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October 1, 2008

Dissertation Prospectus

Subverting Language: Japanese Modernism, Modernity, and Linguistic Critique

This project reconsiders the relation between literary modernism and modernity by examining how Yokomitsu Riichi, Kawabata Yasunari, and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō used experiments in language and narrative to critique ideologies of modernization. It explores the ways these writers manipulated readerly expectations and everyday social language in order to overturn the communicative norms, or the pragmatic linguistic functions, of capitalist society. It will show how modernist writers embraced the medium of language as a means to examine and displace the ideological prescriptions of socio-economic progress and how through this displacement their works are expressive of the historical experience that is Japanese modernity. Understood in this capacity, modernist texts present a way to get beyond ideas of essentialized national culture or a singular cultural sensibility and thus offer a more sophisticated way of exploring the experience of a foreign culture and understanding our own.

During the 1920s, the growth of urban consumerism and the proliferation of mass magazines led to an increased commodification of social language, or the everyday language of social discourse. In response, writers began producing a new type of linguistically innovative literature that embraced such language but did so in the context of larger strategies that sought to undermine its pragmatic functions and to reveal the ways in which meanings and ideologies were produced through it. These modernist works exemplify the ways in which literature can

challenge ideologies produced through social language, expose and subvert conventional modes of thought, and embody aspects of modern experience.

Many critical examinations of modernism, especially Japanese modernist literature, have neglected the linguistic and narrative strategies that form the central nerve of modernist fiction, instead focusing on the events, themes, or settings of the work. By considering only these elements, our efforts to identify the connections between literature and society are limited to projecting analogies between the contours of a story and the contours of history, and literature is read as merely a reflection of larger socio-economic and cultural transformations. The issues of language and form are key to understanding modernism's engagement with modernization.

In *The Concept of Modernism*, Astradur Eysteinnsson develops a productive formulation for understanding this relationship. First he argues that modernism must be understood as a mode of representation. Defining it as a literature that negates modernization is not sufficient, for many works of realist literature, he points out, can be considered anti-capitalist. Its negation must be understood in terms of its linguistic and formal strategies. Elaborating on these strategies, he argues that modernism perpetrates a two-fold strategy of both assimilating and undermining the norms of communicative language.

By norms of communicative language, he refers to language that places a priority on the pragmatic function of communication, the language in which modernization and bourgeois ideology are grounded. It is the social language involved in the workings of social institutions, "perhaps predominantly the family but also the political arena, official administrations, schools, churches, newspapers, and [the] judicial system" (194). Modernist fiction absorbs this language into its narrative discourse, introducing and tentatively legitimizing the ideologies based in such language, but in a larger effort to undermine the pragmatic functions of this language and subvert

its social meanings. It at once calls forth and negates, or calls forth *in order to* negate, the ideologies that are grounded in such language. An example of this is in Tanizaki's *Chijin no ai*, where he satirically portrays a man who uses the language of Hollywood to apprehend and create the woman of his desires. The novel incorporates the social language of "the West" found in newspapers and magazines, but does so within a narrative structure that foregrounds its materiality, exposes its ideological functions, and reveals the way this ideology of "the West" is linguistically produced through desire and fantasy.

In *Asakusa kurenaidan*, Kawabata uses popular songs and advertisements to linguistically represent the Asakusa district. But they are sequenced in a disjointed manner that disrupts the conventional mode of readerly consumption, and by extension the normative mode of commercial and entertainment consumption within Asakusa, in order to reveal a latent and more nuanced logic that binds the carnivalesque space of the district together. Yokomitsu engages the language of the modern self, a concept central to the ideologies of modernization. In his *Hyōgenha no yakusha*, for instance, he uses a decentralized narrating subject to expose the structure of the conventional linguistic representations of self and subjectivity in order to render through language a more contemporary phenomenology. At the heart of this dissertation is an exploration of how these modernist writers engaged the norms of communicative language through formal and linguistic strategies in order to critique social ideologies and find expressions of contemporary experience.

Eysteinnsson's formulation is especially useful in looking at Japanese or "regional" modernism because he analyzes it not in terms of cultural traditions but in terms of factors within material history. He takes up the conventional understanding of modernism's negation as a revolt against the Western tradition, as represented by the conventions of the 19th century

European realist novel, and breaks it down into socio-historical factors, such as communicative language and social ideology. According to Eysteinsson, realism becomes a target of modernism not because it represents tradition per se, but because it was the realist novel that first integrated social language in what was a transformation of the novel form into a more egalitarian genre concerned with more mundane matters of society. Realism, moreover, was not just a language but a set of conventions that affirmed the idea of a social totality. Naturalism, for instance, employs social language but depart from realism because its sustained focus on certain minutiae begins to pierce the impression of the social whole. Thus, modernism's revolt against 19th century realism is more fundamentally understood as a reaction against a literary form that incorporated language in such a way that it embraced that language's capacity to promote ideologies and moreover operated on an implicit claim of a social totality.

Looking at Japan, this understanding of modernism allows us to break through the issues of Western influence and the accusation of a "derivative modernism" that has constricted and consumed critics of Japanese modernism. With it, we can begin to look at Japanese modernism within its material historical context, that is in terms of the development and dynamics of literary form and social language in Japanese history. Approached from this angle, the case of Japan immediately begins to offer fruitful differences. First and foremost is the late, or arguably the absent, development of the realist novel in Japan. The political novel of the 1880s, the *katei shōsetsu* at the turn of the century, and early Naturalist novels of the 1900's are all close candidates, but all present certain discrepancies from the model of the realist novel that Eysteinsson puts forth. Moreover, it is the I-novel that the modernists were self-consciously reacting against, a form whose solipsistic concern with the ego places it far from the realist novel. In order to understand the merging of literature in modern Japan with social language

necessitates an account of the *genbun'itchi* or vernacularization movement, a development which began only in the 1880s. Overall, the unique ways in which the history of literary developments in Japan colored or shaped the modernist novel's engagement with social language is a question this dissertation will investigate.

The development of Japanese modernism offers at least two other important differences from the way modernism was forged in Western Europe. The first is modernism's coincidence with the sudden growth of the film industry in Japan. Indeed, all three writers treated in this dissertation were themselves at one point involved and invested in film production and the formal issues of visual media. As Toeda Hirokazu argues, the awareness of this new mode of representation influenced their consciousness towards language itself. In examining modernism as a mode of linguistic representation, it will be necessary to account for the ways in which film influenced these writers, not just in terms of themes or locations within their stories, but in terms of the way these writers came to use and perceive language differently as a result.

The second important difference is the relationship of the writers and their works to capitalism. Unlike many of their counterparts in Western Europe, Japanese modernists such as Yokomitsu Riichi and Kawabata Yasunari were very much at the center of the commercial decision-making that sold and disseminated their work. These writers were conscious of their status as leaders within a certain literary market and embraced the systems of mass distribution. Capitalism played an ambiguous role in the 1920s, exploiting labor and bureaucratizing the workforce on the one hand but also, in the form of consumer culture, offering the potential for more freedoms and choices. The positions of some of the modernist authors within such socio-economic conditions raises question about the relationship of modernist works to capitalism, or perhaps more precisely the relationship of capitalism to bourgeois culture. If capitalism can be

distinguished from bourgeois culture, perhaps modernism's negation must be framed not in terms of economic models but in terms of social ideologies.

In this way, studying Japanese modernism through this perspective allows us not only to appreciate the unique characteristics of modernism in the Japanese literary and historical context. It also enables us to reveal potentially unchallenged assumption within the Western model and begin to think about modernism from a more global perspective. Under Eysteinsson's model, the differences in Japanese modernism that once indicated imitation or disqualification from the standard become an alternate formation that can productively cast a critical light upon the potentially unchallenged assumptions of the Western European model.

But this approach towards modernism also dovetails with the historical materialist approach to modernity. Just as with modernism, the question of to what degree the West has determined Japanese modernity is a vexing issue that has been a primary concern of intellectuals and historians. Underlying this present study is the post-Marxist understanding of modernity as the experience of being within a society undergoing the socio-economic changes of modernization. According to Lukacs' *Theory of the Novel*, this experience is characterized by contingency, a contingency of the object whereby products have lost their human value due to industrialization and a contingency of the subject whereby the human subject has lost its meaning due to the purposeless freedom of an atomized society. The contingency, Lukacs proceeds, finds expression in the language of modernism, which itself eschews and subverts positivistic meaning. The contingency of modernity, in short, is embodied in the contingency of modernist language.

From a slightly different perspective, modernist fiction is also indicative of modernity in the way it takes concepts – e.g. the West – that are taken to be constitutive of modernity and

exposes them to be ideologies by revealing their basis in linguistic production. In other words, modernism denotes modernity by pointing toward a historical experience which is constituted by the *competition of many* ideologies, which are constantly being produced and recreated.

Herein lies the pedagogical function of modernist literature. Modernist writers, through their engagement with social language, sought to cultivate an awareness of social ideology and how it was produced through language. Thus, in one sense, modernist literature becomes a means by which to understand the historical experience of given culture. But to the extent that social ideologies shape our sensibility, literary modernism also cultivates a consciousness in the reader of how our realities are linguistically produced and ultimately how this reality can be changed and recreated.

Existing Research

In his *Topographies of Japanese Modernism*, Seiji Lippit understands Japanese modernism as a negation of the “linguistic and narrative foundations of the modern novel [*kindai shōsetsu*]”(6), which he equates to the Western realist novel. In his critique, the dissolution and fragmentation within modernism of these traditional forms becomes a metaphor for the dissolution of the modern subject in Japan. This narrative of solid form to chaotic formlessness, however, lacks an awareness that both the modern (or realist) novel and the modernist novel are based on certain linguistic and narrative strategies. The modern novel is not as stable and organic as he assumes nor is the modernist novel, despite its experimentation, without a certain structure and logic.

In *When Our Eyes No Longer See*, Gregory Golley attempts to reverse Lippit’s idea of modernism as destructive and formless and demonstrate this structure and logic. He argues that

the “break down” inherent in modernist writing should be understood not in the psychological sense of collapse but in the constructive scientific sense of objective analysis. Proposing that modernism was much closer to science and not as opposed to realism as conventionally understood, Golley claims that the modernist writers were attempting to accurately depict an external universal of “objective material forces and events that both *defined* and *exceeded* the sensory parameters of the human body, the limits of human language, the laws of social conflict” (2). While Golley’s identification of a positive critique in modernist writing is useful, his analogies of literature to science are often drawn too literally. In his effort to avoid the model of literary influence, his analysis ignores the social aspects of language and literary convention. In his attempt to counter the negative assessment of modernism, he tries to prove that modernism is a constructive form striving to objectively depict a larger social totality. A better understanding of modernism in terms of form and language, however, would help to uncover a positive value in its negative attitude. Modernism’s assimilation and critique of social language, for instance, exposes the production of social ideology, and its embrace of contingency in language allows it to better express the contingency of modern experience.

Also implicit in Lippit’s critique was the conception that modernism was reacting to a form and a tradition that was imported from the West. In large part a response to this underlying assumption, William Gardner’s *Advertising Tower* attempts to situate Japanese modernism within the Japanese historical context by showing it to be a negation of, or reaction to, the social, cultural, and political situation within Japan. In order to do so, he points to more popular works of fiction that described the city life of modern Japan. He points to instances in the works of Hagiwara Kyōjirō and Hayashi Fumiko that manifest the new speed and tempo of contemporary Japanese life. While Gardner’s attempt to establish Japanese modernism within its own social

context is important, he often conflates modernism with modernization, a confusion that arises from his equivocation as to whether modernist literature is a response to or a constituent part of the new social and economic forces of the time. Such an equivocation can be accounted for in the different senses of the two similar terms, modernism, as used in Western critical discourse, and *modanizumu*, a term used during the 1920s to refer to the new culture of urban consumerism. Gardner, however, does not distinguish between these terms and his treatment of modernist works as part of the fabric of this new urban lifestyle often conflicts with his understanding of modernism as critique and negation.

Mariko Schimmel, in her dissertation on Japanese modernism and the proletarian literature movement, clarifies this confusion between modernism and *modanizumu* by explaining how modernist writers such as Kawabata distanced themselves from *modanizumu* because they regarded it as an uncritical embrace of contemporary trends. Schimmel's work focuses on the unacknowledged similarities and interdependence between modernist and proletarian writers in terms of their objectives and the formal and linguistic means they employed. This dissertation falls in line with, and will build off of, Schimmel's approach to Japanese modernism, but will more directly and fully approach the topic of Japanese modernism both conceptually and practically by looking at specific ways in which the modernist novels engaged social language and expressed contemporary experience.

Chapters

Introduction. The Genealogy of Japanese Modernism

In this opening section, I will discuss the predecessors of the Japanese modernists and sketch out a genealogy of modernist literature in Japan. This section will introduce the

formulations of Eysteinnsson discussed above and use it to begin a discussion of the critically productive ways in which Japanese modernism differs from the Western European model. Understanding the unique genealogy of Japanese modernism will also help to understand specifically the ways in which Japanese modernist texts engage social language.

The section will begin with a look at *Uta andon* (1910), a late work by Izumi Kyōka that will help to pry open the issue of Japan's alternate literary development by confounding the Western European model. The work fulfills a main requirement of Western modernism through its use of a linguistic style that is directly antagonistic to the norms of communicative language. Kyōka's style, however, is highly literary and traditional, modeled off of language of Edo period fiction. Kyōka's work uncovers some pivotal ways in which the development of Japanese literary history differed radically from that of Western Europe, particularly on the emergence of the realist novel, and demonstrates a need to account for how these differences shaped modernism in Japan. The importance of Kyōka to Japanese modernism is underscored, moreover, by the fact that Yokomitsu Riichi himself envisioned his new literary movement as a return to the formalism and anti-realism of the Ken'yūsha group, a coterie of which Kyōka was a central member.

Chapter 1. Tanizaki and the Linguistic Critique of the West

This chapter explores how Tanizaki's novels displace social ideologies through an assimilation and examination of social language. In *Chijin no ai*, for instance, he critiques popular ideas of the West through his satirical portrayal of a man who uses the language of Hollywood to apprehend and create the woman of his desires. Closely associated to these ideas of the West was the new culture of living and everyday life, *seikatsu*. The protagonist lives with

his young wife in a new “culture house,” and envisions leading a “*shinpuru raifu* [simple life]” with her, free of the customs and constraints of the traditional Japanese family.

Tanizaki’s *Shunkinshō* presents a type of antithesis to *Chijin no ai* in its representation of the “Japanese” or consciously non-Western way of life, but it is similarly concerned with how the ideologies of everyday living are created through types of language. Though the plot and characters are integral to these novels, they function primarily as an examination of language and how the idea of the West and the everyday work and are produced through that language. Tanizaki’s *Bunshō dokuhon* is also a relevant document that contain the writers own ideas about Western versus Japanese language and its implications for Japanese culture.

The social language that Tanizaki was engaging can be traced to magazines, newspapers, and advertisements in the late 1920s. One specific place to start investigation will be the roundtable discussions published in *Shinchō* from 1928 to 1930. These articles featured commentary on the urban commercial lifestyle and focused around topics like films, train stations, department stores, office buildings, and cafés. There are also compilations of essays written during the 20s on Japanese contemporary life – particularly the works of Minami Hiroshi such as *Nihon modanizumu no kenkyū* and *Kindai shomin seikatsushi* – as well as several books of English criticism on contemporary culture during that time – these include Jordan Sand’s *House and Home in Modern Japan* and Miriam Silverberg’s *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*.

Chapter 2. Yokomitsu and New Renderings of the Self

This chapter examines Yokomitsu’s engagement with representations of the modern subject. Yokomitsu differed from Akutagawa Ryūnosuke in that he used formal and linguistic means to critique the conventions for representing the subject, such as his use of a decentralized

narrating subject in *Hyōgenha no yakusha* or his employment of stream-of-consciousness in *Kikai*. Yokomitsu was also concerned with using descriptive language in unorthodox ways in order to render more accurately what he saw as a new phenomenology of his contemporary time.

The genbun'itchi movement, or the cultivation and standardization of a language that was assumed to enable a transparent communication of psychology, is an important linguistic development to research in this regard. It is also an important model for the communicative language that modernist strategies attempted to undermine. Important critical sources to look at in this regard would be the work on genbun'itchi and society by Nanette Gottlieb and Massimiliano Tomasi as well as the essays and primary source collections compiled by Yamamoto Masahide. The linguistic representations of self found in the works of I-novelists such as Shiga Naoya and Mushanokōji Saneatsu may also be studied to the extent that they were became established conventional ways of writing about the self and could thus be considered a type of social language.

Chapter 3. Kawabata and *modanizumu*

This chapter will mainly look at Kawabata's *Asakusa kurenaidan* as an example of a work that assimilated but undermined the communicative norms of social language. Kawabata was also conscious of breaking with certain novelistic conventions such as a consistent plot development in an attempt to explore different ways of representing Asakusa.

In addition to the types of advertisement and popular songs that went into the novel, it would also be important to look at the type of language employed in urban reportage writing, a genre in which at some level Kawabata believed he was taking part. A discussion of *Asakusa kurenaidan* would also be a meaningful context in which to explore some of the tensions

between high modernism and vernacular modernism and perhaps some of the arbitrary associations given to those categories. Closely related to this would also be relationship of Japanese modernism towards capitalist consumerism. The ambiguity of a consumer capitalist model that was used in the service of anti-bourgeois culture is readily apparent in the space of Asakusa itself. Kawabata's novel was at some level advertised and sold as tourist's guide to the region. This chapter will explore how the critique of social ideology functions within the context of consumer models.

Finally, Kawabata's *Kurutta ippeiji* will be looked at in the context of exploring the ways in which the medium of film influenced the consciousness of writers toward language. This discussion could easily return to aspects within the works of Tanizaki and Yokomitsu.

Research Schedule

From October 2008 until August 2009, I will complete the close reading and analysis of relevant novels, further identifying specific categories of communicative language that I would like to explore. I will also read through secondary sources including histories of the long Taishō period to get a more precise sense of the larger historical developments that shaped the period, criticism in Japanese related to Japanese modernism, and works contributing to the theoretical discourse on modernism in order to determine where Eysteinsson's paradigm of modernism currently stands within the field and what kind of critical challenges it has faced.

This research will prepare me to do the work in primary source material that is best done and in large part can only be done in Japan. In Japan, I will do research at Waseda University under the mentorship of Professor Toeda Hirokazu, a highly regarded scholar of Yokomitsu Riichi and Japanese modernism. With his guidance, I will utilize Waseda's excellent collection

of Taishō and Shōwa literary and historical documents, including newspapers, journals, mass magazines, and critical essays that are not available in the U.S. I will also consult several other important literary scholars at Waseda including Chiba Shunji, Ishihara Chiaki, and Kanai Keiko.

In Japan, I will require approximately six months for research in primary and secondary sources and six months to draft the central portions of my dissertation chapters. Research on the genealogy of Japanese modernism for the introductory chapter will be carried out upon return to the U.S. in August 2010, after the main chapters have been drafted and when the central arguments about modernism have been established. The dissertation will be completed and edited in time for submission in March, 2011.

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