolitan arena of publishing houses and reviews." (Dagnino 2013:132) Published translations into English available in print of his fiction are translations of the short stories: *Umagoya no Otome* (2004) as *The Maiden in The Manger*, the post-Fukushima piece *Ride on Time* (2011) and *Hush… Hush Sweet Charlotte* (2014) all by Michael Emmerich. While the now completed Japanese Literature Publishing Project did plan to include an English translation of Abe in its second round, Alfred Birnbaum's translation of it did not appear in the end. There exists also an unpublished English translation of Abe's 1997 bestseller *Individual Projection* made by my colleague Seth Jacobowitz, which I have referred to in my dissertation. This is it for the English translations – lately though there seems to be an increased general interest in Abe's works: French, Italian and Thai translations of some of Abe's bestselling novels are available and the Japan Foundation Support Program for Translation and Publication in Japan has decided to finance Albanian and Arabic translations in 2014-15. As for Abe's vast, yet little researched, critical oeuvre, I myself have made an English translation of one of his

film criticisms, which appeared as *Licence to Kill: The Meaning of Massacre in Dawn of the Dead* with *SOAS Occasional Translations in Japanese Studies* (see Abe 2018a). A second one, *What Exists Between 'Hana' and 'Bi': On Kitano Takeshi's Hana-Bi*, has appeared in Marie Iida's English translation with Nang (see Abe 2018b).

With my dissertation's focus on Abe Kazushige's 90s fiction, I especially hope to have highlighted the transcultural value of Abe earliest pieces – *Amerika no yoru* and *ABC sensō*, for example, are rich in overt transcultural references and for that reason may appeal to an international market. Despite the challenges that their multiple word-plays, specifically those with the sounds and written shape of words, may pose for a translator, I hope that I have been able to shed light on their potential for an initiation into the current corpus of World Literature by translation; they may be of great interest for its readership.

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